



SEATTLE OPERA
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

NEWS

RING 2005 CAST LETTER

From Speight Jenkins, Seattle Opera General Director:

In 2001, Seattle Opera promised that Stephen Wadsworth would direct a great new *Ring* and that he and the designers—Thomas Lynch (sets), Martin Pakledinaz (costumes), and Peter Kaczorowski (lights)—would return in 2005 not to revive the *Ring* but to recreate it. The same sets, costumes, and lights will not have changed drastically, but the direction of each singer will again be attuned to the artist performing the part. Though this seems obvious, it's not always done. Each time this *Ring* is performed, it will be newly minted.

The cast will be a mix of new and returning artists. Jane Eaglen, our Brünnhilde from 2000 and 2001, will return in the same three roles, roles that she has sung in most of the world's great opera houses. The acclaim engendered by her *Isolde* at the Metropolitan Opera and her *Siegfried* Brünnhilde at Lyric Opera of Chicago this fall marks the constant artistic development of this great artist. Her *Siegfried* will again be Alan Woodrow. Maybe I should say a healthy Alan Woodrow. As I don't need to remind those who were here in 2001, Alan suffered an accident which did not allow him to perform his *Siegfried*, so in a sense this great Canadian artist will sing and act his first Seattle *Siegfried* next summer. Greer Grimsley will sing Wotan and the Wanderer. This great American baritone who has sung brilliant performances in many theaters of the Dutchman, Telramund in *Lohengrin*, Wolfram in *Tannhäuser*, Kurwnal in *Tristan und Isolde*, and Amfortas in *Parsifal*, now will add the king of the gods to his repertoire.

The young Wälsungs Siegmund and Sieglinde will bring back to Seattle Opera two well loved artists from 2001: Richard Berkeley-Steele and Margaret Jane Wray. Berkeley-Steele stepped into Alan Woodrow's shoes and acted *Siegfried* in the first cycle in 2001 and sang the role in cycles two and three. Now he appears as the brown-eyed Wälsung. He will add to this role that of the god Froh in *Das Rheingold*. Ms. Wray gave Seattle a great Sieglinde in both the mini-*Ring* of 2000 and the cycles of 2001. She also enacted the Third Norn, which she will again perform in 2005. In the fall of 2003, she scored a major success as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in Pittsburgh, and she returns to Seattle Opera in February of 2004 in the title role of Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

Richard Paul Fink, a favored Alberich all around the world, will repeat his characterization of the dwarf who starts the ring spinning, a role that he has performed in Germany, at the Met, and at many other opera houses. Two major roles will be taken by newcomers: Hagen (Alberich's son and one of *Götterdämmerung*'s three major roles) will mark the British bass Gidon Saks' first appearance in our cycles. He has sung the role with great success this fall in London, and I saw his superb Boris Godunov both in London and Toronto. Of great interest, too, will be the first appearance in a complete cycle of the Polish contralto Ewa Podles, Erda in *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried* as well as the First Norn. Ms. Podles, a great Handel and bel canto artist, has sung Erda before to great acclaim.

Fricka, Wotan's wife and a major player in *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, will again be in the hands (and vocal cords) of Stephanie Blythe, a great mezzo-soprano and a star of the 2000 mini-*Ring* and the 2001 cycles. She will again sing the Second Norn as well. Nancy Maultsby, a vital component of the Seattle *Ring* over the past decade, will return for the crucial role of Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung*.

Stephen Milling, who made an unforgettable Gurnemanz in last summer's *Parsifal*, which opened Marion Oliver McCaw Hall, will return as Hunding and Fasolt (roles he made his own in both 2000 and 2001), while Gabor Andrasy, who has had several major roles in every Seattle Opera *Ring* since his American debut here in the 1987 cycle, will sing Fafner.

Many other major artists are returning in vital roles they made their own here in 2000 and 2001. Two tenors, Peter Kazaras and Thomas Harper, Loge in *Das Rheingold* and Mime in both *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried*, respectively, will again offer their unforgettable interpretations of these characters. Another returning singer is the American baritone Gordon Hawkins, who will sing again the roles he did so beautifully in the 1995 *Ring* cycle: Donner in *Das Rheingold* and Gunther in *Götterdämmerung*. Major American soprano, Marie Plette, Micaëla

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in this season's *Carmen*, will again sing Freia in *Das Rheingold*, Ortlinde in *Die Walküre*, and Guttrune in *Götterdämmerung*.

The three Rhine Daughters, who in our *Ring* swim as they sing, will be sung by Wendy Hill (Woglinde), Laura Tucker (Wellgunde), and Beth Clayton (Flosshilde). The Forest Bird will be an additional role for Wendy Hill, while Laura Tucker will sing Rossweisse and Beth Clayton, Siegrune. The Valkyries not previously named will be sung by Jennifer Wilson (Helmwige), Stacey Rishoi (Waltraute), Fredrika Brillembourg (Grimgerde), and Loretta Bybee (Schwertleite).

And who will mold all these artists musically? Who will be the musical leader of the *Ring*, without whose powerful presence no cycle has real character? Robert Spano, the music director of the Atlanta Symphony and the Brooklyn Philharmonic. Maestro Spano is one of America's finest and most exciting young conductors. These will be his first cycles.

I believe that with these extraordinary artists Seattle Opera can give you an unforgettable *Ring*. Every time we mount a cycle we want it to be the best one we have done. This time, with this cast and conductor, this director and these designers, it is my sincere hope—and belief—that we can outdo ourselves.