

# THE *Annotated* RING CYCLE

## THE RHINE GOLD (DAS RHEINGOLD)



FREDERICK PAUL WALTER  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CLIFF MOTT

# The Annotated Ring Cycle

*An English Reading Version of*

The Nibelung's Ring

*by Richard Wagner*

The Rhine Gold (Das Rheingold)

Translation and Annotations  
by Frederick Paul Walter

Pen and Ink Illustrations  
by Cliff Mott

AMADEUS PRESS  
*Lanham • Boulder • New York • London*

Published by Amadeus Press

An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706  
www.rowman.com

6 Tinworth Street, London SE11 5AL, United Kingdom

Copyright © 2021 by The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

*All rights reserved.* No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Wagner, Richard, 1813–1883, author. | Wagner, Richard, 1813–1883.  
Ring des Nibelungen. Rheingold (Libretto). English. | Walter, Frederick  
Paul, translator. | Mott, Cliff, illustrator.

Title: The annotated Ring cycle : The Rhine gold (Das Rheingold) /  
translation and annotations by Frederick Paul Walter ; illustrations by  
Cliff Mott.

Other titles: Ring des Nibelungen. Rheingold (Libretto)

Description: Lanham : Amadeus Press, 2020. | German, with English  
translation; annotations in English. | Summary: “A colorful new  
translation and notes by Frederick Paul Walter spotlight the libretto,  
lyrics, and stage directions of Wagner’s colossal masterpiece, getting  
the most basic ingredient right: the actual story! It is gorgeously  
illustrated with dazzling graphic-novel artwork, plus classic  
pictures by Arthur Rackham and others”— Provided by publisher.


Identifiers: LCCN 2020037543 (print) | LCCN 2020037544 (ebook) | ISBN  
9781538136683 (paperback) | ISBN 9781538136690 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Operas—Librettos. | Wagner, Richard, 1813–1883. Ring des  
Nibelungen. | LCGFT: Librettos.

Classification: LCC ML50.W14 R42 2020 (print) | LCC ML50.W14 (ebook) |  
DDC 782.1/0268—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020037543>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020037544>

 The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

# Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>The 1-Minute Ring</i>                      | v   |
| Chronology: The Composition of the Ring Cycle | vi  |
| Introduction                                  | vii |
| Prelude and Scene 1                           | 3   |
| Scene 2                                       | 33  |
| Scene 3                                       | 75  |
| Scene 4                                       | 105 |
| About the Contributors                        | 147 |



# THE 1-MINUTE RING

- A. Dwarf steals gold from river; god recovers gold but gives it to giants. (*The Rhine Gold*)
  - B. God schemes to recover gold from giant and return it to river; fails. (*The Valkyrie*)
  - C. Dwarves scheme to recover gold from giant and keep it; human keeps it instead. (*Siegfried*)
  - D. Dwarves scheme to recover gold from humans; fail. Human returns it to river. (*Twilight for the Gods*)
- Time frame: 3 generations.
  - Motives: wealth, fame, power, justice, fear of death, humane love, and sexual love.
  - Consequences: 1 attempted murder, 2 manslaughters, 3 capital murders, 4 adulteries, many combat mortalities, multiple betrayals, countless deceptions, mass enslavement, self-immolation, and full regime change.



