

The Ring Cycle: Part 1+2

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Lynn Berg · October 10, 2010

I was lucky enough to snag a ticket to a preview performance of The Ring Cycle. Not the opera at Lincoln Center. The one across the river in Bushwick. Performance Lab 115 and Bushwick Starr are presenting their own unique vision of the Ring Cycle, Parts One and Two. The production unleashes the powerful thrills of the stories in Wagner's opera cycle from the fetters of opera's long arias and elitist conventions and sets them free in the worlds of professional wrestling and 1980s America.

Let's dispense with some comparisons between Wagner's iconic opera and PL115's The Ring Cycle (Part 1 + 2). Unlike the hours-long four-part opera, PL115's production isn't in German. It uses heavy metal and hard rock in-

stead of Wagner's music. And one doesn't need to know the stories or have any familiarity with opera to enjoy it. As in professional wrestling, you get who the bad guys and good guys are in the first moments.

There aren't even any in-jokes skewering opera conventions. PL115's Ring Cycle isn't so much a parody of Wagner's opera but a re-contextualizing of its stories, letting the audience see the myths in a different light. Most importantly this production is all about having fun so it creates a completely different kind of cheering geek-fest than what you'll get at the opera.

The first act takes the story of The Rhine Gold and tosses it into the "squared circle" of the wrestling ring. The melodrama between the gods and giants plays out as a grudge match. The king of the gods, Wotan, is, of course, the coolest wrestler around with the most awesome hair and clothes and the hottest wife, Fricka. Unfortunately, he made a deal with the greasy villain wrestlers, the giants, that if they build him Valhalla they can have his equally smoking-hot sister-in-law, Freia. Even heroes make mistakes but the mischievous god Loge has a solution involving a troll, a treasure, and a ring which sets off the curse that reverberates through the four parts of the Ring Cycle and spells the gods' doom. Not before the big bout, though, which ingeniously uses pro wrestling moves to bring Part 1 to a rousing climax.

The second act sets The Valkyries' sordid human love story of Siegmund and Sieglinde in a white trash American home in the 1980s. That beautifully awful time of redefinition and dreams-deferred is a surprisingly appropriate setting for this mythic and messy tale of forbidden love and betrayal. Like a direct-to-VHS from that decade, it's a dirty bag of big bad emotions, music, and hair. And by bad I mean good fun. Part 2 is when this Ring Cycle achieves an engrossing combination of the comic and dramatic, the goofy and grand. It takes what Part 1 establishes and transforms it from what could be a gimmick into a wholly satisfying re-imagining of the myths.

This Ring Cycle is fused with tag-team delight deserving rowdy cheers. Dave Dalton's direction never over-thinks the show's conceit and takes delight in staging the epic sagas with many ingeniously simple visual tricks. Fight choreographer Casey Robinson shapes some of the most amusingly cathartic fights this side of the WWF. And the lighting, set, and costumes forge low budget underdog thrills that rival the Met's millions of dollars.

The entire cast is game for these tales but I did have some favorite performances. Jeremy Beck turns a funny and mournful close to Part 1 as a wrestling super fan and then in Part 2 gives a Marty McFly twist to Siegmund's doomed heroism. Marty Keiser's Alberich has much more pathos than a typical troll might normally show. And Sara Burramanti, Rachel Jablin, and Rebecca Lingafelter play all their roles with relish but I particularly enjoyed their complicity as the Rhine Maidens.

Part 2 ends the evening on a dramatic high note that makes me hope Performance Lab 115 has more of The Ring Cycle planned. Parts 1 and 2 are so brilliantly conceived I'm anxious to see what they'll do with Siegfried and Twilight of the Gods. If you're like me and prefer your Norse mythology to be a cheaper and more low-brow affair than the Metropolitan Opera offers, make the journey to the Bushwick Starr for PL115's less refined and more raucous version of the stage classic.

Opened: October 14, 2010

Closed: October 31, 2010



Pictured: Rebecca Lingafelter and Jeremy Beck in a scene from The Ring Cycle: Part 1+2 (photo © Sue Kessler)