

WAGNER NOTES



Tristan und Isolde, Act II. Met production, March 2026. The two planes show both the downstage level (doubles of Tristan und Isolde) and the upstage level, an oval which becomes a moving tunnel where the lovers lose themselves in a dream world. See review, page 3, and other commentary. Photos: Karen Almond / Met Opera.



Act III: Left, the plaintive English horn solo performed by Pedro R. Diaz, sharing the tunnel-stage with Tristan. Right: Lise Davidsen in the Liebestod as she prepares to enter the tunnel to join Tristan.



WSNY Calendar (see also [WSNY website](https://www.wagnersocietyny.org))

April 30 (Thurs.), 6:30-8:00 pm. Joshua Borths: Wagner's Artistic Influences. National Opera Center, 330 Seventh Ave. at 28th St., New York.

May 22 (Fri.), 2:00-4:00 pm. WSNY Singers Competition Finals. Merkin Hall, 129 West 67th St., New York.

June 16 (Tu.), 7:00-9:30 pm. "Mahler in New York": film by Hilan Warshaw. Co-presented with Gustav Mahler Society of New York. Dolby Screening Room, 1350 Avenue of the Americas at 55th St., New York.

Aug. 8 (Sat.), 8:30 am-7:30 pm. Neuschwanstein Tour. München Hauptbahnhof Bayerstrasse 10A, Munich. Tour by a Wagner specialist, limited to six participants. See details and order form: [wagnersocietyny.org/events](https://www.wagnersocietyny.org/events)

Work-related travel has recently allowed me to share some fascinating theatrical experiences in highly contrasting venues. In Paris in January, I attended Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Atys* in Versailles' ornate theater. American tenor Matthew Newlin, who is appearing in Wagner roles throughout Europe, sang the title role. Watching a baroque band perform in a baroque orchestra pit was a rare treat.

In April, I attended *Parsifal* in the Vienna Staatsoper, with an international cast conducted by Axel Kober. I then ventured to the tiny Tyrol town of Erl, where I attended a performance of Bach's St. John Passion and another *Parsifal*, sung by the rising American Jamez McCorkle, with Michael Nagy as Amfortas and Rene Pape as Gurnemanz. The Erl Festival (Jonas Kaufmann, artistic director) is in a new, sharply

modern, black concert hall next to the white Passion Play Theater.

From there I took a train to Cologne to catch another American, Jordan Shanahan, who is performing his first Wotans, at Opera Cologne. I saw *Die Walküre* in April. Shanahan will sing the Wanderer there in April 2027. Bayreuth audiences will remember him as a WSNY interviewee at the 2025 Festival, where he portrayed both Posner and Klingsor. The Cologne Opera's new home, under construction since 2012, is finally expected to open in September 2026 with *Der Rosenkavalier*.

It's a big world out there, with Wagner to be discovered, and a Society of like-minded friends to share it with!

F. PETER PHILLIPS
PRESIDENT

Contributors

Susan Brodie has been writing about music for over 25 years. She covers events for *Classical Voice North America* and has served on the board of the Music Critics Association of North America.

Caroline Couch is a Netherlands-based researcher. Her work centers cultural, social, and environmental sustainability within opera and classical music. She serves on the Board of the Wagner Society of New York and was a WSNY 2024 Stipendiatiin.

Ako Imamura travels extensively in Europe to attend many Wagner and other performances.

F. Peter Phillips has been President of the Wagner Society of New York since 2022 and a Bayreuth attendee since 1980.

Jeffrey Swann, pianist and musicologist, is the author of the recently published *The Music of the Ring: A Comprehensive Study of the Leitmotives*.

Wagner Notes writers: Joseph Horowitz, Erick Neher, Hans Rudolf Veget, and Nicholas Vazsonyi: "Comments on the Met's New *Tristan und Isolde*."

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Tristan und Isolde – The Met’s Bold New Production

M. Spyres, L. Davidsen, E. Gubanova, R. S. Green, T. Konieczny, T. Glass, B. Reisinger, J. Hacker, B. Brady. April 4: S. Skelton, S. Milling. Cond.: Y. Nézet-Séguin; dir.: Y. Sharon; set designer: E. Devlin. Performances of March 9, April 4; HD: March 21.

Wagner’s groundbreaking, metaphysical romance *Tristan und Isolde* returned to the Metropolitan Opera on March 9 for the first time in ten years in a bold new production featuring Lise Davidsen, opera’s current “it” girl. While the promotion focused mainly on Davidsen and Michael Spyres and on the Met directing debut of Yuval Sharon, the rewards came from the efforts of the strong cast, the superb orchestra, and an elaborate production that sometimes overwhelmed the drama.

