

Detroit Opera

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Detroit Opera Opens 2022–23 season with Yuval Sharon's *The Valkyries* September 17–20

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The Valkyries at The Hollywood Bowl

Photo Credit: Timothy Norris / Los Angeles Philharmonic

Detroit Opera's 2022–23 season opens September 17–20 with *The Valkyries*, a unique staging of Act III of Richard Wagner's *Die Walküre* directed by Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director Yuval Sharon and conducted by Sir Andrew Davis. *The Valkyries* uses green screen technology to seamlessly blend onstage action with real-time computer graphics and animation, created by Jason Thompson and Kaitlyn Pietras of PXT Studio; in doing so, *The Valkyries* draws audiences

deeper into Wagner's proto-cinematic vision than ever before. Students from the College for Creative Studies (CCS) in Detroit contributed to the animation used in the production.

The Valkyries stars Associate Artistic Director Christine Goerke as Brünnhilde and Alan Held as Wotan, alongside Wendy Bryn Harmer (Sieglinde), Angel Azzarra (Gerhilde), Ann Toomey (Ortlinde) who is a native of Detroit, Tamara Mumford (Waltraute), GeDeane Graham (Schwertleite), Jessica Faselt (Helmwige), Leah Dexter who also is from Detroit (Siegrune), Maya Lahyani (Grimgerde), and Krysty Swann who is from Highland Park (Rosswaise). *The Valkyries* is presented in a co-production with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with whom Sharon staged the production on July 17 at the Hollywood Bowl, with Gustavo Dudamel conducting.

Beginning with a world built in Unreal Engine, a tool typically designed for the video game industry, Sharon worked with Thompson and Pietras to storyboard the piece, using VR headsets to place virtual cameras throughout the digital landscape as if he were a film director working on location. These virtual cameras—which can be automated, panned, and zoomed with all the flexibility of a physical camera—work in conjunction with five robotic cameras, which capture the performers from a variety of angles onstage in front of a 16-foot green screen. As the performance unfolds onstage, the feed from the physical cameras and virtual cameras are then synthesized, with real-time video effects used to keep color grading consistent, and to help the performers blend into the virtual environment. The result is a live film that exists dynamically with the onstage performance, while still being replicable on a shot-for-shot basis; audiences are free to watch the action on-stage and on projection screens simultaneously.

"Wagner was a zestful early adapter of technology when it helped him realize his larger-than-life imagination. And technology is at the heart of this production of *The Valkyries*, which provokes you to consider the current state of opera in the digital age," says Sharon. "The latest and greatest technology within our reach helped create a 3D environment stretching beyond the limitations of a conventional theater. We can shift scale, create arresting perspectives, and articulate the moment-by-moment drama in unprecedented ways. The possibilities promised by this technology can be awe-inspiring – but there remains a tension with the live performance, which is the soul of the work itself. As the piece itself lives in the tension between magic and disillusionment, I hope you will see reflected in this production both curiosity and caution as to where the art form of opera might be headed. Enjoy the ride!"

"Artists and audiences alike are making new discoveries in opera through Yuval's unique and engaging lens," said Detroit Opera President and CEO Wayne S. Brown. "Join us for another exciting journey!"

Writing of the July 17th premiere staging at the Hollywood Bowl, Mark Swed of [The Los Angeles Times](#) highlighted the contrast between on-stage and projected realities. "Helmeted Valkyries in flamboyant costumes began to walk onto the small stage. Men in green body suits helped guide them into place. But they were essentially just singers on stage, doing their usual Wagnerian business in following Dudamel and acting some. On video, thanks to green-screen technology, they were transported to an animated digital wonderland. They hopped on

futuristic motorcycles and rode through a landscape that looked like it might have been designed by Buckminster Fuller, he of the geodesic domes. They raced through space with urns on the back of the cycles, the Valkyries' main job being to bring dead warriors to Valhalla, Wotan's mountaintop castle, which he paid for with ill-begotten gold."

