

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Der Ring des Nibelungen

Götterdämmerung



Libretto and Music by
Richard Wagner

Opera in Three Acts

Setting: Germany
Time: Ancient German & Norse Mythology

Characters

Siegfried, son of Siegmund and Sieglinde (heldentenor) Jay Hunter Morris
Brünnhilde, daughter of Wotan (dramatic soprano) Deborah Voight
Hagen, son of Alberich (bass)..... Hans-Peter König
Gunther, Gibichen brother (baritone) Iain Paterson
Gutrune, Gibichen sister (soprano) Wendy Bryn Harmer
Alberich, Nibelungen dwarf (bass-baritone)..... Eric Owens
Waltraute, Valkyrie sister (mezzo soprano)..... Waltraud Meier
Norns, daughters of Erda:
 First Norn (contralto) Maria Radner
 Second Norn (mezzo-soprano)..... Elizabeth Bishop
 Third Norn (soprano) Heidi Melton
Rhinemaidens:
 Woglinde (soprano)..... Erin Morley
 Wellgunde (soprano)..... Jennifer Johnson Cano
 Flosshilde (mezzo-soprano) Tamara Mumford
Vassals and women

Conducted by Fabio Luisi
the Orchestra Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus
Première performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*: August 17, 1876
in Festspielhaus, Bayreuth, Germany

Synopsis

Background

Wotan has realized the futility of regaining the ring. Accepting the coming downfall of the gods, he wishes only that the gold be returned to the Rhinemaidens, and that the race of men grow and prosper on earth. Alberich, meanwhile, has fathered a son, Hagen, whose only purpose for being is to regain the ring for his father.

Prologue

Scene 1

Brünnhilde's Rock

The orchestra plays the same theme that sounded when Siegfried first awoke Brünnhilde in Act III of Siegfried, but it is transposed into a very dark minor key.

The curtain rises, revealing the three Norns, weavers of the Rope of Fate. The Norns relate their story. Once they wove the Rope of Fate and attached it to the World Ash Tree, which was fed by a spring of wisdom. Wotan came to drink there, severed a branch from the tree and fashioned a spear. But the tree has withered and, says the First Norn, she must now fasten the rope to a pine branch.

When Wotan's spear was shattered by a dauntless hero, he ordered the World Ash Tree chopped to pieces. The spring dried up forever, and the Second Norn must now fasten the rope to a jagged rock. Wotan ordered the heroes to pile the logs from the World Ash Tree high around Valhalla. Soon Wotan will use his shattered spear to kill Loge, and then throw the flaming spear into the logs to set Valhalla ablaze.

Night is fading and the Norns' vision becomes clouded. The Second Norn sees the Nibelung's ring and the curse upon it. Suddenly, the Rope of Fate snaps. In terror, the Norns descend to their mother, Erda.

Scene 2

An orchestral interlude depicts the transition from the unearthly gloom of the Norns to the break of day.

In a majestic burst of music, Siegfried and his bride, Brünnhilde, emerge from their cave. Siegfried is in full armor, Brünnhilde is leading her horse, Grane. Because she loves him, Brünnhilde urges Siegfried to seek new adventures. She has given him all her wisdom, and has nothing left to give. Responding ardently, Siegfried says he knows only one thing, to always remember Brünnhilde. He removes the ring from his finger and gives it to Brünnhilde as a pledge of his troth. Enraptured, Brünnhilde places the ring on her finger and, in exchange, offers Siegfried her horse, Grane.

Siegfried and Brünnhilde passionately bid farewell to each other, and Siegfried sets forth up the Rhine. As Siegfried disappears, Brünnhilde stands on the cliff looking down the valley after him. Siegfried's horn is heard from below and Brünnhilde waves him a rapturous farewell.



“Siegfried’s Rhine Journey” is played by the orchestra, describing Siegfried’s voyage up the Rhine River. First we hear the brilliant motif of Siegfried the Fearless, then the gracefully flowing motifs of the Rhine and the Rhinemaids, along with the motifs of the Rhinegold and the Ring. Somber harmonies suddenly pervade the music of Hagen’s malevolent plotting, of which we are soon to learn in the first act.

