

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
Timothy Vernon

PACIFIC
Opera
VICTORIA

Patrick Corrigan
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

www.pov.bc.ca

Key Notes



A dazzling
treasure

An epic battle
for power

The Ring Cycle
Begins

Under the Spell of The Ring

If opera has a mascot, it is a pigtailed diva in a horned or winged helmet and a breastplate – the avatar of Brünnhilde, the heroine of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*).

The Ring has so infiltrated popular culture that it is **the** archetype of opera – and not simply because it is so monumental in scope and scale.

True, the four-opera, 15-hour Ring Cycle calls for a huge orchestra and voices to match. Moreover, it is exceptionally daunting to stage. The first opera, *Das Rheingold*, is set underwater, under the earth, and on a mountaintop; it calls for swimming water nymphs, a pair of giants, a violent dwarf, who not only becomes invisible but also changes into a giant serpent and a toad, as well as gods whose supernatural deeds include conjuring a thunderstorm and tossing a rainbow bridge across a valley.

The special effects pile up in the rest of the Cycle, with a dragon, a ring of fire on a mountaintop, and an apocalyptic ending as Brünnhilde rides her horse into a funeral pyre, the Rhine overflows its banks, Valhalla collapses, and the gods are destroyed by fire.

But *The Ring* is more than size and special effects. A work beyond anything else in opera, it is storytelling at its most elemental, with music of inexhaustible beauty that is instantly understandable and infinitely complex.

Any newcomer can thrill to the story and respond emotionally to the music. Here is the original Lord of the Ring. Here are dwarves and giants, gods and dragons, magic, love, death, and myth – calling to the child in us all.

At the same time, its complexity and depth continue to seduce even the most sophisticated of operagoers. Scholars write reams on it, while committed Wagnerites wander the world in search of new *Ring* productions. Indeed, Ring Nuts exhibit the kind of obsessive fandom and geekish knowledge usually associated with Trekkies and Deadheads. (In a nice musical footnote, members of the Grateful Dead cancelled two 1985 shows in Sacramento in order to attend *The Ring* in San Francisco.)

Yet *The Ring* has been staged only twice in Canada! It made its first Canadian appearance in 1914 when the touring Quinlan Opera Company performed it in English for the bemused citizens of Montreal. Poor attendance led the company to cut its losses and sail home to England just before the outbreak of WWI. It was nearly a century before Canada enjoyed its first homegrown *Ring* – the Canadian Opera Company's 2006 production.

Even more astonishing, *Das Rheingold*, the first and shortest of the operas, has never been staged on its own in Canada. The COC produced *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* in the

1970s and again in the three-season run-up to the 2006 *Ring*, and *Die Walküre* has also made appearances in Toronto and Vancouver.

But Pacific Opera Victoria's staging of *Das Rheingold* will be the first standalone production in Canada since the opera's 1869 première!

One reason for this rarity of *Ring* operas is a perception in North America that Wagner is grandiose and expensive and falls into the purview of only the largest opera companies. Yet Europe abounds in small companies who venture into this lofty territory, using orchestral reductions when their pits are too small to accommodate the 100-plus players called for in Wagner's score.

POV's production, using the first known reduction, by Alfons Abbass (1856-1924), will fit the opera into our small theatre, bringing to Victoria an intimate experience of Wagner that is almost unprecedented in North America.

With Artistic Director Timothy Vernon, we have assembled an exceptional international team, including German designer Hans Winkler, who studied at the National Theatre School of Canada, and Dutch director Wim Trompert, who last year directed *Das Rheingold* in a unique production: a ship converted to a 500-seat opera house sailed the Rhine for performances in Germany and the Netherlands.

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WINCHESTER GALLERIES

Some of the Ring's inexhaustible appeal stems from its protean nature, for it can be approached in many ways.

George Bernard Shaw considered it a socialist fable. It can also be seen as a family psychodrama or viewed through the lenses of environmentalism, feminism, and Jungian psychology. It explores themes of creation, original sin, and redemption through love – yet works as a magical adventure story.

Even Wagner's own sense of the work evolved over the quarter century it took him to write it.

