

# WAGNER NOTES



Walther (Michael Spyres), Hans Sachs (Georg Zeppenfeld), Eva (Christina Nilsson), Magdalena (Christa Mayer), David (Matthias Stier) in the glorious quintet, *Die Meistersinger*, Act III. Photo: Enrico Nawrath. See review, page 3. And see reviews from Vienna, La Scala, and Santa Fe.

## Breaking News – Bayreuth Festival 2026

Bayreuth's 150th anniversary year has been announced, with a focus on special productions, a staged *Rienzi*, classics, and experimental pieces. Seven operas will be presented. The *Ring* will feature a constantly changing visual environment, generated by artificial intelligence. See page 8 and the Bayreuth Festival website: bayreuther-festspiele.de

For radio rebroadcasts of 2025 Bayreuth performances: [operacast.com/bayreuth\\_2025.htm](https://operacast.com/bayreuth_2025.htm)

The WFMT Broadcast Series (Sat., 1:00 pm) will carry *Meistersinger* on Nov. 1, *Parsifal* on Nov. 8, and *Lohengrin* on Nov. 15.

## WSNY Calendar, 2025-2026 Season (see also WSNY website)

**Sept. 8 (Mon.), 4:00-10:00 pm.** Re-stream of Bayreuth's new production of *Die Meistersinger*. Dolby 88 Screening Room, 1350 Sixth Ave., New York. (Sold out.)

**Sept. 11 (Thurs.), 7:00-8:00 pm.** Bayreuth Reports. National Opera Center, 330 Seventh Ave., New York.

**Oct. 9 (Thurs.), 6:30-7:30 pm.** *Hitler's Twilight of the Gods*, by Dr. Alexandra Birch. National Opera Center.

**Oct. 26, Nov. 2, 9, 16 (Sundays), 3:00-4:15 pm.** "Staging Wagner" series with Cori Ellison. Online webinars.  
Nov. TBA.

**Dec. 13 (Sat.), 2:00 pm.** Recital by 2025 awardees: Sadie Cheslak, mezzo-soprano, and Alec Carlson, tenor. Victor Borge Hall, 58 Park Ave. at 38th St., New York.

**2026: Jan. 14 (Wed.), 6:30-7:45 pm.** Annual Meeting: Jeffrey Swann on the Music of the *Ring*. National Opera Center.

**Feb. 3, 10, 17, 24, March 10 (Tues.), 6:30-7:30 pm.** *Tristan* Course. John Muller, lecturer. Collaboration with The Juilliard School, Extension Division. 155 West 65th St., New York.

**Feb. 11 (Wed.), 6:30-7:30 pm.** Walter Frisch on Wagner and Brahms. National Opera Center.

**March 14 (Sat.), noon-4:30 pm.** *Tristan* Seminar. Victor Borge Hall.

**April 30 (Thurs.), 6:30-7:30 pm.** Joshua Borths on Foundations of Wagner's Music. National Opera Center.

**May 22 (Fri.), 2:00-4:30 pm.** Singers' Auditions. Merkin Hall, 129 West 67th St., New York.

**June and July: TBA.**

**Aug. 17-21, 10:30-11:30 am.** Artist Talks and Bayreuth activities. TBA.

The Wagner Society of New York is proud to open its 49th season with a screening of the new Bayreuth production of *Die Meistersinger* on September 8. That will be followed by a program devoted to a panel discussion of the production, on September 11. The following month will feature a presentation by Columbia University's Alexandra Birch, who has written a book on the use of music to underpin authoritarianism and genocide by Germany's Third Reich. Please refer to our web site for more details, and to register.

Members may have noticed the continuing innovations on the Society's web page. Thanks to the indefatigable energies of webmeister Jillian Murray, the Society now hosts a "Ticket Exchange" on which members (only) may post tickets sought or tickets offered to a wide array of events. Non-members may

reply, but not post. Please note that the Society assumes no responsibility for the contents of the page, which is offered as a benefit to our members and the community at large.

The beginning of a new season means the beginning of a new membership year. All current memberships expired on August 31, 2025. New or renewing memberships are for the period September 1, 2025, to August 31, 2026. Revenue from memberships and related contributions from members constitute by far the largest source of the Society's revenue, and our expenses are almost entirely spent on programs for our members and support for young artists. Please join; please renew; and please consider "up-ping" your membership contribution to support our continued growth.

F. PETER PHILLIPS  
PRESIDENT

## About the Contributors

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## Meistersinger: Funny at Last?

*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. G. Zeppenfeld, M. Spyres, C. Nilsson, M. Nagy, J. Park, M. Stier, C. Mayer. Bayreuth Festspielorchester and Festspielchor. Cond.: D. Gatti; dir.: M. Davids. Performance of July 25, 2025.

Staging *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Germany, and especially at Bayreuth, has been a challenge since World War II ended. Its unbridled celebration of German art and culture has been thorny for those who could not see past the “German.” And, increasingly, even the concepts of art and culture, in the Western European sense, have faced headwinds from those who should surely be its staunchest advocates. As a result, *Die Meistersinger* – a work dedicated to art and to a nation where it flowered – has suffered more than most of the great works of the Western canon from directorial embarrassment, discomfort, and the overweening desire to signal virtue. The urge to profess some kind of ideology, usually but not always political, that distanced the director from the work’s seemingly distasteful elements has proved inescapable.

Enter Matthias Davids, a stage director known for his work in musicals, proposing to treat the work as a “colossal comedy.” A completely different approach, at last, even if Barrie Kosky’s complex and inventive 2017 staging was not without its moments of comedy.

