

# Die Walküre

RICHARD WAGNER  
(1813 – 1883)

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Cover: The Valkyries see their sister Brünnhilde surrounded by a circle of fire in a scene from *Die Walküre* (COC, 2006). Photo: Michael Cooper  
Above: Clifton Forbis, as Siegmund, wields the sword Nothung in a scene from *Die Walküre* (COC, 2006). Photo: Gary Beechey

# Welcome!

With its incredible vocal demands, enormous orchestra and a story of gods and mortals, this is opera at its most **epic**! Even if you've never seen a production of Wagner's masterpiece *Die Walküre*, one of the most recognizable musical pieces in the world comes from this opera! This is the second in the four-part *Ring Cycle*, Wagner's incredible artistic achievement, and certainly one of the greatest works of art ever conceived.

Wagner's colossal work is brought to life by visionary film and stage director Atom Egoyan, whose production represents a once-pristine Valhalla, now in ruins as a result of the power struggles for a magical ring, as a site of industrial collapse, with twisted scaffolding and a tangle of cables and wires among the floodlights.

*Die Walküre* opens the door to meaningful discussions with students along a diverse range of curriculum topics including Mythology, Classical Languages and International Languages (German), and Interdisciplinary Studies (music and business).

Based on an ancient legend about gods, war, and forbidden love, and featuring some of the most impressive music ever composed, *Die Walküre* is certainly grand on many levels. Take a closer look at how Wagner communicated the opera's themes through his complex and heroic music, and you'll begin to see why *Die Walküre* is one of the most powerful artworks ever created.

*Die Walküre* is sung in German with English SURTITLES™.



## STUDENT DRESS REHEARSALS 2014/2015

\$15 INDIVIDUAL STUDENT RUSH TICKETS\*

### *Falstaff* Verdi

Tuesday, September 30, 2014 at 7:30 p.m.

### *Madama Butterfly* Puccini

Wednesday, October 8, 2014 at 7:30 p.m.

### *Don Giovanni* Mozart

Thursday, January 22, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

### *Die Walküre* Wagner

Wednesday, January 28, 2015 at 7 p.m.\*\*

### *The Barber of Seville* Rossini

Wednesday, April 15, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

### *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung* Bartók/Schoenberg

Monday, May 4, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

\*In-person, day-of sales only. Age and purchasing restrictions apply. All dress rehearsals are approximately three hours with one or two intermissions. Visit [coc.ca/Explore](http://coc.ca/Explore) for details.

\*\*Please note the earlier start time to accommodate the length of the opera, approx. four hours and 45 minutes including two intermissions.



# Opera 101

## WHAT IS OPERA?

The term “opera” comes from the Italian word for “work” or “piece,” and is usually applied to the European tradition of grand opera. Opera is a form of storytelling which incorporates music, drama and design.

Though its origins date back to ancient Greece, the form of opera we are familiar with today started in the late 16th century in Florence, Italy. Count Giovanni de’ Bardi was a patron and host to a group of intellectuals, poets, artists, scientists and humanists including Giulio Caccini (composer) and Vincenzo Galilei (father to the astronomer and scientist, Galileo Galilei, who was most famous for his improvements to the telescope). These individuals explored trends in the arts, focusing on music and drama in particular. They were unified in their belief that the arts had become over-embellished and that returning to the transparency of the music of the ancient Greeks, which incorporated both speech and song, and a chorus to further the plot and provide commentary on the action, would present a more pure, natural and powerful way to tell stories and express emotions.

The first opera, *Dafne*, about a nymph who fled from Apollo and was subsequently transformed by the gods into a laurel tree, was composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597. From then on, the early operas recreated Greek tragedies with mythological themes. During the 17th and 18th centuries, topics expanded to include stories about royalty, and everyday or common people. Some operas were of a serious nature (called *opera seria*) and some light-hearted (called *opera buffa*). Since then operas have been written on a wide variety of topics such as cultural clashes (*Madama Butterfly*), comedic farce (*The Barber of Seville*), politicians on foreign visits (*Nixon in China*), the celebration of Canadian heroes (*Louis Riel*), and children’s stories (*The Little Prince*), to name a few.

The COC presents works in the western European tradition but musical equivalents to European opera can be found in Japan, at the Peking Opera in China, and in Africa where it is called Epic Storytelling.

## What are the differences between operas, musicals and plays?

Traditionally operas are through-sung, meaning they are sung from beginning to end with no dialogue in between. Singers must have powerful voices in order to be heard over the orchestra (the ensemble of instrumental musicians that accompanies the dramatic action on stage during an opera). Remember: opera singers don’t use microphones!

Musicals are a combination of dialogue and sung pieces and often include choreographed numbers. The singers often use microphones and are accompanied by a pit band which includes more modern instruments like a drum kit, guitar and electronic instruments.

Plays are primarily spoken works of theatre with minimal singing or music.

There are always exceptions to the rule: though *Les Misérables* is through-sung it is still classified as a piece of musical theatre because of its style of music. By the same token, some operas, like Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, have spoken dialogue in addition to singing.

## What does opera feel like?

Take five minutes out of the school day and instead of using regular voices to converse, ask the class to commit to singing everything. Make an agreement with the students that it’s not about judging people’s voices but about freeing our natural sounds. Make up the melodies on the spot and don’t worry about singing “correctly.” Did the musical lines help express or emphasize certain emotions? If so, how?

# Attending the Opera: Make the most of your experience

## WELCOME TO THE FOUR SEASONS CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS



Photo: Sam Javanrouh

So you're headed to the opera, and there are a few questions on your mind. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of your opera experience.

First, there's the question of **what to wear**. People wear all sorts of things to the opera—jeans, dress pants, cocktail dresses, suits, etc. The important thing is to be comfortable. Wear something that makes you feel good, whether it be jeans or your nicest tie. But skip that spritz of perfume or cologne before you go out; the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts is scent-free. Many fellow patrons and performers are allergic to strong scents.