ACT I

Scene 1

The Hall of the Gibichungs



During the interlude, the scene has changed to the Hall of the Gibichungs on the shore of the Rhine. Gunther, Lord of the Gibichungs, and his sister Gutrune, both unwed, ask counsel of their half-brother, Hagen, son of Alberich. *[Hagen, through Alberich’s skillful manipulation, has long planned to possess the ring. He is already aware that Fafner, the dragon, has been killed by Siegfried, and that he has taken the ring and Tarnhelm from the hoard and has given the ring to Brünnhilde.]*

Gunther asks Hagen if his fame along the Rhine is sufficient to honor the Gibichung family. Hagen tells Gunther that the Gibichung name is not secure until he and his sister Gutrune are both wed. Hagen knows the perfect match for Gunther. “A fire surrounds her home.” But, Hagen adds, Gunther is not strong enough to penetrate the fire. Only the Volsung, Siegfried, son of Siegmund and Sieglinde, is up to the task.

Hagen relates how Siegfried slew the dragon and now commands the Nibelung’s hoard. Gunther has heard of the Nibelung hoard and asks for more details. Hagen answers that its master could rule the world. Gunther rises and reproaches Hagen. If Siegfried alone can penetrate the fire, why did Hagen build up false hopes? Hagen has a plan. Siegfried will bring Brünnhilde to Gunther in exchange for Gutrune’s hand in marriage. *[Gunther, presumably, is not aware of the union which already exists between Brünnhilde and Siegfried, and believes that he will receive the Valkyrie in all her goddess-like virginity.]*

Now Gutrune scolds Hagen. How could she possibly win such a hero? Hagen reminds Gutrune of a love-potion which could be used to make Siegfried forget any other woman he had ever seen and fall in love with her. Gunther praises Hagen’s wisdom, and Gutrune longs for Siegfried. *[Hagen craftily conceals from Gutrune the fact that Siegfried had already won Brünnhilde as his bride.]* The three agree to scheme against Siegfried.

Suddenly Siegfried’s horn call is heard down the Rhine. Both men listen attentively. Hagen observes Siegfried rowing up the Rhine and against the current. He calls out a greeting to Siegfried, who answers and then brings his boat up to the bank. Gutrune hastily withdraws to carry out her part of the plot that is to bind him to her.

Siegfried enters and is warmly greeted in courtly fashion by Gunther, who offers Siegfried his home. Siegfried replies that he has only his father’s sword to offer. Hagen returns and inquires about the Nibelung’s hoard. Siegfried replies that he had almost forgotten about it, so little did he value it. Hagen presses for details — did he take any of the treasure? Siegfried points to the chain mail helmet on his belt, but adds that he doesn’t know its use. Hagen does, however, and he slyly explains to Gunther and Siegfried about the magical wonders of the Tarnhelm.

Hagen then asks if Siegfried took anything else from the hoard. “A ring,” responds Siegfried, “which is held by a wondrous woman.” “Brünnhilde!” Hagen mutters under his breath.

Gutrune enters, carrying a drinking horn. She greets Siegfried and offers the horn to him. Siegfried accepts it and raises the drinking horn to his lips and, off to the side, toasts, “Brünnhilde, I drink to you!” He then returns the horn to Gutrune, who casts down her eyes in shame and confusion. The potion has its desired effect, and Siegfried passionately and impetuously offers himself to her. She involuntarily glances at Hagen, and leaves the hall with faltering steps. Siegfried gazes after her.

Siegfried asks Gunther if he has a wife. “Not yet,” replies Gunther. The woman he has his sights set upon is not easily won, he explains. She lives on a mountaintop surrounded by fire. Repeating Gunther’s words, Siegfried appears to be struggling with some distant memory but, by the time Gunther pronounces the name Brünnhilde, all trace of memory is gone from Siegfried’s face. Siegfried tells Gunther that he has no fear of the fire, and will woo Brünnhilde for him if he can take Gutrune as his wife. Gunther quickly agrees to the deal. “But how will you delude her?” asks Gunther. “Through the trickery of the Tarnhelm,” Siegfried replies.

The two men agree to swear an oath of blood-brotherhood. Hagen fills a drinking horn with wine. Siegfried and Gunther each cut their arms with their swords and hold them over the horn. Both sing the oath of blood-brotherhood, then drink from the horn. Hagen then breaks the horn in half and discards it. Siegfried asks Hagen why he did not join in the oath. Hagen replies that his blood does not run pure and noble like theirs, but sluggish and cold. Gunther advises Siegfried to leave the unhappy man alone.

