

**My Dear Friend, Wagner**  
**A Music Drama**  
**By Lana Sage**

**1 - Transcend**

*Throughout the opening of the house, Vogue, who some might confuse for Richard Wagner, faces away from us, the audience. She sits alone at a standing piano. She starts playing. This moment isn't for her—it isn't for anyone, really. It's merely a moment of collected music playing. A sort of concert of Wagner pieces (only ones that Nietzsche liked, of course), beginning with "Lohengrin: Prelude", transitioning into "Tannhäuser: Overture" with only the slightest of pauses. Atop the piano sit two small, unlit lights and an old vintage lamp where all the light seems to come from. Haphazard stacks of music, poetry, books and notebooks, ripped papers almost falling out of them, surround the piano, filling the stage to the brim. Niche, who some might confuse for Frederick Nietzsche, watches the concert with us, sitting in an empty seat. Once "Tannhäuser: Overture" is in its last few moments, the house lights slowly go down. Niche, transfixed, steps into the space of the stage for the first time. She becomes fully immersed in the music, humming and dancing along to the melody lines. It's as if this moment of music is just for Niche and Niche alone. It wasn't intended to be that way, but it has become that for Niche. There seems to be a resolve. Vogue prepares her hands for "Tannhäuser / Act 1: Bacchanale"<sup>1</sup>. Niche applauds, nearing Vogue. Vogue splatters the keys.*

Niche  
Oh I am / so sorry—I—

Vogue  
Do you have a reason / to be here

Niche  
Your music—it's just—

Vogue  
What about it

Niche  
Did you write it yourself.

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<sup>1</sup> In the original Dresden version of Tannhäuser, the overture concludes as concerts do. Twelve years later for the commissioned Paris version, Wagner rewrote the piece so the music led directly into the "Bacchanale" without pause. Paris was the last time Wagner would perform Tannhäuser, himself. He never felt satisfied with the piece, concluding a few weeks prior to his death that he 'still owes the world Tannhäuser'" (Mandel).

Vogue  
Who else

Niche  
Well its...

Vogue  
It's...?

Niche  
Beautiful.

*Beat*

Vogue  
I agree

Niche  
You agree?

Vogue  
It is beautiful

Niche  
Oh.

Vogue  
Does that disappoint you

Niche  
What?

Vogue  
That I find my own piece beautiful

Niche  
No. Not / at all, it's just—

Vogue

As much as I do so adore talking about my music, and thus me, to people who want to talk about my music, and thus me, it can too quickly become very tedious, don't you think

Niche

Tedious?

Vogue

Of course it is rather amusing to glean what new word each person might come up with to describe my music, and thus me. The attempts at originality. That part isn't tedious at all I think

Niche

I would assume not.

Vogue

Of course not. What is tedious is when all those words have run out...

*Vogue starts playing. It's a continuation of what was earlier unfinished: "Tannhäuser, Act 1: Bacchanale." A dance, an underscoring. Clunky, as if she's making it up on the spot, but not overpowering. It's just there.*

Vogue (continued)

... When even the best critics lose all track of language and can only come up with the same thing as the person before them. In my time—my short time, that is—I have heard many a refrain along the lines of lovely, glorious, perfect—that one always makes me feel gross—dramatic, profound, up and coming—I hate that one, up and coming, it sounds so demeaning

*Vogue stops playing. Distracted by her own self.*

Vogue (continued)

Like, I'm right here people, I always have been, always will be, you just haven't had the pleasure of knowing of me quite yet, but don't worry, you will, because I am up and coming... that one actually makes sense, I take away that point, I like up and coming now but only when I say it—pretty, inventive, revolutionary, inspirational, and above all else, the one that drones on and on more than any other—

Niche

Beautiful.

Vogue

Indeed, friend; beautiful

*Vogue starts playing. It's a new beginning from where we left off.*

Vogue (continued)

In that case, you can understand why this reprising of words over and over again can become tedious. But not just that; it is mere mimicry, or what you philosophers might call mimesis<sup>2</sup>. And that, my friend...?

Niche

Niche.

Vogue

Niche—is tedious in and of itself

Niche

And what leads you to assume me a philosopher?

Vogue

You have a certain air about you

Niche

Do all philosophers contain this air?

Vogue

Yes

Niche

Truly?

Vogue

All the ones I've met

Niche

So. Because every philosopher you've met holds this so-called 'air' within themselves, you know that for a fact that every single other philosopher also embodies it.

