

Die Walküre in Concert: Kirill Petrenko Continues the Ring

Saturday, April 3, 2027 · 17:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Kirill Petrenko, conductor · Jamez McCorkle, Siegmund · Christopher Maltman, Wotan · Brindley Sherratt, Hunding · Christina Nilsson, Sieglinde · Lise Davidsen, Brünnhilde · Catriona Morison, Fricka · Aviva Fortunata, Gerhilde · Hedvig Haugerud, Ortlinde · Natalie Lewis, Waltraute · Ekaterina Chayka-Rubinstein, Schwertleite · Tessa McQueen, Helmwig · Xenia Puskarz Thomas, Siegrune · Aytaj Shikhalizada, Grimgerde · Fleuranne Brockway, Roßweiße
approximately 230 minutes

Richard Wagner

1813–1883

230 minutes

Die Walküre (The Valkyrie)

THE COMPOSER

Richard Wagner transformed opera more radically than any composer before or since. Born in Leipzig in 1813, he grew up in a family steeped in theater and from an early age was drawn to the dramatic rather than the purely musical. Apart from a spell of lessons with the Leipzig cantor Theodor Weinlig, he was largely self-directed as a composer, absorbing Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller alongside Beethoven, developing a vision of opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a “total work of art” synthesizing poetry, drama, music, and visual spectacle.

Wagner’s path was turbulent. An active participant in the 1849 Dresden uprising, he spent years in political exile, fleeing creditors and nursing turbulent love affairs. Yet his genius attracted patrons, most notably the eccentric King Ludwig II of Bavaria, whose financial support made possible Wagner’s ultimate achievement: the construction of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, a theater designed specifically for his works. There, in 1876, his monumental four-opera cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung* received its first complete performance.

Wagner’s musical innovations (the seamless orchestral flow, the system of *leitmotifs* or recurring themes associated with characters, objects, or ideas, and the extreme chromaticism that strained the boundaries of tonality) influenced virtually every composer who followed, from Strauss and Mahler to Schoenberg and beyond.

ABOUT THE WORK

First Day of Der Ring des Nibelungen, in three acts

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The storm. There is no overture. Low strings hammer out the rain and Siegmund's flight, and the curtain rises as the storm blows itself out. When Sieglinde brings him water, the orchestra thins to a solo cello: the first sign of what the two do not yet know.

Spring. Near the end of Act I the door flies open on a moonlit night and Siegmund sings "Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond", the nearest thing in the *Ring* to a self-contained song. From there the act runs without a break to the drawing of the sword.

Wotan's monologue. In Act II Wotan tells Brünnhilde the whole story so far, beginning almost in a whisper. In a concert performance, with the orchestra on stage and no scenery, this long scene shows how much the instruments know that the characters do not.

The Annunciation of Death. Brünnhilde appears to Siegmund over slow, solemn brass chords. It is the turning point of the drama, the place where the story of the gods and the story of the twins meet.

The Ride of the Valkyries. The best-known passage in the score opens Act III. Heard in its place, with eight voices calling across the orchestra, it is wilder than the concert extract.

Wotan's Farewell. The last half hour is a scene for father and daughter alone. Wotan kisses Brünnhilde's godhead away, the music of her sleep descends through the orchestra, and he calls up the fire, which flickers in high woodwind, harps and glockenspiel as he leaves.

The Philharmonie gives a running time of about five hours, with two intervals.

ABOUT THE WORK

Die Walküre (The Valkyrie) is the second of the four dramas that make up *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and the one most often given without the others. Wagner wrote the poem in 1852 and composed the music between 1854 and 1856, while he was living as a political exile in Zurich. He tried out the first act there in 1856 before a few invited friends, with a piano standing in for the orchestra and himself singing both Siegmund and Hunding.