Once you're dressed, it's important to **arrive on time** for the show. Late patrons cannot be admitted to the theatre, and you may have to watch the first act on a television screen in the lobby rather than from your seat. If you don't have your ticket yet, arrive as early as possible—the line-up for the box office can often be quite long prior to a performance! The main doors open one hour before the performance. Line up there and have your ticket ready to present to the usher. If you have any questions about

tonight's performance, drop by the Welcome Desk (just inside the main doors) to ask a member of the COC staff, who are full of useful information not only about tonight's opera, but also about COC programs in general. A **pre-performance chat** takes place in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre (Ring 3) about 45 minutes before the show. These chats, given by members of our **COC Volunteer Speakers Bureau**, offer valuable insight into the opera and the specific production that you'll be seeing.

Before the opera starts, take the opportunity to **explore the lobby**, known as the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room. Stop by concessions and **pre-order a beverage for intermission or purchase a snack**. Walk up the stairs, passing a sculpture as you go, and note the floating glass staircase—the longest free-span glass staircase in the world! On the third floor, you'll see the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, home to our Free Concert Series. You'll also see a mobile by artist Alexander Calder, adding some colour and whimsy to the space.

Chimes will ring throughout the lobby **ten minutes** before the performance, reminding everyone to find their



seats. Head towards the door noted on your ticket, get a program from the usher, and find your designated seat in R. Fraser Elliott Hall. It's best to use this time to open any candies you might have and turn off your cell phone—the hall is built to carry sound, so small sounds travel further than you may think! Photography is not permitted once the show starts. The design and direction of the show is under intellectual property and only the official COC photographer and/or members of the media can take pictures and even then, only under special circumstances that require prior arrangements.

As the lights go down and the audience quiets, **listen carefully**. Remember all of that traffic you heard in the lobby? And now... not a peep! The auditorium is physically separated from the outside and the ground below, making for the best acoustic experience possible.

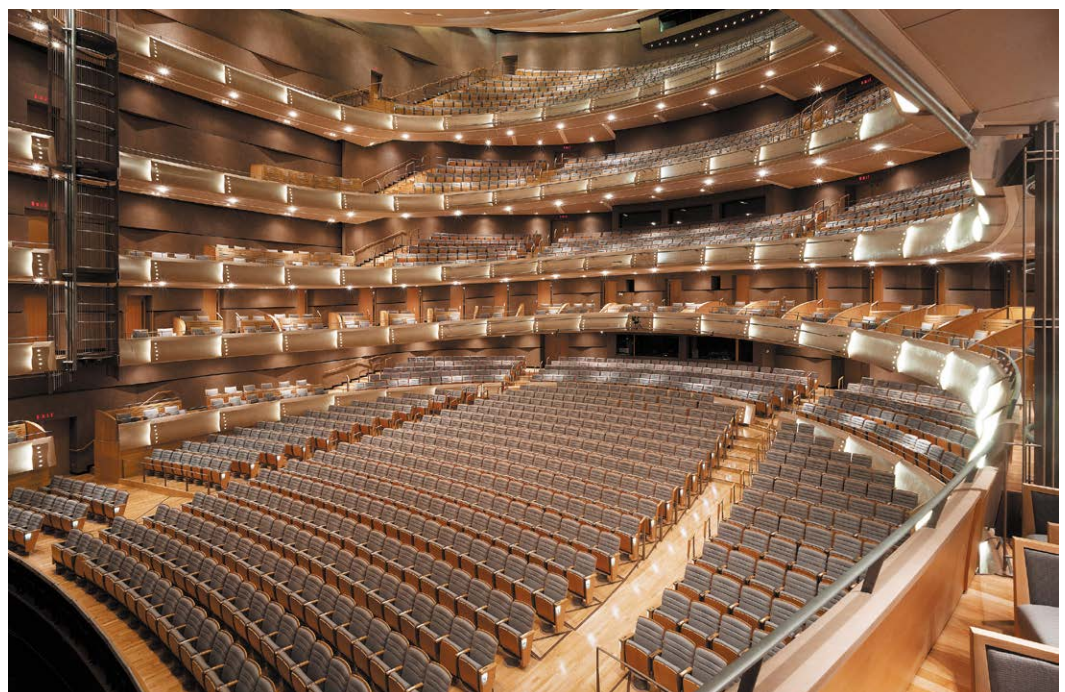
Now it's time to sit back and **enjoy the opera!** **SURTITLES™** will be projected on a horizontal screen above the stage. **SURTITLES™** originate from the idea of

“subtitles”, which are most commonly used in foreign films to make them more accessible outside of their country of origin. The COC was the first opera company to adapt this concept for the operatic stage. Slides containing the English translation of the *libretto* (text for the opera) are projected in a more visible place for the audience: above the stage. **SURTITLES™** were first used by the COC at the premiere of the opera *Elektra* in 1983. Only the name could be trademarked, as the technology for the projections was already in existence. Opera companies from around the world have adopted this audience initiative under different names, and it has revolutionized opera stages everywhere.

Feel free to show your **appreciation to the performers** by laughing at humorous bits or applauding after a well-performed aria. If a performer has pulled off some particularly impressive vocal fireworks, it's absolutely acceptable to yell out your appreciation in addition to applause. You may hear your fellow audience members shouting “bravo!” for a man, “brava!” for a woman, or “bravi!” for a group of performers. Feel free to join in!

*Die Walküre*  
lasts approximately  
four hours and  
45 minutes, including  
two intermissions.  
The opera is sung in  
German with English  
**SURTITLES™**.

