

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Der Ring des Nibelungen

Die Walküre



**Libretto and Music by
Richard Wagner**

Opera in Three Acts

**Setting: Germany
Time: Ancient German & Norse Mythology**

Characters

Sigmund, twin son of Wotan (tenor).....Jonas Kaufmann
Sieglinde, twin daughter of Wotan (soprano).....Eva-Maria Westbroek
Hunding, Sieglinde's husband (bass).....Jans-Peter König
Wotan, Head of the Gods (bass-baritone).....Bryn Terfel
Brünnhilde, favorite daughter of Wotan (soprano).....Deborah Voight
Fricka, Wotan's wife (mezzo-soprano).....Stephanie Blythe
The Valkyries:
Gerhilde (soprano).....Kelly Cae Hogan
Ortlinde (soprano).....Wendy Bryn Harmer
Waltraute (mezzo-soprano).....Marjorie Einor Dix
Schwertleite (contralto).....Mary Phillips
Helmwige (soprano).....Molly Fillmore
Siegrune (mezzo-soprano).....Eva Gigliotti
Grimgerde (mezzo-soprano).....Mary Ann McCormick
Rossweisse (mezzo-soprano).....Lindsay Ammann

Conducted by James Levine
the Orchestra Metropolitan Opera Orchestra

Première performance of *Die Walküre*: June 26, 1870 at the Court Theatre in Munich, together with *Das Rheingold*
Première performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*: August 13, 1876 in Festspielhaus, Bayreuth, Germany

Synopsis

Background



Wotan, head of the gods, and Alberich, the Nibelung dwarf, continue to compete for mastery of the world. Fafner, the giant, now in possession of the hoard of gold, the Tarnhelm and the Ring, has transformed himself into a dragon using the Tarnhelm, and lies sleepily in a cave, guarding the hoard.

Wotan, after first meeting Erda, the earth goddess [in *Das Rheingold*], has plunged into the womb of the earth to conquer her, forcing her to reveal her secrets and her wisdom to him. She bears him a daughter, Brünnhilde, who, along with her eight Valkyrie sisters, are instructed by Wotan to roam the earth, inciting men to make war against each other. Only the most valiant of warriors, after they fall in battle, are taken by the Valkyries to live in Valhalla with the Gods. Their purpose is to defend Valhalla in its predicted apocalyptic battle against Alberich's army.

Wotan is obsessed with reclaiming the Ring but, because of his dependence upon his treaties (which are carved in his spear), he himself cannot take the Ring from Fafner. He would need to create a “free” man, one who knows nothing of the past, is not subject to Wotan's power, and is not acting as his agent — a man who could slay Fafner, the dragon, and win back the Ring for him. [This is not an easy task, since Wotan always wants to be in control of everyone's lives.]

To set this plan into motion Wotan has descended to earth in human guise as “Wälse” the Wanderer, and has sired a pair of Wälzung twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde, with a mortal woman. Wholly in accordance with Wotan's plan to reclaim the Ring, the twins are violently separated as children and have both led harsh and unhappy lives.

Act I

Inside Hunding's Dwelling



As the curtain rises, an exhausted Siegmund, the Wälzung son of Wotan, bursts into a forest dwelling, owned by Hunding, to take shelter from the violent thunderstorm outside. He is being pursued in the forest by his enemies. Sieglinde, wife of Hunding, finds the sleeping stranger lying by the hearth. She fetches him much-needed water, and the pair gaze tenderly at each other with a strangely familiar recognition.

Hunding arrives, and roughly extends his hospitality to Siegmund. He asks where Siegmund has come from and what his name is. Siegmund says he should be called “Woeful,” describing how one day he returned from hunting with his father, Wolfe, to find their home burned down, his mother murdered and his twin sister brutally abducted. Fascinated, Sieglinde prompts him for more, while Hunding regards the two suspiciously.

Siegmund then relates how he went to the aid of a young woman who was forced into a loveless marriage, killing her savage kinsmen in the fight. Hunding now realizes that he is harboring his kinsmen's foe. The laws of hospitality compel him to give Siegmund shelter for the

night, but in the morning Siegmund will have to fight him. Sieglinde leaves the room with a lingering gaze, first at Siegmund and then at the sword in the trunk of the ash tree that stands in the middle of the dwelling.

