

The opera's of Richard Wagner

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Analyses and Reviews

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Preface

Opera entered my life in the early 1960s through a scratched gramophone record featuring highlights from *La bohème*. It was the now-legendary recording with Tebaldi and Bergonzi under Serafin. I must have played that record at least fifty times. A few years later, Wagner joined the mix via the radio, through the overture to *Tannhäuser*. That piece has always fascinated me and remains one of my favorites to this day.

When I started university in 1968, I met someone who had actually been to Bayreuth and had seen *Tannhäuser* there. Another person then chipped in with a story about a *Lohengrin* in which the tenor was supposed to board a swan at the end and exit the stage. The anecdote was that the man was apparently tipsy and, with an uncoordinated wave of his arm, let the swan pass by without mounting it. It must have been a remarkable production, especially when you consider how the end of *Lohengrin* actually unfolds.

All in all, my early Wagner memories possess little depth. My true interest only emerged just over thirty years ago, when listening to and attending operas became my favorite pastime. I was deeply impressed by a recording of *Die Walküre* featuring Jessye Norman as Sieglinde. In 1994, *Die Walküre* was also the first *Ring* opera I attended in the theatre, namely in Cologne. Gwynneth Jones sang one of her last Brünnhildes, Gary Lakes was the Siegmund, and Renate Behle the Sieglinde. Two years later, I saw that same *Walküre* again in Düsseldorf. As it turned out, it was a co-production with Cologne. My first introduction to the Wagner Society dates back to that time.

By now, I have attended each of the ten operas belonging to the canon more than ten times, with *Die Walküre* leading the pack. The revival by Dutch National Opera (DNO) in 2019 was number 25. I have also seen the three *Frühwerke*—*Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot*, and *Rienzi*—multiple times.

From 2011 to 2019, I was the editor-in-chief of the Wagner Society's magazine, the *Wagner Kroniek*. In that capacity, I wrote extensively about Wagner's operas. From 2012 onwards, this was expanded to include reviews I wrote for the opera magazine *Place de l'Opera*. This also made it possible to attend the Bayreuth Festival several years in a row as a member of the press.

This book is a compilation of what I have written about Wagner's operas over the years. Analyses and background articles are, of course, timeless, but readers will also find plenty of information about the works in question within the included reviews—information that stands independently of the performances' original dates.

Although the respective storylines are integrated into the text, a reader might wish to read through them in their entirety first, without being distracted by what the author has to say about them. To that end, a synopsis of each of the operas has been added at the back of the book. These have been drawn from open-source reporting.

Apart from this, it should be noted that this book is specifically intended for seasoned Wagnerians. Titles, technical terms, and quotations from the libretto have therefore not been translated from the German. This preserves their authenticity.

All thirteen of Wagner's operas are covered in this book. During the Bayreuth Festival, I attended and reviewed the ten operas performed in the *Festspielhaus* at least once over the course of six seasons. Consequently, the text provides a reasonably complete picture of my personal experience of the Wagner universe.

Rotterdam, August 2026

Peter Franken

Richard Wagner

Richard Wagner was born on 22 May 1813 in Leipzig. He passed away on 13 February 1883 in Venice. Wagner received his musical education at the University of Leipzig. His first attempt at writing a theatrical piece was *Leubald* in the period 1826–28. The text of this ‘Trauerspiel’ has largely been preserved, but the music has been lost, presumably by the composer’s own doing. In 1832–33, the opera *Die Hochzeit* followed, an unfinished work of which the libretto was destroyed by Wagner after his sister Rosalie, his biggest fan, made it unmistakably clear that she found it a dreadful story. A few small parts of the music have been preserved. Presumably, part of the storyline was used for the libretto of *Die Feen*, Wagner’s first completed work, which was ready in 1833. This was followed by *Das Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi*.

These three works are classical number operas, but starting with *Der fliegende Holländer*, Wagner moved more in the direction of through-composed works. Where self-contained pieces—arias, so to speak—can still be detected in *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, that is definitively a thing of the past with the tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Wagner no longer viewed his work as operas, but as music theatre dramas, Gesamtkunstwerke in which various artistic disciplines form an organic whole. Musically, he developed a style that was increasingly determined by the use of chromatics without crossing the boundaries of tonality. *Tristan und Isolde* is the prime example of this.

Wagner is one of the most frequently performed opera composers. In the 2018–19 season, for instance, 721 performances were given worldwide, spread across 198 productions. All ten operas from the Bayreuth canon were in the top one hundred. Only Verdi, Puccini, Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti and Bizet saw more performances, with *La traviata* leading the pack.

An incredible amount has been written about Wagner as a person, but all of that falls outside the scope of this book, which is almost entirely dedicated to his 13 works for the music theatre.

Die Feen

Wagner completed the romantic fairy-tale opera *Die Feen* in 1833, when he was 20 years old. He was never able to experience a performance of his debut work; the premiere did not take place until 1888, five years after his death. Even after that, the work enjoyed little success. For instance, the French premiere only took place in 2009 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. Many Wagnerians, including myself, saw that production.

Where Wagner's second opera *Das Liebesverbot* can be understood as a German Spieloper in the style of Lortzing, but with strong Italian influences, and *Rienzi* as an attempt to create a German grand opéra, *Die Feen* is above all an 'embryonic Wagner'. This is particularly evident in the libretto, which features elements that would come to characterise Wagner's later work.

It starts right away with the main character Arindal, who has lived with an unknown fairy princess but is not allowed to ask about her name and origins for the first eight years of their marriage. That he does so anyway, just one day before the end of that term, is presumably due to overlooking a leap year. And of course, this blunder ushers in a series of terrible events that keep the characters in their grip until the end of the opera. The similarity to *Lohengrin* and Elsa is clear.

At the end, there is a redemption of Arindal and his beloved because both become immortal; we also see this return in various forms in later works, such as in *Tannhäuser* and *Der fliegende Holländer*. Finally, it is striking that the work already features long narrative arcs, something that never really went away after that. The young composer clearly listened a lot to music by Weber (*Euryanthe*), Marschner (*Der Vampyr*, *Der Templer und die Jüdin*) and especially Beethoven, particularly his Ninth and the opera *Fidelio*. Furthermore, Italian influences (Bellini) can be detected, though much less than in *Das Liebesverbot*. Vocally, high demands are placed on the performers. For instance, Ada's big scene in the second act 'Weh'mir, so nah'die fürchterliche Stunde' foreshadows what Wagner would later serve up to his Brünnhildes.