This is the third time Sharon has used green screen technology for stage productions, following two cinematic adaptations: Andrew Norman's *Trip to the Moon*, inspired by the 1902 silent film of the same title, and Olga Neuwirth's adaptation of David Lynch's *Lost Highway*. By blending the worlds of live performance with cinematic fantasy, *The Valkyries* embodies Sharon's directing philosophy—one that uses opera as an opportunity to allow the fantastic to seep into ordinary reality, while still remaining convincingly rooted in the space in which it is embedded.

As Mark Binelli of [The New York Times Magazine](#) relates, "There's an element of directing that's practical, Sharon told me — 'basically, managing time. But then you need another level, where you are tapping into the realm of the impossible, what can barely be imagined. Sing in a moving car! Play violin while crossing a busy street!' In *Hopscotch*, an actor on a motorcycle pulled alongside the limousines in moving traffic to deliver lines sent to the vehicles' speakers via wireless mics — after which, Sharon said, audience members would 'start to wonder what else might be part of the show. A helicopter flew by and they assumed that was us!' Bringing the fictional into the everyday world highlights, for Sharon, the porousness of those boundaries, allowing witnesses to imagine transformative change in what might have seemed like an immutable reality."

Sharon is currently the Gary L. Wasserman Artistic Director of Detroit Opera; since assuming this role in 2020, his leadership and vision have been credited with transforming the company into the new center for progressive opera in the United States. Sharon began his tenure in October 2020 with *Twilight: Gods*, an innovative and site-specific *Götterdämmerung* adaptation which he both conceived and directed, staged in the Detroit Opera House Parking Center. The 2021–22 season, Sharon's first as Artistic Director, featured collaborations with arts organizations from around the country—including co-productions with Boston Lyric Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Metropolitan Opera, Opera Omaha, Seattle Opera, and Spoleto Festival USA—as well as two of his own productions: a recreation of Ragnar Kjartansson's 12-hour exercise in radical forgiveness, *Bliss*, and a unique reverse-chronology production of *La bohème*.

Upcoming productions at Detroit Opera during the 2022-23 season include: *Faust*, directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz and conducted by Valerio Galli (November 12–20); a revival of Tazewell Thompson's production of *Xerxes* (March 4–12), directed by James Blaszkowski and conducted by Dame Jane Glover; and *Ainadamar* (April 8–16), appearing in a co-production with Opera Ventures, Scottish National Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, and the Welsh National Opera directed by Deborah Colker and conducted by Paolo Bortolameolli.

"It's hard to overstate the unlikelihood of a director as innovative and internationally celebrated as Sharon taking the reins of a decidedly regional (and in certain respects conservative) opera company like Detroit's," writes Binelli. "But today, nearly two years into

his five-year contract, Sharon has already radically elevated Detroit Opera's status in the larger cultural ecosystem."

Performances of *The Valkyries* will be held Saturday, September 17 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, September 18 at 2:30 p.m., and Tuesday September 20 at 7:30 p.m. Run time for the production is approximately 1 hour and 27 minutes with no intermission. Tickets for *The Valkyries* are available online at DetroitOpera.org and start at \$29. Orders for groups of 10 or more may be placed by emailing groupsales@detroitopera.org. Subscriptions for the 2022-23 season can also be purchased online or by calling 313-237-7464. WRCJ 90.9FM will broadcast *The Valkyries'* premiere on Saturday, September 17.

THE VALKYRIES
September 17, 18, & 20, 2022
Detroit Opera House
Detroit, MI

Music and Libretto by Richard Wagner
Directed by Yuval Sharon
Conducted by Sir Andrew Davis
Co-produced with the Los Angeles Philharmonic

with

Christine Goerke, Brünnhilde
Alan Held, Wotan
Wendy Bryn Harmer, Sieglinde
Angel Azzarra, Gerhilde
Ann Toomey, Ortlinde
Tamara Mumford, Waltraute
GeDeane Graham, Schwertleite
Jessica Faselt, Helmwig
Leah Dexter, Siegrune
Maya Lahyani, Grimgerde
Krysty Swann, Rossweise

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