

The Valkyrie

“Die Walküre”

Music drama in three acts

Music composed by Richard Wagner

Drama written by Richard Wagner

Premiere: Hoftheater in Munich, 1870

The Valkyrie is the second music drama in the cycle, The Ring of the Nibelung , “Das Ring des Nibelungen.”

**Adapted from the
Opera Journeys Lecture Series
by
Burton D. Fisher**

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Principal Characters in The Valkyrie

Sigmund, a Volsung (Walsung), mortal son of Wotan	Tenor
Sieglinde, his twin sister	Soprano
Hunding, A Neiding warrior, Sieglinde's husband	Bass
Brünnhilde, a Valkyrie, daughter of Wotan and Erda	Soprano
Fricka, Wotan's wife, Goddess of wedlock	Mezzo-soprano
The Valkyrie sisters: Gerhilde, Helmwige, Waltraute, Schwertleite, Ortlinde, Seigrune, Grimgerde, Rossweisse	

Story Synopsis and Overview

About 20 years have passed since the events of *The Rhinegold*. The Ring, Tarnhelm, and Hoard, are now in the possession of Fafner, the Giant, who used the Tarnhelm to transform himself into a Dragon, and guards the treasure in a forest cave. Wotan is haunted by the possibility that Alberich's Curse will be fulfilled and Fafner will fall; if the evil Alberich recovers the Ring, he will use its magic power against Valhalla, annihilate the Gods, and enslave the world.

Wotan faces a political and moral dilemma. He surrendered the treasure to Fafner under the Laws of his Spear, and if he violates those Laws to recover the Gold, he will precipitate the immediate downfall of the Gods. But as the Gods entered their Valhalla fortress at the end of *Rhinegold*, Wotan envisioned a subterfuge to resolve his predicament, purify the Ring of Alberich's Curse, and return the Ring to the Rhinemaidens: he would create a hero independent of the Gods who would act on his own free Will to accomplish those deeds. For that purpose, he sired the Volsung race with a mortal woman: the twins, Sieglinde and Sigmund. He lived in the forest with

Siegmund, trained the future hero for arduous combat, and left an impregnable Sword in an ash-tree for him to find in his greatest need. At the same time, he reinforced Valhalla's defenses against invasion by the armies of Nibelheim by siring the Valkyries, nine valiant warrior daughters who gather slain heroes on the battlefield, and revive them to become the protectors of the Gods and their fortress.

Act I: As a storm rages, Siegmund appears at a forest dwelling. He has been wounded in battle and is in a frenzied state of fear and terror as he seeks shelter from his pursuing enemies. He finds refuge in this forest dwelling, unaware that it belongs to Hunding, whose Neiding kinsmen pursue him, and that Hunding's wife is his long-lost twin sister, Sieglinde. Sieglinde offers the unknown stranger respite, and they find themselves strangely attracted to each other, overcome by an incomprehensible yearning and desire.

According to the sacred rites of hospitality, Hunding offers the stranger shelter, but becomes mistrustful when he realizes the uncanny physical resemblance of his wife and the stranger. Siegmund relates the travails of his childhood, his wandering in the forest after the disappearance of his father, their eternal battles with the Neidings, and his attempted rescue of a maiden forced into wedlock in which he killed her brothers, and witnessed her death at the hands of her tribesmen. Hunding realizes that the stranger is none other than the enemy who slaughtered his very own kinsmen, and challenges him to mortal combat in the morning.

While Hunding sleeps, Sieglinde tells Siegmund of her unhappy wedding, and the mysterious stranger who thrust a Sword into the ash-tree. Siegmund, weaponless against Hunding, invokes his father's promise of "Needful," the Sword that will suddenly emerge in his time of need. Sieglinde directs his attention to the Sword and he heroically extracts it from the tree. Sieglinde becomes ecstatic, realizing that Siegmund is her long-lost brother: Siegmund claims his sister as his bride, and escapes with her into the night.

Act II – Scene 1: Wotan orders his favorite Valkyrie daughter, Brünnhilde, to defend Siegmund in his forthcoming battle with Hunding. But Wotan's wife, Fricka, the guardian of holy wedlock, confronts him to remind him that his power emanates from the Laws etched on his Spear, and if he defies his own Laws and defends the incestuous union, he will violate the Gods' claim to power and dominion; as such, their downfall will be imminent.

For ancient Teutons and Greeks, their mythological Gods were ambivalent; they were omniscient and omnipotent, but they were not eternal, nor did they lack the frailties of ordinary mortals. Their divinity and cosmic right to power was often subject to doubt and question; they were not considered eternal forces or objects of absolute faith, but rather, like mortals, prisoners of time, change, and fate. So like all humanity, the Gods were also doomed to eventual destruction; just as human life passes away in the course of the cycle of time, so too did the Gods.

Fricka seems to be a contemporary incarnation of a shrew; a nagging, screaming, railing, inflexible, harsh, intemperate, petulant, and scolding wife. She is most definitely an inexorably jealous woman, feeling betrayed by her husband's considerable marital transgressions, as well as his earlier willingness to sacrifice Freia to the Giants, and his use of deceit and force to steal Alberich's treasure. And, she is further outraged because he remains pretty well unrepentant for his misdeeds.

But their confrontation represents more than a domestic squabble. Fricka's accusations possess moral justifications and are unassailable: in her logic, Siegmund cannot be both Wotan's creation and an independent agent of the Gods. Fricka's harangue upholds social propriety and the sanctity of marriage, and in particular, Hunding's marital rights and the injustices inflicted upon him. The Laws of wedlock have been clearly violated and mocked by the incestuous and illicit union of Siegmund and Sieglinde; a blatant adultery that Wotan himself has blessed. Nevertheless, Wotan urges Fricka to celebrate their union, claiming that Hunding's marriage to Sieglinde was not sacred because it was loveless.