The work features no fewer than three pairs of lovers who reflect the noble hierarchy. At the top are Prince Arindal and his wife Ada, daughter of the fairy king. Below them are the knight Morald and his beloved Lora, Arindal's sister. Finally, Arindal's friend Gernot and Lora's friend

Drolla. With so many main roles, recounting the story in brief is an almost impossible task. Let it suffice for me to reveal that Ada is turned into stone by her father for a time, a theme that would later be picked up by von Hofmannsthal in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

In the staging that Renaud Doucet had created for Leipzig, there were three levels of action. The scenes focusing on Arindal take place in a contemporary bourgeois milieu. To emphasise his outsider role in the fairy world—and his complete lack of control over events—he walks around looking like the personification of the main character in *Death of a Salesman*. The fairy world is a fairy-tale garden with lots of greenery and ‘Disney costumes’. The world Arindal comes from, the royal court where his sister Lora resides, has a very grandly designed ‘Camelot setting’ with every imaginable cliché.

Christiane Libor, who performed Brünnhilde in the Leipzig *Ring*, was a good choice for the role of Ada. Anything less than a dramatic soprano is insufficient for this early Wagner role. She made an impression in her big solo in the second act and also managed to draw most of the attention to herself in the third act. Big voice, beautifully sung, excellent performance. Lora was performed by Dara Hobbs, who managed to give Libor a run for her money.

The male lead was somewhat less well cast with Endrik Wottrich. Arindal is clearly a forerunner of Wagner’s later Heldenentens and requires a Siegmund type. The man was also not helped by the intentionally very nerdy appearance of his character.

With the Gewandhausorchester in the pit, there is always a luxury accompaniment in Leipzig. Conductor Friedemann Layer turned it into a potent performance, in the dramatic second act *sempre crescendo*, with plenty of momentum, though a little too loud for my taste.

All in all, a mature performance of Wagner’s debut work, a piece he probably would have been very satisfied with had he been able to experience a performance at this level. A huge compliment to the Oper Leipzig.

Incidentally, the ban on performing it in the Festspielhaus does not mean that Wagner had distanced himself completely from his youthful work. Reportedly, after completing *Parsifal* in Palermo, he played parts from *Die Feen* in his domestic circle. Perhaps to symbolise the end of his career as a composer.

Das Liebesverbot

Wagner composed *Das Liebesverbot* when he was in his early twenties. The work premiered in 1836 in Magdeburg under the baton of the young composer himself. It turned out to be a complete fiasco, and a second performance never materialised during Wagner's lifetime. The full title of this youthful work is: *Das Liebesverbot oder die Novize von Palermo*. The libretto is an adaptation by the composer of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Wagner relocated the action from Vienna to Palermo but otherwise follows the main plot of Shakespeare's play fairly faithfully.

The German governor Friedrich, who temporarily exercises authority in the absence of the Sicilian monarch, wants to curb the debauchery of his subjects. In doing so, he focuses on sexual 'irregularities', whether or not resulting from alcohol consumption. By banning the upcoming carnival, he hopes to kill two birds with one stone. In his zeal to restore bourgeois decency, however, he goes so far as to ban all sexual contact outside of marriage under the ultimate sanction: the death penalty. The police are ordered to immediately clear the entire red-light district of Palermo. This infringement on free trade does not go down well, and the population protests loudly.

Luzio, a bit of a libertine, sees his friend Claudio being led away by the police. He is going to prison because he has fathered a child with a woman he is not married to. Not entirely his fault, by the way, as her parents refused to consent to a marriage. He asks Luzio to inform his sister Isabella, who has entered a convent as a novice, and to ask her to plead his case with Friedrich. In the convent, Isabella talks to another novice, Mariana. The latter confides in her that she ended up there after her lover and husband-to-be, a high-ranking figure, jilted her. Naturally, this is none other than Friedrich himself. Isabella is deeply indignant, both about Friedrich's behaviour and her brother's fate, and undertakes a rescue attempt. In doing so, she makes such an impression on Friedrich that he succumbs to her charms and promises to save Claudio from the gallows.

The governor is a stiff neck who is easily wrapped around Isabella's finger, even though she is dressed as a nun. Apparently, this novice knows a thing or two about sex, a suggestion that is also raised in Shakespeare. Prey to hormonal excitement, Friedrich demands as a

quid pro quo that Isabella give herself to him, if only for an hour. What follows is a series of classic complications with secret rendezvous, masked individuals, mistaken identities, and ultimately an apotheosis in the form of the returning sovereign. And all of this is set to music that does not remind one of the later Wagner at all. Listening to it, you certainly do not get the feeling that the future blacksmith of the *Ring* is at work here. Very occasionally, something of *Tannhäuser* can be recognized in small turns, but that may also be the result of desperately wanting to discern something Wagnerian in the piece.

Leipzig

In Leipzig, director Aron Stiehl took the work for what it is: a light comedy with 'tasty' music. This led to a staging that resembled an operetta, or even a musical, rather than a serious opera. And that worked brilliantly.

Stiehl's stage design is defined by a backdrop featuring a jungle-like nature painting. On stage are mobile walls on which numbers are placed, giving the impression of enormous chests of drawers. It suggests the strict reality of Friedrich's regime. *Ordnung muss sein*. When he gets entangled in his own regulations, the walls move towards each other, threatening to crush him. He pushes them apart as a sign that the person Friedrich ultimately gets the better of the governor Friedrich, with all the corresponding consequences. The costuming is rather colourful, with Claudio as a standout: he looks like a hippie. Officials are reasonably recognizable as such, but the rest of the population walks around as if it is always carnival. And when the time actually comes, it gets even crazier because all the men appear in women's clothes; even police chief Brighella turns out to be wearing a dress under his uniform. The two novices, however, wear normal habits.

In the first act, there is a duet between Isabella and Mariana that musically somewhat recalls *Norma* and Adalgisa. Wagner was still very charmed by the Italian style of singing at that time, so this does not come entirely unexpectedly. Police chief Brighella, who starts passing judgment in Friedrich's absence (always late, that German), is a wonderful bass-buffo. Dorella, a bar girl suspected of violating the *Liebesverbot*, easily wraps him around her finger, turns the tables in no time, and takes his place on the bench, complete with a grey wig. Later, a trio follows with Isabella, Luzio, and Dorella, in which both ladies work the poor man over with rolling pins to punish him for his behaviour. He has the habit of constantly proposing to every woman

who seems nice to him, which causes problems when they find out about each other. The scene ends in a musical-comedy atmosphere.