# CHRONOLOGY: THE COMPOSITION OF THE RING CYCLE

- |         |   |         |  |
|---------|---|---------|--|
| 1848    | October–November: Wagner pens <i>The Nibelung Myth as a Scenario for a Play</i> , plus prose and verse drafts of <i>Siegfried's Death</i> (later called <i>Twilight for the Gods</i> .) | 1864–65 | Wagner completes the full score of <i>Siegfried</i> Act 2.   |
| 1851    | May–November: Wagner pens prose and verse drafts of <i>Siegfried</i> , plus treatments of the two remaining operas.   | 1869    | March: Wagner begins composing <i>Siegfried</i> Act 3.<br>September: Munich offers a stand-alone staging of <i>The Rhine Gold</i> at King Ludwig II's behest.<br>October: Wagner begins composing <i>Twilight for the Gods</i> . |
| 1852    | March–November: Wagner pens prose and verse drafts of <i>The Rhine Gold</i> and <i>The Valkyrie</i> .   | 1870    | June: Munich offers a stand-alone staging of <i>The Valkyrie</i> at King Ludwig II's behest.   |
| 1853    | February: Wagner privately publishes the libretto for his entire <i>The Nibelung's Ring</i> .   | 1871    | February: Wagner completes the full score of <i>Siegfried</i> .  |
| 1854    | January–September: Wagner composes the full score of <i>The Rhine Gold</i> and begins <i>The Valkyrie</i> .   | 1874    | November: Wagner completes the full score of <i>Twilight for the Gods</i> .  |
| 1855–56 | Wagner completes the full score of <i>The Valkyrie</i> and begins <i>Siegfried</i> .  | 1876    | August: Bayreuth premieres <i>The Nibelung's Ring</i> , offering three complete performances rehearsed by Wagner himself.  |
| 1857    | January–August: Wagner completes the full score of <i>Siegfried</i> Act 1 and the piano score of Act 2.   |         |  |

# Introduction

In the English-speaking world, *The Nibelung's Ring* is both hugely famous and badly understood.

Why so famous? Well, for one thing, it's the ancestor of three pop-culture phenomena—J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, George Lucas's *Star Wars* franchise, and J. K. Rowling's septet of *Harry Potter* novels. They're all offspring of Wagner's colossal opera cycle: The fraternal twins Luke and Leia echo the persecuted siblings Siegmund and Sieglinde in *The Valkyrie*; Alberich, the Cycle's power-mad dwarf, is the forerunner of both Gollum and Voldemort; and the three wise men of these sagas—Gandalf, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Dumbledore—are all versions of Wagner's wily old Wanderer, actually the god Wotan in his enlightened senior years.

So this will seem oddly familiar territory even for folks visiting it for the first time. Yet Wagner's *story line* has often been wildly misunderstood, and that's the reason for this book. *The Annotated Ring Cycle* focuses on the work's libretto, lyrics, and stage business; its motives, personalities, and plot twists; what literally happens in it; and what its *narrative* shows and tells us about itself.

## What's the *Ring* really?

Let's get clear on what *The Nibelung's Ring* is and isn't. It's *not* Nordic myth; it's an original piece of storytelling that occasionally borrows from that tangled body of tales (some major characters, a few famous episodes), then weaves a largely new plotline. Yes, a couple of its events are known the world over—the superhero Siegfried once killed a dragon, then was killed himself in a palace intrigue. Otherwise many of the *Ring's* chief ingredients are Wagner's own invention:

- Its whole unifying framework of rectifying a crime and restoring stolen goods.
- Its brand-new history of the god Wotan, from establishing his rule to fathering Valkyries.
- Its presentation of the god as governing ethically through agreements and oaths.
- Its portrait of Wotan going bad, needing outside help, and ultimately annihilating the gods.
- Its depiction of Nibelungs as underground dwarves rather than terrestrial humans.
- Its identification of Nibelungs and gods as elves of dark and light, reverse images.
- The now-familiar truism that acquiring power calls for rejecting love.
- The concept of a coveted magic ring that can rule the world.

Some familiar devices and contrivances are also Wagner's brainchildren:

- A ring of power forged from an innocent natural substance.
- The tarnhelmet as shapeshifter or portkey.
- Blood-brother rituals.
- Magical truth serums.
- The ring finding its way home over generations.

What's more, Wagner reworked story sources other than the old myths:

- "Puss-in-Boots" (Alberich's capture).
- "Sleeping Beauty" (Brünnhilde's punishment).
- "The Boy Who Went Forth to Learn Fear" (Siegfried's youth).