Fricka is the catalyst of the Gods' eventual doom:

she successfully humiliates Wotan, and ultimately compels him to follow the Laws, which leave him no other alternative in Siegmund's forthcoming battle with Hunding than to remove the Sword's magic power, prevent Brünnhilde's intervention, and sacrifice his mortal Volsung son. Thus, Fricka's sanctimonious insistence directs the entire course of the drama; it is the beginning of Wotan's anguish and tragic decline.

This confrontation between Fricka and Wotan highlights the human grandeur of the *Ring*. Wotan has become immersed in a moral dilemma in which he has become bound by the very forces that empower him. He stole the Gold from Alberich by using force and deceit, and he is now trapped in a net of his own weaving; another immoral act by the God would compound his crimes and lead to his downfall. Wotan is ambivalent and paradoxical: he is a God, but he is also morally flawed, and his predicament urges him to break out of his prison of faults and return to the lofty state of directing human evolution and progress toward a higher world order.

Wotan did not create the world, but gained sovereignty over the world. He sacrificed an eye to drink from the archetypal Well of Wisdom which represented his symbolic rise from instinctive nature to thought and consciousness. To master the world, he severed a branch from the World Ash-Tree and carved his Law-laden Spear that initially balanced the forces of the universe to his Will: air, fire, water, and earth. He established dominion over the sky people by wedding Fricka (conscience), and was joined by her brothers, Donner and Froh, and her sister, Freia. But he cannot bind all the elements to his Will: Loge (fire and intelligence), the earth Goddess Erda (omniscience and intuition), and the earthly beings, the Dwarfs and the Giants, remain his foes.

The engine that propels the *Ring* are Wotan's efforts to recover the Gold and restore it to its natural habitat in the Rhine: as such, he strives to balance the powers in the world, and tries to avoid the Ragnarök; that cataclysmic doomsday battle between Gods and heroes against the forces of evil that forecast the destruction of mankind in an apocalyptic fire and flood. To avoid catastrophe, Wotan's grand plan has been to rescue the treasure from Fafner, redress the

Gods' primary guilt, and rid the world of Alberich's evil and his Curse on the Ring. His goals would be achieved through the deeds of an independent hero who was wholly ignorant of the power residing in the Ring: that hero was Siegmund, in whom he implanted divinity, and elevated to exalted moral stature.

In their confrontation, Fricka humiliates the immoral God, and his defeat causes him inner turmoil, shame and frustration. He relates his tragic dilemma to his favorite daughter, Brünnhilde: he stole Alberich's treasure to pay for Valhalla; Erda warned him to return the Ring to the Rhinemaidens and purge it of its Curse; and in seeking Erda's counsel to avert the doom of the Gods, he sired Brünnhilde with the Goddess; Brünnhilde and her sister Valkyries brought him a mighty army of heroic warriors to defend Valhalla. But Fafner now guards the treasure, and Wotan cannot reclaim it through the illegal actions of a God: Siegmund was to be his surrogate, but now Fricka has not only reminded him, but invoked the sanctity of binding laws.

Wotan commands Brünnhilde not to interfere in the forthcoming battle between Siegmund and Hunding; without the power of his magic Sword or Brünnhilde's help, Siegmund will die. Siegmund now represents Wotan's vanished hope. Alberich has sired a son, and the Nibelungs will certainly reclaim the Ring, world power, and thus, the inevitable doom of the Gods. By allowing Siegmund to die, Wotan has betrayed all that he loves; with resignation, he will await the end. Wotan's Will has transformed into withdrawal: he now yearns for the world's destruction in the hope that through purification and fire the cycle of evil will end, and a new world order of loftier values will come into being.

Brünnhilde argues with Wotan and tries to convince him to save Siegmund, his beloved son, but he warns her that if she disobeys him, she will provoke his implacable wrath.

Act II – Scene 2: Siegmund approaches with Sieglinde, She is exhausted, seized with guilt, and possessed by horrifying images of Hunding killing Siegmund. Brünnhilde performs her duty and

confronts Siegmund to warn him that his death approaches, but promises him that in death he will enjoy the delights of Valhalla where he will join its esteemed fallen heroes.

Siegmund refuses her offer after he learns that Sieglinde cannot accompany him to Valhalla. Nevertheless, Brünnhilde advises him that his death is inevitable because his Sword no longer possesses its magic powers. Siegmund observes his beloved Sieglinde and laments his cruel fate.

Brünnhilde witnesses the profound love of Siegmund for Sieglinde and becomes transformed by emotions that up to this moment, were unimaginable and incomprehensible to the Valkyrie Goddess. Ultimately, she exalts love as more worthy of protection than all the Gold and power in the world: she vows to defend Siegmund, even though she will be defying Wotan's Will.

Siegmund and Hunding engage in deadly combat. Brünnhilde attempts to shield Siegmund, but Wotan intervenes, shatters Siegmund's Sword with his Spear, and allows Hunding to slay Siegmund. Brünnhilde gathers the broken Sword fragments, rescues Sieglinde, and disappears with her. Then, with obvious bitter agony and virulent contempt, Wotan fells Hunding. Immediately thereafter, he pursues Brünnhilde, determined to exact punishment on his disobedient daughter.

Act III: The Valkyries are bearing the bodies of slain heroes to Valhalla. As they gather on a mountaintop, they become alarmed when they see Brünnhilde approaching with a woman across her saddle. Brünnhilde dismounts and pleads to her sisters for a fresh horse, but they hesitate and turn to fear when they see Wotan approaching from the distance. Sieglinde becomes ecstatic when she is told that in her womb, she bears Siegmund's child; the future hero, Siegfried. Sieglinde is hastened to the safety of the forest together with the fragments of Siegmund's Sword.

