

TANNHÄUSER
Composed in 1845

ACT I

The minstrel Tannhäuser, having spent a year in the magical underground realm of Venus, the goddess of love, longs to return to the human world. He pays tribute to Venus in a song but ends by asking her to let him go. Surprised, Venus promises him even greater pleasures, but when he insists and repeats his pleas, she furiously dismisses him and curses his desire for salvation. Tannhäuser cries out that his hope rests with the Virgin Mary—and suddenly finds himself transported to a valley near the castle of the Wartburg.

A procession of pilgrims passes on the way to Rome. Tannhäuser is deeply moved and praises the wonders of God, as horns announce the arrival of a hunting party. It is Landgraf Hermann with his knights. Recognizing Tannhäuser as their long-lost friend, they beg him to return to the castle with them, but Tannhäuser is reluctant. Wolfram, one of the knights, reminds him that his singing once won him the love of Elisabeth, the Landgraf's niece. On hearing her name, Tannhäuser understands what he must do and joins his companions.

ACT II

Elisabeth joyfully greets the Wartburg's Hall of Song, in which she hasn't set foot since Tannhäuser left. He is now led in by Wolfram. Elisabeth, at first shy and confused, tells Tannhäuser how she has suffered in his absence, but then joins him in praise of love. Landgraf Hermann is delighted to find his niece in the Hall of Song, and together they welcome their guests who have come for a song contest. The Landgraf declares that it is about "love" and promises the victor to receive whatever he asks from the hand of Elisabeth. Wolfram opens the contest with a heartfelt 36 tribute to idealized love. Tannhäuser, his thoughts still on Venus, replies with a hymn to worldly pleasures. Other singers counter his increasingly passionate declarations until Tannhäuser breaks out into his prize song to Venus, to the horror of the guests. As the men are about to draw their swords, Elisabeth intervenes herself between the parties to protect Tannhäuser and begs the knights for mercy. The Landgraf pronounces his judgment: Tannhäuser will be forgiven if he joins the pilgrims on their way to Rome to do penance. Tannhäuser rushes from the hall.

ACT III

Several months later, Wolfram comes across Elisabeth praying at a shrine in the valley. A band of pilgrims, back from Rome, passes by, but Tannhäuser is not among them. Broken with grief, Elisabeth prays to the Virgin Mary to receive her soul into heaven. Wolfram gazes after her and asks the evening star to guide her way. Night falls, and a solitary pilgrim approaches. It is Tannhäuser, ragged and weary. He tells Wolfram of his devout penitence on the way to Rome—of his joy at seeing so many others pardoned, and of his despair when the Pope proclaimed that he could no more be forgiven for his sins than the papal staff bear green leaves again. Left without hope, all he wants now is to return to Venus. He summons her and she appears, just as Wolfram once again brings Tannhäuser to his senses by invoking Elisabeth's name. At this moment, Elisabeth's funeral procession comes winding down the valley. With a cry, Venus disappears. Tannhäuser implores Elisabeth to pray for him in heaven and collapses dead. As dawn breaks, another group of pilgrims arrives, telling of a miracle: The Pope's staff, which they bear with them, has blossomed.

Tannhäuser (1845)

Geliebter, komm!

Venus

Come, beloved, see yonder grotto,
filled with rosy fragrance gently wafting!
That abode of sweetest delight would offer
enchantment even to a god.
Lulled on the downiest of cushions
let every hurt fly from your limbs,
let coolness fan your burning brow,
blissful ardour swell heart.
Come, sweet love, come, follow me! Come!

Dich, teure Halle

Elisabeth

Dear hall, I greet thee once again,
joyfully I greet thee, beloved room!
In thee his songs awake
and waken me from gloomy dreams.
When he departed from thee,
how desolate thou didst appear to me!
Peace forsook me,
joy took leave of thee.
How strongly now my heart is leaping;

to me now thou dost appear exalted and sublime.
He who thus revives both me and thee,
tarries afar no more.
I greet thee!
I greet thee!
Thou precious hall,
receive my greeting!

LOHENGRIN
Composed in 1848

ACT I

Antwerp, first half of the 10th century. In Antwerp, on the banks of the Scheldt, a herald announces King Heinrich, who asks Count Telramund to explain why the Duchy of Brabant is torn by strife and disorder. Telramund accuses his young ward, Elsa, of having murdered her brother, Gottfried, heir to Brabant's Christian dynasty. (Gottfried was actually enchanted by the evil Ortrud, whom Telramund has wed.) When Elsa is called to defend herself, she relates a dream of a knight in shining armor who will come to save her. The herald calls for the defender, but only when Elsa prays does the knight appear, arriving in a boat magically drawn by a swan. He pledges his troth to her on condition that she never ask his name or origin. Defeating Telramund in combat, the newcomer establishes the innocence of his bride.

ACT II

Before dawn in the castle courtyard, Ortrud and the Telramund swear vengeance. When Elsa appears in a window, Ortrud attempts to sow distrust in the girl's mind, preying on her curiosity, but Elsa innocently offers the scheming Ortrud friendship. Inside, while the victorious knight is proclaimed guardian of Brabant, the banned Telramund furtively enlists four noblemen to side with him against his newfound rival.

At the cathedral entrance, Ortrud and Telramund attempt to stop the wedding—she by suggesting that the unknown knight is in fact an impostor, he by accusing Elsa's bridegroom of sorcery. The crowd stirs uneasily. Though troubled by doubt, Elsa reiterates her faith in the knight before they enter the church, accompanied by King Heinrich.

