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## **Seattle Opera opens 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary season with an imaginative *Das Rheingold***

**Greer Grimsley reprises his role as Wotan  
alongside Denyce Graves in her Seattle Opera debut**

**Innovative staging by director Brian Staufenbiel  
offers visual spectacle and transhumanist aesthetic**

SEATTLE—Seattle Opera kicks off its 23/24 season with Richard Wagner's epic [\*Das Rheingold\*](#) in a stunning production by stage director **Brian Staufenbiel**.

Headlining the cast of performers are conductor **Ludovic Morlot**, bass-baritone **Greer Grimsley**, and mezzo-soprano **Denyce Graves** making her Seattle Opera debut.

"*Das Rheingold* stands on its own as a compact, engaging story that is very theatrical," said **General Director Christina Scheppelmann**. "Each scene propels forward into the next, making for a compelling and dramatic experience. The story's rich allegory and well-defined characters have much to say about the human condition—it is a resonant tale about power, hubris, and corruption that is still very relevant today."

*Das Rheingold* is a fitting start to Seattle Opera's **60<sup>th</sup> anniversary season**, which celebrates the company's history and looks forward to a bright future. "I think doing a 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary season without Wagner would be incomplete," added Scheppelmann, who [recently announced](#) her appointment as the next General Director of La Monnaie/De Munt in Brussels beginning in 2025. "We are fortunate to

have a tremendous cast of performers join us for this exciting start to the new season.”

*Das Rheingold* appears on the McCaw Hall stage for the first time since 2013 in an imaginative staging by stage director **Brian Staufenbiel**, which premiered at Minnesota Opera in 2016. “In mounting this production of *Das Rheingold*, I sought to connect Wagner’s mythical realm with the mysterious complexities of our technological era,” said Staufenbiel, who last appeared at Seattle Opera for the innovative film *Flight* (’21), shot on location at The Museum of Flight. “The action takes place in a future where science and technology have caught up with nature, where the organic, the mechanical, and the digital have started to fuse.”

Staufenbiel’s staging, called “genius [...] stagecraft wizardry” by [Bachtrack](#), places the orchestra on stage, turning the orchestra pit into an extended stage and making the orchestra an active player in the drama. “McCaw Hall gave us the opportunity to integrate the orchestra into the scenic textures onstage, with the orchestra’s physical presence creating a musical-visual fabric,” said Staufenbiel. “This freed us to use the split-level pit to represent the Rhine and the underworld of Nibelheim. Luminous projections superimposed on the performers create a visual framework that supports and develops the storytelling.”

**Ludovic Morlot**, conductor emeritus of Seattle Symphony, returns to conduct his first *Das Rheingold*. In 2021, Morlot conducted Seattle Opera’s *Welcome Back Concert: Die Walküre*, and, in January 2023, *Samson and Delilah in Concert*. Joining Staufenbiel on the creative team are three Seattle Opera debuts—costume designer **Mathew LeFebvre**, projection designer **David Murakami**, and lighting designer **Mextly Couzin**—as well as returning appearances by sound designer **Robertson Witmer** and **Ashlee Naegle**, Seattle Opera’s Wigs, Hair, and Makeup Manager and Designer. English captions are provided by Seattle Opera Dramaturg **Jonathan Dean**.

The mostly American cast features a star-studded combination of returning stalwarts, notable Seattle Opera debuts, and first-time role appearances. Seattle favorite **Greer Grimsley** returns as Wotan alongside company debuts including **Denyce Graves** as Erda, **Katie Van Kooten** as Freia, and **Peixin Chen** as Fasolt. Returning singers include **Frederick Ballentine** (Charlie Parker, *Charlie Parker’s Yardbird*, ’20) as Loge, **Michael Mayes** (Count di Luna, *Il trovatore*, ’19) as Alberich, **Michael Chiodi** (Germont, *La traviata*, ’23) in his role debut as Donner, **Martin Bakari** (Jalil, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, ’23) as Mime, **Melody Wilson** (Olga, *Eugene Onegin*, ’20) as Fricka, **Kenneth Kellogg** (The Father, *Blue*, ’22) in his role debut as Fafner, **Sarah Larsen** (Flora, *La traviata*, ’23) in her role debut as Flosshilde, **Shelly Traverse** (Eurydice, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, ’21) in her role

debut as Wellgunde, **Jacqueline Piccolino** (First Lady, *The Magic Flute*, '17) as Woglinde, and **Viktor Antipenko** (Melot, *Tristan and Isolde*, '22) as Froh.