The disobedient Brünnhilde remains to face Wotan's anger. Wotan declares that by her actions, she must be banished, her Godhood removed, and sentenced to an eternal sleep encircled by fire. Brünnhilde tries to convince Wotan that she did not

disobey nor shame him, but rather, as his alter ego, did what she inwardly knew he desired. Wotan's terrible rage abates, yet he is duty-bound to punish her rebellious deed; she has yielded to the power of love, and therefore, she must be condemned to live as a mortal.

Brünnhilde pleads for one grace: that while she sleeps in the encircling fire, only a hero may penetrate its flames. Wotan agrees and then becomes overcome with emotion as he bids farewell to his favorite daughter: however, both intuitively know that her rescuer will be none other than Siegmund's child; Siegfried. Wotan kisses Brünnhilde's eyes to end her Godhood, and then she falls into a deep slumber while Loge ignites the magic fire.

Wotan's thoughts are encouraged as he contemplates the future hero: Siegfried. He decrees that only a hero unafraid of his Spear-point shall brave the flames to awaken Brünnhilde. He leaves his beloved daughter, overcome with sadness and deep resignation, but with a glimmer of hope as he contemplates the future..

Story Narrative with Music Highlights

*Act I: The interior of Hunding's forest dwelling;
at the center of the room there is a large ash-tree.*

A ferocious storm rages, and the musical imagery depicts the crash of thunder, lightning, and the furious swirling of wind and rain.

The Storm



As the storm subsides, Siegmund stumbles into an unknown forest dwelling where he seeks refuge. He enters through the great entrance door at the rear of the dwelling and stands immobile and guarded, his hand remaining on the door latch as he looks around warily. His clothes are disheveled, and he is exhausted and frightened, pained in both body and spirit. He sees no one, and assures himself that he is safe from his pursuers. He closes the door, staggers toward the hearth, and falls wearily on the bear-skin rug, sinking back exhausted and motionless.

Fatigue



Sieglinde enters from another room and imagines that the sounds she heard were those of her husband, Hunding, returning from the hunt. She becomes startled when she notices the stranger stretched-out out before the hearth. She bends over his body to determine if he breathes, and suddenly is overcome by a wave of tenderness and pity for the stranger.

Tenderness and Pity



Sieglinde fills a drinking horn with water and offers it to the weary stranger, who drinks it heartily and expresses his deep gratitude. As he gazes at her, he subconsciously recognizes her and senses a bond

between them; her kindness and sympathy arouses deep emotions within him.

Dawning of Love



Siegmund inquires about his whereabouts. Sadly, Sieglinde advises the stranger that he is in Hunding's home, she is his wife, and urges him to rest until her husband's return. Apprehensively, Siegmund expresses his hope that her husband will not deny hospitality to a wounded and weaponless man.

Siegmund explains that his life has been burdened by distress and the agony of continuing warfare; after his shield and spear were shattered in battle, he fled his enemies, but they continue to pursue him. Nevertheless, he feels comforted because this kind-hearted woman's tenderness has consoled his pain and weariness.

Sieglinde leaves him and then returns with a horn filled with mead. She offers it to him eagerly, but he refuses to taste it until her lips have first touched it. Afterwards, he drinks the mead and gazes at her warmly, sensing a stirring of his emotions that transcends gratitude. He lowers his gaze gloomily, and exclaims in a trembling voice that she has provided solace to an ill-fated man.

Siegmund reveals that his name is "Woeful": misfortune pursues him wherever he goes, and he is fearful that if he remains, he would bring unhappiness to Hunding's home.

Volsung's Woe



He starts toward the door to leave, but Sieglinde dissuades him, crying out impulsively that he remain, and declaring with unrestrained emotion that he cannot bring ill-fate where it already resides. Siegmund stares at her searchingly, and she lowers her eyes apologetically, trying to hide her feeling of shame and sadness. He becomes so deeply moved by

her apparent unhappiness that he decides to remain. They stare at each other sympathetically, each inwardly expressing the most profound inner emotions of desire and yearning.

Act I – Scene 2: Suddenly, ominous horns announce the approach of Hunding, and then he is heard outside leading his horse to the stable.

Hunding



Hunding appears at the door armed with shield and spear. He pauses at the threshold and becomes visibly confounded by the sight of a stranger in his house, causing him to immediately turn to Sieglinde with a look of stern inquisitiveness. Sieglinde explains that she found the stranger on their hearth faint and weary, and she tended to him as a guest. Firmly, Siegmund defends her, claiming that the woman should not be chided because she offered him rest and drink.

Hunding replies that his hearth and home are sacred to strangers in need. He removes his armor, hands it to Sieglinde, and she hangs it on the branches of the ash-tree at the center of the room. Hunding gruffly orders his wife to set out the meal; she fetches food and drink from the adjacent room and prepares the table, all the while compulsively and involuntarily fixing her eyes on the stranger. Hunding notices their glances and becomes suspicious when he compares their features; he comments to himself that they look alike, and notes that the stranger likewise has a serpent's mark in his eyes.

Hunding tries to conceal his agitation and turns to the stranger to inquire how he found their house. He emphatically asks the stranger's name, which prompts Siegmund to become thoughtful, hesitant, and overcome with fear. Sieglinde fixes her eyes on Siegmund, notices his agitation, and expresses visible sympathy and tenderness as she awaits his response. Siegmund, suspicious and apprehensive, is reluctant to reveal himself to Hunding. Siegmund's hesitation

provokes Hunding's suspicion, provoking him to boldly suggest that the stranger could not deny an answer to his wife. Dutifully, but initially embarrassed, Sieglinde asks the stranger his name.

