

WAGNER NOTES



Götterdämmerung, Act III,
Immolation scene: Brunnhilde
(Ingela Brimberg) preparing
to walk into the flames to
join Siegfried.

Photo: Monika Rittershaus.

See the review, page 3.



WSNY Calendar (also see [WSNY website](#))

March 20 (Thurs.), 6:30 pm: Conductor Jakob Lehmann on the relationship between Wagner and Anton Bruckner. National Opera Center, 330 Seventh Ave.

April 13 (Sun.), 3:00 pm: Recital by Shawn Roth, tenor, the 2024 Robert Lauch Memorial Prize winner. Victor Borge Hall at Scandinavia House, 58 Park Ave. at 38th St. Members: \$20; non-members: \$40.

April 25 (Fri.): Social events to be announced, associated with opening night of *Tannhäuser* at Houston Grand Opera.

April 26 (Sat.): Social events to be announced, associated with opening night of *Siegfried* at Atlanta Opera.

May 2 (Fri.), 5:30 pm: Private reception for conductor Simone Young, by invitation only, to contributors at the \$250 level and up.

May 20 (Tues.), 1:00 pm: Singers' Auditions, Merkin Hall, New York, open to members only, with contributions requested to Singers Fund.

June 11 (Wed.), 6:30 pm: Book launch for Michael Downes' *Story of the Century: Wagner and the Creation of the Ring*. National Opera Center.

Aug. 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 10:30–11:30 am: Artist Talks, Bayreuth Festival.

Performances (including Strauss) in the U.S. and Canada, through August 2025

- **Mar. 21, 22.** All-Wagner (concert). Charlotte Symphony Orchestra. Cond.: C. Perick. [charlottesymphony.org](#)
- **Apr. 10, 12, 15.** *Rheingold* (Curse of the Ring), semi-staged. Pacific Symphony. Cond.: C. St. Clair. [pacificsymphony.org](#)
- **Apr. 11, 12, 13m.** *Holländer*, semi-staged. Fort Worth Symphony. Cond.: R. Spano. [fwsymphony.org](#)
- **Apr. 25, 29, May 3, 8, 11m.** *Tannhäuser*. Houston Grand Opera. Cond.: E. Nielsen; dir.: F. Zambello. [houston-grand-opera.org](#)
- **Apr. 26, 29, May 2, 4m.** *Siegfried*. Atlanta Opera. Cond.: R. Kalb; dir.: T. Zvulun. [atlantaopera.org](#)
- **Apr. 29, May 2, 6, 10m, 13, 17m, 21, 24.** *Salome* (Strauss). Met Opera. Cond.: Y. Nézet-Séguin; dir.: C. Guth (new production). [metopera.org](#)
- **June 1, 8.** *Tristan*, concert. Philadelphia Orchestra. Cond.: Y. Nézet-Séguin. (S. Skelton and N. Stemme.) [philaorch.org](#)
- **June 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13.** *Walküre*. Edmonton Opera (Alberta). Cond.: R. Braun; dir.: J. Ivany. [www.edmontonopera.com](#)
- **June 6.** *Guntram* (Strauss), concert. American Symphony Orchestra, Carnegie Hall. Cond.: L. Botstein. [americansymphony.org](#)
- **June 27, 29, July 4, 12, 15, 17, 20.** *Holländer*. Des Moines Metro Opera. Cond.: D. Neely; dir.: J. Borths. [desmoines-metroopera.org](#)
- **July 26, 30, Aug. 8, 13, 21.** *Walküre*. Santa Fe Opera. Cond.: J. Gaffigan; dir.: M. Still. [santafeopera.org](#)
- **Aug. 18–24.** *Ring Cycle: Rheingold*: Aug. 18; *Walküre*: Aug. 20; *Siegfried*: Aug. 22; *Götterdämmerung*: Aug. 24. Tundi Productions (Vermont). [tundiproductions.org](#)

Looking ahead

Our season continues on March 20 with a talk by Maestro Jakob Lehmann on the relationship between Wagner and Anton Bruckner. We are excited to announce a recital by tenor Shawn Roth, our 2024 Robert Lauch Memorial Prize winner, on Sunday, April 13 (see WSNY website). We have added a program on Wednesday, June 11, to introduce British author Michael Downes and the American publication of his book *Wagner and the Creation of the Ring*, which was launched to substantial acclaim last year in Britain. And we have decided to move our online seminar on “Staging Wagner” to early next season, on a date to be announced.

The Wagner Society of New York has awarded grants to promising Wagner singers for over thirty years. This year’s grant preparations are already well underway, with details for applicants posted on the online site YAP Tracker, as well as on our web site. Applications are due by the end of March and the final (live) auditions will

take place at Merkin Hall in New York City on Tuesday, May 20, 2025, at 1:00 pm. The Singers Committee is pleased that Jane Eaglen, a renowned soprano, will join them as a guest judge. (She was our first recitalist, in 1984, when touring with the English National Opera.)

