

DAS RHEINGOLD (THE RHINEGOLD)

BY

RICHARD WAGNER

STUDY GUIDE



RICHARD WAGNER

(1813-1883)

DAS RHEINGOLD

Premiere: Munich, September 22, 1869

Opera in one act

Libretto: Richard Wagner

In German with English and French surtitles

Wotan	Ryan McKinny
Alberich	Nathan Berg
Fricka	Aidan Ferguson
Fasolt	Julian Close
Fafner	Soloman Howard
Freia	Caroline Bleau
Loge	Roger Honeywell
Mime	David Cangelosi
Donner	Gregory Dahl
Froh	Steeve Michaud
Erda	Meredith Arwady
Wogline	Andrea Nunez ¹
Weglunde	Florence Bourget ¹
Flosshilde	Carolyne Sproule
Conductor	Michael Christie
Stage Director	Brian Staufenbiel
Sets	Brian Staufenbiel
Costumes	Matthew LeFebvre
Lighting	Nicole Pearce
Projections	David Murakami
Rehearsal Pianist	Louise-Andrée Baril

Orchestre Métropolitain
Opéra de Montréal Chorus

Production: Minnesota Opera

November 10, 13, 15, 17, 2018 at 7:30 pm
Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier, Place des Arts

¹ Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal

Duration: 2 hrs. 25 min. (no intermission)

DAS RHEINGOLD (THE RHINEGOLD), first evening of the tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*), by Richard Wagner, to his own libretto.



Alberich the dwarf, rejected and humiliated by the captivating Rhinemaidens, renounces love and robs the maidens of their precious treasure: the Rhine gold. He uses the gold to make a ring that will give him great power and allow him to rule over the subterranean Nibelung people, who amass riches for him day and night. In the meantime, the gods have had the giants Fasolt and Fafner build them a magnificent fortress for which they have refused to pay the agreed-upon price: Freia, the goddess who can guarantee them eternal youth. Taking the advice of Loge, the god of fire, Wotan, the ruler of the gods, decides to use the Nibelung's ring and gold—instead of Freia—to pay the giants. Defeated, Alberich curses the ring and all those who may possess it...

*The Rhinemaidens mock the dwarf Alberich in this illustration by Arthur Rackham, which appeared in 1910 in the book *The Rheingold and the Valkyrie* (London: William Heinemann) (<https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ring2.jpg>)*

SOCIAL ISSUES addressed in this opera

With its mythological world populated by gods, dwarves, and giants, *Das Rheingold* exposes us to various social issues that are still remarkably relevant today. Indeed, on the one side, we have the gods who have had a fortress built for themselves, promising to pay an impossible price (without Freia, the goddess who takes care of the trees providing them with the fruit of eternal youth, they will be destined to die) and hoping to find a solution later on, once the fortress is complete. On the other side, we have a dwarf among the subterranean Nibelung people who, hungry for power, renounces love and reduces all of the Nibelung to slaves, so he can continue to amass his riches. As for the giants, they will resort to violence, if necessary, to take what they are owed. These three categories of characters, each in its own way, show us the dangers of seeking power and riches without thinking of the consequences. *Das Rheingold* presents us with these dangers, still very evident in our society in various forms:

- Environmental destruction: whether it is with the promise of Freia, the goddess associated with nature, in exchange for a fortress symbolizing power, or through the Nibelungs' over-exploitation of the subterranean mines to grow Alberich's fortune, the characters in *Das Rheingold* destroy their environment without thinking of the consequences. In fact, the very theft of the Rhine gold symbolizes an environmental imbalance: the only solution is to give the gold back to the Rhinemaidens, but all of the characters refuse, driven by their own greed.
- People or objects? In *The Anatomy of Peace*, the authors (The Arbinger Institute) suggest that one of the main reasons for conflict resides in our vision of the other: instead of seeing others as people—with needs, hopes, and problems—, we view them as objects, with respect to ourselves (impediments to our progress, threats, etc.). *Das Rheingold* provides a good example of this: Wotan thinks only of his desire to build a great fortress and does not consider the needs of the other gods (in fact, his wife Fricka reproaches him for it), nor those of Freia, who he plans to use as currency. Alberich must go as far as renouncing love (thereby refusing to see others as people) in order to create the ring that will give him the power to rule over his people (and his brother) as slaves.