Sharon’s imagination has never been bound by ordinary limits. He has received many awards, and he was the first American to direct an opera at the Bayreuth Festival, in 2018. As the former artistic director of Michigan Opera Theater (now Detroit Opera), his first production there was a Covid-era adaptation of *Götterdämmerung* staged in a parking garage in Detroit in 2020. Sharon will stage the new Met production of Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*, beginning with *Das Rheingold* in 2028. His 2024 book, *A New Philosophy of Opera*, provides an overview of his thirst for change in the tradition-bound world of opera. His vision for *Tristan* incorporated more concepts than one evening can handle: his main organizing principle was the duality of, well, everything: death and rebirth, the ritual of the concrete, acted out at a table downstage, versus the fable that plays out in a tunnel floating above the stage.

Es Devlin’s ingenious, monumental set spanned the full area of the proscenium. Functioning as a drop curtain was a panel painted with an asymmetrical iris diaphragm. Midway through the prelude, this panel rose on a small table downstage where a couple sat facing one another: doubles for Tristan and Isolde in modern dress. For the duration of the act, these two actors enacted ritual tasks involving an hourglass, a shared drink, and a dagger. Above and behind the table was a large round disc which opened to reveal a tunnel; most of the singing took place within its walls, which provided some natural amplification to compensate for the acoustical handicap of singing 20 feet above stage level.

From time to time, a portal slid open at the back of the tunnel to reveal a seascape, a sunset, or a row of apothecary vials. Projections covering or surrounding the tunnel included intermittent live video of the action on the downstage table, alternating with moving



Tristan (Michael Spyres) and Isolde (Lise Davidsen).

waves. During the second act duet, the tunnel split into two sections, which drifted slowly right and left as the lovers sang, though they rarely touched (this is one of the few productions that actually has the lovers embrace). The movement tempos of the set and of the actors were dreamlike, with the occasional burst of energy at momentous events like the ship’s arrival in Cornwall or the Melot-Kurwenal sword fight ending Act II.

Clint Ramos dressed the characters in sumptuous robes in rich colors, with stripped-down versions in the same colors for their stage doubles; in the third act the lovers wore paler colors, suggesting the transition to “das Land der Tristan meint.” Lighting by John Torres balanced light and dark and introduced a rainbow of saturated colors, in contrast to the unrelieved murkiness of most *Tristan* productions; key moments were emphasized with hot white beams of light, à la Robert Wilson. Projections by Jason H. Thompson and video by Ruth Hogben gave depth, motion, and visual interest to an essentially static scenario. Sightlines were good even from my balcony seat, though distance from the stage muted some of the effects. Overall, this production is the most eye-catching *Tristan* I’ve ever seen, with its live and recorded video of the actors, recurring video wallpaper of water, striking use of color and light, and multiple levels of action.

And that’s the problem: Too much of a good thing becomes a liability. On opening night I found myself briefly ignoring King Marke’s wrenching monologue because I was trying to decipher the live video of a



Act II, Left to right: Isolde (Lise Davidsen), Brangane (Ekaterina Gubanova), King Marke (Ryan Speedo Green), Kurwenal (Tomasz Konieczny), and Tristan (Michael Spyres), as Marke conveys his anger and sadness. All photos: Karen Almond / Met Opera.

broken dinner plate and purple anemones scattered about, or enjoying the crashing waves that covered the screen surrounding the tunnel. When the screen went blank, I was grateful for a break from the visual distraction. Wagner would never have tolerated anything that robbed attention from his music.

Sharon's more-is-more approach reached its nadir in Act III. The downstage table became a clinic setting; the singing Tristan and Isolde repeatedly switch places with their mute doubles, leaving the stage to reappear in the tunnel overhead which now represents death's threshold. Downstage, while the actor Tristan lies in agony, attended by Kurwenal and later Isolde, the singing Tristan raves from the tunnel overhead, surrounded by dancers (choreography by Annie-B Parson) who prepare him (and later Isolde) for death. After the Tristan double expires at one end of the table, the Isolde double gives birth at the other end, with the baby ultimately handed to King Marke by Brangane. In the tunnel, Isolde croons the Liebestod as a lullaby before turning to walk into the light at the end of the tunnel.

By the final performance, the production had settled down somewhat. Now familiar with the visual vocabulary, I was able to appreciate the precise coordination of lighting and musical phrases. Substantial stretches of live and recorded video had been eliminated, and they were not missed.

Online responses to the HD screening were mostly positive. The HD was more cinematic, edited to provide many close-ups and eliminate much of the busy background video. The monumental scale had shrunk to human dimensions, but the imagery remained strong.