This year we are trying out a new approach, by inviting Society members to attend the finals. We hope that many members will share our excitement at discovering new talent. Further details will be forthcoming, but attendance will be limited only to members. Although formal admission will not be charged, it will be necessary to register and registrants will be asked to make a voluntary contribution to the Singers Fund. Whether it’s \$1.00 or \$1,000.00, we hope that members will contribute as they are led, to grow our Singers Fund and ensure that the Society’s important mission of supporting our vocal artists will continue.

F. PETER PHILLIPS
PRESIDENT

About the Contributors

David Hughes monitors upcoming orchestral performances and travels to several continents for live Wagner. **Ako Imamura** reports on Wagner and other performances throughout Europe.

Ira Lieberman has a PhD in Musicology and has taught music at two universities. He was a violinist in the Met Opera Orchestra for 36 years, the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra for 20 years, and is a founding member of the New York Pops.

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Finale of the Brussels *Ring*

Götterdämmerung. I. Brimberg, A. Fritsch, N. Gubisch, B. Register, A. Anger, S. Kendricks, A. Foster-Williams. La Monnaie, Brussels. Cond.: A. Altinoglu; dir.: P. Audi. Performance of Feb. 4, 2025.

An epic new series of *Ring* operas was realized at Brussels' Theatre de la Monnaie on February 4 with the premiere of *Götterdämmerung*. All eight performances were sold out. An abstract and atmospheric production by Pierre Audi, a splendid orchestra led by the company's music director Alain Altinoglu, and a fine ensemble of singers brought the story of the end of the world of power and greed and its rebirth through love to breathtaking new heights of artistic success. One will not soon forget several seconds of a deliberate musical pause before Altinoglu ushered in the final theme of Brünnhilde's sacrifice/treasure of the world. (It has been rumored, but not substantiated, that the La Monnaie cycle will move to Barcelona, with Roman Castellucci, director of the first two, to direct all performances.)

Director Audi and his team continued their approach of placing the *Ring* in a dreamy setting of no specific time or place when they took over the production of *Siegfried* in the fall of 2024 (reviewed in the Nov. 2024 issue). The sets consist of monolithic walls and movable platforms on rotating tables on stage. Props are minimal, as lightings by Valerie Tiberi of white, red, blue, and purple hues are used effectively to highlight the shifting moods of characters and changing scenes, with close attention to musical motifs. Music and singing flow with natural smoothness to make the hours fly away. Costumes by Petra Reinhardt are simple but stunning. Brünnhilde is clothed in a long white dress, as if to symbolize her status as a sacred savior of the world. She dons a dark coat at times and appears on stage in Act III as a mute figure, with veil, to witness and mourn Siegfried's death. When she sheds her dark coat during the immolation scene, she reveals a flame red dress as she hands the Ring to the Rheinmaidens and joins her husband in death by walking towards the red wall hanging in the back, indicating fire. Other characters are mostly dressed in dark colors. Günther and



Act III: Gutrune (Anett Fritsch) and Hagen (Ain Anger) watching Siegfried (Brian Register) drink the second potion that restored his memory. Photo: Monika Rittershaus.

Gutrune, with the same blond hair bob, are in identical gray robes and coats to emphasize their strong affinity and mutual affection. The Norns are clothed in earth-colored bulky costumes to make them appear as earth worms. The Rheinmaidens wear revealing bathing suits at first but add long skirts as they try to entice Siegfried to give them the cursed Ring.

Audi's command of stagecraft is perhaps most striking in the Act II crowd scene. The male chorus was seated on long benches that glided on stage. Hagen's powerful call and the subsequent chorus scene were more ominous and sinister than usual as the singers did not have to move around on stage, and the audience was fully able to absorb the unfolding of the tragedy leading to Siegfried's murder through the music. The exit of the chorus from the stage was managed so quickly and quietly that the following scene of Brünnhilde, Hagen, and Günther seemed to appear out of nowhere.

The quality of singing was mixed, although all the singers were well rehearsed and committed. Ingela Brimberg, tall and statuesque, did not have the

dramatic and powerful core in her voice to be an effective Brünnhilde. Her high notes were often shrill and detached from her middle notes, but she rallied to deliver a moving immolation scene. Taking on the role of Siegfried for the first time, American tenor Bryan Register, whose career has been mostly in Europe, was a beefy-voiced hero with the requisite legato and lyricism, but his voice lacked the strength and sheen to cut through the orchestra for clear projection. Anett Fritsch was delightful as a clear-voiced and sensual Gutrune, well matched with Andrew Foster-William's robust, assertive, and conflicted Günther. The Norns and Rheinmaidens were well cast, and the Rheinmaidens' Act III harmony was a standout. Scott Hendricks' Alberich and Nora Gubisch's Waltraute were adequate to their tasks.

