

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Selections from *Die Valküre* and *Götterdämmerung*

- I. Ride of the Valkyries from *Die Valküre*
- II. Magic Fire Music from *Die Valküre*
- III. Siegfried's Rhine Journey from *Götterdämmerung*
- IV. Siegfried's Death and Funeral Music from *Götterdämmerung*

Richard Wagner began work on what was to be his epic series of four operas known collectively as *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in 1848. He began by writing a dramatic poem which he titled *Siegfried's Death*. Wagner wrote the texts, also known as librettos, for his own operas and in them expounded his own philosophies and visions relating to society, nationalism, religion and race. After completing *Siegfried's Death*, which Wagner later developed into the opera *Götterdämmerung*, he determined that there needed to be an explanation as to what had brought the story to this point. Wagner then wrote another long dramatic poem entitled *Young Siegfried*. This is the basis for the opera *Siegfried*. At this point, however, Wagner still did not feel that the story was complete. More background needed to be provided. He then went on to write the texts for two more, bringing the total to four. Thus we have the texts that comprise what we now know as the "Ring Cycle." The four corresponding operas, which he did compose in the correct chronological order, are *Das Rheingold*, *Die Valküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. It took Wagner twenty-six years to complete the cycle. He only took time off from the project to compose one of his other great operas, *Tristan und Isolde*.

The "Ride of the Valkyries" is one of the best-known of all Wagner works. It opens the third act of *Die Valküre* and depicts the exultant ride of the warrior-maidens through the stormy skies, bearing the bodies of dead heroes into Valhalla. The concert version played tonight is arranged by the Dutch musician Wouter Hutschenruyter, Jr. (1859-1943) a noted composer, violinist and pianist. The "Magic Fire Music" accompanies the final scene in *Die Valküre* in which the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, having broken Wotan's command, is put into a charmed sleep and is surrounded by flames, from which only a fearless hero (Siegfried) can rescue her.

"Siegfried's Rhine Journey" is part of the prologue to Act I of *Götterdämmerung*, featuring one of the most famous horn calls in the literature along with some of the most romantic and exciting music in the symphonic literature. This evening's concert version is arranged by the German musician Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921), the composer of the opera *Hänsel und Gretel*, and Wagner's assistant at Bayreuth. "Siegfried's Death and Funeral Music" is the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*, which depicts the death of the hero and Brünnhilde's desire and decision to die with her beloved. In doing so, she destroys the curse of the ring and brings mankind to a new age of sublime human love, and brings the entire cycle to a passionate ending. Tonight's concert version is by the Czech musician Ludvik Stasny (1823-1883), himself a composer, conductor and oboist.