

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

# Der Fliegende Holländer

*(The Flying Dutchman)*



**Music and libretto  
by Richard Wagner**

**Music-drama in Three Acts**

**Setting: On the coast of Norway  
Time: 19<sup>th</sup> century**

## Characters

The Dutchman (bass-baritone)..... Donald McIntyre  
Daland, a Norwegian captain (bass).....Bengt Rundgren  
Senta, Daland's daughter (soprano).....Catarina Ligendza  
Erik, a huntsman (tenor)..... Hermann Winkler  
Mary, Senta's nurse (contralto).....Ruth Hesse  
Daland's helmsman (tenor).....Harald Ek  
Norwegian sailors, the Dutchman's crew, young women

Conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch  
Bayerischer Orchestra and Chorus

Première performance in Semper Oper in Dresden, Germany, January 1843

# Synopsis

## Act I

### Norwegian shore with steep cliffs



A sudden and violent storm has blown a Norwegian fishing boat off-course. Daland, its captain is forced to anchor in a sheltered bay not far from his home port. He and his crew go below to rest to wait for the storm to abate. A young helmsman, left alone on watch, falls asleep singing of his sweetheart.

A large galleon with a black mast and red sails suddenly appears and drops anchor next to Daland's ship. While the ghostly crew furls the sails, their captain goes ashore. This is the legendary Flying Dutchman, condemned with his crew to sail the seas for all eternity. Every seven years he is allowed to

land to search for a faithful woman who will be faithful to him until death, but so far all have proved faithless. At this point the Dutchman yearns only for death and oblivion.

When Daland awakens he notices the strange vessel and hails its captain. The helmsman awakens and calls to the other ship. No one answers and the call is repeated. This time the Dutchman appears on shore. Daland joins him on the beach and greets him. The Dutchman explains how for many years he has sought a home. He tells Daland that his ship is full of treasures. If Daland will grant him shelter for the evening, he will be richly rewarded.

Two of the Dutchman's crew appear on deck, carrying a chest of jewels. The Dutchman says that this is just a small part of the collection that he has onboard. He then asks Daland if he has a daughter; Daland replies that he does. The Dutchman says that if Daland will give him his daughter's hand in marriage, Daland can have all the treasure on the Dutchman's ship. Daland expresses joy over his new-found treasures and gladly agrees to give Senta to the stranger. The Dutchman admits apprehension over the promise, but feels excitement at the prospect of finally ending his torment.

Meanwhile the storm has abated and a south wind has sprung up, allowing them to resume their homeward voyage. To the singing of the crew, Daland's ship sets out to sea first. The Dutchman promises to follow when his crew has rested.

## Act II

### A large room in Daland's house

The village girls are singing and spinning under the supervision of the old nurse Mary. Only Senta, Daland's daughter, takes no part. She is absorbed in a painting on the wall of the legendary Flying Dutchman, a man with a pale face and dark beard wearing a black cloak.

The girls chide Senta for being in love with the man in the painting when she could have the Erik, the huntsman. Senta asks Mary to sing the ballad of the Flying Dutchman. The nurse refuses, and so Senta herself sings the legend of the captain



whose blasphemous oath has condemned him to sail the seas for eternity unless he can find a woman who will be faithful to him until death.

Senta sings with ever-growing emotion and the girls listen to her with increasing sympathy until they eventually join in the refrain. At the end, Senta, in a moment of wild excitement, declares that she herself wishes to be the Dutchman's redeemer. Mary and the girls are horrified, and so is Erik, who has just entered the room and reports sighting Daland's ship approaching their cliff. Mary ushers the girls out so they can welcome the sailors.

Erik detains Senta and scolds her for her obsession with the legend of the Dutchman. He knows that her father will not accept a poor son-in-law, but asks her at least to return some of the love which he declares for her. Senta replies evasively, telling him she should go and greet Daland. Erik then shares with Senta a dream that he has had in which he saw her and the mysterious sailor of the portrait disappear together over the sea. Senta interprets this as an omen, declaring ecstatically that she will sacrifice herself for the Dutchman. Erik, realizing that his dream is about to become a reality, rushes from the room in despair. Senta returns to her contemplation of the portrait.