It is almost tempting to call the opera "Hagen" when blessed with an excellent Hagen as in Ain Anger. He was the best singer of the evening, with his dark, menacing, and powerful bass and his tall, hulking, and frightening stage presence dominating the proceedings whenever he appeared on stage. His slimy manipulation of his half siblings, Gunther and Gutrune, and eventually the hero Siegfried and his bride Brünnhilde, and his heart of darkness as an unloved child and adult were first rate acting, making the character the complex, total villain that he is. Anger received the loudest and well-deserved applause among the singers, although the enthusiastic



Act III: Hagen (Ain Anger), Brünnhilde with veil (Ingela Brimberg), and Gutrune (Anett Fritsch). Photo: Monika Rittershaus.

premier night audience reserved their highest praise for the excellent orchestra and its conductor, Altinoglu, and to the production team. A triumph of a happy marriage of music and theater.

AKO IMAMURA

Note: *Götterdämmerung* was live-streamed Sunday, Feb. 23, a 9:00 am EST, on various platforms, with English translation. It will be available free on La Monnaie's website for six weeks after the last performance on March 2. Check local time zones.

La Monnaie/De Munt has received the **Oper!** Award from a German panel of music critics and reporters as the best opera house of 2025. The jury stated that the company, under its general and artistic director Peter de Caluwe for almost 20 years and now in his last season, has been led by him at a consistently high level and with great creativity, setting an exceptional record in the international opera world. –Editor.

Ring Cycles are underway in many European cities, e.g. Basel, Berlin (Deutsche Oper Berlin and Staatsoper den Linden), Brussels, Bulgaria, London, Milan, Munich, Paris, Prague. Please go to page 9 for many upcoming Wagner performances.

Nothing is better than music...It has done more for us than we have the right to hope for.”—Nadia Boulanger.

Wagner-Maazel: *The Ring without Words, for Orchestra* (1987)

New York Philharmonic. Cond.: Nathalie Stutzmann. Performance of Jan. 18, 2025 (one of three, also presented on Jan. 16 and 19).

Wagner composed *Der Ring des Nibelungen* over a span of 26 years. It is considered his magnum opus and one of the most extraordinary works of the imagination ever written, representing a revolutionary synthesis of music and theater. And he had a theater built in Bayreuth to best showcase his *Ring*, with a sunken orchestra pit which promoted a balance between music and drama by preventing his instrumental forces from overpowering the singers. Crucially, Wagner unified his complex story through the use of leitmotifs, musical “tags” that could be shaped to express the inner workings of his characters and their situations.

Wagner himself created excerpts from his operas in his lifetime, conducting them as a means of furthering his career as composer, and they succeeded as stand-alone concert pieces. But synthesizing the events and emotions of the complete *Ring* into one stand-alone composition is another story. They are comprehensible only if the music is played with continuity and in context.

Lorin Maazel had created his 70-minute symphonic synthesis of the *Ring* at the behest of the Telarc label, which issued it as a CD in 1987. The NY Philharmonic premiere was given under Maazel in 2000 and, again under him, in 2008. (He led the NY Philharmonic from 2002 to 2009.)

I strongly doubt that Wagner would have sanctioned piecing together instrumental excerpts from his mammoth work. Though engaging in themselves, here they resemble a film experienced on fast-forward. Maazel’s “suite” of predominantly loud hit tunes and sections transforms an inspiring and uplifting experience over four operas into a 70-75 minute potpourri.

Conductor Nathalie Stutzmann, music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, is undoubtedly among the gifted Wagner maestri; she was well received in her 2023 Bayreuth debut with *Tannhäuser*. She and the NY Philharmonic acquitted themselves



Nathalie Stutzmann conducting the New York Philharmonic.
Photo: Chris Lee.

well. Solo passages in all sections sounded idiomatic and the tempi were appropriate, but there was no attempt to mitigate the very loud on-stage dynamic bequeathed them by Maazel.

This listener, having performed full *Ring Cycles* at the Metropolitan Opera with such luminaries as Leinsdorf, Levine and Luisi, deeply felt the lack of linear development in Maazel’s synthesis. I wasn’t helped by plot summaries of each opera in the program notes; nor did I see any purpose in illustrating only four out of myriad leitmotifs. (The program stated that these items were included in a performance [June 2024] by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.) However, attendees at the NY Phil’s January 18th performance, perhaps suffering from no Wagner in this season’s Met schedule, clearly disagreed, having obviously enjoyed this musical digest. I prefer to digest my gourmet meal according to its creator’s recipe, with singers, one coherent opera at a time.

IRA LIEBERMAN

Der fliegende Holländer in Santiago

W. B. Harmer, E. Ramírez; R. McKinny, V. Gazaryan, A. Carlson, N. Noguchi; Conductor: P-P. Prudencio; Director: M. Lombardero; Performances of November 27 & 30, 2024.



The Dutchman (Ryan McKinny) in his monologue “Die Frist ist um” as Daland listens. Photos, p.6 & 7: Patricio Cortés/Teatro Municipal de Santiago-Ópera Nacional de Chile.