The title role (*Isabella, die Novize*) was excellently portrayed by house diva Christiane Libor. The two remaining female roles were outstandingly cast with Anna Schoeck (Mariana) and Magdalena Hinterdobler (Dorella). And Mark Adler delivered a convincing Luzio, less so *stimmlich* than in his acting. Daniel Kirch was less convincing to me as Claudio – adequate but not remarkable. Reinhard Dorn made a feast of his appearance as Brighella. Governor Friedrich was portrayed by the bariton Tuomas Pursio. He convincingly portrayed a stiff neck who is easily wrapped around Isabella's finger.

As is customary at the Oper Leipzig, the accompaniment was provided by the Gewandhausorchester, this time conducted by Matthias Foremny. Talk about quality in the orchestra pit...

Richard Wagner would have been amazed at the qualities of this work, which he later consistently dismissed as a youthful sin. But a lot can be made of it, so much so that *Das Liebesverbot* was reportedly seen as the greatest success in Bayreuth in 2013, and that including the performances in the Festspielhaus. Compared to *Hans Heiling* (Marschner 1833), *Zar und Zimmermann* (Lortzing, 1837), and *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (Nicolai, 1849), *Das Liebesverbot* definitely does not come off badly. I have seen all four, and Wagner's 'youthful sin' in Leipzig could easily hold its own against the competition.

Teatro Real

Opus Arte has released *Das Liebesverbot* on DVD and Blu-ray.

In his production for the Teatro Real, director Kasper Holten chose a striking approach. He presents the work as a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, with lots of heavily emphasised 'humour' and exaggerated mannerisms. The occasion for this co-production with the Royal Opera House and the Teatro Colón was the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death. The emphasis is therefore on his *Measure for Measure*, and less on an effort to give Wagner's second opera more exposure. A truly serious attempt in that direction it did not become. Steffen Aarfing's set is inventive and allows for quick changes, with a red-light district turning into a convent, courtroom, or prison in the blink of an eye. Aarfing was also responsible for the costuming, and that is where things go a bit wrong: although carnival plays a major role in the story, that should be no reason to have almost the entire cast constantly walk around as if they are attending a costume ball.

The acting is already consistently over the top, and the costuming reinforces that impression, causing the whole thing to risk sliding into being 'deliberately funny'.

The German Wagnerian soprano Manuela Uhl takes on the title role (Isabella). The gestures Holten gave her are a tad childish, but fortunately, she manages to sing the part excellently. The two remaining female roles are well cast with María Miró (Mariana) and María Hinojosa (Dorella). Hinojosa excels in the scene where, as the bar girl Dorella, she manages to wrap police chief Brighella around her finger. A prelude for Isabella, who subsequently repeats this feat with Friedrich.

Christopher Maltman plays a decent Friedrich, but his singing is somewhat disappointing. All the men, for that matter, have more difficulty with their parts than expected. Forced high notes are all too frequent, both with Maltman and with Ilker Argayürek (Claudio) and Peter Lodahl (Luzio). An exception is Ante Jerkunica, who embodies his buffo role of Brighella without audible effort. The chorus and orchestra of the Teatro Real are conducted by Ivor Bolton.

In a review of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (in which the role of Friedrich is portrayed by Angelo, a comparable character), I came across the following passage:

'Claudio asks Lucio to acquaint Isabella with his fate that she might persuade Angelo for, 'in her youth / There is a prone and speechless dialect / Such as move men; beside, she hath prosperous art / When she will play with reason and discourse, / And well she can persuade' [1.2.179-83]. Though Claudio's last remark makes allusion of her astute ability to bend words, it is also used in juxtaposition with her 'speechless dialect / Such as move men', referring to sex. Claudio is inferring that Isabella is sexually talented and her level of competence can move a man as hardened and mad as Angelo. This idea is followed in Act 2.2 where Angelo and Isabella converse with the assistance of Lucio. This scene starts slowly then rises to a climax that leaves Angelo flustered, frustrated, and undone. The rhythm is intentionally similar to the rhythm of sex but is transmitted through the Aristotelian use of language; moreover, it is intriguing to recognize how this process was disturbingly assisted by Lucio as he coached Isabella into the act.'

Rienzi

A good deal has been said and written about *Rienzi*. Reference is often made to Meyerbeer, such as by Hans von Bülow, who spoke of it as if it were that composer's best opera. Such a comparison is rather villainous and quickly takes on a life of its own. Meanwhile, references to Meyerbeer, Halévy, and Auber are fairly gratuitous nowadays, since relatively few opera lovers can speak about their work from personal experience. Over the past thirty years, I have attended staged performances of *Les Huguenots*, *L'Africaine*, *Le Prophète*, *La Juive*, and *La Muette de Portici*, and that cost me a great deal of time and effort. Based on this experience, I would like to state here that *Rienzi* has little to do with these works. Actually, I find that in *Rienzi*, Wagner mainly preludes on works yet to be written. You can recognize a hint of *Holländer* in it (logical when you consider that he was already working on it when *Rienzi* still had to be completed), furthermore a lot of *Lohengrin*, and a suspicion of *Tannhäuser*. Rienzi's prayer at the beginning of the fifth act points emphatically forward to Wolfram's aria 'O du mein holder Abendstern'.

Rienzi premiered on 20 October 1842 in Dresden and would remain Wagner's greatest public success during his lifetime. The only real role for soprano is that of Irene. We find her later as Senta and, to a lesser extent, as Elsa. The part of her lover Adriano is written for a mezzo-soprano, though that choice is not always made. The live recording under Sawallisch, made during the Wagner Festspiele in Munich in 1983—where all his operas were performed to mark the 100th anniversary of Wagner's death—indicates that they opted for a tenor casting there. A very poor choice! Furthermore, an important role is reserved for the chorus; that too fits into the tradition of grand opéra. The overture to *Rienzi* is a masterpiece in its own right, comparable to what Wagner would later write for *Lohengrin*. If played well, it can move the spectator before a single note has been sung.