So after all that, how was the singing? Many had come to hear Isolde sung by Davidsen in her heaviest Wagner role to date. She has become a Met favorite since her 2019 house debut in *Queen of Spades*. New Yorkers have

now heard her in Beethoven, Verdi, Puccini, Strauss, and Wagner; while German seems to be her forte, she will open the next Met season in Verdi's *Macbeth*. Davidsen's voice is a once-in-many-generations phenomenon: cool, steady, amazingly large. Her gleaming laser-like top is her strongest register, but the bottom of her range also projects, and her dramatic engagement has increased. In this production, Isolde dominates physically as well as vocally. Although she relies on her companion, Brangäne, in the first act she bullies Kurwenal and later Tristan, until the Liebestrank, when passion catapults her into new emotional territory. Her vocal acting was most detailed in the first act, but after the opening of the second act she mostly just sang, and on opening night it was glorious. The creamy perfection of her Liebestod, sung as a tender lullaby, didn't need visible emoting to make its mark.

Michael Spyres made a powerful role debut as Tristan, becoming probably the only singer in history to sing both Nemorino and Tristan in a single season. Spyres chooses his roles to emulate the repertoire of an evolving cast of historic singers as his voice matures. His voice is not as large as Davidsen's, but his bel canto clarity and focus enabled him to project to the highest reaches of the house. Much of the part lies in his strong baritone register, but he also rose to the tenorial demands of the role with only a couple of rough high passages. He had admirable endurance in the punishing last act, vividly conveying the dying Tristan's anguish and unwavering faith that Isolde would return. He also had the best diction of the night. For the April 4th performance, which the Met added after the first few sold-out performances, Stuart Skelton, who is a highly experienced Tristan, gave a fine, sensitive performance, considering that he had not spent weeks with this demanding production.

Ryan Speedo Green's first-ever King Marke was sonorous and imbued with dignity and sorrow. The staging rendered his first entrance puzzlingly low-key: Instead of bursting in on the lovers singing overhead, he quietly took his place at the banquet table, with his back to the audience. I enjoyed more the final (April 4th) performance's Marke, Steven Milling. His experience showed in the nuance and gravitas that Green has yet to develop.

Ekaterina Gubanova returned as Brangäne, which she had sung in the Met's 2016 Trelinski production. Her voice shows audible wear since 2016, and the staging often required her to sing behind a scrim. But she played a good companion to her Isolde, her mezzo-soprano sounding girlish next to Davidsen's more womanly sound.

As Kurwenal, Tomasz Konieczny was raw and bluster in the first act, but by the third act he had mellowed dramatically and vocally into a sympathetic friend.

Both timbre and interpretation became more settled during the run. Ben Reisinger as the Sailor, singing from the balcony, sounded both fresh and stentorian. Thomas Glass' Melot had fine vocal and theatrical presence, though with more vibrato than expected in a young baritone. In his Met debut, Steersman Ben Brady sang sweetly, with a hint of a heldentenor future.

Music director Yannick Nézet-Séguin utilized spacious tempos, allowing the music's energy to surge and subside, and highlighting smaller wind and brass solos. At times, the Met Orchestra overpowered the singers, a tendency often noted with this conductor and noted especially in the final performance. But even with the staging challenges, vocal-instrumental balances were not overly problematic. English horn soloist Pedro R. Díaz played beautifully, costumed in numinous white, sharing the tunnel-stage with Tristan in the third act.

SUSAN BRODIE

The Met's 2026 *Tristan*: Comments from Wagner Notes Writers

Joseph Horowitz: The tendency of the Met orchestra to phone it in – notwithstanding its high reputation – is something I've felt impelled to comment upon, as have [others]. Two nights ago I attended *Tristan und Isolde* at the Met and again encountered a crippling lack of urgency in the pit (in this of all operas). Upon returning home I listened to Artur Bodanzky lead the *Tristan* Prelude in live performance at the Met on March 9, 1935. Bodanzky's is the most memorable reading of the Prelude in my experience – in 10 minutes, it conveys *Tristan und Isolde* more potently than Wednesday night's five hours. The opera's preternatural gravitas registered instantly.

Erick Neher: A few quibbles aside, it is a ravishing, powerful production. The bifurcated playing space and the doubling of performers lucidly communicate the multiple planes of consciousness found in the libretto. I particularly loved the third act. The vision of Tristan among those wandering souls inhabiting the liminal space between life and death was heart-wrenching. And if the tunnel is a passageway to the afterlife, it is also a (re)birth canal. The baby is a "big swing": it certainly changes the meaning of the Liebestod. But I found myself profoundly moved by the redirection of Isolde's words, suddenly newly apt, to her child.

Hans Rudolf Valet: Mr. Sharon's stupefying decision to change the ending and have Isolde, before she expires, give birth to a baby to be raised by King Marke turns the work on its head. Claiming directorial freedom, one assumes, he injects a cyclical sense of continuity and afterlife. But Wagner's work offers no such consolation; it spells complete extinction. Sharon seems to believe that Wagner's characterization of Isolde's death as "Verklärung" means transfiguration. It means "glorification," no suggestion of rebirth. Thus, he sugarcoats Wagner's dark vision with kitschy positivity in synch with this "post-dramatic" production that buries the drama under a display of technical wizardry, transforming it into a cumbersome ritual. Sharon's baby ought to have been aborted.

