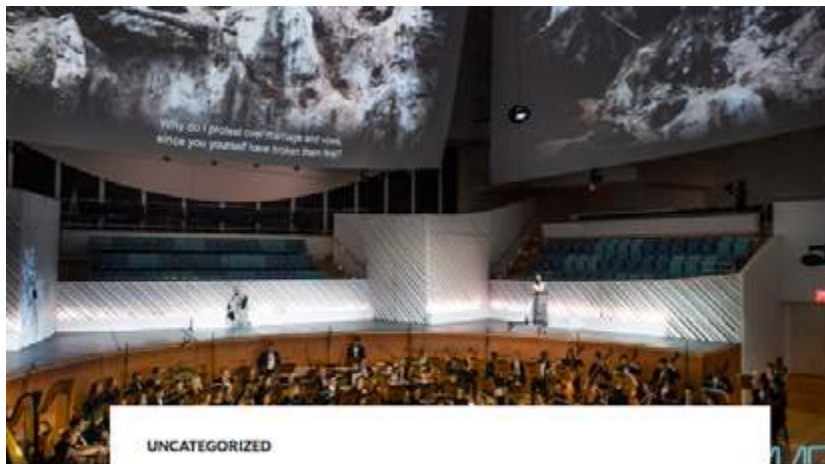


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## MIAMI WAGNER INSTITUTE

### Wagner Concert Pulls Out All the Stops Miami Beach, FL. 7/23/2018

The Miami Music Festival outdid itself yet again with this season's *pièce de resistance*, the annual Wagner Institute's performance at the New World Symphony in Miami Beach on Saturday. Entering its fifth year, the Festival makes active strides to expand and surpass with every new season, and fans of the three-year-old, internationally-respected Wagner program were surely not disappointed by this year's presentation.

Under the baton of Artistic Director and Founder Michael Rossi, the full-sized Festival Orchestra performed the second acts of the renowned works *Lohengrin* and *Die Walküre*, with casts that blend veteran Wagnerian superstars, such as Alan Held and Linda Watson, with young professionals who attend the training program to brush elbows and sharpen their chops with famous faculty and co-stars. The festival welcomed Antoine Wagner among the stars on this year's roster, who, in addition to being the composer Richard Wagner's great-great-grandson, has made his name as a distinctive international visual artist with an impressive resume.

The second act of *Lohengrin* starred young singers who acquitted themselves well of their roles, especially the dulcet soprano Megan Nielson, who sang a heavenly Elsa, and Peter Bass as the plotting, acrimonious Friedrich of Telramund. The treat in this half was the thrilling combination of full-sized romantic orchestra and a festival-wide chorus tackling some of Wagner's finest musical themes.

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The turbulent opening themes of *Die Walküre* were deftly sculpted by the orchestra under Rossi's conducting, producing a roiling sound that underscored the cold, foggy projections of Wagner's visual design. Alan Held, who returns for his third year with the festival, sank into his signature role of Wotan with masterful dimension. In contrast to the menace of Held's Wotan, Vivien Shotwell sang Fricka with a delicacy and tenderness difficult to achieve given the weight of the role (and orchestra). Linda Watson was an energetic Brünnhilde, and Dominic Armstrong sang the hero Siegmund with great warmth, especially in the top of his range.

The highlight of the concert was Wagner's imaginative visual design throughout *Die Walküre's* Act II. Frank Gehry's New World Center is a breathtaking venue that requires a reconceptualization of space in both stage and visual production, and here Antoine Wagner thrives. In lieu of stage sets, which would be difficult to execute in the space, massive cinematic projections cast across the three ceiling panels that tower over the u-shaped stage. Behind the orchestra and singer-actors, squalls rolled in across a stormy Valhalla as Wotan and Fricka argued; later spectacular Nordic mountain passes gave way to a stark, concrete ruin where Siegmund and Sieglinde rested from their flight from Hunding's hall.

The combination of visual creativity and live performance, underscored by the wall of sound from the compositional masterpiece, converged into a feast for the senses, making for a truly special evening. The Festival, which runs for 8 weeks from June to end of July every year, has grown in leaps and bounds in its five-year tenure and continues to impress with the quality of musicianship it brings to South Florida and the imagination of each production. After Saturday, it is clear the future of opera and orchestral performance is bright with such creativity steering the way.