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Richard Wagner's

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

ACT TWO COMPLETE

FRIDA LEIDER
LAURITZ MELCHIOR
HERBERT JANSSEN
KERSTIN THORBORG
LUDWIG WEBER
EMANUEL LIST
EDUARD HABICH
MARIA NEZADAL

Chorus & Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

14, 29 May 1936



Also Act I - Hagen's Hier sitz to end of the act
Act III - Brunnhilde's Immolation



Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

GÖTTERDÄMERUNG

Act II

Frida Leider	Brünnhilde
Lauritz Melchior	Siegfried
Herbert Janssen	Gunther
Kerstin Thorborg	. Waltraute
Ludwig Weber/Emanuel List	Hagen
Eduard Habich	Alberich
Maria Nezadal	Gutrune

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden conducted by

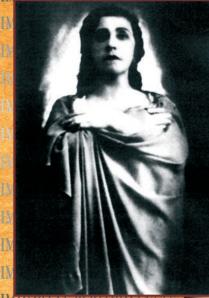
SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

14, 29 May 1936

Also

Act I – Hagen's Hier sitz to end of the act • Act III – Brünnhilde's Immolation

Frida Leider: Scenes from Die Walküre and Siegfried



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GÖTTERDÄMERUNG

CD 1 [00:00]

Act I, Scene 2 Hier sitz ich zur Wacht (Hagen [Weber]) 0:00 Orchestral passage Act I. Scene 3 Altgewohntes Geräusch (Brünnhilde, Waltraute) Höre mit Sinn (Waltraute) Welch' banger Träume Mären (Brünnhilde, Waltraute) Brünnhild! Ein Freier kam (Siegfried, Brünnhilde) Act II, Scene 1 Orchestral introduction Schläfst du, Hagen (Alberich, Hagen [Weber]) Der Ewigen Macht (Hagen [Weber], Alberich) Orchestral passage Act II. Scene 2 Hoiho, Hagen! Müder Mann! (Siegfried, Hagen [Weber], Gutrune) Act II. Scene 3 Hoiho! Hoihohoho! Ihr Gibichsmannen (Hagen [Weber], vassals) Act II. Scene 4 Heil dir. Gunther! (vassals) CD 2 [00:00] Act II. Scene 4 cont. Brünnhilde, die hehrste Frau (Gunther, vassals) Was müht Brünnhildes Blick? (Siegfried, Brünnhilde, vassals, Hagen [Weber], Gunther) Ha! Dieser war es (Brünnhilde, Siegfried, Hagen [List], Gutrune, vassals, women, Gunther) Helle Wehr! Heilige Waffe! (Siegfried, Brünnhilde, vassals) Welches Unholds List (Brünnhilde, Hagen [List], Gunther)

Dir hilft kein Hirn (Hagen [List], Gunther, Brünnhilde)

- · Series Producer: Jonathan Wearn
- Re-creation & Restoration: Richard Caniell, IPRMS, British Columbia, Canada
- Source: Immortal Performances Recorded Music Society, a Non-profit, Educational Organization,
 British Columbia and Irwin Elkins, Omega Opera Archives.
- Equipment: This recording was mastered from original source material using a 24bit Prism A to D Converter,
 Cedar DeClicking and DeCrackling equipment and finally Noise Shaped to 16bits using the Prism SNS 2
 system. No filtering, compression, limiting or any other digital intervention has been used on this recording.
- Final master preparation: P. I. Reynolds Mastering, PO Box 5092, Colchester CO1 IFN, UK
- Design: Paul Brooks, Design & Print Oxford
- Series consultant: Irwin Elkins
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0:00

Though much work was expended to draw the best sonics from the tape transfer of the tests which we received in the 1980s, there is a poor join (CD-1, track 4, at approximately 8:33) which could not be corrected.

We wish to convey our appreciation for the generous help of Nathan Brown, that of the late Keith Hardwick and the notes of William Shaman, William Collin and Calvin Goodwin in their invaluable volumes on Edward J. Smith (Greenwood Press), in the preparation of this Guild release.