Siegmund begins the grave story about his conflicted past, a life that has been exposed to torturous sorrow and pain: he cannot be called *Friedmund* (Peaceful) nor *Frohwalt* (Joyful), but rather *Wehwalt* (Woeful). Wolfé, his father, was a strong warrior, but one day after they returned from the hunt they found their dwelling turned to ashes by the Neidings, his mother dead, and his twin sister vanished. Afterwards, he and his father lived in the woods, but were continuously hunted by their enemies. Hunding claims that he knew neither Wolfé nor his son, Wölfig, but heard rumors about their reputation as warriors.

Siegmund recounts that one day the Neidings assaulted them furiously. During the onslaught, he was separated from his father who suddenly vanished. Afterwards, he left the forest to live among men and women, but he found only mistrust, wrath, and animosity: he had sought happiness in the world but found only grief; so indeed, woe lies in his wake, and he is truly *Wehwalt* (Woeful). Sieglinde indicates a warm understanding of the stranger's tortured life, but Hunding interprets his sad fate as the Will of the Norns who obviously had little love for him.

Sieglinde inquires why he is now weaponless and seeking refuge. Siegmund explains that he heeded a distressed maiden's cry for help because her brutal kinsman were seeking to bind her in a loveless marriage: he fought and killed her brothers, the maiden grieved, and then died over the bodies of her dead kinsmen. Then the surviving kinsmen assaulted him, shattered his spear and shield, and he fled wounded and weaponless.

Siegmund turns earnestly toward Sieglinde, confident that she now understands a man who is unable to live in peace. As Siegmund rises and walks toward the hearth, Sieglinde seems deeply moved, and her sad eyes become transfixed to the ground as her thoughts strangely become engrossed in her Volsung past; she is Wotan's mortal offspring.

Volsungs

Hunding rises and is unable to suppress his anger. He is a Neiding, and realizes that he has returned home to find his hated enemy in his own hearth. He promises to honor his duty to provide guest sanctuary for the stranger, but he is compelled to avenge his kinsmen's blood and challenges him to mortal combat in the morning. Sieglinde tries to pacify the two enemies, but Hunding orders her away. She stands motionless while overcome with compassion for the stranger. The she prepares to leave, all the while continuously pausing as if contemplating a solemn idea that she cannot interpret in her confusion.

Sieglinde's Pity

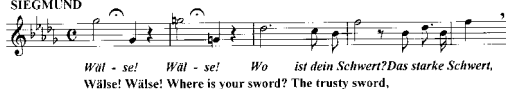
A purpose has taken shape in Sieglinde's mind. With quiet resolution, she opens the cupboard and shakes spices into a drinking horn. Siegmund's eyes have remained fixed upon her, but when she perceives that Hunding watches her, she departs to an inner chamber. As she leaves, she looks toward Siegmund with yearning, and then looks hopefully toward the ash-tree in which the divine Sword is buried; Siegmund carefully follows her glance although he is unaware of its meaning. Hunding rouses himself from his somber brooding, removes his weapons from the ash-tree, and proceeds to retire; as he leaves, he gruffly reminds Siegmund to prepare himself for combat until death.

Alone, Siegmund becomes melancholy and despairing as he contemplates his impending battle with Hunding. He recalls his father's unfulfilled promise that when he would find himself in his direst need, a Sword would await him, yet he now finds himself weaponless in an enemy's house, a vulnerable victim of Hunding's hateful vengeance. An engaging woman with childlike charm and innocence has aroused his emotions, but she serves the very man

who now mocks his impotence to defend himself. Siegmund's thoughts become frenzied, and he cries out for his father Wälse, who seems to have abandoned him.

Wälse!

SIEGMUND



“Wälse! Wälse! Where is thy Sword? The trusty Sword!” Suddenly, a flicker of fire from the hearth illuminates the ash-tree causing Siegmund to notice the faint yet seemingly visible hilt of a Sword.

Sword



The hearth fire extinguishes and leaves the room almost totally dark. Sieglinde, robed in white, advances lightly and rapidly toward Siegmund and breathlessly urges him to heed her words. She tells him that Hunding sleeps because she drugged his draught, but more importantly, that Siegmund must flee from danger. To protect himself, there is a mighty Sword imbedded in the ash-tree; if he can retrieve it, he is the noblest and strongest of heroes.

Sieglinde explains the mystery of the Sword's presence. She was sold to Hunding to become his wife. At her wedding, while in sorrow and shame, a stranger suddenly appeared before her; he was an old man robed in gray, wore a large hat so low that it hid one of his eyes, and his one eye gleamed with menace and terror. But in his presence, she was fearless and felt yearning and solace. The stranger heaved a great Sword into the trunk of the ash-tree, announcing that it will belong only to the man who possesses the heroic power to withdraw it from the tree. All tried in vain, but it remains. Sieglinde reveals that she intuitively knows that it is he, the stranger, for whom the weapon awaits.

Sieglinde expresses her hope that one day she may find the friend who will comfort her, relieve her sufferings, and end the shame and disgrace that have befallen her.

Victory

SIEGLINDE

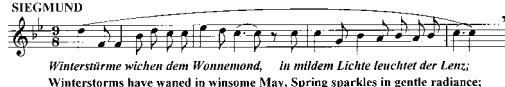


Siegmund embraces Sieglinde compassionately, and with intense emotion tells her that he is both her friend and savior: he will not only win the Sword from the tree, but he will win her as his wife; both have shared suffering, but now they will share the joy of vengeance.

Suddenly, the large rear doors open to reveal a beautiful Spring night, and the full moon's radiant light floods the new-found lovers. Siegmund, who is at first startled, compulsively draws Sieglinde closer to him with ardent tenderness.

