

Siemens Festival Evening  
**Bayreuth Festival 2010**

## ***The Valkyrie (Die Walküre)***

### ***The Ring of the Nibelung (Der Ring des Nibelungen)***

A stage performance for an evening and three subsequent days

First day: *The Valkyrie*

### **The cast, the plot the production**

Music drama in three acts  
Music and libretto by Richard Wagner  
Production by Tankred Dorst (summer 2006)

#### **Production**

Christian Thielemann  
Tankred Dorst  
Frank Philipp Schlößmann  
Bernd Ernst Skodzig  
Norbert Abels

Conductor  
Stage Director  
Set Design  
Costume Design  
Dramaturge

Johan Botha  
Kwangchul Youn  
Albert Dohmen\*  
Edith Haller\*  
Linda Watson  
Mihoko Fujimura  
Sonja Mühleck\*  
Anna Gabler\*  
Martina Dike  
Simone Schröder\*  
Miriam Gordon-Stewart\*  
Wilke te Brummelstroete  
Annette Küttenbaum  
Alexandra Petersamer

Siegfried (tenor)  
Hunding (bass)  
Wotan (bass)  
Sieglinde (soprano)  
Brünnhilde (soprano)  
Fricka (soprano)  
Gerhilde (high soprano)  
Ortlinde (soprano)  
Waltraute (low soprano)  
Schwertleite (alto)  
Helmwige (high soprano)  
Siegfrune (low soprano)  
Grimgerde (alto)  
Rossweisse (low soprano)

\*New cast members

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Sunday, August 21, 2010

Act I: 4:00 p.m.

Act II: 6:05 p.m.

Act III: 8:35 p.m.

End: ca. 9:50 p.m.

**Public viewing:** 4:00 p.m. (CEDT), Festplatz, Bayreuth. Introduction starting 2:00 p.m.

**Web stream:** starting 4:00 p.m. (CEDT) at: [www.siemens.com/festspielnacht](http://www.siemens.com/festspielnacht)

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**The work**

Richard Wagner's opera *Die Walküre* was first performed on July 26, 1870, at the [Königliches Hof- und Nationaltheater](#) in Munich, with Franz Wüllner conducting. Together with the operas *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, it is a part of the tetralogy known as *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

**Back story**

The earth goddess Erda has borne Wotan nine daughters, the Valkyries (Walküren), who stand by warriors in battle and carry fallen heroes to eternal bliss in Valhalla. Wotan's favorite among all the Valkyries is Brünnhilde. The gods are threatened with destruction by Alberich, who is furtively seeking to regain control of the Ring that confers vast power. As an instrument of his revenge against Wotan he has now engendered a son, still unborn, so that Wotan, father of the gods, must himself apply all his powers to recover the Ring that he was forced to give over to the Giants as payment for building Valhalla. The Giant Fafner, the sole surviving master of the Nibelungs' treasure and the Ring, has transformed himself into a dragon. In that form he guards the Ring, which Wotan is powerless to take from him because the god is bound by his own word. Only a free hero who is not bound by the laws of the gods would be able to recover the Ring. For that reason, Wotan has sired the race of the Volsungs (Wälsungen) – the twins Siegmund and Sieglinde – with a mortal woman. This is where the opera begins.

### Act One



Siegmund seeks refuge in Hunding's cabin from a terrible storm. Sieglinde offers refreshment to the exhausted stranger. They feel an uncanny attraction to one another. When Hunding returns, Siegmund narrates his sad background for his wary host: one day, returning with his father from the hunt, he found their house burned to the ground, his mother dead, and his twin sister vanished without a trace. He became separated from his father in a battle with an enemy clan and never found him again. Now he is fleeing and without a weapon. Hunding reveals that he himself belongs to that same hostile clan, and has found his enemy in his own house.


The sacred laws of hospitality protect Siegmund for the night, but tomorrow he will fall victim to the tribe. Left alone, Siegmund calls upon his father Wälse, who promised him a weapon in his moment of direst need ("Ein Schwert verhieß mir der Vater"). For a moment he thinks he sees the gleam from the hilt of a sword plunged into the trunk of a giant ash tree that holds up the house. Sieglinde returns. She has drugged Hunding to sleep. Now she points out the weapon to Siegmund and tells him her own joyless story ("Der Männer Sippe sass hier im Saal"). As she was being wed in a loveless marriage to Hunding, an old man appeared amid the festivities and thrust the sword into the tree trunk, announcing that it was meant for the strongest man alone, the man who could pull it out again.

In a strange rush of feelings she recognized her father Wälse, who had placed the sword there for his strong son, who would accomplish the work of redemption for him. Spring floods the cabin with bright moonlight ("Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond"). As the pair find themselves drawn more and more intensely to one another, Siegmund reveals his identity to Sieglinde ("Deiner Augen Glut... Wehwalt heisst du fürwahr?... Siegmund heiss ich"). Naming the sword "Nothung," he pulls it from the tree with a mighty tug. The couple flees into the blossoming spring night in passionate abandonment.

### Act Two

In a wild mountainous landscape, Wotan orders Brünnhilde, his favorite Valkyrie, to help Siegmund win the impending fight with Hunding. But Fricka, the guardian of matrimony, has heard Hunding's prayers and demands that Wotan punish the twins' adultery and incest. He is forced to swear to her that he will revoke his orders to Brünnhilde. In dejected resignation he tells his favorite daughter of the threatened end of the gods, Erda's prophecy, Alberich's still-unborn son, and his own self-deception that Siegmund would be a free hero. It was none other than Wotan himself, after all, who has protected him with the sword that Siegmund found in his moment of need ("Als junger Liebe Lust mir verblich"). Now all Wotan desires is the end. He orders Brünnhilde to make Siegmund lose the fight with Hunding. When she protests, he threatens her with terrible punishment.