The recording of the Immolation - with Frida Leider and Elfriede Maherr-Wagner (as Gutrune) — derives from the 1928 recording Leider made with the Berlin State Opera Orchestra, conducted by Leo Blech, for the Gramophone Company (D-2025-26). However, the orchestral finale was omitted between Brünnhilde's final lines and the Redemption Motif that concludes the opera. This is a disappointing way to the end Wagner's music drama so I have included a full orchestral finale taken from a recording long in our archive (received as part of a bequest from the Aldrich Memorial Sound Library). The tape bears no identification of what engineer is responsible nor the disc source for the orchestral finale, nor am I able to identify the conductor and orchestra. Nevertheless, the tape sounds like the transfer of the original 78s with no intervention. However, the discs of the orchestral finale were obviously pitted (which produces an occasional pock-like sound in the bass end). Nevertheless, they offered, to my ears, better, more solid, natural sound than the LP issues I've heard. (I've not heard any CD issues.) In any event, I believe the untruncated Leider recording of the Immolation is the fitting conclusion to her glorious singing of Brünnhilde and to Wagner's stupendous music drama. So did the famed Keith Hardwick, who added the orchestral conclusion conducted by Albert Coates in his issue of the Leider Immolation in the EMI album Wagner on Record.

The bonus recordings provide an opportunity to hear more of Leider as Brünnhilde. The excerpt from *Walküre* Act III (Berlin State Opera Orchestra / Leo Blech, 1927) is taken from the Victor set M-27, disc 9175 A & B. The edits you hear are in the original recording.

The *Siegfried* recording (Berlin State Opera Orchestra / Leo Blech, 1927; Victor 7762/65) suffers from extremely shallow, thin recording. Leider stated she was not happy with the discs. Nonetheless, one can gain from these excerpts a sense of how she sounded onstage in the Beecham 1936 Ring Cycle, offering a stunning Brünnhilde: one for the ages.

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Richard Caniell

Act III. Immolation Scene

Frida Leider (Brünnhilde), Elfriede Maherr-Wagner (Gutrune) Berlin State Opera Orchestra / Leo Blech (1928)

- Schweigt eures Jammers jauchzenden Schwall! (Brünnhilde, Gutrune)
- 8 Starke Scheite schichtet mir dort (Brünnhilde)
- 9 Wisst ihr, wie das ward (Brünnhilde)
- Mein Erbe nun nehm ich zu eigen (Brünnhilde)
- Grane, mein Ross, sei mir gegrüsst! (Brünnhilde)
- Zurüch vom Ringe! (Hagen)

FRIDA LEIDER EXCERPTS

Die Walküre, Act III, Scene 3

Friedrich Schorr as Wotan

Berlin State Opera Orchestra / Leo Blech (1927)

War es so schämlich, was ich verbrach (Brünnhilde, Wotan)

Siegfried, Act III, Scene 3

Rudolf Laubenthal as Siefgried

Berlin State Opera Orchestra / Leo Blech (1927)

- Heil dir, Sonne! (Brünnhilde, Siegfried)
- Ewig war ich, ewig bin ich (Brünnhilde, Siegfried)

0:00

0:00

Cover photo: Leider as Brünnhilde, Immolation Scene

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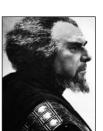
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Frida Leider as Brünnhilde



Herbert Janssen as Gunther



Ludwig Weber as Hagen



Lauritz Melchior as Siegfried



Kerstin Thorborg as Waltraute



Emanuel List as Hagen

in the 1936 performance could be heard. The recording of Weber stems from 1950 La Scala (Furtwängler) and Habich is taken from the Met 1936, conducted by Bodanzky. It was the comparatively hollow, noisy, tinny tone of the 1936 Bodanzky recording that dictated the nature of the sonics for the first scene. Thereafter, the sound steadily improves until it is quite superb for its age and source, especially during Hagen's Call to the Vassals. The Covent Garden 1936 performance begins a bit before Siegfried's greeting to Hagen. Following this, the 29th of May performance continues until List's voice is heard as Hagen (at Brünnhilde ku'hne Frau!) This stems from the performance of the 14 May 1936 and continues to the end of the act. (Weber can be heard in the conclusion of Act II in Guild's dream Götterdämmerung.)

