

Calgary Opera Study Guide

DAS RHEINGOLD

By Richard Wagner



Student Dress Rehearsal - Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium - April 18th, 2024

CALGARY opera

APRIL 20, 24 & 26, 2024

CALGARYOPERA.COM

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Iyarhe Nakoda Nations, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government of the Métis Nation within Alberta Districts 5 & 6, and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta

Hello and welcome to our final opera of the 2023-2024 season, Richard Wagner's *Das Rheingold*.

Not only is this opera the epic introduction to an epic fantasy tale of giants and gold, fortresses and Rhine daughters, known as Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, but it is also the first time in our 51 year history at Calgary Opera that we are performing it on stage.

The opera deals with many big ideas and emotions including greed, self-destruction and power, but the warning in it is simple, do not take from the earth without regarding the consequences. Stealing the Rhine gold from the Rhine daughters and then mining the earth for more has devastating consequences for all who seek to own it. There are several voices of reason that speak up against the theft, but ultimately those voices fall on deaf ears, as they so often do.

We hope that you are transported to a mythical land in this production and experience something new and exciting in our theatre. What else is opera for but to engage, enlighten and transport us out of our day to day for a few hours? Hopefully along the way something changes, something new is considered or felt, as opera so often has the power to do—go straight to the heart of the matter and open us to sensations we might not have known we are capable of. Isn't that the basis of the world we all want to live in? One in which we can feel and understand the situation of others in order to get closer to understanding their point of view?

I wish this for you as you enter this new land with us and I sincerely hope that you take something new with you when you go.

See you at the Jubilee Auditorium,

Patricia Kesler

Education and Community Engagement Manager

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Table of Contents

	Page #
Things to know	4
Your Guide to Attending the Opera	5
Statement on Wagner and Antisemitism	6
Composer and Librettist Richard Wagner	7, 8
Conductor and Director	9
Director's Notes	10
Synopsis	11
Cast	12
Cast—Visual Description	13, 14
A New Kind of Opera and Leitmotifs	15
A Brief History of Opera	16
Voice Types in Opera	17
Ideas to Consider, Exercises	18
Sources	19

Things to know

- *Das Rheingold* (The Rhinegold), is the first opera in the tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung), also known as The Ring Cycle by Richard Wagner
- Richard Wagner was both the Composer and the Librettist of *Der Ring des Nibelung*, meaning he both composed the music and wrote the words to the opera
- The opera is based on German mythology and the epic German tale *Song of the Nibelungenlied* and pieces from Old Norse mythology, *The Poetic Edda* and *The Prose Edda*
- *Das Rheingold* premiered at Munich National Theatre in Munich, Germany, in 1869
- The characters in *Das Rheingold* are based on Norse gods, the most recognizable of whom is arguably Loge, based on the trickster god Loki, which many readers may be familiar with because of the Marvel Universe comics, movies and series
- *Das Rheingold* and the three ensuing operas of the Ring Cycle were written over 26 years and last over 16 hours when performed all together, which happens at special occasions around the world
- The libretto, or text, of the final opera of Wagner's Ring Cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, was written first and the three other libretti were written afterward as pre-stories
- Wagner used a new concept in opera called Leitmotifs with the Ring Cycle. These are short musical passages that belong to a character or a plot piece
- Wagner was so obsessed with opera, how it should sound, how it should be performed, that he designed and built his own opera house called Bayreuth Festival Opera House, which exists to this day as a working festival opera house in Bayreuth, Germany. It opened in 1876 and can be seen here.



Your Guide to Attending the Opera

Many people have fixed ideas about opera because it has been around for a long time. As such, a first visit to an operatic performance may bring up a number of questions. Here are some tips on how to make your night at the opera a hit.

By far, the most popular question and concern is:

What do I wear to the opera?

In the past, opera audiences have been known to wear lavish gowns as well as top hats and bow ties, giving the rest of the public a feeling that opera isn't for everyone, which is definitely not the case! In today's opera lovers' world, audiences come dressed in whatever they feel most comfortable! Your pajamas might attract stares, but you do you!



Where are the performances held?

All Calgary Opera's productions are held at the *Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium*, 1415 14 Ave N.W., Calgary. If you are driving, it is recommended that you arrive approximately 45 minutes prior to the start of the show to avoid traffic. Another great reason to arrive on time is to avoid missing part of the opera! If you arrive after the performance begins, you may be held in the lobby until the ushers can admit you.