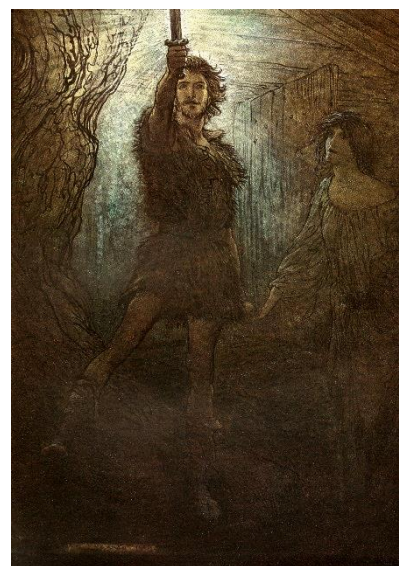
Left alone by the hearth, Siegmund calls on his father, Wälse, for the sword that he had once promised him in his time of need. [This soliloquy is traditionally regarded, by singers and listeners alike, as a test of the singer's virility.]

Sieglinde reappears, having given Hunding a sleeping draught. She tells Siegmund of her wedding to Hunding, at which time an old man dressed in grey, his low-brimmed hat pulled down over one eye, thrust a sword into the tree. Every effort to pull it out ended in failure. Sieglinde confesses her unhappiness to Siegmund, whereupon he ardently embraces her and vows to free her from her forced marriage to Hunding.

Suddenly the great door of the dwelling bursts open and moonlight floods the room. Siegmund speaks of spring and love ("Winterstürme"), to which Sieglinde replies that he is the spring for whom she has so longed ("Du bist der Lenz"). [True to Wagner's theoretical principles, the duet does not allow the couple to sing together at the same time.]

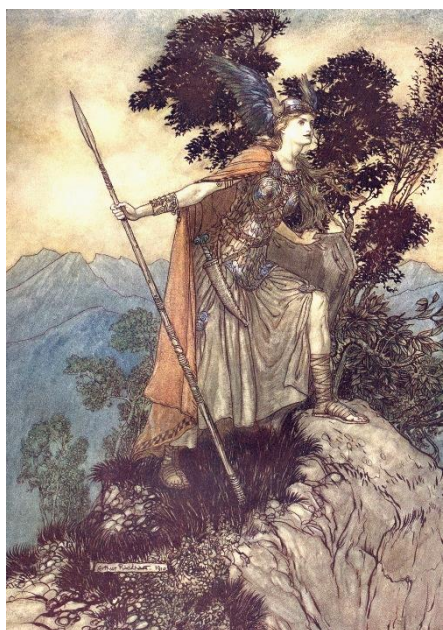
Sieglinde asks Siegmund if his father was really named "Wolf," as he had said earlier. When Siegmund gives his father's name now as Wälse, Sieglinde rapturously recognizes him as Siegmund, her long-lost twin brother. The remainder of the act is an ecstatic declaration of their love, with an unashamed acknowledgment that they are also brother and sister. Siegmund admits that "Woeful" is no longer an appropriate name, and Sieglinde renames him Siegmund ("guardian of victory").

To her delight, Siegmund, with one powerful tug, pulls the sword out of the tree, and names it "Nothung" ("Needful"). He then claims Sieglinde as his bride, rejoicing in the union of the Wälzung race. They embrace rapturously, and the curtain falls with decorous swiftness.



Act II

A Wild and Rocky Mountainside



High in the mountains, Wotan instructs his Valkyrie daughter, Brünnhilde, to ensure that Siegmund will win the subsequent battle with Hunding. Brünnhilde revels in the Valkyrie battle cry, but warns Wotan that he has another battle on hand — his wife, Fricka, is furiously approaching in a ram-drawn chariot.

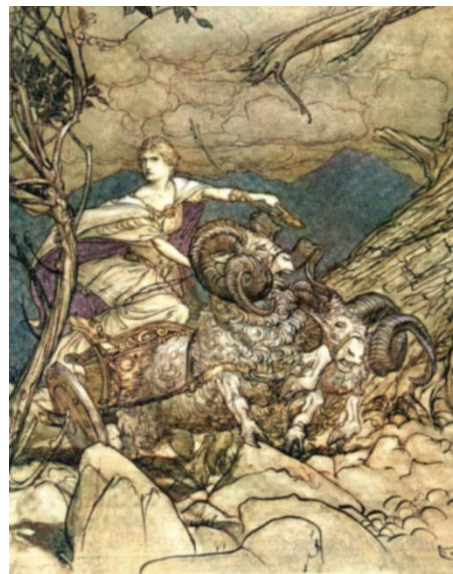
Brünnhilde disappears as Fricka angrily tells Wotan how she, as guardian of marriage, has been appealed to by Hunding to punish the adulterous Wälzung pair, that they have broken the vows of marriage. But Wotan calmly replies that he has no respect for vows that compel a union without love. Fricka turns her attack to the twins' incestuous relationship, but Wotan's reply indicates that not even this breach of conventional morality shocks him.

