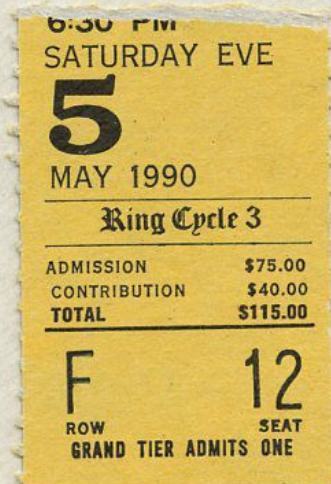
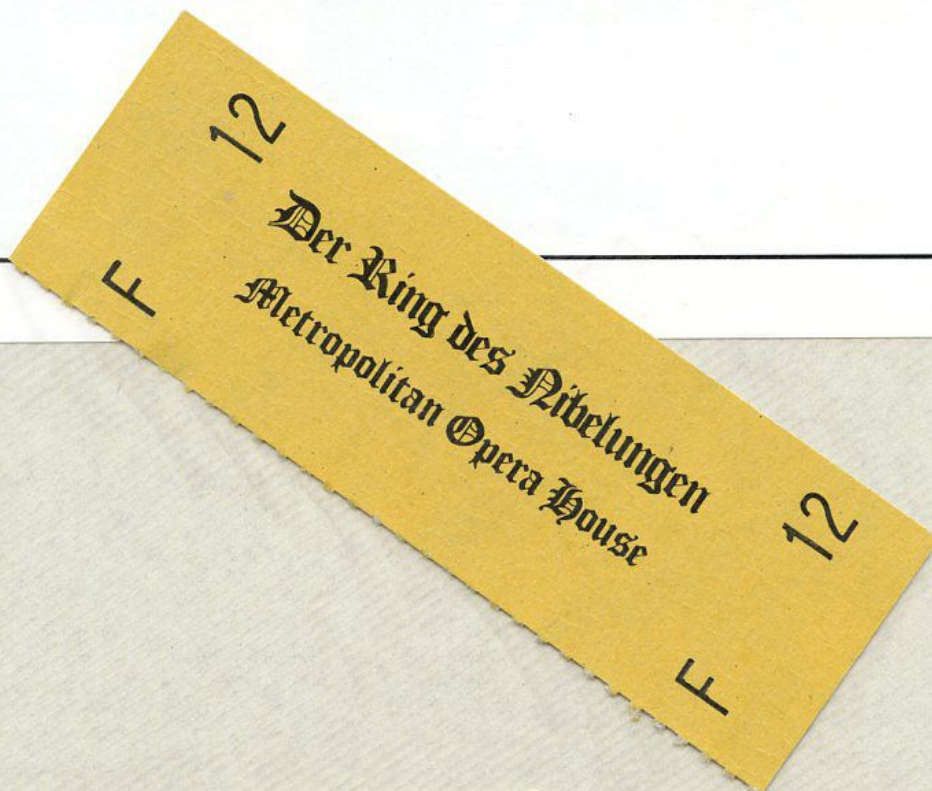


Get Ready For

# THE RING!





Richard Wagner's  
**Der Ring des Nibelungen**  
Metropolitan Opera  
1989-90 Season





# EDISON METUCHEN METROPARK TO NEWARK/NEW YORK EFFECTIVE: APRIL 1, 1990



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## Scenery tells Brunnhilde

The end of the gods came a few seconds too early at the Metropolitan Opera. As a result, Brunnhilde wound up in a New York hospital Saturday night instead of on Siegfried's funeral pyre beside the Rhine.

Richard Wagner's 19½-hour "Der Ring Des Niebelungen" is supposed to conclude with mass destruction by flood and fire. The composer did not say anything about the hall of the Gibichungs collapsing on the soprano's head.

But that's what happened at the Metropolitan Opera in the final scene of "Gotterdammerung," the final opera of the epic tetralogy. Hildegard Behrens, the West German soprano singing Brunnhilde, was struck by a collapsing foam rubber-and-canvas beam and knocked to the ground.

"It collapsed earlier than it should have," said Peter Clark, a Metropolitan Opera spokesman. "She did slip, but that wasn't the problem."

Behrens, who is in her mid-40s, walked off the set under her own power using the cover of the fire and the flood, Clark said.

She had a grazed forehead and scrapes on her elbows, according to Clark, and was taken out of the opera house on a stretcher after she was examined by the house doctor. She was treated at Roosevelt Hospital and released.



**Hildegard Behrens**  
*Hit by beam during opera*

TUESDAY EVENING, MAY 1, 1990 AT 6:00 P.M.  
RING CYCLE III

Richard Wagner

## DIE WALKÜRE

Conductor: James Levine

Production credits same as April 24 performance.