Your Experience at the Opera

On Dress Rehearsal nights the performance begins at 7:00pm. The Jubilee Auditorium opens at 6:00pm and doors into the theatre open at 6:30pm. Please arrive early! There are several things to do in the lobby pre-show: snacks, drinks are available at the bars and there are sometimes displays to take in. Also, our Shopera sells an

interesting assortment of Opera merchandise for you to remember your experience by. You will be advised by an announcement when the doors to the main hall are open. Once in the theatre, you will notice a number of individuals gathered at the very front of the auditorium: these are the patrons that like to look into the orchestra pit and see the musicians. Don't be shy, wander down and have a look!

Food is not allowed inside the hall, however you may bring your drinks if they are in a plastic container. Please remember that many hours have gone into bringing this particular production to you, so please be considerate of the performers and your fellow audience members and turn off and put away your cell phones.

Please take note that photography is not permitted once the performance begins. The design and direction of the show is under intellectual property and only the official Calgary Opera photographers may take pictures. Another big concern that the public has about opera is the fact that it is in a different language. This, of course, is true for most operas, however, like any foreign film that is accessible to the public, opera always, no matter what language it's sung in, has easy to read English titles which are projected above the stage.

Please, do feel free to **show your appreciation** to the performers by laughing at the humorous parts and or applauding after a well-performed aria. If you were particularly impressed by a performer's vocal acrobatics, feel free to express your enthusiasm vocally as well as by applause; if you hear fellow audience members shout "**bravo**" for a man, "**brava**" for a woman or "**bravi**" for a group of performers, chime in if the spirit moves you! Remember, for a performer, audience response is one of the most rewarding parts of their work!

Some argue that opera is an acquired taste. However, to acquire the taste we must first expose ourselves to it, and there is no better way than doing it live!

Below is a helpful Calgary Opera link that may answer any additional questions you may have:

<https://www.calgaryopera.com/plan-your-visit>

Statement on Wagner and Antisemitism

RICHARD WAGNER (1813—1883)

Revolutionary. Egomaniac. Influencer. Antisemite. Philanderer. Historian. Debtor. Agitator. Human. Opera's Sacred Monster.

Composer and librettist Richard Wagner set out to change the world every time he put ink to paper. He spent 28 years crafting the Ring Cycle: a four-opera epic of escalating crimes against humanity and the natural world that he believed could be healed by all-encompassing, infinite love. *Das Rheingold* is the first opera in the Cycle.

Beyond his musical and theatrical works, Wagner designed and built the Bayreuth opera house and summer festival, radically altered the theatrical environment, invented musical instruments, fled lenders, escaped arrest, lived in exile, and launched a family dynasty that remains in charge at Bayreuth today.

He was also a deeply flawed human being, one of many prominent and outspoken antisemites in Western society at that time. He wrote, published, and re-published articles whose concepts and conclusions we condemn in the strongest terms today.

Decades after his death and further complicating his legacy, family members befriended Adolf Hitler, who visited and attended performances at Bayreuth between 1923 and 1940.

Reckoning with divisive figures like Wagner means holding opposing truths and examining complex histories through a lens of contemporary perspective. We believe there is still much to learn from *Das Rheingold* and other powerful works of art that critique the best and worst of humanity and offer inspiring world-changing lessons for us all.

Calgary Opera is committed to constructive debate and with this production, launches a new web feature that explores and reckons with injustices in the works we perform. Please visit [CalgaryOpera.com/InContext](https://calgaryopera.com/InContext) for more information and links to resources.

Composer and Librettist Richard Wagner



Wilhelm Richard Wagner was born on May 22, 1813 in Leipzig, Germany. He was born into an artistic and theatrical family. He was one of many siblings in his family who took to the creative life, as opera singers, actresses and he, as a writer and composer. He wrote many operas in his lifetime which have had an undeniable influence on western music history and development.

Wagner's impatience with school life meant that he only studied composition for six months with his teacher Theodor Weinlig. He took it upon himself to pour over scores of the masters including Beethoven, and this 'self-schooling' gave him the grounding in which to move forward with his own ideas and musical vision. He composed his first opera at the age of 20 in 1833, after having left school and taking a summer position as an opera coach at Würzburg. The opera, *Die Feen (The Fairies)*, was based on a tale by

Italian poet and dramatist Carlo Gozzi. It did not garner much attention so he took a position as a conductor for a theatrical troupe from Magdeburg. Wagner had fallen in love with one of the actresses from the troupe, Wilhelmine Planer, whom he married in 1836.