Fricka continues her indignant protest. She complains that Wotan has brought disgrace on the gods by fathering these incestuous twins with a mortal woman. He replies that the gods need a hero free from their protection, who will be able to do the deed that they themselves are prevented from doing — to capture the Ring. But Fricka

devastatingly exposes the flaw in the guilty god's argument — Siegmund is not able to act as a free hero so long as he is protected by Wotan.

Beaten at his own game, Wotan thrashes about in despair. Fricka insists that Wotan must defend Hunding's marriage rights against Siegmund, and then she extracts from him an oath that he will no longer protect his son. Wotan, realizing that he is caught in his own trap [his power will leave him if he does not enforce the law] he reluctantly agrees to his wife's demands.

After Fricka leaves, Wotan continues to writhe in mental anguish. Brünnhilde reappears to receive the full brunt of his outburst of grief and frustration. [Wotan's ensuing long narrative is not only intended to reveal his secrets to Brünnhilde, but is an act of self-revelation in which we see Wotan in a new light.] He begins by confessing how he had attempted to fill the lovelessness in his life by acquiring power. Wotan recalls the building of Valhalla, Alberich's forging of the Ring and Erda's prophecy of doom. He now longs for only one thing — “das Ende.” He then instructs Brünnhilde to not protect Siegmund in the coming battle with Hunding. She tries to change his mind, but he is unyielding. Disheartened and confused, Brünnhilde agrees to do her father's bidding.



Siegmund and Sieglinde enter breathlessly. Sieglinde, tormented by guilt, begs Siegmund to leave her, but he merely vows to kill Hunding to avenge the wrong done to her. Horns are heard echoing throughout the forest, and Sieglinde feverishly imagines Hunding's dogs tearing at Siegmund's flesh. She then falls into a faint. Lovingly, Siegmund watches over her.

Brünnhilde, who has been watching the twins from behind a rock, now appears to Siegmund as if in a vision, “Todesverkündigung” (“Annunciation of Death”), announcing that he must follow her to Valhalla. When Siegmund learns that he cannot take his sister-bride with him to Valhalla, he is determined not to go. Brünnhilde tells him that his fate is unalterable. Siegmund then threatens to kill Sieglinde and himself rather than be separated from her. Stunned and confused by Siegmund's devotion to Sieglinde, Brünnhilde suddenly relents and promises to protect him in battle — in defiance of Wotan's command.

The sound of Hunding's approaching horn is heard in the distance. Siegmund affectionately bends over the sleeping Sieglinde, then bids her farewell to find Hunding. As Siegmund and Hunding fight, Brünnhilde attempts to protect Siegmund with her shield. Suddenly Wotan appears, shattering Siegmund's sword with his spear, thus allowing Hunding to kill him.

Brünnhilde, terrified of Wotan's wrath, picks up the shattered pieces of the broken sword and escapes with Sieglinde. In disgust, Wotan contemptuously fells Hunding with a wave of his hand, telling him to apprise Fricka of the outcome. Wotan, then sets off in pursuit of the disobedient Brünnhilde.

Act III

On the Summit of a Rocky Mountain

On the Valkyries' Rock, eight warrior-maidens have gathered, collecting slain heroes for Valhalla (“The Ride of the Valkyries”). The Valkyries are concerned that Brünnhilde has not yet arrived. When she is eventually sighted, they are stunned to see that she is carrying over her saddle not a hero, but a woman.

Brünnhilde tells them that she is fleeing Wotan's wrath and needs their protection. Fearful of Wotan, they refuse to shield her. Sieglinde is numb with despair and longs to die. Brünnhilde tells her that a

Walsung stirs in her womb, Siegmund's child. Sieglinde, now suddenly eager to be saved, implores Brünnhilde to protect her and her child. The Valkyries agree that she will be safest in the forest in the east, near Fafner's cave — a place where Wotan won't go. Brünnhilde then gives Sieglinde the fragments of Siegmund's sword, from which one day his son will forge a new weapon. Sieglinde ecstatically thanks Brünnhilde and leaves.