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The couple is fleeing from Hunding. Sieglinde collapses from exhaustion. As Siegmund lovingly cradles her, Brünnhilde appears to him, announcing that he must soon die (“Siegmund, sieh auf mich”). He fiercely declares that he will not be separated from his sister, that he would sooner kill Sieglinde (and himself) first. Brünnhilde takes pity on the unhappy hero, and promises to help him against Hunding, defying Wotan’s command. But when she shelters Siegmund with her shield in the fight, Wotan kills his son himself with his spear. Then, felling Hunding with a contemptuous wave of his hand, he hurries after his disobedient daughter, who has fled with Sieglinde.

### **Act Three**

The Valkyries are gathering on the peak of “Brünnhilde’s Rock” before carrying their fallen heroes to Valhalla (“The Ride of the Valkyries”). Now Brünnhilde approaches with the stunned, despondent Sieglinde, pleading with her sisters to protect her from furious Wotan, who is following in pursuit. Sieglinde begs Brünnhilde to kill her. But when the Valkyrie tells her she is carrying Siegmund’s son, who is destined to be the greatest hero of all, Sieglinde finds new will to live (“O hehrestes Wunder”). Brünnhilde gives her the fragments of Siegmund’s sword, which Wotan had shattered, and Sieglinde flees. Then Brünnhilde faces her father’s rage. His decree is severe: she will no longer be a Valkyrie, she will be banished from among the gods. Left asleep, she is doomed to be the wife of the first man who finds and wakens her. The Valkyries flee in horror from Wotan’s terrible verdict. Brünnhilde stirringly reminds Wotan that she only did what he originally meant her to. Now Wotan softens her punishment. An immense fire will surround the place where she sleeps, and only a hero who knows no fear will win her as his wife. Deeply moved, Wotan bids his favorite child farewell (“Leb wohl, du kühnes herrliches Kind”). Then he kisses her to sleep, and conjures up Loge to surround the place with fire. Wotan glances back in profound pain, then disappears into the sea of fire.

### **Remarks on Tankred Dorst’s production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* By Prof. Norbert Abels**


#### **Thoughts on a new production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen***

Many pathways from Tankred Dorst’s own world have led him to Wagner’s “Der Ring des Nibelungen,” first performed in full at Bayreuth in 1876. Dorst’s famed creation Merlin fails to achieve his plans, becomes more and more deeply enmeshed in the contradictions of human history, loses his faith in utopia, and flees into the timelessness of the cycle of nature. He must deal with the obligatory ingredients of failure: egotism, lovelessness, and the hunger for power.

Love, which in Wagner is the “eternal feminine” personified, withdraws from the tangled mess of history. As happens at the end of “Götterdämmerung,” the world steadily becomes a less vivid place in Dorst’s “Merlin” as well. Dorst’s words about the beings on his dying dwarf planet could apply just as well as an introduction to the “Ring”: “It has not been shown to what extent they predict, or even bring about, the end of the planet. The few traces of their existence remain

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an enigma.”



Dorst has been exploring the world of Merlin for 26 years, keeping his “desolate land” in motion. Just recently he continued this ongoing approach with a modern semi-opera, “Purcell’s Dream of King Arthur.” “Die Walküre” begins with a storm that paints a very expressive sound picture of both external and internal turmoil. Before Siegmund and Sieglinde ever look into each other’s eyes – Wagner’s dense dramaturgy of glances achieves a pinnacle in this work – the elements crash together in thunder and lightning. A group of people from our own day have sought shelter from the storm in a condemned mansion in the forest. A telephone pole has fallen through the roof. In that pole, still invisible at first, the sword Nothung is stuck fast. As the storm dies away, the people leave the villa. Only a stool remains in the center, with Sieglinde sitting on it – an image of melancholy, of expectation, but also of captivity. Sieglinde does not emerge from her trance even when Siegmund, her still unrecognized brother, enters the scene. Hunding’s rowdy militia, wearing removable dog’s heads – reminiscent of the Egyptian god of the dead – occupies the space with their martial behavior. It takes no more than a glance for Siegmund to realize the full extent of the young woman’s misery.

The second scene is set at the edge of a modern megalopolis. A tall rock face in the center conceals a secret. In the background appear the petrified fossils of history, once great conquerors and destroyers of the world, or great thinkers, but now porous. We are looking at the trash heap of history – monuments, equestrian statues, busts and reliefs. We are viewing things that once vaunted themselves as great and imperishable. We experience the relativity of any claim to absoluteness as we see them decaying. This is the background against which the sad story of the god Wotan plays itself out. Nietzsche asked us all where in our midst we can find the people who will follow the divine example of Wotan, and “become greater the more they withdraw.” And even more: we must all face the question, “Who will renounce power, knowing and feeling that it is evil?”

In the heroes’ cemetery of history – close by we once again see unsuspecting people from our own time, a pair of lovers with a bicycle – the god simultaneously experiences the transience of greatness. The “sometime” of the past and the “sometime” of the future collapse briefly into a “now.”

The cliff in the center moves, and Wotan sees his own petrified head – the head of the great god – rammed into the ground. At the same time, moving very slowly, holding broken spearheads in his hands, his look-alike crosses the stage: Wotan’s future in the guise of the Wanderer, who wants to escape the myth, who has become infinitely weary and now has to fear only one thing: that there will never be an end.

A great deal happens there among the statues in “Die Walküre.” The god’s warlike daughters later appear in a quarry – perhaps the very one that provided the stone for the heroes’ statues. It too is a derelict place, a trash heap with utensils from today that also perform a function of prescience in the last act – at the very moment when the father performs his monstrous duty and turns his

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own daughter into a living statue on a discarded shipping pallet.