Paris

His second opera, *Das Liebesverbot (The Ban on Love)*(1836) only received one performance. With failures piling up and money owing everywhere, he made an escape to Paris in 1839 to evade his many creditors and fulfill a personal goal to become a success in Paris. To no avail, his time there was disastrous as he was never able to crack the tight Parisian opera world. Nonetheless, he did compose two operas, the first was well received but is almost unheard of today and the second, *Der fliegende Holländer (The Flying Dutchman)*(1843), remains a part of the modern operatic repertoire around the world.

Political views

Wagner returned to Germany in 1842 and was appointed conductor of the court opera in Dresden, where he remained until 1849. During this time he wrote *Tannhäuser* (1845) which was initially coolly received but soon was seeing full houses. In these years Wagner was exercising his strong political views in the theatre, attempting to take artistic control away from the court and put it into the hands of the artists' union. His increasing preoccupation with ideas of social change and regeneration saw him heavily involved in the German revolution of 1848-49 from Dresden. The revolution failed across the country and a warrant for his arrest was produced, forcing him to flee Germany yet again, this time to exile in Switzerland.

Exile

While in exile, his ideas about art and opera and life crystallized into many written and operatic works, but not for many years. While working as a conductor he had been studying Norse and Germanic mythology, which he felt better reflected the truth of humanity than historic recounts did. In particular he was interested in the story of Siegfried, which is found in differing versions in both mythological histories. Wagner wrote an operatic poem called *Siegfrieds Tod (Siegfried's Death)*, creating a version of Siegfried that was a mixture of the two mythologies, a practice which he leaned on consistently as he studied myths more and developed his own language of story and character. As he was developing his creative structures and worlds, he wrote voraciously from 1849-1852 producing a series of prose works that were the basis of his personal philosophy, notably the book *Oper und Drama (Opera and Drama)* which outlined the new, revolutionary style of opera that he ushered in.

Composer and Librettist Richard Wagner

Exile—continued

By 1852 he had also added three more poems to his *Siegfrieds Tod*, all back stories for the first. He called the entire work *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*) which was the basis for his operatic tetralogy of the same name. The eventual operas, which slowly came about in the ensuing decades, were given the names *Das Rheingold* (*The Rhine Gold*), *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*), *Der jung Siegfried* (*Young Siegfried* which later changed to just *Siegfried*) and *Siegfrieds Tod* (*Siegfried's Death*, later changed to *Götterdämmerung*).

These masterworks were the culmination of his thought and social beliefs. He felt that opera should evolve away from mere entertainment and work to bring people to freedom. As his work on the *Ring* operas advanced, which came to be known as the *Ring Cycle*, he realized that it was becoming too big of a project to mount. He decided to create something more accessible which led to his masterpiece *Tristan und Isolde* (1865). His outlook on life at this time began to sour which was not helped by the fact that he was hopelessly in love with Mathilde Wesendonk, who was the wife of a rich patron. He separated from his wife to pursue Mathilde. The affair was widely criticized in Zürich and forced him to leave again and complete the work on *Tristan* in Lucerne, Switzerland and Venice, Italy.

Return to Germany

In 1861 amnesty was granted and Wagner was able to return to Germany. After continuing on to Vienna to await a production of *Tristan und Isolde*, that never came because the artists claimed the style was too revolutionary, he began working on a second attempt at a more accessible work, the comedy-opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (*The Meistersingers of Nürnberg*)(1868). This piece saw him bring back some of the traditional operatic elements he had abandoned. However by 1864 his continued lavish spending caught up with him and he had to run again for fear of being imprisoned for his debts.

Louis II

He was divorced, penniless and 51 years old when, incredibly, Louis II, an ardent admirer of Wagner's work, was named King of Bavaria. He invited Wagner to come to Munich to complete his work on his *Ring Cycle*. He was given the run of a villa and a hefty monthly allowance and over the following 6 years, productions were mounted of his works to date, including the first two operas in the *Ring Cycle*. These two were directed by the great conductor Hans von Bülow. Unfortunately Wagner's proclivity for social disruption, spending and other men's wives found him in an affair with von Bülow's wife Cosima, with whom he had three children before she was even divorced. The two married but Wagner understood that he had yet again been the source of too much disruption and had to leave, so in 1865 the family of 5 left Munich. Louis II remained a close ally and compassionately provided him with a new home on the Lake of Lucerne.

End years

By 1869 Wagner was back to work on his *Ring Cycle*. He had struck a deal with the King that the premieres would take place in the opera theatre in Munich, but he had other plans. He toured Germany to raise funds for a new style of opera house, one that fit with his new ideas for opera. In 1872 the foundation stone was laid in Bayreuth, Germany and by 1874, the *Festspielhaus* (Festival House) was built and his entire *Ring Cycle* had its premiere in August of 1876. In 1874 Wagner moved into an adjacent house which he called *Wahnfried* (Peace from Illusion) and there he lived out the rest of his days, where he dictated his life story to his wife and wrote his final opera *Parsifal*(1882). He died of heart failure in Venice, Italy on February 13, 1883.

