

Siegfried Wagner

LOS ANGELES OPERA

Reviewed by Josef Woodard
Photography by Monika Rittershaus

Freyer's *Ring* is shaping up to be a brilliant triumph: an inventive, yet sensitive rethinking of the *Ring*, mixing the surreal circus aspects of Freyer's scheme and the cerebral depths of Wagner's music...



GIVEN THE GRADUAL, YEAR-AND-A-HALF ROLL-OUT plan for LA Opera's much-vaunted *Ring* Cycle, Achim Freyer's production (which he has designed and directed) has had the effect of a bizarrely slow-mo carnival in this city. It's a grand experiment and a long-anticipated broaching of the *Ring* in Los Angeles – a rite of passage for any ambitious, self-respecting opera company. It has also been (perhaps predictably) controversial to some nay-sayers, who cite extravagant costs – US\$32 million, give or take – as the source of their displeasure; or else the usual misplaced grousing about Wagner's anti-Semitism.

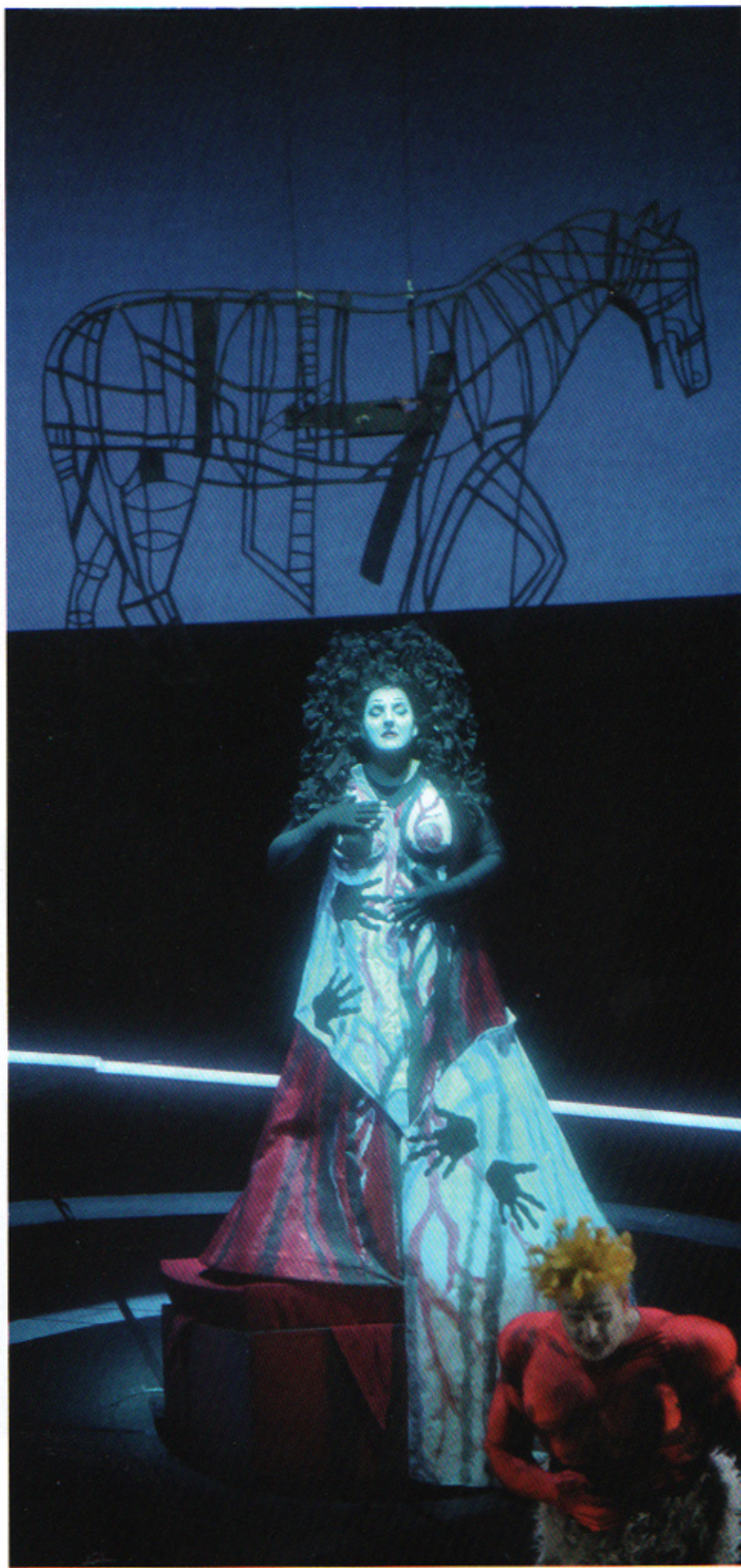
Last spring, Freyer's wild, elaborate vision, with all its fantastical machinery, was unveiled to the tune of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*. At the end of 2009 came *Siegfried*, the longest and most potentially languorous of the 'tetralogy'. After the spring 2010 performance of *Götterdämmerung*, LA Opera will serve up the entire feast of a cycle over the coming summer, the centrepiece of a citywide arts festival.