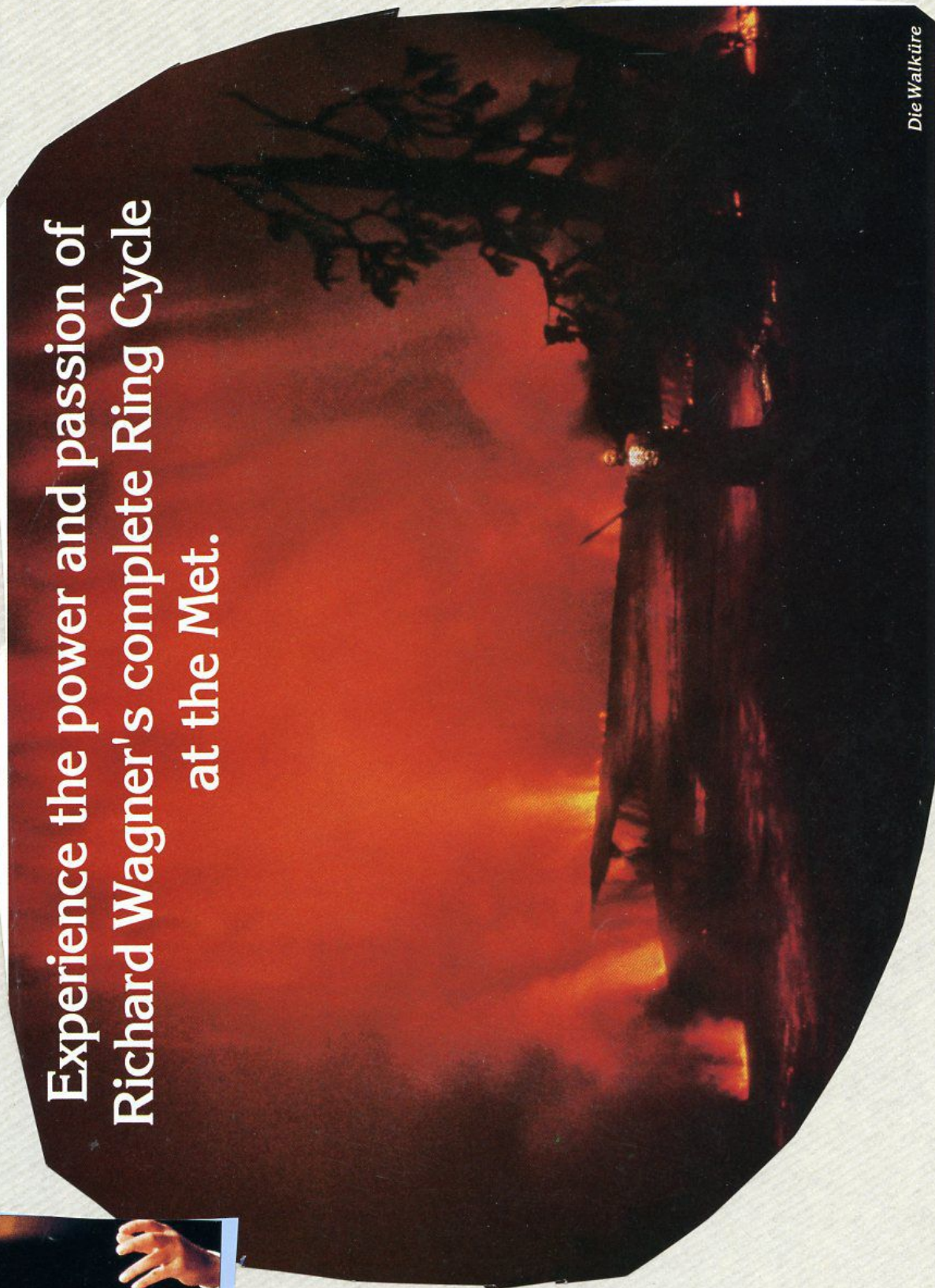
BRÜNNHILDE	Hildegard Behrens
SIEGLINDE	Jessye Norman
FRICKA	Christa Ludwig
SIEGMUND	Gary Lakes
WOTAN	James Morris
HUNDING	Matti Salminen
HELMWIGE	Margaret Jane Wray
GERHILDE	Pyramid Sellers
ORTLINDE	Adriana La Ganke
WALTRAUTE	Joyce Castle
SIEGRUNE	Diane Kesling
ROSSWEISSE	Jacalyn Bower
GRIMGERDE	Wendy Hillhouse
SCHWERTLEITE	Sondra Kelly

This performance will end at approximately 11:00 pm.