Senta is startled by the sudden appearance of her father and a stranger standing at the door. She recognizes the Dutchman from the painting and looks at him spellbound. The Dutchman gazes wonderingly at Senta, seeing in her the faithful woman he had always dreamed of. Daland explains to his daughter that the stranger wishes to marry her and speaks of his wealth. At the same time he points out Senta's beauty to the Dutchman. Daland goes out, leaving them alone together.

The Dutchman comments quietly, as if in a trance, that he has seen her before in his dreams. He talks of the warmth he feels, wondering if it is love or the yearning for redemption. Senta feels compassion for him and hopes his salvation will come true through her. The Dutchman asks if she agrees with her father's decision and if he can really depend on her. She responds that, regardless of his past, she will obey her father. He comments on her quick answer and asks if she has pity for his suffering. Senta wonders to herself if she can console him. The Dutchman overhears her and his ecstasy soars as he begins to believe his redemption might really be at hand. He warns Senta of the sacrifices she would have to make. She tells him that she knows about the sacred duty of a woman. This reassures the Dutchman.

Daland returns and asks Senta if she will consent to marriage with the Dutchman. She swears that she will marry the stranger and be faithful to him unto death. The three join in a joyful trio filled with hope and love.

## Act III

### A cove with a rocky beach overlooking the Norwegian and Dutch Ships

It is evening. Daland's boat and the Dutchman's ship are both docked at the quay. On board their ship Daland's sailors are celebrating their homecoming. The Dutchman's ship is uncannily dark and quiet. The village girls bring food and drink and call out to the Dutchman's crew to join them. Several attempts are made to hail them. All their calls go unanswered. The Norwegian sailors claim the wine and food as their own and return to drinking and revelry. The girls leave.

A blue flame suddenly flares up on the Dutch ship. The sea around the ship becomes violent and the wind whistles through its rigging. The crew is suddenly illuminated in the flickering flame. In an evil chorus they declare that Satan has blessed their ship. They call upon their captain to return as he will never find a woman to redeem his soul. The chorus grows louder until the Norwegian crew retreats below deck, making

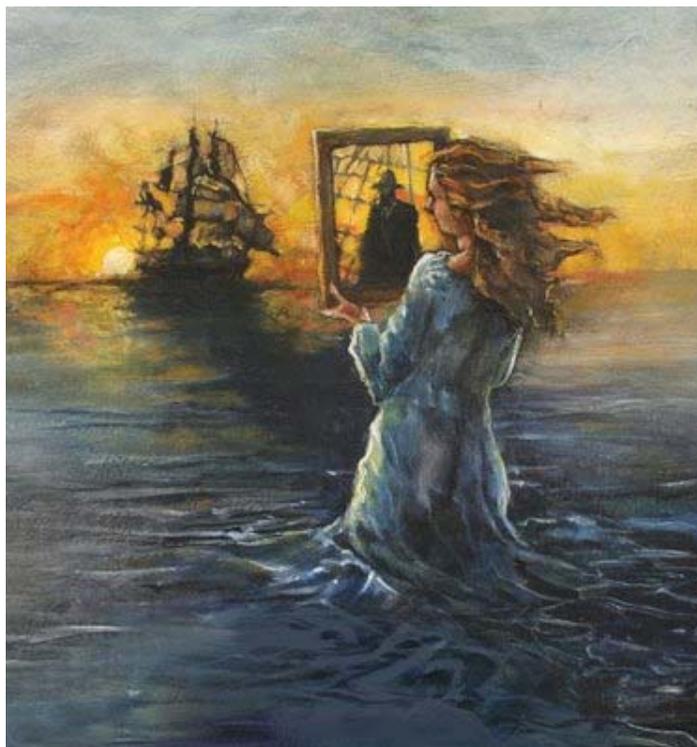
the sign of the cross as they leave. The ghostly crew mocks them and silence once more returns to their ship and the surrounding area.