The Gramophone Company Covent Garden preservations, recorded on 16" lacquers, were dubbed down to test pressings TT 2192-1 to TT 2192-16. These tests, drawn variously from the performances of 14 May and 29 May 1936, are as follows:

Act I

Hagen's Watch (29 May 1936) Scene 3 (14 May 1936, Thorborg sang Waltraute) [29 May E. Szantho sang Waltraute] Concluding moments (2 EA 5629-1) (1 June 1937)

Act II

Scene 1 - Alberich / Hagen (1936 / 1950) Scene 2 - Hagen - Gutrune - Siegfried (29 May 1936) Hagen's Call (29 May 1936) Remainder of the act (14 May 1936)

I first heard Hagen's Call to the Vassals sung by Weber when I was a boy (in the early 1940s) having acquired it on a Columbia 78 rpm disc (60947D). This was the first public performance disc I ever owned. I felt then that it was an electrifying experience in its exceptional energy and sense of vital, enacted drama and still do. The only change I made was to alter the prominence of a tenor in the chorus who, closest to the microphone, inflicted a phony 'Ho ho ho' twice throwing me out of the recording by its artificiality, so I buried his voice by adding another veil of the Vassals' merriment.

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45), Vienna (1945-60), London (before and after the war), Bayreuth (1951-60), and as a guest elsewhere in Europe and South America. With his huge and superbly steady voice he was particularly revered for his Hagen, Gurnemanz, and Ochs. Beginning in 1961 he taught at the Salzburg Mozarteum.

Emanuel List, 1890 (Vienna)-1962 (Vienna), was a mainstay first in Berlin (1923-33) and then at the Metropolitan (1933-50), and sang also in London, Berlin, and Salzburg: a noted Hunding, Hagen, and Ochs. Eduard Habich, 1890 (Kassel)-1960 (Berlin), made his career in Berlin (1910 until the late 1930s), Bayreuth (1911-31), London, and then in Chicago (1930-32) and at the Met (1935-37). His Alberich was famous for decades. Of Maria Nezadal's career little is currently available, save that she was praised for her "clear, strong voice" in this role, and that she was the wife Clemens Frankenstein, the Director of the Munich Opera from 1920 to 1934

Sir Thomas Beecham, 1879 (St. Helens)-1961 (London). A witty titan among English conductors and entrepreneurs, he founded numerous orchestras (the great London Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic among them), first brought Russian opera and the Diaghilev Ballet to England, and led some of the most exciting opera seasons in Covent Garden's history, including four *Ring Cycles* in the 1930s. During the war he conducted widely in America, and then continued multiple activities in England and elsewhere.

London Green

Recording Notes

In this album Guild presents all that remains, so far as we know, of the 1936 performance of *Götterdämmerung* conducted by Beecham. It begins with Hagen's *Hier sitz ich zur Wacht* (Weber) through to the end of Act I. Regrettably many years ago, the disc concluding Act I was lost. The recording breaks off after Brünnhilde's *jag'st du mich hin!* Leaving it in this state is unacceptable because it is ruinous to the musical, emotional, dramatic thrust of the work. Therefore I have brought Melchior in from the 1937 performance to conclude the act.

The second act no longer appears to exist in complete form. As a result the first scene of Act II had to be cobbled together so that the actual voices who sang Hagen and Alberich

Wagner GÖTTERDÄMERUNG

ike all of the great Western tragedies, the *Ring Cycle* encompasses, at least by implication, the whole of human experience: love in all of its manifestations, friendship, faith, courage, self-sacrifice in the name of an ideal—and then lust, greed, despair, betrayal, and vengeance. Lear, Hamlet, Coriolanus, Faustus, Oedipus, and the heroes of *The Oresteia*: these characters exemplify the complex essence of "humanness", as do the multiple protagonists of the *Ring Cycle*. Whether nominally they are gods, humans, or other beings, Wotan, Loge, Fricka, Brünnhilde, Seigmund, Sieglinde, Siegfried, Gunther, Fafner, Fasolt, Alberich, Mime, and Hagen plunge on through all the human relationships—the power struggles, the insatiable hungers, the moments of Promethean release and those of degradation, and finally death—that comprise the wealth (if that is the word) of human experience.