Vogue

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<sup>2</sup> From *Birth of Tragedy*, the birth of tragedy itself was the experience of mimesis: “the primary dramatic phenomenon: projecting oneself outside oneself and then acting as though one had really entered another body, another character.”

Precisely

Niche

But you can't have met all the philosophers to ever live.

Vogue

Correct there as well...

*Vogue stops playing. She leaves the piano and Niche behind.*

Vogue (continued)

You are too smart, my friend—I feel like a plebian just standing next to you. I must bow, how / lowly I am in comparison to you. Shall I bow—

Niche

No. No need to bow.

I am just as much a plebian as you are. Possibly less.

But I am still a plebian philosopher.

As such, I am deeply curious: How could you possibly know every philosopher gives off this air you speak so confidently of.

Vogue

Although glad to know my confidence shines, I must be frank with you: you're the only philosopher I have met

Niche

Why am I not surprised.

Vogue

However, based on that data, I'd still say... yes, it is statistically sound to say all philosophers give off this air / we speak of

Niche

That air which I happen to embody.

Vogue

Your words, not mine; I never spoke of your body

Niche

Neither did I.

Vogue  
I only spoke of air

Niche  
Like the air we breathe together?

*Beat*

Vogue (continued)  
You sound like Robber<sup>3</sup> when you sing my music

Niche  
Robber?

Vogue  
My dog... The thing so adores to sing along to my songs but I regret to say it is dreadfully off key—I guess the gift of beauty does not run in the family

Niche  
...Are you saying my singing is off key.

Vogue  
I'm saying Robber's singing is off key

Niche  
Is that an insult?

Vogue  
To Robber

Niche  
I sing like Robber.

Vogue  
It's more so a feeling than an exact replica

Niche  
Good to know I exude the feeling of a dog / singing off key.

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<sup>3</sup> Wagner's real rescued dog, Robber, was a common player in rehearsal rooms (Hogstad).

Vogue

It's good you've accepted this about yourself

*Vogue examines the piano, hands traipsing over the keys. The ghost of playing. Seemingly out of nowhere, Vogue unintentionally splatters the keys of the Leitmotif "Love Tragedy."*

Vogue (continued)

It was nice to / meet you—

Niche

Are you kicking me out.

Vogue

...No

*Beat*

Vogue (continued)

I thought we were done.

Niche

I'm not.

Vogue

Don't you have something else to do

Niche

No.

Vogue

Something more important

Niche

I'd prefer to stay.

Vogue

Stay and procrastinate on whatever important things a philosopher is to do

Niche

I think being here is important for my work.

Vogue

Being here and doing... what, may I ask

Niche

Listen to you play.

Vogue

Who would ever want to do that

Niche

You.

Vogue

Too smart

Niche

And many people.

Vogue

Too true

Niche

And me.

Vogue

And you?

Niche

And me

Vogue

Why me

Niche

Because your music is—

Vogue

Let me guess: Beautiful



Niche  
Transcendent.

Vogue  
I don't like that word

Niche  
That's what it was. It transcended art and beauty.

*Beat*

Vogue  
Well... They were old

Niche  
What were.

Vogue  
My music—those pieces? I don't know quite how much you heard, but every single one of them was old—uninspired—and no one wants to listen to old, uninspired things

Niche  
Everyone loves a good oldy.

Vogue  
Funny

Niche  
Being old is not directly proportional to the lack of inspiration. It is only the act of being aged.  
As we all do.

Vogue  
You really think that

Niche  
I know that.

Vogue  
You seem to know many a thing

Niche

I open my mind to many a thing.

Vogue

I should try that sometimes

Niche

You should.

Vogue

Maybe it would inspire me

Niche

I find it often does.

Vogue

What inspires you

Niche

...Me?

Vogue

Yes, you, who else

Niche

Who would seek advice from me. I, nothing but a lowly philosopher.

Vogue

I think I have made it expressly clear that I hold philosophers in a fairly high regard

Niche

You have.

Vogue

I see it as paying it forward

Niche

Paying what forward.

If I can ask?

Vogue

You did and you can: Paying forward... what was... given...

Niche

Given...?

Vogue

Time... energy... relief... etcetera...

Niche

You mean a philosopher's writings?

Vogue

Yes! That... Those

Niche

...Writings about musicians.

Vogue

Musicians... Yes

Niche

And...

Artists?

Vogue

...Yes...

*Beat*

Niche

Like philanthropy...

Vogue

Yes-No.