Something new and magical occurred in LA. There was a sense of the action unfolding over an expanse of time, working and reworking core themes of identity, alienation and greed on Freyer's mind-twisting stage.

IN AN ODD WAY, THIS SIEGFRIED IS POSSIBLY THE MOST engaging piece of Freyer's *Ring* puzzle yet, despite the extended dialoguing between our blonde protagonist (here, the heroic, dazzling John Treleaven, in an exaggerated Teutonic flaxen hair and pumped-up *faux* musculature) and the conniving 'poor dwarf' Mime (Graham Clark, suitably arch and flexible). When Siegfried bemoans that 'the blood burns like fire', the phrase resonates like a multi-layered thematic motif for the entire tale.

In many ways, *Siegfried* tests the mettle of any production of the cycle as a whole, since it contains the conceptual seed and very starting point of Wagner's creative ambition for the *Ring*. Something new and

Right: Gloriously powerful: Linda Watson as Brünnhilde in her incestuous love duet with Siegfried





Left:
Dazzling: John Treleavan
as Siegfried

magical occurred in L.A. There was a sense of the action unfolding over an expanse of time, working and reworking core themes of identity, alienation and greed on Freyer's mind-twisting stage, which blended the classical spectacle with modern neon sabers and fluid techno-gewgaws.

With James Conlon conducting, sumptuous textures rose out of the orchestra pit (newly altered for acoustics' sake), compounding the sense of aesthetic completeness.

By the time the gloriously powerful Brünnhilde of Linda Watson showed up in Act III, the quasi-incestuous love duet with Siegfried had the air of a long-awaited release of tension. A glowing, sonorous warmth emerged between them despite – and in part, perversely, because of the intentionally detaching, or post-modern mythologising effect of Freyer's staging. Freyer celebrates grandly conjured artifice while at times unmasking this very same false pretence – a feat not unlike Wagner's own creative handiwork. ●

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

The final installment of the cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, will take place between 3 and 25 April at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles.

www.lasangelesopera.com

Los Angeles will be hosting a citywide arts festival to celebrate performances of its completed Ring Cycle. The 10-week festival will feature cultural events mounted by more than 100 artistic and educational institutions, culminating in three complete cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Cycles begin on 29 May, 8 and 18 June and run for nine days each.

www.RingFestivalLA.com



Above:
Achim Freyer, director
of the Ring Cycle in
Los Angeles: 'I never
see theatre as being
completely ready and
perfect – that is death,
I think. I am a director
who has *schmutz* – dirty
spots. I love it if the set
decoration looks a little
bit used, so the public
will not have the illusion
that it is a table or a tree
when it is not.'
Los Angeles Times

Left:
Arch and flexible:
Graham Clark as Mime