DAS RHEINGOLD, THE FRUIT OF POLITICAL AND AESTHETIC REVOLUTION

How is it that this opera can present us with social issues that are so powerful and relevant, going so far that it is seen by some as a critique of capitalism? The first draft of the libretto for the **tetralogy**, a prose summary of the story, dates to 1848, when a series of revolutions was shaking Europe. Richard Wagner himself was very politically involved (he had to flee Germany in 1849 and lived in exile until 1862), sharing the ideals of his co-revolutionaries, who were seeking to lessen the power of the state and to share power among the various social classes, giving significant importance to the emerging **bourgeoisie**. Wagner's political ideals were inseparable from his aesthetic ones: in his view, only art could allow for the emancipation of the human race—especially opera, which combined all forms of art. While writing the librettos for the *Ring*, he also wrote a book that would go on to revolutionize the history of opera: *Oper und Drama* (1851). In this book, as well as in the essay *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (*The Artwork of the Future*, 1849), Wagner lays out his vision for opera of the future as a "**Gesamtkunstwerk**" or "total work of art"), in which all of the arts (music, poetry, dance, architecture, and painting) would be assembled to work together, as they had in ancient Greek theatre. This synthesis of the arts allowed each form of art to find its true expressive power, symbolizing the political ideals of the revolutionaries of the day, who aimed to overcome strong social divisions and work together.

Das Rheingold is the first opera in which Wagner systematically tried to apply his new ideas, with very powerful results: the singing is fully integrated with the action and the orchestra does not simply accompany the voices but actively participates in the plot. Traditionally, in opera, the sung parts could be divided into **recitatives** (in which the vocal lines are more like spoken word, imitating regular speech) and **arias** (in which the vocal lines are more melodic and often structured with the use of repetition; these pieces generally have easily identifiable musical forms). In arias, the orchestra generally plays the role of accompanist—with the voice in the spotlight. Wagner overcame these operatic traditions in two ways. First, he no longer differentiated recitatives from arias: the vocal lines always follow the inflections in the text and there are no longer any easily identifiable forms. This creates a greater continuous flow in the opera, with the audience no longer having a break during which to applaud the performer (traditionally, there had been brief moments to applaud at the end of each aria). Wagner then gave the orchestra key role, through the use of what are now called "**leitmotifs**." These *leitmotifs* are musical motifs (often combining melodic, harmonic, and tonal elements) associated with certain central themes and characters in the opera. The motifs return each time these themes are mentioned, to keep the listener informed about related or upcoming events. Wagner systematically uses these *leitmotifs* in *Das Rheingold* and introduces us to motifs he will go on to use throughout the tetralogy.

This new vision of opera as a synthesis of the arts, and the way in which Wagner applied it to music in *Das Rheingold*, profoundly transformed opera as we know it: after Wagner, most composers began to strive for greater continuity in their works, increasingly setting aside the clear distinction between recitative and aria, with several composers using, in one way or another, recurring musical motifs, even if they did not use them in a systematic way. This union of Wagner's political and aesthetic ideals in *Das Rheingold* had an immeasurable impact on the history of opera: *Das Rheingold* is a revolutionary work in every respect.

DID YOU KNOW THAT Wagner not only revolutionized the way operas are composed but also the way we listen to opera? When he was composing his tetralogy, he also planned for the construction of a theatre in which his work would be performed. This theatre, which still stands today in Bavaria, is called the Bayreuth Festival Theatre (*Bayreuther Festspielhaus*). The hall is built such that the spectators can be completely immersed in what is taking place on stage: the orchestra is out of sight, in no way distracting to the spectators, who can instead focus on the story unfolding before them. The silent, focused way in which we watch opera, in the dark, as we do today, was not the norm before Wagner. Prior to that, spectators could talk amongst themselves during opera performances, play cards, eat and, above all, people watch: the opera was a place to see and to be seen as much as it was a place to attend performances. It was only with this new vision of opera as an art form capable of saving the human race, as an almost mystical or religious experience, that it became unacceptable to do anything else but allow yourself to be completely immersed in the experience. In fact, in the 19th century, French Wagnerophiles called their visits to Bayreuth "pilgrimages." In listening

to the opera, try to immerse yourself in the story, to concentrate on the plot and the music, to fully take part in the mystical experience as Wagner had planned it!