*Vogue starts playing. It's the first repetitive strings of "Das fliegende Holländer: No. 8, Duett, Kavatine und Finale, "Was musst' ich hören!" over and over again. Methodical and predictive. Giving with its pattern. This is what Vogue plays when she wants to feel smart.*

Vogue (continued)

I actually think it is eleemosynary of philosophers to discuss artists in general

Niche

...Ele-

Vogue

Yes, E-lee-mo-sy-na-ry

Niche

Eleemosynary?

Vogue

Your words, not mine

Niche

But you-

Vogue

It is a gift that philosophers give artists—to take in our world and spend the time, energy, and offer us the relief of understanding a way in which our art—our vulnerability—our heart—is perceived. It is so refreshing to have what we do—what we are affirmed—that our heart is good and right rather than wrong and unpalatable—that our heart written into the hidden folds of our art is wanted. The court drones on and on about foundations and tradition and the whole ‘that’s just the way it is, and falling back on what was’ and I want nothing to do with that<sup>4</sup>. I want to move forward; I want to bring something new to the conversation, do what has never been done before... All because I can. Because I have the autonomy to do so—and philosophers like you praising this possible progression paves the way for it to continue and maybe change. People talking about change fosters the possibility for change. That is a gift only philosophers can give

*Vogue stops playing.*

Vogue (continued)

Is it not?

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<sup>4</sup> “The refusal of the court opera authorities in Dresden to stage his next opera, Lohengrin, was not based on artistic reasons; rather, they were alienated by Wagner’s projected administrative and artistic reforms. His proposals would have taken control of the opera away from the court and created a national theatre whose productions would be chosen by a union of dramatists and composers” (Cooke).

Niche  
I get that.

Vogue  
You do

Niche  
As a philosopher.  
But also an artist. Very / much so.

Vogue  
You are an artist

Niche  
My writings—

Vogue  
Besides that

Niche  
Besides... my writings?

Vogue  
It's what I said

Niche  
You do realize writing is art.

*Beat*

Niche (continued)  
Okay.  
Yes.  
Besides my writings...  
Well, I am fond / of music

Vogue  
Fond... Do you refrain from fancying yourself a musician

Niche

I don't know—  
I mean I do play / violin. But that is child's play—

Vogue  
I do not blame you for it, after all you shant trust a musician

Niche  
Shant you, now.

Vogue  
Shant indeed

Niche  
And why is that.

Vogue  
We're untrustworthy

Niche  
You mean you're untrustworthy.

*Beat*

Niche (continued)  
You mean I'm untrustworthy?

*Beat*

Niche (continued)  
Well?

Vogue  
I have not decided yet

Niche  
No need.  
I am not a real musician. Not compared / to you—

Vogue  
You are mistaken

Niche

I'm sorry.

Vogue

You are a musician

Niche

...So I am untrustworthy.

Vogue

I didn't say that

Niche

You just—

Vogue

I mean that I, myself, am no mere musician—that the title too small a box to fit me in

Niche

You do seem to require a bigger box.

Vogue

Which is why I... am a dramatist

Niche

I like that.

Vogue

Why thank you

Niche

Who founded that term.

Vogue

Oh, someone who is very smart

Niche

You?

Vogue  
How did you guess

Niche  
Just a hunch.

Vogue  
Only a hunch...

Niche  
You know, a dramatist can create change.  
No different from a philosopher. In that regard.

*Beat*

Vogue  
No

Niche  
Yes.

Vogue  
No... You really think so

Niche  
I know so.

Vogue  
How

Niche  
I get artists.  
The chaos, the glory, the beauty, / the destruction—

Vogue  
You and your beauty... Are you truly so vain

Niche  
There is nothing wrong with beauty.  
Music goes where words cannot and / that, in and of itself, is beauty at its finest.



Vogue

I cannot agree more, for I suck at words

Niche

Fear not. Words are forever hopeless in their endeavor to delve into the depths that only music can divulge.

Music is...

The essence of art, itself<sup>5</sup>.

Vogue

Oh... Okay, so... Based on all those words... you just said... it is then... completely acceptable that I suck... at words...?

Niche

You could go very far in life sucking at words, yes.

That is, if you allow people to fully experience your music. Invite them into those moments of yours. They'd then hear all you have to say with the words written into the melodies of your music alone.

You wouldn't need to even attempt the pleasantries that actual plebeians like me pretend to perfect to get our points across. For everything you could ever hope to say would already be expressed tenfold just in your scoring alone.