Cola di Rienzo was a tribune of the people at a time when this had already been an anachronism for a thousand years. This historical figure is described in the novel *Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. This book was published in a German translation in 1836 and read by Wagner shortly thereafter. It is the period of his marriage crisis with Minna, and that may have partly determined the choice of this text as a libretto, as evidenced by the following quote from Wagner's autobiographical notes:

‘Aus dem Jammer des modernen Privatlebens, dem ich nirgends auch nur den geringsten Stoff für künstlerische Behandlung abgewinnen durfte, riss mich die Vorstellung eines grossen historisch-politischen Ereignisses, in dessen Genuss ich eine erhebende Zerstreuung aus Sorgen und Zuständen finden musste, die mir eben nicht anders als nur absolut kunstfeindlich erschienen‘.

The opera is set at a time when the political situation in Rome was so unstable that the pope sought a safe haven in Avignon. Properly considered, *Rienzi* is a charismatic demagogue. The people make him their leader, and to more easily maintain his distance from his noble enemies, he does not opt for a title like duke or king but chooses tribune. In this opera, Wagner clearly shows his political side. He is still in the revolutionary phase of his life. That undoubtedly also played a major role in the choice of this historical figure.

Of *Rienzi*, as with several of Wagner's works, it is said that it was Hitler's favourite opera. A certain August Kubizek stated in 1953 that he had attended a performance of *Rienzi* together with his friend Adolf. The then fifteen-year-old Hitler had been completely absorbed by it, and the work seems never to have let him go. In itself, this is a remarkable story, given the fact that *Rienzi*, as a great leader, ultimately fails so manifestly and perishes physically.

Wagner's later rejection of this early work places a heavy burden on anyone wishing to perform it. The fact that *Rienzi* was and remained his most successful opera during his lifetime must have given Wagner little pleasure. Hence, undoubtedly, the ban on programming this opera in the Festspielhaus. And even more than other works, *Rienzi* is stigmatised by the specific interest of Hitler, who apparently acquired the original manuscript and took it with him into his *Untergang*.

Wieland Wagner staged *Rienzi* in 1957 in Stuttgart, also known as 'Winter Bayreuth'. A recording of one of the performances was released with Wolfgang Windgassen in the title role and the tenor Josef Traxl in the role of Adriano. It was a 'qualified success'. All the more remarkable that Sawallisch made the same choice for Adriano in 1983.

Bremen

After a concert performance conducted by Stefan Soltesz in Essen in 2005, Katharina Wagner's production at the Staatstheater Bremen three years later was my first acquaintance with this work in a staged form.

The set in Bremen consisted of an enormous staircase spanning the full width of the stage. Everything took place on it throughout the entire performance. The opening shows how the noble families Colonna and Orsini have gained control of the city of Rome as if they were two competing gangs. Rome is depicted as an enormous statue of a woman being stripped and beheaded by these gangs. The action is initially limited to the Orsinis' attempt to kidnap Irene, Rienzi's sister. This is prevented by the intervention of Adriano Colonna, Irene's lover. The people desire peace and quiet and want to get rid of the situation in which they are terrorised by the *Nobili*. The papal legate joins them. Thus, Rienzi can seize power with the support of the church and the people.

On stage, we see a very trendy hair salon where Rienzi, Adriano, and Irene are given a new look. Under his minimal hair, Rienzi turns out to be completely bald. He receives a new wig in Caesar style: Mussolini as Augustus. Such an image can also be seen on the facade of one of the buildings flanking the altar of peace in Rome. Later, as his popularity goes to his head, he replaces this wig with a wild mane of hair, giving him the appearance of a pop star from years gone by.

Numerous complications follow, but briefly, it comes down to this: the *Nobili* close ranks and try to kill Rienzi. This fails, and he forgives Colonna, the father of his sister's lover. The *Nobili* must swear to submit to his authority. They do so but later rebel anyway. Under Rienzi's leadership, the *Nobili* are defeated, but this comes at the cost of many casualties among the citizens. The people begin to stir; Rienzi has let his family interest prevail over the public interest. If he had allowed Colonna to be executed, this civil war would never have happened. Once more, Rienzi manages to convince the people of his good intentions, but shortly thereafter, when the Church also turns against him, it is over. Rienzi and Irene are killed by the people; here too, the parallel with Mussolini and his mistress is clearly visible.

The original version of the opera is rather on the long side, something like a slowly played *Parsifal*. In Bremen, this was cut to three hours of pure playing time plus two intervals, a total of four hours in the auditorium. That requires a stage design with plenty to look at, and the direction provides for this adequately. Lady Roma returns a number of times as a large banner, as an Anita Ekberg type from *La Dolce Vita*, as a Jane Fonda type from *Barbarella*, and subsequently as a provocatively dressed manga girl with a distinct 'Hand im Schritt'. Every time a canvas is pulled away, you wonder what will be underneath next. Not

very functional, but it does attract attention. Weapons are depicted by means of portable electric leaf blowers. *Rienzi* tackles the whole world with them.

When the women's chorus has to perform as the accompaniment to the messenger of peace, they are dressed as primary-school-aged girls. Each girl has a self-made drawing of a peace dove as a prop, and afterwards, they are allowed to present them to the tribune, three at a time. During their performance, some children begin to look ostentatiously bored; they yawn, sit on the floor, talk to each other, etc. But they sing incredibly well, let there be no misunderstanding about that. In the steps of the staircase are small tubes from which red water flows during the war episode. The entire staircase becomes a red water ballet in which *Rienzi* wallows voluptuously. Even though you know it is nonsense, that much red mess becomes a bit repulsive after a short time. Properly speaking, almost everything that happens on stage is a tad over the top.

This *Rienzi* almost tries to be an opera version of *The Rocky Horror Show*, perhaps in the expectation that it will one day become 'camp'. The result is that as a spectator you are not bored and even have to laugh sometimes. Fortunately so, because musically it is sometimes a bit tedious. I do not expect, therefore, that this opera will yet become a real repertoire piece.

Conductor Christoph Ulrich Meier led the Bremer Philharmoniker adequately. His tempo was high, and unfortunately, so was the sound level. I almost got the impression as if a fortissimo indication had been added everywhere in the score. The singers cannot lag behind, of course, and luckily for them, there was quite a bit of vocal volume available. Tenor Mark Duffin stood there as a very reliable, if not very subtle *Rienzi*, a singer you would like to hear as Lohengrin sometime in a less noisy environment. Patricia Andress sang the role of Irene in a similar manner; with some imagination, one could speak of a 'heldensopraan' here. Tamara Klivadenko as Adriano completed the lineup of main roles. Compared to the other two, she turned it up a notch. With a somewhat less loudly playing orchestra, all that would not have been necessary; the auditorium in Bremen really isn't that big. Chorus are often made to sing loudly, and the volume here certainly did not seem out of place. The chorus carries large parts of this opera and deserves all praise for that. I would have quite liked to experience it all again, but then somewhere on the balcony.