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883) AND THE CREATION OF THE TETRALOGY

Richard Wagner is a dominant figure in the history of music: not only did his works serve to profoundly transform operatic composition, he also left us several writings describing his aesthetic and political ideas (including an autobiography, *My Life – Mein Leben*), as well as the Bayreuth theatre, which brought to life his new ideas about opera. His tetralogy, a cycle of four operas (*Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*), lasting a total of about fifteen hours and featuring mythological figures from several Nordic legends, took him over twenty years to complete while he was in exile for his political involvement in the revolts of 1848-1849. These various elements, along with the way he depicted himself in his writings, contributed to creating a mythical image of Wagner and his work (and of the tetralogy in particular). His influence on composers of generations that followed was great: no one was immune to Wagnerism and Wagnerophilia; all opera composers had to face up to the legacy of Wagner, whether or not they decided to follow his example.

At the same time, Wagner remains a very complex and problematic figure: his political involvement was closely tied to his artistic vision, but some of his political ideas—relating to emerging German nationalism in the 19th century—were strongly influenced by anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The Nazi regime also took up and glorified his works during the Second World War (Wagner was Adolf Hitler’s favourite composer), and the performance of his works can still be quite controversial in Israel. Wagner presents us with a profound issue, which troubles many researchers and music lovers: can we admire the works of a man who was, without a shadow of a doubt, a dramatic and musical genius but who, as a man, held horrible and indefensible positions? Can we separate the artist and the man? And if yes, how? Despite these questions, it is undeniable that the operas Richard Wagner composed are an invaluable part of our cultural heritage and, while they should continue to raise questions and stimulate thought, they certainly cannot be ignored.

DID YOU KNOW THAT Wagner began to write the story of the tetralogy by starting with the last opera (*Götterdämmerung*) and working his way back in time to increasingly give context to this final opera? He wrote the story in reverse before starting to compose the music in the correct order, beginning with *Das Rheingold*. He also started with **prose** versions, before working on the **versification** of the libretti and setting them to music.

THE WAGNERIAN ORCHESTRA

Wagner’s innovations did not end with the way in which operas are composed and listened to, they also extended to the orchestra, which he greatly developed and expanded. For his tetralogy, Wagner required sixty-four stringed instruments, he quadrupled the number of wind instruments, and he greatly developed the brass section. The brass section plays a great number of his leitmotifs, with a starring role going to instruments that, until then, had not been in such a position (like the trombones). Wagner took this orchestral development so far as to incorporate a new instrument called the “Wagner tuba,” which was often played by the horn players and acted as a bridge between the trombones and the horns. Wagner also included instruments generally used for military fanfares, such as bass trumpets and contrabass trombones. Lastly, he also developed the percussion section, with the orchestral score for *Das Rheingold* calling for eighteen anvils!

CHARACTERS AND LEITMOTIFS

THE GODS

LEITMOTIF: To represent Valhalla, the fortress of the gods, the brass section, including the Wagner tubas, play a noble and melodic theme (once you’ve heard it, try singing it). The first few times it is heard, the motif is followed by a martial rhythm. Audio sample: “Valhalla”