Winterstürme

SIEGMUND



Siegmund and Sieglinde celebrate nature's blessing of Spring: the storms of winter have waned and transformed into the beauty of May, and birds sing while flowers flourish. Siegmund proclaims that their love lured the Spring while Sieglinde calls him the Spring for which she had longed for through ice-bound winters when she was alone and friendless. When Siegmund appeared she yearned for him the moment her eyes met his, and there is no more darkness in her starved soul.

Bliss

SIEGLINDE



Siegmond and Sieglinde recognize that they are Volsungs: Wälse's children. She names him *Siegmund*: "Victorious Protector and Guardian."

Siegmund springs toward the ash-tree and seizes the Sword. "Holiest love's most mighty need! Passionate longing's feverish need, brightly burns in your breath, drives to deeds and death."

Siegmund's pronouncement is accompanied by Alberich's Renunciation of Love motive; nevertheless, Siegmund is not renouncing love, but announcing its rebirth. With his hand on the hilt of the Sword, Siegmund names the weapon *Nothung*, "Needful," the Sword that shall serve him in his direst need.

Nothung: "Needful"

SIEGMUND



No - thung! No - thung! so nenn'ich dich Schwert: No - thung!
Needful! Needful! So I name this Sword: Needful!

Siegmund wields the Sword before the astonished and ecstatic Sieglinde. He announces that he has won her as his bride, and the Sword is his bride-gift to her. Together they shall flee from sorrow to the rapture and bliss of Spring where his love and "Nothung" shall guard her. Sieglinde responds with equally rapturous passion: they fall into each other's arms, and Siegmund ecstatically claims his bride: "Bride and sister, I am to you brother; so the Volsungs will flourish!" Siegmund and Sieglinde escape into the night to consummate their sacred union.

Act II: A mountain pass, a gorge in the background, and a high rocky ridge.

The energetic musical imagery suggests Wotan's warrior daughters, the Valkyries, riding through the skies bearing slain heroes to Valhalla.

Wotan, dutifully bearing his sacred Spear, heralds the arrival of his favorite Valkyrie daughter, Brünnhilde, and alerts her that she has much work to do for the Gods: soon there will be combat between Siegmund and Hunding, and Brünnhilde must aid Siegmund in the battle. Elated by the news, Brünnhilde springs up and energetically expresses her joy: *Hojotoho! Heilaha!*

Hojotoho!

BRÜNNHILDE

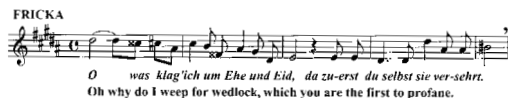


Ho - jo - to - ho! Ho - jo - to - ho! Heia - ha! Heia - ha!

Brünnhilde looks down into the gorge and alerts Wotan that Fricka approaches in her ram-drawn chariot, whipping the terrified beasts with a frenzied urgency. Brünnhilde, disinclined to intercede in domestic disputes, disappears, leaving her father to face his angry wife alone.

Fricka appears and immediately erupts into moral outrage and indignation. She begins her harangue with quiet dignity, reminding her husband that she is the sacred protector of marriage and must heed Hunding's cries for vengeance: she has vowed to punish the Volsung pair who have betrayed him. Wotan tries to placate his consort, suggesting that they have done no harm, but have merely surrendered to the magic of love. Fricka finds his approval of their incestuous union unacceptable, rebuffs him furiously, and urges their punishment. Contrarily, Wotan frankly counsels her to bless their exalted new bond of love.

Wotan's casual attitude toward marriage provokes Fricka's indignation. She reminds him that he dishonored the morality of the Gods by betraying their own marriage with his wanton escapades: he sired the Volsung twins and eight Valkyrie daughters with mortal women, and begot Brünnhilde with Erda.

O was klag'ich um Ehe und Eld.

As Fricka speaks with mounting passion, Wotan's uneasiness intensifies. He defends the Volsungs as the Gods' surrogates: he sired Siegmund purposely to become an independent hero who would redeem the Gods. Nevertheless, Fricka invokes the sacred Laws and orders Wotan to abandon Siegmund, cease protecting him, and withdraw the Sword. Wotan defends his actions vehemently, claiming that Siegmund won the Sword in his moment of need. However, Fricka accuses him of creating the hero's dire need by planting the Sword in the tree and leading him there with a promise that he would find it.

Wotan springs up angrily, but then restrains himself. Fricka perceives that he is weakening and uneasy, and grows more confident and aggressive, further admonishing him that Siegmund must be punished because Wotan has scoffed and shamed Fricka's Laws of sacred marriage.

Wotans' Dejection

Wotan is impotent against Fricka's moral rectitude. She demands that he renounce the Volsung and leave his destiny to fate, promise that the Valkyrie, Brünnhilde, will not intervene, and withdraw the magic spell on the Sword. Complying with Fricka will shatter all of Wotan's hopes. He makes a final passionate plea to her that he cannot forsake his son, but the unmerciful Fricka, invoking the Gods' sacred covenants, remains intransigent and implacable. Wotan, bound by Law, reluctantly agrees to abandon the ill-fated hero.

Brünnhilde returns and senses that their confrontations had been grave. As Fricka prepares to depart, she majestically orders Wotan to vindicate the honor of the Gods, reminding him that he must order

Brünnhilde to protect Hunding. Utterly defeated and dejected, Wotan mutters, “Take my oath!”

***Deiner ew’gen Gattin heilige Ehre beschirme heut’
ihr Schild!***

FRICKA



Deiner ew' - gen Gattin hei - lige Eh - re beschir - me heut' ihr Schild!
Guard your eternal consort's shield today!