Things began quite well. The curtain stayed down during the Prelude, at last allowing the audience to listen to the music without distraction. I won’t mention that the orchestra started playing before everyone was seated, and that conversations in the audience continued for at least two minutes into the Prelude. I’ve never ever witnessed the like at Bayreuth.

The curtain rose to a giant and steep staircase. Atop rested a tiny Lutheran church. At the end of the service, the congregation carefully makes its way down the endless staircase. They are dressed in outfits that span the 16th through the 21st century, a mix of costumes throughout. Maybe to suggest that the opera is timeless? More puzzling is the distinct group of smartly dressed Japanese people who stand at the front of the stage. Are they tourists or a delegation?

During all this, we meet Eva and Walther. Eva is traditionally dressed, but the costume is unappealing. She’s kind of jumpy and immature. Walther has a man bun; he moves aimlessly about the stage, his costume indistinct. Why exactly are they attracted to each



Sachs (Georg Zeppenfeld), Eva (Christina Nilsson), Act II.  
Photo: Enrico Nawrath.

other? It’s unclear. Maybe we should ask the Japanese delegation. So far, I haven’t found anything much to laugh about.

Things get interesting as we transition to the guild meeting. The stage turns to reveal an interior space, reminiscent of the Festspielhaus auditorium: the same lights, the raked seating, the identical folding seats. The steep staircase is still visible and atop still rests the church. To me this represented the idea that art and religion are united in their pursuit of the highest.

After David’s extensive lecture on mastersong, perfectly delivered by Matthias Stier, Veit Pogner and Beckmesser enter, the latter played straight by Michael Nagy. No caricature, no exaggeration, nothing anti-Semitic. Exactly the right approach. Wagner’s text and music take care of everything else. That’s the genius of it. Next in is Hans Sachs, sung by Georg Zeppenfeld. Over the course of the evening, Sachs turns out to be rather irritable and bad tempered...why is Eva smitten with him? At this point, Beckmesser is way more sympathetic than either Sachs or Walther.

The Masters are a weird lot, and many of them have odd tics. They are dressed in the style of the Schlaraffia, a 19th-century men’s society. If you didn’t read the program notes, there is no way you would understand the reference.

Walther unsuccessfully tries to sing his way into the group, and it all descends into chaos at the end of the first act, which culminates with a detonation at the

top of the stairs causing the church to lurch off its foundation and tilt menacingly to the side. What does this shocking and not at all funny moment mean?

The second act set suggests a Nuremberg street with buildings built of children's building blocks. Colorful. The series of duets proceeded relatively straight-forwardly. The third act was a circular dais representing Sachs's workshop. The program notes stated that each act represented a basic shape: triangle, quadrangle, circle, though with no explanation.

It was in this act that Sachs's bad mood became most evident. He was mightily annoyed when David suggested he get remarried. And he lost it completely after Walther's improvisation of the third bar of the Preislied upon seeing Eva, throwing furniture around and banging his hands on the table. The music certainly shows emotion, but calm down, Hans. Finally, we get to the quintet. You know it's a bad director, when they simply can't leave well enough alone. At first, time really did seem to stop, as it should for that sublime moment. But then Beckmesser appears in the background, fidgeting and trying to memorize the song he stole. Sadly, our attention is stolen. But even this misstep by Davids was not as hideous as Katharina Wagner's version in 2008, when she staged the quintet as a family photo where one of the kids can't hold still because he needs to go pee.

Which gets us to the Festwiese: a gaudy, brightly lit set reminiscent of a game show, with an inflated cow upside down above the stage. The cow is a reference to "Laughing Cow," the French cheese, which in French is "La Vache qui rit" which is a pastiche on "Val-kyrie." It came about in WWI as a way for the French to mock the Germans. At least the cow was laughing.

Eva appears, trapped inside a cocoon made of flowers. When she emerges from the flowers, she is wearing a modern casual outfit, completely different from the dress she wears in Sachs' workshop earlier in the act, where she is apparently dressed for the Festwiese. The Festwiese was celebratory, and Davids was probably at his best choreographing the various groups of guilds. It did look a bit like a musical, but in this context, that worked.

Then came the ending, which has proven the greatest challenge in recent times. Sachs's closing exhortation to Walther was when his bad mood delivery actually worked. I've never seen it sung so

aggressively, but it was convincing. He was pissed off that Walther refused the medal and was passionate in his defense of German art. But midway through Sachs's monologue, Beckmesser comes to the front of the stage and, with much effort, manages to unplug a huge cable. As soon as Sachs is done singing his monologue, he rushes to the front of the stage and plugs the cable back in. Slowly the cow reinflates.

It gets worse. At the conclusion of Sachs's monologue, Eva strides to Walther and grabs the medal out of his hand, goes straight back to her father, Pogner, and shoves it back into his hands. Then she returns to Walther, takes his hand, and walks with him off stage. Meanwhile Sachs and Beckmesser engage in friendly banter and walk together slowly towards the back of the stage while the chorus sings "Heil Heil." So, Sachs's exhortation was all in vain? And is it Eva who disdains him, after passionately sharing her feelings for him in the previous scene? Could someone explain the logic to me.

Musically, there were extreme highs and lows. Daniele Gatti's conducting was occasionally chaotic and demonstrated a loss of control. During Pogner's aria, singer and orchestra drifted apart and even the orchestra had trouble keeping themselves together. Things collapsed completely at the conclusion of the second act riot scene, as if chorus and orchestra were in two different time zones. That scene is notoriously difficult to stage and perform, but I have never experienced anything quite this disastrous at a theater the caliber of Bayreuth. On the Festival Meadow the offstage band was a good half second out of sync with the orchestra in the pit. How is this possible? That particular organizational problem was conclusively solved over 50 years ago. But Gatti also delivered moments of heart-stopping sublimity. He achieved an ebb and flow that brought movement and grace to the music, and a lightness of touch perfectly in tune with Wagner's score that moves so effortlessly from one moment to the next: what a miracle that score is. Occasionally, there were balance problems in instrument voicing, but often enough, Gatti got it just right.