ACT III

Alone in the bridal chamber, Elsa and her husband express their love until anxiety and uncertainty at last compel the bride to ask the groom who he is and whence he has come. Before he can reply, Telramund and his henchmen burst in. With a cry, Elsa hands the knight his sword, with which he kills Telramund. Ordering the nobles to bear the body to the king, he sadly tells Elsa that he will meet her later to answer her questions.

Escorting Elsa and the bier to banks of the Scheldt, the knight tells the king he cannot now lead the army against the Hungarian invaders. He explains that his home is the temple of the Holy Grail at distant Monsalvat, to which he must return; Parsifal is his father, and Lohengrin is his name. He bids farewell and turns to his magic swan. Ortrud rushes in, jubilant over Elsa's betrayal of the man who could have broken the spell that transformed her brother into a swan. But Lohengrin's prayers bring forth Gottfried in place of his vanished swan, and after naming the boy ruler of Brabant, Lohengrin disappears, led by the dove of the Grail. Ortrud perishes, and Elsa, calling for her lost husband, falls lifeless to the ground.

Lohengrin (1848)

Entweihte Götter!

Ortrud

Ye gods profaned! Help me now in my revenge!
Punish the ignominy that you have suffered here!
Strengthen me in the service of your holy cause!
Destroy the vile delusions of the apostate!
Woden! I call on you, O god of strength!
Freyja! Hear me, O exalted one!
Bless my deceit and hypocrisy,
that I may be successful in my revenge!

DIE WALKÜRE **Composed in 1856**

ACT I

Pursued by enemies during a storm, Siegmund stumbles exhausted into an unfamiliar house. Sieglinde finds him lying by the hearth, and the two feel an immediate attraction. They are interrupted by Sieglinde's husband, Hunding, who

asks the stranger who he is. Calling himself “Woeful,” Siegmund tells of a disaster-filled life, only to learn that Hunding is a kinsman of his enemies. Hunding tells his guest they will fight to the death in the morning.

Alone, Siegmund calls on his father, Wälse, for the sword he once promised him. Sieglinde reappears, having given Hunding a sleeping potion. She tells of her wedding, at which a one-eyed stranger thrust into a tree a sword that has since resisted every effort to pull it out (“Der Männer Sippe”). Sieglinde confesses her unhappiness to Siegmund. He embraces her and promises to free her from her forced marriage to Hunding. As moonlight floods the room, Siegmund compares their feelings to the marriage of love and spring (“Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond”). Sieglinde addresses him as “Spring” but asks if his father was really “Wolf,” as he said earlier. When Siegmund gives his father’s name as Wälse instead, Sieglinde recognizes him as her twin brother. Siegmund pulls the sword from the tree and claims Sieglinde as his bride, rejoicing in the union of the Wälsons.

ACT II

High in the mountains, Wotan, leader of the gods, tells his warrior daughter, the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, that she must defend his mortal son Siegmund in his upcoming battle with Hunding. She leaves joyfully to do what he has asked, as Fricka, Wotan’s wife and the goddess of marriage, appears. Fricka insists that Wotan must defend Hunding’s marriage rights against Siegmund. She ignores his argument that Siegmund could save the gods by winning back the Nibelung Alberich’s all-powerful ring from the dragon Fafner. When Wotan realizes he is caught in his own trap—he will lose his power if he does not enforce the law—he submits to his wife’s demands. After Fricka has left, the frustrated god tells the returning Brünnhilde about the theft of the Rhinegold and Alberich’s curse on it (“Als junger Liebe Lust mir verblich”). Brünnhilde is shocked to hear her father, his plans in ruins, order her to fight for Hunding.

Siegmund comforts his fearful bride and watches over her when she falls asleep. Brünnhilde appears to him as if in a vision, telling him he will soon die and go to Valhalla (“Siegmund! Sieh auf mich!”). He replies that he will not leave Sieglinde and threatens to kill himself and his bride if his sword has no power against Hunding. Moved by his steadfastness, Brünnhilde decides to defy Wotan and help Siegmund. Siegmund bids farewell to Sieglinde when he hears the approaching Hunding’s challenge. The two men fight and Siegmund is about to be victorious, when Wotan appears and shatters his sword, leaving him to be killed by Hunding. Brünnhilde escapes with Sieglinde and the broken sword. Wotan contemptuously

kills Hunding with a wave of his hand and leaves to punish Brünnhilde for her disobedience.

ACT III

Brünnhilde's eight warrior sisters—who have gathered on their mountaintop bearing slain heroes to Valhalla. They are surprised to see Brünnhilde arrive with a woman, Sieglinde. When they hear she is fleeing Wotan's wrath, they are afraid to hide her. Sieglinde is numb with despair until Brünnhilde tells her she bears Siegmund's child. Now eager to be saved, she takes the pieces of the sword from Brünnhilde, thanks her, and rushes off into the forest to hide from Wotan. When the god appears, he sentences Brünnhilde to become a mortal woman, silencing her sisters' objections by threatening to do the same to them. Left alone with her father, Brünnhilde pleads that in disobeying his orders she was really doing what he wished. Wotan will not give in: she must lie in sleep, a prize for any man who finds her. She asks to be surrounded in sleep by a wall of fire that only the bravest hero can pierce. Both sense this hero must be the child that Sieglinde will bear. Sadly renouncing his daughter ("Leb' wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind"), Wotan kisses Brünnhilde's eyes with sleep and mortality before summoning Loge, the god of fire, to encircle the rock. As flames spring up, the departing Wotan invokes a spell defying anyone who fears his spear to brave the flames.