All in all, this *Rienzi* was certainly worth the trip to Bremen.

Rienzi in Leipzig

In 2013, Wagner's third 'Frühstück' was on the programme of Oper Leipzig. Nicolas Joel's staging was characterised by a virtually empty stage. Not much more than a backdrop, a row of chairs, and at the end a few models of buildings meant to evoke an image of Rome, was to be seen. The costuming was also sober, with only Rienzi in a classic Roman tunic and toga after his assumption of power. The emphasis was entirely on the actions of the protagonists, with a major role for the chorus. Despite the ballet being cut, the performance lasted four hours, including two fairly short intervals. This means that hardly any interventions were made in the rest of the work.

Stefan Vinke was an admirably strong Rienzi, very convincing and beautiful of tone in all registers. The man deals in heavy roles, also outside the Wagner repertoire. For instance, I once saw him as Menelaos in Strauss' *Die Ägyptische Helena* in Berlin.

His sister Irene was portrayed by Vida Miknevičiūtė, a soprano with a voice like a laser beam, a bit like Gundula Janowitz in her youth. Moreover, very suitable for the role of the mainly screaming Irene.

Adriano Colonna was taken on by Kathrin Göring, a beautiful mezzo who is making a name for herself with Wagner parts. For instance, she was also to be heard as Kundry in Wuppertal. For the occasion, she had her hair cut a bit shorter, which gave her an appropriately youthful male appearance. In all respects a believable Adriano.

The remaining roles were adequately cast. The chorus vied with Vinke and Göring as to who should harvest the greatest admiration.

And the Gewandhausorchester under the baton of Matthias Foremny delivered a top performance. That began already with the first part of the overture, played so beautifully that as a listener you were already moved before the curtain rose. With his *Lohengrin* overture, Wagner later repeated that feat.

Thanks to the efforts of the Oper Leipzig, Wagner's three 'Frühstücke' finally stand a chance of gaining a permanent place in the repertoire, at least in Germany. And that is a source of satisfaction. Wagner lovers can be grateful to the Oper Leipzig for this.

Berlin

In 2010, Deutsche Oper Berlin came out with a new production of *Rienzi*. Director Philipp Stölzl focused heavily here on the associations with *Der Untergang*, the film about Hitler's final days that had been released a few years earlier. Torsten Kerl portrayed the title role and Kate Aldrich was Adriano. During the overture, a double very nimbly reenacts the scene from *The Great Dictator* in which Charlie Chaplin juggles with a globe.

In April 2012, I intended to go and see this *Rienzi* and had bought a ticket for the performance scheduled for 20 April. But in February, they suddenly remembered at DOB that 20 April used to be a national holiday in former times due to Hitler's birthday. Suddenly it was no longer appropriate to present *Rienzi* on that day, resulting in a *Terminwechsel*: *Rienzi* from 20 to 21 April. The opera now suddenly fell outside the period of my stay. Dealing with Wagner in relation to the Nazi era remains a sensitive matter in Germany, as became apparent once again. Fortunately, a DVD of this *Rienzi* has been released by Arthaus.

Toulouse

In the run-up to the anniversary year 2013, the Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse programmed a new production of *Rienzi* which appeared on DVD from Opus Arte, an absolute asset. Jorge Lavelli's staging is extremely sober, without a discernible set and with only a few props. Lighting and character direction have to do the work, and in this, Lavelli has succeeded excellently. The thought crossed my mind that this was a *Rienzi* Wieland Wagner could have made, had he lived long enough. In this context, that is a great compliment.

Torsten Kerl excels as the doomed tribune Rienzi. As soon as he appears, he commands the stage, not just because of his role, but mainly by his own doing. Kerl was in excellent voice during the recording and definitively claims this role as his own, after an earlier recording at the Deutsche Oper Berlin. Very beautifully sung is his 'Allmächt'ger Vater', the prayer that Wagner later seems to repeat in Wolfram's 'O du, mein holder Abendstern'. Adriano is very convincingly portrayed by Daniela Sindram. Her great lament 'Gerechter Gott' in the third act is of a very high level, and she effortlessly draws the rest of this act to herself as well. Although it is a 'Hosenrolle', Adriano's singing reminds me most of Elisabeth, in the third act of *Tannhäuser*. The characters naturally

differ immensely; never before did Adriano strike me as such an annoying, untrustworthy understrapper. Marika Schönberg gives a good interpretation to the relatively small role of Rienzi's sister Irene, the only one who remains faithful to him unto death. The remaining roles are reasonably well cast, but otherwise unremarkable.

The costuming is relatively modest, with dominant shades of grey, alternated with black. All singers (including the chorus members) wear white makeup, which results in a certain uniformity, but at the same time strongly accentuates their facial expressions. Colour comes from Irene, dressed in a snow-white gown, and the papal legate, in red. Nevertheless, the costumes make the class differences between the characters clear at a glance. Good work by costume designer Francesco Zito.

Small details create a discontinuity in the stage design. Thus, Rienzi suddenly appears seated on a real horse, and the corpses of Colonna and Orsini are wheeled onto the stage in wheelbarrows. Very impressive is the scene where Rienzi is denied entry to the church by the papal legate. The latter has retraced his steps after receiving instructions from Avignon to excommunicate Rienzi. In this way, the pope can cement his good relationship with the German emperor. A fine piece of ecclesiastical power politics. No church facade here, but the suggestion of it is impressive thanks to the ingenious lighting.

The chorus of the Théâtre du Capitole was reinforced for the occasion by that of La Scala. As in every grand opéra, it plays a major role in *Rienzi* too. Great appreciation here as well; chorus master Alfonso Caiani could be satisfied. The Orchestre National du Capitole was conducted by Pinchas Steinberg. Already during the overture, he has the listener sitting on the edge of their seat. This is how *Rienzi* should sound.

