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# FESTIVAL DE **lanaudière**



## EPIC WAGNER

PRESENTED BY



ORCHESTRE MÉTROPOLITAIN  
Christine Goerke, soprano (Sieglinde)  
Brandon Jovanovich, tenor (Siegmund)  
Franz-Josef Selig, bass (Hunding)  
Yannick Nézet-Séguin, conductor

**AUGUST 6, 2022 | 8:00 PM**

Amphithéâtre  
Fernand-Lindsay

# EPIC WAGNER

## PROGRAM

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**Claude Debussy** (1862–1918)

*Pelléas et Mélisande* (orchestral suite)

**Richard Wagner** (1813–1883)

*Die Walküre*, Acte 1 (concert version)

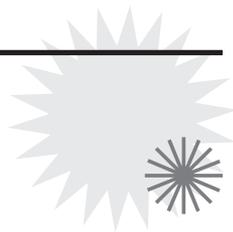
**Christine Goerke, soprano** (Sieglinde)

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ORCHESTRE MÉTROPOLITAIN

**Yannick Nézet-Séguin, conductor**



## PROGRAM NOTES

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### Debussy and Wagner: an air of revolution

Although he may not be considered as a “modern” composer, in his time Claude Debussy (1862–1918), had the temerity to transcend the norms of a 300-year-old tonal system and to claim a special place in the history of music. He was known, however, for taking risks and for his thirst for freedom, instigating new creative approaches and ways of reaching listeners while eschewing all prevalent musical trends and theories, however fashionable.

Previously, Richard Wagner (1813–1883) had spearheaded a school of thought featuring a new brand of opera that garnered many followers, an art based not on a succession of admirable sung numbers in which soloists would demonstrate their virtuosity, but on a dramatic form in which the music continually merged with the text. With *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Debussy fashioned an opera—whose initial version was completely in 1895—wherein he embraced these ideals while defining them on his own terms. The result was the very antithesis of Wagnerism. Gone were the grand arias and expansive lyricism: here, the music closely imitates the spoken voice, without pomp or excess. As Debussy explained: “The characters of this drama try to sing like natural people and not in an arbitrary language made of outdated traditions. This is the reason for reproaches made to my so-called bias for monotonous declamation where nothing melodic ever appears... First, the reproach is false: the feelings of a character cannot be expressed continuously in a melodic way.”

*Pelléas et Mélisande*, originally a play by the Belgian Symbolist writer Maurice Maeterlinck, immediately captivated Debussy. The composer found in such avant-garde works an art of suggestion, of allusions and evocations that perfectly suited his own musical aesthetic. In both the play and the opera, ideas burgeon (either

verbally or musically) only to branch off into something else or be met with silence instead of developing to their conclusion, imparting a feeling of unreality. Dramatically, the characters of Pelléas and Mélisande experience a perplexing love hesitatingly acknowledged. Theirs is an innocent affair, yet it provokes the jealousy of Pelléas' half-brother Golaud, who claims Mélisande as his wife.

Debussy was so consumed by Maeterlinck's text that he devoted twelve years of his life setting it to music, revisiting it several times, in versions both for orchestra and piano. In preparation for the opera's premiere in 1902, he added interludes to the score to fill time during set changes: some 150 measures of music. Wagner's influence, evinced in Debussy's perpetual quest for fusion between text and music, is also perceptible in the orchestration of these passages. It is likely that the latter's two successive visits in 1888 and 1889 to Bayreuth, the "mecca" of Wagnerian music in Germany, left a deep and lasting impression on him.

From the few interludes and preludes to each of the opera's five acts, a first symphonic suite was elaborated by the conductor and arranger Erich Leinsdorf in 1946. Leinsdorf's efforts made the music of *Pelléas et Mélisande* more accessible by adapting it to the concert form and eliminating the apparatus of a stage production. Two subsequent orchestral adaptations were also published: Marius Constant's *Pelléas et Mélisande-Symphonie*, in 1983, and René Koering's *Suite de Pelléas et Mélisande*, in 2015.

Similarly, **Act I of Wagner's *The Valkyrie*** is remarkable for its abundance of characteristic Wagnerian features found in his large-scale musical dramas. This adaptation is derived from the second opera of his *Ring of the Nibelungs* tetralogy ("Ring Cycle"). Indeed, the first act of *The Valkyrie* is often performed separately from the rest. It lasts but an hour and lends itself admirably to an un-staged concert format while retaining all the ingredients of an opera-within-an-opera. Here, the classic unities of time (a stormy evening), of place (a house in the forest) and of action (a couple welcomes a refugee who is sought out to be killed) are enacted by three characters (Siegfried, Sieglinde and Hunding) in a love triangle against the backdrop of a conflict between two rival families and of a hidden truth that comes to light. As we may conclude, certain elements of Wagner's plot are reminiscent of the mystical dimensions of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, among them the supernatural forces that inhabit the forest of Allemonde.

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# Benoit Brière

## A passionate spokesperson

Mr. Brière is basically wedded to classical music, given that his spouse is a cellist—and in addition, Joliette-born. “A person who marries must adopt their wife’s hometown.” One might say that our Spokesperson is steeped in classical music everyday from morning to night!

“Don’t search for me this summer: I’ll be at the Festival de Lanaudière.”

Get to know him, his passion for acting and the importance of music in his everyday life. [READ+](#)



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