*Beat*

Vogue

Why me

Niche

Did my answer not suffice?

Vogue

...I need some relief

Niche

You have far too much to say for you to be silenced in such a way.

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<sup>5</sup> From *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*: "The musical art often speaks in sounds more penetrating than the words of poetry, and takes hold of the most hidden crevices of the heart... Song elevates our being and leads us to the good and the true. If, however, music serves only as a diversion or as a kind of vain ostentation it is sinful and harmful."

*Beat*

Vogue

You really think that

Niche

I would not say it otherwise.

*Beat*

Niche (continued)

Do you not like your music?

Vogue

Do you like it

Niche

I think I have not been shy about my feelings.

Vogue

Tell me with those words / of yours

Niche

You fear the end.

Vogue

Excuse me

Niche

You fear—

Vogue

I heard what you said. Is that all you think of this—you are so disinterested once it begins you can only think of its end

Niche

You misunderstand.

Your music tells me everything your heart wants to say, yes.

But it also tells me so much of your fear / of its ending.

Vogue

I'm not following

Niche

In the time we have talked, you have played many melodies. Yet you have not ended a single one.

They are fleeting. Yet constantly continuing.

Your melodies.

As if you are afraid what might happen when you let one complete / itself. Grow on its own.

Vogue

Art is never completed. It is only abandoned

Niche

Why?

Vogue

Because

Niche

Why because.

Vogue

Because I said so

Niche

Why do you say so.

Vogue

Because that's just / how it is

Niche

That's just the way it is? The way it has... always been?

*Beat*

Niche (continued)

That sounds awfully familiar to me.

Like a distasteful court camouflaged by the ego of its own notoriety.

*Vogue packs up her instruments and books.*

Niche (continued)

Wait–

What if you just tried completing a melody. Just let a piece be after you've done with it.

Just once?

Create a full piece that just ends. On its own. With no opening / for continuation–

Vogue

An open ending is still an ending

Niche

You didn't let me finish.

No opening for continuation for you. No open endings that *you* can add to.

Vogue

I'm fully capable of all of that; I have no need to prove myself–

Niche

And I have full faith in you.

I have expressed that very clearly.

Have I not.

*Vogue tries to exit. Niche rushes to follow her.*

Vogue

I don't want to

Niche

Why.

Vogue

I thought you were smart, Niche, yet you ask questions like a four year old

*They have switched places: Niche at the piano, Vogue at the sidelines.*

Niche

Is there anything wrong with / that. Asking questions?

Vogue

There is when there is no point in asking questions other than being a waste of time

Niche

No question is a waste of time. You can only learn / from asking and answering questions–

Vogue

I have not learned a thing from you

Niche

Are you so sure?

*Beat*

Niche (continued)

Or are you afraid what might happen if you let something go beyond you. Go just past what you are comfortable controlling.

*Niche picks up the guitar, feeling it out. She starts playing. It's a few chords in steady succession: F, E, D, C, Bb, A. The Leitmotif "Love Tragedy."*

Niche (continued)

If you asked me, I would say that opening my mind to being uncomfortable—just in this one conversation—has taught me so much.

In pushing past whatever fear I might have had, I have learned so much about someone I hope will only teach me more.

*With every point Niche makes, she strums a new chord on the guitar, repeating the Leitmotif over and over again, stepping closer to Niche with each one.*

Niche (continued)

I have learned that there is nothing quite as beautiful as music, but beautiful can easily become tedious which means that music can then become tedious yet it somehow hasn't done so in the many years we humans have created and told and taken in its very untentious stories

I have learned that you admire a good complement, as long as you have never heard it before  
I have learned that you cherish surprises—surprising yourself, others, the world, everything, as long as it involves some sort of surprise—but don't let people know that you treasure said surprises

I have learned that you hate the word beautiful in your mind, but your heart betrays you, because when I call your music beautiful, your heart betrays your mind, taking control of your entire being

*Niche is fully strumming the Leitmotif.*

Niche (continued)

I have learned that you take everything someone says about your music to heart, because your music is you and you are your music

I have learned many more things and will learn many more things and I will tell you all about them, because I have learned that you will enjoy hearing what I have to say about you, because I have learned that, by you staying here, listening to me ramble about the things I have learned about you in this one small interaction between the two of us, that you enjoy me

I have learned—

*Vogue pulls the guitar out of Niche's hands, their toes touching.*

Vogue

Can I kiss you?