R. Fraser Elliott Hall.  
Photo: Tim Griffith



# Characters and Synopsis

## MAIN CHARACTERS (in order of vocal appearance)

Name	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Siegmond	Tenor	ZEEG-moondt
Sieglinde	Soprano	Zeeg-LIN-duh
Hunding	Bass	HOOHN-ding
Wotan	Bass-baritone	VOH-tahn
Brünnhilde	Soprano	Brooehn-HEEL-duh
Fricka	Mezzo-soprano	FREE-kah
Gerhilde	Soprano	Gehr-HEEL-duh
Helmwige	Soprano	HELM-wee-guh
Waltraute	Mezzo-soprano	Vahl-TRAHoo-tuh
Schwertleite	Contralto	Shvert-LIE-tuh
Ortlinde	Soprano	Ohrt-LEEN-duh
Siegrune	Mezzo-soprano	Zeeg-ROOH-nuh
Rosswisse	Mezzo-soprano	ROSZ-vie-zuh
Grimgerde	Mezzo-soprano	Greehm-GER-duh

For some, jumping into *Die Walküre* as their first introduction to the *Ring Cycle* is like starting a TV or movie series with the second episode or film. The opera is often performed as a stand-alone and while it packs a dramatic punch, some nuances and context are naturally absent.

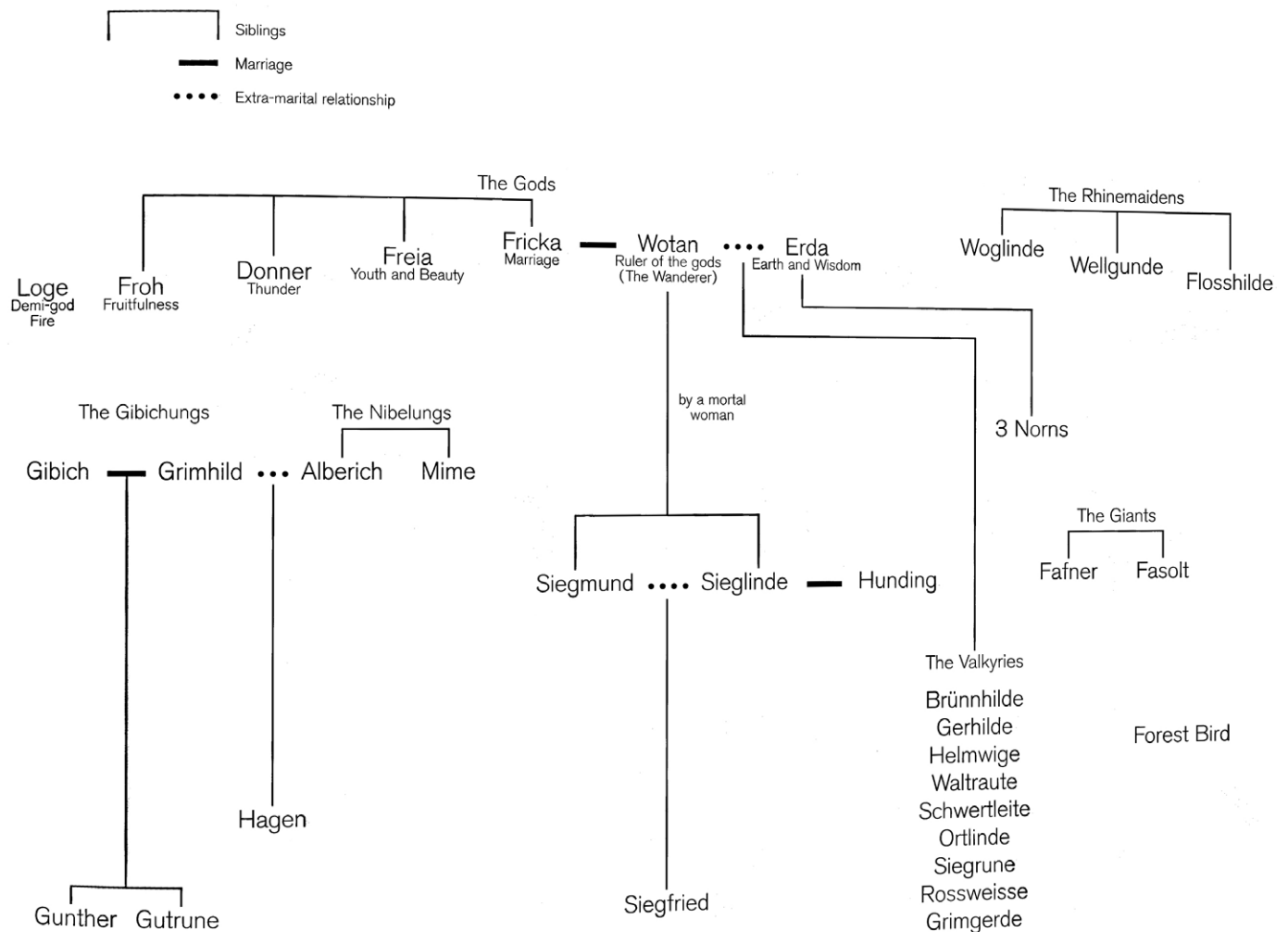
The experience is even more riveting if the audience is familiar with the backstory, characters and drama that led to this point in Wagner's epic cycle.

To help guide you through the intricate family relations, refer to the *Ring Cycle* family tree on the next page!

Clifton Forbis as Siegmund and Adrianne Pieczonka as Sieglinde, his twin sister, in a scene from *Die Walküre* (COC, 2004). Photo: Michael Cooper



## THE RING CYCLE FAMILY TREE



## SYNOPSIS

### BEFORE THE OPERA BEGINS

Alberich, the Nibelung dwarf-king, had stolen the magic Rhine gold from the Rhinemaidens and forged it into a ring giving world power to its wearer. Wotan, ruler of the gods, acquired it from him by trickery and gave it to the giants, Fafner and Fasolt, in payment for building him the mighty fortress, Valhalla. However, Alberich had cursed the ring and its possessors.

In an effort to forestall Alberich's vengeance, Wotan ordered his nine Valkyrie daughters, to retrieve fallen heroes who will become immortal protectors of Valhalla.

Wotan also sired twin children, Siegmund and Sieglinde, by a mortal woman. He now hopes that Siegmund will be the one who recovers the ring and returns it to the Rhinemaidens, thereby saving the gods.



## **ACT I**

Fleeing his enemies and seeking refuge, Siegmund enters Hunding's dwelling and is found by Sieglinde, Hunding's wife, who gives him a drink and bids him rest awhile. They are unaware that they are twin brother and sister separated at birth.

