



OPERA THEATER OREGON

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For more information, contact:

Katie Taylor, artistic director

503-234-4515

kt@operatheateroregon.com

Spray tan, swimwear and horns: big opera gets Baywatched

Brass blazing, electric guitars wailing, here comes OTO's 'Das Rheingold,' Feb 17-28 at the Portland home of Rocky Horror, Clinton Street Theater, where the beer flows and the pizza is cheap and tasty.

PORTLAND – Is pop culture ready for Wagner? Opera Theater Oregon thinks so. The daring young company's newest production, a Baywatchified version of Richard Wagner's 'Das Rheingold,' takes the biggest of big operas out of the misty wilds of German myth and lands it smack on Malibu Beach, circa 1994. Think 'Lord of the Rings' with David Hasselhoff as Frodo.

The company's quirky 16-piece orchestra features special guests **Electric Opera Company**, who make up the entire string section with electric guitars, and **Festival Brass**, who will deliver Wagner's trademark big, rich brass sound.

"Like most of my ideas, this one started out as a joke," says **OTO Artistic Director, Katie Taylor**. "Then I got all excited and tracked down ["Baywatch" series creator] Greg Bonnan's email. I never expected him to write back."

But Bonnan did write back, with the surprising news that he loves opera and would be happy to grant OTO permission to use an episode he and Deborah Bonnan wrote in 1994 as the basis for the opera's new story. Taylor would spend the next two years painstakingly editing down the monster 3-hour score to its tastiest 80 minutes and changing the story from dark, tortured Bavarian treachery to the sun-kissed, wave-washed California variety.

OTO Music Director Erica Melton reduced and arranged the score, originally orchestrated for 100+ instruments (including seven harps, 18 tuned anvils and a thunder machine) to fit the company's 16-piece chamber orchestra (six electric guitars, electric bass, drum kit, brass quartet, two clarinets, harp and piano). She was assisted in this mammoth task by **Bobby Ray** (*guitar arrangements, Electric Opera Company*), **Ben Landsverk** (*score preparation, Holcombe Waller, Fourscore, Rachel Taylor Brown*), and **Brad Bleything** (*Festival Brass*).

"The prospect of using electric guitars is thrilling," Melton says. "In the right hands, the sound can be

agile, powerful, even sweet, and when I saw Electric Opera Company perform, I knew that they had the skill and creativity to pull it off."

Taylor has written, edited and directed six other shows for OTO since she started with the company in late 2006, three of them conducted and arranged by Melton, who has worked with the company since its founding in 2005 and officially came on board as music director in 2008.

THE PLOT: The story follows the mad career of deejay Larry Loomin' Large (Alberich, the dwarf, in the original), whose lifelong Napoleon complex has driven him to a dark obsession with obtaining the Perfect Tan and, with it, ultimate control over everyone and everything. Can Mitch (Wotan, king of the gods) stop him in time, or will he too succumb to the unholy allure of the magical Tanhelm? CJ, Matt, Hobie, Stephanie and Caroline join in a race against time to stop the Perfect Tan, once enjoyed in innocence, from becoming the destroyer of all.

LEITMOTIF BINGO: One of Wagner's most groundbreaking inventions was the theme song (leitmotif), which most people today take for granted. Listen to almost any movie soundtrack and you'll catch a recurring love theme, villain's theme, fight theme, etc. etc. "Most people don't realize that Wagner was the first one to do that in the way we think of it now - - making the orchestra remind the audience who a character is, and what feelings are driving that person along," says Taylor.

The audience is invited to come a half hour before every show for a rousing round of Leitmotif Bingo, designed to give everyone a fighting chance to catch all the theme songs in the opera and learn what they stand for. Tasty German prizes will reward the winners. "Obviously, this is a little different from the original," says Taylor. "Instead of Loge's Theme, we have Knuckle Sandwich, but a lot of the leitmotifs make the jump as-is."