Fricka, triumphant in her moral victory, departs haughtily.

Wotan's Narration

Brünnhilde gazes at her father with dismay. He seems haggard and dejected, his soul tortured by profound conflicts. Mournfully, he tells Brünnhilde, “I am held in my own shackles, I am the least free of all those that live!” He vents his shame and distress, “I am the saddest of all living!” Brünnhilde sinks at his feet and lovingly implores him to confide in her, the truest of his children, and the Will of his inner soul.

Wotan reviews past events and ominously predicts that his lust for power will signal the downfall of the Gods. His intentions were noble when he engaged the Giants to build Valhalla, the fortress from which he would bring peace and order to the world, and foster humanity by raising moral consciousness. But when his youthful passions vanished, his soul grew thirsty for power, and wildly, he won the world and protected himself with binding Laws. The Nibelung Alberich forswore love, stole the Rhine's Gold, and fashioned the magic Ring that provided measureless might. But the God allowed himself to be cunningly lured by Loge to steal the Nibelung's Hoard to pay the Giants for Valhalla, and unwittingly participated in fraud and deception; he himself gradually surrendered to evil, becoming as immoral as those he fought to transform.

The wise Erda counseled him to surrender the Ring, warning him that it would doom the Gods if he retained it. But she refused to tell him more, and in

fear, he ceded it to Fafner. Then he sought Erda, learned much from her counsel, and with her, begot his beloved Brünnhilde, his alter ego.

The Valkyrie army of maidens bring him the spirits of heroes fallen in battle who become guardians against his foes. Nevertheless, he fears not Alberich's assault on Valhalla, but the power of the Ring itself. Alberich is tormented by rage and envy and forever lurks in the shadows; if he recaptures the Ring, he would rouse all creation against the Gods. Fafner now sleeps on the treasure, and as long as it remains in his protection, the Gods and the world are secure. But if it should be wrested from Fafner, it would spell doom. The evil Alberich works unceasingly to doom the Gods. Erda warned him that when Alberich begot a son, it would signal their downfall. Alberich bought a woman's love, and in her womb lies the fruit of hate and envy; the forthcoming victor for the loveless Alberich.

Need of the Gods



One alone can save the Gods: a hero who is free of Wotan's Will and guidance who will fight even against the God himself, yet accomplish what the God cannot do. Therefore, he sired Siegmund and provided him with the magic Sword that would do the deed longed for by the Gods. But Fricka pierced through his deceit, overwhelmed him with shame, and he is honor-bound to yield to her. Alberich's Curse pursues him everywhere, and now he must abandon and betray his beloved son, Siegmund.

Wotan concedes that all of his efforts have been in vain. He has become tired of struggling, and with resignation and despair, invokes the ruin of the Gods: "Once I craved for power, but now I curse the work I have begun! I leave Valhalla and all its pomp to the greedy Nibelungs! There is only one fate that I await – my downfall!"

Wotan tells Brünnhilde that they must obey Fricka's command: in the fight between Siegmund and Hunding, Siegmund must fall. Brünnhilde protests and tries to persuade him to alter his brutal

decree, even vowing that she will never fight against the hero whom Wotan loves. But he warns Brünnhilde that if she fails to heed his command, she will provoke him to wrath and be subjected to appalling punishment: “Siegmond is to die; this must be the work of the Valkyrie!”

Wotan rushes away in frustration and despair. Brünnhilde remains terrified and bewildered, saddened by her father’s distress.

Act II - Scene 2:

Brünnhilde catches sight of Siegmund and Sieglinde approaching. She watches them for a moment, sighs mournfully that she must betray the Volsung, and then disappears into a cave.

Sieglinde is exhausted and terrified by the horn calls she hears from the pursuing Hunding, imagining that his bloodhounds have surrounded them, tear at Siegmund’s flesh with their fangs, and have splintered his Sword. Gently and passionately, Siegmund seats her and calms her agitation. Suddenly, she hears Hunding’s booming horn calls again and breaks away from Siegmund in panic and terror, hysterically urging him to leave her because she has brought him only woe; Sieglinde’s rapturous love has transformed into self-loathing, a conviction that she has brought scorn and shame to the brother and friend who has freed her. Siegmund assures her that he will avenge the shame she feels by killing Hunding with Nothung gnawing at his heart. With a last cry of “Brother! My brother! Siegmund!”, the trembling Sieglinde faints in his arms. Siegmund bends over her anxiously, finds that she still breathes, kisses her brow, and seats himself with her head resting on his lap while she slumbers.

Act II - Scene 3:

Complete darkness envelops the height. In a sudden burst of moonlight, Brünnhilde emerges from the cave. She strides slowly and solemnly towards the Volsungs and pauses to contemplate the man

whose fate lies in her unwilling hands. Her solemn thoughts are about death, a Valkyrie duty that for the first time has left her confused and perplexed.

Fate



Brünnhilde stands earnestly as she stares at Siegmund, the Volsung who will soon join Wotan's brave and faithful heroes.

Annunciation of Death



Brünnhilde addresses Siegmund by name and announces that she has come to summon him to Valhalla, explaining that she chooses those ill-fated in battle to join the hallowed fallen heroes who surround Wotan. In Valhalla he will find his father, Wälse, and smiling wish-maidens, however, Sieglinde is fated to remain on earth. At these words, Siegmund bends gently over Sieglinde, kisses her softly on the brow, and then turns to the Valkyrie: "Then greet Valhalla for me, greet Wotan for me, greet Wälse for me, and all the heroes: greet too the gracious wish-maidens. I will not follow you! Rather I will destroy Sieglinde and myself!"