Hunding returns and offers Siegmund the traditional night's hospitality for travelers. In answer to his host's questions, Siegmund tells of his mother's death and the disappearance of his sister and father. He then tells of his flight from a battle with local tribesmen. Hunding angrily exclaims that they are his kinsmen and challenges Siegmund to a fight in the morning. Siegmund wonders when he will find the sword, Nothung, which his father had promised him in his hour of need.

Sieglinde returns, having drugged Hunding into a deep sleep. She tells Siegmund the events of her forced marriage and of the stranger who appeared in her house at the wedding feast. The stranger plunged a sword into the ash tree around which Hunding's house was built and said that it would belong to the warrior who could remove it. Sieglinde then recognizes Siegmund as her twin brother, and as the two embrace, Siegmund declares he will claim the sword and Sieglinde for himself. He then rushes to the tree and, pulling free the sword, he releases Sieglinde from Hunding's bondage.

## **ACT II**

Wotan orders Brünnhilde to assemble her sisters, the Valkyries, to help Siegmund in his battle with Hunding. As Brünnhilde leaves, Fricka, the goddess of marriage and Wotan's wife, arrives outraged at the incestuous twins and demands that Wotan withdraw his protection of Siegmund. Wotan protests that Siegmund is the champion he has chosen to recover the Ring. But Fricka will not be persuaded and he finally gives in.

Brünnhilde returns to a gloomy and despairing Wotan, who tells her of his futile attempts to get the Ring and of Alberich's imminent victory over the gods. Wotan instructs Brünnhilde to ensure that Siegmund dies in battle.

The fleeing lovers rest in the forest. Sieglinde, exhausted, begs to be left to die in shame and falls asleep. Brünnhilde

approaches, calling Siegmund by name. Only warriors destined to die in combat can look at her, she explains, and she has come to take him to Valhalla. Determined never to leave Sieglinde, he stands ready to fight. His bravery and defiance win Brünnhilde's sympathy and she promises her help in spite of Wotan's orders.

At the sound of Hunding's horn, Siegmund prepares for battle with Brünnhilde standing close to shield him. Wotan appears and shatters Siegmund's sword. Defenseless, he is slain by Hunding. Brünnhilde hurriedly gathers up the fragments of the sword and takes Sieglinde to safety. Wotan gazes on his fallen champion and kills Hunding. He disappears, promising punishment for Brünnhilde's disobedience.

## **ACT III**

Accompanied by Sieglinde, Brünnhilde is met by the Valkyries and relates the events of Siegmund's death and Wotan's anger. Brünnhilde's sisters reproach her, themselves fearful of Wotan's wrath.

Sieglinde, begging for help, is advised to hide near Fafner's cave in the forest for even Wotan fears the place and will not pursue her there. Brünnhilde tells her that she will bear Siegmund's son, the greatest of all the world's heroes—Siegfried. Sieglinde takes the fragments of Siegmund's sword and departs.

Wotan appears and orders Brünnhilde to come forward. Henceforth, she is no longer a Valkyrie, but a mortal woman, and forever banished from the company of her sisters. The others scatter in terror.

Wotan is overcome with sadness and affection for his favourite daughter. But she must be punished. She will be put into a deep sleep until a worthy hero awakens her and wins her love. Brünnhilde begs Wotan for protection while she is in her defenseless sleep by encircling her with fire. He gently kisses her eyes, bidding her farewell, and she loses consciousness. Striking a rock, he calls to Loge, god of fire, to bring forth his ring of flames. Holding his spear aloft, Wotan declares with a last sorrowful gaze at Brünnhilde that only the one who does not know fear will be able to cross the ring of fire.

# Genesis of the Opera

***“Wagner’s dramas are disturbing because they plunge us through myth and music deep into ourselves, and what we discover there—often primitive, frightening, vindictive, and erotic—are feelings that we who have constructive roles in society have suppressed.”***

Father Owen Lee, “The Wagner Case”



## WAGNER AND THE TOTAL WORK OF ART

Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig, Germany (where Bach spent most of his life, and where Schumann, Mendelssohn, Mahler, among others, spent a good deal of time) in 1813 and died in Venice in 1883. Primarily known for his opera/music drama works, Wagner lived a life of controversy and greatly changed the face of opera with his aesthetic concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“total work of art”). In this concept, music and words are seamlessly integrated, and various art forms are combined for maximal expressive effect. Mythology, philosophy, dance, architecture, as well as the visual and plastic arts, would all be synthesized and absorbed into a unified, complete, multimedia experience. Wagner even designed a special performance venue, the Bayreuther Festspielhaus, where these operas of the future could be appropriately staged.

By “total work of art,” Wagner didn’t just mean the combination of discrete artistic practices into a unified whole. He also meant that the art work should bring *people* together (Wagner was far from the clichéd figure of a genius composing only for himself; he was an essentially *popular* composer). Indeed, Wagner was following—or was trying to revitalize, in a distinctly modern way—the traditions of ancient Greek theatre, in which a community gathers to reaffirm its self-understanding and collective values, as happens in religious ceremonies or festivals, for example.

Wagner is known for his very rich orchestrations and harmonies, and especially for his use of the *Leitmotif*, a term for a recurring musical theme that identifies a specific character, place, emotion or idea.

It is impossible to discuss the genesis of Richard Wagner’s incredible opera *Die Walküre* without first addressing the artistic enormity of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*, also commonly known as the *Ring Cycle* or the *Ring*), arguably Wagner’s greatest achievement and certainly one of the most monumental operatic works ever written. Composed over the course of 26 years, Wagner’s *Ring* was in many ways the culmination of a life’s work that evolved throughout its composition as Wagner’s approach to opera changed. Public reception to his third opera, *Rienzi* (1842) had been largely positive, but his *Der fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*, 1843) and *Tannhäuser* (1845)—both of which had begun to move away from the favoured grand opera form of *Rienzi*—were not as well received.