Die Walküre Act 1, Scene 3 (1856)

(Siegmond alone. It has become quite dark. The hall is only lighted by a dull fire on the hearth.)

(Siegmond sinks on a bench by the fire and broods silently for some time in great agitation.)

Siegmond

A sword, my father foretold me,
should serve me in sorest need.
Swordless I come to my foe-man's house;
as a hostage here helpless I lie:
a wife saw I, wondrous and fair,
and blissful tremors seized my heart.

The woman who holds me chained,
who with sweet enchantment wounds,
in thrall is held by the man
who mocks his weaponless foe.
Wälse! Wälse! Where is thy sword?
The trusty sword,
that in fight shall serve me,
when from my bosom outbreaks
the fury my heart now bears?

(The fire falls together. From the flame which
springs up a bright light strikes on the spot in the ash
stem indicated by Sieglinde's look, on which a sword
hilt is now clearly seen.)

What gleameth there from out the gloom?
What a beam breaks from the ash tree's stem!
The sightless eye beholdeth a flash:
gay as laughter its light!
How the glorious gleam doth pierce my heart!
Is it the glance of the woman so fair
that there clinging behind her she left
as from the hall she passed?

(The fire now gradually sinks.)
Darkening shadow covered mine eyes,
but her glance's beam fell on me then:
bringing me warmth and day.
Blessing came with the sun's bright rays;
the gladdening splendor encircled my head,
till behind mountains it sank.

(Another faint gleam from the fire.)
Once more, ere day went hence,
fell a gleam on me here;
e'en the ancient ash tree's stem
shone forth with a golden glow:
now pales the splendor, the light dies out;
darkening shadow gathers around me:
deep in my breast alone yet glimmers a dim,
dying glow.

(The fire is quite extinguished: complete darkness.)
(The door at the side opens softly. Sieglinde, in a

white garment, comes out and advances lightly but quickly toward the hearth.)

Sieglinde

Sleep'st thou, guest?

Siegmund

(in joyful surprise)

Who whispers there?

Sieglinde

(with furtive haste)

It is I: list to my words!

In deepest sleep lies Hunding;

o'ercome by a slumberous draught:

now, in the night, save thy life!

Siegmund

(interrupting her passionately)

Thy coming is life!

Sieglinde

A weapon let me now shew thee:

o might'st thou make it thine!

The first of heroes then might I call thee:

to the strongest alone was it decreed.

O heed thou well what I now tell thee!

The kinsmen gathered here in the hall,

to honor the wedding of Hunding:

the woman he chose,

by him unwooed, miscreants gave him to wife.

Sad I sat the while they were drinking;

a stranger entered the hall:

an old man clad all in grey

low down hung his hat,

and one of his eyes was hidden;

at the other's flash fear came on all men

when their eyes met its threat'ning glance:

yet on me lingered his look with sweet yearning

regret,

sorrow and solace in one.
On me glancing, he glared on the others,
as a sword he swung in his hands;
which then he struck in the ash tree stem;
to the hilt buried it lies:
but one man might win the weapon,
he who could draw it forth.
Of all the heroes, though bravely they labored,
not one the weapon could win;
guests came hither and guests departed;
the strongest tugged at the steel ...
not a whit it stirred in the stem:
there cleaves in silence the sword.
Then knew I who he was
who in sorrow greeted me: I know too
who alone shall draw the sword from the stem.
O might I today find here the friend;
come from afar to the saddest wife:
what e'er I have suffered in bitterest pain,
what e'er I have borne in shame and disgrace,
sweet were my vengeance, all were atoned for!
Regained were then whate'er I had lost,
and won, too, were then all I have wept for,
found the delivering friend,
my hero held in my arms!

Siegmond

(embracing Sieglinde with ardor)
Thee, woman most blest, holds now the friend,
for weapon and wife decreed!
Hot in my breast burns now the oath
that weds me ever to thee.
Whate'er I have sought in thee now I see;
in thee all that has failed me is found!
Though thou wert shamed and woe was my lot;
though I was scorned and dishonored wert thou:
joyful revenge now laughs in our gladness!
Loud laugh I in fullest delight,
holding embraced all thy glory,

Sieglinde

Ha, who went? who entered here?

(The door remains open: outside a glorious spring night; the full moon shines in, throwing its bright light on the pair, so that suddenly they can fully and clearly see each other.)

Sigmund

(in gentle ecstasy)

No one went, but one has come:

laughing, the spring enters the hall!

(Sigmund draws Sieglinde to him on the couch with tender vehemence, so that she sits beside him.

Increasing brilliance of the moonlight.)

Winter storms have waned in the moon of May,
with tender radiance sparkles the spring;

on balmy breezes, light and lovely,

weaving wonders, on he floats;

o'er wood and meadow wafts his breathing,

widely open laughs his eye:

in blithesome song of birds resounds his voice,

sweetest fragrance breathes he forth:

from his ardent blood bloom out all joy-giving
blossoms,

bud and shoot spring up by his might.

With gentle weapons' charm he forces the world;

winter and storm yield to his strong attack:

assailed by his hardy strokes now

the doors are shattered that, fast and

defiant, once held us parted from him.

To clasp his sister hither he flew;

'twas love that lured the spring:

within our bosoms deeply she hid;

now gladly she laughs to the light.

The bride and sister is freed by the brother;

in ruin lies what held them apart;

joyfully greet now the loving pair:

made one are love and spring!