Brünnhilde warns Siegmund that he will fall to Hunding, provoking his scornful contradiction that it is Hunding who will die; he suggests that she take Hunding to her majestic Valhalla. Gently and solemnly, Brünnhilde urges Siegmund to heed her, advising him that his Sword's spell has been withdrawn and it will fail him.

Siegmund bends tenderly over Sieglinde, and in an outburst of grief, condemns his traitorous father, Wälse, cursing him for allowing him to be scorned before his foe. Siegmund proclaims that if he must fall, he will go to Hella's underworld rather than to Valhalla; let anguish and grief comfort his father's pitiless heart.

Brünnhilde becomes suddenly transformed by

Siegmund's profound love for Sieglinde and turns to Siegmund with heretofore unfelt stirrings of sympathy and compassion. She vows to protect Sieglinde after he is gone, but Siegmund replies that he alone will protect Sieglinde, overwhelming Brünnhilde when he raises his Sword and threatens to dispatch Sieglinde and himself. In a sudden passionate outburst, Brünnhilde declares that Sieglinde shall live, nor shall Siegmund be parted from her. The Valkyrie decides that she will disobey Wotan, intercede on Siegmund's behalf, and he shall triumph in his fight against Hunding.

Siegmund bids farewell to his sleeping bride and joins the Brünnhilde in preparing for battle. As the ominous horn calls are heard in the distance, Brünnhilde tells Siegmund to raise his Sword without fear, for the steel and the Valkyrie's help will insure his victory. As Brünnhilde disappears, Siegmund looks after her with joy and relief.

Heavy thunderclouds descend, darken, and envelop the mountaintop. Siegmund broods tenderly over the sleeping Sieglinde, urging her to sleep until the fight is over when peace will end her pain. He leaves her alone as the sounds of his pursuers draw nearer, climbs up the mountain resolutely with his Sword drawn, and then disappears into the darkness.

Sieglinde stirs restlessly in her nightmarish slumber: she is overcome with horrible memories of her childhood, her wedding, the harsh and hateful strangers, and the flames that destroyed her Volsung home. She calls out for her mother, and then her brother: "Siegmund! Where are you?"

Roars of thunder and blinding flashes of lightning awaken Sieglinde. She leaps up, gazes around in terror, hears Hundings horn calls nearing, and then Hunding's hoarse voice urging his enemy to stand and face him. Siegmund answers him and asks his enemy where he hides, boasting that he is no longer weaponless and now wields the great Sword he plucked from the ash-tree; the Sword that will make a mockery of Fricka's protection of his foe.

Suddenly, the two men are visible at the summit of the mountain, locked in ferocious combat. Hysterically, Sieglinde cries despairingly that the mad Hunding should slay her first, but a flash of lightning

makes her reel back as if blinded. Brünnhilde suddenly intervenes in the battle, sheltering Siegmund and guarding him with her shield. But just as Siegmund aims a blow at Hunding, a red glow breaks through the clouds and Wotan appears, thundering that all should stand back. Wotan stands over Hunding and holds his Spear in front of Siegmund's Sword. Angrily, he shouts to Siegmund to draw back from his Spear for it will splinter his Sword. Brünnhilde shrinks back in terror as the weight of Wotan's spear shatters Siegmund's Sword. At once, Hunding thrusts his spear into Siegmund's breast.

Brünnhilde rushes to Sieglinde, who has heard Siegmund's death sigh and has fallen to the ground as if lifeless. She raises Sieglinde on her horse and disappears with her. When the clouds divide, Hunding is seen with his spear buried into the breast of the dead Siegmund while Wotan stands above, leaning on his Spear and gazing with infinite sadness at the fallen hero's body. Wotan has obeyed Fricka, and he is now free once more to act for himself. Sunk in grief at his betrayal of Siegmund, Wotan scornfully and bitterly exclaims to Hunding: "Get away, slave! Kneel before Fricka and tell her that Wotan's spear has upheld her honor. Go! Go!" With a contemptuous wave of his hand, he strikes Hunding dead.

Silence descends on the mountain height as Wotan suddenly remembers that Brünnhilde flouted his Will. He erupts into uncontrollable rage, shouts that Brünnhilde has disobeyed him, and that after he overtakes her, she will pay dearly. Amid thunder and lightning, and with fury and purpose, Wotan disappears in pursuit of his daughter, determined to punish her for violating his sacred word.

Act III: A wild landscape at the summit of a rocky mountain

The fierce Valkyrie maidens rendezvous from their various battlefield expeditions before returning to Valhalla. With dead heroes attached to their saddles, they ride through the skies, stridently shouting their Hojotoho's, and descend on the rocky summit.

Ride of Valkyries

Gerhilde, Ortlinde, Waltraute, and Schwertleite, have assembled on the mountaintop and greet each other joyously. But before riding off to Valhalla together, they hesitate, note the absence of Brünnhilde, and watch anxiously for her arrival.

Suddenly, the Valkyries become astonished when they see Brünnhilder in the distance bearing a woman across her saddle. After she descends, she breathlessly appeals for her sister's aid, telling them that Wotan pursues her because she disobeyed him by protecting Siegmund and rescued Sieglinde. She pleads for a swift horse to replace her exhausted charger so she can escape her father's wrath.

Ortlinde and Waltraute cite a thundercloud approaching from the north and announce that Wotan approaches, relentlessly and furiously driving his steed towards them. Fearing Wotan, the terrified Valkyrie sisters refuse to lend Brünnhilde a horse.

Sieglinde, devastated by the loss of Siegmund, reproaches Brünnhilde for protecting her and implores her to strike her sword through her heart. But Brünnhilde exhorts her to cling to life, for she bears a Volsung child in her womb; Siegmund's pledge of his love. Brünnhilde's prophesy transforms Sieglinde from despair into fervent exaltation, and she cries out ecstatically: "Rescue me, brave one, rescue my child! Maidens, shelter me with your shields!"