Der fliegende Holländer

The Flying Dutchman is a legendary figure who is also referred to as Captain Willem van der Decken. It is claimed that a powerful storm prevented him from rounding the Cape of Good Hope. After a few weeks, he became so frustrated by this that on Good Friday 1676, he exclaimed: 'I will sail, even if it be until eternity'. Immediately, the storm subsided and the devil appeared before him, saying: 'Thou shalt sail until eternity'. Having thus become invulnerable, Van der Decken sailed around the cape and subsequently remained at sea forever. The members of his crew passed away, one after the other, turning the vessel into a ghost ship with the captain as the only living being left. Some sources cite Barend Fockesz as the origin of the legend. He was a captain on a ship of the VOC (Dutch East India Company) and was famous for the speed with which he used to make the voyage from Holland to the East Indies. For instance, in 1678, he managed to deliver a bundle of letters to the governor in Batavia after a voyage of 100 days. That equates to an average speed of nearly 200 km per day! Consequently, people suspected him of being aided by the devil. In reality, he most likely flogged his crew and took immense risks.

In 1834, a novel by Heinrich Heine was published, entitled *Aus den Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski*. This Polish gentleman pays a visit to the Netherlands and attends a performance of a play at the theatre in Amsterdam: *De vliegende Hollander*. In the story, however, he pays little attention to the piece since he lets himself be seduced by an attractive blonde who manages to lure him to her box by pelting him with orange peels. Schnabelewopski has actually travelled to the Netherlands to study theology in Leiden, but little comes of that. His activities on-site are rather reminiscent of an early version of the adventures of Henry Miller in Paris. In itself, the description of this somewhat hedonistic conduct forms a beautiful contrast with the core of the Dutchman legend: the unconditional loyalty of a woman to a man.

When Wagner departs from Königsberg with his wife Minna in July 1839 aboard the small sailing ship *Thetys*, bound for London—having hastily fled from his creditors in Riga by carriage—he has already taken note of Heine's story. En route, the ship gets caught in a storm and has to seek refuge in the Norwegian fjord Sandwike, a name that appears literally in the *Holländer* that would emerge later. Reportedly,

the origin of the name Senta can also be traced back here, which recalls the term for a maidservant in the local dialect: *tjenta*. Regarding the stay in the fjord and the inspiration it provided, Wagner writes:

‘Ein unsägliches Wohlgefühl erfaßte mich, als das Echo der ungeheuren Granitwände den Schiffsruf der Mannschaft zurückgab, unter welchem diese den Anker warf und die Segel aufhißte. Der kurze Rhythmus dieses Rufes haftete in mir wie een kräftig tröstende Vorbedeutung und gestaltete sich bald zu dem thema des Matrosenlied in meinem Fliegende Holländer, dessen Idee ich damals schon mit mir herumtrug und die nun unter den soeben gewonnene Eindrücken eine bestimmte poetisch-musikalische Farbe gewann’.

Marschner’s *Der Vampyr* from 1828 and Weber’s *Der Freischütz*, published shortly before, also qualify as further sources of inspiration. In all three works, the central figure is an ‘undead’ being who must claim victims to prolong his earthly existence (Kaspar in *Der Freischütz*, Lord Ruthven in *Der Vampyr*) or to be redeemed from an earthly existence (*Holländer*). Wagner saw *Der Vampyr* as a teenager and conducted a performance of this work in Würzburg in 1833. Emmy, one of Ruthven’s victims, sings in a ballad: ‘Der bleiche Mann ist ein Vampyr’. In Wagner’s opera, Senta appears with a corresponding characterisation: ‘Doch kann dem bleichen Manne Erlösung einstens noch werden, fänd er ein Weib das bis in den Tod getreu ihm auf Erden’. In that respect, *Der Vampyr* is a key work in German ‘Scheuerromantik’, forging the link between Weber and Wagner.

The work on the *Holländer* took place primarily in Paris, where Wagner had settled after a brief stay in London in an attempt to make a name for himself there. Following the completion of his grand opéra *Rienzi*, which he failed to get performed at the Paris Opéra, Wagner bid farewell to this genre and embarked on an entirely new path that would ultimately lead to through-composed works without show-stoppers. In Heine’s version, the female protagonist was called Katharina and the story was set in Scotland. Wagner built upon this and used the names Donald and Georg for the later Daland and Erik, respectively. In his work, Katharina had already become Senta in the Scottish version. This early version of the *Holländer* did not reach the stage in Paris either, after which Wagner lost heart and returned to Germany. The work had its premiere on 2 January 1843 in Dresden, just a few months after *Rienzi*.

Belief in ghosts and phantoms has declined sharply in the Western world since Christianity established a firm foothold there. A legend in

which they appear is generally viewed merely as a story that one should by no means take literally. On this point, things clash a bit with the story of the *Holländer*. After *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Wagner stays closest to the actual existing world in this work: Norwegian sailors, hunters, spinning women. You get the impression that you could simply find that village in a Baedeker guide. Yet everyone and everything goes along with the supernatural matters surrounding the figure of the Dutchman. The question is whether that should be taken for granted.

The phenomenon of the 'unattainable lover' is universally known. This unattainability can be the result of a difference in age, social status, and so forth. But it can also stem from the fact that the lover in question is nothing more than a fantasy, a chimera. A beautiful example of such a non-existent character is Princess Leia in the Star Wars film *Return of the Jedi* from 1983. She has become a cult figure who lives on in the minds of countless fans, not least because of her famous gold bikini. By way of comparison, Senta's preoccupation with the Dutchman can also be understood as a focus on an unattainable person that dominates her normal life. Not in the sense that she is in love with him (the Eros aspect), but rather a combination of compassion and a willingness to self-sacrifice (the Agape aspect). She has, as it were, internalised the problem of that legendary figure and wants to redeem him, even if it costs her her life. The more wretched the life someone leads, at least in their own perception, the more attractive the thought of such a grand gesture can become. For Senta, it is virtually the only thing that still matters. At the same time, death also implies an instant redemption from her own existence.

Liège

The staging by Petrika Ionesco, which I saw in Liège in 2011, built upon this and revolved around the idea that the entire story takes place solely in Senta's imagination. Senta was memorably portrayed here by Manuela Uhl, one of my favourites. During the overture, we see her wandering around a small graveyard. Popular belief dictates that the ghosts of drowned sailors from the village wander there in search of a final resting place. A beautiful spot to let your imagination run wild in complete tranquility. Senta walks around in the snow with the painting of the Dutchman under her arm. Mary appears and tries to tear her away from her dream world; she even goes so far as to knock the canvas in question out of its frame and crumple it up. It is all to no avail; Senta remains where she is, in the nocturnal cold.