Nicholas Vazsonyi: The premise of Sharon's staging was both visually and dramatically effective. Especially in the third act, as Tristan weaves in and out of consciousness, having both a corporeal Tristan and a Tristan spirit hovering at the portal between life and death solved perennial dramaturgical problems. However, the small space inside the suspended disc prevented freer movement of the singers and made an already static work even more so. The most stunning effect of the concept was at the conclusion when the pregnant Isolde dies in childbirth and sings her final aria as she looks down from on high.

Tristan: The Cut in Act II

In the current production, one cut was taken in Act II: the longest and most disfiguring of the many variants of traditional cuts in the love duet. It represents nearly 30% of Act II, scene 2, basically between 11-12 minutes of music, from just after the extremely excited music of Tristan's arrival to the onset of "O sink' hernieder." It eliminates some glorious music, also many "premonitions" of music heard prominently later in the scene, but, worst of all, it entirely destroys the overriding structure of the scene and the opera as a whole.

Wagner carefully organizes the 35 minutes of the love scene around three poles: the explosive entrance, the heart of the duet – Brangäne's Watch – and the final interrupted climax, dividing the time into three nearly equal parts. With this cut, the first part is three times shorter than the other two parts. The rationale is to spare Tristan for the demands of Act III. Barenboim never once allowed the cut, but Simon Rattle did, although a shorter version (10:35) of the cut. It is the only cut made in any major Wagner opera in important theaters over the past 40 years

JEFFREY SWANN

WSNY's 45th Annual Seminar on *Tristan*: March 14, 2026

A sold-out *Tristan und Isolde* Seminar (F. Peter Phillips, moderator) took place in Scandinavia House, with excellent speakers—Prof. Karol Berger (Stanford University), Prof. Wayne Oquin (The Juilliard School), and Will Crutchfield (Teatro Nuovo)—and four *Tristan* soloists in the Met Cast Roundtable.



March 31, 2026

Yuval Sharon, *Tristan* director:
WSNY's program, hosted
by Cori Ellison.

Met Cast Roundtable, left to right: F. Peter Phillips (Roundtable moderator), Ryan Speedo Green, Tomasz Konieczny, Ekaterina Gubanova, Michael Spyres. Speakers (below): Wayne Oquin, Will Crutchfield, Karol Berger.

All WSNY photos: Neil Friedman.



Tristan Seminar: YouTube Channel Information

The Met Cast Roundtable from the Seminar, featuring four principals of the recent production, is now available on the WSNY's website and YouTube channel. Prof. Karol Berger's "*Tristan und Isolde*: Music Drama as Opera" and Prof. Wayne Oquin's "Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*: Harmony as the Embodiment of Longing," who were Seminar speakers, will also be available online beginning mid-May. These videos can be viewed by visiting wagnersocietyny.org/resources/videos or youtube.com/@WSNY1/videos—in addition to an exciting catalogue of our previous events!

2026 Richard-Wagner-Verband International Congress Amsterdam, The Netherlands, February 19-22, 2026

The Wagner Society of The Netherlands welcomed over two hundred Wagnerians from around the world to Amsterdam for the 2026 Richard Wagner Verband International (RWVI) Congress. As the first full Congress since 2023, the weekend provided a rich experience filled with performances, cultural programming, and networking among Wagner enthusiasts and delegates of global Wagner Societies, of which I was the WSNY delegate.

The Congress opened with a reception at Amsterdam's H'ART Museum and an official greeting from Dutch Wagner Society President Rien Spies and RWVI President Harry Leutscher. The group walked along Amsterdam's scenic canals to the Dutch National Opera and Ballet, where they attended a revival performance of *Tristan und Isolde*, directed by Pierre Audi, the late visionary opera director and artistic director of the Dutch National Opera (reviewed in the March 2026 issue).

The following morning, the RWVI Assembly of Delegates portion of the Congress began with a piano introduction by Cyril Plante, President of Paris' Cercle National Richard Wagner and RWVI Presidium member, and an official welcome from President Leutscher. Gouke Moes, Dutch Minister of Education, Culture, and Science, provided an inspiring speech covering how organizations like the RWVI contribute meaningfully to our broader cultural ecosystem.

The Assembly covered various topics, including introducing presidents of new Wagner Societies, a report from Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation President Stephanie Kollmer, and presentations on future Congress locations. [One of the functions of the RWVI is to manage and report on the Bayreuth Scholarship Foundation, which WSNY supports through its designated fund. The Society has announced its 2026 Bayreuth Stipendium Awardees; the Stipendiaten Program will take place Aug. 22-28.] President Leutscher followed up on his 2025 "RWVI Future-Proof" plan, which includes revising the RWVI's statutes and continuing to build program-



Harry Leutscher, RWVI President, and Caroline Couch, WSNY Delegate to RWVI Congress

ming and pathways for global Wagner Societies on topics ranging from digitalization to young member development.