Overall, the singing was outstanding. The strongest performance was Christina Nilsson's Eva. Her bright voice is ideal: she was at times lyrical, spunky, gentle, loving. Her heart-wrenching outbursts in Sachs's workshop filled the hall like no other singer that



night. Michael Spyres provided a Walther to match Eva nicely. His voice carried without having that piercing metallic quality of Klaus Florian Vogt that many adore but I find off-putting. Matthias Stier gave a strong performance as David, as did Christa Mayer as Magdalena, and Jongmin Park did a solid Pogner. Michael Nagy's Beckmesser was a good match for Zeppenfeld's Hans Sachs. Both of them were underpowered for the orchestra and the space. I did not care for Zeppenfeld's rendition of Sachs: it lacked lyricism, humor, wit. In recent times, Michael Volle's Sachs is hard to top: the clarity of his diction, the attention to the nuances of the text, delivered with his velvety yet powerful voice. Zeppenfeld did not even come close.

In sum: Davids indeed presented *Meistersinger* freed from overt politics. However, absent politics and

ideology, there was not much substance left. What a disappointment; an opportunity squandered. *Meistersinger* at Bayreuth evidently still has a way to go. I hope one day to see a production that unashamedly embraces the opera that Wagner wrote, an opera that celebrates art and culture, an opera rooted in the spirit of Bach, of Sachs and Dürer and, by extension, Luther and Gutenberg, Germans who ended the middle ages and made possible the modernity we enjoy today. Yes, *Meistersinger* celebrates Germany – the nation that would come to unleash unspeakable horror upon the world, but also a nation that has given the world undreamed-of riches that inspire and nourish, a gift for which I am eternally grateful.

NICHOLAS VAZSONYI

## Die Meistersinger via Livestream

I watched the opening night of the 2025 Bayreuth Festival on my computer. When the curtain rose on Matthias Davids's new staging of *Die Meistersinger*, I was sure we were in for a starkly modern regie production. The dark stage, empty but for a long steep stairway stage right, leading to the church, looked oddly menacing. But when the stage rotated to reveal the hall of song, we saw an all-purpose meeting hall, vaguely modern and fitted with Bayreuth auditorium seating. The apprentices and Meistersingers behaved perfectly normally.

Beyond the striking visuals and playful German-coded sight gags, the staging was thoroughly conventional. The whimsical mix of modern and medieval dress along with Bavarian stage elements allowed for directorial indulgence, largely without interfering with the story, a welcome contrast to Kosky's scolding Nürnberg Trials setting in the previous Bayreuth production. One pointed contemporary theme was the misogyny experienced by Eva, closely surveilled by her companion Magdalena and offered up to the winner of the song contest. In Act II, Eva cringes at her father's physical familiarity, and in the Johannestag procession she was engulfed in flowers. No wonder that she ditched the flowers for blue jeans and eagerly ran off with Walther at the end.

Musically, the proceedings were solidly rewarding. Michael Spyres was an exemplary Walther, contributing a sturdy, bright tenor with vocal and dramatic expressiveness as well as a sense of humor. Christina Nilsson's bright soprano and passionate responses made her Eva a good match. Michael Nagy was a more attractive Beckmesser than usually portrayed, sounding beautiful. Georg Zeppenfeld's Sachs sounded rich, perhaps a bit underpowered, though that impression disappeared with his magnificent Gurnemanz in *Parsifal* days later in the Bayreuth broadcast. Matthias Stier (David) and Christa Mayer (Magdalena) were a comely and well-sung youthful pair. Conductor Daniele Gatti luxuriated in broad tempi and dynamic contrasts, with unusual flexibility in some of the dialogues.

Was the mighty "Wach auf!" a tad less thunderous than usual? Were some of the visual in-jokes distracting? The quibbles weren't enough to seriously diminish the pleasure of a masterly opening to the Festival.

SUSAN BRODIE

### Sachs Speaks:

Sir Donald McIntyre's comment at WSNY's Jan. 16, 1993 *Meistersinger* Seminar: "We're talking about German art which Wagner was very proud of and Sachs was very proud of, not weapons and swords and the rest of it...it's German art which will bring us through. That's the essence of what the piece is about."

## Vienna Staatsoper Ring – An Epic Musical Performance

I. Paterson, M. Bohinec, A. Schager, S. Schneider, A. Kampe, J. Schmeckenbecher, M. Laurenz, A. Kissjudit, S. Youn, C. Unterreiner, R. Hangler. Cond.: P. Jordan; dir.: S.-E. Bechtolf. Performances of June 20-28, 2025.

The Vienna Staatsoper *Ring Cycle*, seen June 20-28, was a mesmerizing, somewhat eccentric musical journey, with impassioned, high-volume conducting from Philippe Jordan and a gifted cast, especially tenor Andreas Schager, who sang both Siegmund and Siegfried. Sven-Eric Bechtolf's rather bland 2007 production offered little in the way of insight but rarely detracted from the epic musical performance.