Ópera Nacional de Chile concluded its 2024 season in November with five performances of *Die fliegende Holländer* in Santiago’s Teatro Municipal. The theater, located in Santiago’s historic center, opened in 1857 but was destroyed by fire in 1870 and rebuilt in its original location. It has since been damaged several times by fires and earthquakes but has been restored after each such event and maintains its position as the cultural center of Santiago. The theater’s significance is recognized internationally; during the recent run of *Holländer* it served as host to the 17th Annual Ópera Latinoamérica Conference.¹

The production, although set in the present, followed the original libretto and made extensive use of lighting and video projections. The open downstage area served, at various times, as Daland’s home or a public area where sailors and townspeople gathered. Upstage, a raised platform was used as a dock for Daland’s ship (or, more accurately, tugboat) and, later, a balcony at his home. Videos on LED panels at the back of the stage displayed rough seas and stormy skies, augmented at times by projections onto scrims showing rain or fog downstage.

During the Overture, actors depicting a younger Mary and Daland are seen physically fighting in Daland’s home, all observed by a young Senta as she hides a dark portrait of a pallid sailor, portending her later interactions with the principal characters. As Act I begins, Daland’s ship is anchored upstage as waves crash and a large ominous ship approaches. The *Holländer* climbs onto the dock to begin his monologue, during which he is beckoned by young Senta, spotlighted in the darkness downstage. The light is extinguished and Senta disappears, with the atmosphere on stage foreboding and dark, echoing the lyrics and lighting. Daland offers the *Holländer* overnight refuge, and then effectively sells his daughter in marriage in exchange for a chest of jewels before the two seamen sail toward Daland’s home.

After the Spinning Chorus opens Act II, Senta sings her haunting ballad about the condemned Dutch Captain, and does not seem eager to greet her father, but is entranced by the subsequent entry of the *Holländer*. Video and lighting effects, showing calm seas and clearing skies, convey a more relaxed mood in Daland’s household. By Act III the atmosphere



Senta (Wendy Bryn Harmer) leaps into the sea, “faithful unto death.”

changes again; storm clouds gather as the Norwegian sailors and townspeople call to the Dutch crew. During his cavatina Erik raises his hand to strike Senta in a scene reminiscent of Daland’s striking Mary during the Overture, but Senta grabs the gun in Erik’s holster and forces him back, and, later, the Norwegian sailors and townspeople. The Holländer, believing he is lost forever, leaves and Senta jumps into the raging sea. She has been “faithful until death,” and the concluding video shows her sinking under the waves, hoping to join the Holländer.

Bass baritone Ryan McKinny, an experienced interpreter of the Holländer role, had a commanding vocal

presence, with a steely voice and precise delivery. As his prospective bride, Wendy Bryn Harmer sang an impassioned and haunting ballad about the Holländer’s curse, and later used her bright and powerful midrange soprano – and great stage presence – to pledge fidelity to him and reject Erik. Armenian bass Vazgen Gazaryan sang a booming and resolute Daland. Alec Carlson, a WSNY 2018 grant recipient, sang Erik with heartfelt emotion about his love for Senta and anger at losing her, to the point of threatening to strike her. Chilean mezzo Evelyn Ramírez’s vocal presence established her as leader of the Spinning Chorus, and Nicolás Noguchi sang with precision as the Steersman. The chorus was impressive, with choristers singing the Dutch sailors’ lyrics creating an appropriately supernatural sound from the upper side boxes flanking the stage.

Pedro-Pablo Prudencio, resident director of the Orquesta Filarmónica de Santiago, which also plays for the ballet company and on its own, led the orchestra in a brisk (138 minutes) and incisive reading of the score, never overpowering the singers. The theater, with seating for 1500 in a traditional horseshoe pattern, has excellent acoustics, and a more intimate atmosphere than larger venues.

Upcoming: In 2025 the company will perform four operas – no Wagner, but *Salome* in Nov. The Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires also has posted its 2025 season: seven operas – no Wagner, but *Salome* in Oct.-Nov. The Director of Opera at the Municipal was recently hired for the same position at the Colon.²

DAVID HUGHES

¹Ópera Nacional de Chile hosted the 17th annual Ópera Latinoamérica Conference, at the Teatro Municipal and other venues in Santiago, from Nov. 17-20, on the theme of Theatres and Sustainable Development. A wide range of topics were addressed in both general and panel/roundtable sessions by speakers from Chile, Argentina, Spain, France, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, and the U.S. (Marc A. Scorca, president of OPERA America). The results of the new Latin American Creation Competition were also announced.

²The Richard Wagner Stiftung (Foundation) Chile was officially created in 2019 and began its activities in 2020, promoting activities to create interest in and deepen the understanding of Wagner, and to send scholars to the Bayreuth Festival. They have held an extensive series of 33 Zoom-conferences with an international attendance as well as live conferences in Santiago and have issued a newsletter since 2022. The current President is Alejandra Kantor Brucher. It is a member of the Richard-Wagner-Verband International. Homepage: <https://www.frw.cl>

Yuval Sharon. *A New Philosophy of Opera.*

New York, Liveright, 2024. 320 p., illus. Hardcover/Audiobook/Kindle. List price: \$29.99.