Sieglinde

Thou art the spring
that I have so longed for
in frosty winter's spell.
My heart greeted thee with blisfullest dread,
as thy look at first on me lightened.
Strange has seemed all I e'er saw,
friendless all that was round me;
like far off things and unknown,
all that ever came near.
When thou camest all was made clear:
as my eyes on thee fell, mine wert thou only:
all I hid in my heart, all I am;
bright as the day dawned on my sight,
like echoing tones struck on my ear,
as in winter's frosty desert
my eyes first beheld the friend.
(She hangs in rapture on his neck and gazes
closely into his face.)

Siegmond

(with transport)
O sweetest enchantment! woman most blest!

Sieglinde

(close to his eyes)
O let me closer to thee still press me
and see more clearly the holy light
that forth from eyes and face doth break
and so sweetly sways all my sense.

Siegmond

Beneath spring's moon
shinest thou bright;
wrapped in glory of waving hair:
what has ensnared me now well I know
in rapture feasteth my look.

Sieglinde

(pushes the locks back from his brow and gazes at him with astonishment)
How broadly shines thy open brow,
the wandering veins in thy temples entwine!
I tremble with the rapture of my delight!
A marvel wakes my remembrance:
my eyes beheld thee of old
whom first I saw today!

Siegmond

A love-dream wakes in me the thought:
in fiery longing can'st thou to me!

Sieglinde

The stream has shewn me my pictured face,
and now again I behold it:
as from the water it rose,
show'st thou my image anew!

Siegmond

Thou art the image I held in my heart.

Sieglinde

(quickly turning her eyes away from him)
O hush! again the voice is sounding:
I heard it, methinks, once as a child—
but no! of late I have heard it,
(*excitedly*) yes, when the echo's sound
gave back my voice in the woods.

Siegmond

O loveliest song that sounds as I listen!

Sieglinde

(again gazing into his eyes)
Thine eyes' bright glow erewhile on me shone:
the stranger so glanced, greeting the wife,
as he soothed with his look her grief.
By his glance then knew him his child;
almost by his name did I call him!

(pausing)

Wehwalt art thou in truth?

Siegmond

Ne'er call me so, since thou art mine:
now won is the highest rapture!

Sieglinde

And Friedmund may'st thou gladly not name thee?

Siegmond

Call me, thyself,
as thou wouldst I were called:
my name I take but from thee!

Sieglinde

Yet calledst thou Wolfe thy father?

Siegmond

Wolf was he to fearful foxes!
But he whose eye proudly did glisten,
as, fairest one, glistens thine own, of old,
Wälse was named.

Sieglinde

(beside herself)
Was Wälse thy father, and art thou a Wälsung?
Struck was for thee the sword in the stem,
so let me now name thee as I have loved thee:
Siegmond, so name I thee!

Siegmond

(springs up)
Siegmond call me for Siegmund am I!
Be witness this sword I hold now undaunted!
Wälse foretold me in sorest need
this should I find: I grasp it now!
Holiest love's most highest need,
love-longing's piercing passionate need,
burning bright in my breast,

drives to deeds and death:

Nothung! Nothung! so name I thee, sword.

Nothung! Nothung! conquering steel!

Shew now thy biting, severing blade!

come forth from thy scabbard to me!

(With a powerful effort Siegmund pulls the sword from the tree, and shows it to the astonished and enraptured Sieglinde.)

Siegmund, the Walsung, seest thou here!

As bride-gift he brings thee this sword;

so wins for him the woman most blest;

from foe-man's house thus bears her away.

Far from here follow me now,

forth to the laughing house of spring:

there guards thee Nothung the sword,

when Siegmund lies captive to love!

(He has embraced her in order to draw her away with him.)

Sieglinde

(in highest excitement tears herself away and stands before him.)

Art thou Siegmund, standing before me?

Sieglinde am I, who for thee longed:

thine own twin sister thou winnest at once with the sword!

(She throws herself on his breast.)

Siegmund

Bride and sister

be to thy brother:

then flourish the Walsungs for aye!

(He draws her to him with passionate fervor. The curtain falls rapidly.)

Intermission 15 minutes

Die Walküre (1856)

So ist denn aus

Fricka

Is all, then, at end with the glory of godhood
since thou begatt'st the riotous Wälsungs?
I now speak it; pierced is thy thought?
Nought worth is to thee the race of eternal!
Away thou castest what once thou didst honor;
thou breakest the bonds
thou thyself hast ordained,
loosest laughing all heaven's hold
that in wanton freedom may flourish
this insolent twin-born pair,
of thy falseness the unholy fruit.
O why wail I o'er wedlock and vows
which thyself thou first hast profaned.
The truest wife thou still hast betrayed;
never a deep and never a height
but there turned thirsting ever thy looks,
as thy changeful humor allured thee,
and stung my heart with thy scorn.
Saddened in spirit, must I behold thee
fare to the fight with the graceless maidens,
whom lawless love hath given to thee:
for thy wife still fearedst thou so,
that the Valkyries' band
and Brünnhild' herself,
thine own wish's bride,
to the goddess as handmaids thou gav'st.
But now, when unwonted names have ensnared thee,
as "Wälse" wolfish in woods thou hast wandered;
now that to deepest disgrace thou hast fallen,
to foster mortals begot of thy falseness:
shamed by whelps of a wolf thou
fling'st at thy feet, too, thy wife!
Then finish thy work! Fill now the cup!
The betrayed one trample beneath thee!

DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG
Composed in 1868

ACT I

Nuremberg, 16th century. At St. Katherine's Church, the visiting young knight Walther von Stolzing approaches Eva, daughter of the wealthy goldsmith Pogner, who is attending mass with her companion, Magdalene. Eva tells her admirer that she is to be engaged the following day to the winner of a song contest held by the local guild of mastersingers. David, Magdalene's sweetheart and apprentice to the cobbler and mastersinger Hans Sachs, explains the rules of song composing to Walther, who is surprised by the complicated ins and outs of mastersinging. Meanwhile David's fellow apprentices set up for a preliminary trial singing. The masters arrive, including Eva's father, and Walther expresses his desire to become a mastersinger in order to ask for Eva's hand. The town clerk Beckmesser, a spiteful pedant who also wants to marry Eva, is immediately suspicious of the young knight. As proof that tradesmen value art, Pogner offers his daughter's hand as the prize for the next day's contest and explains that she can reject the winner, but must marry a mastersinger or can marry no one. Walther introduces himself and describes his natural, self-taught methods of musical composition, provoking mocking comments from Beckmesser. For his trial song, Walther sings an impulsive tune in praise of love and spring, breaking many of the masters' rules. Beckmesser vigorously keeps a count of his errors. Rejected by the masters, Walther leaves, while Sachs wonders about the unexpected appeal of Walther's song.

ACT II

That evening in front of Pogner's house, David tells Magdalene about Walther's misfortune and Eva gets the disappointing news from Magdalene. Across the street, Sachs sits down to work in his doorway, but the memory of Walther's song distracts him. Eva appears, hoping to learn more about the knight's trial. When Sachs mentions that Beckmesser hopes to win her the next day, she suggests she wouldn't be unhappy if Sachs himself won the contest. Sachs, who has known Eva since she was a child, responds with paternal affection. Asked about Walther, he pretends to disapprove of the young man, which leads Eva to reveal her true feelings and to run off. In the street, she is met by Walther who convinces her to elope. The two hide as a night watchman passes. Sachs, who has overheard their conversation, decides to help the lovers but prevent their flight. He lights the street with a lantern, forcing Eva and Walther to stay put. Meanwhile Beckmesser arrives

to serenade Eva. As he is about to begin, Sachs launches into a cheerful cobbler's song, much to the clerk's irritation, claiming he needs to finish his work. They agree that both would make progress if Beckmesser were to sing while Sachs marked any broken rules of style with his cobbler's hammer. Beckmesser finally sings his song, directing it at Magdalene who is impersonating Eva at a window of Pogner's house. Sachs frequently interrupts with hammer strokes, to Beckmesser's mounting anger. Walther and Eva observe the scene from their hiding place, bewildered at first, then amused. Confusion increases when David appears and attacks Beckmesser for apparently wooing Magdalene. Finally the night-shirted neighbors, roused from sleep, join in the general tumult until the sound of the night watchman's horn disperses them. Pogner leads Eva inside while Sachs drags Walther and David into his shop. The night watchman passes through the suddenly deserted street.

ACT III

The next morning in Sachs's workshop, David apologizes for his unruly behavior. Alone, Sachs reflects on the world's madness. Walther arrives to tell Sachs of a wondrous dream he had. Recognizing a potential prize song, Sachs takes down the words and helps Walther to fashion them according to the rules of mastersinging. When they leave to dress for the contest, Beckmesser appears. He notices Walther's poem and, mistaking it for one of Sachs's own, pockets it. The returning cobbler tells him to keep it. Certain of his victory with a song written by Sachs, Beckmesser leaves. Now Eva arrives, pretending there is something wrong with her shoe. Walther returns, dressed for the festival, and repeats his prize song for her. Eva is torn between her love for Walther and her affection for Sachs, but the older man turns her towards the younger. When Magdalene arrives, Sachs promotes David to journeyman and asks Eva to bless the new song. All five reflect on their happiness—Sachs's tinged with gentle regret—then leave for the contest. Guilds and citizens assemble in a meadow outside the city. The masters enter and the people cheer Sachs, who responds with a moving address in praise of art and the coming contest. Beckmesser is the first to sing. Nervously trying to fit Walther's verses to his own music he makes nonsense of the words, earning laughter from the crowd. He furiously turns on Sachs and runs off. Walther then steps forward and delivers the song. Entranced, the people proclaim him the winner, but Walther refuses the masters' necklace. Sachs convinces him to accept—tradition and its upholders must be honored, as must those who create innovation. Youth and age are reconciled, Walther has won Eva, and the people once again hail Sachs.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (1868)

O Sachs! Mein Freund

Eva

O Sachs! My Friend! You dear man!
How can I possibly repay you?
What, without your love,
What would I be without you?
If you had not awoken me,
I would have always remained a child!
Through you I have won
What people prize;
Through you I learned the workings of the spirit
by you awoken,
only through you did I think
nobly, freely, and boldly;
you made me bloom!
Yes, dear Master, scold me if you will;
but I was on the right path,
for, if I had the choice,
I would choose none but you;
you would have been my husband,
I would have given the prize to none but you.
But now I am chosen
for unknown torment,
and if I am married today,
then I had no choice:
that was necessity, compulsion!
You yourself, my Master, were dismayed.