Siegfried tells Gunther to head for the boat and in the morning Brünnhilde will be his. Gutrune appears for a moment, and Hagen tells her that the men are off to woo Brünnhilde. She calls out and then returns to her chamber.

Hagen is left alone to guard the hall. He sits with his back to a pillar, brooding. “Siegfried will soon return, bringing his own bride. But, for me he brings the ring!” Hagen swears that the “sons of freedom” will soon serve the Nibelung’s son. The curtain falls.

Scene 2

Brünnhilde’s Rock

*The orchestra plays a scenic transformation interlude,
moving gradually from Hagen’s dark plotting back to Brünnhilde’s rock.*



As the curtain opens Brünnhilde is seen lost in contemplation of Siegfried’s ring. Her rapturous reminiscences are interrupted by the sounds of an approaching storm.

Thunder is heard in the distance. The orchestra gives the unmistakable impression that someone is coming to see her. From offstage there is a call, “Brünnhilde! Sister!” She recognizes the voice of Waltraute, a sister Valkyrie. She greets her joyously, not noticing her extreme agitation, hoping that she brings news of Wotan’s forgiveness.

Waltraute tells Brünnhilde that the gods are in dire distress. Wotan no longer sends the Valkyries out to battle. He has restlessly roamed the world as the Wanderer returning to Valhalla with the splinters of his spear in his hand, which was shattered by the sword of a great hero. He has ordered his warriors to fell the World Ash Tree and pile the logs high around Valhalla.

There he sits in silence, holding his shattered spear. He refuses the life-preserving Golden Apples. The Valkyries all clasp his knees, but he ignores

their pleading looks. The only time his look softens is when he thinks of Brünnhilde, saying that, if only Brünnhilde would return the ring to the Rhinemaidens, the gods would be saved from the curse. Waltraute has stolen away from Valhalla to try to convince Brünnhilde to end the god's grief.

Brünnhilde, now a mortal woman, no longer understands the ways of the gods. What is it that Waltraute would have her do? Waltraute anxiously tells Brünnhilde to give the accursed ring back to the Rhinemaidens.



Brünnhilde is stunned. The ring is Siegfried's token of love and means more to her than all the joys of Valhalla. She tells Waltraute to return to the council of gods, and tell them that she will never let go of love, "... even though Valhalla's glittering splendor shall fall to ruins!" Realizing that Brünnhilde cannot be swayed, Waltraute leaves in a tempest, crying of woe.

Evening has fallen. Far below, the light of the fire shines gradually brighter. The magic fire rising from the valley throws a glow over the landscape. Siegfried's horn is heard. Joyously Brünnhilde prepares to meet him. Suddenly Siegfried appears in Gunther's form, and wearing the Tarnhelm. "Betrayed!" Brünnhilde shrieks.

Siegfried stands silently for some time. Disguising his voice to sound deeper, Siegfried tells Brünnhilde that a suitor has come, and that she must go with him. Brünnhilde demands to know who he is. "A Gibichung," he answers, "Gunther." Brünnhilde rails in despair at Wotan, seeing this betrayal as a vengeful extension of his sentence

upon her.

Siegfried approaches her, and she threatens him with the ring. Siegfried claims the ring as Gunther's wedding right and says, "With this ring shall you be wedded to him." Brünnhilde invokes the power of the ring but, after a brief struggle, Siegfried wrenches it from her finger. He demands that she take him into the cave and, with trembling steps, she obeys.

Before entering the cave himself, Siegfried draws his sword and calls on Nothung to bear witness that, by placing the sword between them throughout the night, he remains chaste and faithful to his brother, Gunther. The curtain falls.

ACT II

Scene 1

The Hall of the Gibichungs

It is night. Hagen, spear in hand and shield at his side, leans in sleep against a pillar of the hall. Through the weird moonlight Alberich appears. He urges Hagen to claim the ring for him. Hagen pledges an oath that he will be faithful to the hate he has inherited and to himself. Alberich then disappears.

The weirdness of the surroundings, the monotony of Hagen's answers, uttered seemingly in sleep, as if, even when the Nibelung slumbers, his mind remains active, fill this scene with mystery.



Scene 2

A charming orchestral interlude depicts the break of day.

All night Hagen has watched by the bank of the river for the return of Gunther. Siegfried suddenly appears, returning ahead of the others via the power of the Tarnhelm. He tells Hagen of his success in winning Brünnhilde for Gunther, and tells him to prepare to receive Gunther and his new bride, Brünnhilde. Hagen notices that on his finger he wears the ring. Gutrune joins them, and Siegfried leads her into the hall.