While Yuval Sharon is undoubtedly a unique presence in the contemporary operatic world, for many his work is enigmatic, needlessly complicated, and meaningless. “Why,” he has been asked, “do you want to do it that way?” The work of avant-garde directors of recent generations, such as Patrice Chéreau, Robert Wilson, and Barrie Kosky, has enraged but ultimately stimulated changes in the opera house, but Sharon’s productions, while they have been seen at prominent venues in Vienna, Frankfurt, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, and Detroit, have not won universal acceptance. Now, whoever wishes to find out more about this disruptive figure can consult his most recent publication, *A New Philosophy of Opera*.

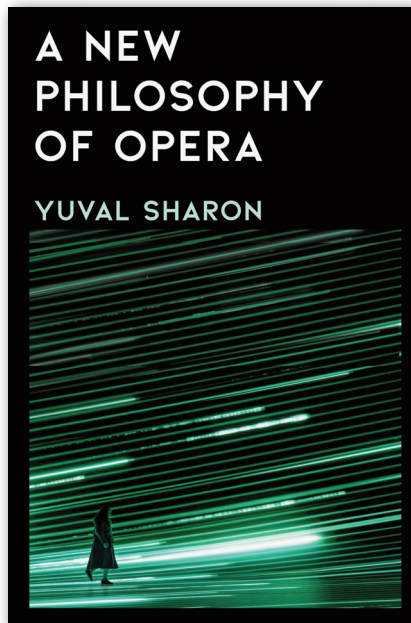
The title is rather misleading, because, as Sharon observes at the very start, his “is a philosophy without a system”; a puzzling statement, as “system” would seem to be an essential element in philosophy. More importantly though, it tends to mask the strengths of this volume by evoking an aura of calm deliberation when it provides one of the most clear-eyed and vigorous critical evaluations of the entire institution of operatic performance of recent years. Sharon is a reformer and writes with a partisan passion: opera is too elitist, it has been “lobotomized by routine,” it is too bound by convention, all too frequently operatic performances fail to find any poetry or magic on stage, the “naked power of the moment” is erased by the formality of the contexts in which opera is presented. Sharon’s ire is all encompassing, and for those of us who agree with him, this eloquently written volume is an exhilarating read. It should be on the shelves of all opera lovers as, far from

being just raw polemic, it provides a richly imagined view of opera’s vast potential.

Sharon’s diagnosis of the ills of opera is not scatter-shot, but precisely focused. It is grounded in opera’s irrefutable status as a genre of theatre, and his discussion is anchored on but not restrained by the theories of Bertolt Brecht and visions of Antonin Artaud. Interestingly, while these two idealists imagined a modern theater notably different from that of the 19th century, throughout the book the reader hears echoes of the ideas of Richard Wagner, as they were expressed in his great essays of the 1840s and 50s. Sharon does not explore this link to Wagner, nor should he as his ideas apply to our own time and the future, but Wagner’s concept of opera as a central event in the artistic and social life of the community and performances that reflect and even aspire to contribute toward the wider life of that community lies constantly in the background of his discussions. Wagner and Brecht would never, I suspect, have been easy bedfellows, but in

Sharon’s writing we can sense a kinship.

The major theme running through the whole book is the issue of change. Sharon is not being fanciful when he describes the operatic world and our understanding of it as being static: even though many of our opera house auditoria are among the most beautiful indoor spaces in the world, there can be no denying that the incongruity of seeing modern opera in a splendid baroque environment can weaken considerably the impact of the opera’s drama. The architecture of the opera house, the often-archaic heroism of the action, and the opera audience’s reputation for stuffy ritual create the illusion that it is ossified, which has



endangered its possibility of survival. But as Sharon continually points out, opera, like any other art form, records patterns of change in human life, both private and social, and those operas that survive are those that most freshly and vividly record that change. Changes in performance practice, for example, the way in which operas are produced and acted on stage, have to fight, not always successfully, for space in the repertoire.

Change, above all, is brought about through shifting dualities, which can change our understanding of human identity and erode our understanding. As Sharon observes, the isolated hero is rarely the only central figure in the opera. Drama is an art of relationships – something Wagner knew acutely and constructed his scores around this insight – and therefore character can never be a stable entity. Opera recognizes this, but do the institutions that sponsor and control it?

It is stasis, lack of change in the presentation of

opera, that most agitates Sharon. For him opera is not a closed world but a genre that is constantly asking questions, opening up new perspectives, revealing uncertainties rather than fixed opinions about human life. The ideal end that he foresees is harmony among the multiple dialogs that opera incorporates, a series of new questions that will lead on to new insights. It is in the very nature of his examination of opera that each of us will find points on which to disagree. For example, I have a very different understanding of the ending of *Parsifal* than his, and as with many polemicists, he often commits the error of generalization, for example, when he seems to tar most audiences with the brush of elitism. As a demand to action to bring new vitality to the most elaborate and glorious of art forms, *A New Philosophy of Opera* should be a powerful and efficacious call.