Another important topic concerned the limited allocation of tickets to the 2026 Bayreuth Festival for RWVI member societies. In preparation for 2027, the RWVI will reach out to the Festival's new management with these concerns. Following voting on administrative matters and conclusion of the Delegates' portion, delegates and Congress guests were invited to a cocktail reception and gala dinner.

The Congress concluded with a symposium "Wagner in the Low Countries," featuring three distinct lectures covering Wagner's influence in The Netherlands, interspersed with performances from former Stipendiaten of the Dutch Wagner Society. I look forward to continuing to play a role representing the WSNY abroad in pursuit of the RWVI's future.

WSNY members are cordially invited to attend the 2027 RWVI Congress, to be held in Nice, Jan. 28-Feb. 1, 2027. Registration details will be shared when they become available. The RWVI website, which contains extensive information, is richard-wagner.org/rwvi

CAROLINE COUCH

Roger Allen. *Arthur Nikisch: Connecting Cultures in a Fragmenting World*.

Boydell Press, 2025. 336 pages. Available to readers with code NIKISCH at boydellandbrewer.com: Hardcover: \$48. Ebook: \$24.00.

On May 12, 1872, in the course of his persistent efforts to raise funds for his Bayreuth Festival, Richard Wagner visited Vienna to conduct the Court Orchestra in a concert of selections from *Walküre* and *Tannhäuser*, and Beethoven's Third Symphony. Among the first violins was a replacement, a 16-year old student named Arthur Nikisch. After the concert, Nikisch was elected as a spokesperson to present Wagner with a silver cup. He later recalled, "That moment, when I came face to face with the mighty Master, will never leave my memory."

An even more formative event was to come ten days later, when Wagner conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the Margrave Theatre in Bayreuth as part of the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone of the Festival theatre. In preparation for this event, Wagner asked for "an elite orchestra of 100 men." Among them was young Nikisch.

Thus at a very early age Arthur Nikisch personally experienced Richard Wagner's distinctive style of conducting. As Roger Allen explains in this absorbing biography and cultural history: "There can be no doubt that the performance of the Ninth Symphony in Bayreuth was one of the defining events in the practice of conducting as it subsequently developed, and in the enhancement of the virtuoso conductor from the status of quotidian craftsman to that of a visible icon."

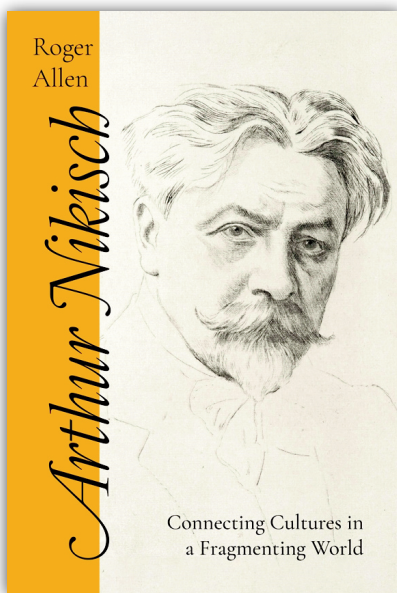
This book traces that "enhancement" through the career of Nikisch, who became, again in Allen's words, one of "a cadre of strong-willed individuals who in a remarkably short space of time came to exercise absolute power and authority over European and then

American public music-making." Much as he did in his previous biography of Wilhelm Furtwängler, Allen simultaneously traces the profound cultural shift from European romantic tradition – not only in the development of compositional style (Brahms to Mahler to Schoenberg) but in the rise of the conductor as an interpretive agent independent of the composer (Mendelssohn to Mottl to Seidl to Furtwängler to Karajan).

After the Bayreuth performance, Nikisch continued as a violinist of apparent skill, joining the Vienna Court Orchestra at 19 and playing *Aida* and the Requiem under Verdi's baton, *Tannhäuser* led by Richter, and Brahms' First Symphony under that composer. He began conducting both opera and symphonic work in his early 20s in Leipzig and came to such prominence that he was invited to assume the post of Music Director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1889. Only a few years later he was named Director of the

Hungarian Royal Opera and began an international career, conducting in London, Russia, and Berlin, where he ascended to the role of Chief Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. He was an early interpreter and proponent of Bruckner, Mahler, Elgar, Pfitzner, and Schoenberg. Regarded as a "star" with ineffable qualities of magnetic charisma, as well as astonishing orchestral insight, his career survived World War I and he conducted tours of Rome, Turin, Zurich, Amsterdam, and Buenos Aires before dying on January 23, 1922, at the age of 66.