As clouds roll in and thunder nears, the terrified Valkyries urge Brünnhilde to flee with the woman, but she decides to remain to face the angry Wotan. She tells Sieglinde that she will find safety in the vast eastern forest where Fafner, transformed into a Dragon, lies in a cave guarding the Hoard. Although the land is perilous and dangerous for a woman, she will be safe from Wotan's wrath for he dreads and shuns Fafner's cave. She tells Sieglinde to be brave and defiant, endure hunger, thirst, and hardship because she bears the world's bravest of heroes. Brünnhilde gives Sieglinde the fragments of Siegmund's Sword and exhorts her to preserve them for her child, who, shall one day forge the splinters

anew; his name shall be “Siegfried, who shall rejoice in victory.”

Sieglinde quickly takes the shattered steel and responds ecstatically with a great cry of thankfulness and gratitude, bids farewell, and is hastened away.

Sieglinde: O hehrstes Wunder!



As the storm increases in violence, the enraged voice of Wotan is heard calling his disobedient daughter to face him. Brünnhilde appeals to her sisters to shield her from Wotan’s wrath, and they draw themselves together and conceal her in their midst. Wotan arrives, strides furiously towards the Valkyrie sisters, and threateningly asks the whereabouts of Brünnhilde. With agitated cries, they vainly try to appease his wrath, but he scolds them for their display of womanish weakness. He announces that Brünnhilde scornfully broke their holy bonds by defiantly disobeying his wishes and Will, and he summons her to come forward and receive her punishment.

Humbly, but with firm steps, Brünnhilde emerges from amidst her Valkyrie sisters. She pauses a short distance from the God and stoically addresses him: “Here I stand father, pronounce your punishment.”

Wotan scolds her for betraying him; his treasured Valkyrie whom he created to stir heroes has provoked heroes against him. With anger and heartbreak he announces that Brünnhilde has willed her own punishment: “You will no longer seek warriors, no longer bring heroes to fill my hall.”

Brünnhilde’s Destiny



Brünnhilde will no longer be a Valkyrie who shares the company of the Gods, but an outcast, banished from her father's sight. Sadly, Brünnhilde questions why he must take away all that he has given her, but Wotan is implacable; she defied him and he decrees that she must remain on the rock defenseless in sleep. Brünnhilde sinks to the ground, half-kneels before Wotan, and implores him to relent. Meanwhile, Wotan turns savagely and harshly to the wailing Valkyries and orders them to leave lest they share their sister's fateful punishment. The Valkyries cry wildly and then ride away.

Brünnhilde kneels before Wotan in despair and utter debasement, timidly but poignantly asking him if her deed was in truth so shameful and disgraceful as to merit such a severe punishment. She asks him to look into her eyes and silence his rage, master his wrath, and expose his hidden guilt in betraying his favorite child.

She protests that she was merely executing her father's deepest inner wishes. When he announced his supreme sacrifice to placate Fricka, she pierced beneath his words and knew exactly what lay in his heart; that in his soul he desired Siegmund's victory. Indeed, she presumed to substitute her wisdom for his, but she knew that he wanted Siegmund to live, and she felt that she was performing the highest form of obedience to his secret Will.

Brünnhilde describes how she became consumed with emotion and compassion by Siegmund's distressed soul. She began to pity and love him, and suddenly recognized that the love that was filling her heart was the same as Wotan's love for the Volsungs.

Volsung's Love



Wotan recognizes that Brünnhilde believed that she was bestowing love on those her father loved, and she believed she was fulfilling her father's Will; the wishes he was forbidden by law to enact. Indeed, her actions preserved the Volsungs from destruction by saving Sieglinde and her unborn child. But Wotan's

anger is unrelenting: Brünnhilde betrayed him, broke their holy bonds, and because of the inexorable Laws, he must abandon her.

Brünnhilde's punishment will be an eternal sleep: she is to lie bound and weaponless in deep slumber and become the wife of the first mortal who shall find and awaken her. Brünnhilde erupts into passionate protest, begging him to surround the rock with such flaming terrors that only the bravest and greatest of heroes can penetrate them.

Slumber



Wotan's anger dissolves as he raises Brünnhilde to her feet, gazes into her eyes, and bids farewell to his favorite daughter: "Farewell! O valiant child, I must forsake you. We can never meet again."

Farewell



Muss ich dich



With a tender loving embrace, Wotan savors his love for his daughter for the last time: "Their gleam once more gladden me now, as my lips meet yours in love's last kiss! On a hero more blessed happily they will beam: on me, care-ridden God, now must you close them for ever. For the God turns from you now, and thus kisses the Godhead away!"

Wotan ends Brünnhilde's God-head with a long kiss on her eyes; she sinks into his arms as unconsciousness gently overcomes her. He leads her

tenderly to a low bank underneath a tree, and there lays her down, closing her helmet and covering her completely with the great Valkyrie shield. He moves slowly away, then turns around once more with a sorrowful look.

With solemn decision he points his Spear towards a large rock and strikes it three times, summoning Loge to encircle her with fire, which at once, flames fiercely and furiously. For Brünnhilde's love, Wotan has built a spectacular bridal fire that has never yet burned for a bride, a fire that will strike fear into the heart of all but the boldest: "For one alone can win the bride, one freer than I, the God!" Prophetically, his thoughts turn to Siegfried, the future hero.

Siegfried: the future hero



Wotan stretches out his Spear, as if imposing a spell, and pronounces his final command: "He who does not fear the sharpness of my Spear-point, shall break through this fierce-flaming fire!"

As he departs, he looks back sorrowfully at his beloved daughter who is now completely encircled by the flaming fires.

