

= Rhinemaidens =

The Rhinemaidens are the three water @-@ nymphs ( Rheintöchter or " Rhine daughters " ) who appear in Richard Wagner 's opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* . Their individual names are Woglinde , Wellgunde and Flosshilde ( Floßhilde ) , although they are generally treated as a single entity and they act together accordingly . Of the 34 characters in the Ring cycle , they are the only ones who did not originate in the Old Norse Eddas . Wagner created his Rhinemaidens from other legends and myths , most notably the *Nibelungenlied* which contains stories involving water @-@ sprites ( nixies ) or mermaids . The key concepts associated with the Rhinemaidens in the Ring operas ? their flawed guardianship of the Rhine gold , and the condition ( the renunciation of love ) through which the gold could be stolen from them and then transformed into a means of obtaining world power ? are wholly Wagner 's own invention , and are the elements that initiate and propel the entire drama .

The Rhinemaidens are the first and the last characters seen in the four @-@ opera cycle , appearing both in the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* , and in the final climactic spectacle of *Götterdämmerung* , when they rise from the Rhine waters to reclaim the ring from Brünnhilde 's ashes . They have been described as morally innocent , yet they display a range of sophisticated emotions , including some that are far from guileless . Seductive and elusive , they have no relationship to any of the other characters , and no indication is given as to how they came into existence , beyond occasional references to an unspecified " father " .

The various musical themes associated with the Rhinemaidens are regarded as among the most lyrical in the entire Ring cycle , bringing to it rare instances of comparative relaxation and charm . The music contains important melodies and phrases which are reprised and developed elsewhere in the operas to characterise other individuals and circumstances , and to relate plot developments to the source of the narrative . It is reported that Wagner played the Rhinemaidens ' lament at the piano , on the night before he died in Venice , in 1883 .

= = Origins = =

Alone of the Ring 's characters , the Rhinemaidens do not originate from the Poetic Edda or Prose Edda , the Icelandic sources for most of Norse mythology . Water @-@ sprites ( German : Nixen ) appear in many European myths and legends , often but not invariably in a form of disguised malevolence . Wagner drew widely and loosely from those legends when compiling his Ring narrative , and the probable origin of his Rhinemaidens is in the German *Nibelungenlied* . In one part of the *Nibelungenlied* narrative Hagen and Gunther encounter certain " wise women " ( thereafter described as water @-@ sprites ) , bathing and refreshing themselves in the waters of the Danube . Hagen creeps softly towards them , but he is seen , whereupon the sprites retreat and mock him from a distance . Hagen then steals their clothes . To obtain the return of these , one of the sprites , Hadeburg , promises falsely that Hagen and Gunther will find honor and glory when they enter Etzel 's kingdom . After their clothes are returned , another sprite , Sigelinde ( a name Wagner would adopt again for use elsewhere ) , tells Hagen that her sister has lied . If they go to Etzel 's land , they will die there .

This story , itself unrelated to the Ring drama , is echoed by Wagner both in the opening *Das Rheingold* scene and in the first scene in Act III of *Götterdämmerung* . Wagner first adapted the story for use in his early libretto of *Siegfried 's Death* ( which eventually became *Götterdämmerung* ) , introducing three unnamed water @-@ maids ( *Wasserjungfrauen* ) , and locating them in the Rhine , where they warn Siegfried of his impending death . Later these water @-@ maids became Rhinemaidens ( *Rheintöchter* ) , and were given individual names : Flosshilde , Wellgunde , and Bronnlinde . As Wagner continued working on his reverse chronology from Siegfried 's death , he arrived at what he determined was the initial act of the drama ? Alberich 's theft of the Rhine gold . Believing that a simple abduction of the unguarded gold would lack dramatic force , Wagner made the Rhinemaidens the guardians of the gold , and he introduced the " renunciation of love " condition . Bronnlinde became Woglinde , probably to avoid confusion with Brünnhilde .

Wagner may also have been influenced by the Rhine River @-@ based German legend of Lorelei , the lovelorn young maiden who drowns herself in the river and becomes a siren , luring fishermen onto the rocks by her singing . Further possible sources lie in Greek mythology and literature . Similarities exist between the maiden guardians in the Hesperides myth and the Rhinemaidens of Das Rheingold ; three females guard a highly desired golden treasure that is stolen in the telling of each tale . Wagner was an enthusiastic reader of Aeschylus , including his Prometheus Bound which has a chorus of Oceanids or water nymphs . One author , Rudolph Sabor , sees a link between the Oceanids ' treatment of Prometheus and the Rhinemaidens ' initial tolerance of Alberich . Just as in Greek myth the Oceanids are the daughters of the titan sea god Oceanus , in Norse mythology ? specifically the Poetic Edda ? the jötunn ( similar to a giant ) sea god Ægir has nine daughters . The name of one of these means " wave " ( Welle in German ) and is a possible source for Wellgunde 's name .