WOTAN Bass-baritone (medium-low male voice) Performed by: Ryan McKinny	FRICKA mezzo-soprano (medium-low female voice) Performed by: Aidan Ferguson
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(United States)	(Canada)
<p>Wotan, ruler of the gods, is one of the most complex characters in the tetralogy. He should be a hero who governs the natural order of the world, but he is not immune to greed and a thirst for power. He gets the giants to build him a fortress, promising to give them the goddess Freia in exchange... but he's looking for a way to get out of his promise. Unfortunately, all of the contracts and agreements he has entered into are engraved on his spear, forcing him to respect them. He ends up resorting to theft (stealing the Nibelung's treasure and Alberich's ring) to avoid losing Freia, and even then, he is very resistant to giving up the ring. Musically, Wotan plays an important role: he sings more than most other characters and is accompanied by several leitmotifs over the course of the opera, showing his central role in the storyline.</p> <p>LEITMOTIF: Wotan's spear, which governs his contracts, is musically represented by a long, descending scale with a dotted rhythm, played by the brass section.</p> <p>Audio samples: "Spear 1" and "Spear 2"</p>	<p>Wotan's wife, Fricka, is also rather complicated. On the one hand, she is concerned about Freia's well-being and seems to want to steer her husband towards righteousness. On the other hand, she is also driven by less noble motivations: she is jealous and is just as drawn to power and to an attraction to Valhalla as her husband is. Musically, her vocal lines are at times more lyrical (more song-like) but, like all characters in the opera, she never strays too far from declamation, the rhythm of speech. The fact that she is rarely accompanied by leitmotifs shows that she is less crucial to the events than her husband is.</p>
	<p>FREIA soprano (higher-pitched female voice) Performed by: Caroline Bleau (Canada)</p>
	<p>Freia—the goddess of love and nature, who takes care of the apple trees that give the gods eternal youth—suffers terribly in this opera, as she ends up a prisoner, held in payment for the construction of Valhalla. She has the highest voice of all the gods, which reflects her purity.</p> <p>LEITMOTIF: While it is heard much less often than other leitmotifs and it is often doubled by a voice (which is rather rare), we can nevertheless identify a leitmotif associated with Freia's apples. It recalls the nobility and colour of the Valhalla theme, but its melody is different.</p> <p>Audio samples: "Freia's apples 1" and "Freia's apples 2"</p>
<p>LOGE tenor (higher-pitched male voice) Performed by: Roger Honeywell (Canada)</p>	
<p>Loge, the god of fire, is praised by Wotan for his cunning mind and his energy. While he helps Wotan steal the treasure and the ring from the Nibelung, he tries to guide Wotan to be good, encouraging him to give back the ring to the Rhinemaidens. He is therefore a morally ambivalent character.</p> <p>LEITMOTIF: Loge has his own leitmotif, representing his vitality and his association with fire. Much faster than the other motifs associated with the gods (with a sequence of wavering sixteenth notes, resembling trills), it also makes use of chromatism.</p> <p>Audio samples: "Loge 1" and "Loge 2"</p>	

<p>DONNER Bass-baritone (medium-low male voice) Performed by: Gregory Dahl (Canada)</p>	<p>FROH tenor (higher-pitched male voice) Performed by: Steeve Michaud (Canada)</p>
<p>God of thunder (his name means "thunder" in German) and Freia's brother, he is very bad-tempered and attempts to stop the giants from taking his sister.</p>	<p>His name ("joyful" in German) tells us how different his personality is from that of his brother Donner. However, he is also concerned with the fate of his sister Freia.</p>
<p>ERDA contralto (deepest female voice) Performed by: Meredith Arwady (United States)</p>	

Although Erda, goddess of the Earth (her name means “earth” in German), only appears at the end of the opera, she nevertheless plays a very important role, as she announces the upcoming events in the next operas. LEITMOTIF: Her leitmotif is a modification of the leitmotif that opens the opera, generally called the “creation of the world” motif. This first motif features rising intervals over a sustained low note played by the bassoons. It is repeated several times at the beginning of the opera (with bright-sounding and higher-pitched instruments being added each time), musically illustrating the creation of the world and the appearance of light. To accompany Erda, these intervals change and get darker (going from major to minor). The motif nevertheless remains recognizable.
 Audio samples: “Creation of the World” and “Erda”