Subsequently, the story commences; as spectators, we now experience what Senta imagines. The graveyard folds up, and the space beneath it forms the deck of Daland's ship. When the Dutchman later appears on the scene, his men bring glowing chests of jewellery onto the deck. The Dutchman looks fairly normal, but his crew members are dressed up as zombies. The Dutchman arrives seated on a large anchor that is lowered, and he has a halo (a round tubular lamp) above his head. A clear attempt was made to make it all look a bit frightening.

After Daland, as a good businessman, has sold his daughter to the rich man who happened to drop out of the sky so coincidentally, the second act begins with the scene in the workshop. The imagery is classic: there is spinning and singing, and the painting is simply a painting. I thought it would never happen again!

When Erik appears, the double meaning in the story features prominently. Erik sings about the dream he had in which Daland walks towards the house with a strange sailor, and then follows this:

'Du kamst von Hause her; du flogst, den Vater zu begrüßen.... Doch kaum doch sah ich an dich langen, du stürzest zu des Fremden Füßen, ich sah dich Seine Knie umfassen....'

Senta immediately recognizes her own fantasy in this; naturally so, because both Erik's dream and her fantasy originate from her own thoughts. It is somewhat comparable to prophecies written 'after the fact', which always come true as well.

Eroticism plays no role in the meeting between Daland and Senta; both are aware of the nature of the relationship to be entered into: he wants to be redeemed, she wants to redeem him. For both, that redemption exists in death. After Senta has thrown herself into the waves at the end, the curtain closes briefly. As soon as it opens again, we see the graveyard from the overture with a Senta who has frozen to death, tightly clutching the crumpled painting. She lived her fantasy through to the very end.

The title role was portrayed by the American baritone Mark Rucker, by now a well-known name at The Met and Staatsoper Wien. Not bad for Liège, a casting like that! He has an impressive stature and a big voice. Without question an excellent Dutchman.

Daland was sung by the British-born bass Alastair Miles. His costume is more reminiscent of a merchant rather than the captain of a ship, something that is moreover characteristic of his way of doing things. Particularly in his aria 'Mögst du mein Kind?', in which he wishes to ratify the deal already concluded with the Dutchman, he is in fine form, both *stimmlich* and acting-wise.

The American tenor Corby Welch was convincing as Erik, a role he also previously portrayed at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein.

Yuri Gorodetski as the Steuermann charmed me less. It must be said, however, that the direction depicts him as someone who looks too deeply into the glass, making him resemble a Russian drunkard rather than a serious steersman.

And then the Senta of Manuela Uhl, my primary reason for attending this performance. At the time, Uhl came along with Kirsten Harms from Kiel to the Deutsche Oper Berlin, at least for a single role. That was Chrysothemis in Harms' splendid production in which *Cassandra* (by Gnechi) was performed as a prologue to *Elektra*. The critics spoke very highly of her and even deemed Chrysothemis more strongly cast than Elektra (Eva Johansson). I was there and could entirely agree with that. By now, Uhl is universally known for her Chrysothemis in Baden-Baden, a stage with which you reach a few more interested parties than DOB. In Berlin, Manuela Uhl furthermore sings Danae (Strauss) and Venus/Elisabeth, among others.

In Liège, she fully met my expectations, a beautiful Senta. She convinced particularly in the upper register, something that came in handy at the end of the opera. Flawless in the heights, she plunges from the rocks. In the ballad, she was a bit less effective, primarily due to the phrases in the lower register being delivered with somewhat less strength. All in all, a performance that was highly worthwhile.

Essen

In Barrie Kosky's *Holländer* for the Aalto Musiktheater, Senta is not merely a girl with an obsession with the Flying Dutchman and his fate, but a second obsession is added to it: that with death. As is frequently the case, the spectator is shown the action from the perspective of a dreaming Senta—though this time, it resembles more of Senta's recurring nightmares. Erik has dreamt of Senta and the Dutchman, and what he recounts unfolds exactly as described. Logical, because it is a dream within a dream. That Senta has more problems than just the aforementioned obsessions is further evident from a few compulsive gestures. Constantly, she stands rubbing her hands against her wrists, as if there is blood on them, or at least something that arouses her aversion. Furthermore, for part of the time, she adopts a posture that refers to a catatonic state, something like complete stiffening. She sits staring ahead like a zombie with her right hand against her cheek.

Within this framework, the spectator no longer needs to be surprised by anything. During the sailors' chorus, everyone and everything wears the same red dress as Senta. The imagery is completed by matching red wigs: in Senta's dream at that moment, everyone is a projection of herself. One of the 'Sentas' gives birth to a skeleton with which other 'Sentas' perform conspicuous sexual acts. Her obsession with death is materialised by giving birth to death in her nightmare. It is difficult to fathom what the direction expects from Senta in terms of acting. If we assume that in her dream she is unable to act independently—just as someone who dreams cannot speak either—then her performance is entirely in line with that. For her direct counterparts, the Holländer and Erik, something similar applies.

Ten years after I first saw the performance, it was on the programme again in 2016. The Daland of Tijn Faveyts was absolutely magnificent. Sung so effortlessly and convincingly acted: here stood the merchant who trades in everything, including his own child.

Astrid Weber as Senta performed inconsistently, clearly having difficulty with some passages. She alternated very soft singing with major outbursts, especially on the top notes. Almas Svilpa took on the official title role. Displayed as a powerhouse with the brawn of a docker, this 'undead' man looked exceedingly alive. After all, he has been trying to die for centuries, and if you expect a clothed skeleton anywhere, it is with the Dutchman and his crew.

Conductor Ed Spanjaard led the whole affair with enthusiasm and managed to elicit splendid sounds from the orchestra.

Teatro Real

Harmonia Mundi has released a live recording of *Der fliegende Holländer* from the Teatro Real in Madrid. The staging is by Àlex Ollé, and Pablo Heras-Casado conducts. The result is commendable. Àlex Ollé, a member of the theatre collective La Fura dels Baus, focused entirely in this production on creating beautiful, spectacular imagery and well-crafted character direction. There is no question of any concept superimposed onto the plot. Granted, no room with spinning women is involved, but we very clearly see an opera about sailors and women ashore.

On the left of the stage stands a structure resembling a metal ship's hull. Down a long ladder, the Steuermann and his boss Daland descend onto the beach, with real sand. The Dutchman's ship is not visible in the somewhat dark cinematic imagery. Later, however, the impression

is given that the then opened-up section of the ship's hull doubles as quarters for both ships' crews. During the chorus of the Norwegian sailors, fascinating lighting displays can be seen here, with stroboscopic effects. The Dutchman is chalk-white, as are his clothes. The other men also walk around dressed in rather drab attire. The women, by contrast, provide colour to the whole.