Wagner began to seriously re-think his approach to opera, and how he defined the art form itself.

In his 1851 essay “A Communication to My Friends”, Wagner wrote:

I shall never write an opera more. As I have no wish to invent an arbitrary title for my works, I will call them Dramas [...] I propose to produce my myth in three complete dramas, preceded by a lengthy Prelude (Vorspiel). [...] At a specially-appointed Festival, I propose, some future time, to produce those three Dramas with their Prelude, *in the course of three days and a fore-evening*. The object of this production I shall consider thoroughly attained, if I and my artistic comrades, the actual performers, shall within these four evenings succeed in *artistically conveying my purpose to the true Emotional* (not the Critical) *Understanding* of spectators who shall have gathered together expressly to learn it...”

This was the first time Wagner publicly addressed his plans to compose the *Ring Cycle*.

Wagner created the four-part story of his monumental *Ring Cycle* based on German and Scandinavian legends and myths. *Die Walküre* was based on the 13th-century Icelandic *Völsunga saga* as well as the Poetic Edda, a collection of ancient Norse poems. All four of the *Ring* operas are interconnected and, though *Die Walküre* is the second in the cycle, it was the third that Wagner composed. We get into more of the plot and musical details in the synopsis! (See page 8).

## PREMIERE AND RECEPTION

Along with *Das Rheingold* (the first opera of the *Ring Cycle*), *Die Walküre* was premiered at the National Theatre Munich (home of the Bavarian State Opera, still very active today) on June 26, 1870. Shortly after, Wagner began overseeing the construction of a new opera house in Bayreuth, where he intended to have the first performance of the complete *Ring Cycle*, which he saw to fruition in 1876, when his Bayreuther Festspielhaus opened and the premiere was given.

The COC opened the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts in 2006 by presenting the complete *Ring Cycle*. It is believed the COC is only the second company in history to open a new opera house with the *Ring Cycle*—almost 130 years to the day after Wagner’s opening of Bayreuth.

## BAYREUTHER FESTSPIELHAUS: A HOME FOR THE RING CYCLE

Wagner dreamed of creating a festival dedicated to his works. One of his greatest challenges was finding an opera house that would be able to accommodate the demands of his expanded orchestra. Unfortunately, none of the existing houses were adequate. Wanting to maintain complete control over his work, Wagner realized that the only way to have the *Ring Cycle* performed the way he intended it would be to build his own theatre.



## THE AMPHITHEATRE SHAPE

Wagner oversaw the project and ensured that the designs followed democratic principles. His idea of the amphitheatre form ensured that all audience members were equals: there were no tiers or divisions separating the upper class from the lower class. Instead of focusing on who’s who in the audience, the amphitheatre shape encouraged all operagoers to focus their attention and energy towards the stage.





### WAGNER'S ORCHESTRA PIT: A TRUE MUSICAL INNOVATION

The real gem of the house and architectural innovation was Wagner's design of the orchestra pit. Wagner scored the *Ring Cycle* for 124 musicians. An orchestra this size needs more space for the large sound that it produces than the traditional baroque and classical shallow orchestra pit can provide. Instead, Wagner came up with the idea of extending the traditional orchestra pit far beneath the stage, as deep as three meters, and divided the orchestra into "levels" of instruments. An acoustic sound board at the top of the pit enclosed the players and hid them from view of the audience. Lighter instruments—like strings and other woodwinds—would play on the top levels, closest to the stage and audience, while the more powerful and louder instruments—like the brass—played in the lowest levels of the pit. This arrangement propelled the sound of the brass forward where it mixed with the sound of the strings and woodwinds. Their combined sound reflected off the sound board onto the stage and finally mixed with the singers' voices. Uniting the sound with the dramatic action was at the core of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*—the complete synthesis of all art forms—orchestral music, singing, drama and visual design—on stage.

For the COC's production of *Die Walküre*, the orchestra pit at the Four Seasons Centre, which was built on hydraulic lifts to accommodate a Wagner-sized orchestra, will be lowered to balance the sound and achieve the same unification of sound that Wagner demanded of his operas.

### WAGNER THE ENTREPRENEUR

To fund the development of his theatre, Wagner acted on one of the suggestion of his friends and developed Wagner Societies—regional clubs consisting of his greatest fans—to secure support. What Wagner conceived was akin to modern day "crowd-funding" by inviting some of his biggest supporters to financially contribute to his cause. Alas, the money from the Wagner Societies fell short, and Wagner had no choice but to turn to his former patron, Ludwig II of Bavaria for the remaining funds. The construction of his theatre commenced in 1874 in the small town of Bayreuth.

Despite the inability of the Societies to be the sole financial backers of the Festspielhaus, all the work Wagner put into creating the societies certainly paid off. The number of Wagner Societies steadily increased over the 20th century, and to date 137 regional associations exist all across the world including one in Toronto! The membership exceeds 21,000 around the world and many of the members flock to Bayreuth every summer to take in one of Wagner's operas at his beloved theatre.

# Listening Guide

## INTRODUCTION

*Die Walküre* is generally regarded as the most approachable and popular of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* operas. Extracts, often referred to as "bleeding chunks," frequently turn up on concert programs as well as "opera's greatest hits" recordings and, it is the one *Ring* opera that is most often presented outside the context of a complete cycle. It is also the *Ring's* best exemplar of the theoretical principles Wagner wrote about in *Oper und Drama* (*Opera and Drama*) where an ideal synthesis of poetry and music is achieved without any notable sacrifice in musical expression.