Their experience is quintessential, complex, and finally incomplete: do we ever come to an end of understanding Siegmund and Sieglinde, Wotan, Brünnhilde and Siegfried (in all of their guises!)—or Alberich and Hagen, for that matter? The drama may involve gods, myths, symbols, and allegorical figures, but the sensibility of its characters is always essentially human. Thus, what in the end makes a performance of *The Ring* "great" is not merely some sort of generic "grandeur", but the depth of human response quarried out of the cycle by its performers. How comprehensively, for example, can a Brünnhilde convey the sense of "verrat" (betrayal) as she repeatedly utters the word in *Götterdämmerung*? It's not at all a matter of overacting—or oversinging—but a matter of vocal color and placement, pronunciation, timing, and of course the imponderables: the qualities of the voice itself, the interplay between characters and with the orchestra, the responsiveness of the audience, and the illusion among them all that the specific response is

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happening for the first time. And of course there is no "definitive" version: the work is too great, too endlessly suggestive, for that. In any event, the generations have brought forth a procession of performances of the most extraordinary variety, great or not.

The characterizations preserved in this 1936 Covent Garden performance seem to me to capture the dramatic heart of Wagner's opera, which chronicles the final destruction of the attempt to maintain a civilization. One by one the vital relationships and alliances are destroyed by acts of the past. That is the curse on the thieves of the Rhinegold and then the (repeatedly stolen) Ring. At the start of our selection, Gunther and the duped Siegfried have joyfully set off to capture Brünnhilde and her Ring, while the bitter Alberich and Hagen secretly plan to filch it for themselves. Brünnhilde, happy at last with Siegfried, welcomes her sister Waltraute, assuming that her father Wotan at last has forgiven her, only to be told that her banishment has bereft the god of the capacity for action; he waits motionless, in effect, for the death of all the gods. When Waltraute pleads with her to save them all by renouncing the Ring, symbol of her love for Siegfried, she angrily refuses, dismissing her sister forever. Expecting the return of Siegfried, she sees only his "Gunther" disguise and is dragged off to Gibichung Hall for marriage to this stranger. She feels ultimately betrayed when led to believe that Siegfried has been a conscious part of this vile conspiracy. At the end of Act II, she and Gunther, encouraged by Hagen, call for the death of Siegfried.

One may question the qualities of Wagner's poetry, but as a librettist he knew exactly what he wanted: a series of confrontations that eventually reveal the deadly illusions surrounding all human relationships. *Götterdämmerung* is a series of increasingly agonizing revelations ending in an actual immolation and an earthly cataclysm resolved only by Brünnhilde's realization of the truth and the restoration of the Ring to the Rhine, in a world now bereft of the old gods and, presumably, awaiting the new.

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Biographies

Frida Leider. 1888 (Berlin)-1975 (Berlin). After training in Berlin she made her debut in Halle as Venus, sang with smaller companies and in Hamburg, and then in Berlin (1923-38) in Mozart, Verdi, Strauss, and of course Wagner, in which she gained her supreme reputation. Guest appearances took her to Vienna, Paris, London, La Scala, Chicago, and for two seasons to the Met (1932-34). She ended her operatic career with the onset of war, but at its end gave occasional concerts in Berlin, staged operas there, and taught very successfully.

Lauritz Melchior. 1890 (Copenhagen)-1973 (Santa Monica, California). This unequalled Wagnerian tenor began as a baritone at the Danish Royal Opera in 1913, but by 1918 he had made his tenor debut there, as Tannhaüser. After years of further study he debuted at Covent Garden (1924, 1926-39) as Siegmund, was invited to Bayreuth (1924-1931), and later joined the Met (1926-1950). The continuing beauty, warmth, and power of his voice, together with his superb technique and unparalleled vocal conviction, made him by common consent the greatest Wagnerian tenor of the century.