He took such steps because the Nordic legends are disorganized and conflicting. As Austrian critic Eduard Hanslick (130) once wrote, “this saga cycle has assumed many forms in a wide variety of times and places and is extant in widely diverse versions.” The result, he concluded, was that Germans were “more familiar with Roman and Greek mythology” than with their own. Not surprisingly, as UK scholar Michael Ewans (58) later noted, the composer was “obliged to perform a quite formidable feat of adaptation, synthesis, and creative imagination.”

In short, much of *The Nibelung’s Ring* isn’t truly mythology. It’s Wagner’s own creation.

### Basic Misunderstandings

Yet, despite his efforts, the *Ring’s* narrative is still misconstrued and misunderstood, not only its characters and motives but its principal events. There are several explanations. First, its operas are often performed separately and out of context (particularly *The Valkyrie*). Second, performances of the full Cycle have often *omitted* major parts of it. Early productions at the Metropolitan Opera and other leading theaters made heavy cuts in the key role of Wotan, deleting passages that clarified the god’s desires and objectives. Cuts were also made in passages elsewhere depicting the *Ring’s* cosmic framework, as in the sequences with the Norns or the Valkyrie Waltraute. Audience confusion was inevitable.

It’s true that a growing number of today’s stagings are free of cuts, yet condensed Cycles are still offered outside the major venues. Small wonder, then, that misinformation circulates about the *Ring*. Faulty plot summaries are especially common: We read, for instance, that Wotan is forced to have his son killed because “he broke the gods’ laws against adultery and incest,”<sup>1</sup> yet the Cycle itself gives an entirely different reason. And even program notes for the *Ring’s* major recordings can blunder, as in pp. 21–30 of the booklet accompanying Daniel Barenboim’s acclaimed performance (Teldec 2564 67714). Its synopses are often wrong-headed—the dwarf Mime doesn’t tell Siegfried he “can reforge the sword,” the youth figures it

out himself, and Mime realizes only later. Wotan doesn’t find it “difficult to abdicate of [his] own free will,” he does so “freely and happily” (*froh und freudig*), nor is it Brünnhilde who “sets fire to Valhalla,” it’s the head god himself.

And erudite critics have often stumbled as well. According to Victor Gollancz (30), “Wagner specifies” that Siegmund must leap on a table to seize his sword—but neither the composer’s stage directions nor his rehearsal records ask for such a thing. Elsewhere, Father Owen Lee (49) describes the Cycle as ending “with a world-destruction myth,” yet the stage directions show plenty of survivors—it isn’t an end, it’s a new beginning. Furthermore, *mis-translations* of Wagner’s German can likewise sow misunderstanding: Writing about the gods’ demise, Michael Tanner (9) calls Wotan delusional in hoping the ring’s return “will save both god and the world.” But “save” misrepresents the German *erlöst*, which simply means they’ll be “released” from the ring’s power. Wotan knows he’ll pass away like the rest of us.

Beyond this, the Cycle’s stagings can lead to hefty misunderstandings. *The Nibelung’s Ring* has been the subject of experimentation since the minimalist designs of Swiss architect Adolphe Appia back in the 1890s. Even so, stylized sets needn’t be troublesome in themselves—Wagner’s directions don’t automatically prescribe naturalistic visuals (as in the picture-postcard backdrops of the first Bayreuth productions), and *Ring* settings have ranged from outer space to the Wild West without necessarily obscuring Wagner’s narrative.<sup>2</sup>

However, some experimental stagings have sharply deviated from Wagner’s lyrics and directions, resulting in a muddled plotline. Two of the most famous are for sale at retail video outlets: the 1976 Bayreuth *Ring* by French director Patrice Chéreau and the 1988 Bayreuth staging by Germany’s Harry Kupfer. Both upend the characterizations: Wagner’s libretto establishes Siegfried as a free spirit who’s powerful enough to defeat Wotan, but both directors contradict the text by turning the hero into the god’s puppet—a reversal they can implement

## INTRODUCTION

only by *inventing pantomime scenes not in the script*. Siegfried is an innovative weaponsmith who's exceptionally attuned to Nature—but the French director has Wotan give him a sword-making machine to do the work, and Kupfer shows Siegfried receiving insights not from Nature but, again, from the interfering Wotan. The outcome in both cases? Siegfried becomes the god's stooge.