As M. Owen Lee explains, *Wagner, when he began it, seems to have intended the Ring as a political allegory for his own century... It took a while even for Wagner to see that it takes place outside of time, in the human imagination and the memory. In your imagination and memory. On the landscape of your soul, as you listen.*

The work transcends everything we can throw at it – laughter and parody (think Bugs Bunny dressed in drag as Brünnhilde) and the gamut of directorial concepts, from traditional reproductions of Wagner's every rock and cloud to

space-age productions like the Valencia Ring, which looks as if Cirque du Soleil and the Terminators had wandered into an episode of *Doctor Who*.

Always, what dominates is the brilliance and dark energy of the music and the timeless story and characters. Political or cosmic, in any time or place, the work is bigger than any single interpretation.

As Shaw said, *Most of us are at present so helplessly under the spell of The Ring's greatness that we can do nothing but go raving about the theatre ... in ecstasies of deluded admiration.*

Maureen Woodall

The Rhinegold Story

Strip *Das Rheingold* of magic and myth, and the story is simple: the god Wotan hires two giants to build a house and then spends the opera figuring out how to pay for it.

His original promise to pay the giants by handing over his beautiful sister-in-law Freia is a bad idea, for Freia grows the golden apples that keep the gods alive and spry.

The resourceful Loge comes to the rescue: the Rhinemaidens have told him that Alberich, a Nibelung dwarf, has stolen their gold and forged it into a ring that gives him world domination and endless wealth. Alberich had to renounce love to acquire the ring, but as the Rhinemaidens wanted nothing to do with him anyway, it wasn't much of a sacrifice.

Since Alberich is a thief, Wotan sees no harm in stealing from him to pay the giants. Wotan plans to keep the ring for himself, but has to cede it to the giants, who demand a pile of gold that will completely hide Freia from their sight.

However, the enraged Alberich curses the ring, promising that all who wear it will be doomed. The first victim of the curse is the giant Fasolt, killed by his brother in a dispute over the ring. The opera ends as Wotan and his family move into their new home, Valhalla.

The rest of *The Ring* deals with the consequences of the theft through to a third generation as Wotan and Alberich both plot to get the ring back. In the end, it is returned to its original owners, the world is destroyed by fire and flood, and everyone dies, except the Rhinemaidens and (possibly) Alberich.

Sources and Characters

Wagner started out to write a single opera on the death of Siegfried, the hero of the 12th century German epic, the *Nibelungenlied* (*Song of the Nibelungs*). That opera eventually became *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*).

But when Wagner found he needed to explain earlier events, he wrote three more libretti, moving back in time for each, to tell the stories of young *Siegfried*, *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*), and finally, *Das Rheingold* (*The Rhinegold*). He essentially invented the prequel trilogy a century before George Lucas came along with *Star Wars*.

Despite the title *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, relatively little of the Cycle comes from the *Nibelungenlied*. What we think of as the most German of operatic works is based almost entirely on Icelandic mythology – the same sources J.R.R. Tolkien called on for *The Lord of the Rings* over half a century after Wagner's death.

Tolkien bristled at suggestions that his work was inspired by Wagner, testily stating, *Both rings were round, and there the resemblance ceases*. But it was Wagner who invented the concept of a cursed ring of power that made *the lord of the ring* into the *slave of the ring*.

The major sources for *The Ring* are the *Völsunga Saga*, the *Poetic Edda*, and the *Prose Edda*, the latter written by a fat, ale-swilling 13th century Icelandic chieftain with the evocative name Snorri Sturluson.

Snorri's biographer Nancy Marie Brown observes that much of the *Ring* story

exists only in the Icelandic sources: *the dragon, the ring, the valkyries ... Odin and the other gods, the giants, the dwarfs, Idunn's apples, the rainbow bridge, the magical helmet, Valhalla, the Twilight of the Gods*.

Wagner masterfully remove these old myths to create something wholly new, that nevertheless seems to have sprung from the dawn of time.

The characters in *Das Rheingold* are all flawed in very human ways – but not a single one is a human.

The three Rhinemaidens are nymphs responsible for guarding the Rhinegold, but they're too flighty to do it very well. (*played by Lucia Cesaroni, Betty Wayne Allison, and Maria Soulis*)

The Nibelungs are skilled miners and blacksmiths who live underground in Nibelheim. **Alberich** (*Todd Thomas*), the Nibelung after whom the *Ring Cycle* is named, renounces love, steals the Rhinegold, forges the ring of power, and places a curse on it. His brother **Mime** (*Benjamin Butterfield*) is the superb blacksmith who forges the magic Tarnhelm – a helmet that lets its wearer change shape or become invisible.