*Das Rheingold*'s cast is noteworthy for its diversity, which has historically been an anomaly in Wagner productions. "I have never heard of another Wagner production that has cast so many people of color, especially when it comes to the star power of Black singers in the leading roles," said musicologist **Dr. Naomi André**, who has served as Seattle Opera's scholar in residence since 2019. "This *Rheingold* cast follows the historic performance of Mary Elizabeth Williams as Isolde last season in *Tristan and Isolde*, which was, as far as I know, the first time a Black singer performed this role in a major house. Outside of other leading companies casting one or two Black singers in leading roles, it's hard to think of another opera house that has done more for Black singers in Wagner than Seattle Opera."

Audiences eager to learn more can look forward to a **one-of-a-kind opera class** on [\*The Music of Das Rheingold\*](#), led by conductor **Ludovic Morlot**. Maestro Morlot will unravel the marvels of Wagner's score, focusing on the orchestral tapestry that weaves the drama together.

- **The Music of *Das Rheingold* with Ludovic Morlot**

*August 17, 2023, at 7:00 PM, Tagney Jones Hall*

\$30 sliding-scale fee, registration at [seattleopera.org/rheingoldclass](https://seattleopera.org/rheingoldclass)

## **About Seattle Opera**

Established in 1963, Seattle Opera is committed to serving the people of the Pacific Northwest through music, storytelling, and programs for people of all ages. Each year, more than 50,000 people attend the company's performances, and more than 100,000 people are served through school performances, radio broadcasts, and more. The organization brings opera to life in a number of different ways, offering artistic excellence through national and international collaborations. Seattle Opera strives to create an environment where artists, staff, behind-the-scenes workers, and members of the community feel a strong connection to the company, and to the art of opera. Follow Seattle Opera on Facebook, Twitter, SoundCloud, and on Classical KING FM 98.1.

## **Performance Information**

- Music and libretto by Richard Wagner
- Sung in German with English subtitles
- Run time approx. 2 hours 30 minutes with no intermission
- Tickets \$35–399

**McCaw Hall (321 Mercer Street, Seattle, WA 98109)**

Saturday, August 12, 2023 at 7:30 PM  
Wednesday, August 16, 2023 at 7:30 PM  
Friday, August 18, 2023 at 7:30 PM  
Sunday, August 20, 2023 at 2:00pm

**Conductor:** Ludovic Morlot  
**Director:** Brian Staufenbiel  
**Costume Designer:** Mathew LeFebvre†  
**Lighting Designer:** Mextly Couzint†  
**Sound Designer:** Robertson Witmer  
**Projection Designer:** David Murakami†  
**English Captions:** Jonathan Dean

**Wotan:** Greer Grimsley  
**Loge:** Frederick Ballentine  
**Alberich:** Michael Mayes  
**Donner:** Michael Chioldi  
**Erda:** Denyce Graves†  
**Mime:** Martin Bakari  
**Fricka:** Melody Wilson  
**Freia:** Katie Van Kooten†  
**Fafner:** Kenneth Kellogg  
**Fasolt:** Peixin Chen†  
**Flosshilde:** Sarah Larsen  
**Wellgunde:** Shelly Traverse  
**Woglinde:** Jacqueline Piccolino  
**Froh:** Viktor Antipenko

† = Seattle Opera debut

*Tickets and information at [seattleopera.org/rheingold](https://seattleopera.org/rheingold).*

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