Hagen, placing a steer horn to his lips, blows a loud call toward the four points of the compass, summoning the Gibichung vassals to the double wedding ceremony of Siegfried and Gutrune, Gunther and Brünnhilde. When Gunther brings his boat up to the bank, the vassals greet him exuberantly, while Brünnhilde stands there pale with downcast eyes.

Siegfried enters, leading Gutrune, to greet Gunther and his new bride. When Gunther calls Siegfried by name Brünnhilde starts, raises her eyes and stares at Siegfried in amazement. She drops Gunther's hand and advances toward Siegfried. She then recoils in horror, her eyes fixed upon him, while all look on in astonishment. There is a sudden hush. Brünnhilde is shocked and confused; Siegfried remains unconscious of guilt and quietly self-possessed. Gunther, Gutrune and the vassals stare silently at them.

Siegfried, confused by Brünnhilde's attitude toward him, asks her what troubles her. Brünnhilde suddenly sways and is about to fall. When Siegfried supports her with his arm, Brünnhilde looks up into his face and realizes that Siegfried doesn't recognize her. Siegfried then gestures over to Gunther, pointing, "There stands your husband."

Brünnhilde suddenly sees the ring upon Siegfried's finger, the ring he had given her and, which to her horror, Gunther had supposedly wrested from her. She realizes the whole significance of the wretched situation in which she finds herself, and of which she has been made victim. *[She knows nothing, however, of the treachery that Hagen is plotting, or of the love-potion that has aroused in Siegfried an uncontrollable passion for Gutrune, and has caused him to forget her, and to win her for Gunther.]* There, standing at Gutrune's side, and about to be wed, is the man she loves. To Brünnhilde, infuriated with jealousy, her pride wounded to the quick, Siegfried appears simply to have betrayed her to Gunther through infatuation for another woman.

Brünnhilde cries out that the ring was taken from her by Gunther, and demands to know how Siegfried now has it on his own finger. If it is not the same ring, Brünnhilde demands, then where is the ring that he tore from her hand? Gunther, knowing nothing about the ring, is plainly perplexed. Brünnhilde surmises that Siegfried must have been disguised as Gunther, and it was not Gunther himself who won it from her. She warns Gunther that Siegfried had betrayed him as well, since Siegfried was already married to her.

Brünnhilde's words arouse consternation in all but Hagen and Siegfried. *[Hagen, noting the effect on Gunther, from whom he had concealed Siegfried's true relationship to Brünnhilde, sees an added opportunity to mold Gunther to his plan to destroy Siegfried.]* Through the effect of the potion, Siegfried is wholly unconscious of the truth of Brünnhilde's accusations. He had even forgotten that he gave Brünnhilde the ring, calmly proclaiming that he found the ring among the dragon's treasure and never parted with it.

Hagen steps forward and says that if this ring is the one Gunther wrested from Brünnhilde, then Siegfried won it by fraud and must pay. Brünnhilde calls out for revenge. Pointing to Siegfried, she tells the assembled wedding guests that she is already married to him, and not to Gunther. Amidst great confusion, Siegfried denies this, claiming that his sword separated them throughout the night. Brünnhilde, recalling Siegfried's love, and not the events of the previous evening, says that Notung remained sheathed and hanging on the wall while its master won his beloved.

Gunther, Gutrune and the vassals demand that Siegfried swear that he remained faithful to Gunther. Siegfried readily agrees. Hagen holds out the point of his spear. Siegfried swears a solemn oath upon it, vowing that the spear strike him dead if Brünnhilde's accusations are true. Brünnhilde, livid with rage, strides into the circle of men, thrusts Siegfried's fingers away from the spear, grabs it and makes a similar oath.

Siegfried shrugs his shoulders. To him Brünnhilde's ravings are of an overwrought brain. Siegfried appeals for Gunther to control his wife, suggesting that perhaps the Tarnhelm did not completely do its job. With a laugh, and in highest spirits, Siegfried throws his arm around Gutrune and draws her after him into the hall. The vassals and women follow behind them.

Brünnhilde, Hagen and Gunther remain behind. Brünnhilde asks by what treacherous magic these events have happened. She had given all her wisdom to Siegfried, and is now "fast in his bonds." Brünnhilde insists that she has been betrayed by everyone. Only Siegfried's death will avenge her and blot out the Gibichungs' guilt.