Herbert Janssen. 1892 (Cologne)-1965 (New York). The renowned German opera and lieder singer began at the Berlin State Opera (1922-38), where he sang a wide variety of Verdi and Wagner roles. He also guested every year at Covent Garden (1926-39) and at Bayreuth (1930-37), and finally came to the Metropolitan (1939-52). His beautiful baritone voice and superb musicianship made him a classic Wolfram, Amfortas, and Kurvenal, and one of the finest lieder artists of his day.

Kerstin Thorborg.1896 (Venjan)-1970 (Falun). This great Swedish contralto studied at the Royal Conservatory in Stockholm, where she debuted in 1924 as Ortrud. She then sang in Prague (1930-32), Berlin (1933-35), at the Vienna State Opera and Salzburg (1935-38) with great success, and finally at the Metropolitan Opera (1938-50), with guest appearances in London, Paris and Germany, and many international concert tours. She was especially famous for her Wagnerian roles, Orfeo, and Marina. Later she lived and taught in Stockholm.

Ludwig Weber. 1899 (Vienna)-1974 (Vienna). This renowned Austrian bass began at the Vienna Volksoper (1920-25), sang at Düsseldorf and Cologne, and then in Munich (1932-15)

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Act II, Scene 4. [13] Heil dir, Gunther! (vassals). The vassals greet Gunther. [CD2] [1] Brünnhilde, die hehrste Frau (Gunther, vassals). Gunther presents his bride to the welcoming crowd and announces that Siegfried's great service will be repaid by marriage to Gutrune. [2] Was müht Brünnhildes Blick? (Siegfried, Brünnhilde, vassals, Hagen [Weber], Gunther). At this news Brünnhilde collapses in amazement and anger. On Siegfried's hand she suddenly spies the Ring, which "Gunther" had snatched from her during their struggle. [3] Ha! Dieser war es (Brünnhilde, Siegfried, Hagen [List], Gutrune, vassals, women, Gunther). She names Siegfried a traitor and thief, calls for vengeance, and claims that in fact she herself is Siegfried's wife. [4] Helle Wehr! Heilige Waffe! (Siegfried, Brünnhilde, vassals). Siegfried swears upon Hagen's spear that he is innocent; if not, he says, may Hagen strike him dead! Brünnhilde calls even more passionately for vengeance, but Siegfried says only that the Tarnhelm must have been at fault, and calls them all to the hall to celebrate his joyful marriage. Everyone leaves but Hagen, Brünnhilde, and Gunther.

[5] Welches Unholds List (Brünnhilde, Hagen [List], Gunther). Brünnhilde is overcome by shame and helpless despair. Hagen offers revenge, and Brünnhilde remembers that only Siegfried's back is unprotected by her spells and thus vulnerable: she knew he would never turn his back on an enemy. Gunther is overcome by his own shame, and Brünnhilde is filled with loathing for him: a coward and cheat. [6] Dir hilft kein Hirn (Hagen [List], Gunther, Brünnhilde). Hagen and Brünnhilde convince Gunther, though, that only Siegfried's death will atone for their crimes, while Hagen whispers to Gunther that with the Ring the world will be his to command. But what of Gutrune's feelings?—she loves Siegfried. Brünnhilde curses her as an enchantress who stole Siegfried's love, but Hagen plans to tell Gutrune that Siegfried has been killed by a wild boar. While Brünnhilde and Gunther glory in their planned revenge, Hagen thirsts to possess the Ring and the power that it will bestow upon him and his father Alberich.

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London Green

How does a conductor handle such a titanic work without exhausting an audience to the point where it can no longer respond emotionally? In his deeply perceptive book, *Voices, Singers and Critics*, John Steane quotes the eminent critic Ernest Newman on Sir Thomas Beecham's leadership of *Tristan* with Leider, Melchior, and Janssen, in the same Covent Garden season as his *Ring Cycle*: 1936. I did not read his words until long after I had heard this *Götterdämmerung* fragment, but they immediately struck a chord:

The great things [in the performance of *Tristan*], however, were the playing of the orchestra and Sir Thomas Beecham's reading of the score. In no other work in the whole history of art, I imagine, does the human mind function continuously at such high tension, yet at a tension always under supreme direction and control On Tuesday we had the maximum of tension with the perfection of control As it was, the orchestral part of the performance will remain in my memory as the greatest thing in all my long experience of opera: there is not another conductor in the world who could have equaled it.