Experience the power and passion of  
Richard Wagner's complete Ring Cycle  
at the Met.

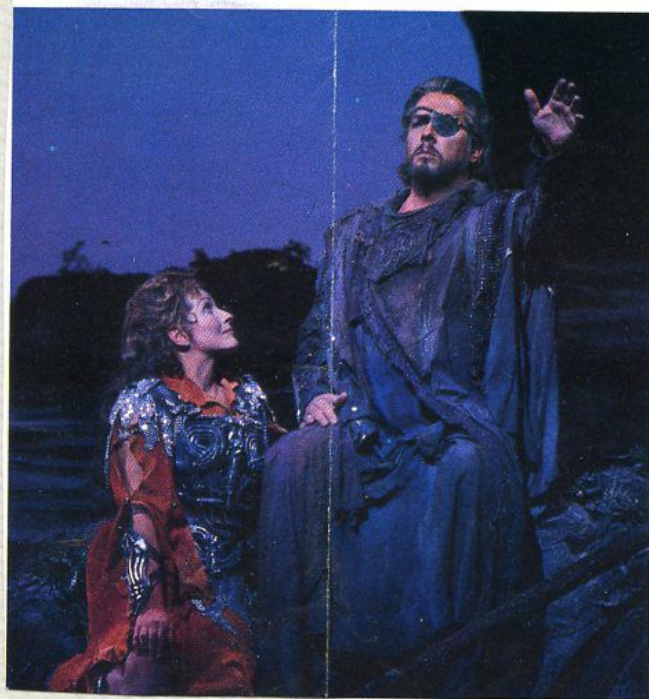


Die Walküre





Heinz Zednik



Siegfried Jerusalem

# Metropolitan Opera



Christa Ludwig



Tatiana Troyanos



Ekkehard Wlaschiha



Gary Lakes



Jessye Norman



Matti Salminen



THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 3, 1990 AT 6:00 P.M.  
RING CYCLE III

Richard Wagner

## SIEGFRIED

Conductor: James Levine  
Production credits same as April 26 performance.

BRÜNNHILDE	Hildegard Behrens
FOREST BIRD	Dawn Upshaw
ERDA	Anne Gjevang
SIEGFRIED	William Johns
MIME	Horst Hiestermann
WANDERER	James Morris
ALBERICH	Julian Patrick
FAFNER	John Macurdy

This performance will end at approximately 11:20 pm.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MAY 4, 1990

# Injured Behrens Cancels Final Brünnhilde at Met

By GLENN COLLINS

The soprano Hildegard Behrens has withdrawn from tomorrow night's performance of Wagner's "Götterdämmerung" at the Metropolitan Opera. The company said a replacement for the role of Brünnhilde would be named today.

Miss Behrens was injured in the final moments of last Saturday night's performance of the same opera when a piece of scenery struck her on the head. A beam made of styrofoam and canvas stretched over a wooden frame collapsed prematurely and knocked her to the floor.

The singer's son, Philip Behrens, said yesterday that her forehead was bruised and her eyes blackened, and that "her doctor told her to stay in bed." A CAT scan showed no brain injury, he said, but orthopedic X-rays were being taken because the singer was experiencing pain in her shoulders and back.

Miss Behrens could not perform on Tuesday night in "Die Walküre," or last night in "Siegfried." The soprano Gudrun Volkert replaced her in both performances.

### Might Have Been Worse

Because Miss Behrens was undergoing medical tests, she was unable to comment yesterday. But in a statement released Monday, the soprano said that if the beam had not struck her, she might have taken a fatal fall into an open shaft created by a premature lowering of the stage floor in front of her.

The singer was injured in the spectacular final scene of "Götterdämmerung," in which she runs upstage to throw herself on Siegfried's funeral pyre. The ensuing conflagration causes the collapse of the castle, and leads to the mass destruction of the

world in fire and flood. The opera ends the cycle "Der Ring des Nibelungen."

Customarily Miss Behrens runs from the stage before the collapsing castle descends into an elevator shaft. It is this shaft that Miss Behrens nearly fell into, her son said.

David M. Reuben, a spokesman for the Met, said yesterday that the hydraulically operated elevator machinery had worked correctly, but that the cue given by the stage manager to begin the collapse of the castle was misinterpreted by one or more members of the stage crew. "We have revised the way in which the cue is given and received," Mr. Reuben said, "so it will not happen again."

### 'Not Angry at the Met'

Mr. Behrens said of his mother that "As far as I know she is not angry at the Met."

