

## **DAS RHEINGOLD**

Richard Wagner; The first “music drama” in The Ring of the Nibelung

### **Scene One**

As the Rhinemaidens Woglinde, Wellgunde and Flosshilde frolic in the waters of the Rhine, an ugly Nibelung, Alberich, climbs up to a rocky ledge to watch them and to lure them into his grasp. The sirens elude and mock him, and he curses in fury. When mysterious light begins to radiate through the waters, the sisters explain that it emanates from the gold in their charge. When forged into a ring, the gold promises world domination. Since the magic to forge the ring can only be obtained by one who renounces love, the Rhinemaidens do not fear that the lusty dwarf will steal it. Forswearing love, Alberich tears the gold loose and scrambles away, leaving the nymphs to lament their loss.

### **Scene Two**

In the realm of the gods, Fricka awakes her husband Wotan, the ruler of the gods, to remind him that the price of his newly built castle, Valhalla, is Freia, her sister. Freia, the goddess of youth and love, rushes in and begs protection from the giants, Fasolt and Fafner, who have come to claim her. Her brothers Froh and Donner try to protect her, but Wotan intervenes, hoping that his crafty advisor Loge will arrive with a solution. Loge explains that the only substitute for Freia might be Alberich's gold hoard and ring, which would make a fair exchange. Wotan rejects the idea, but when the giants lead the goddess away and the gods begin to age in her absence, he follows Loge to Alberich's realm, Nibelheim, in search of the treasure.

### **Scene Three**

Since achieving ultimate power, Alberich has forced his fellow Nibelungs to forge gold, and has enlisted his talented brother Mime to make from it a magic helmet. Alberich tests this Tarnhelm and, rendered invisible, rewards his brother's diligence with a beating. Mime bemoans to Wotan and Loge that he has been outwitted. The gods goad Alberich into demonstrating his power, which he does by transforming himself into a huge dragon. Loge is impressed but challenges him to change into something small. Choosing to become a toad, Alberich is himself outwitted by the gods, who tie him up and drag him from Nibelheim.

### **Scene Four**

Alberich supposes that surrendering his hoard of gold will purchase his freedom. With the Ring, he summons the Nibelungs who bring his treasure, but refuses to relinquish the Ring, which Wotan then wrests from his finger. Alberich curses the Ring to all who possess it. The giants bargain that they will accept as payment a pile of gold tall enough to conceal Freia from them. They stack the gold and Loge surrenders the Tarnhelm to hide her hair, which was still showing, but Wotan refuses to part with the Ring when Fasolt sees Freia's eye through a chink, one he demands be closed with the Ring. Erda, the Earth Mother, appears and warns of the gods' doom. Unsettled, Wotan throws the Ring onto the hoard. Arguing over a fair division of the spoils, Fafner slays Fasolt and drags away the gold, the Tarnhelm and the Ring. Donner invokes a

thunderstorm to clear the air, and Wotan invites the gods to cross the rainbow bridge into Valhalla, as the Rhinemaidens are heard lamenting the loss of their gold.