
Götterdämmerung

Seen opening night: August 1, 2026



Strength upon strength from the singers and orchestra. Our first chance to hear the chorus, who sounded amazing, although kept invisible. The familiar names (Nyland, Vogt, Mayer) were all fabulous, but it was a name entirely new to me who took cycle honors: Mika Kares brought a sonorous, beautiful instrument to Hagen. A lively group of Rhine daughters sang beautifully and managed to add a spark of energy

to their characterizations, despite the static nature of the staging.

The curtain call for the production team was more civil than I expected, but I have never heard such unanimity from a Bayreuth audience. Usually there is a minority claque (pro or con) to be heard from at every production I have attended. But here the standing and cheering ovation for the artists went immediately to an unalloyed chorus of boos when the production team appeared, and back to cheers when the artists returned. There was no audible or apparent dissenting opinion.

“Artificial Intelligence Didn’t Fail Bayreuth: Natural Intelligence Did”

An interesting post popped up in my feed while here, that made a lot of sense to me. It argued that it wasn’t AI that failed; its human creators misunderstood how to use the technology. Rather than using AI as an analytical and creative collaborator, they reduced it to “a visual gimmick” and “a decorative image factory,” while direction of the singers, staging, costumes, movement, and dramatic choices remained human responsibilities (and were sorely lacking, if not totally absent from the production). The author criticizes the decision to elevate familiar technical flaws of generative AI (“extra fingers, strangely distorted anatomy, hyperrealistic lilies, impossible rings, surreal textures”) as though these were a legitimate artistic language. “They are not. Those are [AI] errors.” Ultimately, “It [AI] should be asked to think before it is asked to draw,” because the central issue is not whether AI can make art, but whether humans understand how to collaborate with it creatively.

It's a long post, which can be read in full here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/41094986782/permalink/10162340564426783/>

If you were to see only still images captured from this production, you would probably be struck by how visually striking it must have been. This only goes to highlight the missed opportunity here. It is clear from this production what AI can do to create an environment within which the human artists can perform. But it was all wasted on a presentation in which the artists were left without direction and within mindless and only intermittently powerful visual effects.

Given the current state of economics in Bayreuth (and the opera world writ large), one wonders if this sesquicentennial Ring was driven more by budgetary limitations than creative considerations. (I think this production must have cost a fraction of the amount of your typical Ring.) I am sure we will see increasing use of AI technology in creating scenic spaces and stage effects in opera. But hopefully future experiments will be approached as an actual collaboration of humans applying technology to realize an artistic vision, not just an unguided release of technology.

It turns out, algorithms, left to their own devices, are as stunningly uncreative as one might have expected they would be.

But then, a bad night in Bayreuth is still better than a good night anywhere else.