SIMON WILLIAMS

International Scene, through August 2025

Always confirm information with venue websites, given below. Additions and corrections are welcome. Also, consult the Operabase website for many performances throughout the world.

- **July 25-Aug. 26. Bayreuth season. Opening night:** *Meistersinger*, new production, 10 performances. Cond.: D. Gatti; dir.: M. Davids. See all operas at <http://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de>
- **After the fact and upcoming: Feb. 4, 8, 11, 15, 19, 23, 26, Mar. 2.** *Götterdämmerung*. La Monnaie/De Munt (Brussels). Cond.: A. Altinoglu; dir.: P. Audi. lamonnaiedemunt.be/en NOTE: A report, not confirmed, states that the four La Monnaie *Ring* operas will move to Barcelona, where R. Castellucci will direct a complete cycle.
- **Feb. 5, 9, 12, 15, 20, 23.** *Walküre*. Teatro alla Scala (Milan). Cond.: S. Young/A. Soddy; dir.: D. McVicar. teatroallascala.org/en. 2 full cycles: Feb.-Mar., 2026.
- **Mar. 16-27.** *Meistersinger*. Royal Opera Copenhagen. (Co-production with Teatro Real Madrid.) Cond.: A. Kober; dir.: L. Pelly. kglteater.dk
- **Mar. 17, 19, 21, 24, 27, 30.** *Lohengrin*. Gran Teatre del Liceu. Cond.: J. Pons; dir.: K. Wagner. liceubarcelona.cat. See info in RWVI/News and in Club Wagner, Barcelona. info@weopera.com
- **Mar. 23, 25, 27, 29.** *Holländer*. Irish National Opera. Cond.: F. Sheil; dir.: R. Hewer (first Wagner with this company). irishnationalopera.ie
- **Mar. 25, 28, 31.** *Holländer*. Bayerische Staatsoper. Cond.: M. Franck; dir.: P. Konwitschny. bayerischestaatsoper.de
- **Mar. 26-Apr. 21.** *Walküre*. Royal Swedish Opera. Cond.: A. Gilbert; dir.: S. V. Holm. operan.se/en
- **Mar. 30, Apr. 4.** *Siegfried* (concert). Dresdner Festspielorchester-Concerto Köln. Cond.: K. Nagano. At Grand Salle P. Boulez, Paris. <https://philharmoniedeparis.fr/>
- **Mar. 30, Apr. 3, 6.** *Lohengrin*. Semperoper (Dresden). Cond.: S. Weigle; dir.: C. Mielitz. semperoper.de
- **Apr. 1.** *Siegfried* (concert). Dresdner Musikfestspiele-Concerto Koln. Cond.: K. Nagano. At State Opera of Prague. narodni-divadlo.cz
- **Apr. 5, 13.** *Tannhäuser*. Deutsche Oper Berlin. Cond.: J. Fiore/A. Kober; dir.: K. Harms. deutsche-operberlin.de
- **Apr. 6, 20.** *Lohengrin*. Deutsche Oper Berlin. Cond.: I. Repusic; dir.: K. Holten. deutsche-operberlin.de