The Wagnerian tension of which Newman writes seems to me in Beecham's Götterdämmerung the tension of a cosmic dance. Lest that suggest triviality, I mean that Beecham imparts a vital rhythm, of great variety and full effect, to all the recorded scenes, an inevitable dramatic pace that leaves not a syllable or a note free of the growing emotional drama. The cumulative effect is...well, Wagnerian. Everything in this Götterdämmerung is at once passionately alive and yet dramatically proportionate. Beecham's is, of course, not the only way to play the opera—Furtwängler and a few others have offered quite different magical worlds—but here is a performance that I have never heard equaled for its very special qualities.

That is only half of the story, however. The conductor has a cast of the

requisite genius to fully realize his vision, as he does to accommodate theirs. They obviously have practical intelligence, too. During the same period most of them were singing the same scores for Furtwängler (also at Covent Garden then), with whom they apparently achieved equal success.

By the time of this recording, Frida Leider had been singing with brilliant effect the heaviest roles in the repertoire for twenty years all over the Western world. She was generally beloved as the period's most moving Wagnerian soprano, although others had their occasional votaries. She had, first of all, great warmth of tone (as any five minutes of listening will reveal), a fine legato, and an unequalled dramatic ability with both the music and the words. Elisabeth Grümmer, that great Mozartian and incomparable Agathe, said that Leider moved her more than any other singer; and Germaine Lubin, France's finest Wagnerian soprano (and not given to compliments) admired her deeply. To Melchior, Leider was, both as singer and colleague over many years, "an angel". Their 1929 recording of the Tristan love duet demonstrates their unique artistic sympathies. She was also reputed a splendid actress physically, although the one or two minutes of live film now available will tell you only that she had mastered authoritative repose and wore her costumes well. In her autobiography Leider recalls seeing in her youth the great realist actress Eleanora Duse and being overwhelmed by her simplicity of action and directness of approach. In her own work Leider says she tried to follow that unadorned vision. Again in Voices, Singers and Critics, Steane quotes an anonymous London Times critic, writing in 1925, on Leider's Isolde:

She makes the Irish princess not a mere woman of ordinary scale, but a great tragic figure, and at moments her acting reaches an almost terrible intensity It is her command of gesture, including facial expression, which makes her performance so remarkable. She discards nearly all the conventional movements; yet we feel that nearly always what she does is right, and not

tells Brünnhilde that Wotan forsook his home in Valhalla to search the world for true moral knowledge. His spear (the source of universal law) shattered, he disbanded his army of immortal heroes, destroyed the World Ash Tree (symbolic of immortality) and ordered that its dead branches be piled around Valhalla: an admission of failure and a prelude to the gods' destruction. He has told Waltraute that the gods and the world can be saved only if Brünnhilde returns the Ring (a symbol of universal harmony) to the Rhinemaidens.

[5] Welch' banger Träume Mären (Brünnhilde, Waltraute). Despite Waltraute's abject pleading, Brünnhilde refuses to part with the symbol of Siegfried's love simply to save gods who have abandoned her. Waltraute rushes away in despair. [6] Brünnhild! Ein Freier kam (Siegfried, Brünnhilde). Passing easily through the Magic Fire, Siegfried suddenly appears. Disguised by the Tarnhelm as Gunther, he claims her as his bride. In a violent struggle he seizes her Ring as she collapses. Driving her into the cave to sleep, he swears to himself that her purity that night will remain protected by his sword Notung.

Act II, Scene 1. The shore of the Rhine before the Gibichungs' hall. Night.