Wagner 's operas do not reveal where the Rhinemaidens came from , or whether they have any connection to other characters . Whereas most of the characters in the cycle are inter @-@ related , through birth , marriage , or sometimes both , the Rhinemaidens are seemingly independent . The identity of their father who entrusted them with the guardianship of the gold is not given in the text . Some Wagnerean scholars have suggested that he may be a " Supreme Being " who is the father of Wotan and all the gods ? indeed , of all creation . Others take the German Rheintöchter literally and say that they are the daughters of the Rhine River . Whatever is surmised , the Rhinemaidens are in a different category from Wotan and the other gods , who are destroyed by fire at the end of Götterdämmerung , while the Rhinemaidens swim happily away in the river , bearing their recovered treasure .

= = Nature and attributes = =

The Rhinemaidens have been described as the drama 's " most seductive but most elusive characters " , and in one analysis as representatives of " seduction by infantile fantasy " . They act essentially as a unity , with a composite yet elusive personality . Apart from Flosshilde 's implied seniority , demonstrated by occasional light rebukes and illustrated musically by awarding the role to a deeper @-@ voiced contralto or mezzo , their characters are undifferentiated . In The Perfect Wagnerite , his 1886 analysis of the Ring drama as political allegory , George Bernard Shaw describes the Rhinemaidens as " thoughtless , elemental , only half @-@ real things , very much like modern young ladies " . The attributes most apparent initially are charm and playfulness , combined with a natural innocence ; their joy in the gold they guard derives from its beauty alone , even though they know its latent power . However , this veneer of childlike simplicity is misleading ; aside from proving themselves irresponsible as guardians , they are also provocative , sarcastic and cruel in their interaction with Alberich . When the demigod Loge reports that the Rhinemaidens need Wotan 's help to regain the gold , Fricka , the goddess of marriage , calls them a " watery brood " ( Wassergezücht ) and complains about the many men they have lured away with their " treacherous bathing " . They are beguiling and flirtatious with Siegfried , but finally wise as revealed by the undisclosed counsel which they give to Brünnhilde . Sabor sees the personality of the Rhinemaidens as a blend of the " good hearted nature " of the Oceanids and the " austerity " ( including the willingness to drown people ) of the daughters of Ægir .

The first lines sung by Woglinde in the Ring are dominated by wordless vocalisations . Weia ! Waga ! ... Wagala weia ! Wallala weiala weia ! This attracted comment both at the 1869 premiere of Rheingold and the 1876 premiere of the entire Ring , with Wagner 's work being dismissed as " Wigalaweia @-@ Musik " . In a letter to Nietzsche dated 12 June 1872 , Wagner explained that he had derived Weiawaga from old German and that it was related to Weihwasser , meaning holy water . Other words were intended as parallels to those found in German nursery lullabies ( ' Eia Poppeia ' , ' Heija Poppeia ' and ' Aia Bubbeie ' are common forms ) . Thus Woglinde 's lines portray both the childish innocence of the Rhinemaidens and the holiness of Nature .

The Rhinemaidens ' sorrow in the loss of the gold is deep and heartfelt . As the gods are crossing the rainbow bridge into Valhalla at the end of Das Rheingold , Loge ironically suggests that , in the

absence of the gold , the maidens should " bask in the gods ? new @-@ found radiance " . The maidens ' lament then becomes a stern reproof : " Tender and true are only the depths " , they sing ; " False and cowardly is all that rejoices up there " . In the final Götterdämmerung scene they show ruthlessness as , having recovered the ring , they drag the hapless Hagen down into the waters of the Rhine .

The Rhinemaidens are the only prominent characters seen definitely alive at the end of the drama ; the fates of a few others are ambiguous , but most have certainly perished . Despite the relative brevity of their roles in the context of the four @-@ opera cycle , they are key figures ; their careless guardianship of the gold and their provocation of Alberich are the factors which determine all that follows . Wagner himself devised the " renunciation of love " provision whereby the gold could be stolen and then used to forge a ring with power to rule the world . Since the ring is made from the stolen gold , only its restoration to the Rhinemaidens ' care in the waters of the Rhine will lift the curse on it . Hence , the return of the stolen property provides a unifying thematic consistency to Wagner 's complex story .