Conductor and Director



Conductor Jonathan Brandani on Das Rheingold: [Jonathan Brandani on Das Rheingold \(vimeo.com\)](#)

Jonathan Brandani was appointed Calgary Opera's Artistic director in September 2021. Recent engagements include opera productions and concert appearances at Gothenborg Opera (Sweden), Meininger Hofkapelle (Germany), the Bregenser Festspiele (Austria), the Danish Royal Opera House Copenhagen (with soprano Angela Gheorghiu), Teatro Comunale di Bologna (Italy), Théâtre Royal de Wallonie-Liège (Belgium), Teatro Lirico di Cagliari (Italy). From 2014-2019 he was Associate Conductor of Minnesota Opera (USA), and from 2017-2020 he was Principal Guest Conductor of Daegu Opera House (South Korea). Upcoming engagements in the 23/24 season include *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Das Rheingold* for Calgary Opera, as well as *La Bohème* at Atlanta Opera (USA) and concerts with the Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra (Austria) and Orchestra Filarmonica Toscanini in Parma (Italy).

Director Brian Staufenbiel is the creative director for Opera Parallèle where he has directed and spearheaded the conceptual designs of the company's productions since it was founded in 2010. Specializing in multimedia, immersive, and interdisciplinary productions, he actively works across a wide range of artistic disciplines collaborating in film and with media designers, choreographers and dancers, circus and fabric artists, and designer fabricators. His progressive approach to stagecraft has garnered critical acclaim for many of the company's productions, including *Wozzeck*, *Orphée*, *Champion* and *Dead Man Walking*. Staufenbiel recently directed films for the online festival season of the Sun Valley Music Festival, a film of Dove/Angelis' *Flight* for Seattle Opera, and a graphic novel film of Talbot/Scheer's *Everest* with Opera Parallèle. Staufenbiel will be co-directing, with choreographer Yayoi Kambara, Ikkai, a dance installation about Japanese incarceration camps in the United States during World War II. Staufenbiel enjoys an ongoing relationship with composer Philip Glass, having directed a number of his operas including *In the Penal Colony* for Philip's own festival. The production is currently streaming on a new platform, Philip Glass Days and Night's Festival Presents and was named a New York Times Top Ten pick.

Staufenbiel recently created a new production of *Elektra* for Minnesota Opera. His 2016 production of *Das Rheingold* for Minnesota Opera was reprised at Arizona Opera and at L'Opéra de Montréal and was named a Star Tribune Classical Pick of the Decade. He also recently created a new production of Gordon Getty's *Usher House* and *Canterville Ghost* for the Center of Contemporary Opera in NY and LA Opera.

Staufenbiel's interdisciplinary approach to opera extends to his academic activity. He recently left his position after seventeen years as the director of the opera program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and holds degrees in Philosophy and Music including a Doctorate of Musical Arts from the Eastman School of Music. He currently resides in San Francisco.



Director's Notes

What does the Stage Director do? They are the person who is responsible for telling the performers where and how to move on stage to best tell the story. A popular joke about older operatic singing style on stage was called “park and bark”, this referred to a singer walking out to a certain place on the stage then standing and singing for a long time. Obviously it is an insulting term, because this style was not seen as being creative or helpful to the audience when it comes to staying engaged. Nowadays, opera performers spend much of their training learning proper acting technique as well so that they can move in an appropriate and believable way on stage.



Our Director, Brian Staufenbiel, has directed this exact production of *Das Rheingold* before, notably for Seattle Opera in 2023 and Minnesota Opera in 2020. There are some high-tech elements to this performance including many projections and special effects. The orchestra is also on stage and so the singers have to move around in smaller spaces, including a bridge that goes over the orchestra, where much of the action takes place.

When Mr. Staufenbiel was directing *Das Rheingold* for Seattle Opera, he had this to say about the production:

Richard Wagner’s world of flawed gods, aspiring demi-gods, and power-mad dwarves presents a formidable challenge for modern sensibilities. So, in mounting this production of *Das Rheingold*, I sought to connect Wagner’s mythical realm with the mysterious complexities of our technological era. The action takes place in a future where science and technology have caught up with nature, where the organic, the mechanical, and the digital have started to fuse. Indeed, the distinction between biological processes and industrial artifice has almost ceased to exist. Gods are part human, part machine, and dwarves aspire to reign supreme by mining the technology of the past—semiconductors and computers. Technology permeates all aspects of existence and identity, and status is measured by one’s degree of technological assimilation.