- **Apr. 6, 13, 17, 21, 30, May 11.** *Parsifal*. Staatsoper Stuttgart. Cond.: C. Meister; dir.: C. Bieito. staatsoper-stuttgart.de
- **Apr. 9, 13, 17, 21.** *Walküre*. Opera national de Paris. Cond.: P. Jordan; dir.: C. Bieito operadeparis.fr
- **Apr. 12, 15, 18, 20.** *Parsifal*. Staatsoper unter den Linden. Cond.: P. Jordan; dir.: D. Tcherniakov. staatsoper-berlin.de/de
- **Apr. 12, 19, 27.** *Meistersinger*. Deutsche Oper Berlin. Cond.: U. Schirmer; dir.: J. Wieler. deutsche-operberlin.de
- **Apr. 13, 16, 24, 27, Mar 4.** *Lohengrin*. Zurich Opera. Cond.: A. Kober; dir.: A. Homoki. opernhaus.ch
- **Apr. 17, 20, 23.** *Parsifal*. Vienna State Opera. Cond.: A. Kober; dir.: K. Serebrennikov. wiener-staatsoper.at
- **Apr. 18, 20.** *Parsifal*. Hungarian State Opera. Cond.: P. Halasz; dir.: A. Almási-Tóth. opera.hu/en
- **Apr. 18, 21, 27, May 4.** *Parsifal*. Staatsoper Hamburg. Cond.: P. Hahn; dir.: A. Freyer. staatsoper-hamburg.de
- **Apr. 21, 26.** *Holländer*. Deutsche Oper Berlin. Cond.: J. Fiore/G. Cilona; dir.: C. Spuck. deutsche-operberlin.de
- **Apr. 27, May 1, 4.** *Lohengrin*. Vienna State Opera. Cond.: C. Thielemann; dir.: J. Wieler. wiener-staatsoper.at
- **May 1, 4, 7, 11, 14, 17.** *Walküre*. Royal Opera House. Cond.: A. Pappano; dir.: B. Kosky. roh.org.uk
- **May 4, 8, 10, 16.** *Holländer*. Staatsoper unter den Linden. Cond.: P. Heras-Casado; dir.: P. Stölzl. staatsoper-berlin.de/de
- **May 7, 11, 15, 19.** *Siegfried*. Opera national de Paris. Cond.: P. Jordan; dir.: C. Bieito. operadeparis.fr
- **May 16, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27.** *Holländer*. National Theater of Prague. Cond.: K. Januschke; dir.: O. A. Tandberg. narodni-divadlo.cz
- **May 16, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27.** *Holländer*. Opera National du Capitole. Cond.: F. Beermann; dir. M. Fau. opera.toulouse.fr
- **May 17, 21, 29, June 2, 6, 11, 19, 24.** *Parsifal*. Glyndebourne. Cond.: R. Ticciati; dir.: J. Mijnsen. glyndebourne.com
- **May 25.** *Siegfried* (concert). Dresdner Festspielorchester-Concerto Koln. Cond.: S. Rouland. operaroyal-versailles.fr
- **May 20-25, June 4-9.** *Two Ring Cycles*. Theater Basel. Cond.: J. Nott; dir.: B. von Peter. theater-basel.ch/en
- **May 22, 25, 29, June 1, 4.** *Tannhäuser*. Vienna State Opera. Cond.: P. Jordan; dir.: L. Steier. wiener-staatsoper.at
- **May 25.** *Siegfried* (concert). Royal Opera Chateau de Versailles. Cond.: S. Rouland. operaroyal-versailles.fr
- **May 27, 29, 31, June 5, 7, 12, 14.** *Holländer*. Opera Holland Park (London). Cond.: P. Selwyn; dir.: J. Burbach. info@hollandpark.com

Michael Downes. *Story of the Century: Wagner and the Creation of The Ring.*

New York, Pegasus Books, 2025. 336 p., illus. Hardcover. List price: \$29.95.

To be honest, I was initially guilty of not following that advice to “not judge a book by its cover.” Both the title and the cover illustration triggered thoughts that the book might be unserious and lightweight, given that “Story of the Century” is reminiscent of the Barnum and Bailey circus that was contemporaneous with Wagner’s life and which toured the globe, claiming to be “The Greatest Show on Earth.” The cover illustration – a starburst – was equally cause for concern. It was clear that this book is directed towards the general reader, but the cover caused me to wonder whether it was also unserious.

At the start, the gimmick of beginning each chapter’s leading paragraph with a date and location, rem-

iniscent of a newspaper headline, and the consistent use of the present tense as if the reader were contemporaneous to Wagner himself, only seemed to confirm my presupposition. However, it quickly became apparent that this is an extremely well-researched and serious book, albeit written in an engaging and flowing style that avoids all of the pseudo-intellectual jargon that has infected academic writing. The book, as the subtitle suggests, is about “Wagner and the Creation of the Ring” – or, perhaps more accurately, about “The Creation of the Ring and Wagner.” There is nothing in the book that does not somehow relate to the *Ring*, but Downes quite skillfully manages to offer a full Wagner biography as well.

The book begins in 1846, with Wagner in Dresden, talking and writing about how to create an ideal theater. Though not directly related to the *Ring* project, Downes chooses this moment to show how, well before the reality, or even the dream, of Bayreuth, Wagner's main preoccupation had from the earliest moment been to fashion the optimal theatrical experience. By choosing this moment, Downes takes us deep into the core of Wagner's essence and demonstrates to what extent his ability not only to create the work, but to realize that the vision for its performance was indeed the "story of the century."

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first three trace the initial conception and the literary, cultural, philosophical and ideological backgrounds of the *Ring* project. This includes a quite substantial discussion of Schopenhauer. Chapter 4 – by far the longest – is divided into four sections, each devoted to the individual *Ring* operas in turn. Each subchapter traces both the composition of the work as well as a description of the music and dramatic action. Chapter 5 recounts the complex process of bringing the finished work to the point of staging and includes much detail about Wagner's relationship with King Ludwig II and the extent to which his involvement and support was responsible for making the Festspielhaus and the 1876 world premiere possible.

Chapter 6 concerns the 1876 opening season and is the culmination of the book, towards the end invoking the title of the book: the story of the century. By the time we get to this moment, we quite understand the claim. Who can disagree?