Senta comes running from her father's house, followed by Erik, who bitterly reproaches her for her decision to marry the stranger who he recognized as the one from the portrait. Erik maintains that Senta had previously sworn to be true only to him.

The Dutchman, quietly observing the two, becomes overwhelmed with despair, believing that he has again been betrayed. Because Senta had not yet sworn fidelity to him before God, the Dutchman resolves to leave immediately in order to prevent her ruin. He bitterly renounces salvation and orders his crew to set sail. Senta pleads with him to stay, telling him that she will fulfill her promise to marry him. Erik can't believe what she is saying and tries to drag her away. Then Senta tells the Dutchman that she knows who he is and insists that through her he will find salvation.

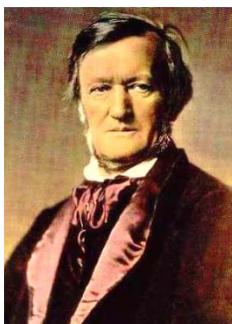
The villagers arrive, summoned by Erik's cries for help. The Dutchman turns on Senta and tells her that she has no idea who or what she is getting involved with. "I am the terror of all devout men — the Flying Dutchman is what I am called!" He rushes aboard his ship and instantly puts out to sea. Senta tries to follow, but is held back by Daland and Erik. She struggles free and runs to a cliff overhanging the sea. She throws herself into the sea, claiming that she will be faithful to him unto death — this is the Dutchman's salvation.

The Dutchman's ship sinks with all of its crew. The sun begins to descend and, in its glow, the Dutchman and Senta can be seen embracing, rising from the ocean to the heavens — at last the Dutchman will find peace.



# Richard Wagner

**Born: May 22, 1813 in Leipzig, Germany; died February 13, 1883 in Venice, Italy**



Wilhelm Richard Wagner was the ninth child of Carl Friedrich and Johanna Rosine Wagner. His father died when he was six months old and Ludwig Geyer, who his mother was now living with, was rumored to have been the boy's biological father. In August 1814 Johanna married Geyer and moved with her family to his residence in Dresden.

Young Richard entertained ambitions of becoming a playwright and only first became interested in music as a means of enhancing the dramas that he wanted to write and stage. He enrolled at the University of Leipzig in 1831. One of his early musical influences was Ludwig van Beethoven.

In 1833, at the age of 20, Wagner finished composing his first complete opera, *Die Feen (The Fairies)*. In 1836, Wagner married actress, Minna Planer, and moved to the city of Riga in Russia, where he became music director at the local opera house. By 1839, the couple had amassed such a large amount of debt that they were forced to flee Riga to escape their creditors. During their flight, they took a stormy sea passage to London where Wagner got the inspiration for *Der Fliegende Holländer (The Flying Dutchman)*. The Wagners then lived in Paris for several years; Wagner made a living writing articles and arrangements of operas by other composers.

Wagner completed writing his third opera, *Rienzi*, in 1840, which was a considerable success. The Wagners lived in Dresden for the next six years, where he was eventually appointed the Royal Saxon Court Conductor. During this period, Wagner wrote and staged *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*.

Wagner spent the next twelve years in political exile from both Saxony and Prussia for his support of the 1848 revolution. He had completed *Lohengrin* before the Dresden uprising, and he now wrote desperately to his friend, Franz Liszt, to have it staged in his absence. Liszt, proving to be a friend in need, eventually conducted the premiere in Weimar, Germany, in August 1850.