In putting *Rheingold* on the stage, I was inspired by Wagner’s philosophy of *Gesamtkunstwerk*—total work of art—and that accumulative notion informed the concept for this new production. Integrating the orchestra into the scenic texture onstage creates a musical-visual fabric. It also frees us to use the split-level pit to represent the Rhine and the underworld of Nibelheim. As you’ll see, the singers and orchestra will be immersed in luminous projections, images that create a framework of backstories and enhance Wagner’s expansive compositional technique—leitmotifs—to support and develop the storytelling.

Wagner considered *Das Rheingold* a prelude (*Vorspiel*) to the three operas that followed, making the complete *Ring* cycle. In *Rheingold*, we see the creation of the magic ring and are introduced to the salient elements that propel the entire cycle. It’s an epic story that very much has the power to speak to our time.

Synopsis

SCENE ONE—ON THE BED OF THE RHINE RIVER

Three Rhine Daughters, Woglinde, Wellgunde, and Flosshilde, swim in the river, guarding their gold, while Alberich admires them. They tease and mock him and repel his flirtations. Angered, he vows to be revenged. His eye catches the Rhinegold, and the Rhine Daughters explain its magical powers—if someone were to renounce love, he could fashion the Rhinegold into a ring which would give its wearer power over the world. Alberich boldly manages to steal the gold, to the Rhine Daughters' protestations.

SCENE TWO—AN OPEN SPACE ON A MOUNTAIN, A CASTLE GLIMMERING IN THE DISTANCE

Wotan marvels at the newly completed castle, future home of the gods. His wife Fricka reminds him that the giants Fasolt and Fafner only agreed to build the castle because Wotan promised to give them her sister Freia. Freia tends the crucial golden apples, which grant the gods eternal youth. Freia begs Wotan to protect her from the giants, but Wotan is confident that the ever-slick and slithery Loge will find a clever way to resolve the issue.

Fasolt and Fafner come to take possession of Freia; her brothers, Froh and Donner, rush to her defense. Loge arrives, belatedly, and tempts the giants by explaining how Alberich, the Nibelung, discovered something more valuable than love: gold. The giants agree to accept Alberich's gold as a substitute for Freia, whom Fasolt loves—but they take the goddess as hostage for the treasure. The gods, deprived of Freia and eternal youth, suddenly grow old. Wotan, who now desires the ring for himself, and Loge, who insists it must be returned to the Rhine, descend to Nibelheim to steal Alberich's treasure.

SCENE THREE—THE SUBTERRANEAN CAVERNS OF NIBELHEIM

Alberich has forced his brother Mime to craft the Tarnhelm, a magic helmet that renders its wearer invisible or transforms their shape. Loge and Wotan arrive; Mime explains how Alberich's ring has made him a tyrant over the Nibelungs, whom he forces to toil ceaselessly, mining gold for his ever-growing hoard. Loge, who calls Alberich 'kinsman,' pretends to worry that Alberich will not be safe as he sleeps—his slaves may rebel. Alberich is confident the Tarnhelm will protect him. Loge asks for a demonstration. Alberich first changes into a large dragon and then a small toad, at which point Loge and Wotan overpower him and take him prisoner.

SCENE FOUR—AN OPEN SPACE ON A MOUNTAIN

In exchange for Alberich's freedom, Wotan demands all his gold, so Alberich commands the Nibelungs to bring the hoard up from the depths. Wotan also takes the Tarnhelm and ring, and Alberich puts a curse on the ring—it will bring its wearer only misery and death. Fasolt and Fafner return with Freia. Fasolt insists the gold be piled high enough to conceal her beauty, thus making the parting easier. They demand the Tarnhelm and ring as well, but Wotan refuses. Erda, the primeval earth goddess, mysteriously appears and warns Wotan that the ring spells doom for the gods. Reluctantly, he concedes the ring.

The brothers immediately fall to brawling over the ring, and Fasolt is killed. Donner calls the clouds together to clear the atmosphere, and Froh creates a rainbow bridge. Wotan, naming the castle Valhalla, leads the gods across the rainbow bridge over the river to enter their new home. Loge foresees that the gods are moving toward their doom. The Rhine Daughters, below, lament the loss of their gold.