Hagen agrees to avenge her. Brünnhilde sneers at the notion. "A single glance from the hero's eyes would melt Hagen's courage." Hagen asks Brünnhilde if Siegfried is vulnerable in some way. Brünnhilde says that she used her magic to protect him but, knowing that he would never flee from an enemy, she failed to protect his back. "And there my spear shall strike!" Hagen proclaims.

Hagen has a plan that will free Gunther and himself of all accusation. "Tomorrow," he suggests, "we will go on a great hunt. As Siegfried boldly rushes ahead, we will fell him from the rear, saying that he was killed by a wild boar." In an aside to Gunther, Hagen assures him that Siegfried's death will bring him great power and wealth, for the ring will then be his.

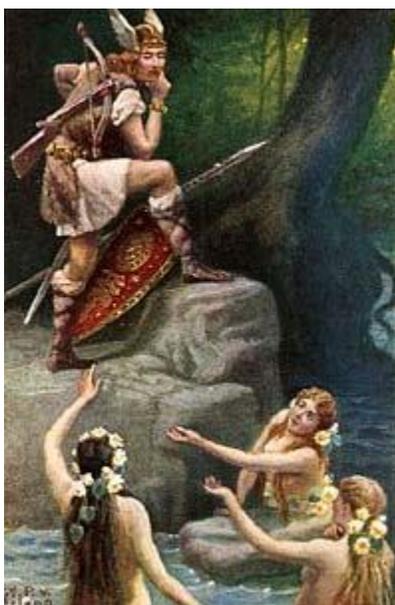
At that moment the bridal procession arrives, with Siegfried leading Gutrune, whose hair is bedecked with flowers. Gutrune beckons to Brünnhilde in a friendly way. When Brünnhilde shrinks from her, Hagen intervenes and forces her to Gunther, who takes her hand. The procession makes its way up to the altars. Hagen alone remains behind and, with a look of grim triumph, watches them as they disappear inside. The curtain falls.



ACT III

Scene 1

On the bank of the Rhine



Siegfried's horn call is heard. It is answered variously by Hagen's steer horn and the Gibichung horn call. The hunting party is in progress.

The curtain rises. The Rhinemaidens are swimming on the surface of the Rhine. They are thankful for the sunlight, but how much more beautiful it was when their father's gold shone in the depths of the Rhine. They hear Siegfried's horn and take heart, diving quickly as Siegfried appears.

The Rhinemaidens rise to the surface and greet him. Siegfried asks them if they have seen the bear he was hunting. After some good-natured teasing, they say they will give him the bear for the ring that glitters on his finger. Siegfried refuses. He slew a dragon to get the ring — and besides, his wife would be angry with him. The Rhinemaidens make great sport of this, suggesting that his wife beats him. They dive below the surface.

Siegfried, stung by their teasing, calls them back. He draws the ring from his finger and offers to give it to them. The Rhinemaidens reappear, this time in a more solemn mood. They tell Siegfried to keep

the ring until he has learned about the curse upon it. Siegfried replaces the ring on his finger, and asks them to tell him what they know.

The Rhinemaidens tell Siegfried the tragic history of the ring, and about the curse placed upon it by Alberich. They warn him that, if he won't give them the ring, he will be slain that very day. They add that only the waters of the Rhine can cleanse the ring of its curse.

Siegfried replies that their flattery does not fool him, and their threats don't frighten him. The Rhinemaidens repeat their warning, adding that the curse on the ring is woven by the Norns into the Rope of Fate. Siegfried boasts of shattering a spear with his sword. He will do the same to the Rope of Fate. However, he would gladly give up all the power in the world for love, but not under threat to life and limb.

The Rhinemaidens decide to leave Siegfried to his fate. They predict that today a proud woman will inherit the ring from Siegfried. She will give the nymphs a fairer hearing. As the Rhinemaidens swim away, Siegfried is left alone to ponder the ways of the gentler sex. Had he not been wed to Gutrune, he might have sought love from one of them.

Various horn calls are heard. Hagen's voice calls out. Siegfried answers the call with his own horn. Hagen appears on the rocky bluff above Siegfried and invites him below. Gunther and the vassals arrive, bringing the day's kill. Hagen orders a meal, wineskins are filled, and everyone lies down to rest.