In *Die Walküre*, this theory takes real form in its series of extended dialogues between Wotan and his daughter, Brünnhilde; Wotan and his wife Fricka; Siegmund and his sister/lover, Sieglinde; and, Siegmund and his conflicted savior, Brünnhilde. It is in these dramatic confrontations that Wagner achieves full mastery of a new, more continuous style of operatic composition in which text, vocal line and orchestra are intricately fused together. For each episode, Wagner utilizes differing orchestral ranges and colours, dynamic levels, keys, tempos, meters and rhythms into which are subsumed a variety of declamatory

and lyrical vocal lines. Add to the mix the equally important (to Wagner) element of staging (direction of singers; lighting; set design...) and the result is the complete work of art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Woven into *Die Walküre's* musical web are a series of "set pieces"—what in more traditional opera might have been called "arias" for lack of a better term. These extended solo vocal passages differ from arias of the past in that they are intrinsically connected to each other by through-composed orchestral transitions. Despite the (for their time) modernity of their form, these passages contain memorable, emotion-filled melodies that telegraph the key dramatic moments in the opera. As such, they function as essential conduits for the listener, engaging them in Wagner's greater, all-encompassing music-drama.

The tracks listed below are excerpted from *Die Walküre*, Deutsche Grammophon 477 9135. The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James Levine, conductor. Hildegard Behrens, Jessye Norman, James Morris, Gary Lakes. You can also experience the Listening Guide online at [coc.ca/LookAndListen](http://coc.ca/LookAndListen).

The Valkyries carry the bodies of fallen warriors to Valhalla in "The Ride of the Valkyries," one of the best-known pieces of classical music.  
A scene from *Die Walküre* (COC, 2004). Photo: Michael Cooper







## 1

### MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act III, Ensemble: “Hojotoho! Hojotoho!”

### CONNECTION TO THE STORY

The Valkyries are weapon-bearing maidens who incite warriors to murderous combat and then bring their souls back to the gods’ fortress, Valhalla. In this scene they assemble with their horses, each carrying a fallen warrior over her saddle.

### MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE

As the lone ensemble (several voices singing together) in *Die Walküre*, this excerpt is a bit of an anomaly, but it is perhaps **the** most recognizable musical moment in all opera. The gathering of the Valkyries at Valhalla provides an awesome, triumphant, noisy and frankly terrifying opening to Act III. As the scene opens, the violins and flutes play against each other for a full eight measures, swooping and trilling to a dotted rhythm, anticipating the Valkyrie call to come.

The famous galloping “Ride” tune emerges full-on at 0:22, played in a *marcato* style (where specific notes are sounded more forcefully than those surrounding them) by the low bass trumpet and two of the French horns. Four trombones peel out the tune (at 1:05) just before we hear Gerhilde, one of the Valkyries, emit the first “Hojotoho!” (at 1:20), crying out to her sisters. The chugging “Ride” tune then alternates with the rhythmic warrior cries to create an aggressive, otherworldly atmosphere befitting the Valkyries’ message of death to the heroes who they collect to defend Valhalla.

After the initial Valkyrie meet-up ends (at 3:44), the music, which up to this point has been in a minor key, aggressively shifts to major, this time with a triumphant, *fortissimo* (very loud) dynamic. The ensemble ends with more “Hojotohos” (at 4:17), this time sung in overlapping harmony, adding yet more weight to the overall texture.

### FURTHER REFLECTION

In opera, groups of female singers are often used to represent supernatural or superhuman forces (think of the witches in Verdi’s *Macbeth* or the water sprites in Dvořák’s *Rusalka*). Why do you think composers have so often fixated on female voices to convey otherworldliness?

The “Ride of the Valkyries” has been used in many films. Research a few examples on YouTube and describe how the music is being used; for what dramatic purpose; is it effective?



## 2

### MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act I, Narration: “Der Männer Sippe sass hier im Saal” (“The men of his family sat in the room here”)

### CONNECTION TO THE STORY

Sieglinde relates how, during her wedding to Hunding (a man she does not love), an old man came among the guests and very deliberately thrust a sword into the trunk of the ash tree around which Hunding’s house was built.



### MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In *Die Walküre*, Wagner uses “narratives” which take on the role that set-piece arias might have done in earlier operatic forms. They infuse the opera with a degree of lyricism that is almost wholly absent from the *Ring Cycle*’s prelude, *Das Rheingold*. However, in contrast to the stand-alone arias of the past, these long narratives are woven much more closely into the overall orchestral fabric and are connected to each other by Wagner’s system of “musical presentiments” or *Leitmotifs*. These are the short melodic and/or harmonic characterizations of persons, objects, emotions, and ideas that appear throughout the *Ring*. It is the orchestra that plays a key role in presenting and developing most of the leitmotifs—only occasionally do they originate in the vocal line. In turn, this brought about an enormous development in the opera orchestra, establishing it as a more central participant in the drama. In addition, the tonal and thematic density communicated by the orchestra was increased by Wagner’s ability to weave two, three or more of these leitmotifs together, depending on who is speaking, what they are saying and to whom they are speaking.

As Sieglinde begins telling her story, which is in fact her own history, we are immediately pulled into Wagner’s world of colourful word-painting. For example, listen at 0:49 to the low-lying vocal line that depicts the old man’s (in reality Wotan, king of the gods in disguise) low-brimmed hat and then, how it rises to portray the flash of his eye with its threatening glance (at 1:02). There is no doubt as to the mysterious visitor’s true identity when the horns and bassoons announce his god status with the Valhalla (Wotan’s castle) leitmotif at 1:45. Then, when Sieglinde indicates the spot on the tree trunk where Wotan thrust his sword, the bass trumpet announces the Sword motif at 2:14. Note that in both cases, the leitmotif is played in the orchestra, independent of what is being sung and supporting the meaning conveyed by the text and vocal line.

### FURTHER REFLECTION

Can you think of leitmotifs in everyday life—that is, catch phrases that go viral; tunes that you suddenly hear everywhere; images that pop up on a regular basis?

## 3

### MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act I, “Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond” (“Wintry storms have vanished before Maytime”)

### CONNECTION TO THE STORY

The sudden advent of spring transforms the world of nature that surrounds Siegmund and Sieglinde and with it, their feelings for one another.

### MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE

This passage is the closest one finds to a conventional aria in *Die Walküre* for two reasons. First, unlike the preceding story-based narration (Excerpt #1), its text is more poetic and imagery-based, dealing in the birdsong, blissful scents and balmy breezes that symbolize the burgeoning love between long-lost twins and soon-to-be-lovers, Siegmund and Sieglinde. Second, unusual amongst the *Ring*’s longer-form vocal set pieces, this one does not give rise to additional leitmotifs which would then normally appear several times throughout the opera. In fact, its main theme is only repeated once in Act II, scene 1 when Wotan pleads with his wife, Fricka, to bless the twins’ illicit love.

The “Winterstürme” has a lyrical beauty that is rare in Wagner—listen, for example, to the undulating harp melody at 1:43 that perfectly telegraphs the gentle blossoming of Siegmund’s love for Sieglinde. Underpinning all this tonal gorgeousness is an equally descriptive, purposeful choice of words, which, like the music, were also authored by Wagner. The opening phrase is enlivened by the alliteration of the

initial consonants “W” (a “V” sound in German) and “L” in “**W**interstürme **w**ichen dem **W**onnemond, in mildem **L**ichte leuchtet der **L**enz” (“Wintry storms have vanished before Maytime comes, Spring brings its milder light”). The crisp W’s conjure up the chilly winter but then give way to caressing L’s, reflecting the welcoming spring thaw.

#### FURTHER REFLECTION

See if you can identify some of the musical instruments in this passage that communicate the idea of Spring. What instruments do you think would be suited to suggest other seasons?

## 4

#### MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act III, “Leb wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind!” (“Farewell, you bold, wonderful child!”)

#### CONNECTION TO THE STORY

Wotan’s decision to banish his beloved daughter Brünnhilde for her disobedience is tempered by his recognition of her brave spirit. The god accedes to her one wish, agreeing to erect a wall of fire around her place of banishment so that only a “fearless, unrestrained hero” might rescue her.

#### MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE

For many listeners, Wotan’s farewell to Brünnhilde is the musical and emotional summit of the *Ring*. In *Die Walküre*, Wagner adds a new dimension of humanity to Wotan’s character that contrasts with his imposing, “master of the universe” persona in the cycle’s prelude, *Das Rheingold*. The composer felt this could best be conveyed by making him subject to mortal emotions: in this case, the love between a human father and his favourite daughter.

The dramatic and musical structure of *Die Walküre* is largely shaped by five major confrontations between pairs of characters, the climactic one occurring between Wotan and Brünnhilde at the end of the opera. Within these dialogues, much of the vocal writing is primarily conversational and to some ears, may lack a degree of immediately appealing lyricism. Instead, it is in the orchestra that Wagner develops his more “melodic” ideas, building musical motives that acquire great emotional weight at the climaxes. One of the most stirring examples of this occurs at 4:12 in a surging E major orchestral passage as Wotan takes Brünnhilde into his arms. The overwhelming melodic crescendo that accompanies his supreme act of forgiveness leaves no doubt as to the father’s true feelings despite what his actions might convey.

#### FURTHER REFLECTION

Fathers and daughters are central to many operas – Verdi was especially drawn to this complex family relationship. Why do you think fathers and daughters provide such rich territory for composers and their librettists to explore?



Peteris Eglitis as Wotan bids a sad farewell to his beloved daughter Brünnhilde, played by Frances Ginzer in this scene from *Die Walküre* (COC, 2004). Photo: Michael Cooper

# What to Look for

In July 2002, then-COC General Director Richard Bradshaw announced that the COC would be producing the first Canadian *Ring Cycle* directed by four different directors, working together with Canadian production designer Michael Levine who would create the sets and costumes, and the creative link, for all four epic *Ring* operas.

Director Atom Egoyan's production of Richard Wagner's *Die Walküre* was the first of the four operas in the cycle to have its premiere, though sequentially, it is actually the second opera in the cycle—preceded by *Das Rheingold*, the prologue, and then followed by *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. When Bradshaw first approached Egoyan to see if he would be interested in creating a new production of *Die Walküre*, Egoyan came on board immediately, citing that opera as his first choice out of the four *Ring* operas to direct, as it explored similar material as many of his films, including the complex emotional life and motivations of characters and the power of sexuality.

The greatest challenge for Egoyan and Levine was to create a production that could stand alone and yet fit seamlessly into the larger story when all four operas are performed as a complete cycle. While Egoyan and Levine focused on *Die Walküre*, Levine was also working the design and direction of *Das Rheingold*, and designing the sets for *Siegfried* with director François Girard and *Götterdämmerung* with director Tim Albery. Over the course of the cycle, the creative teams chose to depict a transition from an imperialistic-looking 19th-century world in *Das Rheingold*, to a society undergoing an industrial revolution and corruption in *Die Walküre*, to an era of Freudian introspection and psychological exploration in *Siegfried*, to a contemporary capitalist environment in *Götterdämmerung*. The designers and directors wanted to invite the audience to find a sense of familiarity with the modern world without being attached to a specific time period.

The full set is shown here in an early scene from the opera, with Clifton Forbis as Siegmund and Adrienne Pieczonka as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* (COC, 2004). Photo: Gary Beechey





Levine conceived an atmospheric and suggestive world on stage that, with different lighting and minimal set changes, easily transitions from a dwelling, to war-torn land, to a rocky mountainside. The debris-filled set reflects the moment of crisis that *Die Walküre* is about: the dissolution of a family, the chaos caused by Wotan's power struggle for a magical ring, and the downfall of the gods. A large white door at the back of the stage acts as an ominous entryway to the realm of the gods and destroyed industrial metal scaffolding (numerous lighting fixtures and hanging cables and wires) with earthy natural features (trees, leaves, soil, fire) create the world of Valhalla.

As Egoyan himself put it, "even the costumes are falling apart and disintegrating. The whole production is about chaos."

### When Egoyan's *Walküre* premiered at the COC in 2004, the critics raved:

"This was the [COC's] most important premiere of the decade."

Robert Everett-Green, *The Globe and Mail*, April 6, 2004

"The Canadian Opera Company is one-quarter up the Mount Everest of the opera world, and from the looks and sounds of things, it's going to be a thrilling journey to the top..."