Allen's argument that Nikisch was the first "superstar conductor" – the precursor of Karajan, Bernstein,



Barenboim, Mehta, and so on – is easy to accept but difficult to prove. In the absence of recordings of his performance, what did Nikisch actually do on the podium to justify his international stardom? Allen says he was restrained in gesture, yet wore flamboyant sleeve cuffs and had piercing eye contact with members of the orchestra. It's difficult to assign aesthetic weight to such details, and yet something amazing must have happened during those concerts. We're talking about a time period embracing such "star" conductors as Beecham, Bodanzky, Boult, Bülow,

Furtwängler, Karajan, Klemperer, Knappertsbusch, Koussevitsky, Levi, Mahler, Mottl, Muck, Richter, Seidl, Strauss, Toscanini, Walter, and of course Wagner himself. What exactly distinguished Nikisch's artistry that could explain the pivotal role Allen argues that he took in the course of the rise of the conductor as an internationally acclaimed superstar? All we can say for sure is that it happened; the course of this phenomenon is charted with wit, precision, and erudition in this book.

F. PETER PHILLIPS

Upcoming Performances (including Strauss) in the U.S. & Canada through March 2027

- **May 8, 9.** Minnesota Orchestra (concert). Wagner: Prelude to *Lohengrin*; Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan*. With *Bluebeard's Castle*. Cond.: T. Sondergard. minnesotaorchestra.org
- **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.
- **May 25, 27, 29, 31.** *Siegfried*. Edmonton, Alberta. Cond.: S. Rivald; dir.: J. Ivany. (Jonathan Dove arr.) edmontonopera.com
- **May 30, June 2, 5, 7.** *Götterdämmerung*. Atlanta Opera. Cond.: R. Kalb; dir.: T. Zvulun. atlantaopera.org
- **June 7, 11, 14, 19, 23, 27.** *Elektra*. San Francisco Opera. Cond.: E. S. Kim; dir.: A. Kühnhold. sfopera.com
- **June 18, 20.** *Salome*. Cincinnati Opera. Cond.: R. Spano; dir.: J. M. Condemi. (Salome: K. Lewek.) cincinnatiopera.org
- **July 24, 26, 29, 31, Aug. 2.** *Die Aegyptische Helena*. Fisher Center at Bard. Cond.: L. Botstein; dir.: C. Rath. fishercenter@bard.edu
- **August 14-19.** Wagner in Vermont 2026: *Tristan*: Aug. 14 and 19; *Holländer*: Aug. 16; *Parsifal*: Aug. 17. TUNDI Productions. info@tundiproductions.org
- **Oct. 9, 11.** *Walküre*. Tacoma Opera. Cond.: B. Kwiram; dir.: T. Harper. tacomaopera.com
- **Feb. 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 16, 20, 2027.** *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Canadian Opera Company. Cond.: J. Debus; dir.: P. Curran. coc.ca
- **March 5, 7, 10, 13, 2027.** *Lohengrin*. Dallas Opera. Cond.: E. Villaume; dir.: L. Désiré. dallasopera.org

Updates to Upcoming Ring Cycles

Brief updates only. See March issue and upcoming issues for further information. Always check websites.

In NYC - 2027: one *Ring Cycle* (concert) - Carnegie Hall: March 18, 19, 21, 23. Cond.: S. Nosedá. Zurich Opera House Orchestra. carnegiehall.org

In NYC - 2030: Metropolitan Opera: cycles: Spring 2030. Cond.: Y. Nézet-Séguin; dir.: Y. Sharon. Preceded by: *Rheingold*: Spring 2028; *Walküre* and *Siegfried*: 2028-29. metopera.org

2026: July 2, 5. Baltic Opera (Poland). *Walküre*. Cond.: A. Kober; dir.: J. Fulljames. balticoperafestival.pl

2027 (TBA): Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich. Cond.: V. Jurowski; dir.: T. Kratzer. Preceded by *Walküre*: June 25, 28, July 1, 4, 8, 2026. **NEW:** A co-production with the Liceu, Barcelona, dates TBA. www.staatsoper.de

2029. Korean National Opera: *Ring Cycle*, individually. *Rheingold*: Oct. 29, Nov. 11, 2026. Cond.: L. Fioroni; dir.: L. Königs; Seoul Arts Center. kno_1962@nationalopera.org

2030. Salzburg will not do cycles in 2030. **NEW:** Their *Ring* production, directed by K. Serebrennikov, is now a co-production with Danish Royal Opera. salzburgerfestspiele.at/en

2026 Bayreuth Festival News

WSNY extends another call for Bayreuth tickets (WSNY members only) in case any should become available. See wagnersocietyny.org/bayreuth-festival. Also, see bayreuther-festspiele.de for Bayreuth box office instant online purchase: now open online. See also bayreuther-festspiele.de for full schedule, casts, creative teams, and updates. The Bayreuth Festival announced in January that the 2026 Festival was sold out; however, a few tickets appear from time to time. Our Bayreuth Coordinator, Dr. Claudia Deutschmann, is our contact person for any developments. Questions regarding tickets may be sent to bayreuth@wagner-societyny.org



Artist Talks: Announcements of these talks, which have taken place in performance mornings for several years, will be available on the WSNY website.

