

As each sang, I could imagine that we were in a new golden age. But their splendor did put the others in the shade – in Act II Blythe blew Bryn Terfel off the stage.

No one would claim that the Met and the Met Orchestra is the best frame to display either Terfel's Wotan or **Deborah Voigt's** Brünnhilde. His *Walküre* Wotan had subtlety and none of the hectoring that plagued his *Rheingold*, yet he lacked the impact that great Wotans must have. His singing seemed overly careful and poised. His efforts were focused on defining the character – not a bad thing – and, as in *Rheingold*, he became securer with each performance.

What can be said about Deborah Voigt? I dislike the squeezed quality of her present voice, the gold has tarnished, and far too often in the early performances she was unable to hold a steady tone. That said, she nego-

tiated the heights of the “hojotoho's” well, which perhaps reimbursed us for her breathiness in the lower parts. Her athleticism as well as Terfel's allowed them to hop around the set, while their interaction had extremely touching moments, necessary in the drama that centers on these two.

Despite his pain (after the first night he took all his bows from the pit) **James Levine** conducted boisterous performances, drawing a rough-and-ready sound from the orchestra. His conducting varied from evening to evening: for instance, on those nights when Westbroek was going especially strong, he broadened the tempo at “O herrstes Wunder!” to let her soar.

I should explain my disappointment further. I don't consider the new Met *Ring* a “bad” *Ring*, just unfocused, at least up to now. I continue to hope that something substanti-

ve will result from Lepage's exploration, something that will cast new light on the meaning of the *Ring*. I would be delighted if the machine came to symbolize Fate – **Cocteau's** *Machine infernale* – with its exigencies standing for the limits placed on the characters. Yet in the back of my mind is the example of another innovative director who fell flat on his face when confronted with Wagner's epic. In summer 1999, **Andrei Serban** came in practically at the last moment to restage **Nikolaus Lehnhoff's** production for San Francisco Opera. He seemed awed by the job and spent far more time considering how to dress the giants than how to address Wagner's themes. Lepage, of course, has had much more time than Serban to mull over what he wants to do, and the sets and mechanism are his own, but I get the same feeling of aimlessness. I hope I'm wrong.

Siegfried at the Met Opera Text: John L. DiGaetani

In November of 2011 the Met's new *Siegfried* had its premiere and by and large really pleased the audience. The night I saw it “the machine” worked just fine and everything went smoothly – not always the case. The machine moves enormous planks around so that the unit set changes to reflect each of the scenes and its visual requirements. It is fascinating to see the set moving and sliding and altering to meet the demands of the various scenes. While the images onstage are governed by the dimensions of the machine, these images were consistently enticing.

The machine was also able to project wonderful images of nature onto the planks – a birch forest, falling leaves, a blacksmith's hut, a waterfall, a mountain top, a flying bird, etc. The forest bird was especially captivating in the second act, though the mountaintop at the end of the opera needed more light to reflect Wagner's stage directions. But Robert Lepage's *Ring* did not become Euro trash and did try to reflect Wagner's stage directions and the visual demands implied in the orchestral music. We were never put in someone's basement (as in the Copenhagen *Ring*) and the costumes were never ridiculous (as in the Los Angeles *Ring*). In fact, Francois St-Aubin's costumes and Etienne Boucher's lighting added to the drama onstage, though I did wish the final scene of the opera were brighter since the opera moves from darkness to bright light.

The big surprise of this *Siegfried* was the Siegfried, **Jay Hunter Morris**, who replaced **Gary Lehman**, who replaced **Ben Heppner**. All these cancellations undoubtedly added to the pressure on this tenor. But Morris, who sang the role in the San Francisco *Ring* last summer, sounded much better at the Met – a real Helden tenor who was not vocally exhausted by the end of the opera. His voice is



Kuva: Ken Howard / Metropolitan Opera

large and has real tenor ping and a beautiful tone. He got the biggest ovation at the end for not only getting through this most difficult of tenor roles but singing the part beautifully and with dramatic credibility.

Bryn Terfel's Wotan is certainly now the greatest Wotan around – he sang the role with a lovely, lyrical baritone sound, excellent German diction, and dramatic conviction. Here he was the defeated Wotan, the Wanderer, trying to control events but knowing that they were beyond his grasp. **Eric Owens** was a lyrical-sounding Alberich, though one wished he were more malevolent and more a foil to Wotan. **Gerhard Siegel's** Mime was comic rather than malevolent, though here again more malice would have generated more dramatic intensity. He was too likeable and his plotting to poison Siegfried never became a palpable reality, though Siegel sang the part beautifully.

Hans Peter König presented a very moving Fafner, who appears from beneath the dragon when he is mortally wounded and becomes very sympathetic as the dying giant. **Mojca Erdmann** impressed as the Forest Bird, with all the easy high notes and flexibility that this bel canto soprano role demands. **Patricia Bardon** had dramatic presence and a lovely contralto voice as Erda,

though she did not have the sonorous low tones that the role demands.

Deborah Voigt sang with a fresh, youthful-sounding voice as Brünnhilde. The *Siegfried* Brünnhilde is the highest of her three roles in the *Ring*, and Voigt certainly has the high notes so she sounded wonderful, and her duet with Siegfried at the end of the opera has sexual energy and dramatic excitement to end this most comic of the four *Ring* operas with real flourish.

Fabio Luisi's conducting won a well-deserved ovation at the end, especially since he had to take over quickly due to the illness of **James Levine**. Luisi conducted with brisk tempos so that this *Siegfried* moved along with real energy and dramatic drive. While some of the lovelier passages were not as languorous, one appreciated that this performance never dragged. Luisi also remained sensitive to the singers' needs and, except in the first act, which was too loud, he by and large did not drown out the singers.

The Met's new *Ring*, produced and directed by **Robert Lepage**, has so far won audience approval for its clever designs and emphasis on the cycles of nature which control the *Ring*. Water, earth, fire, and air all become tangible realities in this lovely *Siegfried*.