Tomorrow night's performance will end the Met's third complete cycle of "The Ring" this season. Miss Behrens's performances have been taped for a telecast on the Public Broadcasting Service. The final version will be a composite of the three cycles, and will be broadcast June 18 through 21.

Miss Behrens's injury is not expected to affect the broadcast. "Taping of 'Siegfried' had already been completed," Mr. Reuben said, "and we hope we have enough scenes of 'Götterdämmerung' already." He added that Miss Behrens was scheduled to sing the title role in "Salome" in the fall.



SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 28, 1990 AT 6:00 P.M.  
RING CYCLE II

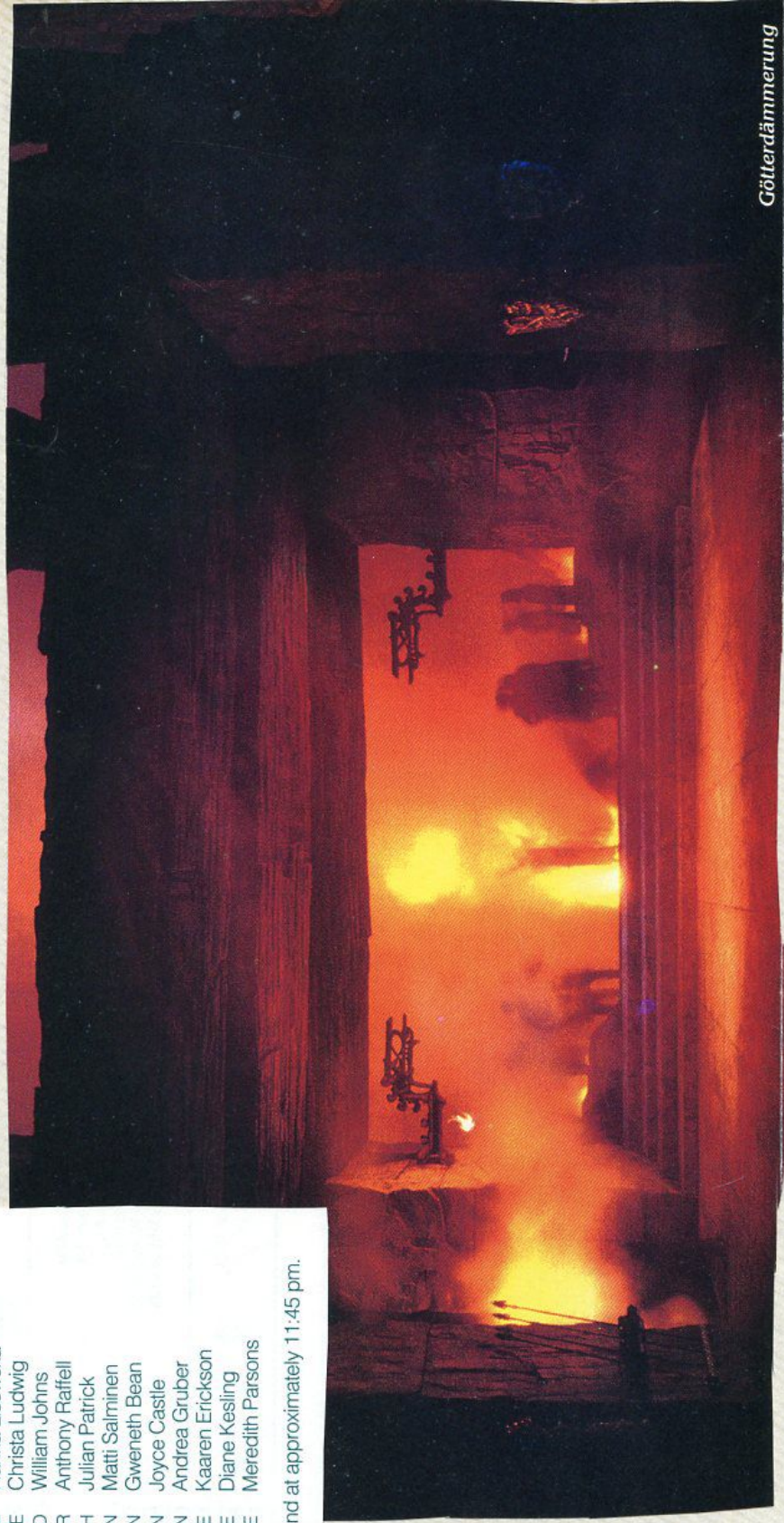
Richard Wagner

# GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

Conductor: James Levine  
Production: Otto Schenk  
Set and Projection Designer: Günther Schneider-Siemssen  
Costume Designer: Rolf Langenfass  
Lighting Designer: Gil Wechsler