During the chorus 'Summ und brumm', the ladies sit on the beach polishing some indistinct items. It is unclear what is meant here. Have they been beachcombing? Up until the final scene, the entire action will unfold on the beach and a few underlying 'dunes'. Splendid lighting effects turn the final scene, in which the Dutchman walks into the sea pursued by Senta, into an impressive image.

The role of Daland is, just as previously in Bayreuth, portrayed by Kwangchul Youn. By now, he knows this character inside out. Daland receives a few bracelets and a necklace (yes, really) from the Dutchman and is subsequently allowed to take a whole bag full of valuables aboard straight away. Senta is sold with payment upfront. Excellently sung, this Daland, and also beautifully acted in 'Mögest du mein Kind?' Strikingly well-sung is the Erik of Nikolai Schukoff. He is in fine voice and does not need to force anything anywhere; he sings his character like a 'Lohengrin light'. As a hunter, he enters in appropriate attire and carries a rifle. Nice details. His fellow tenor Benjamin Bruns also delivers a good performance. He manages to convincingly embody his frustrated Steuermann—having missed his homecoming and then on top of that being saddled with the night watch—and his singing is fully up to scratch.

The two main roles are in the hands of Samuel Youn and Ingela Brimberg. Brimberg's Senta has been directed by Ollé down to the smallest details, with particularly beautiful results. Although Brimberg does have to force a little bit in the tricky, highest passages (who doesn't, really?), her performance is definitely top-tier. Her counterpart Youn delivers a somewhat creepy Dutchman and matches her well in every respect. No fault can be found with the casting of the protagonists.

Pablo Heras-Casado has the orchestra play as if he primarily wants to avoid anyone noticing that this is an opera by Wagner. Perhaps he fantasised something along the lines of 'how would the second opera that Beethoven never wrote have sounded?' Everything sounds calm and soft, and at a very restrained tempo, like someone telling a long story. That greatly benefits the intelligibility during the long monologues of Daland, the Holländer, the Steuermann, and Erik, but it does

cause the recording to run rather long. Heras-Casado takes nearly an extra quarter of an hour compared to some of his colleagues. In 'Mögest du mein Kind', the orchestra sounds unabashedly romantic—Wagner, who? Only during the large choral scene 'Steuermann! Laß die Wacht' and in the final scene does the orchestra sound at Wagnerian strength, and the tempo is also turned up a bit. This, unfortunately, comes at the expense of the quality of the chorus's contribution. In any case, the chorus constitutes the weak point musically in the production. The members have difficulty with the text and rattle it off to keep up with the orchestra, seemingly stumbling over their own words. It is not Ollé's fault; the chorus acts excellently, nor is it really Heras-Casado's fault. Chorus master Andrés Máspero simply should have taken (or been given) more time for it.

Original Version

The Theater an der Wien came out with a special production in 2016: the original version of *Der fliegende Holländer*. Olivier Py directed, and Marc Minkowski stood before the orchestra Les Musiciens du Louvre—not the most obvious choice. This original version was a true one-act piece, so not the current opera of which the three acts are usually played directly back-to-back. The choice of the Musiciens du Louvre, specialised in Baroque and Classicism, and conductor Minkowski must be seen as an attempt to make Wagner sound as little Wagnerian as possible. That succeeded excellently; the orchestral accompaniment always remained pleasantly light, allowing certain passages to be sung almost in a whisper by the singers. Incidentally, at certain moments quite a bit of sound did emerge from the orchestra pit, certainly towards the end, which is packed with drama.

Samuel Youn portrayed the title role in a highly convincing manner, just as he had previously done in Bayreuth. His barely restrained anger at his fate erupted in the scene where Senta pledged her loyalty to him. Instead of embracing her, he throws her to the ground and turns away from her. Here stands someone who has experienced this countless times already and foresees that this woman too will break her vow again. His male counterpart Donald was in the hands of Lars Woldt, who beautifully embodied the haggling merchant selling his daughter for a suitcase full of treasures. Bernhard Richter is known as a Mozart tenor but is gradually developing into a singer capable of handling the romantic Wagnerian heroes. His Georg was a Tamino on the way to Lohengrin. Vocally still somewhat uncontrolled here and

there in his outbursts towards Senta, but for the rest a splendid 'Erik'. He also has his looks on his side, which fit the character of the youthful fiancé very well. Senta was taken on by Ingela Brimberg. Highly secure and beautiful of voice, save for a few shrill moments in the highest passages. There is still some room for improvement, but here stood a Senta of real stature.

Olivier Py, as usual, opted for dark grey and black shades. His approach is based on Senta's state of mind. Py suggests that the Dutchman is merely a chimera existing only in Senta's imagination. His Senta is psychologically unstable and lives almost in a sham world in which the portrait of the Dutchman on which she has fixated comes to life. In this context, Georg's dream is also nothing more than a rehash of her own thoughts. At the end, she loses her mind and plunges into the sea to save a man only she can see.

Through an ingenious revolving set, new spaces could constantly be created in which specific scenes unfolded. These fitted wonderfully with the general atmosphere and the state of mind of the protagonists. Apart from the suggestion that Senta is unhinged and urgently needs to be institutionalised, Py did not put his own twist on the piece. No ship was to be seen, and all the main characters walked around in somber clothing, but of war scenes or automatic weapons there was no trace. A relief. The fact that it was the original version was really only apparent from details, and *de facto* there is little difference anyway for the spectator between a one-act piece and three acts without an interval. Nonetheless, a nice initiative by the Theater an der Wien.

Reisopera

The Nederlandse Reisopera, since its restart as a small-scale production company, ventured for the second time into an opera by Richard Wagner in 2018. Following the successful production of *Tristan und Isolde*, it was now the turn of *Der fliegende Holländer*. The Reisopera has to manage with limited means but always succeeds in masking that perfectly. A good designer can naturally work wonders here, and that is safely entrusted to Gary McCann. Just as with the phenomenal production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* from 2016, McCann managed to create a highly attractive stage design with an appealing set and fine costumes. A large scaffolding with multiple levels effortlessly succeeds in evoking the suggestion of a sailing ship. An open space with a large window on the upstage area serves as Daland's workshop and living room. Just as in that *Ariadne*, well-chosen cinematic images by Sil-