THE GIANTS

LEITMOTIF: The giants have their own leitmotif, which seems to imitate the heaviness and awkwardness of their gait and their brutality in its rhythm, its nuances, and its use of percussion, which seems to emphasize the downbeat (a strong beat for each step). They also sometimes use their motif in their vocal line, which might symbolize their simplicity of spirit.
 Audio samples: “Giants 1” and “Giants 2”

FASOLT Bass-baritone (medium-low male voice) Performed by: Julian Close (United Kingdom)	FAFNER bass (deepest male voice) Performed by: Soloman Howard (United States)
In love with Freia, Fasolt is gentler than Fafner. His music alternates between tenderness (when he speaks of Freia) and agitation (when he expresses his anger about Wotan, who is refusing to pay them). He is reluctant to lose Freia, even in exchange for the Nibelung’s treasure.	Fafner is colder than Fasolt. He is only interested in Freia because, without her fruits, the gods will die. His very low voice is impressive and also reflects his coldness and cruelty, which will lead him to kill Fasolt.

THE NIBELUNG

LEITMOTIF: The Nibelung's leitmotif is characterized by the use of repeated notes with a very quick dotted rhythm, as well as, in certain spots, the use of anvils in the orchestra. It represents the constant work in the mines that the Nibelung must carry out at Alberich's bidding.

Audio sample: "Nibelung with anvils"

ALBERICH

Bass-baritone (medium-low male voice)

Performed by: Nathan Berg

(Canada)

Alberich is the opera's villain. He steals the gold from the Rhinemaidens, renounces love, creates the ring that will make him all-powerful, and subjugates and exploits his own people, the Nibelung. At the same time, as we have seen with the gods (who are far from being the examples of morality they should be), the "good guys" and "bad guys" in this opera are not well defined. Alberich is certainly hungry for power and behaves badly. Yet, we also see the Rhinemaidens profoundly humiliate him at the beginning of the opera. His behaviour is therefore also, in part, the result of his suffering at the hands of others (which does not justify it, however). When he meets the Rhinemaidens, his rather fitful vocal line, the use of *acciaccature* (notes performed very quickly and briefly before another note), and the low timbre of the accompanying instruments introduce us to Alberich as an awkward and ridiculous character. Later, when his actions are closely tied to several of the opera's key leitmotifs, he is never the one creating (or presenting) them: the motifs of the Rhine gold, the renunciation of love, and the power of the ring are presented by the Rhinemaidens, the ring motif first appears instrumentally, and even the curse motif does accompany Alberich's curse but rather the first effects of this curse, Fafner's murder of Fasolt. This therefore presents Alberich as a weak character with no real power on the action in the opera or on the other characters.

LEITMOTIF: While the motif associated with the "curse of the ring" does not accompany Alberich's curse (which is, by the way, a powerfully dramatic moment in which the only things accompanying Alberich are drum rolls or a few chords), the dwarf is nevertheless the creator of the curse. The curse motif, presented for the first time by three trombones, is rather slow, characterized by rising leaps and sustained notes, letting the reality of the curse sink into the spectators' skins.

Audio sample: "Curse of the ring"

MIME

tenor (higher-pitched male voice)

Performed by: David Cangelosi

(United States)

Alberich's brother, mistreated and beaten by his sibling. His vocal lines often contain onomatopoeia (exclamations of pain), making the character rather grotesque. Under Alberich's instructions, he creates the "*Tarnhelm*" (literally "camouflage helmet"), a helmet that allows the wearer to change his appearance or become invisible.

LEITMOTIF: The motif associated with the "*Tarnhelm*" is rather sinister sounding, played by muted horns. It slowly oscillates between similar chords.