Of special interest to Bayreuth Festival attendees:

Richard Wagner Museum: located in the heart of Bayreuth at Villa Wahnfried. A special ticket can be purchased to access the Richard Wagner Museum, the Franz Liszt Museum (where Liszt spent his last years), and Jean-Paul Museum, all of which are adjacent to the RW museum. The graves of Richard and Cosima Wagner are located behind Villa Wahnfried; the WSNY often places flowers on the grave.

Haus Wahnfried Concerts: The Richard Wagner Museum hosts several evening concerts during the Festival season.

Places in the News

BBC Proms has announced their 2026 listings: 86 concerts, with 72 at Royal Albert Hall and 14 at venues elsewhere around the U.K. from July 17-Sept. 12. No Wagner this year, but Strauss and Mahler are included. Note: *Ariadne auf Naxos*, semi-staged from Glyndebourne, on Aug. 19; cond.: R. Ticciati. All events are broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Sounds. bbc.com/royalalberthall.com

Tyrolean Festival Erl (Jonas Kaufmann, artistic director) has announced its next season, organized into four parts/seasons and including two Wagner operas. *Parsifal* will be performed at Easter 2027, with the title role to be sung by Kaufmann. *Tristan und Isolde*, in a new production, will be performed during summer 2027. Kaufmann seeks to promote young talent and discover new voices through a new singing competition, culminating in a joint concert. tiroler-festspiele.at

Dallas Symphony Orchestra Ring Cycle Recording. The complete *Cycle* in concert, conducted under Maestro Fabio Luisi in 2024, will be released soon. (The *Cycle* was reviewed by Bryan Gilliam in the Jan. 2025 issue.) The box of 13 CDs will appear on the Delos label in May 2026.

Collectors' Coin. The German Government will have a 35-euro sterling silver collectors' coin minted to commemorate "150 years Richard Wagner." It is expected to be available in July 2026.

***Parsifal* in Venezuela.** The Asociación Wagner de Venezuela has announced that for the first time in Venezuela, *Parsifal* (selections from Acts I and III) will be presented on May 23, 2026, in a minimalist staging at the Teatro Teresa Carreño in Caracas. Conductor: Raoul Grüneis; Orquesta Sinfonica Simón Bolívar de Venezuela, many of whose members are products of the comprehensive musical education of El Sistema; chorus: Coral Nacional Simón Bolívar. *Parsifal*: Magnus Vigilius; Kundry: Aušrine Stundyte. Information is from the RWVI site. asowagner@gmail.com

Götterdämmerung at Teatro alla Scala – A Memorable Ending

K. F. Vogt, C. Nylund, R. Braun, G. Groissböck, J. M. Kranzle, N. Stemme; Norns: C. Mayer, S. Voros, O. Bezmertna; Rhinemaidens: L.-A. Dunbar, S. Stoyanova, V. Verrez. Cond.: A. Soddy (2/01, 2/04, 2/08) and S. Young (2/12, 2/17); dir.: D. McVicar. Reviewed here: performances of Feb. 1, 4, 8, and 12. (Reviewed in Sept. 2025 issue: June 6, 2025 performance of *Siegfried*.)

With the premiere of *Götterdämmerung* on February 1, the first new *Ring* production at Milan's La Scala in over a decade concluded with a visually arresting production and a strong musical performance. The theater presented two sold out *Ring Cycles* in March. (WSNY obtained a block of tickets for the first cycle for members.) The director David McVicar and his team succeeded not only in telling the story of the Ring, set in a primordial landscape, but in combining a grand tale of greed for power and an intimate drama of love. The final moments were some of the most memorable and moving endings of the many *Cycles* that I have experienced.

McVicar's production has developed from a rather dark and static *Das Rheingold*, a simple and straightforward *Die Walküre*, a colorful and evocative *Siegfried*, finally to a complex and dramatic *Götterdämmerung*. The curtain shows a golden ring with many small hands reaching for it. The Norn scene plays out in front of Brünnhilde's rock, with the Norns passing a bright red rope of fate. As they recede, the enormous rock turns to reveal half a face and the home of Brünnhilde and Siegfried. The curtain is lowered during Siegfried's Rhine journey to reveal the Gibichungs in a sparse forest with a gold semicircular sphere. The crowd scenes (Gibichung soldiers wearing animal fur, the women in glittering gold with animal headdress), became a group of blind followers in Act II and illustrate why the splendid La Scala chorus is the best opera chorus winner of Germany's 2026 Oper! Awards.

