

# A New *Ring* at Bayreuth

BY GLENN LONEY

The *Ring* cycle directed by Harry Kupfer at the Bayreuth Festival 1988 depicts a world after global catastrophe (1. *Das Rheingold*). The road makes up the Bayreuth stage, hiding an underground world and other scenic surprises.

Le cycle du *Ring* mis en scène par Harry Kupfer au Festival de Bayreuth en 1988, dépeint le monde après une catastrophe planétaire (1. L'Or du Rhin). L'image principale de la scène de Bayreuth est une grande route qui cache un monde souterrain et d'autres surprises scéniques.

Der *Ring* auf den Bayreuther Festspielen 1988 unter der Regie von Harry Kupfer beschreibt eine Welt nach der globalen Katastrophe (1. *Das Rheingold*). Die Straße bildet die Bayreuther Bühne; sie verbirgt eine unterirdische Welt und andere bühnentechnische Überraschungen.

Instead of the immense concrete Rhine River Dam which set the tone for Patrice Chereau's 1976 Bayreuth *Ring*, or the spectacle of Rhinemaidens swimming nude in a shallow pool of real water in the subsequent Peter Hall staging, a scarred gray road is the dominant image in director Harry Kupfer's contemporary vision of Wagner's mythic masterpiece which premiered at the Bayreuth Festival 1988.

This is the first new Bayreuth *Ring* in five years and is destined to remain in their repertory through 1992. Kupfer's staging is highly theatrical and daringly high-tech. His version of the *Ring* finds support in news stories of the poisoning of the Rhine River by a flood of toxic chemicals and the extermination of German forests by acid rain. With sets designed by Hans Schavernoch and costumes by Reinhard Heinrich, this production is an environmentalist's worst nightmare-come-true.

"We begin the cycle with the catastrophe that has already overcome mankind," explains Kupfer, also director of the East Berlin's Komische Oper. "The few who have survived are on their historic road. The 'Road of History' stands on our stage. The entire stage picture is basically a very deep, endlessly long road. On it develops the whole story of the *Ring*. A new catastrophe unfolds." In Kupfer's vision, the old world crumbled, and now the survivors live among the ruins, starting over.

At the July 1988 premiere—which won mixed reviews—some critics decided this *Ring*'s milieu is post-Chernobyl. Others suggested it was a vision of the world after a bigger nuclear holocaust. Actually, the cycle begins in the past and ends, as Kupfer says, "a little bit in the future, but not too far. We're not presenting science fiction." The so-called Romantic Realism of the Peter Hall-William Dudley Bayreuth *Ring* was not for him. "We

KUPFER, SCHAVERNOCH, AND HEINRICH DESIGN  
A HIGH-TECH VERSION OF WAGNER'S MASTERPIECE