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Der fliegende Holländer

Vienna State Opera, 04.05.2026 [ENA]

At the Vienna State Opera, Wagner's Der fliegende Holländer offers a thrilling and deeply satisfying evening of music drama, and this production confirms how powerfully the opera can still speak to a modern audience. The work is often described as a tale of curse and redemption, but in performance it becomes much more than that: a searing exploration of obsession, longing, isolation, and the possibility of salvation through faithfulness. In this production, those themes are brought into vivid relief with exceptional dramatic focus and musical conviction.

One of the great strengths of Der fliegende Holländer is its dramatic concision. Wagner later expanded his operatic vision into larger and more philosophically complex works, but here the intensity is immediate. The storm music, the haunted arrival of the Dutchman, and Senta's overwhelming identification with his fate create a world in which psychological pressure is felt from the very beginning. That tension is sustained throughout the performance with admirable control. The opera never loses its forward movement, yet it also allows space for atmosphere and inner reflection, which is exactly what this score requires.

The title role is one of Wagner's most compelling bass-baritone creations, and Tomasz Konieczny brings formidable authority to it. The Dutchman is not merely a supernatural figure; he is a man crushed by destiny and trapped by the burden of endless wandering. Konieczny's presence gives the role a magnetic intensity, combining vocal weight, dark color, and an unmistakable sense of tragic inwardness. He is especially effective in making the character both fearsome and vulnerable, which is essential to the opera's emotional power. This is not a one-dimensional cursed seafarer, but a deeply human figure who seems to carry the weight of eternity.

Erica Eloff as Senta is equally central to the success of the evening. Senta can easily become either an overly dreamy romantic heroine or an implausibly self-sacrificing figure, but in a strong interpretation she becomes the opera's moral and emotional axis. Eloff gives the role both fervor and focus. Her singing has the kind of concentrated intensity that makes Senta's obsession feel real, and yet there is also tenderness in her phrasing that prevents the performance from becoming harsh or hysterical. In her great ballad, the character's fascination with the Dutchman's legend becomes a genuine act of emotional identification, and that gives the entire opera its dramatic coherence.

Franz-Josef Selig as Daland adds substantial vocal authority and practical dramatic sense. Daland is often

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treated as a comic or merely opportunistic figure, but in fact he is crucial to the opera's social and ethical structure. Selig understands this well. His Daland has solidity, a clear bass presence, and just enough worldly calculation to make the character believable without diminishing the work's seriousness. He is a strong foil to the Dutchman's haunted nobility and a reminder that Wagner's drama is never simply symbolic; it is rooted in human choices and everyday motives.

Andreas Schager as Erik brings urgency and dramatic intensity to a role that can be underestimated. Erik is not merely the rejected suitor; he is the voice of earthly attachment and emotional alarm. Schager gives him real force and lyrical breadth, making his scenes matter dramatically rather than functioning as routine interludes. Stephanie Maitland as Mary and Hiroshi Amako as the Steersman complete the cast with secure and characterful contributions, helping to shape the opera's social world with clarity and balance.

The musical direction by Bertrand de Billy is a major asset. Wagner's score requires both dramatic momentum and careful control of orchestral color, and this performance finds exactly that balance. The overture and storm passages have real propulsion, while the more lyrical moments unfold with ample breathing space. De Billy understands the score's contrasts: the sea's turbulence, the Dutchman's bleak fate, and Senta's visionary intensity all receive their proper weight. The orchestra responds with rich sonority and disciplined ensemble, ensuring that the musical structure remains taut even in the most expansive moments.

The production by Christine Mielitz, with stage design by Stefan Mayer, serves the opera well by emphasizing its theatrical atmosphere without distracting from the core drama. The visual world supports the emotional seriousness of the music, and the staging allows the characters' inner conflicts to emerge clearly. That clarity matters in Der fliegende Holländer, where Wagner's early mastery lies in the fusion of mythic scale and psychological immediacy.

What makes this performance especially rewarding is its refusal to treat the opera as a mere Gothic curiosity. Instead, it reveals the work as a profoundly moving drama of hope, loneliness, and redemption. When the final emotional resolution arrives, it does so with real tragic force and genuine lift. The audience is left with the impression of having encountered not only an early Wagner masterpiece, but one of the composer's most direct and haunting achievements. In the Vienna State Opera's hands, Der fliegende Holländer becomes an evening of great intensity, noble singing, and memorable theatrical power.

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