Act III opens as *Rheingold* did, with the Rhinemaidens frolicking around three enormous hands on stage, although their warnings to Siegfried of his impending doom are delivered with sinister malice. Siegfried's death by Hagen's spear takes place on a dark and bleak stage; as he sings his final tribute to Brünnhilde, the Gibichung men walk away one by



Act II: Hagen (Gunther Groissböck), Gunther (Russell Braun), and Brünnhilde (Camilla Nylund). Brescia / Amisano © Teatro alla Scala.

one, leaving Siegfried alone to die. As Siegfried's funeral march begins with the strings and brass exploding in sorrow, a man and a woman appear from opposite sides. The woman carries a white funeral shroud for the dead hero, and as they kneel besides Siegfried, we realize that they are Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegfried's parents, coming from beyond to mourn their son's death. Next, a figure with a broken spear – the shattered figure of Wotan – slowly walks over and collapses in grief. As grandfather and parents mourn the death of Siegfried, we experience a moment of intimacy amid the grand drama of the *Ring*: humanity and redemption through love, not power, accompanied by the brilliant orchestral funeral march.

As Brünnhilde brings the story of the Ring to its conclusion, five large masks representing the gods in *Das Rheingold* are rolled onto the stage, only to disappear to the back to signal their end. Brünnhilde plunges to her fiery death, accompanied by Grane, here as a man sporting long black hair. The Ring, a male dancer in gold, reappears as he did at the

beginning of *Rheingold*, as the fire consumes the gods, with the stage bathed in blue light. After Hagen and the Rhinemaidens exit, the lone figure of Alberich is left on stage, trying to claim the Ring. He is soon overpowered and killed by the Ring, and the opera concludes with the Ring dancing slowly on stage. Evil is vanquished and nature is restored.

After Christian Thielemann's cancellation, La Scala engaged Simone Young and Alexander Soddy to split conducting duties of individual Ring operas as well as the complete cycles. Soddy emphasized vertical and harmonic structures of the music, and his conducting was often energetic and inspiring. Young focused on the symphonic sweep of the score, with continuous melodies created by the nuances of each instrument: two different and equally valid interpretations.

The cast arguably represents the best ensemble of Wagnerian singers of this moment. The German tenor Klaus Florian Vogt, with his radiant and clear voice, may not fit the idea of a Heldentenor held by some, but he is now at his vocal peak as a Wagnerian tenor in a fashion that Wagner may have envisioned. His roles are characterized by legato, clear diction, power, and beauty, and he delivers sincerity and nobility in singing and acting.

The soprano Camilla Nylund as Brünnhilde possesses a voice of steely and creamy beauty, singing with indefatigable energy. She unleashed her anger and frustration in Act II in thrilling outbursts and then in a memorable immolation scene, alternating wisdom and sadness.

Gunther Groissböck, in his debut as Hagen, was a youthful yet authoritative figure of complexity. His powerful voice cut through the orchestra to convey the character's insatiable quest for dominance. It was a treat to have Johannes Martin Kränzle as Alberich;



Act I: Brünnhilde (Camilla Nylund) and Siegfried (Klaus Florian Vogt) in disguise. Brescia e Amisano © Teatro alla Scala.

he made the most of his brief scene with Hagen, singing with intensity and nuance.

The Canadian baritone Russell Braun, in his role debut as Gunther, sang with reliable consistency. Olga Bezsmertna, doubling as the third Norn and Gutrune, brought clarion color to both roles. Christa Mayer was luxury casting as the first Norn.

It was a thrill to have Nina Stemme in her role debut as Waltraute, sung with an evenness across registers, power, brilliance, and deep understanding of every word. Having heard Christa Ludwig and Waltraud Meier, among others, I can say that Stemme is a definitive Waltraute. Unfortunately, she had to cancel her appearances in the *Cycles* in March and was replaced by Christa Mayer.

AKO IMAMURA

Germany's 2026 Oper! Awards included several Wagner-related awards. Miina-Liisa Varela was named Best Singer. She will sing Kundry in *Parsifal* in the Bayreuth Festival this year; she sang Ortrud in *Lohengrin* there in 2025. Barrie Kosky was named best director (Royal Opera & Ballet Ring cycles). Best orchestra: Staatskapelle Berlin. Best opera chorus winner: La Scala chorus.

Sir Reginald Goodall Award 2026, presented by The Wagner Society (U.K.), will be awarded in 2026 to Ben Woodward and Regents Opera for their *Ring Cycle*, being built up since 2022 and culminating in the complete *Cycle* in 2025. (They were reviewed year by year in these pages.)