BRÜNNHILDE Hildegard Behrens  
GUTRUNE Hanna Lisowska  
WALTRAUTE Christa Ludwig  
SIEGFRIED William Johns  
GUNTHER Anthony Raffell  
ALBERICH Julian Patrick  
HAGEN Matti Salminen  
FIRST NORN Gweneeth Bean  
SECOND NORN Joyce Castle  
THIRD NORN Andrea Gruber  
WOGLINDE Kaaren Erickson  
WELLGUNDE Diane Kesling  
FLOSSHILDE Meredith Parsons

This performance will end at approximately 11:45 pm.



Götterdämmerung





Jennifer Sloan

## The Word On the 'Ring'

Sonya Friedman (in photo) was decompressing in New England the other day after coming out of the mine pit known as "Der Ring des Nibelungen." She had been working since September crafting the subtitles that proved to be one of the big hits of the Metropolitan Opera's four-night televised "Ring" cycle the week before last. The subtitling was notable for its clarity and pithiness, and for the extreme care with which even the placing of the captions on the screen avoided interfering with the images.

But the process itself was a frantic one that continued almost to air time, as did the tape editing. "Every time they changed the edit, I had to go back to the drawing board," Ms. Friedman said. "They finished editing on Sunday for 'Götterdämmerung,' to be shown Thursday. I was doing titles on Monday."

Although a veteran of film and television titling as well as live opera (she has done most of the New York City Opera's supertitles and most of the Met's televised operas), she acknowledged that Wagner's four-opera work was the biggest challenge she had faced.

"It's an involved saga with such an intricate plot, and you have to

link it all. I tried to follow the main line of plot and character development. If you tried to translate everything Wagner wrote into subtitles, the audience wouldn't have time to do anything but read the subtitles."

As in the movies, unlike live opera, a major problem for TV subtitling is to tell what needs to be told within each camera shot; a subtitle can't bridge shots. That meant excising many references to mythology and making Wagner's often complex language immediately graspable. "And even after I had pared each title down, Peter Gelb, executive producer for the Met's media productions, insisted on even more clarity for maximum dramatic impact." Yet the goal was also to retain a strong flavor of the original.

Mr. Gelb and Ms. Friedman both noted that German-speaking friends found the subtitles for Wagner's archaic German just as useful as did people who don't speak German. Ms. Friedman admitted that her German was not as fluent as her French and Italian and that she had the help of German-language and Wagner experts. Ms. Friedman is a partner with her husband, Herman J. Engel, in Four Corners Productions. Mr. Engel gives a graduate course in documentary film at New York University.

—Gerald Gold



# Do We Really Need to See Wotan's Dimples?

**D**O I REALLY WANT TO KNOW that Wotan has dimples? That may not rank high among the esthetic issues raised by the Metropolitan Opera's recently televised "Ring des Nibelungen" and I apologize for bringing it up. But there they were, demanding my attention, those charming indentations in James Morris's cheeks, highlighted by tight camera work. The question, like so many others raised by Wagner's epic, teases thought. Yes: it might suggest an extra nuance to Wotan's tortured personality to see hints of the young rogue he must have been when fathering nine Valkyries, three Norns, the incestuous twins Siegmund and Sieglinde (and who knows how many other extramarital or premarital offspring). But then again, no: any

**The close-ups didn't help the mythical qualities of the 'Ring,' but the subtitles proved a boon in unraveling the twists and turns.**

gain in filling out the god's personality profile is offset by the disenchanting eye of the cameras. The obsession with facial close-ups and other presumably humanizing detail verges on cliché, at times threatening to dissipate the mythic haze of the "Ring." Being specific is a virtue in prose or daytime TV drama, but not always helpful in poetry or opera.

I have several positive observations to make about the Met's video venture and I should register them now, before they slip my mind. First and probably most important, the concise but adequate subtitles allow a "Ring" beginner to come away with a better understanding of the narrative than could be claimed by many a veteran Wagnerian who still relies on zipping through the synopsis just before the house lights go down. The video project's greatest contribution, in fact, may be in unraveling the saga's famous convolutions, meanwhile doing as little as possible, given the medium's artistic limitations, to demystify a work that depends heavily on myth and mystery to ensnare the audience.