Audio sample: "Tarnhelm"

THE RHINEMAIDENS

WOGLINDE

soprano (higher-pitched female voice)
Performed by: Andrea Núñez* (Canada)

WELLGUNDE

soprano (higher-pitched female voice)
Performed by: Florence Bourget* (Canada)

FLOSSHILDE

mezzo-soprano (medium-low female voice)
Performed by: Carolyne Sproule (Canada)

The three Rhinemaidens often sing at the same time. Cheerful and full of life, they mock the dwarf Alberich without realizing the danger he represents (their laughs, set to music, are very powerful). Once he steals the Rhine gold they were to guard, they are inconsolable. Their vocal lines, generally quite melodic and harmonious compared to those of the other characters, are often characterized by an absence of chromatism and predominance of the sound of a descending tone (Audio sample: "Weia"). They also use words that sometimes seem to have been chosen more for their sound than for their meaning: in the first line Woglinde sings ("Weia! Waga! Woge, du Welle,/walle zur Wiege! wagala weia!/ wallala, weiala weia!"), only the "Woge du Welle walle zur Wiege" portion makes sense in German. While they only appear at the beginning of the opera, the Rhinemaidens play a fundamental role. They introduce us to the work's principal leitmotifs, doubling the melody of the theme with their vocal line.

LEITMOTIF: Two motifs are associated with the Rhine gold. The first instrumental one is made up of a majestic rising arpeggio played for the first time by a solo French horn over strings regularly oscillating between two notes. This motif is followed with a melody to the glory of the gold, sung by the Rhinemaidens over stringed instruments increasingly evoking the sparkling of the gold with their constant movement.

Audio samples: "Gold 1," "Rhine gold," and "Rhine gold (instrumental)"

The Rhinemaidens then sing a melody that undergoes a transformation to become the ring motif, describing its power. This motif is made up of descending **thirds**, before going back up, imitating—according to some—the circular aspect of the ring.

Audio samples: "Ring" (first presentation by the Rhinemaidens) and "Ring instrumental 1" (its instrumental transformation will be reprised throughout the opera)

Lastly, the Rhinemaidens also present the very lyrical and sombre-sounding renunciation of love motif, in a minor key, which will be heard throughout the opera. We encourage you to try to sing the melody, to help you remember it.

Audio samples: "Renunciation of love" and "Renunciation of love (instrumental)"

THE CHALLENGES OF SINGING WAGNER

Wagner's operas are among some of the most difficult works to sing: indeed, they are generally longer than most other operas (though *Das Rheingold* is an exception in terms of its length) and their dramatic and theatrical demands on the singers are immense. However, the greatest challenge for all of the singers is to make themselves heard over such a powerful orchestra, especially when it is no longer acting as just an accompanist but rather as a narrator and participant in the action, on an equal footing with everything else. Don't forget that, in opera, singers do not have microphones but instead use their natural resonators (within their skulls). In fact, singers learn how to make their voices resonate in what they call "the mask," or the part of the face that includes the cheekbones, the back of the eyes, and the brow.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS, A MODERN RING?

There are several parallels that can be drawn between the story of *The Lord of the Rings* and that of Wagner's *Ring* cycle: at the centre of each is a ring that gives its wearer infinite power, but that also carries a curse that brings great suffering; in both cases, the prologue ends with the character who finds the ring (the giant Fasolt and the hobbit Deagol) killed at the hand of a friend (the giant Fafner and the hobbit Sméagol) who will then transform his appearance and live in a cave (Fafner becomes a dragon and Sméagol is transformed into Gollum); the ring will then fall into the hands of a hero who does not know of its power (Siegfried in Wagner's version and Bilbo Baggins in Tolkien's); and both works end with the ring's purification by fire, causing the collapse of a palace built on high, home to a powerful ruler served by nine cavaliers (Wagner's Valhalla, fortress of the ruler of the gods, Wotan and his Valkyries; and Tolkien's Barad-dûr, the dark tower of Sauron and his Nazgûl or black riders). Despite these parallels, Tolkien always denied any link between his work and that of Wagner, and both works also have numerous differences, especially as far as the message they seek to convey.

