



[Lohengrin](#) by [WNO](#)

Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) June 2013

**Antony McDonald** updates the action to Bismarck's Germany. I don't think I have ever heard the prelude to Act 1 played so beautifully. Lothar Koenings took command of the orchestra from the start, making this as triumphant as last year's [Tristan and Isolde](#) .

**King Henry** (*Matthew Best*, said to be suffering a sore throat which wasn't noticeable) has arrived in Brabant where he has assembled the German tribes in order to expel the Hungarians from his kingdom. He also needs to settle a dispute involving the disappearance of the child-Duke Gottfried of Brabant.

The Duke's guardian, **Count Friedrich von Telramund** (*John Lundgren*), has accused the Duke's sister, **Elsa** (*Emma Bell*)

(*Dank, König, dir, daß du zu richten kamst!/Die Wahrheit künd ich, Untreu ist mir fremd*). He calls upon the King to punish Elsa and to make him, Telramund, the new Duke of Brabant, since he is the next of kin to the late Duke, after having renounced to his right to Elsa's hand in matrimony, having taken

**Ortrud**

(*Susan Bickley*)

instead. The King calls for Elsa to answer Telramund's accusation. She enters, surrounded by her attendants. She does not answer to the King's inquiries only lamenting her brother's fate (*Einsam in trüben Tagen/hab ich zu Gott gefleht*)

). The King declares that he cannot resolve the matter and defers it to God's judgment through ordeal by combat. Telramund, a strong and seasoned warrior, agrees enthusiastically.



When the King asks Elsa who shall be her champion, Elsa describes a knight she has beheld in her dreams (*In lichter Waffen Scheine/ein Ritter nahte da*), **The Herald** sounds the horn twice in summons, without response. A boat drawn by a swan appears on the river and in it stands

**Lohengrin**

. He disembarks and greets the king, and asks Elsa if she will have him as her champion (*So sprich denn, Elsa von Brabant: /Wenn ich zum Streiter dir ernannt,*), Elsa kneels in front of him and places her honour in his keeping. He asks one thing in return for his service: she is never to ask him his name or where he has come from. Elsa agrees to this.

Telramund's people advise him to withdraw because he cannot prevail against the Knight's powers, but he refuses and the combat area is prepared. Each contender prays to God for victory for the one whose cause is just. Ortrud privately expresses confidence that Telramund will win, and the combat commences. The unknown knight defeats Telramund but spares his life. Taking Elsa by the hand, he declares her innocent and asks for her hand in marriage. The crowd exits, cheering and celebrating whilst Telramund and his pagan wife, Ortrud, sadly walk away in defeat.

**Act 2** opens with a short orchestral introduction. Dejected, Ortrud and Telramund hear the celebration music in the distance and begin crafting a plan to gain control of the kingdom. Knowing that the mysterious knight asked Elsa to never ask of his name or where he came from, they decide that it would be best for Elsa to break her promise ( *So gält' es Elsa zu verleiten,/daß sie die Frag ihm nicht erließ?*

). They approach the castle and Ortrud spies Elsa in a window. Hoping to spike Elsa's curiosity to find out about the knight's name, Ortrud begins speaking underneath the window about the knight. Instead of curiosity, Elsa offers Ortrud friendship (

*Euch Lüften, die mein Klagen/so traurig oft erfüllt*

). Angrily, she walks away. Meanwhile, the King has enlisted the knight as the Guardian of Brabant. Telramund convinces four of his friends to join him in taking control of the kingdom, and they meet outside of the wedding hall along with Ortrud. In an effort to stop the wedding, Ortrud declares that the knight is an imposter and Telramund states that the knight practices sorcery. The King and the knight banish Ortrud and Telramund, and Elsa proceeds with the ceremony. The Prelude to act 3 is one of those fantastically energetic pieces and include one of the most famous tunes in Western music:

*Treulich geführt ziehet dahin*

, better known as

*Here Comes the Bride.*