Hagen asks Siegfried how he fared in the hunt. Siegfried admits that he is empty-handed. He jokes that he was hoping for wood game, but only water fowl showed up. The three water creatures warned him that he would be killed this very day. At hearing this, Gunther looks darkly at Hagen.

Hagen fills a drinking horn and hands it to Siegfried, whom he persuades to relate the story of his life. Siegfried obliges, telling how he slew the dragon, tasted its blood, and found that he could then understand the song of the wood bird. On the bird's advice, he retrieved the ring and the Tarnhelm from the dragon's cave, and then killed the deceitful Mime.

As Siegfried pauses for a moment, Hagen sprinkles some herbs into his drinking horn, an antidote that counteracts the effect of the love-potion. He hands it to Siegfried, telling him that the herbs will help refresh his memory. Siegfried drinks and continues his story, saying how the wood bird then told him to seek a wonderful woman high on a mountaintop surrounded by fire and, if he passed through the blaze, Brünnhilde would then be his.

"And did you follow the bird's advice?" Hagen asks. Gunther listens with increasing astonishment as Siegfried recounts plunging through the flames, finding the sleeping maiden, and awakening her with a kiss. "How passionately then I was clasped in beautiful Brünnhilde's arms!" Siegfried recalls. Gunther springs up, aghast at this revelation, and realizes that Brünnhilde's accusation was true.

Two ravens suddenly fly overhead. Hagen points to the ravens and asks Siegfried if he can read their thoughts. Siegfried turns to gaze after the ravens, presenting his back to Hagen. Hagen plunges his spear into Siegfried's back. Siegfried raises his shield to crush Hagen, but his strength fails him, and he falls back onto his shield.

Horried, the vassals cry out, "Hagen, what have you done?" Hagen answers that he has avenged perjury. Motionless with grief, the men gather around Siegfried's body. Hagen, with stony indifference, turns away and disappears over the rocky height.



Grief-stricken, Gunther bends over Siegfried. Supported by two men, Siegfried rises to a sitting position and, with a strange rapture gleaming in his glance, remembers seeing the sleeping Brünnhilde for the first time. "Brünnhilde, thy waker comes to wake thee with his kiss." Siegfried's last whispers, "Brünnhilde beckons to me." Siegfried then sinks back in death.

Night falls. The moon casts a pale, sad light over the scene. At the silent bidding of Gunther, the vassals raise the body and bear it in solemn procession over the rocky height. Mists gradually fill the stage.

[“Siegfried’s Funeral March” is played by the orchestra as the scene changes.]

Scene 2 The Hall of the Gibichungs

The mists clear to reveal the Gibichung Hall. Moonlight is reflected on the Rhine. Gutrune comes out of her chamber into the hall, thinking that she heard Siegfried’s horn. Nightmares have disturbed her sleep. She thought she heard Brünnhilde’s laughter. She saw a woman go down to the banks of the Rhine and wonders if it was Brünnhilde. She goes to the door of her chamber and calls out to her. There is no answer. “Then it was she I saw go down to the Rhine,” Gutrune surmises.

Hagen is heard outside, calling for the household to awaken. They are bringing home the spoils of the hunt. Hagen enters the hall and brusquely informs the horrified Gutrune that Siegfried is dead, a wild boar’s fallen prey. Gutrune shrieks and falls on Siegfried’s body. Gunther attempts to comfort her, but she pushes him away, accusing him of murder. Gunther cries out that it was Hagen who is really the accursed boar that killed Siegfried. Hagen steps forward defiantly and admits that he indeed killed Siegfried.

Suddenly Gunther angrily claims the ring as Gutrune’s inheritance, and it is therefore rightfully his. A fight ensues, and Hagen strikes Gunther dead. Hagen then lunges for the ring on Siegfried’s finger, but the dead hero’s arm rises defiantly. All draw back in horror.

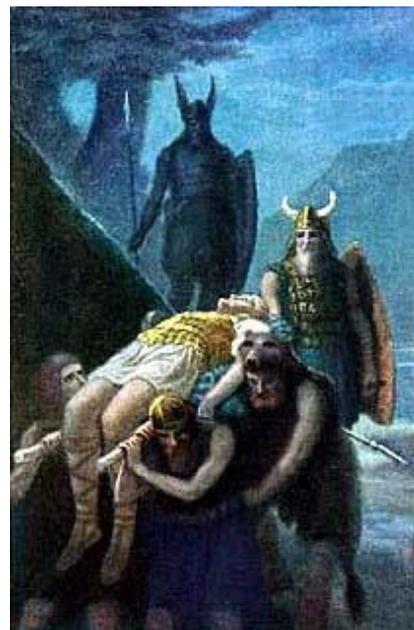
Brünnhilde comes forward solemnly. While watching on the bank of the Rhine she has learned from the Rhinemaidens the treachery of which she and Siegfried have been the victims.