THE CREATIVE TEAM: OTO's 'Das Rheingold' stars baritones Michael Miersma (Larry "Loomin'" Large/Alberich) and Benjamin Bell (Mitch Buchannon/Wotan), soprano Emily Kinkley (CJ Parker/Freia), tenor David Simmons (Matt Brody/Loge), mezzo soprano May Winner (Kay Morgan/Fricka), mezzo soprano Claire Craig Sheets (Hobie Buchannon/Flosshilde/Erda), tenor Ian Timmons (Basil Frankenkos/Mime), soprano Helen Funston (Stephanie Holden/Woglinde) and mezzo soprano Eva Wolff (Caroline Holden/Wellgunde)...and features the glamorous girls and boys of the Opera Theater Oregon Chorus and Orchestra, with special guests Electric Opera Company and Festival Brass.

Loosely adapted from the "Baywatch" Season 5 ep "KGAS The Groove Yard of Solid Gold" by Gregory J. Bonnan and Deborah Bonnan. Written, edited and directed by OTO Artistic Director Katie Taylor, with musical direction by OTO Music Director Erica Melton and arranged by Melton with Ben Landsverk (*Holcombe Waller, Fourscore, Rachel Taylor Brown*), Bobby Ray (*Electric Opera Company*) and Brad Bleything (*Festival Brass*). Technical direction by Robin Greenwood.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS: Tickets, \$15 (general admission), are available by calling PDXTix at 503-205-0715, or online at www.operatheateroregon.com. All shows are all ages (not appropriate for kids under age 10, including babies, who are usually terrified by the noise). Beer, pizza and snacks are allowed in the auditorium and available throughout the evening. Group rates are available. Call

503-234-4515 for details. This world premiere production of OTO's "Das Rheingold" is generously supported by a grant from THE AUTZEN FOUNDATION and the support of individual donors.

ABOUT Opera Theater Oregon

Opera Theater Oregon's mission is to bring opera back into pop culture through creative editing and adaptation. Affordable, entertaining, and commonly available (bars, movie theaters, online), OTO helps more people connect with classical music in a way that feels relevant to their lives.

OTO is a 501c(3) tax exempt organization, IRS Section 170b(2)iii for both federal and state tax purposes.

Calendar Listing

WHAT: Opera Theater Oregon's "Das Rheingold," the first opera in Richard Wagner's epic Ring Cycle rescripted as a 'Baywatch' episode. Think 'Lord of the Rings' with David Hasselhoff as Frodo.

WHEN/WHERE:

February 17, 19, 20, 24, 26 and 28, 2010, 7:30 pm (run time 90 minutes w/intermission). Leitmotif Bingo before the show every night at 7:00! Clinton Street Theater, 2522 SE Clinton Street, Portland, OR. All shows are ALL AGES (not appropriate for kids under age 10, including babies, who are usually terrified by the noise).

WHO: Produced by Opera Theater Oregon, written, edited and directed by Artistic Director Katie Taylor. Music arranged by Music Director Erica Melton, with Ben Landsverk, Bobby Ray and Brad Bleything. With a cast of rising operatic talent, including baritones Michael Miersma (Larry/Alberich) and Benjamin Bell (Mitch/Wotan), soprano Emily Kinkley (CJ/Freia), tenor David Simmons (Matt Brody/Loge) and mezzo soprano May Winner (Kay Morgan/Fricka). With special guest stars Electric Opera Company and Festival Brass. Made possible through the generous support of The Autzen Foundation and by kind permission of "Baywatch" series creator Gregory J. Bonnan.

TICKETS: \$15 (general admission). Call PDXtix at 503-205-0715, or go online to operatheateroregon.com. Group rates available. Contact Katie at Opera Theater Oregon for details: 503-234-4515, kt@operatheateroregon.com.

WHY: We thought it would be funny. Also, loud and glorious! And we got permission, which still flabbergasts me.

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