The last chapter (7) was for me the most questionable. Titled "the story retold," it is a selection of significant moments in the history of the *Ring*'s existence since 1876 and Wagner's death not too long thereafter. Included are the arrival of the *Ring* in New York and

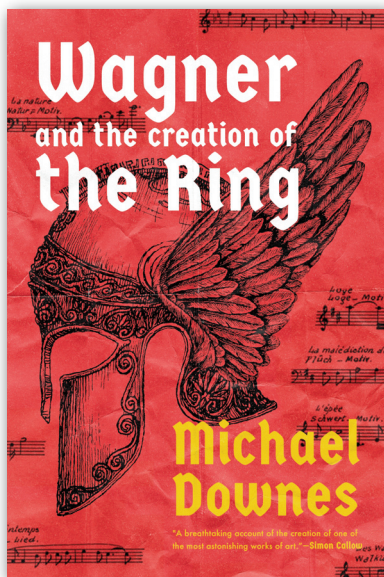
the immense popularity of Wagner in late 19th-century America; the reopening of Bayreuth in 1951 with a good description of Wieland Wagner's approach to staging; the historic studio recording of the *Ring* under the baton of Georg Solti and the technical wizardry of John Culshaw; and the 1976 centennial *Ring*. The chapter closes with the author's 2024 visit to Stefan Herheim's production at the Deutsche Oper, Berlin. Perhaps the most problematic part of the chapter was the inescapable section on the *Ring* in Hitler's Germany. There was no way for Downes to avoid this topic, but also no way to treat it with the amount of care this particular episode requires. In the wake of Hans Vaget's beautifully nuanced and meticulously written discussion of

the Hitler-Wagner nexus in *Wehvolles Erbe: Richard Wagner in Deutschland*. Hitler, Knappertsbusch, Mann, the bar for discussing this topic has been set very high indeed. I would have wanted Downes to at least indicate that the issue was more complex than he had the space to cover.

Downes has clearly thought very deeply about the subject matter and has read copious amounts of Wagner's correspondence, so that he often lapses into conjecture to convey Wagner's psychology. This is of course dangerous territory in

scholarship, but forgivable for the kinds of readers with whom he is trying to connect. All criticism aside, this is a beautifully written book. While it is aimed at the educated general reader, there are things here and there that even the Wagner expert might not know. Downes also has a talent for describing the music in an intensely vibrant and emotional way that is extremely satisfying to read, especially when one already knows the music and can hear it playing in one's mind while reading.

NICHOLAS VAZSONYI



In Memoriam



WSNY program with Otto Schenk on April 2, 2009: interviewed by Joe Clark, who was the Met technical director, 1980-2008. Photo: Neil Friedman.

tenth revival in November 2023. The cast agreed that none had ever experienced such a traditional, unencumbered production. His Met production of *Die Fledermaus*, from 1986 to 2003, included his Met acting debut performance as Frosch, which he performed there 28 times. Most outstanding was his naturalistic realization of the *Ring Cycle* with Schneider-Siemssen, first performed in full in the 1988-89 season, revived six times through 2009, widely attended by Europeans, always sold out, and released on video. In 2009, WSNY presented its prestigious Anton Seidl Award to both Schenk and Schneider-Siemssen for their superb achievements. In defending his traditional approach to opera, he stated: “if you stick the contemporary on top of old works, it doesn’t make the whole thing modern.”

Otto Schenk (June 12, 1930, Vienna - Jan. 9, 2025, Lake Irrsee, Austria) was both an acclaimed actor, encompassing television and film, and a prolific director. In his native Austria, he had arguably greater fame as an actor, often as a comedic performer through 2021. However, his international reputation came from the operas he directed, including 31 productions for the Vienna State Opera through 2014, and for other European houses including Milan, London, and Germany’s leading companies), with some productions still in the Vienna’s repertoire. He was beloved at the Salzburg Festival, directing many operas and plays, as well as performing there 237 times. He loved working with singers individually for every opera he directed. Schenk’s Metropolitan Opera debut was in 1968 with *Tosca*. His first of many Wagner productions at the Met (working closely with music director James Levine and Met general manager Joseph Volpe) was *Tannhäuser* in 1977, with designer Günther Schneider-Siemssen, his frequent and brilliant collaborator; it was seen in its



Die Walküre (final scene of Act III): directed by Schenk and designed by Schneider-Siemssen, premiered on Sept. 22, 1986. Their *Ring Cycles* always sold out. Photo: Winnie Klotz.



Paul Plishka (Aug. 28, 1941, Old Forge, PA - Feb. 3, 2025, Wilmington, NC), was an operatic bass, mostly with the Metropolitan Opera, whose prolific career included several Wagner roles. He began with buffo roles, adding dramatic roles such as Boris Godunov, Philip II, and Mephistopheles, ultimately appearing at the Met in 88 roles over 1,672 performances, his favorite being Falstaff. He also sang many German roles. His Wagner roles included a noble in *Lohengrin*: 8 performances in 1968, King Marke in *Tristan und Isolde*: 5 performances in 1974 and 1999, Tituel in *Parsifal*: 11 performances in 1979, 1991, and 1995, and Daland in *Der fliegende Holländer*: 13 performances in 1979 and 1992.