Wagner's tetralogy was, as we have seen, a work in which the line between good and evil is blurred: the gods are corrupt, as are most of the characters, and the ring comes from the Rhine gold, initially pure but corrupted by Alberich's greed and frustration. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the line between good and evil is much more clear cut, and the ring itself was created for evil from the outset; it almost has its own free will. In Wagner's work, the corruption of men and gods leads to their fall; with Tolkien, it is evil itself, contained within the ring, that causes the fall of those that come into contact with it. Wagner and Tolkien specialist Jamie McGregor suggests that Tolkien may have created *The Lord of the Rings* as a correction or inversion of Wagner's work, which, at the time *The Lord of the Rings* was conceived, had been appropriated by the Nazis to justify the horrors perpetuated by their regime.

VOCABULARY

acciaccatura: a note performed very rapidly, and of very short duration, before another note.

aria: unlike a recitative, in opera, an *aria* has a regular musical structure with more melodious vocal lines.

bourgeoisie: the social class midway between the nobility and the peasant or working class (it is sometimes called the middle class); it became more prominent in the 19th century with the social changes brought about by industrialization. Members of the bourgeoisie are generally well off, or at least have enough money to allow them to buy property. According to Marxist theory (which may have inspired Wagner), the bourgeoisie is the social class possessing the means of production in a capitalist society, thereby dominating the working class. In *Das Rheingold*, Alberich the Nibelung is sometimes interpreted to be a caricature of the bourgeoisie.

chromatism: in tonal music, scales are made up of tones and semitones. Semitones are the smallest interval between two notes in Western music (identified on the piano as the distance between a white key and the black key alongside it). When we speak of chromatism or of chromatic music, we mean music that mostly uses semitones, which creates a lot of tension, as the sounds are close to one another.

Gesamtkunstwerk: the German word meaning "total work of art" and symbolizing Wagner's vision of opera as a synthesis of all the arts, in which music, poetry, dance, and painting are brought together on equal footing.

leitmotif: a brief musical idea that identifies a character, object, or situation; it is often characterized by a tone (a specific instrument, for example), a melodic line, and a harmonic progression. The orchestra returns to this musical idea every time the character, object, or situation makes a return in the story.

prose: written or spoken language in its usual form, which does not follow the rules of poetry. A novel is written in prose, for example, as is this study guide.

recitative: in opera, a section of freer declamation in which the vocal line imitates speech.

tetralogy: a group of four related works; like a "trilogy" but with four works instead of three.

third: an interval of a distance of three degrees between two notes. The third can be major (a distance of two tones) or minor (a distance of one tone and one semitone).

trill: rapid repetition of two adjacent notes (a tone or a semitone apart).

versification: a set of rules allowing for the writing of verses, associated with poetry. Opera librettos are generally written in verse rather than in prose.

ACTIVITIES

I. FIND THE MATCHING PAIRS

a. Match the leitmotifs to their corresponding descriptions (if you wish, you can also listen to the corresponding audio samples).

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Wotan's Spear | a. several notes repeated with a very quick dotted rhythm |
| 2. Loge | b. percussion, emphasizing the downbeat, as if to imitate a heavy and awkward gait |
| 3. The Rhine Gold | c. a sequence of wavering sixteenth notes (with trills) and the use of chromatism |
| 4. The Giants | d. a long, descending scale with a dotted rhythm, played by the brass section |
| 5. The Nibelung | e. slow oscillation between similar chords, played by muted horns |
| 6. The Renunciation of Love | f. descending thirds, which then go back up |
| 7. Tarnhelm | g. a very lyrical and sombre sounding melody, in a minor key |
| 8. The Ring | h. a majestic rising arpeggio played for the first time by a solo French horn over strings regularly oscillating between two notes |

Answers: 1-d; 2-c; 3-h; 4-b; 5-a; 6-g; 7-e; 8-f

b. Match the characters to their corresponding descriptions.