Glenn Sumi, *NOW Magazine*, April 8 - 14, 2004

"Something magical and intoxicating takes over, and the hours fly by."

Mary Kunz, *The Buffalo News*, April 11, 2004

"...Wagner's *Ring* makes enormous demands on its audience... and if the rest of it is performed with such total commitment as here, it will lavishly reward the effort."

Christopher Hoile, *Eye Weekly*, April 15 - 21, 2004

"If this *Walküre* is any indication, it will mark an important milestone in the history of opera in Canada."

Joseph K. So, *Opus*, Summer 2004



The Valkyries costumes are late Victorian, ornate and distressed. Note the red bindings covering Brunnhilde's hands and wrists. They represent the Valkyrie's godly power. When Wotan strips Brunnhilde of her status, he slowly unwinds these bindings and ties them onto his spear. Susan Bullock is Brunnhilde in this scene from *Die Walküre* (COC, 2006). Photo: Michael Cooper

# COC Spotlight: Rick Gordon

Not everyone at the COC is an opera singer... take a peek behind the scenes and learn about the many diverse careers available in the arts!



**Rick Gordon**  
(Head Scenic Artist)

Rick Gordon is seen here working with participants at a Summer Youth Intensive in 2013, sharing his vast experience as a master scenic artist. Photo: COC

**Position:** Head Scenic Artist

**Name:** Rick Gordon

**What made you decide to pursue this career path?**

Back in my university days, I was taking fine art courses and there was a program running at the Faculty of Music at University of Toronto, for performers and technicians, and one day in the MacMillan theatre, I asked a scenic painter (who turned out to be the head scenic artist at The National Ballet) if I could help, and we got talking, and he offered me a job! I started working for the ballet, and then later on shifted over to the opera.

**What skills sets are most important in your line of work?**

Drawing skills are very important and mixing colour is a big part of our work. There is a lot of sculpture work required—carving, architectural components, rocks and statues. A good sense of three-dimensional space helps. Individual artistic styles must blend together to maintain the overall look of the production. Therefore, the ability to work as a team member is very important. There are often five to 10 scenic artists working on one project. All scenery must have a similar style. The work we execute can be physical and demanding.

**What educational path would you recommend to a young person looking to become a scenic artist?**

The National Theatre School in Montreal. The two post-secondary college that offer courses in the field are Sheridan and George Brown. Most universities and colleges also offer courses (e.g. York and Ryerson). Getting involved in school productions is a great introduction to theatre arts. Contact small theatre companies around you. Volunteering with small companies to help paint their scenery is very good exposure to see if it might be a possible career choice.

**Do you have a favourite COC memory?**

There was a season where we did a new production of *Kismet* at the Royal Alexandra, which was kind of a musical, kind of an opera. It was a heavily painted show, so the whole thing was a faux kind of look, heavily decorated, and painted on flat canvas. Working on that was very satisfying for me.

**What do you love about your job?**

There are very few work opportunities these days where you can work hard for a few months, produce something, it gets taken away, and then you can see it. That gratifying feeling and sense of accomplishment is so satisfying.

**What do you enjoy outside of opera?**

In my spare time, I enjoy gardening. My wife and I have a nice country home we go to where I garden. I love to read as well. I haven't done a lot of my own painting regularly in a while, but I am looking forward to that in the future. I enjoy cooking, and I walk, bike, and spend a lot of time outdoors!

**What are you looking forward to most in *Die Walküre*?**

Working on the set for *Die Walküre* was very rewarding for us to work on. The scenery in *Die Walküre* is a complex mixture of many components that come together in a way that is always a pleasure for me to see. The main stage area consists of large painted tiles. The central portion of the floor appears to be exploded from which a large sculpted tree has grown and then cut down. For me this is visually stunning. I look forward to the "Ride of the Valkyries" in the beginning of Act III. The music is very moving and the costumes and props are incredible.



# Active Learning

One of the best parts of taking your students to the opera is the discussion and further exploration that live theatre can inspire. Take a deeper look into the themes and story of *Die Walküre* with these discussion questions and ideas for further exploration.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ♦ Study *The Hero's Journey* in English class. How does *Die Walküre* explore this concept? What other stories (including movies and novels) can your class think of that fit this structure?
- ♦ Hitler drew links between Wagner's personal views on politics, anti-Semitism, and his own ideology, and Wagner's music was appropriated by the Nazi regime. His music was sometimes used in propaganda and Bayreuth became the site of many pro-Nazi events. The relationship was a complex and important one—research this further on your own. Should Wagner's work be viewed in a different light with this information in mind, or should art be judged separately from the artist? What relationships exist between art and politics?
- ♦ Discuss the female characters in *Die Walküre* and examine other women in opera, theatre, and literature from this period. What makes characters like Brünnhilde stand out?

Did viewing  
the opera spark some  
scintillating debates or  
discussions? Would your  
students like to share examples  
of their work with the COC?  
E-mail us at  
**education@coc.ca.**  
We'd love to hear from  
you!

## EXTENSIONS

- ♦ Have students research Icelandic mythology. Compare *Die Walküre* to the Icelandic saga on which it is based.
- ♦ Read and/or watch *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. Compare and contrast this with *Die Walküre*.
- ♦ Do you believe in the inevitability of fate? Are some things inevitable? Split the class into two groups and hold a debate, using examples from the opera, life, television, books, and movies. Here are a few questions to get the debate going:
- ♦ Does fate exist? Are our lives pre-determined?
- ♦ Do social restrictions govern our lives more than fate?
- ♦ Consider "fate" as it relates to social class, or children born in third-world countries. How can they control their own lives?
- ♦ Has fate determines your life? Or has your path been determined by deliberate decisions?
- ♦ *Die Walküre* is an operatic powerhouse—as mentioned in the listening guide, excerpts frequently appear in concert and on recordings, and also within pop culture. Where have you heard some of this music before? Listen carefully and attempt to identify some of the musical elements that help to make this piece so enduring. What is it about things like the rhythm, key, and melody of the piece that make it stick?

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Above: Workshop at Howard Park Jr. P.S. Photo: COC