What to Listen For

Wagner: *Die Walküre (The Valkyrie)*, Act III, closing of scene 3

Here’s what to listen for in the closing of Wagner’s *Die Walküre (The Valkyrie)*, Act III, scene 3.

■ Solo bass voice and orchestra with focus on brass

The singing character in the closing scene of *Die Walküre (The Valkyrie)* is Wotan, who has cast a sleep spell on his daughter Brünnhilde. During this scene, he calls to Loge, the god of Fire, to encircle the rock on which she sleeps with fire, and only a true hero—one who knows no fear—will cross the wall of fire and awaken her.

The closing scene of *Die Walküre (The Valkyrie)* is performed by solo bass voice and orchestra, with a focus on brass instruments. Listen to these performing forces in this excerpt: [2:02–2:32].

■ Continuous orchestral sound in duple meter

Throughout this scene, you will hear continuous orchestral sound and duple meter. In this excerpt, listen to the unbroken sound of the orchestra (no silences) playing in duple meter: [3:25–4:32].

■ Leitmotifs: magic fire, magic sleep, slumber, and Siegfried

In this scene, Wagner uses leitmotifs (recurring themes that represent a person, place, or idea) to assist in telling the story. This scene involves fire, a sleep spell, slumber, and the idea of a hero. As Wotan calls to Loge to bring fire, you will hear the “magic fire” leitmotif, followed by “magic sleep” and the “slumber.” Listen to the “magic fire” leitmotif in full orchestra: [1:03–1:37]; the “magic sleep” leitmotif in descending woodwinds: [1:38–1:50]; and the “slumber” leitmotif in woodwinds: [1:51–1:58]. As Wotan sings of a hero, he sings the leitmotif of “Siegfried”, the character that will brave the fire and waken Brünnhilde. Listen to Wotan sing the “Siegfried” leitmotif: [2:02–2:32]. Sometimes these individual leitmotifs are also played simultaneously.

So remember to listen for solo bass voice and orchestra focused on brass; continuous orchestral sound in duple meter; and leitmotifs for “magic fire,” “magic sleep,” “slumber,” and “Siegfried,” played/sung alone and simultaneously.