Wotan (*John Fanning*) is the ruler of the gods and protector of treaties and promises (save for his marriage vows).

Fricka (*Joni Henson*) is Wotan's wife, the goddess of marriage and Wotan's nagging conscience.

Loge (*Gordon Gietz*), the demigod of fire, is Wagner's amalgamation of two Norse gods, Logi (god of fire) and Loki, the brilliant, wily trickster.

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The Opera Centre: Building Our Own Valhalla

The walls are rising on POV's Valhalla, a new home for our art-making and a centre for artist training and youth education in the community.

We're in the throes of renovations as architect Franc D'Ambrosio oversees acoustic engineering for the Opera Centre and construction of an office suite, music room, and public entrance.

Unlike Wotan, we haven't had to hand over a goddess or steal a treasure to cover our costs. The inspiring generosity of many patrons and donors has provided funds for the renovations to the Opera Centre and seed money for our

Raising Voices programs, which represent our long-term vision for community art-making, artist training, and youth education.

Many exciting Opera Centre Naming Opportunities are still available, in particular the beautiful acoustic ceiling canopy being created by Kwagiulth artist and former opera singer Carey Newman. We invite anyone who is interested in exploring Naming Opportunities to contact us for a tour of the Opera Centre.

We look forward to moving into our new home within the next couple of months and to ringing in 2015 by welcoming our POV family to the Opera Centre and launching our Raising Voices programs.



To make a donation, please call 250.382.1641 or donate online at www.pov.bc.ca

To discuss naming opportunities or for more information, please call 250.382.1641 or email development@pov.bc.ca

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Freia (*Betty Wayne Allison*), the goddess of love and beauty, tends the golden apples that give the gods eternal youth.

Donner (*Doug MacNaughton*) is the god of thunder, lightning, and storms. Also known as Thor, he uses his great hammer to bash giants and level mountains.

Froh (*Adam Luther*) is god of springtime, fertility, and the sun and rain. He is associated with the rainbow bridge that leads to Valhalla.

The Giants, Fasolt and Fafner, build Valhalla for Wotan. Fasolt has a bit of a crush on Freia. The brothers quarrel over the Ring, and Fafner (*Jeremy Galyon*) kills Fasolt (*Uwe Dambruch*).

Erda (*Susan Platts*) is the ancient goddess of the earth, who predicts the destruction of the gods and urges Wotan to give up the ring. He does so – but also hatches a long-term plan to get it back, which unfolds in the remaining operas of the Cycle.

The Music of Das Rheingold

My favourite way of enjoying a performance of *The Ring* is to sit at the back of a box, comfortable on two chairs, feet up, and listen without looking.

So wrote George Bernard Shaw. He has a point: Although Wagner sought to create a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a total work of art that fused music and drama – the music of *The Ring* is its most enduring wonder.

The opening of *Das Rheingold* is stunning – a hushed low E flat on the double basses, held for 136 bars as the other instruments gradually join in. This simplest of music quietly grows, creating waves of arpeggios that gather force, evoking creation, and then the swirling, surging waters of the Rhine. Wagner called this *the beginning of the world*.

Thomas Mann added that it was *the beginning of music*. This is music at its most elemental, before harmonic progression, before modulation, before dissonance and chromaticism.

The first Leitmotifs of the Cycle emerge ... snippets evoking nature, the river, the gleam of the golden treasure, the Rhinemaidens' cry of *Rheingold* – bits of tone painting that trace intricate fractal patterns of meaning and emotion, so that, as Wagner wrote to Liszt, *people shall hear what they cannot see*.

Although music scholars have catalogued close to 200 Ring Leitmotifs, there is no need to play an exhaustive game of whack-a-motif to enjoy this music. Even the first-timer will respond instinctively to the giants' stomping entrance, the manic hammering of the Nibelung hordes, the gorgeous Valhalla theme.

Shaw himself noted that Wagner's music is perfectly approachable for non musicians:

If the sound of music has any power to move them, they will find that Wagner exacts nothing further ... not a note ... has any other point than ... giving musical expression to the drama... The unskilled, untaught musician may approach Wagner boldly; for there is no possibility of a misunderstanding between them: The Ring music is perfectly single and simple.

