

## LOHENGRIN

## ACT I

King Heinrich, in Brabant to raise an army, calls on Friedrich von Telramund to explain why the country is wracked by strife. Telramund claims that Elsa, daughter of the late Brabantian ruler, has murdered her younger brother Gottfried, the heir of Brabant. Convinced of Elsa's guilt, Telramund has married Ortrud and staked his claim to the kingdom. Elsa is summoned to defend herself and tells of a vision she has had of a knight who will be her champion and whom she will marry. Twice the Herald calls on the knight to appear, but only after Elsa has added her prayer does he arrive. The stranger, led by a swan, announces that he has come to vindicate Elsa and to be her husband—but only if Elsa never asks him his name or place of origin. Elsa readily agrees. To establish her innocence, the stranger defeats Telramund in single combat, but spares his life.

## ACT II

Cast out and banished, Telramund broods on his defeat and blames Ortrud for ensnaring him in her plot for the throne. Ortrud defends herself and convinces Telramund that the stranger won the battle through sorcery. When Elsa appears, Ortrud laments her miserable lot and throws herself on Elsa's mercy. Offering forgiveness and friendship, Elsa invites Ortrud into her chambers.

The Herald tells the Brabantian men of Telramund's banishment, stirs up patriotic fervor, and persuades them to join King Heinrich's army. Joyful preparations are made for the wedding. As Elsa prepares to enter with her bridal procession, Ortrud halts the festivities, claiming that the "nameless knight" is an imposter. The fight between the two women is broken up by the arrival of the King and Elsa's bridegroom. Then Telramund bursts into the crowd, accusing the stranger of sorcery. Put under enormous pressure, Elsa remains strong and assures her champion of her faith in him. The King leads the couple to the altar.

## ACT III

In their bridal chamber, as the married couple express their love for each other, Elsa's anxiety slowly grows. Seized by the need to know his identity, she begs him to reveal his name and origin. Suddenly Telramund invades the bedroom and attacks the stranger, but is himself slain. Elsa's distraught husband says that he will meet her with the King, to answer her questions.

As King Heinrich gathers the armies for the coming battle, the body of Telramund is carried in, followed by Elsa, pale and silent. Her husband arrives, revealing Telramund's treachery and the news that Elsa has asked the "forbidden question." He declares that he is one of the knights who guard the Holy Grail, and that it is his duty to defend those, like Elsa, who are beset by evil. He is the son of Parsifal, and his name is Lohengrin. Elsa's promise having been broken, he must now return to the Grail. Perceiving on the horizon the swan that led him to Brabant, Lohengrin bids Elsa a painful farewell. Ortrud rushes in declaring that her magic had turned Elsa's brother, Gottfried, into a swan. She rejoices over Elsa's betrayal of Lohengrin, the one man who could reverse the spell. Lohengrin transforms the swan back into the boy and proposes that Gottfried be the new leader of Brabant. He unwillingly sets off on his long journey back to the Grail, leaving behind a despairing Elsa.

**First performance:** Weimar, August 28, 1850

**First San Francisco Opera performance:** September 14, 1931

*Lohengrin* has been performed in 11 previous San Francisco Opera seasons. For complete casting and other information, visit [archive.sfopera.com](http://archive.sfopera.com).

**Personnel:** 10 principals, 80 choristers, 11 supernumeraries; 101 total

**Orchestra:** 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, 2 timpani, 2 percussion, 1 harp; Expanded (43) strings

**Onstage:** 4 herald trumpets

**Backstage:** 10 trumpets, 1 horn, timpani, snare drum, organ