Yet the hero *still goes on to defeat Wotan*, because that's what Wagner's lyrics and music inescapably require. Needless to say, this makes no sense.

Some later productions present stage action even less related to Wagner's text. Frank Castorff's 2013 Bayreuth *Ring*, for instance, mixes mass-culture stereotypes from mafiosi to oil barons to Irma la Douce. Operagoers who had seen too many Cycles may have been amused, but newbies were probably clueless. The fact is, many European opera houses tolerate ridiculous schisms between what we hear and see. On one hand, musicologists labor to generate increasingly faithful editions for the new *Wagner-Gesamtausgabe* published by Schott Music in Mainz, but, on the other hand, stage directors do the exact opposite and raucously thumb their noses.<sup>3</sup> No, they daren't doctor the notes and lyrics, which are still viewed as inviolate however irrelevant they've become to the visual elements,<sup>4</sup> but schizophrenic productions are the predictable result.

Why this noisy compulsion to be different? Maybe it makes more sense in Europe, because Germany and Austria often stage several competing productions of the Ring Cycle per season, all within decent driving distance. So it's understandable that audiences who've seen many *Rings* might welcome a fresh approach, even wholesale irreverence. But such easy availability rarely occurs elsewhere: In the United States years can go by without a full Cycle on offer.

Finally, one other reality can perplex audiences—the countless opinions of critics and scholars weighing the *Ring's* implications and subsurface meanings. Some are gleefully con-

troversial, such as George Bernard Shaw's famed *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1899), in which the great Irish dramatist packages the first three operas as a witty parable on the ins and outs of capitalism. A totally different take, nearly as famous, is Robert Donington's *Wagner's "Ring" and Its Symbols* (1963), which mines the Cycle as a lode of Jungian archetypes. Jean Shinoda Bolen exploits this vein further in her *Ring of Power* (1992), turning the work into an innovative case study of a dysfunctional family. But these are only the iceberg's tip—elsewhere, the field of *Ring* scholarship boasts a range of disciplines, procedures, priorities, and verdicts that are both amazing and befuddling.

### And so this book . . .

All of which has led to *The Annotated Ring Cycle*. Wagner's stage piece has been analyzed and interpreted by thousands, sometimes to its detriment. So, in hopes of providing an antidote, the comments in this volume go back to the basics—the work's lyrics, stage directions, and plotline, *what's actually happening in the narrative*.

True, some scholars scoff at Wagner's libretto, claiming to find carelessness and inconsistency, yet the hard facts normally refute them. Consult the Chronology on p. vi for the year 1853: By that point Wagner had completed the *Ring's* full libretto—which means he worked with his total narrative for nearly a quarter century before opening night, tweaking it through the final rehearsals. As Ewans notes (206), “Wagner was a consummate librettist . . . fully capable of adapting any text to his will—or indeed of replacing it completely.” Unlike Rossini, who tossed off *The Barber of Seville* in three weeks, Wagner had plenty of time to polish and perfect. Take the Cycle's very end: Wagner revised it repeatedly between 1848 and 1856, then one final time eighteen years later—at that juncture (Ewans 55), his vision and music bore “little relationship to the spirit of the lines which he had written . . . in the mid-fifties,” hence it was easy for him to edit those lines. Again, he had ample opportunity to get things right.