Maureen Woodall

Discover more: www.pov.bc.ca/rheingold.html

Synopsis

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There's simply not a more congenial spot for happily-ever-aftering

Brimming with romance, nostalgia, humour, and glorious music, *Camelot* debuted on Broadway in 1960 with a top-tier cast that included Julie Andrews, Richard Burton, Roddy McDowall, and Robert Goulet. The original production ran for three years and garnered four Tony awards.

Pacific Opera Victoria and the Victoria Symphony will present *Camelot* with full orchestra and glorious operatic voices. Giuseppe Pietrarola conducts the Victoria Symphony and a cast of guest artists.

Relive King Arthur's dream of the Knights of the Round Table, his rivalry with Sir Lancelot, and their love for Queen Guinevere. *Camelot* is an enjoyable sendup of the bloodthirsty, swashbuckling age of chivalry and a tribute to loyalty, friendship, and honour.

Lerner & Loewe

CAMELOT

IN CONCERT

Saturday, November 22, 8 pm
Sunday, November 23, 2:30 pm

Tickets \$40, \$55, \$70, \$90
250-385-0222
www.pov.bc.ca

Events Calendar

COMMUNITY EVENTS

INSIDE OPERA with Robert Holliston

Sunday, September 21. Two sessions: 10 am and noon
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall, University of Victoria

Robert Holliston and guests present a guided tour of *Das Rheingold*. Bring your friends. It's all free, including the parking.

Please reserve by noon September 19, specifying which session you plan to attend. Space is limited. 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca.

INSIDE OPERA at the Union Club

Monday, September 29, 11:45 am to 1:15 pm
Union Club, Centennial Ballroom, 805 Gordon Street
\$25 per person includes a light lunch.

Enjoy lunch in elegant surroundings while Robert Holliston presents a special INSIDE Opera on Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. Dress code: Business Dress.

Please call 250-382-1641 to reserve with payment.

Robert Holliston: *Hum that Leitmotif!*

Sunday, October 12, 1:30 to 2:30 pm.
Robin & Winifred Wood Recital Hall, Victoria Conservatory of Music
Enter by gate near 907 Pandora Avenue

Get to know the music of *Das Rheingold* as Robert Holliston sheds a light on the labyrinth of Leitmotifs in the opera. Presented by POV and the VCM Theory Department.

Free. RSVP by October 10 to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca

Sense of Occasion

Thursday, October 16, 6:30 pm. East Lobby, Royal Theatre
Pre-performance reception to celebrate the opening night of *Das Rheingold*. Gourmet finger foods and wine. Space is limited. Dress is festive.
\$25 per person. Reserve with payment: 250-382-1641.

Opera Bus for the *Das Rheingold* Matinée October 26

\$25 round trip plus the cost of your ticket

Up-Island bus pickup: Nanaimo, Ladysmith, Duncan, and Mill Bay.

Peninsula bus pickup: Swartz Bay Sidney, and Saanich.

www.pov.bc.ca/operabus.html BOOK NOW 250-382-1641

DAS RHEINGOLD

Royal Theatre

October 16, 18, 24, at 8 pm. October 26 at 2:30 pm

Pre-performance lobby lecture an hour before curtain

Das Rheingold is a one-act opera with no intermission.
Approximate running time is 150 minutes.

DONOR RECOGNITION EVENTS

Producers' Fall Sneak Peek

Saturday, September 20, 10 am to noon
POV Opera Shop, 620 Discovery Street

We invite our Producers Donors to meet the stagecraft professionals who build our original productions and to view the sets, costumes, and props for *Das Rheingold*.

For Producers donors. Invitations have been sent by mail. RSVP by September 16 to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca

President's Circle Working Rehearsal

Monday, October 13, Royal Theatre
6 pm Coffee and cookies
6:20 pm Discussion with Conductor Timothy Vernon and Director Wim Trompert

7 pm Orchestra dress rehearsal begins
For members of the Impresario Circle and President's Circle. Invitations will be sent by mail.
RSVP by October 8 to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca.

President's Circle Season Launch Party

Tuesday, October 21, 7 to 9 pm
Union Club of BC, 805 Gordon Street
A wine and hors d'oeuvres reception to celebrate our new season. For members of the Impresario Circle and President's Circle. Invitations will be sent by mail. RSVP by October 16 to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca.



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