SIEGFRIED

Composed in 1871

ACT I

In his cave in the forest, the dwarf Mime forges a sword for his foster son Siegfried. He hates Siegfried but hopes that the boy will kill the dragon Fafner, who guards the Nibelungs' treasure, so that Mime can take the all-powerful ring from it. Siegfried arrives and smashes the new sword, raging at Mime's

incompetence. Having realized that he can't be the dwarf's son, as there is no physical resemblance between them, he demands to know who his parents were. For the first time, Mime tells Siegfried how he found his mother, Sieglinde, in the woods, who died giving birth to him. When he shows Siegfried the fragments of his father's sword, Nothung, Siegfried orders Mime to repair it for him and rushes out.

As Mime sinks down in despair, a stranger enters. It is Wotan, lord of the gods, in human disguise as the Wanderer. He challenges the fearful Mime to a riddle competition, in which the loser forfeits his head. The Wanderer easily answers Mime's three questions about the Nibelungs, the giants, and the gods. Mime in turn knows the answers to the traveler's first two questions but gives up in terror when asked who will repair the sword Nothung. The Wanderer admonishes Mime for enquiring about faraway matters when he knows nothing about what closely concerns him. Then he departs, leaving the dwarf's head to "him who knows no fear" and who will re-forged the magic blade.

When Siegfried returns demanding his father's sword, Mime tells him that he can't repair it. He vainly tries to explain the concept of fear to the boy and, in order to teach him, proposes a visit to Fafner's cave. Siegfried agrees and enthusiastically begins to forge the sword himself. While he works, Mime prepares a sleeping potion to give to Siegfried once he has killed Fafner. Flashing the finished sword, Siegfried smashes the anvil in half and runs off into the forest.

ACT II

The same night, Mime's brother Alberich is hiding by the entrance to Fafner's cave, obsessed with winning back the ring for himself. The Wanderer enters and tells the Nibelung to watch out for Mime. He then wakes Fafner and warns him that a young hero is on his way to kill him. Unimpressed, the dragon goes back to sleep.

As Dawn breaks, Mime and Siegfried arrive. Caught up in the peaceful beauty of the woods, Siegfried thinks about his parents. He tries to imitate the song of a bird on a reed pipe but fails and blows his horn instead. This awakens Fafner, and in the ensuing fight Siegfried kills the dragon. With his dying words, Fafner warns the boy of the destructive power of the treasure. When Siegfried accidentally touches a drop of Fafner's blood to his lips, he suddenly understands the singing of the bird, which directs him to the gold in the cave. Alberich and Mime appear quarreling but withdraw as Siegfried returns with the ring and the Tarnhelm. The bird warns Siegfried not to trust Mime, and when the dwarf offers him the potion, Siegfried kills him. The bird then tells Siegfried of a beautiful woman named Brünnhilde, asleep on a mountain surrounded by fire. He sets out to find her.

ACT III

High on a mountain pass, the Wanderer summons Erda, goddess of the Earth, to learn the gods' fate. She evades his questions, and he resigns himself to the impending end of the gods' reign. His hope now rests with Brünnhilde and Siegfried. When Siegfried approaches, making fun of the god whom he takes for a simple old man, the Wanderer attempts to block his path. With a stroke of his sword, Siegfried shatters the Wanderer's spear—the same spear that smashed Nothing to pieces years before. Defeated, the Wanderer retreats. Siegfried reaches the mountaintop where Brünnhilde sleeps. Never having seen a woman before, he thinks he has discovered a man. When he removes Brünnhilde's armor, he is overwhelmed by the sight of her beauty and finally realizes the meaning of fear. Mastering his emotions, he awakens her with a kiss. Hailing the daylight, Brünnhilde is overjoyed to learn that it is Siegfried who has brought her back to life. She tries to resist his declarations of passion, realizing that earthly love must end her immortal life, but finally gives in and joins Siegfried in praise of love.

Siegfried (1871)

Notung! Nothing!

Siegfried

(during the following blows up the fire
with the bellows)

Notung! Notung!

Sword of my need!

What mighty blow once broke you?

I've filed to splinters

your shining steel;

the fire has melted and fused them.

Hoho! Hoho!

Hohi! Hohi! Hoho!

Bellows, blow!

Brighten the glow!

Wild in the woodlands

grew that tree

I felled in the forest glade;

I burnt to ashes

branches and trunk;

on the hearth it lies in a heap.

Hoho! Hoho!
Hohi! Hohi! Hoho!
Bellows, blow!
Brighten the glow!
The blackened charcoal
so bravely burns;
how bright and fair its glow!
A shower of sparks
is shooting on high:
Hohi! Hoho! Hohi!
and fuses the splintered steel.
Hoho! Hoho!
Hohi! Hohi! Hoho!
Bellows, blow!
Brighten the glow!

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG **Composed in 1874**

PROLOGUE

At night on the Valkyries' rock, the three Norns, daughters of Erda, weave the rope of destiny. They tell how Wotan ordered the world ash tree, from which his spear was once cut, to be felled and its wood piled around Valhalla. The burning of the pyre will mark the end of the old order. Suddenly the rope breaks. Their wisdom ended, the Norns descend into the earth.

Dawn breaks and Siegfried and Brünnhilde emerge. Having cast protective spells on him, she sends him into the world to do heroic deeds. As a pledge of his love, Siegfried gives her the ring he took from the dragon Fafner, and she offers her horse, Grane, in return. Siegfried sets off on his travels.