Wotan storms in (“Wotan’s Wrath”) and the Valkyries try in vain to shield Brünnhilde, but after hearing Wotan’s threats to her sisters, she eventually steps forward to face her father. Wotan tells her that she can no longer be a Valkyrie, but must now live as a mortal woman. He also tells her that she is to be confined in sleep on the mountaintop, prey to the first man who finds her. The Valkyries, horror-struck by this severe punishment, protest in defense of their sister. Wotan warns them that they will receive the same fate if they interfere. Terrified of their father’s wrath, the Valkyries quickly separate and scatter.

Left alone with her father, Brünnhilde begs for mercy. She asks whether it was so shameful if, though disobeying Wotan’s orders, she was in fact carrying out his inward desires. She recounts how the Walsung had touched her heart and informs him of Sieglinde’s pregnancy.

But Wotan will not relent — Brünnhilde must lie in sleep, prey for any man who finds her. Brünnhilde pleads that at least she be spared the disgrace of an ignoble union — let her be surrounded by a circle of fire that will deter all but the bravest of heroes. [Both sense that this hero must be the child that Sieglinde will bear.] Deeply moved, Wotan agrees to her demand.



Sadly renouncing his daughter (“Leb’ wohl”), Wotan tenderly kisses Brünnhilde’s eyes with sleep and mortality. He then gently places her on a rock, puts on her helmet, covers her with her shield and sets her spear beside her.

Finally, Wotan summons Loge, god of fire, to encircle the rock with flames. As flames spring up, Wotan invokes a spell forbidding the rock to anyone who fears his spear.

The fire spreads to enclose the whole mountain in flames, as Wotan, looking back, sorrowfully departs [the orchestra plays the “Magic



Fire Music”].



Die Walküre



Much against Wagner's wishes, *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* were premiered in Munich before the rest of the tetralogy was finished. King Ludwig insisted on this "preview," while the furious composer looked on helplessly in the face of the King's privileges and his own dependence on the King's funds.

Die Walküre, as part of the complete Ring cycle, was first performed in 1876 at the festive opening of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. Of the four Ring operas, *Die Walküre* is the one that stands most comfortably on its own, and is the favorite with audiences because it includes some of the most lyrical music in the entire *Ring*.

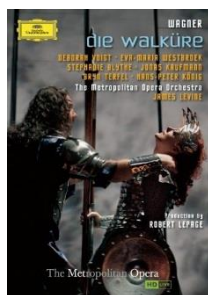
Die Walküre is shown frequently on its own, and saw its first performances (apart from the Munich "premiere") in Vienna and New York 1877, Hamburg and Rotterdam 1878, Strasbourg 1883, Brussels 1887 (in French), Mexico 1891 (in English), Turin 1891 (in Italian), Paris 1893 (in French), London 1895 (in English) and many other opera houses in languages ranging from Russian via Polish to Croatian.

Most people would abhor an incestuous relationship of siblings in ordinary life, yet Wagner tugs at our heart strings to wholeheartedly support Siegmund and Sieglinde. It is the music given to the twins — Siegmund's woeful heart-searching phrases in Act I, his exciting sword aria, and the delirious exchange between brother and sister as they discover their true identities. The callous slaying of Siegmund at the end of Act II upsets us to the core.

And, even if Wotan's Act II monologue has sent some members of the audience to dreamland, they are hopefully awake again for Brünnhilde's "Annunciation of Death" scene with Siegmund. The "Ride of the Valkyries," at the beginning of Act III, is sure to exhilarate again, and the finale between Wotan and Brünnhilde can only be described as one of the most thrilling moments in all of opera.

Die Walküre: The Video (2011)

Starring Deborah Voight, Bryn Terfel, Jonas Kaufmann and Eva-Maria Westbroek



The imaginative staging of this production grabs you right from the beginning with Siegmund being pursued through the woods by his enemies. The singers were absolutely first-class: Eva-Maria Westbroek with her amazing voice was completely believable as Sieglinde, the duty-bound and inexperienced wife of Hunding who feels drawn to Siegmund, her long lost-twin brother. Jonas Kaufmann as Siegmund was at his best vocally. His calls of "Wälse" were long and powerful and his "Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond" aria was sung so beautifully. Deborah Voigt, Bryn Terfel and Stephanie Blythe — what a cast! With James Levine conducting, what more can you ask for? You will watch this DVD over and over.