= = Role in the Ring Operas = =

= = = Das Rheingold , Scene 1 = = =

As the musical prelude climaxes , Woglinde and Wellgunde are seen at play in the depths of the Rhine . Flosshilde joins them after a gentle reminder of their responsibilities as guardians of the gold . They are observed by the Nibelung dwarf Alberich who calls out to them : " I 'd like to draw near if you would be kind to me " . The wary Flosshilde cries : " Guard the gold ! Father warned us of such a foe " . When Alberich begins his rough wooing the maidens relax : " Now I laugh at my fears , our enemy is in love " , says Flosshilde , and a cruel teasing game ensues . First , Woglinde pretends to respond to the dwarf 's advances but swims away as he tries to embrace her . Then Wellgunde takes over , and Alberich 's hopes rise until her sharp retort : " Ugh , you hairy hunchbacked clown ! " Flosshilde pretends to chastise her sisters for their cruelty and feigns her own courtship , by which Alberich is quite taken in until she suddenly tears away to join the others in a mocking song . Tormented with lust , Alberich furiously chases the maidens over the rocks , slipping and sliding as they elude him , before he sinks down in impotent rage . At this point the mood changes : as a sudden brightness penetrates the depths , a magical golden light reveals , for the first time , the Rhinegold on its rock . The maidens sing their ecstatic greeting to the gold , which rouses Alberich 's curiosity . In response to his question Woglinde and Wellgunde reveal the gold 's secret : measureless power would belong to the one who could forge a ring from it . Flosshilde scolds them for giving this secret away , but her concerns are dismissed ? only someone who has forsworn love can obtain the gold , and Alberich is clearly so besotted as to present no danger . But their confidence is misplaced ; in his humiliation Alberich decides that world mastery is more desirable than love . As the maidens continue to jeer his antics he scrambles up the rock and , uttering a curse on love , seizes the gold and disappears , leaving the Rhinemaidens to dive after him bewailing their loss .

= = = Das Rheingold , Scene 4 = = =

As Wotan , Fricka and the other gods start to cross the rainbow bridge leading to Valhalla , they hear a melancholy song from the depths of the Rhine ? the maidens , mourning the loss of the gold . Embarrassed and irritated , Wotan tells Loge to silence the maidens , but as the gods continue across the bridge the lament rises again , now with bitter words of reproach to the gods for their heartlessness .

= = = Götterdämmerung , Act 3 Scene 1 = = =

Some time has passed ( at least two generations ) . In a remote wooded valley where the Rhine flows , the ageless Rhinemaidens continue to mourn for the gold , pleading with the " Sun @-@ woman " to send them a champion who will return the gold to them . Siegfried 's horn is heard , and he soon appears , having lost his way while hunting . The maidens greet him with their old playfulness and offer to help him , for the price of the ring on his finger . After a flirtatious exchange , Siegfried offers , apparently sincerely , to give them the ring . But instead of wisely simply accepting his offer , the mood of the naive , formerly flirtatious Rhinemaidens suddenly becomes solemn : they warn Siegfried he will be killed that very day unless he delivers the ring to them . But brave Siegfried will never submit to any such implied threat and declares : " By threatening my life and limb , even if it weren 't worth as much as a finger , you won 't get the ring from me ! " The maidens are scornful of his folly : " Farewell , Siegfried . A proud woman will today become your heir , scoundrel ! She 'll give us a better hearing " . Siegfried is not aware that it is to Brünnhilde that they refer . They swim off , leaving a puzzled Siegfried to ponder their words and to admit to himself that he could happily have seduced any one of them .

= = = Götterdämmerung , Act 3 Scene 3 = = =

In her final soliloquy , Brünnhilde thanks the Rhinemaidens for their " good advice " . They have apparently told her the full story of Siegfried 's ensnarement and betrayal , and advised that only the return of the ring to the waters of the Rhine can lift its curse . Brünnhilde sings : " What you desire I will give you : from my ashes take it to yourselves . The fire ... will cleanse the curse from the ring " . She exhorts the Rhinemaidens to " carefully guard it " in the future , then leaps into the flames of Siegfried 's pyre . The fire blazes up to fill the stage , representing the destruction of the gods . As the Rhine overflows its banks the Rhinemaidens appear , making for the ring . Hagen , who covets the ring , shouts to them " Get back from the ring ! " ( Zurück vom Ring ! ) , the last words of the drama . He is seized by Woglinde and Wellgunde and dragged into the Rhine 's depths , as Flosshilde grabs the ring , holds it aloft , and joins her sisters swimming in circles as the waters of the Rhine gradually subside .