These performances marked Jordan's farewell as Music Director here, and there will not be a replacement. As is the case at the sibling Vienna Philharmonic, the Staatsoper will revert to a roster of guest conductors and a more collective form of leadership. Jordan is a veteran Wagner conductor – he conducted the Met's 2019 cycle – known for lyricism, luminous textures, and a fluid approach to tempi, all of which were apparent in this cycle. But this time he chose to “pump up the volume” at critical moments. This occasionally came at the expense of covering singers. Fortunately, most of this cast had the rarest of clarion voices, and the combination was thrilling. The celebrated Staatsoper orchestra was not always at its best: its famously distinctive brass sound was marred by flawed entrances and intonation issues, with an inordinate number of horn flubs. But the loss of precision was more than offset by the level of energy in this singular production.

Schager was the other hero of the cycle. I don't think anyone alive has more vocal power! As Siegmund, he sometimes overdid it with, for example, prolonged, earth-shaking calls of “*Wälse!*” Then, as Siegfried in *Siegfried*, his tendency to constantly sing fortissimo became a bit annoying. But he eased up in *Götterdämmerung*, managing to become more controlled and confident. He has a sonorous top register and a bright, metallic sound. He even managed to change his voice to a more baritone sound when he impersonated Gunther. He moves well on stage, and



Brünnhilde (Anja Kampe) and Wotan (Iain Paterson).  
Photo: ©Vienna State Opera / Michael Pöhn.

his youthful appearance is perfect for these roles. Singing both roles in the same cycle is extremely rare. Schager did so last year at Wiesbaden on short notice after the Siegmund had to cancel. This time around it was planned, aided by a two-day break between *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*.

Anja Kampe was a powerful Brünnhilde with a large, thrilling voice and sensitive acting. She has formidable stamina and is quite beautiful. Prior to *Götterdämmerung*, an announcer informed us that she had a viral infection and asked the audience's indulgence. Her voice seemed more vulnerable in the cruel top notes, but she never ran out of steam. Her immolation scene was exceptionally moving.

Iain Paterson portrayed Wotan; this was not a good cycle for him. In *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, his voice was thin and arid, sometimes barely audible against Jordan's soaring orchestra. Things had worsened notably in *Siegfried* when, before the second act, an announcer came onstage to explain that Paterson was experiencing an acute allergic reaction and was treated by a physician so he could finish the performance. That said, he was always a sympathetic Wotan with a capacity to display pain and his love for Brünnhilde.

Jochen Schmeckenbecher was a surprisingly effective Alberich, with a strong, dry baritone, acting in a way that made his character more sympathetic than usual. To understand the *Ring*, we need to see the flaws and virtues in every character: if Wotan is “Light Alberich,” the converse is also true. Michael Laurenz was far more typical as Mime, hyperactive, with the whiny “character voice” often associated with the role.

Simone Schneider was a radiant, intense Sieglinde, pairing nicely with Schager. Monika Bohinec was a solid mezzo as Fricka. Daniel Behle was a scene-stealing Loge, vocally strong, vividly dramatic. Anna Kissjudit sang Erda with a sweet voice, a bit underpowered. Samuel Youn was disappointing as Hagen, with a forced sinister sound. Clemens Unterreiner was dramatically and vocally ideal as Gunther, but Regine Hangler, with a large vibrato, lacked the innocent lyric spinto sound needed for Guttrune.

The Valkyries were excellent. The Norns were exceptional. The Rhinemaidens, while athletic enough, were vocally less impressive. The chorus was superb.

The great Wagner scholar Oswald Georg Bauer referred to prewar Bayreuth productions as “Grandma’s productions.” That term could now describe Bechtolf’s 2007 *Ring*. So much has happened since then in terms of Wagner production that this *Ring* is a curious relic. At major companies in Europe, *Ring* cycles now feature everything from elaborate, intellectually challenging metaphor to banal, ridiculous soap opera. Meanwhile, sophisticated projection techniques have allowed smaller companies to present *Ring* operas in theaters everywhere without the kind of stage facilities once thought essential for mounting a *Ring*. But if Bechtolf’s production seems quaint, it is not without its charms. In its relative simplicity, it offers an advantage similar to that of a concert version: the ability to concentrate on music and, in this case, acting. Both were superb.

Much of the cycle unfolds in black and white on a bare stage, with a translucent scrim in back on which colors are projected and characters are sometimes seen

in silhouette. In *Das Rheingold*, the Rhinemaidens go up and down on inflatable domes, and most scenes take place in a field of boulders. The giants are in blackface, something rarely seen these days. Wotan and Loge arrive at Nibelheim via metal boxes lowered from the flies. Valhalla is seen only in a silly snow globe that Froh carries around. Alberich’s slaves produce piles of gold body parts. Oddly, a couple of the heads belonging to Wotan reappear in *Die Walküre*, seemingly a reference to Siegmund and Sieglinde.

*Die Walküre* begins on a shallow abstract stage, then opens to reveal life-size artificial horses for the Valkyries, which remain in place even for Wotan’s farewell to Brünnhilde, with only a flickering light on the horses to suggest the magic fire, while Brünnhilde is laid to rest on the flat stage floor atop what appears to be a small rock. The Valkyries gleefully chase and mock the frightened heroes, a bizarre inversion of the text. In *Siegfried*, Mime gets a stage-filling factory for a hut. Siegfried’s bear is a projected silhouette. The dragon is a giant projection of an eye. Siegfried disappears backstage to kill him, at which point the eye turns red. Siegfried discovers Brünnhilde wrapped in a white shroud, which he ceremoniously unwraps. In *Götterdämmerung*, the Gibichungs entertain in a modern furnished parlor but abstraction returns with a forest of small Christmas trees for Brünnhilde.