Secondly, in the same positive vein, the Met's ambitious enterprise testifies again and in a more perilous idiom that a traditionally conceived "Ring" can speak to modern audiences at several levels of sophistication. While the 17-hour saga, as viewed on my private 19-inch stage, was much less compelling than the compact "Ring" I experienced in four live performances two seasons ago, I often found the small-screen version more palatable than the harshly lighted performances

last April during which this cycle was videotaped. Some of the vocal flaws of the live performances — specifically those of Hildegard Behrens, who was sometimes ill, and Siegfried Jerusalem, who was overmatched as Siegfried — underwent a magical cure on TV. Or at least the problems were pushed into the background by visual business. This may have been only the flickering shadow of Wagner's "Ring," as a devout Wagnerite could insist, but it could be watched with profit by almost anyone. It deserves the commercial success it undoubtedly will have.

But to return to Wotan's dimples. Such subtleties of visual perception do not ordinarily arise to bother audiences in the opera house, except perhaps for the unlucky few persons gifted with telescopic eyesight. In most productions of the "Ring," we are happy to take on faith that Loge tricks Alberich into turning himself into a toad. Even the cursed golden ring itself, passed on from victim to victim, is not easily detected without binoculars. The

pained grimace, the arched eyebrow, the side-long glance — all must be intuited by most of the opera audience. The Met's battery of cameras, however, could and did zoom in on this minuscule amphibian or that fatal bit of jewelry, which lent visual credibility to words being sung at the time. But is that technological game worth playing? An audience reared on television probably would say so. I remain unpersuaded, though bemused.





Jessye Norman and James Morris (insets) and the final scene from the Met's "Walküre"—A traditional "Ring" can speak to modern audiences on several levels.

Winnie Klotz/The Metropolitan Opera



In the June issue of Opera News, the Metropolitan Opera Guild's publication, an article about the making of the video "Ring" described how a strategically positioned camera could improve on a live performance. During the taping of "Die Walküre," a camera placed offstage on a lighting tower focused on the face of Hildegard Behrens, the Brünnhilde, who had her back to the audience as she implored James Morris's Wotan to encircle her with magic fire as he put her to

sleep. "In Brünnhilde's teary face, the home viewer sees the humanness of this heroic woman. The camera shows us what James Morris responds to as a character and as a performer. And it makes us realize the total involvement and commitment with which Behrens has assumed her role. None of this was witnessed by the audience in the opera house."

Nor, of course, did it need to be. I am not sure I could find a better example of what televised opera is about — and what live opera is not about. No person of any musical sensibility would need to examine Ms. Behrens's teary face during this scene to know what Brünnhilde was feeling, any more than it helped to fasten the camera's close-up eye on the imposing bulk of Gary Lakes and Jessye Norman while they did their best to beguile the ear as Siegmund and Sieglinde. Even Wagner fanatics would agree that many of Wagner's staging stipulations — Brünnhilde riding into the flames on her warhorse Grane,

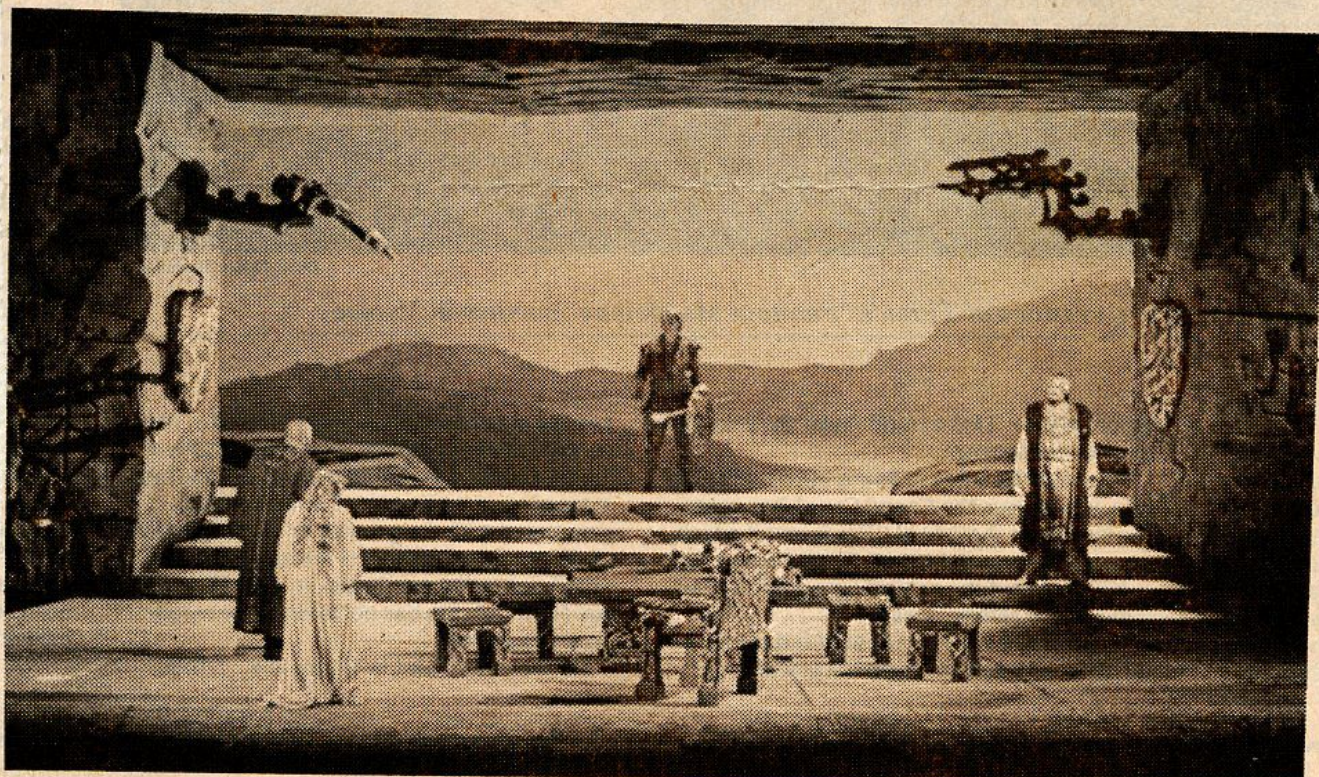
for instance — are best ignored in traditionally pictorial productions like the Met's. Crafty lighting and lots of smoke can be trusted to cover up Wagner's theatrical miscalculations here. It helps not to be able to have 20-20 eyes at such a moment, when Wagner's cataclysmic point is not made primarily by visual detail but by the piling up of reprised motifs and other purely musical effects.