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1. Loge | a. Brother of Alberich and creator of the Tarnhelm |
| 2. Wotan | b. Wotan's wife |
| 3. Fasolt | c. Ruler of the gods |
| 4. Alberich | d. God of thunder |
| 5. Fricka | e. Giant in love with Freia |
| 6. Mime | f. God of fire |
| 7. Freia | g. Nibelung who steals the Rhine gold and makes a ring from it |
| 8. Donner | h. Goddess of love and nature who cares for the apple trees that give the gods eternal youth |

Answers: 1-f; 2-c; 3-e; 4-g; 5-b; 6-a; 7-h; 8-d

II. TRUE OR FALSE?

1. Wagner composed *Das Rheingold* while in exile.

2. In *Das Rheingold*, Wagner applied the principles he developed in his autobiography, *Mein Leben*.

3. In the Bayreuth Festival Theatre, the orchestra was on stage because, for Wagner, its role was just as important as that of the singers.

4. Wagner innovated the operatic genre by reducing the difference between recitatives and arias through the use of leitmotifs.

Answers: 1-T; 2-F (he developed the principles in *Oper und Drama*); 3-F (the orchestra was hidden so that the spectators could immerse themselves in the story); 4-T

III. IN THE FOLLOWING LIST, CHOOSE THE INNOVATIVE INSTRUMENTS THAT WAGNER USED IN THE ORCHESTRA FOR HIS TETRALOGY

1. Wagnerian trumpet

2. Bass trumpet

- 3. Soprano trombone
- 4. Wagner tuba
- 5. Hammer

- 6. Anvil
- 7. Contrabass trombone
- 8. Electric guitar

Answers: 2-4-6-7

IV. WORD SEARCH

Find the vocabulary words in the following table.

A	V	S	C	N	U	I	M	P	L	K	A	T	E	I	F	C
G	E	S	A	M	T	K	U	N	S	T	W	E	R	K	M	T
G	R	A	N	T	E	W	R	E	L	I	R	A	I	L	B	G
R	S	O	N	A	T	H	E	L	O	T	I	I	A	P	O	D
T	I	T	E	P	R	O	S	E	P	R	E	R	C	T	U	E
H	F	A	B	R	A	C	C	I	A	C	C	A	T	U	R	A
O	I	M	O	O	L	W	E	R	M	A	I	R	R	E	G	M
A	C	I	L	L	O	N	T	H	I	R	D	I	I	P	E	N
V	A	P	A	N	G	U	I	G	E	S	A	M	L	N	O	K
B	T	A	R	E	Y	D	S	L	M	O	P	E	L	R	S	O
I	I	F	L	E	I	T	M	O	T	I	F	B	E	T	I	L
U	O	T	D	E	C	H	R	O	M	A	T	I	S	M	E	T
A	N	R	E	C	I	T	A	T	I	V	E	N	O	I	U	N

V. REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL ISSUES: PERSON OR OBJECT?

Think about a conflict you are currently experiencing with someone, and then choose the option that best corresponds to your way of seeing this person.

Object	Person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I'm not concerned with the person's needs or motivations 2. I only think of this person in relation to the way he or she behaves towards me 3. I feel justified in thinking negatively about this person 4. I often think of how this person has wronged me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I recognize that this person also has needs and concerns 2. I do not view this person's behaviour strictly in terms of myself 3. I also take my behaviour towards this person into account 4. I do not entertain negative thoughts about this person; I think of myself and the values I can create

Sometimes, people can make you suffer, but if you forget that these people also have their own motivations, concerns, and needs, you can let negativity take over and become like Alberich. While you cannot change the behaviour of others, you can change your vision of them and of yourself: by remembering that these individuals are people (and that not everything is all about you), you give them less power over you, which allows you to react with a heart that is at peace rather than at war. In fact, everything can be done with a peaceful or combative spirit: even if you need to place limits on others and protect yourself, doing so with a peaceful outlook lets you reduce your suffering in the process and have a more positive impact on others.

VI. CREATIVITY

In *Oper und Drama*, one of Wagner's goals was to bring together the arts (poetry, music, dance, and painting) on an equal footing to create a "total work of art." In this exercise, we encourage you to respond to *Das Rheingold* through dance or a drawing. As Wagner's vision also included collaboration between various artists, this can be done in groups. Choose one of the leitmotifs from *Das Rheingold* and listen to it several times. Then, create a drawing and/or dance that seem(s) to respond to the theme and its musical interpretation.