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Nazism as an Operatic Performance: Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* as Hitler's Inspiration

On March 13, Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868) was staged to celebrate the first Nazi-led Reichstag. Why a *dramatic performance*? why *opera*? why a *Wagner* opera? and why *this* 5-hour 3-Act didactic comic opera to represent the 'National Awakening'? It will be argued that *Die Meistersinger* qua *völkisch* opera, mingling fact and fiction, tradition and dramatic innovation, banal soulfulness and judging laughter, resonated closely with Hitler's own political career, social theory and plans for Nazism because it had in part inspired them. Drawing upon Wagner's infamous prose writings, and especially *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1850/1869), and attending to relevant secondary scholarship, I will argue for the salience of the opera in three respects. First, it was well-suited to the Nazi's reactionary modernism. Second, it effectively illustrated the *Führer-Prinzip* of the artistic 'great man.' Finally, third, it offered a biblically-resonant model of social diagnosis and treatment.