Gutrune rebukes Brünnhilde for bringing this anguish to the Gibichungs. Brünnhilde calmly silences her and reveals that Siegfried swore eternal vows to her before he had ever met Gutrune. Finally understanding the treacherous effect of the potion, Gutrune curses Hagen and, consumed with guilt and grief, turns away from Siegfried and collapses on Gunther’s dead body. Hagen, leaning on his spear, is lost in gloomy brooding.

This begins “Brünnhilde’s Immolation Scene”

Brünnhilde turns to the men and women in solemn exaltation, and commands the vassals to build a funeral pyre. Bright flames will consume Siegfried’s noble body and, with Grane, she will follow. Brünnhilde gazes upon Siegfried’s face and calmly eulogizes him. He was both honest and deceitful, loyal and faithless. She questions how this could be. He, truest of all, had to betray her, so that a woman might find wisdom!

Brünnhilde then turns her gaze inward and addresses Wotan, “Behold your everlasting guilt!” Wotan sacrificed Siegfried to escape the curse that had fallen on him. “All things, now I know. All is clear in my eyes. The wings of thy ravens I hear rustling. I send them home to thee, with news both feared and longed for. Rest! Rest thou, oh god!”





Brünnhilde signals for the vassals to lift Siegfried's body onto the pyre. Taking the ring from Siegfried's finger, she claims it as her inheritance. She thanks the Rhinemaidens for their wise counsel. "What you desire I give you now. From my ashes take it for your own." She slips the ring onto her finger, saying "May the fire that burns me cleanse the ring from the curse!"

Taking a torch from one of the vassals, she commands Wotan's ravens to fly home. "Fly past Brünnhilde's rock where Loge is still blazing, and bid him go to Valhalla! Thus I throw the firebrand into Valhalla, glorious citadel." Then, turning toward the pyre upon which Siegfried's body rests, Brünnhilde snatches a huge firebrand from one of the men, and hurls it onto the pyre, which kindles brightly. She greets her horse, Grane and, after a rapturous final farewell, she then mounts him and leaps with a single bound into the blazing pyre.

The flames immediately blaze up so that they fill the entire space in front of the hall, and appear to seize on the building itself. The men and women press to the extreme front in terror. The fire suddenly subsides, leaving only a mass of smoke, which collects and forms a cloud bank on the horizon.

At the same time the Rhine overflows its banks in a mighty flood, which pours over the fire. On the waves the three Rhinemaidens swim forward and now appear above the pyre. Hagen, who has watched Brünnhilde's behavior with increasing anxiety, is much alarmed at the appearance of the Rhinemaidens. He hastily throws aside his spear, shield and helmet, and madly plunges into the flood, shouting, "Away from the Ring!" Woglinde and Wellgunde twine their arms round his neck and draw him into the depths as they swim away. Flosshilde, swimming in front of the others to the back, joyously holds up the recovered ring.

Through the cloud bank, which has settled on the horizon, a red glow breaks out with increasing brightness. By its light the Rhinemaidens are seen circling and playing with the ring on the calmer waters of the Rhine, which has gradually returned to its bed.

From the ruins of the fallen hall, the men and women, in great agitation, watch the growing firelight in the heavens. When this reaches its greatest brightness, Valhalla is seen, in which gods and heroes sit assembled, just as Waltraute described them in the first act. Bright flames seize on the hall of the gods. When the gods are entirely hidden by the flames, the curtain falls. [Wagner's stage directions]

Götterdämmerung

Wagner had the idea of writing an opera on the death of the Teutonic hero, Siegfried. He then decided to add additional material, and the project grew and grew to become the four-opera, 18-hour *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, one of the most remarkable accomplishments in all of western civilization.