## INTRODUCTION

Even so, some scholars have picked nits. Ernest Newman (328–330) imagines a discrepancy in Act 1 of *Siegfried*: The dwarf Mime claims he was given the sword Notung by Siegfried’s mother, then later blurts out that he stole it. Newman attributes this inconsistency to “complete forgetfulness” on Wagner’s part, yet the composer had five perfect opportunities to make corrections *had he wanted to*: In 1851 when he penned the lyrics, in 1856 when he composed the piano score, in 1857 when he orchestrated it, in 1871 when he proofed the opera’s full score, or in 1876 when he supervised its stage rehearsals and often massaged details.

Yet Wagner did nothing, because, of course, this isn’t a genuine discrepancy. To steal from the suffering Sieglinde is in character for Mime, and he’s clearly truthful when he admits the theft. There are obvious explanations for his lying earlier: a) he often lies to Siegfried (“I’m your father and mother combined” is a recent whopper); b) had he confessed the truth, Siegfried would have throttled him just as he did moments before. So Newman is inventing difficulties, and I find this instance additional proof that’s it’s safe to trust Wagner.

So here’s the first assumption underpinning this book: *The work is the way Wagner wanted it.*

As for sources beyond the *Ring*, many commentaries tap into political and cultural history, the composer’s theoretical writings, and insights from other disciplines from anthropology to economics. *The Annotated Ring Cycle* centers on the work itself and the disclosures in its lyrics, stage directions, story line, and music. This book tries to honor novelist E. M. Forster’s celebrated ideal for literary analysis and “considers the object in itself, as an entity, and tells us what it can about its life.”

So here’s the second assumption underpinning this book: *The work itself is its highest authority.*<sup>5</sup>

And as for my new translation, its intent is to provide a reading version in clear, modern English that hints at Wagner’s style, from his alliterative effects to his humor, colloquialisms,

and occasional rhyme schemes. In drafting his libretto, the composer crafted a deliberately old-fashioned German to fit the antiquity of his narrative, much as Hollywood scripts for *Ivanhoe* and other epics once counterfeited the lofty verbiage of medieval times—for example, Tony Curtis’s immortal, Brooklyn-accented line “Yonder lies the castle of my father!” For his part, Wagner resurrected an old verse form called *Stabreim* in which alliteration is the main poetic device, linking terms by repeating their initial consonants. Shakespeare himself often did something of the sort, as in the opening soliloquy of *Richard III*:

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,  
our bruised arms hung up for monuments,  
our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,  
our dreadful marches to delightful measures.

Here *brows* and *bruised* link up, likewise *monuments*, *merry*, and *meetings*, all of it ending with the neat symmetry of *dreadful marches to delightful measures*.

From start to finish the *Ring* uses *Stabreim* in much the same way, so its very first scene is filled with such symmetrical lines as:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Schaut, er lächelt<br>in lichtem Schein. | Look how he smiles<br>in the sparkling light. |
|--|---|

Elsewhere, the alliteration can get intense—as when young Siegfried falls in love for the first time:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Mir schwebt und<br>schwankt,<br>und schwirrt es<br>umher . . .<br>Ein herrlich Gewässer<br>wogt vor mir—<br>mit allen Sinnen<br>seh ich nur sie,<br>die wonnig wogende<br>Welle. | Everything’s swaying,<br>swirling,<br>and swimming around<br>me . . .<br>Floodwaters<br>flow over me—<br>all of my senses<br>are swept up in them,<br>wading in their wondrous<br>waves. |
|--|--|

Admittedly, some audiences—especially those who know German—are put off by the

## INTRODUCTION

elaborate wordings. As Stewart Spencer concedes (“Language” 36), the composer “counterfeited a style more of a hindrance than a help to our understanding.” In my translation, then, I step warily and work to keep my renderings intelligible for today’s readers. As for the Cycle’s musical fabric, I normally confine my remarks to moments where it supplies information or ambiance not conveyed by the words. Little further musical analysis is needed since many prior volumes investigate Wagner’s system of motifs—for instance, Deryck Cooke’s long-admired *An Introduction to Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Once again, this book is based on two assumptions:

- 1) Wagner’s text is the way he wanted it.
- 2) The work itself is its own highest authority.