The next years Wagner found himself in grim personal straits — he was isolated from the German musical world, and without any income to speak of. The musical sketches he was writing, which would eventually grow into *Der Ring des Nibelung*, seemed to have no prospects of ever being performed. His wife, Minna, who had disliked the operas he had written after *Rienzi*, was falling into a deepening depression. Wagner also fell victim to erysipelas — a superficial bacterial skin infection that causes high fevers, shaking, chills, fatigue, headaches and vomiting — which made it difficult for him to continue writing.

During his first years in Zürich, Wagner wrote a set of notable essays he called, *The Art-Work of the Future* (1849), describing a vision of opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total artwork,” in which the various arts such as music, song, dance, poetry, visual arts, and stagecraft were unified. He also wrote *Judaism in Music* (1850), an anti-Semitic tract directed against Jewish composers, and *Opera and Drama* (1851), in which described ideas in aesthetics that he was putting to use on the *Ring* operas.

**Schopenhauer's influence.** In 1854 Wagner's poet and friend, Georg Herwegh, introduced him to the works of philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, which Wagner would later call the most important event of his life. His personal circumstances certainly made him an easy convert to Schopenhauer's philosophy, which was centered on a deeply pessimistic view of the human condition. He would remain an adherent of Schopenhauer for the rest of his life, even after his fortunes had improved. One of Schopenhauer's doctrines was that music held a supreme role among the arts, since it was the only one unconcerned with the material world.

**Mathilde Wesendonck.** Another source of inspiration for Wagner was the poet-writer, Mathilde Wesendonck. Though Mathilde seems to have returned some of his affections, she had no intention of jeopardizing her marriage, and kept her husband informed of her relationship with Wagner. Nevertheless,

the affair inspired Wagner to put aside his work on the *Ring* cycle (which would not be resumed for twelve years) and begin work on *Tristan und Isolde*. The uneasy affair collapsed in 1858, when Minna intercepted a letter from Wagner to Mathilde. After the resulting confrontation, Wagner left Zürich alone, and headed for Venice. The following year, in 1861, he once again moved to Paris to oversee production of a new revision of *Tannhäuser*, which was an utter fiasco, due to disturbances caused by aristocrats from the Jockey Club. Further performances were cancelled and Wagner hurriedly left the city.

In 1861, the Saxony-Prussian political ban against Wagner was lifted, and he settled in Biebrich, Prussia, and began working on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. In 1862, Wagner finally parted with Minna, though he (or at least his creditors) continued to support her financially until her death in 1866.

**King Ludwig II of Bavaria.** Wagner's fortunes dramatically improved in 1864, when King Ludwig II assumed the throne of Bavaria at the age of 18. The young king, an ardent admirer of Wagner's operas since childhood, had the composer brought to Munich. He settled Wagner's considerable debts, and made plans to have his latest opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, produced. After grave difficulties in rehearsal, the opera premiered to enormous success at the Munich Court Theatre on June 10, 1865.

**Cosima von Bülow.** In the meantime, Wagner became embroiled in another love affair, this time with Cosima von Bülow, wife of conductor Hans von Bülow, one of Wagner's most ardent supporters, and première conductor of *Tristan und Isolde*. Cosima was the illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt and 24 years younger than Wagner. In April 1865, Cosima gave birth to Wagner's illegitimate daughter, who was named Isolde. Their indiscreet affair scandalized Munich and, to make matters worse, Wagner fell into disfavor among members of the Bavarian court, who were suspicious of his influence on the king. In December 1865, King Ludwig was finally forced to ask the composer to leave Munich. He apparently also toyed with the idea of abdicating the throne in order to follow his hero into exile, but Wagner quickly dissuaded him.

Ludwig set Wagner up at the villa Tribschen, beside Switzerland's Lake Lucerne. Wagner completed *Die Meistersinger* at Tribschen in 1867, which premiered in Munich on June 21<sup>st</sup> the following year. In October, Cosima finally convinced Hans von Bülow to grant her a divorce. Richard and Cosima were married on August 25, 1870. They had another daughter, named Eva, and a son named Siegfried.