Marianne Glittenberg’s costumes for the men had more of a sci-fi flavor, but almost all the women, even the Valkyries, wore gowns (covered with bloodstains in their scene with the warriors). When Hagen called the Gibichung vassals, they arrived in uniforms that resembled those of the Nazi SS, a bold and chilling unmistakable reference. The final scene was appropriately abstract and rather elegant, using a combination of stage elevators, projected flames, and the lighting design of Rolf Glittenberg, who also designed the sets.

Bogdan Rošćić, general director of the Staatsoper, has indicated that a new *Ring* production will be created during his new term (his contract was just renewed), but no other details are available.

JAMES L. PAULK

## BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 2026 – Further News

The 150th anniversary will feature a *Ring* generated by artificial intelligence, with a constantly changing and expanding visual environment. See full schedule on [bayreuther-festspiele.de](http://bayreuther-festspiele.de) and on social media channels. Full cast and creative teams are given there.

**Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.** July 25. Cond.: C. Thielemann; P. Beczala, G. Zeppenfeld.

**Rienzi** (first and only performances in the Festspielhaus). July 26, Aug. 8, 14, 19, 22, 24, 26. Cond.: N. Stutzmann; dir.: M. Parditka and A. Szermerdy. Cast: A. Schager, G. Scherer, J. Holloway, M. Nagy, and M. Stier.

**Ring 10010110.** 3 cycles. *Rheingold*: July 27, Aug. 4, Aug. 12; *Walküre*: July 28, Aug. 5, Aug. 13; *Siegfried*: July 30, Aug. 7, Aug. 15; *Götterdämmerung*: Aug. 1, Aug. 9, Aug. 16. Musical direction: C. Thielemann; curation: M. Lobbes. Cast: M. Volle, K. F. Vogt, C. Nylund, C. Mayer, and M. Kares.

**Holländer.** July 29, Aug. 18, 23. (A radical reimagining.) Cond.: O. Lyniv; dir.: D. Tcherniakov.

**Parsifal.** July 31, Aug. 20, 25. Cond. P. Heras-Casado; dir.: J. Scheib.

**Matthias Rädcl** has been named General Manager of the Bayreuth Festival in a new position, announced on July 7, 2025, by the Festival's Board of Directors. He will oversee finances. Katharina Wagner was relieved of her duties as a managing director and will be able to concentrate on the arts as Artistic Director through 2030.

**The Richard Wagner Museum** has a new installation/ exhibit. It includes an AR headset allowing one to “conduct” a virtual orchestra. There is also a wall display of the Festival Directors, beginning with RW, which appear on tablets that slide across a track, showing a photo of each Director at dates inscribed on the track. From each photo it is then possible to see the dates of all Festivals during each Director's tenure, as well as the works performed during each Festival.

## Ring Cycles in Europe and U.S. through 2030

(Full cycles are preceded by individual *Ring* operas and are noted if known. (Always check websites.)

- **NEW!** Saaremaa (Estonia) Opera Days. *Ring Cycle*, individually from 2026 - 2029, with many Estonian singers. *Rheingold*: July 18, 2026; *Walküre*: July 17, 2027; *Siegfried*: July 22, 2028; *Götterdämmerung*: July 21, 2029. Music director: Risto Joost; dir.: Michiel Dijkema. [saaremaaopera.com](http://saaremaaopera.com)
- **2026: March.** La Scala, Milan. 2 cycles. March 1-7: Cond.: A. Soddy; March 10-15: Cond.: S. Young. Dir.: D. McVicar. Preceded by *Götterdämmerung*: Feb. 1-7, 2026. [teatroallascala.org](http://teatroallascala.org)
- **2026: May-June.** Deutsche Oper Berlin. 2 cycles. May 16-25; May 26-31. Cond.: D. Runnicles; dir.: S. Herheim.
- **2026: June.** Wagner Days in Budapest. 10th Anniversary. 2 cycles: June 18-21, June 25-28; *Parsifal*: June 5 and 30; recitals. Cond.: A. Fischer; dir.: H. Schörghofer. [info@mupa.hu](mailto:info@mupa.hu)
- **2026: July-Aug.** Bayreuth Festival. AI-generated special *Ring Cycle*. [bayreutherfestspiele.de/en](http://bayreutherfestspiele.de/en)
- **2026: Nov.** Opera Nationale de Paris. Cond.: P. Heras-Casado; dir.: C. Bieito. <http://www.opereadeparis.fr> Preceded by *Walküre*: Nov. 11-30, 2025; *Siegfried*: Jan. 17-31, 2026; *Götterdämmerung*: Fall 2026.
- **2027:** Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich. Cond.: V. Jurowski; dir.: T. Kratzer. <http://www.staatsoper.de> Preceded by *Rheingold*: July 28 and 31, 2025; *Walküre*: late June 2026.
- **2027-2028 (TBA):** Royal Opera, Covent Garden, London. Dir.: B. Kosky. [rbo.org.uk](http://rbo.org.uk) Preceded by *Siegfried*: March 17-April 6, 2026; *Götterdämmerung*: during 2026-27 season.
- **2029:** Opera Cologne: “*Ring Cycle* over 3 seasons.” Dates TBA. [oper.koeln/de](http://oper.koeln/de) Preceded by *Rheingold*: Oct. 26-Nov. 16, 2025; *Walküre*: March 29-May 3, 2026.
- **2029:** Atlanta Opera. Dates TBA. Cond.: TBA; dir.: T. Zvulun. [atlantaopera.org](http://atlantaopera.org)
- **2030:** Grange Park Opera, Surrey, UK. Orchestra: English National Opera. Cond.: A. Negus / H. Sever; dir.: C. Edwards. [grangeparkopera.co.uk](http://grangeparkopera.co.uk) Preceded by *Rheingold*, 2026; *Walküre*, 2027; *Siegfried*: 2028; *Götterdämmerung*: 2029.
- **2030:** Salzburg Easter Festival, Berlin Philharmonic. Cond.: K. Petrenko; dir.: K. Serebrennikov. Preceded by *Rheingold*, 2026; *Walküre*, 2027; *Siegfried*, 2029; *Götterdämmerung*, 2030. [salzburgerfestspiele.at/en](http://salzburgerfestspiele.at/en)
- **2030:** Metropolitan Opera. Cond.: Y. Nezet-Seguin; dir.: Y. Sharon. [metopera.org](http://metopera.org)