Even so, I’ll sometimes reach for outside help (such as the composer’s rehearsal comments) to highlight what’s clearly onstage. Otherwise I prefer to duck interpreting and stay with what the text itself shows. When my notes ask questions, they’re trying to indicate relationships with moments elsewhere or to underline questions the Cycle itself raises. Finally, I follow the work’s major subdivisions with retrospective one-page recaps in an effort to erase some of the misunderstandings that have tarnished the *Ring*, but feel free to skip them if you wish.

To sum up, *The Annotated Ring Cycle* aims to provide a clear rendering of Wagner’s libretto in modern English, to hint at its alliterative style while remaining readable and understandable, to suggest the humor and colloquial tone found in parts of it, to avoid spoilers and respect Wagner’s storytelling, to quote his motifs when they suggest information not in the lyrics or stage directions, and to use extra sources purely to illuminate undeniable aspects of the narrative.

The result I hope for? A multipurpose handbook both newcomers and old-timers can enjoy as they take on *The Nibelung’s Ring*. Dip into it for fun, or keep it by you as you listen to your

favorite recording. You’re dealing with the most colossal achievement in the performing arts—maybe this volume will add value to the experience!

FREDERICK PAUL WALTER  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

## Notes

1. <http://stageagent.com/shows/opera/1719/die-walkure> (Accessed February 3, 2018).

2. This is borne out by Wieland Wagner’s 1965 Bayreuth staging of *The Valkyrie*. It’s set in prehistoric times with bare-bones playing areas and huge, gouged slabs serving as backgrounds . . . yet the action’s turning points are communicated with force and clarity. (A black-and-white video of the 1967 touring version is accessible at [youtube.com](http://youtube.com).)

3. And a curious by-product has been a kind of critical snobbery that almost forbids faithful stagings. Britain’s Sir Peter Hall (in 1983) and Quebec’s Robert Lepage (in 2010) both directed productions with the announced priority of clearly conveying Wagner’s narrative. They were slammed respectively as “lacking in ideas” and “witless.”

4. However I’ve seen local-language *surtitles* that deliberately mistranslate Wagner’s German to coincide with a drastically revised stage concept—as in the 2011 *Tannhäuser* at Paris’s Bastille Opera, which replaced Wagner’s singing contest with a juried art show.

5. In other words, I’ll normally follow the time-honored procedures of “New Criticism,” defined by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as the “literary critical theory that insisted on the *intrinsic* value of a work of art and focused attention on the individual work alone as an independent unit of meaning. . . . The primary technique employed . . . is close analytic reading of the text” (Accessed February 5, 2018, at <https://www.britannica.com/art/New-Criticism>).

## References

Bolen, Jean Shinoda. *Ring of Power: The Abandoned Child, The Authoritarian Father, and the Disempowered Feminine—A Jungian Understanding of Wagner’s Ring Cycle*. San Francisco: Harper, 1992.