Even some theatrically crucial events, such as the shattering of Siegmund's sword by Wotan, do not suffer from taking place in such dim light that the weapon wielded by the hero might as well be a magic salami. Some of Wagner's staging directions are simply self-defeating. It takes a serious Wagnerite indeed not to smile during the gathering of the Valkyries in "Die Walküre" when the female warriors repeatedly emit such shouts as "Helmwige, bring your horse over here!" (No steeds appear, of course.) Such theatrically intractable

*Continued on Page 28*



# Do We Really Need to See Wotan's Dimples on Television?



Winnie Klotz/The Metropolitan Opera

The first scene of "Götterdämmerung"—With Wagner, 20-20 vision doesn't always help.

Continued From Page 21

scenes actually work best in avant-garde productions that treat the "Ring" as a series of allusive stage pictures rather than a master plan that deserves to be followed closely.

One legitimate advantage of the Met's televised version is the chance it allows for intimate study of a few especially accomplished actors. Unfortunately, this cast was not overflowing with artists on the dramatic level of Ms. Behrens, Christa Ludwig and Mr. Jerusalem. Oddly, when Mr. Jerusalem underwent his transformation from Loge to the heavier

**It's clear that Wagnerian vocalism is strenuous work.**

role of Siegfried in the later operas, he became less interesting to watch as well as to hear.

As a rule, however, it is cruel and inhuman to focus cameras on opera singers. The sight of bulging neck muscles and flapping tongues can only distract attention from what is being sung: not what, but how (or occasionally why) becomes the pressing question. The Met's "Ring," most of which was apparently taped at performances, leaves no viewer in doubt as to the strenuous nature of Wagnerian vocalism. Argue as you may that the sight of vibrating tonsils is interesting in its

own way, does anyone really believe that dramatic illusion is promoted by pictures that might be best appreciated by an oral surge?

■

Otto Schenk, who produced the Met "Ring" (Brian Large redirected the cycle for television), takes a sensibly modest view of what a video version of an opera may accomplish. He concedes in the Opera News article that a televised "Ring" can be "only a percentage of what you have in the theater." It is a report on the work "from a place you cannot be . . . showing the tension of live performance, the inevitability of imperfection . . . you can't say that you actually saw the opera." No quarrel with any of that. However, Mr. Schenk also professes to believe that in producing opera for television "we are showing you what is on stage — we are not making a film." Sorry, you could have fooled me. □



# Lord of 'Der Ring'

PBS to broadcast  
Wagner masterpiece  
over 4 evenings

By Patricia Brennan

The Washington Post

Richard Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen" is a formidable achievement, tales of Germanic and Norse myth told in four operas fraught with incest and lust, conspiracy and betrayal, theft and lies, hatred and murder, and eventually love, forgiveness, compassion and redemption.

That PBS is airing all four — "Das Rheingold," "Die Walkure," "Siegfried" and "Götterdämmerung" — this week is also a formidable achievement.