**Festspielhaus.** Wagner, now happily settled into his newfound domesticity, turned his energies toward completing the last two operas of the *Ring* cycle, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. He wanted the complete *Ring* cycle to be performed in a new, specially-designed opera house. In 1871, Wagner decided on the small town of Bayreuth as the location of his new opera house. The Wagners moved there the following year, and the foundation stone for the Festspielhaus (Festival House) was laid. Later that year, the Wagners moved into their permanent home in Bayreuth, a villa that they named "Wahnfried" ("Freedom from Illusion").

In 1877 Wagner began work on *Parsifal*, his final opera. The composition took four years, during which he also wrote a series of increasingly reactionary essays on religion and art. Wagner completed *Parsifal* in January 1882, and a second Bayreuth Festival was held for the new opera. Wagner was, by this time, extremely ill, having suffered through a series of increasingly severe angina attacks. During the sixteenth and final performance of *Parsifal* on August 29<sup>th</sup>, Wagner secretly entered the pit during Act III, took the baton from conductor Hermann Levi, and led the performance to its conclusion.

After the Festival, the Wagner family journeyed to Venice for the winter. On February 13, 1883, at the age of 70, Wagner died of a heart attack in the Palazzo Vendramin on the Grand Canal. Franz Liszt's memorable piece for pianoforte solo, *La Lugubre gondola*, evokes the passing of a black-shrouded funerary gondola bearing Wagner's mortal remains over the Grand Canal. His body was returned to Bayreuth and buried in the garden of the Villa Wahnfried. (Cosima would later be buried there in 1930, forty-seven years later.)

## The Flying Dutchman



*You're bound to be familiar with the tale  
of the Flying Dutchman.*

*It's the story of the curse-laden ship  
which people see scudding past in a storm,  
its sails unfurled.*

*Sometimes it lowers a boat with all kinds of letters  
for the ships that it meets.*

*These letters are addressed to people  
who have long been dead.*

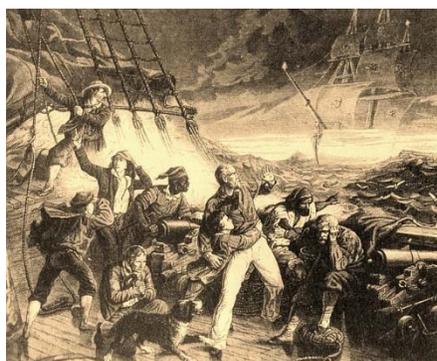
*This wooden specter, this terrible ship,  
takes its name from its captain,  
a Dutchman who once swore by all the devils  
that he would round some cape or other,  
even if it took him till the Day of Judgment.*

*The devil took him at his word,  
and he now has to wander the seven seas  
until he is released from his curse  
by a woman's true love.*

*Every seven years he is allowed to set foot on land  
in pursuit of his redemption.*

Heinrich Heine

Wagner claimed in his 1870 autobiography *Mein Leben* that he had been inspired to write *Der Fliegende Holländer* following a stormy sea crossing he made from Riga to London in July and August 1839. However, in his 1843 *Autobiographical Sketch* Wagner acknowledged that he had taken the story from Heinrich Heine's retelling of the legend in his 1834 satirical novel, "Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski," along with the Englishman Frederick Marryat's 1839 novel, "The Phantom Ship." That started a mini craze for "Flying Dutchman" plays and literature in Europe. But it was Wagner's addition of contemporary obsessions with vampirism and magnetism that has given his version of the old sea story its special resonance. As in the *Ring Cycle*, the central theme is "redemption through love."



Wagner originally wrote *Der Fliegende Holländer* to be performed without intermission — an example of his efforts to break with tradition. While today's opera houses sometimes still follow this directive, it is also performed in a three-act version.