The stage had to wait another fourteen years. Wagner wanted the *Ring* to be heard complete or not at all, but he had sold the performing rights to his patron, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, and the king would not wait. Wagner begged him to have the piece played in private and keep the public out. The king went ahead, and *Die Walküre* was first performed in Munich on 26 June 1870, as *Das Rheingold* had been the year before. Wagner's own production came in 1876, at the first Bayreuth Festival, as part of the full cycle.

The story takes up a generation after *Das Rheingold*. Wotan, ruler of the gods, needs the ring back from the giant who now guards it, but he is bound by his own treaties and cannot take it himself. His plan is to raise a free hero who will do it unprompted. That hero is Siegmund, his son by a mortal woman.

In Act I Siegmund, wounded and unarmed, takes shelter from a storm in a house built round an ash tree. It belongs to Hunding, whose unhappy wife, Sieglinde, tends the stranger. Hunding turns out to be one of the men hunting him, and grants him one night's hospitality before they fight. Sieglinde drugs her husband's drink and shows Siegmund a sword that an old man once drove into the tree. He pulls it out. By then the two have recognised each other as twins separated in childhood, and as lovers.

Act II belongs to the gods. Wotan orders his daughter Brünnhilde, the Valkyrie of the title, to protect Siegmund. Then his wife Fricka, guardian of marriage, shows him that a hero he has bred and armed is not free at all, and makes him swear to let Siegmund die. Brünnhilde goes to Siegmund to announce his death, is moved by his refusal to leave Sieglinde, and decides to defy her father. Wotan intervenes, the sword shatters on his spear, and Hunding kills Siegmund.

In Act III Brünnhilde flees to her sisters with Sieglinde, tells her she is carrying Siegmund's child, the future Siegfried, and sends her into the forest with the pieces of the sword. Wotan's punishment is to strip Brünnhilde of her divinity and leave her asleep on a rock for the first man who finds her. Her last request is granted: a ring of fire that only a fearless hero will cross.

Tonight's artists

Jamez McCorkle *Siegmund*

Siegmund carries the first act almost alone: the long narration of his life as an outlaw, the cries of “Wälse!” and the spring song all fall to him. Jamez McCorkle sang the part in the staged performances at the Salzburg Easter Festival that preceded this concert.

Jamez McCorkle is an American tenor. He came to wide notice in the title role of *Omar*, an opera about the enslaved Muslim scholar Omar ibn Said, which was first staged at the Spoleto Festival USA in 2022 and received the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2023. He went on to sing the part in other American productions of the work, among them in Los Angeles, Boston and San Francisco.

Christopher Maltman *Wotan*

Wotan is on stage for most of Acts II and III, and the part ranges from the near-whispered monologue to the Farewell that closes the opera. Christopher Maltman sings it here after the staged performances in Salzburg.

Christopher Maltman is a British baritone. He has sung many principal roles with the Royal Opera in London, among them Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* and the title role in *Don Giovanni*, and appears at the Salzburg Festival and at leading opera houses in Europe and North America.

Brindley Sherratt *Hunding*

Hunding has little to sing and a great deal of menace to supply, most of it in a few low phrases at his own table in Act I. Brindley Sherratt takes the part.

Brindley Sherratt is a British bass, born in Lancashire. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where he is now a Fellow and Visiting Professor. His roles at the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne and English National Opera have included Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*, Gremin in *Eugene Onegin* and Rocco in *Fidelio*.

Christina Nilsson *Sieglinde*

Sieglinde moves from the hushed exchanges of the first scene to the outburst of thanks in Act III, “O hehrstes Wunder”, whose melody returns only at the very end of the *Ring*. Christina Nilsson sings her.

Christina Nilsson is a Swedish soprano, born in Ystad. She took her master’s degree at the University College of Opera in Stockholm in 2017 and had her breakthrough soon afterwards in the title role of *Aida* at the Royal Swedish Opera. Later roles include Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Frankfurt Opera and Elsa in *Lohengrin* in Dortmund and at the Tyrolean Festival in Erl. She won first prize at the Renata Tebaldi International Voice Competition in 2017, and third prize and the Birgit Nilsson Prize at Operalia in 2019.