## Siegfried at La Scala: a Fairy-Tale Opera

K. F. Vogt, C. Nylund, W. Ablinger-Sperrhacker, M. Volle, F. Aspromonte. Cond.: S. Young; dir.: D. McVicar. Performance of June 6, 2025.

**S***iegfried* is a fairy-tale opera and, with its naïve hero and happy ending, almost a comedy. Perhaps you appreciate this most clearly when you see the opera on its own, outside of the full *Ring Cycle* where it must perform a transitional function between the high drama of *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*. La Scala's new production, which had its premiere on June 6, encourages you to appreciate the glories of *Siegfried* on its own terms, in a relatively small house, with an unusually lyrical cast, and a delicately detailed orchestra reading by Australian conductor Simone Young. (It was Toscanini who introduced the opera to La Scala in 1899.)

Scottish director David McVicar has been charged with La Scala's *Ring Cycle*, and has created a very serviceable production of *Siegfried*, though rather dark and conceptually unambitious, with the light of the sun largely reserved for Brunnhilde's awakening: *Heil dir, Sonne!* The Nibelung dwarves, Mime and Alberich, are quite at home in the dark, and were played more than usually for comedy in this production. Wagner, in an 1857 letter, noted that "I couldn't help laughing out loud" as he composed Mime's role. McVicar has made Mime a comically cross-dressing dwarf (Mimi perhaps) prancing in a clownish red wig and fusty housecoat, brewing his poisons and packing a picnic, a sinisterly domestic Mrs. Doubtfire. Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacker threw himself into the characterization and sang the long role with admirable clarity. His riddle scene with the Wanderer was the highlight of the first act.

Michael Volle as the Wanderer was a magnificent vocal presence throughout the evening, his gorgeous baritone colorings (in a role often taken by a basso) at the service of keen dramatic sensibility. Volle's Wanderer is fiercely emotional, alternating between overweening arrogance and raging insecurity, as he confronts Mime, Alberich, and Erda, encountering them now for the first time since *Das Rheingold*—which might have been aeons ago in the mythological



Brunnhilde (Camilla Nylund) and Siegfried (Klaus Florian Vogt).  
Photo: Brescia / Amisano © Teatro alla Scala.

chronology of the *Ring*. Volle's Wotan stills bears the psychic wounds of those ancient encounters, now recurring, and sonorously recalled for him by the La Scala orchestra with the motifs of *Das Rheingold* during the riddle scene with Mime and the motifs of *Die Walküre* with the questioning of Erda.

Wagner suddenly stopped composing the *Ring Cycle* in 1857, most of the way through the second act of *Siegfried*, convinced that he would never get the cycle produced. "I have led my young Siegfried into the beautiful forest solitude," wrote Wagner to Liszt, and "have said farewell to him with tears of heartfelt sorrow." Twelve years later, in 1869, after composing *Tristan* and *Die Meistersinger*, Wagner returned to *Siegfried* with the patronage of King Ludwig of Bavaria, and claimed, in a letter to Ludwig, to be able to "reimmerse" himself in the score "as though I had never been interrupted." Wagner noted "a dark, sublime, and awesome dread with which I enter the realm of my third act."

The immensely difficult role of Siegfried was assigned at La Scala to the vocally unconventional, even controversial, tenor Klaus Florian Vogt. He has a voice of exceptional lyricism, clarity, and purity, with an ethereal sound that sometimes resembles falsetto

or counter-tenor in its top notes, a voice that might seem more suited to Bach or Mozart than to Wagner. One hears immediately with Vogt Siegfried's kinship to the definitive fairy-tale tenor role of Tamino, and Vogt actually recorded *Die Zauberflöte* as recently as 2017, when he was already singing Lohengrin, Parsifal, Walther, and Tannhäuser. Vogt sang the role of Siegfried at La Scala with no barking at all, the usual resort of a Heldentenor up against the Wagnerian orchestra. While the famous first-act forging song was not his most memorable moment of the evening, Vogt was stunning with the orchestral forest murmurs in Act II and wondrous in his fairy-tale exchanges with the forest bird. That soprano role was sung by early music specialist Francesca Aspromonte, the only Italian in the cast, singing not just with timbral purity but with some of the intensity of baroque passion.

The great passion of the evening, however, was, naturally enough, between Siegfried and Brünnhilde in the final scene, with Vogt's unusual Wagnerian voice matched by the likewise unconventional lyricism of Finnish soprano Camilla Nylund. The harps accompanied her awakening, as she greets the sun, the light, and then the dawning day. On *Täg*, Nylund ascended to a high G as the full orchestra entered, and you recognized very clearly that this was a soft-grained voice of great tonal beauty, not a Wagnerian voice of steel. Kirsten Flagstad, Birgit Nilsson, and Nina Stemme have all awakened and greeted the sun on the stage of La Scala, but Nylund offered the delicate lyricism of a soprano who has sung many Mozart roles and Richard Strauss heroines, and as a Wagnerian has graduated from Freia and Guttrune to Eva, Elsa, and Elisabeth.