Wagner wrote the first prose draft of the story in Paris early in May of 1840, basing the story on Heinrich Heine's satire *Aus den Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski*, published in *Der Salon* in 1834. In Heine's tale, the narrator watches a performance of a fictitious stage play on the theme of the sea captain cursed to sail forever for blasphemy. Heine introduces the character as a Wandering Jew of the ocean, and also added the device taken up so vigorously by Wagner in this, and many subsequent operas: the Dutchman can only be redeemed by the love of a faithful woman. In Heine's version, this is presented as a means for ironic humor; however, Wagner took this theme literally and in his draft, the woman is faithful until death.

By the end of May 1841 Wagner had completed the libretto, or poem, as he preferred to call it. These were composed for an audition at the Paris Opéra, along with the sketch of the plot. Wagner actually sold the sketch to the Director of the Opéra, Léon Pillet, for 500 francs, but was unable to convince him that the music was worth anything. The rest of the opera was composed during the summer of 1841, with the Overture being written last, and by November 1841 the orchestration of the score was complete. Relieved

of the need to give the Opéra a one-act drama, he had expanded the opera to the more conventional three acts. Wagner conducted the premiere at the Semper Oper in Dresden, January 1843.

This work shows early attempts at operatic styles that would characterize his later music dramas. In *Der Fliegende Holländer* Wagner uses a number of leitmotifs (literally, “leading motifs”) associated with the characters and themes. The leitmotifs are all introduced in the overture, which begins with a well-known ocean or storm motif before moving into the Dutchman and Senta motifs.

Wagner’s original draft had the action set in Scotland, and many of the characters had Scottish names. He changed the location and names to the final Norwegian version while the opera was in rehearsals for its first production.

Writing in “Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde” (“A Communication to my Friends”) in 1851, Wagner claimed that *Der Fliegende Holländer* represented a new start for him: “From here begins my career as poet, and my farewell to the mere concoctor of opera texts.” Indeed, to this day *Der Fliegende Holländer* is the earliest of Wagner’s operas to be performed at the Bayreuth Festival and, at least for that theater, marks the start of the mature Wagner canon.

## The legend of the Flying Dutchman

The legend of The Flying Dutchman is said to have started in 1641 when a Dutch ship sank off the coast of the Cape of Good Hope. Captain van der Decken was so deep in thought that he failed to notice that they had sailed straight into a fierce storm. The captain and his crew battled for hours to get out of the storm. The ship hit treacherous rocks and began to sink. Van der Decken, realizing that death was approaching, screamed out a curse: “I WILL round this Cape, Satan be damned!” Satan heard him and punished the Dutchman, his ship and crew, consigning them all to sail the seas until eternity with no hope for salvation. Every seven years the Dutchman is permitted to bring his ship ashore to find a woman who will be faithful to him until death. Only then will his soul will be saved.

Even today, whenever a storm brews off the Cape of Good Hope, if you look into the eye of the storm, you will be able to see the ship and its captain. However, the old folk claim that those who do see the ship will die a terrible death.

## *Der Fliegende Holländer: The Video (1975)*

**Starring Donald McIntyre, Catarina Ligendza and Bengt Rundgren**



You can taste the salt spray and feel the waves heave beneath your feet. This brilliantly evocative 1975 film of Wagner’s tale of the *Flying Dutchman* is replete with mighty square-rigged ships, storm-tossed waves, pea soup fog and ghosts of dead sailors, making for a splendidly atmospheric operatic experience. Filmed in the studio, with the singers lip-synching the score, the production is enhanced by wonderful 19th century period sets and costumes, and heightened by mighty ocean waves and their tempest-swept ships, an effect filmed in two huge water tanks.

Donald McIntyre is the perfect towering Dutchman, whose anguish is clear from his very first appearance and whose singing is exemplary. The film’s musical collaborator and conductor, Wolfgang Sawallisch, is probably the only conductor to date to have performed (and recorded) every single Wagner opera, and an acknowledged *Hollander* specialist ever since his Augsburg days in the late

1940s. This production of *The Flying Dutchman* moves along quite nicely, as if it were a two-hour sea shanty, not your typical Wagnerian opera.