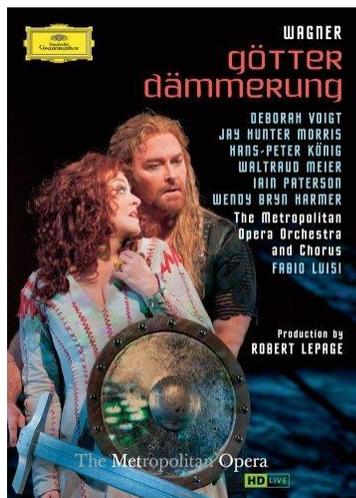
The final episode of the Ring cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, is the last and most amazing of the four operas of the cycle, as Wagner brings down the world of the gods and heroes in fire and water. What he accomplishes with his orchestral writing is nothing short of mind-boggling.

Götterdämmerung is a colossal work — one of the longest evenings of opera in the standard repertory. Musically, Wagner had gained such mastery of his music-drama and his use of musical motifs that he treated both with superb freedom. The handling of leitmotifs in this opera can be thought of as one of the most powerful psychological achievements in art.

Götterdämmerung is also deemed excessively repetitive by many critics. “How convenient is the method of giving the same tinkling leading theme to each reappearing person, each similar situation, and each returning trend of thought,” Ludwig Speidel declared, “as though one were hanging a dog-license number round its neck.” Thus Sir Thomas Beecham’s complaint: “We’ve been rehearsing for two hours,” he exclaimed one day, “and we’re still playing the same bloody tune!”

***Götterdämmerung*: The Video (2011)**

Starring Deborah Voigt, Jay Hunter Morris, Hans-Peter König, Waltraud Meier



Götterdämmerung is the most theatrically effective staging of the four works in this epic series, and the clearest representation of the director Robert Lepage’s vision. With each installment, Mr. Lepage has simplified the staging and used fewer of the capacities of the 45-ton set of “the machine,” as it has been called.

Act II, for example, takes place in the hall of the Gibichungs. Here the planks simply formed the outlines of a spacious room in a palatial home, with grainy wood columns, rafters and doorways. The old-fashioned imagery reveals how, at its core, Lepage’s “Ring” is quite a traditional production — call it high-tech traditional.

Fabio Luisi, who had taken over the conducting of the “Ring” from the ailing James Levine, drew an uncommonly articulate and nuanced account of this daunting opera from the Met orchestra. His lucid, textured and urgent conducting was distinguished and he received a huge ovation.

American tenor Jay Hunter Morris, who took over the title role in *Siegfried* on short notice, was again impressive. He was the perfect Siegfried — beautiful singing, a charming combination of innocence and manliness, and a seemingly effortless stage presence, ranging from romantic to playful to tragic. He has found his own way to sing this heldentenor role with a lighter yet athletic and youthful sound. His clarion top notes project nicely over the orchestra.

Soprano Deborah Voigt received a rousing ovation for her Brünnhilde and was the dominating and convincing goddess-turned-mortal. Her voice had lost gleam, warmth and power and was sometimes patchy and tremulous. Her lower range continued to be a problem, and her sometimes sustained mid-range tones wavered. But through sheer force of will, she proved herself as Brünnhilde here, especially during the complex confrontation scene in Act II, when her character lashes out at Siegfried, who she thinks has betrayed her, with blazing phrases of accusation and bitterness. Voigt’s sound was not pretty, but it sliced through the orchestra and throbbed with intensity.

Bass-baritone Iain Paterson, a vocally solid Gunther, conveyed the complexities of this weak-willed but ambitious lord. The husky bass Hans-Peter König brought his booming if sometimes leathery voice to Hagen. He showed Hagen’s poignant self-doubt in the ominous dream scene in which Alberich (the formidable bass-baritone Eric Owens) urges his son to reclaim the magic ring and restore control to the family.

Soprano Wendy Bryn Harmer was a bright-voiced and affectingly volatile Guttrune. And in a bit of luxury casting, the great German mezzo-soprano Waltraud Meier stilled the house as the Valkyrie maiden Waltraute, who comes to Brünnhilde’s mountain to beg her sister to return the ring to the Rhinemaidens, the last chance to save the gods.

Mr. Lepage’s attentiveness to the libretto is sometimes literal-minded. At the end of the Immolation Scene, Brünnhilde, as the stage directions indicate, mounts Grane, her horse, and rides it into the conflagration. Yet at the climax of this vocal tour de force, which Ms. Voigt sang with steely toned vehemence and vulnerability, she looked a little comic getting on her mechanical steed.