ACT I

In the hall of the Gibichungs on the banks of the Rhine, Gunther and Gutrune discuss the royal family's diminishing glory with their half-brother, Hagen. Hagen advises them to strengthen their rule through marriage, suggesting Brünnhilde as Gunther's bride and Siegfried as Gutrune's husband. Since only the strongest hero can pass through the fire on Brünnhilde's rock, Hagen proposes a daring plan: a potion will make Siegfried forget Brünnhilde and fall in love with Gutrune. To win her as his wife, he will claim Brünnhilde for Gunther. When Siegfried's horn is

heard from the river, Hagen calls him ashore. Gutrune offers the potion to Siegfried, who salutes Brünnhilde as he takes the cup but immediately confesses his love for Gutrune after he has drunk. When Gunther describes his chosen bride, Siegfried offers to walk through the flames for him, using the Tarnhelm to transform himself into Gunther. The two men take an oath of blood brotherhood and set out on their quest. Hagen remains behind to guard the hall.

The Valkyrie Waltraute, horrified by the impending destruction of Valhalla, arrives at Brünnhilde's rock to ask for her sister's help: The only way to save the gods, she says, is for Brünnhilde to give the ring back to the Rhinemaidens, its rightful owners. Brünnhilde refuses, declaring that Siegfried's love is more important to her than the fate of the gods. Waltraute leaves in despair. When Siegfried's horn is heard in the distance, Brünnhilde is overjoyed at his return. Her happiness quickly turns into confusion and terror when a strange figure appears before her, claiming her as Gunther's bride and tearing the ring from her hand.

ACT II

As Hagen sits sleeping outside the Gibichungs' hall at night, Alberich appears as if in a dream and reminds his son that he has to win back the ring. Dawn breaks and Siegfried arrives. Hagen summons the Gibichungs to welcome Gunther, who enters with the humiliated Brünnhilde. When she sees Siegfried, she furiously accuses him of betraying her. Still under the spell of the potion, Siegfried tells her he is to marry Gutrune and that she will become Gunther's wife. Noticing the ring on Siegfried's finger, Brünnhilde demands to know who gave it to him, since the night before it was taken from her, supposedly by Gunther. Accusing Siegfried of having stolen the ring, Brünnhilde declares he is her husband. Siegfried protests, swearing on Hagen's spear that he has done no wrong. He dismisses Brünnhilde's accusations and leads Gutrune and the men away to celebrate.

Brünnhilde can only think of vengeance. Hagen offers to kill Siegfried, but she explains that he is invincible: she has protected him with magic—except for his back, which he would never turn to an enemy. Gunther hesitates to join the conspiracy of murder but finally gives in.

ACT III

Siegfried, separated from his hunting party, meets the three Rhinemaidens by the banks of the river. They ask him to return the ring to them and he almost agrees, but when they tell him of Alberich's curse he decides to keep it as proof of his fearlessness. The Rhinemaidens predict his imminent death and disappear as Hagen, Gunther, and the other hunters arrive. Encouraged by Hagen, Siegfried tells

of his youth and his life with Mime, the forging of the sword Nothung, and his fight with the dragon. While he is talking, Hagen offers him wine containing an antidote to the potion. His memory restored, Siegfried describes how he walked through the fire and woke Brünnhilde. At the mention of her name, Hagen stabs Siegfried with his spear and tells the shocked Gunther that he avenged a false oath. Siegfried remembers Brünnhilde with his last words and dies.

Gutrune wakes from a bad dream, wondering what has happened to Siegfried. When his body is brought in, she accuses Gunther of murder, who replies that Hagen committed the deed. The two men fight about the ring and Gunther is killed. As Hagen reaches for the ring, the dead Siegfried threateningly raises his arm, terrifying everyone. Brünnhilde enters and calmly orders a funeral pyre to be built on the banks of the Rhine. She denounces the gods for their guilt in Siegfried's death, takes the ring from his hand and promises it to the Rhinemaidens. Then she lights the pyre and leaps into the flames. The river overflows its banks and destroys the hall. Hagen, trying to get to the ring, is dragged into the water by the Rhinemaidens, who joyfully reclaim their gold. In the distance, Valhalla and the gods are seen engulfed in flames.

Götterdämmerung (1874)

Höre mit Sinn

Waltraute

Hearken with heed to what I tell thee!
Since from thee Wotan turned him,
to battle no more hath he sent us:
dazed with fear, bewildered we rode to the field;
Walhall's heroes no more may meet Warfather.
Lonely to horse, without pause or rest,
as Wand'rer he swept thro' the world.
Home came he at last;
in his hand holding the spear-shaft's splinters:
a hero had struck it asunder.
With silent sign
Walhall's heroes sent he to hew
the world-ash-tree in pieces.
The sacred stem at his command was riven
and raised in a heap round about the hall of the
blest.
The holy host called he together;
the god on his throne took his place.

In dismay and fear at his word they assembled;
around him ranged, the hall was filled by his heroes.
So sits he, speaks no word,
on high enthroned grave and mute;
the shattered spear-shaft fast in his grasp;
Holda's apples tastes he no more.
Awestruck and shrinking sit the gods in silence.
Forth on quest from Walhall sent he his ravens;
if with good tidings back the messengers come,
then forever shall smiles of joy
gladden the face of the god.
Round his knees entwining cower we Valkyires;
nought recks he nor knows of our anguish:
we all are consumed
by terror and ne'er-ending fear.
Upon his breast weeping I pressed me;
(hesitating) then soft grew his look;
he remembered, Brünnhilde, thee!
He closed his eyes, deeply sighing,
and as in slumber spoke he the words:
if e'er the river maidens
win from her hand again the ring,
from the curse's load
released were god and world!

