

**GUIDE THROUGH THE MUSIC
OF R. WAGNER'S "THE RING
OF THE NIBELUNG" (DER
RING DES NIBELUNGEN)**

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Guide Through the Music of R. Wagner's "The Ring of the Nibelung" (Der Ring Des Nibelungen)
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"THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG"
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BY
HANS VON WOLZOGEN
TRANSLATED BY
ERNST VON WOLZOGEN

NEW EDITION



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FEODOR REINBOTH,
PUBLISHER.

MUSI



THE TENOR OF WAGNER'S POEM.

Secure from covetous desire, the golden treasure in all its pure beauty once lay at the bottom of the Rhine. Around it the nimble folk of the Rhine-daughters dance and sing in playful joy — too careless guardians of the securely slumbering treasure. But sneaking out of the depths, a lustful Nibelung of the tribe of the dwarfs (residing in *Nebelheim, the home of fog*), the spiteful *Alberich* fights his way through the flood. There, reflecting the first rays of the rising sun, the radiant gold strikes his eyes. Laughingly the jeering nymphs betray to him the accursed importance of the metal, whose possessor should win the world if he could resign love; for where gold reigns, love must fly. The Nibelung forgets the charms of the merry water-fairies for the power-promising glitter of the gold: thus he curses *love*, which to him is but *lust*, and violently snatches the treasure from the rock. Eternal night falls over the guiltless depths. — Meanwhile shines out on the summit of a mountain in the bright sunlight the newly built castle of the chief-god *Wotan*. His mind, since the delights of young love faded for him, was likewise bent on possession and power. He therefore made a treaty with the daring *giants* to build him a strong castle, in return for which they requested what all beings long for; sunny, warm love for their cold home, in the shape of the fair *Freia*, the goddess of youth and beauty. *Fasolt* and *Fafner*, the giant-brothers, now demand their re-

ward; but the deceitful companion of Wotan, the fickle fire-god *Loge*, knows how to raise greedy longings after the cursed gold in their hearts by cunningly relating Alberich's adventure. The giants now claim the gold as ransom for Freia. — Wotan and *Loge* step down into Alberich's misty dens, where the robber forces the dwarfs, by thy power of the magic ring which he has forged out of the »Rhinegold«, to gather together a most enormous treasure for him. His brother *Mime* was obliged to procure him the *tarn-cap* (»Taruhelm«), which has the power of rendering invisible or transfiguring its wearer. The gods artfully use this and by its means catch the haughty possessor: he is forced to give up the treasure, the tarn-cap, and even the ring. No power is left him, save the power of the curse, and this falls upon the gods together with the possession of the fatal ring. — But now the giants again demand their reward. Wotan, knowing well the magic which dwells in the ring, tries to keep it from them and Freia already fears she must fall to their lot, when the warning apparition of *Erda*, the prophetess, the goddess of primeval wisdom, rises out of the ground and, holding over Wotan the curse which cleaves to the ring and the eternal end it is predestined once to bring upon the gods, induces him—but now too late—to give it up to the giants. All too soon he recognises the truth of her threat: for, in hastily packing up the treasure, the giants quarrel over the ring and Fafner kills Fasolt, taking all the riches along with him, which he is henceforth to guard in the shape of a dragon. (»Lindwurm«.) Deeply affected, Wotan and the gods turn their steps towards the castle, and as he crosses the rainbow-bridgè a new creative thought arises in his mind, a thought born of the divine necessity of the god, not of a mere creative desire: *Walhall* shall be the name of his heavenly building. — These are the contents of the prelude: »Rhinegold«. —

In order to fill the vast halls of *Walhall* with valiant champions, who should help the gods, if at any time destruction should threaten them through the power of Alberich, who is always lurking about, seeking for a chance

of regaining his ring. Wotan begets the *Walküren**), his knightly daughters, amongst whom *Brünnhilde*, with *Erda* herself. But of what avail are all heroes, who merely work out his own will, unless he can find the *only one*, who, himself free from the curse, may save the gods by regaining the fatal ring? To this end a human woman bears him the twins *Siegmond* and *Sieglinde*. Of these two the girl was carried off and married by *Hunding*. The boy, growing up amongst enemies and hardships, became a hardy, valiant man. And who but Wotan himself caused all his troubles, who himself thrust the sacred sword into the tree in *Hunding's* house, which only *Siegmond* is able to draw out again? Yet even *Siegmond* is not the hoped-for free hero, he is likewise under the ban of the curse. Whilst flying from *Hunding*, he accidentally enters his house and there finds his sister as well as the sword. The *Walsungen* twins, the children of Wotan, in order to save their race from destruction, bind themselves by a stronger tie than that of brother and sister. But *Fricka*, Wotan's wife, the protectress of marriage, cannot suffer this outrage and forces her husband to withdraw his help from the guilty hero; he, Wotan, now despairingly wishes for *the end* himself, and with a most terrible curse consecrates the *Nibelung*-hero *Hagen*, the son whom *Alberich* begot without love of the corrupt wife of the *Rhine-king Gibich*, as the annihilating heir of the world. *Brünnhilde*, conscious of the necessity under which the gods suffer, is to foretell to *Siegmond* his death. But when she sees him flying before *Hunding* with the poor despairing woman he loves so dearly, her noble heart is deeply touched. The fight with *Hunding* commences, *Brünnhilde* protects the *Walsung*, but upon the sacred spear of the offended god, which he stretches between the combatants, *Siegmond's* sacred sword breaks into splinters and he falls beneath *Hunding's* blows. — The *Walküre* surrenders herself to Wotan for punishment, having first helped *Sieglinde* to escape by giving