= = Rhinemaidens ' music = =

The music associated with the Rhinemaidens has been portrayed by the Wagner commentator James Holman as " some of the seminal music in the Ring " ; other descriptions have noted its relative charm and relaxation .

In Woglinde 's opening song to the Rhine : " Weia ! Waga ! Woge , du Welle , ... " ( Das Rheingold , Scene 1 ) the melody is pentatonic , using the notes E flat , F , A flat , B flat and C. The song begins with a two @-@ note falling step ( F followed by E flat ) , a figure which recurs in many musical motives throughout the Ring . The melody itself is reprised during Fricka 's denunciation of the Rhinemaidens in Das Rheingold , Scene 2 and , dramatically , at the end of Götterdämmerung when , after Brünnhilde 's immolation , the Rhinemaidens rise from the river to claim the ring from Siegfried 's funeral pyre . Its first five notes , with an altered rhythm , become the motive of the sleeping Brünnhilde in Die Walküre , Act 3 . A variant of the tune becomes the Woodbird 's greeting " Hei ! Siegfried " in Act 2 of Siegfried . The Rhinemaidens and the Woodbird , in Deryck Cooke 's analysis , are related through nature , as " fundamentally innocent allies of the natural world " .

The " Rhinemaidens ' joy and greeting to the gold " : " Heiajaheia , Heiajaheia ! Wallalallalala leiajahei ! Rheingold ! Rheingold ! ... " ( Das Rheingold Scene 1 ) is a triumphant greeting song based on two elements , which are developed and transformed later in the Ring and put to many uses . For example , the joyful " heiajaheia " cries are converted , in Rheingold Scene 2 , into a dark minor version as Loge reports the theft of the gold to the gods and the consequent rising power of the Nibelungen . The " Rheingold ! " repetition is sung by the Rhinemaidens to the same falling step that marked the start of Woglinde 's song . This figure recurs constantly in the later stages of the drama ; in Das Rheingold Scene 3 a minor key version is used as a motive for the evil power of the ring that Alberich has forged from the gold . It comes to represent the theme of servitude to the ring ;

in Götterdämmerung , enslaved to the ring by his desire for it , Hagen utters his " Hoi @-@ ho " call to his vassals using the same minor two @-@ note figure .

The lament " Rheingold ! Rheingold ! Reines Gold ! ... " ( Das Rheingold Scene 4 ) is sung by the maidens at the end of Das Rheingold , as the gods begin to cross the Rainbow Bridge into Valhalla . It begins with the music from the greeting , but develops into what Ernest Newman describes as a " haunting song of loss " , which becomes increasingly poignant before it is drowned by the orchestral fortissimo that ends the opera . A slow version of the lament is played on the horns in Siegfried , Act 2 , as Siegfried enters Fafner 's cave to claim the gold ? the lament , says Cooke , serves to remind us of the gold 's true ownership . The lament is played spiritedly during the Götterdämmerung prologue , as part of the orchestral interlude known as Siegfried 's Rhine Journey , before a shadow falls across the music as it descends into the minor key of the " servitude " motive .

Newman describes the Rhinemaidens ' scene with Siegfried " : Frau Sonne ... " and " Weilalala leia ... " ( Götterdämmerung , Act 3 Scene 1 ) , as a " gracious woodland idyll " . The musical elements associated with the Rhinemaidens in this scene have not previously been heard ; Holman describes them as alluding to the maidens ' seductive nature , as well as conveying a sense of nostalgia and detachment , as the drama approaches its conclusion .

= = On stage = =

From the first complete production of the Ring , at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus in 1876 , it was established that the Rhinemaidens should be depicted in conventional human form , rather than as mermaids or with other supernatural features , notwithstanding Alberich 's insult to Wellgunde : " Frigid bony fish ! " ( Kalter , grätiger Fisch ! ) . The staging of their scenes has always been a test of ingenuity and imagination , since Wagner 's stage directions include much swimming and diving and other aquatic gymnastics . Traditionally , therefore , much use has been made of backdrops and lighting to achieve the necessary watery effects . Until the Second World War , under the influence of Cosima Wagner and her ( and Wagner 's ) son Siegfried , a policy of " stifling conservatism " was applied to Bayreuth stagings of the Ring operas . Although there had been some innovation in productions staged elsewhere , it was not until the postwar revival of the Festival in 1951 that there were any significant changes in Bayreuth 's presentation of the Ring operas . Since 1976 , in particular , innovation at the Festival and elsewhere has been substantial and imaginative .