CAST

Character	Brief Description	Artist	Voice Type
Wotan	Leader of the gods, husband to Fricka, the one who commissions Fasolt and Fafner to build a new castle for the gods	James Rutherford	Bass-Baritone
Alberich	Power hungry Nibelung who steals the gold from the Rhinedaughters, renouncing love as he does so	Boaz Daniel	Baritone
Loge	God of fire and Wotan's counselor	Rodell Rosel	Tenor
Mime	Alberich's brother, a blacksmith	Gordon Gietz	Tenor
Fricka	Wotan's wife, represents virtue, Freia's sister	Jill Grove	Mezzo-Soprano
Erda	Earth mother, warns the other of the danger of the gold	Catherine Daniel	Contralto Mezzo-Soprano
Donner	Weather god, angers easily	Connor Hoppenbrouwers*	Baritone
Froh	Freia's brother who builds the rainbow bridge	Elias Theocharidis*	Tenor
Fasolt	One of the giant brothers who build Wotan a castle in exchange for Freia	Guido Jentjens	Bass-Baritone
Fafner	The other giant brother, the more sensitive of the two, also in love with Freia	Kenneth Kellogg	Bass-Baritone
Freia	Goddess of love who cares for the golden apples that grant eternal youth, Fricka's sister	Anna Pompeeva	Soprano
Woglinde	One of the three Rhinedaughters who guard the gold	Juliana Krajčovič	Soprano
Welgunde	One of the three Rhinedaughters who guard the gold	Justine Ledoux*	Soprano
Flosshilde	The oldest of the three Rhinedaughters and the one that takes guarding the gold seriously	Yenny Lee	Mezzo-Soprano
Nibelungs	The dwarves who work underground, mining the Rhinegold	Cantaré Children's Choir performers	

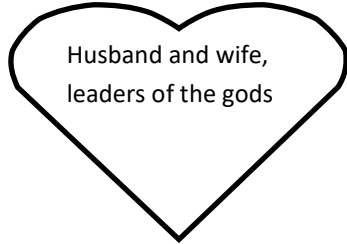
CAST-Visual Description

Das Rheingold has a very large cast, as you saw on the last page. For a complete biography of each one of them, go to our homepage for Das Rheingold on the Calgary Opera website here: [Das Rheingold — Calgary Opera](#) . Where available, I have also listed the artist's personal website so you can find out more about them.



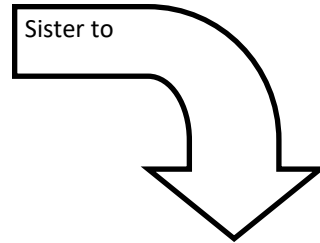
James Rutherford as Wotan

[James Rutherford, Baritone](#)



Jill Grove as Fricka

[Jill Grove, Mezzo-Soprano | The Official Site of American Mezzo-Soprano, Jill Grove \(jillgrovemezzo.com\)](#)



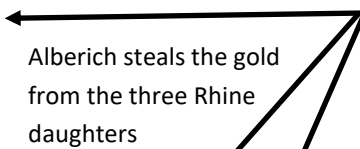
Anna Pompeeva as Freia

[Anna Pompeeva, Soprano | Operabase](#)

The three Rhine daughters who guard the gold:



Juliana Krajščovič as Woglinde [Juliana Krajščovič, Soprano | Operabase](#)



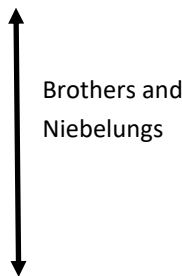
Boaz Daniel as Alberich [Boaz Daniel, Baritone | Operabase](#)



Connor Hoppenbrouwers as Donner [Connor Hoppenbrouwers, Baritone | Operabase](#)



Yenny Lee as Flosshilde [Mezzo Sop. Yenny Lee \(yennyleemezzo.com\)](#)



Gordon Gietz as Mime, the blacksmith [Gordon Gietz](#)



Elias Theocharidis as Froh [Elias Theocharidis, Tenor | Operabase](#)



Justine Ledoux as Welgunde [Justine Ledoux – Mezzo soprano](#)

CAST-Visual Description



Catherine Daniel as Erda, Earth Goddess, warns Wotan to return the gold to the river

[Catherine Daniel](#)

Rodell Rosel as Loge –diplomatic and wise, he is Wotan’s counselor and convinces the giants to take gold instead of Freia as payment for the new fortress

[HOME | Rodell Rosel](#)



Valhalla, the home of the gods that the giants Fafner and Fasolt have built for Wotan. As payment he promises them Freia.