Lise Davidsen *Brünnhilde*

Brünnhilde enters with the war cry “Hojotoho!” and ends the evening pleading with her father. Lise Davidsen takes the title role.

Lise Davidsen is a Norwegian soprano, born in 1987. She studied at the Grieg Academy in Bergen, singing as a mezzo-soprano in the Norwegian Soloists’ Choir, and changed to soprano repertoire during her studies in Copenhagen, where she graduated from the Opera Academy in 2014. In 2015 she won first prize at both the Queen Sonja Competition and Operalia. She sang the title role in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Glyndebourne in 2017, and in 2019 made her debuts at the Bayreuth Festival, as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, and at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, as Lisa in *The Queen of Spades*.

Catriona Morison *Fricka*

Fricka has a single scene, and it decides the opera: in a quarter of an hour of argument she takes Wotan’s plan apart. Catriona Morison sings her.

Catriona Morison is a Scottish mezzo-soprano, born in Edinburgh in 1986. She studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and at the University of the Arts in Berlin, began her career in an opera studio in Weimar and then joined the ensemble of the Wuppertal Opera. In 2017 she won the main prize at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition, the first British singer to do so, and shared the Song Prize.

Aviva Fortunata *Gerhilde*

Aviva Fortunata sings Gerhilde, one of Brünnhilde’s eight Valkyrie sisters, who open Act III and try in vain to shield her from Wotan.

Hedvig Haugerud *Ortlinde*

Hedvig Haugerud sings Ortlinde, one of Brünnhilde's eight Valkyrie sisters, who open Act III and try in vain to shield her from Wotan.

Natalie Lewis *Waltraute*

Natalie Lewis sings Waltraute, one of Brünnhilde's eight Valkyrie sisters, who open Act III and try in vain to shield her from Wotan.

Ekaterina Chayka-Rubinstein *Schwertleite*

Ekaterina Chayka-Rubinstein sings Schwertleite, one of Brünnhilde's eight Valkyrie sisters, who open Act III and try in vain to shield her from Wotan.

Tessa McQueen *Helmwige*

Tessa McQueen sings Helmwige, one of Brünnhilde's eight Valkyrie sisters, who open Act III and try in vain to shield her from Wotan.

Xenia Puskarz Thomas *Siegrune*

Xenia Puskarz Thomas sings Siegrune, one of Brünnhilde's eight Valkyrie sisters, who open Act III and try in vain to shield her from Wotan.

Aytaj Shikhalizada *Grimgerde*

Aytaj Shikhalizada sings Grimgerde, one of Brünnhilde's eight Valkyrie sisters, who open Act III and try in vain to shield her from Wotan.

Fleuranne Brockway *Roßweiße*

Fleuranne Brockway sings Roßweiße, one of Brünnhilde's eight Valkyrie sisters, who open Act III and try in vain to shield her from Wotan.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung**

Roger Scruton, Penguin Books 2017

A philosopher's reading of the whole cycle, at its most persuasive on Wotan's dilemma and on the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde, the two threads that meet in Die Walküre.

ACCESSIBLE **Richard Wagner: The Sorcerer of Bayreuth**

Barry Millington, Oxford University Press 2012

A modern illustrated life of Wagner that follows the Ring from the Zurich exile in which Die Walküre was composed to the first complete cycle at Bayreuth in 1876.

DEEPER **I Saw the World End: A Study of Wagner's Ring**

Deryck Cooke, Oxford University Press 1979

Cooke's unfinished study of the Ring; the part he completed works through the text and sources of Das Rheingold and Die Walküre scene by scene.

SOURCES

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21. Catriona Morison (Mezzo-soprano), Bach Cantatas Website. <https://bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Morison-Catriona.htm>
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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2027-04-03-petrenko>

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