## INTRODUCTION

- Cooke, Deryck. *An Introduction to Der Ring des Nibelungen*. With Georg Solti and the Vienna Philharmonic. London: Decca, 2005.
- Donington, Robert. *Wagner's "Ring" and Its Symbols*. 1st American ed. New York: St. Martins, 1974.
- Ewans, Michael. *Wagner and Aeschylus: The Ring and the Oresteia*. London: Faber, 1982.
- Gollancz, Victor. *The Ring at Bayreuth: And Some Thoughts on Operatic Production*. New York: Dutton, 1966.
- Hanslick, Eduard. "Richard Wagner's Stage Festival at Bayreuth (1876)." In *Music Criticisms, 1846–99*. Rev. ed. Translated and edited by Henry Pleasants. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963.
- Lee, M. Owen. *Wagner: The Terrible Man and his Truthful Art*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.
- Newman, Ernest. *The Life of Richard Wagner, Vol. 2: 1848–1860*. New York: Knopf, 1937.
- Shaw, George Bernard. *The Perfect Wagnerite*. Chicago: Stone, 1899.
- Spencer, Stewart. "Language and Sources of 'The Ring.'" In *The Rhinegold (Das Rheingold): English National Opera Guide 35*. London: Calder, 1985.
- Tanner, Michael. "An Introduction to the End." In *Twilight of the Gods (Götterdämmerung): English National Opera Guide 31*. London: Calder, 1985.

Richard Wagner  
**THE RHINE GOLD**  
(DAS RHEINGOLD)

Preamble of the festival drama  
*The Nibelung's Ring*

Gods

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Wotan, <i>baritone</i>        | leader of the gods                          |
| Donner, <i>baritone</i>       | god of thunder; brother of Fricka and Freia |
| Froh, <i>tenor</i>            | god of fertility; also their brother        |
| Loge, <i>tenor</i>            | god of fire                                 |
| Fricka, <i>mezzo-soprano</i>  | Wotan's wife; sister of Donner and Froh     |
| Freia (Holda), <i>soprano</i> | goddess of youth; also their sister         |
| Erda, <i>contralto</i>        | goddess of the earth; oracle                |

Nibelungs

|                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Alberich, <i>baritone</i> | dwarf                     |
| Mime, <i>tenor</i>        | dwarf; Alberich's brother |

Giants

|                     |                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Fasolt, <i>bass</i> | laborer                   |
| Fafner, <i>bass</i> | laborer; Fasolt's brother |

Rhine daughters

|                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Woglinde, <i>soprano</i>         | water sprite                  |
| Wellgunde, <i>soprano</i>        | water sprite; her sister      |
| Flosshilde, <i>mezzo-soprano</i> | water sprite; also her sister |

Time: the age of northern myth



# PRELUDE AND SCENE 1



SCENE 1

The bottom of the Rhine River

*The orchestra begins playing while the curtain's closed.*

*The curtain opens to reveal greenish twilight, brighter above, darker below. Upstage, billowing waves keep flowing across from right to left. Downstage, the water gradually dissolves into a thin mist, leaving a playing area that's free of water, which flows above the shadowy bottom like scurrying clouds. At the edges of the stage, sharp crags rise from the depths everywhere. The whole riverbed is wildly jagged and uneven, deep crevices merging with the darkness.*

WOGLINDE

*(Gracefully swimming around a crag at center stage)*

Weia! Waga!  
Woge, du Welle,  
walle zur Wiege!  
Wagala weia!  
Wallala weiala weia!

Weia! Waga!  
Ripple, you currents,  
and rock our cradle! [1]  
Wagala weia!  
Wallala weiala weia!

WELLGÜNDE'S VOICE

*(Overhead)*

Woglinde, wachst du allein?

Woglinde, you're on watch by yourself?

WOGLINDE

Mit Wellgunde wär' ich zu zwei.

Let's work as a pair, Wellgunde!

WELLGÜNDE

*(Diving through the water to the crag)*

Laß sehn, wie du wachst!

Show me how you keep watch!

*(She tries to catch Woglinde.)*

WOGLINDE

*(Swimming off)*

Sicher vor dir!

Way out of reach!

*(They playfully tease and chase each other.)*

FLOSSHILDE'S VOICE

*(Overhead)*

Heiala weia!  
Wildes Geschwister!

Heiala weia!  
Sisters, you're so rowdy!

WELLGÜNDE

Floßhilde, schwimm!  
Woglinde flieht:  
hilf mir die Fließende fangen!

Swim after her, Flosshilde!  
Woglinde's running off—  
help me capture the fugitive!