Nylund and Vogt were perfectly attuned as Siegfried and Brünnhilde, marvelous in their rapt and tender exchange as two strangers discovering each other and

falling in love Both of them are realizing (he a wild child brought up in the woods, she a former goddess condemned to an earthly life) what it means to be human together. Nylund is awakened from her long sleep by the naïve young Siegfried who has so much to learn from her. McVicar's direction of their encounter was full of subtle pathos.

At the beginning of the scene Siegfried finds Brünnhilde sleeping in the giant stone hand of a collapsed colossus, the archaeological evidence of an older world of fallen gods and slain dragons. If Mime cannot forge the steel sword, it is perhaps because the world is just emerging from the Homeric bronze age, and McVicar's generally conservative production plays to this paleohistorical dimension of the *Ring Cycle*. McVicar's settings may lack the old-fashioned beauty of the Met's retired Otto Schenk production, but neither is it anything like Frank Castorp's recently retired Bayreuth production with its copulating alligators and the carved stone heads of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. The Ring will be complete in spring 2026, with Vogt and Nylund returning in *Götterdämmerung*. [WSNY has secured a block of tickets for the first cycle.]

A team of puppeteers managed Fafner as a full-size dinosaur skeleton with a human skull, ready for installation in some museum of natural history, the relic of a past epoch. Yet, the most potent evocation of Fafner came from the La Scala orchestra, with the very dark triple-time preludes of the first and second acts, Fafner implicitly present in the sinister and terrifyingly low lines of the tubas and bassoons. By the time the third act begins Fafner is dead, and the stormy prelude already suggests a different terror, invoked by Wagner himself: his awesome dread at imagining a world on the brink of destruction.

LARRY WOLFE

## International Scene – Individual Operas in 2025

- **Oct. 24, 26.** *Götterdämmerung* (concert). Teatro Comunale di Bologna. Cond.: O. Lyniv. [tco.bo.it](http://tco.bo.it)
- **Oct. 26-Jan. 11.** *Lohengrin*. Mannheim. Cond.: R. R. Brignoli; dir.: R. Vontobel. [nationaltheater-mannheim.de](http://nationaltheater-mannheim.de)
- **Nov. 2.** *Holländer* (semi-staged). Monte-Carlo. Cond.: G. Marciano. (B. Terfel, A. Grigorian.) [opera.mc](http://opera.mc)
- **Nov. 13, 16.** *Siegfried* (concert). Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Cond.: S. Young. [sydneyphilharmonic.com](http://sydneyphilharmonic.com)
- **Nov. 15, 16, 18, 20.** *Lohengrin*. Hungarian State Opera. Cond.: M. Rajna; dir.: A. Tóth. [opera.hu](http://opera.hu)
- **Nov. 16-Dec. 28.** *Lohengrin*. Karlsruhe. Cond.: G. Fritzsche; dir.: M. Schnitt. [staatsoperkarlsruhe.de](http://staatsoperkarlsruhe.de)

## Santa Fe's First Walküre

R. S. Green, T. Wilson, J. McCorkle, V. Miknevičiūtė, S. Howard, S. Saturnino. Santa Fe Opera. Cond.: J. Gaffigan; dir.: M. Still. Performance of July 30, 2025.

Santa Fe Opera's spectacular natural setting confronts directors with unique opportunities and challenges. As the audience enters the Crosby Theater, a spectacular vista of the Jemez mountain range lies ahead through the open back of the stage. Performances start at 8 p.m., just as the sun begins its slow multi-colored descent, flooding the partially covered auditorium with light. An hour later, the house and surroundings are plunged into darkness.

Cooling (even cold) breezes flow across the orchestra seats from the open sides. Some nights, violent thunderstorms erupt. The cloudburst that besieged the theater during Wagner's tempestuous *Die Walküre* on July 30 could not have been better planned.

Between a *Flying Dutchman* in 1988 and a revelatory *Tristan and Isolde* in 2022, Wagner's operas had gone oddly missing in the Santa Fe Opera repertoire. Now the company is making up for lost time. In 2023, *Dutchman* returned in a beautifully sung, techno-heavy production directed by David Alden.

And this season, *Die Walküre* has landed in a superbly sung if oddly staged production, the first opera of the *Ring Cycle* ever to be presented at SFO.

The stellar cast assembled for this scenic premiere, directed by British director Melly Still, a newcomer to SFO, was a dream come true for devoted Wagnerians. Bass-Baritone Ryan Speedo Green sang the role of Wotan in a fully staged production for the first time. In January 2024, Green starred as Wotan in a highly acclaimed, semi-staged *Das Rheingold* at the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Dominating the stage, Green sang with clarion intensity and lyricism. His voice was smooth and penetrating throughout the range, with fine German diction, radiating power. Few singer-actors could have so convincingly pulled off his striking (and here, entirely appropriate) bare-chested appearance in Act III, looking devilish, sexy, and commanding in his long dialogue with Brünnhilde.

Tamara Wilson, the acclaimed Isolde in SFO's 2022 *Tristan*, was a forceful but deeply sympathetic



Sieglinde (Vida Miknevičiūtė) and Siegmund (Jamez McCorkle) . Photo: Curtis Brown.

Brünnhilde. In vocal artistry, stamina, and dramatic intensity, she teamed up with Green for a memorable and searing Act III, showing all the changes in her complicated emotional relationship with her controlling father. The pairing of these two voices in their daughter-father therapy session kept us riveted despite the damp chill and the very late hour, with the performance ending at 12:45 am.

The acoustics at SFO don't favor the orchestra. The pit is sunk below the stage, and sound can get lost into the open air. Under conductor James Gaffigan, no stranger to Wagner's operas, the orchestra provided sensitive accompaniment for the singers but sounded underpowered at times, with some tentative playing. Not surprisingly, the players sounded tired by the end.