PARSIFAL
Composed in 1882

ACT I

Near the sanctuary of the Holy Grail, the old knight Gurnemanz and two sentries wake and perform their morning prayers, while other knights prepare a bath for their ailing ruler Amfortas, who suffers from an incurable wound. Suddenly, Kundry—a mysterious, ageless woman who serves as the Grail's messenger—appears. She has brought medicine for Amfortas. The knights carry in the king. He reflects on a prophecy that speaks of his salvation by a “pure fool, enlightened by compassion,” then is borne off. When the esquires ask about Klingsor, a sorcerer who is trying to destroy the knights of the Grail, Gurnemanz tells the story of Amfortas's wound: The Holy Grail—the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper—and the Spear that pierced his body on the cross were given into the care

of Titirel, Amfortas's father, who assembled a company of knights to guard the relics. Klingsor, wishing to join the brotherhood, tried to overcome his sinful thoughts by castrating himself, but the brotherhood rejected him. Seeking vengeance, he built a castle across the mountains with a magic garden full of alluring women to entrap the knights. Amfortas set out to defeat Klingsor, but was himself seduced by a terribly beautiful woman. Klingsor stole the Holy Spear from Amfortas and used it to stab him. The wound can only be healed by the innocent youth of which the prophecy has spoken. Suddenly, a swan plunges to the ground, struck dead by an arrow. The knights drag in a young man, who boasts of his archery skills. He is ashamed when Gurnemanz rebukes him, but he cannot explain his violent act or even state his name. All he remembers is his mother, Herzeleide, or "Heart's Sorrow." Kundry tells the youth's history: His father died in battle, and his mother reared the boy in a forest, but now she too is dead. Gurnemanz leads the nameless youth to the banquet of the Grail, wondering if he may be the prophecy's fulfillment.

The knights assemble in the Hall of the Grail. Titirel bids Amfortas uncover the Grail to give strength to the brotherhood, but Amfortas refuses: The sight of the chalice increases his anguish. Titirel orders the esquires to proceed, and the chalice casts its glow about the hall. The nameless youth watches in astonishment but understands nothing. The ceremony ended, Gurnemanz, disappointed and angry, drives him away as an unseen voice reiterates the prophecy.

ACT II

At his bewitched fortress, Klingsor, the necromancer, summons Kundry—who, under his spell, is forced to lead a double existence—and orders her to seduce the young fool. Having secured the Spear, Klingsor now seeks to destroy the youth, whom he knows can save the knights of the Grail. Hoping for redemption from her torment, Kundry protests in vain.

The nameless youth enters Klingsor's enchanted garden. Flower maidens beg for his love, but he resists them. The girls withdraw as Kundry, transformed into a beautiful young woman, appears and addresses him by his name—Parsifal. He realizes that his mother once called him so in a dream. Kundry begins her seduction by revealing memories of Parsifal's childhood and finally kisses him. Parsifal suddenly feels Amfortas's pain and understands compassion: He realizes that it was Kundry who brought about Amfortas's downfall and that it is his mission to save the brotherhood of the Grail. Astonished at his transformation, Kundry tries to arouse Parsifal's pity: She tells him of the curse that condemns her to lead an unending life of constantly alternating rebirths ever since she laughed at Christ on the cross. But Parsifal resists her. She curses him to wander hopelessly in

search of Amfortas and the Grail and calls on Klingsor for help. The magician appears and hurls the Holy Spear at Parsifal, who miraculously catches it, causing Klingsor's realm to perish.

ACT III

Gurnemanz, now very old and living as a hermit near the Grail's sanctuary, finds the penitent Kundry in the forest and awakes her from a deathlike sleep. An unknown knight approaches, and Gurnemanz soon recognizes him as Parsifal, bearing the Holy Spear. Parsifal describes his years of wandering, trying to find his way back to Amfortas and the Grail. Gurnemanz tells him that he has come at the right time: Amfortas, longing for death, has refused to uncover the Grail. The brotherhood is suffering, and Titurel has died. Kundry washes Parsifal's feet, and Gurnemanz blesses him and proclaims him king. As his first task, Parsifal baptizes Kundry. He is struck by the beauty of nature around them, and Gurnemanz explains that this is the spell of Good Friday. The distant tolling of bells announces the funeral of Titurel, and the three make their way to the sanctuary. Knights carry the Grail, Amfortas, and Titurel's coffin into the Hall of the Grail. Amfortas is unable to perform the rite. He begs the knights to kill him and thus end his anguish—when suddenly Parsifal appears. He touches Amfortas's side with the Spear and heals the wound. Uncovering the Grail, he accepts the homage of the knights as their redeemer and king and blesses them. The reunion of the Grail and Spear has enlightened and rejuvenated the community.

Parsifal (1882)

Nur eine Waffe taugt

Parsifal

Be whole, absolved and atoned!
For I now will perform your task.
O blessed be your suffering,
that gave pity's mighty power
and purest wisdom's might
to the timorous fool!

(Parsifal steps towards the centre,
holding the Spear aloft before him)

I bring back to you
the holy Spear!

(All gaze in supreme rapture
at the uplifted Spear
to whose point Parsifal raises
his eyes and continues ecstatically)

O supreme joy of this miracle!
This that could heal your wound
I see pouring with holy blood
yearning for that kindred fount
which flows and wells within the Grail.
No more shall it be hidden:
uncover the Grail, open the shrine!

(Parsifal mounts the altar steps, takes the Grail from the shrine already opened by the squires, and falls to his knees before it in silent prayer and contemplation. The Grail gradually glows with a soft light. Increasing darkness below and growing illumination from above.)