[7] Orchestral introduction. [8] Schläfst du, Hagen (Alberich, Hagen [Weber]). Waking his son Hagen, the dwarf Alberich recounts to him the fate of the cursed Ring. [9] Der Ewigen Macht (Hagen [Weber], Alberich). All of its owners but Siegfried have been cursed, and Alberich commands the hate-filled Hagen to destroy the hero so that the dwarf and his son can gain ultimate power. In a dead voice Hagen swears (to himself) that he will do so. [10] Orchestral passage. Alberich disappears as dawn rises over the Rhine.

Act II, Scene 2. [11] Hoiho, Hagen! Müder Mann! (Siegfried, Hagen [Weber], Gutrune). Siegfried joyfully appears, telling Hagen and Gunther's sister, Gutrune, how he has captured Brünnhilde for Gunther.

Act II, Scene 3. [12] *Hoiho! Hoihohoho! Ihr Gibichsmannen* (Hagen [Weber], vassals). Hagen commands their vassals to assemble and greet the returning Gunther and Brünnhilde, who must be honored with animal sacrifices and ceremonial drinking.

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Synopsis

Previously in Der Ring des Nibelungen:

Guarded by the Rhinemaidens, a hoard of gold lies inviolate at the bottom of the Rhine. It will belong to anyone who renounces Love. The Nibelung dwarf Alberich thus captures it. A Ring is forged from it guarantying its owner control of the world. Wotan (leader of the gods) steals the gold from Alberich. The giant Fafner demands it in payment for the building of Valhalla, the god's new home. Wotan is later forced to banish his beloved daughter Brünnhilde to earth, where she is protected by a Magic Fire and then rescued by the young hero Siegfried, who has gained the Ring, although he remains ignorant of its powers.

At this point *Die Götterdämmerung* begins. Before setting out on his worldly adventures, Siegfried entrusts the Ring to Brünnhilde as a pledge of their marriage. Sailing down the Rhine, he meets the nobleman Gunther and his adviser the evil Hagen, son of Alberich, who is still seeking to recapture the Ring and its powers. Together Gunther, his sister Gutrune, and Hagen drug Siegfried so that he will forget his pledge to Brünnhilde and, magically disguised as Gunther, penetrate the Magic Fire and capture Brünnhilde and the Ring for his new friend. We begin at this point, when Siegfried and Gunther have just left to capture Brünnhilde and Hagen is coldly considering his plans for world domination.

Act I, Scene 2, closing passage. [1] *Hier sitz ich zur Wacht* (Hagen [Weber]) Hagen muses on his dark plans. "Though you two [Gunther and Siegfried] despise me," he murmurs to himself, "you'll serve me soon." [2] Orchestral passage dramatizing the dark implications of Siegfried's return to Brünnhilde.

Act I, Scene 3. The rocky height where Brünnhilde awaits Siegfried.

[3] Altgewohntes Geräusch (Brünnhilde, Waltraute). In the midst of happy memories of Siegfried, Brünnhilde sees her sister Waltraute approaching, and joyfully greets her with the news that indeed her hero Siegfried has come through the Magic Fire and claimed her as his bride. Waltraute, however, is in anguish. [4] Höre mit Sinn (Waltraute). She

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merely dictated by the fact that it is different from what others have done. Indeed, her hands, which are the chief instruments of her acting, seem to follow every movement of the music and to be a visible expression of it like those of a dancer.

This is a visual concomitant of what we find on this recording. From the start, Leider's voice, as no other in my experience, suggests immediately a Brünnhilde of great warmth and yet authority. The complex color of the voice is constantly before us, and she phrases and breathes with such easy mastery that it is always the drama of the character that is center stage, and never the confrontation between the singer and the music—a common effect in this score. Her later passages of anger show the hurt, the pain of a woman betrayed, and not the simple vengeance of a former goddess scorned.

Of course, just a year before, Kirsten Flagstad had electrified the Metropolitan Opera with her intitial season of Wagnerian roles. She then appeared at Covent Garden, and for two seasons these peerless sopranos sang Brünnhilde and Isolde there in tandem. There are things to be said about these two wonderful singers, from our current perspective and also from points of view held in the past.