Kenneth Kellogg as Fafner

[Kenneth Kellogg, Bass](#)



Guido Jentjens as Fasolt

[GUIDO JENTJENS | Aktuell \(guido-jentjens.com\)](#)

Brothers and giants

A New Kind of Opera and Leitmotifs

Richard Wagner changed the course of opera, dramatically, not only in structure and style, but also in the way the audience experienced it. He felt that opera, which contained all the art forms, should be thought of as *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total art work) where all elements of the art work together and are directed toward the same end. This idea ended up being applied to

Recitative in Wagner's opera

Operatic style before Wagner typically consisted of both aria and recitative. Arias are the songs of the opera, sung in a way to highlight the character or their voice. Arias focus on one emotional aspect of the character and take a long time to sing. The story in the opera would never proceed if the characters only sang arias, so to counter this slow and ornamental singing is recitative, essentially faster sing-speaking that delivers the plot quickly to move the story along.

Wagner more or less removed arias and made all of his characters sing recitative. In this way, his operas are structured more like plays than operas. Dramaturg Jonathan Dean of Seattle Opera calls *Das Rheingold* "the world's longest recitative" as there are no natural break points for the audience to applaud, as there would be after an aria.

The use of Leitmotif

Wagner also revolutionized the use of the orchestra in opera. No longer there to simply support the vocalists, the orchestra in a Wagner opera is telling you the story and the singers are supporting it. The way this occurs is through an invention of Wagner's called Leitmotifs, which are short musical phrases that relate to a specific character or event in the opera and are repeated each time that character or event is relevant. This creates a rich musical language for the viewers in which they learn and then follow the storytelling of the orchestra as the opera progresses. *Das Rheingold* begins with the leitmotif for the Rhine river, which can be heard here: <https://youtu.be/gH4947fQcgo?si=glVhgOiUXDQmsEzg> Familiarize yourself with this short musical motif and then hear it as the opera opens. Every time you hear this music, it is referencing the flowing waters of the Rhine river, where the sacred gold lays guarded by the Rhine daughters.

There are many leitmotifs that run throughout *Das Rheingold* and, upon first hearing them, it requires attention from the audience to hear them and then recognize them as the opera continues.

The opera hall

Of course, the changes that Wagner made extended beyond the stage. He also wanted to revolutionize the way the theatre was arranged to ensure that the audience's attention was on the stage and not on seeing and being seen. Opera in the 1800s was a social affair and the way that the seats were placed in the theatre were for audience members to be able to see each other. Wagner wanted the audience to be watching his operas so he built his own Opera Hall which still performs operas to this day in Bayreuth, Germany, dimmed the lights and turned the seats toward the stage.

A Brief History of Opera

Opera is a combination of so many different art forms. It is a sung work on stage that can sometimes include acting, singing, dancing, scenery, props, lighting, costumes and maybe even projections and holograms! An orchestra accompanies the performers and usually performs from the pit, which is a sunken space at the front of the stage and a conductor conducts both the orchestra and the performers from a raised step in the pit.

The word opera is the plural form of the Latin word *opus* which translates quite literally as ‘work.’ The use of the plural form speaks to the many art forms that combine to create an operatic performance.

Opera developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570’s by a group of artists known as the Camerata who were influenced by earlier Greek drama.



Image of Peri's score for *Dafne*, 1597 from www.at.or.at

Their discussions led to the musical setting of Rinuccini's drama, *Dafne*, by composer Jacopo Peri in 1597. The work of early Italian masters, such as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical piece made up of recitative (fast sing-speaking) sections which revealed the main storyline; followed by arias which provided the soloist an opportunity to develop the emotions of the character through emotive singing. The new art form was greeted enthusiastically by the nobility of the time and, over the centuries, to the public, where it became a popular entertainment that often dealt with the common people and stories of the day.

Opera has flourished throughout the world as way to express the full range of human emotions. Italians claim the art form as their own, with the bulk of famous opera composers being of Italian origin through to the 1900s. Puccini, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly de-

finied periods that produced opera buffa, opera seria, bel canto, and verismo. The Austrian Mozart also wrote operas in Italian. Further, he championed the singspiel (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Les Contes D'Hoffmann*), Gounod, Faust, and Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots*) led adaptations by the French which ranged from the opera comique to the grand full-scale tragedie lyrique. German composers von Weber (*Der Freschutz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms, such as singspiel and through-composed spectacles. The English ballad opera, Spanish zarzuela and Viennese operetta styles all helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment, one that continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world today.

