

April 9, 2020 – Wagner's *Parsifal*

Richard Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal*, is featured on this Maundy Thursday's expanded edition of the WCPE Opera House. The vessel that was used to serve the wine at Jesus Christ's Last Supper has been one of the supposed subjects of Holy Grail literature in Christian mythology. The quest for the Holy Grail makes up an important segment of the Arthurian cycle, combining Christian lore with a Celtic myth of a cauldron endowed with special powers. The early Grail romances centered on Percival, who—in the hands of Wagner—evolved into Parsifal. *Parsifal* was described by Wagner as a *Bühnenweihfestspiel* (stage consecration festival play).

Many years earlier, the vessel of the Holy Grail was given into the keeping of Titurel (bass **Victor von Halem**) and his Christian knights, as was the Sacred Spear that pierced the side of Jesus during His crucifixion. These relics have been guarded in a fortified castle at Montsalvat, a beacon of Christianity in Islamic Spain. Nearby lives the evil sorcerer Klingsor (bass **Siegmund Nimsgern**) and the beautiful enchantress Kundry (mezzo-soprano **Dunja Vejzovic**), enemies of the knights. When Titurel grew old, he handed over the Kingdom of the Grail to his son Amfortas (bass-baritone **José van Dam**), who—determined to kill Klingsor—entered his enemy's magic garden. There, he fell prey to Kundry's charms and lost the Sacred Spear to Klingsor. Badly wounded by the spear, Amfortas continues to suffer: only the touch of the Sacred Spear will close the gash it made.

A prophecy from the sanctuary of the Grail has told Amfortas that only a "holy fool," unaware of sin, will be able to resist Kundry and regain the Sacred Spear. The plot of the opera deals with the fulfilment of this prophecy as a guileless youth, Parsifal (tenor **Peter Hofmann**), is brought to the venerable knight Gurnemanz (bass **Kurt Moll**), charged with killing a holy swan. When it becomes clear that the boy is innocent of the crime, and entirely ignorant of the world, he is selected to rescue the Sacred Spear. He triumphs, heals Amfortas, and is anointed King of the Grail by Gurnemanz. As Amfortas and the knights kneel to Parsifal, he baptizes Kundry, who finds at last the redemption of peaceful death.

Herbert von Karajan conducts the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the chorus of the German State Opera of Berlin in this 1980 Deutsche Grammophon recording. This encore performance will be introduced by the late **Al Ruocchio** (1937-2007).

From the Act III finale, here's **Peter Hofmann** as Parsifal singing "Nur eine Waffe taugt": <http://youtu.be/t1KTL9dq0ww>.

This Saturday, April 11th, at 1:00 p.m., join us for the rebroadcast of the Metropolitan Opera's April 30, 2018 performance of Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*, starring **Anna Netrebko** as the volatile opera diva in love with a politically revolutionary painter. She's joined by **Yusif Eyvazov** (Cavaradossi) and **Michael Volle** (Scarpia) in principal roles. **Bertrand de Billy** conducts.

Please join us next Thursday, April 16th, for an encore broadcast of Gioachino Rossini's *Semiramide*, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio** (1937-2007). **Joan Sutherland** sings the title role, portraying a queen who murders her husband, then wants to marry Arsace, a man who turns out to be her own son, played by **Marilyn Horne** (in a "trouser" role). **Richard Bonyng**e conducts this 1966 Decca/London recording.

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're streamed online world-wide at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, and you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House