*) *Wal* (*Val*) means the totality of warriors killed in battle; *küren* means to choose. *Walküren* are the maidens who choose the heroes most fit for the last combat. (*Einherier*.) — Note of the transl.

her her own mare Grane and the pieces of Siegmund's sword. The god is forced to condemn his dearest child to slumber on a rock, till a man shall find her by the way, wake and win her. The maiden implores but one favour from her offended father: so surround her during her slumbers with a wide circle of blazing fire, in order that no man shall wake her, but a *jealous hero*, whom she hopes and expects will be: *Siegfried*. — These are the contents of the »Walküre».

From henceforth the god Wotan roves as a *Wanderer* through the world, content inactively to watch the tardy accomplishment of his devises. In an eastern wood, where Father as dragon lies in his den, Siegfried, who was brought forth there by the dying Sieglinde, grows up; The Nibelung *Mime* being his sly guardian, who wants to bring him up and train him to kill Fafner and win the ring for him. But Siegfried hates the ugly dwarf; in the free woods he educates himself. Scarcely does he learn that the sacred sword, whose splinters *Mime* is unable to forge together rightly belongs to him, than he does the work himself and with this new sword »*Nothing*» he purposes to slay the dragon. *Mime* brews a poisoned potion with which he intends to kill the vanquisher, when he shall have done the deed. — Siegfried does indeed the valiant act, unconscious of what spoils he had gained by it. But a little of the dragon's blood touches his lips and by that he learns to understand the language of the birds. They counsel him to kill the treacherous *Mime* and to take the ring and the tarn-cap. Now he is the free owner of the treasure; but he, the merry son of the woods, does not care for the glittering gold. The mysterious awe of the lonely wood fills him with longing after the hitherto sorely missed love and in exulting joy he follows his bird-guide to *Brünhilde's* rock. — Here once more Wotan interposes between his grandchild and victory; for the hero must win what the god wishes him to win through strife and trouble, and by his own might. His sword breaks the spear of the god, upon which it formerly was splintered. He wakes the maiden. He triumphs over the last re-

sistance—she casts away her holy fear of the husband to whom she shall belong and Love celebrates his most glorious victory. — Thus ends the second day of the festival-play: »Siegfried».

But the end, the salvation of the accursed world, is not yet accomplished, for Alberich and his son Hagen, whom Wotan destined as heir of the world, are still living and working, the gold is still unrestored to the Rhine and the ring is still in Siegfried's possession. The drama of the »Götterdämmerung»*) is still to follow. — The hero starts in pursuit of new deeds of valour, leaving Brünnhilde the ring as a token of remembrance. How shall she, now become a devoted loving wife, give his beloved gift back to the Rhine in order to save the world and the gods? No, she too falls under the curse in the mistaken joy and pride of her love. — Siegfried comes to the court of Gibich: there awaits him Alberich's son Hagen, the half-brother of king *Gunther*, and throws the net of his Nibelungish art around him. Their sister *Gutrune* offers him a magic potion which makes him forget all that before was dear and sacred to him and awakens earthly desires for *Gutrune*: this new vision of human grace and beauty. He demands her for his wife and in return offers to win Brünnhilde for *Gunther*. He assumes *Gunther's* shape by means of the tarn-cap, struggles with Brünnhilde and snatches the ring from her — In despairing grief at having been deceived, Brünnhilde openly accuses him of treachery. Not *Gunther* could have overcome her, for he has not the ring, but Siegfried, who was her husband. Thus *Gunther* sees himself detected and in the meanwhile must suspect Siegfried of having stained his conjugal honour. Brünnhilde, *Gunther* and *Hagen* swear his death. He is to be slain in the chase. — Shortly before his end he

*) »Götterdämmerung» in the language of ancient German mythology means the *dawn of doomsday*, on which the gods perish in the combat against the evil powers, and old earth is swallowed up by water and burnt by fire (*Muspilli*). The new world, in which love and light are to reign, arises out of the waves. — Note of the transl.