In fact, televising the Metropolitan Opera's production on four consecutive evenings is the largest opera telecast ever undertaken in American television.

Wagner originally wanted "The Ring" to be performed on four consecutive evenings, but doing so proved exhausting for the singers and conductor. The Met chose to perform the first two in a row, then took a day off before the taxing "Siegfried" and another before "Götterdämmerung." James Levine, the Met's artistic director, conducted all four.

The Met's production was first seen during the 1988-89 season, prompting Donal Henahan of The New York Times to remark that "the entire 'Ring' project ... will stand as the decade's finest achievement by the Met and its artistic director."

For PBS's 17 hours of telecasts, Monday through Thursday nights, host F. Murray Abraham will explain Wagner's dramatic spectacle (subtitled in English) to those who are unfamiliar with the tale. Executive producer Peter Gelb said successive evenings will include introductory scenes recapping previous action.

The story begins with "Das Rheingold," in which Alberich, a Nibelung gnome, learns that who-

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# PBS broadcasts Wagner's 'Ring'

## Metropolitan Opera performs tale of Germanic, Norse myths

Continued from cover page

ever forges a ring from the Rhinemaidens' magic gold will rule the world. Ownership of the ring — and the curse to all who own it — connects all four operas until the ring is eventually returned to the Rhinemaidens.

Major cast members: Hildgard Behrens as Brunnhilde, eldest Valkyrie and Wotan's favorite daughter; James Morris as Wotan, ruler of the Gods and father of the Valkyries and of the Volsung twins, Siegmund (Gary Lakes) and Sieglinde (Jessye Norman); Siegfried Jerusalem as Siegfried, son of Siegmund and Sieglinde, grandson of Wotan and Brunnhilde's lover; Ekkehard Wlaschiha as Alberich, the Nibelung dwarf, brother of Mime (Heinz Zednik) and father of Hagen (Matti Salminen).

Using Wagner's original stage directions, Otto Schenk has overseen the production, with sets — including Wotan's fortress, Valhalla — by Gunther Schneider-Siemssen, costumes by Rolf Langenfass and exceptionally atmospheric lighting by Gil Wechsler.

Brian Large served as television producer. Large, who has directed many of the Met's telecasts, was also TV director of the 1976 production of "The Ring" from the Bayreuth (Germany) Festival. PBS aired the operas over more than four months in 1983.

"Brian Large has done an absolutely superb job," said Mr. Gelb. "Our challenge is always to make a television performance as close as possible to being there. Some productions are easier to translate. This one is particularly difficult, although I believe we've been successful.

"My whole goal is to try, without compromising the artistic integrity of any subject, to reach out to the broadest possible audience and to demystify the whole world of opera."

Mr. Gelb, son of former New York Times cultural-affairs editor Arthur Gelb and a relative of violinist Jascha Heifetz, grew up in New York City surrounded by music and theater.

Although he said he has had no formal music training, and has devoted the past decade to producing for television (including the Emmy-winning "Horowitz in Moscow"), Peter Gelb said he has become caught up in "The Ring."

After the operas were taped before an audience, more shooting was done of scenery alone with subdued, murky lighting to be edited into the tapes. Then Mr. Gelb, Mr. Large and the tape

editors reviewed the tapes "over and over again. Every time you look at one of these things, you have to prepare yourself for six hours."

But instead of the tedium he expected, Mr. Gelb found excitement.

"It's incredible," he said. "The amazing thing about 'The Ring,' the more I've worked on it, the more involved and excited I've become with the operas. They really are extraordinary. They really are musical theater in a true sense. They are much more than operas — some operas have great music but dramatically are really flat. You can really feel that this was a masterpiece. I'd like to believe, I guess, that this production is the kind of production that Wagner would have liked to have seen mounted in his day, but that technically was not possible ...



"This one works because it is very credible. It's this grand-epic myth that unfolds over the course of these four operas. You really get involved with the characters and the emotions. They're very complicated characters, really deep psychological studies. Wotan has a lot of ambiguities about his personality, very tragic, very knowing, very vain, petty — he's an extremely complicated figure."

The production, he said, "is so accessible, for anything that's so long. I really hope that people who don't see opera will give it a chance. This music finds itself in so many other places — 'The Ride of the Valkyries,' for example, is in 'Apocalypse Now.'

"All of the way it's being presented on television — the introductions, the title sequences, even the subtitles — we try to make as clear as possible."

And because a television audience may get fidgety, he said, "Jimmy Levine got PBS to make the station breaks slightly longer, so people will have a chance to stretch their legs."