Regarding recordings, Flagstad was the first Wagnerian dramatic soprano to broadcast or record most of her Wagnerian repertoire in studios with enough resonance to suggest the voice as it really was. In the thirties even the studio recordings, compressed and badly accompanied as some of them were, produced the huge voice recognizably, and the early LPs after the war certainly gave us the splendid voice of her maturity. When I first saw her as Isolde, in 1949, I thought "Yes, this is the voice I have heard," though the top notes were consistently a little harsher than on my pre-war recordings. Now that so many of her early broadcasts have been issued in improved sound, her true effect onstage at that early time is easier to gauge. What seemed cold or inexpressive on earlier issues now on the new

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pressings often sounds touchingly youthful and inward. The radiant vocal sound itself is heard to do what more demonstrative "acting" might not accomplish. And that voice alone is, in Wagner, incomparably eloquent. With such an instrument and such a direct and technically uncluttered approach, she can often let the curve of the music work for her, and with unforgettable results.

Leider, though she was only half a dozen years older than Flagstad, belongs to a previous recording and performing era. In fact Flagstad had been singing professionally since 1913, two years earlier than Leider, but in Scandinavia, and during the first years in small and then light lyric roles. Her big international career in Wagner had begun only in 1935, so the voice, which had been growing over a twenty-year period, was astoundingly fresh. Leider, however, had begun in 1915 in provincial Germany in the heaviest roles, and achieved star status in the next half-dozen years and international celebrity in the 20s. Many of her recordings are acoustical. Though there are a few fine electrical discs, she left the Met just as regular broadcasts were beginning, and then departed from the operatic stage as the war began in Europe—so we have a few tantalizing electrical recordings of her Wagner, several of them with middling associates, and a few broadcast segments, none of them of complete roles. This one comes closest, and reveals an artist of consummate qualities, illuminating one of Wagner's most complex characters with a warmth, dramatic commitment, and graceful technique unequalled in the sixtyfive years since. Both of these sopranos still stand, in their very different ways and after all this time, at the summit of Wagnerian singing, in my view.

The others in the Leider's cast are, almost without exception, still unsurpassed. They have been treated at length in other Guild albums. Melchior remains wonderful Melchior, and unequalled for vocal beauty and dramatic vitality, though in fact his tone for some reason does not sound *quite* so youthful as in other broadcasts made at the same time or later. Kerstin Thorborg is a magnificent Waltraute, and vocally she and Leider make the idea of sisterhood movingly convincing. The voice

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is lighter than we might expect in this role (years before, Schumann-Heink, for example, sang the role often at the Met), but her lyric tone is perfectly handled and her textual projection is unforgettable. I have always found Gunther a problematic character-he often seems not only weak-willed but weak-minded-but Herbert Janssen's beautiful baritone of the 30's and his lieder-singer's sensibilities give the role more dramatic credibility than any other performance I have heard. Ludwig Weber is a priceless Hagen. Many Hagens bore us with the suggestion that the character is, in fact, already dead, but Weber manages to suggest a figure filled with sublimated desires resolved into a hunger for power—a subtlety which makes his later fraudulent sociability much more intriguing. His overwhelming "Hagen's Call" remains after seventy years unsurpassed for authority and absolute security of line. This was, it should be noted, not the only kind of role in which he excelled; his live 1952 King Marke at Bayreuth under Von Karajan is still one of the most moving on records. When Emanuel List takes over Hagen in this recorded Götterdämmerung, he manages to provide a reasonable share of the required qualities. Eduard Habich sings his classic Alberich, long well-known throughout Europe and introduced in the year of this recording to the Met. Maria Nezadal is at least a lyric presence as the unfortunate Gutrune—not always the case with this role.

So we have here a long and impressive stretch of *The Ring*'s final opera, sung live at the height of an unforgettable age of Wagnerian vocalism. It is led by a conductor of altogether extraordinary abilities with this score. And we are given the rare chance to make further acquaintance with one of the greatest and most revered Wagnerian sopranos of the twentieth century, singing with a cast of equals, and abetted, by the way, with moving studio recordings of other passages from her unforgettable Brünnhilde.

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