

# 'Siegfried'

## Rings True

### Lyric Production's Slow Start Swells to Rapture, Excitement

#### OPERA

By Wynne Delacoma

**F**after the dragon looked ferocious; Siegfried Jerusalem was in ringing, vibrant voice as the young hero Siegfried; Eva Marton's Brunnhilde, for the most part, matched his rapture in their Act III love scene.

Despite some uneven spots, Tuesday's unveiling of "Siegfried," the third installment in Lyric's new production of Wagner's four-part "The Ring of the Nibelungs" cycle, could be counted as a success.

"The Ring" is a talky set of operas, with characters constantly filling us in on what has gone before. "Siegfried" is especially so. The first act dragged, perhaps because designer John Conklin's set was so claustrophobic. The manipulative Mime (Graham Clark) and his young charge, Siegfried, were mostly confined to a dilapidated, wooden shack set on rickety pilings. But the sense of confinement seemed artificial, a stage trick instead of a sign of a state of mind.

Clark's Mime was wonderful, however, a powerful dwarf whose darting, twitching body reflected a restless, clever mind. The relics of Siegfried's childhood—toys, tiny clothes, a rocking horse—which littered the set served a double function. They remind us that Siegfried, usually sung by a strapping, if not paunchy, middle-aged man, is a teenager barely out of boyhood. Under August Everding's direction, however, Mime handled the props as if they were an obsession. Mime seemed deranged and, therefore, doubly dangerous.

Jerusalem's acting was tepid in Act I, since he kept an almost constant eye on conductor Zubin Mehta's baton. When the action

slowed in Acts II and III, he was much more relaxed and involved. He was in excellent voice, his lines soaring over the orchestra with open, fresh-sounding tone.

As has been the case since the start of Lyric's "Ring" three years ago, James Morris' Wotan provided a profound moral center. His voice was dark and weighty, but expressive, lightening with love as he described Valhalla and his beloved daughter, Brunnhilde. As the troubled leader whose transgressions will topple his fellow gods, he conveyed wisdom and despair.

"Siegfried" is virtually an all-male show until Brunnhilde appears in Act III. The sound of Marton's robust soprano was a welcome musical

change. She was instantly involved emotionally in the action, greeting the sun with rapture. Her singing wasn't always seamless, but she projected easily. She and Jerusalem were well-matched in the ecstatic final moments.

Like the anvil scene, Siegfried's battle with Fafner is one of those places in which Wagner's dramatic music can overpower the stage action. Conklin and puppetmaster Lisa Aimee Sturz solved the problem superbly with a massive figure resembling a dinosaur skeleton.

Manipulated by 16 black-clad handlers, Fafner was truly terrifying, with claws that loomed over Siegfried like the prehistoric beasts in "Jurassic Park." The battle was exciting, with Siegfried being squeezed by the dragon's tail.

The handling of the Forest Bird who leads Siegfried to Brunnhilde was also inventive. A dancer carrying a white carved bird appeared, eventually soaring across the stage on wires as Olga Makarina sang the bird's song offstage. This blend of artifice and fantasy involving dancers and acrobats has been one of the strong points of this "Ring."

#### 'Siegfried'

■ Through Feb. 18

■ Civic Opera House,

20 N. Wacker

■ Sold out, but last-minute turnbacks may be available; \$21 to \$102

■ (312) 332-2244