In the original 1876 production , the Rhinemaidens were wheeled around on stands behind semi @-@ transparent screens . The stage machinery and the lighting effects were designed by Carl Brandt , who was the foremost stage technician of the time . One innovation which Cosima did eventually approve was the replacement of the wheeled stands with giant , invisible " fishing rods " on which the Rhinemaidens were dangled . Wires continued to be used in the Bayreuth productions of Siegfried Wagner and , later , those of his widow Winifred , who ran the Bayreuth Festival until the end of the Second World War . Similar techniques have been used in more modern productions . In the 1996 Lyric Opera of Chicago Ring cycle , repeated in 2004 ? 05 , the Rhinemaidens were suspended on bungee cords anchored in the fly space above the stage , enabling them to dive up and down , as intended by Wagner . The Rhinemaidens were played on @-@ stage by gymnasts , mouthing words sung by singers standing in a corner of the stage .

The 1951 Festival production , by Siegfried 's and Winifred 's son Wieland , broke with tradition and featured an austere staging which replaced scenery and props with skilful lighting effects . The Rhinemaidens , along with all the other characters , were plainly dressed in simple robes , and sang their roles without histrionics . Thus the music and the words became the main focus of attention . Wieland was influenced by Adolphe Appia , whose Notes sur l 'Anneau du Nibelungen ( 1924 ? 25 ) had been dismissed by Cosima : " Appia seems to be unaware that the Ring was performed here in 1876 . It follows that the staging is definitive and sacrosanct . " However , Wieland and his brother Wolfgang praised Appia : " ... the stylised stage , inspired by the music and the realisation of three @-@ dimensional space ? constitute the initial impulses for a reform of operatic stagings which led quite logically to the ' New Bayreuth ' style . "

The innovative centenary Bayreuth Ring , directed by Patrice Chéreau , did away altogether with

the underwater concept by setting the Rhinemaiden scenes in the lee of a large hydro @-@ electric dam , as part of a 19th @-@ century Industrial Revolution setting for the operas . For the scene with Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung* , Chéreau altered the perpetual youth aspect of the Rhine Maidens by depicting them as " no longer young girls merrily disporting themselves ; they have become tired , grey , careworn , and ungainly " . Since this production " the assumption of unrestricted interpretive license has become the norm " . For example , Nikolaus Lehnhoff , in his 1987 Bayerische Staatsoper production , placed the Rhinemaidens in a salon and had their lament at the end of *Rheingold* played on a gramophone by Loge .

Peter Hall directed the Bayreuth Ring after Chéreau . His version , staged 1983 ? 86 , portrayed the natural innocence of the Rhinemaidens in the simplest of ways ; they were naked . Keith Warner adapted this feature in his Ring production for the Royal Opera House Covent Garden , first staged 2004 ? 06 . A Covent Garden spokesman explained " The maidens are children of innocence , a vision of nature ? and as soon as someone appears they hastily throw on some clothes to protect their modesty . " While Warner relies on lighting to achieve an underwater effect , Hall used a Pepper 's ghost illusion : mirrors at a 45 ° angle made the Rhinemaidens appear to swim vertically when the performers were in fact swimming horizontally in a shallow basin .

Although the roles of the Rhinemaidens are relatively small , they have been sung by notable singers better known for performing major roles in Wagnerian and other repertoire . The first person to sing the part of Woglinde in full was Lilli Lehmann at Bayreuth in 1876 . In 1951 , when the Bayreuth Festival re @-@ opened after the Second World War , the same part was taken by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf . Other Bayreuth Rhinemaidens include Helga Dernesch who sang Wellgunde there between 1965 and 1967 . Lotte Lehmann played Wellgunde at the Hamburg State Opera between 1912 and 1914 and the Vienna State Opera in 1916 . Recorded Rhinemaidens have included Sena Jurinac for Furtwängler and RAI , Lucia Popp and Gwyneth Jones for Georg Solti , and Helen Donath and Edda Moser for Karajan .