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in



Will Liverman and Angel Blue in *Fire Shut up in my Bones*, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, 2019

America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their roots while exploring and developing the work of folk music and legends in the country. Composers such as Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Scott Joplin and more recently Jake Heggie and Terence Blanchard have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. In Canada, composer John Estacio and librettist John Murrell were commissioned by Calgary Opera to produce *Filumena*, based on a true Canadian story of the last woman to be hanged in Alberta, which premiered in 2003 in Calgary to great success, and is one of the most produced Canadian grand-operas worldwide.

Voice Types in Opera

Voice Types

SOPRANO	Traditionally considered highest female voice
MEZZO-SOPRANO	Voice type between Soprano and Contralto
CONTRALTO	Usually the lowest female voice
TENOR	Usually the highest male voice
COUNTER TENOR	Higher than a tenor, but less common, however it is becoming a more common and popular type, and it is considered highest voice type for a male voice
BARITONE	Voice between Tenor and Bass
BASS	The lowest voice type of them all

Breaking down the voice types, categories within the types listed above:

COLORATURA	Typically a voice with a very high range and the ability to sing complicated passages with great agility
DRAMATIC	A heavy, powerful voice with a steely timbre capable of great range and emotion
LYRIC	An average size voice, but capable of singing long beautiful phrases.
HELDEN	A German term referring to a powerful voice capable of singing very demanding roles– translates to heroic
FALSETTO	The upper part of a voice, more often used in reference to male voices
SPINTO	A somewhat more powerful voice than that of a true lyric.

*Bonus Resource : To watch a short but descriptive video on operatic voice types explained, go to the Royal Opera House London (ROH) YouTube video here:

<https://youtu.be/hLfvkwTnJVMsi=bWyF65R0D8mI7nkO>

Ideas to Consider, Exercises

1. Director's Perspective.

A director has the difficult but extremely interesting job of studying a work and deciding how the artists will tell the story through action and emotion on stage. The set and costumes are designed by different artists, so the director is working only with movement on stage. The director's medium, or material that he works with, is the performers. Calgary Opera had the great pleasure of presenting Gaetano Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* in February of this year and with that, working with opera director Pablo Maritano. In discussion with Pablo about how he approaches directing an opera, he gave these insights to anyone interested in understanding how to approach a work:

- What were the original conditions in which the play/opera was conceived? Not only literary and musical, but also sociological (philosophy, politics, religion, etc.). Who paid for it or commissioned it? Is it part of the repertoire?
- Are these ideas and cultural movements that produced it valid today? How have they evolved? (f.e. a play about monarchy...how does it work today?) Is this opera or play relevant today, beside its beauty?
- Under what conditions will the opera be performed? Does the public understand its language? Will it be performed at a traditional venue, or an adapted space? Is it a work that the public is familiar with? Is the cast familiar with this repertoire?
- What is this play about? How does it approach these topics? Do I agree with its statements?
- Do I have any point of intimacy with this play/opera? Can I express myself through it?

After you take in our *Das Rheingold* dress rehearsal or one of the performances, ask yourself how our director Brian Staufenbiel dealt with these considerations on stage. What is the current cultural situation he is dealing with and how did he present *Das Rheingold* in a way that speaks to our present reality?

Also, look at these questions and apply them to a different piece of work that you are studying in class, or hold up these thoughts to a work that you have seen but either did or didn't enjoy. What would you do differently if you were the director?

2. Can you separate the artist from the art?

There is no question that Richard Wagner was an antisemite. He openly wrote and spoke about his views in several published works. After his death, Adolf Hitler, who was an ardent Wagner fan, celebrated Wagner and his works, cementing Wagner as the musical and ideological representation of the party through art. Although Hitler's adoration came after Wagner's death, it is undeniable that Wagner held some of the same views.

Knowing this, is it possible to separate these viewpoints from the genius of his work? Is the music he created distinct from his beliefs, or is it informed by it? How can we know?

There are much more recent examples of this same problem that we, as consumers and fans of music and art have to grapple with. Kanye West is a perfect example of someone who has created brilliant work but whose social and political beliefs have been deeply controversial and offensive to many people.

Have a discussion around this and share your views with others. There are many different viewpoints in a conversation like this one. Allowing yourself to be open to differing viewpoints creates tolerance and builds a society in which people have the freedom to share their minds, and also have their minds changed.

3. *Das Rheingold* vs. *Lord of the Rings*

The author of the *Lord of the Rings* series J.R.R. Tolkien is believed to have had exposure to Wagner's operas before writing his saga. How are the two stories similar? Look up Tolkien and his influences, he too was a fan of Old Norse mythology. Do you think that Tolkien was influenced by Wagner? Discuss.

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