Four cast members were making Santa Fe Opera debuts. Fast-rising Lithuanian Vida Miknevičiūtė reprised the role of Sieglinde that she has sung in Europe. The sheer volume and force of sound that this diminutive dramatic soprano produced left the audience awe-struck. American singers were well represented. Bass and noted Wagnerian Solomon Howard took the part of Sieglinde's crude mortal husband Hunding, with a powerful and carefully controlled musicality. Tenor Jamez McCorkle was a tender Siegmund, and Sarah Saturnino's gleaming mezzo made Wotan's

nagging wife Fricka a much more appealing character than she often appears. Rarely does one have the opportunity to hear and see *Die Walküre* with a more balanced crew of singer-actors. The evening was a triumph for Santa Fe Opera, and left us hoping there will be more Wagner to come in future seasons.

Surprisingly, Still did not take advantage of the scenic opportunities of the natural environment. Wagner's operas, perhaps especially *Die Walküre*, are ideally suited for such a rugged backdrop, but sunset and mountains were ignored.

Instead, Still opted for a hermetic, inward-looking and cerebral interpretation that seemed over-thought and artificial. Scenic and costume designer Leslie Travers created a claustrophobic world enclosed by fences, ropes, and barriers, symbolizing the entanglements that bind and constrict the fraught relations between mortals and gods. The two halves of the set opened and closed occasionally and briefly to allow entrances and exits from the rear.

Still has said that her vision of *Die Walküre* is about "more than good versus evil. The great tension of the opera results from the conflict between the power of love and the love of power." But somehow, the universal appeal of the magic and romance of the story gets rather lost here. I was almost yearning for Otto Schenk's traditional Met production, with its humble huts, open skies, and fairy-tale atmosphere.

The network of lies, deceit, and passion that underlie the opera's dramatic tensions dominate the visual concept. Freedom of choice or movement does not

exist. Deposited on the stage one-by-one in cloth wrappers that look like cocoons or papooses, the eight *Walküre* emerge for their big ho-jo-to-ho moment in Act III, attached to ropes, symbolizing their dependence upon their father Wotan. They strain to gallop or fly. The octet that follows was, however, one of the evening's vocal highlights, sung with urgency by Valkyries Jasmin Ward, Jessica Faselt, Gretchen Krupp, Jennifer Johnson Cano, Wendy Bryn Harmer, Aubrey Odle, Lauren Randolph, and Deanna Ray Eberhart.

Characters mentioned in Wotan's Act II recap (Erda, Alberich) of the convoluted backstory appear and disappear through a permeable barrier encircling the stage. Only those familiar with the *Ring Cycle* would understand who those folks are. Wotan and Fricka (often knitting) preside on a raised platform, looking down through a network of twisted cords.

When Wotan surrounded his wayward daughter Brünnhilde with the protective ring of fire in the pyrotechnic finale, the scene took place not on a mountaintop but at center stage around what looked like a backyard barbecue. Here, opening the stage to the post-midnight sky would have taken the action to the higher cosmic plane that the music and libretto demand. At times, the staging seemed to get in the singers' way but Wagner's incomparable vocal genius could not have been better served.

HARLOW ROBINSON

The Santa Fe 2026 schedule (July 3 – August 31) will include *Madama Butterfly*, *The Magic Flute*, *Eugen Onegin*, and *Rodelinda*.

## Performances (including Strauss) in the U.S.

- **Oct. 23.** *Tristan* excerpts (concert). Icelandic Symphony Orchestra. Cond.: E. Ollikainen. See below.
- **Oct. 25, 28, Nov. 2, 7, 13.** *Parsifal*. San Francisco. Cond.: E. S. Kim; dir.: M. Ozawa. [sfopera.com](http://sfopera.com)
- **Nov. 12.** Opera Gala with Ride of the Valkyries. Boston Lyric Opera Orchestra. Cond.: D. Angus. [blo.org](http://blo.org)
- **2026: Jan. 16, 18.** *Daphne* (concert). Seattle Opera. Cond.: D. Afkhan.
- **Jan. 25, 29, Feb. 3, 6, 11, 14.** *Salome*. Lyric Opera of Chicago. Cond.: T. Netopil; dir.: D. McVicar.
- **March 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, April 2.** *Tristan*. Metropolitan Opera. Cond.: Y. Nezet-Seguin; dir.: Y. Sharon. [metopera.org](http://metopera.org)
- **May 7, 8, 9.** *Götterdämmerung* excerpts (concert). Cleveland Orchestra. Cond.: E. Welser-Moser. [clevelandorchestra.com](http://clevelandorchestra.com)
- **May 19-24.** *Walküre*. LA Philharmonic. Act I: May 19 & 22; Act II: May 20 & 23; Act III: May 21 & 24. Cond.: G. Dudamel; dir.: A. Arvelo. [laphil.com](http://laphil.com)
- **May 30, June 2, 5, 7.** *Götterdämmerung*. Atlanta Opera. Cond.: R. Kalb; dir.: T. Zvulun. [atlantaopera.org](http://atlantaopera.org) Full cycle dates TBA.

"Wagner Days in Iceland": a celebration, Oct. 23-27, of 30 years of the Icelandic Wagner Society. The Oct. 23rd concert will feature N. Stemme and S. Skelton in *Tristan* excerpts. Packages, with dinners and excursions are available: [weopera.com/s/Wagner-Days-Iceland/025updated.pdf](http://weopera.com/s/Wagner-Days-Iceland/025updated.pdf)