

## REVIEWS

## SF Symphony, Simone Young, and Wotan's Incestuous Twins

November 25, 2019 | By [Thomas May](#), *Musical America*

SAN FRANCISCO — Following last year's [triumphant Ring Cycle](#) at San Francisco Opera, any prospect for a return of the epic to the Bay Area—indeed, to the West Coast, since Seattle Opera has no imminent plans for one—is at best years away. So a fair number of Wagnerians assembled at Davies Hall to get a quick fix with San Francisco Symphony's (SFS) concert performance of the first act of *Die Walküre* on November 14.

Even without the benefit of scenery or costumes, let alone a directorial vision, this relatively brief excerpt proved to be not only immensely satisfying but illuminating in its right. Australian guest conductor Simone Young, the first woman to have recorded the complete *Ring*, had a warmly responsive rapport with this excellent orchestra.



Stuart Skelton, conductor Simone Young, Emily Magee in SFSymphony's *Die Walküre*, Act I

With Stuart Skelton as Siegmund, Emily Magee as his twin Sieglinde, and Ain Anger in the role of Hunding, this was luxury casting of a most distinctive sort: the SFS itself in the limelight as a major character, acoustically and interpretively, sharing the stage with the singers.

Wagner, complaining about the challenge of staging the *Ring*, once quipped that having invented the invisible orchestra, the next step would be to progress to the invisible stage. But here was a taste of his music theater recalibrated as a kind of sung symphony: the visible orchestra taking the place of sets and lighting design, with Young's lithe gestures providing still another layer of commentary.

Wagner's symphonic cohesion was more apparent than ever, no longer subservient to cues and stage business. The opening storm, for example, built with sturdy suspense but then eased naturally into the first strains of the love music. Young underscored the musical logic of this progression, like an enormous exposition that lays out the main thematic ideas. The long orchestral passages that convey the as-yet unspoken emotional bond between Siegmund and Sieglinde glowed with meaningful detail, eliciting a golden, burnished sound from the horns and vibrant color from the woodwinds in particular.

The unrelenting string tremolos that set *Walküre* in motion sounded all the more electrifying in light of the program's first half, in which Young led an ensemble of 23 SFS strings in *Metamorphoses*, Richard Strauss's late-life work of mourning from the last year of the Second World War. Her vision, while boldly focused on the overall trajectory, gracefully allowed solo lines to emerge and blend back into the string body, like wordless singers.

The focus on *Walküre's* musical values did not shortchange dramatic ones but cast the latter in a different light. Careful pacing of the various stages of Siegmund's monologue about his childhood trauma, for instance, gave greater weight to the *Wälsung's* vulnerability. Skelton let loose the full, glorious force of his heldentenor in his house-shaking invocation to "Wälse," but he also had space to shape his storytelling with considerable sensitivity. Magee's soprano evoked different shades of demure grace and fear as Sieglinde, but then progressed convincingly to soaring outbursts of full-voiced, ecstatic bliss with her gleaming high notes in the final scene.

Ain Anger's multilayered portrayal made of Hunding more than the brutal, villainous foil. Along with an unnervingly brooding quality, he added a tinge of dark irony, even self-doubt, that only enhanced his threatening presence.

Young found an effective balance between luxuriant detail and Wagner's sweeping dramatic trajectory from doom to liberating (moon)light — a trajectory that also seemed symphonically familiar.

## ma career center

### FEATURED JOBS

## Find Jobs

Attractions Booking Agent  
New York, NY - **Opus 3 Artists**

Talent Agent, Classical  
New York, NY - **UIA Talent Agency**

Cultural Affairs Director  
Thousand Oaks, CA - **City of Thousand Oaks**

YOLA Site Conductor  
Los Angeles, CA - **Los Angeles Philharmonic Association**

Marketing and Programs Associate  
New York, NY - **Concert Artists Guild**

Senior Individual Giving Manager  
West Palm Beach, FL - **Palm Beach Opera**

Chief Development Officer  
Phoenix, AZ - **The Phoenix Symphony**

Director of Advancement & Patron Communications  
Richmond, VA - **Richmond Symphony**

Post a Job

More Jobs

Powered By [yourmembership](#)

### PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

## FIND:

- ☐ **CONTESTS**
- ☐ **SCHOLARSHIPS**
- ☐ **SCHOOLS**

ADVERTISEMENT

» [MORE](#)

## MOST READ on musicalamerica

Photo by Stefan Cohen

Tweet



## WHO'S BLOGGING



### NOTED ENDEAVORS

Interviews with musicians who have successfully created their own opportunities.

#### Fundraising, Part II: Corpo...



[Read more about this video](#)

### WHO ELSE IS BLOGGING

**Law and Disorder** by GG Arts Law  
**Career Advice** by Legendary Manager Edna Landau  
**An American in Paris** by Frank Cadenhead

1. [New Artist of the Month: Violinist Hao Zhou](#)
2. [David Geffen Hall Will Never Be the Same](#)
3. [Mariss Jansons Dies at 76](#)
4. [Runnicles Threatens His Exit in Grand Teton Fest Dispute](#)
5. [Domingo: 'Gallant gestures are viewed differently nowadays.'](#)
6. [Venerable Met Staging as Backdrop for Major House Debuts](#)
7. [P'burg Festival Opera Names Artistic Director](#)
8. [Hungarian State Opera House Renovation Incomplete](#)
9. [California Composer Wins 2020 Grawemeyer Award](#)

## ■ NETWORK

### FIND:

- ☐ PRESENTERS
- ☐ ARTISTS
- ☐ MANAGERS
- ☐ MEDIA

ADVERTISEMENT

» [LATEST ROSTER CHANGES](#)

Updates to artist manager rosters

» [MORE](#)

## ■ RENT A PHOTO

Search Musical America's archive of photos from 1900-1992.



» [BROWSE & SEARCH ARCHIVE](#)

ABOUT US | SITE MAP | ADVERTISE | CONTACT US  
 NEWSLETTER SIGN UP | TERMS OF SERVICE  
 COPYRIGHT | PRIVACY POLICY | TERMS OF SALE