

The Wagner Society



IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Newsletter No. 117, February - March 2010

President's Report

Dear Members

Happy New Year, and welcome to our first Newsletter for 2010.

Congratulations to Miriam Gordon-Stewart

Our warmest congratulations go to Miriam Gordon-Stewart, who has been cast in the role of Helmwig in Bayreuth this year. We last saw Miriam in August 2006, when she arranged a discussion with Deborah Polaski as a special member function. I'm not sure when the last Australian soprano sang in Bayreuth, and I'd appreciate hearing from anyone who knows. For details of her recent European performances and repertoire, check her website <http://www.gordon-stewart.de/>

2009 Functions

On **Sunday 20 September 2009**, a number of members who had attended the 2009 Bayreuth Festival gave a fascinating presentation covering more than just the performances. Because there were no new productions in Bayreuth in 2009, the group decided not to cover the same ground as speakers from the 2008 festival, but to talk about events and interests around the Festival itself.

For example, Maree Leech began by discussing what someone might read before attending his or her first Bayreuth visit, recommending for "Bayreuth Virgins" works as diverse as Robin Holloway's article entitled "The Bayreuth Experience" in the Spectator of 27 August 2008 (still available online), Ernest Newman's Wagner Nights and Bryan Magee's Aspects of Wagner; Loraine Longfoot spoke about concerts she had attended at other Bayreuth venues, including a piano recital by Stefan Mickisch; Michael Chesterman talked about touring the countryside around Bayreuth; Jim Leigh covered material which has been expanded into an article on Stefan Herwegh's production of

Parsifal published elsewhere in this Newsletter; and others discussed the performances and their likes and dislikes.

Our thanks to all who participated in the meeting, and gave such an informative and in many cases personal account of their Bayreuth experiences.

On **Sunday 18 October**, members of the Sydney University Opera Company gave a singularly outstanding concert.

- ♪ Louis Garrick and Jack Symonds played an arrangement of the "Pilgrim's Chorus" from Tannhäuser for piano duet;
- ♪ Emma Moore (soprano) accompanied by Louis Garrick (piano) sang Berg's Seven Early Songs; and
- ♪ Jack Symonds and Chad Vindin played seven scenes from Parsifal arranged by Humperdinck for piano duet.

I only knew the Berg songs from a CD with Jane Eaglan, and hearing them fresh and live was a revelation, with Louis Garrick's lucid and supporting accompaniment. Emma has recently won the 2009 2MBS-FM Young Performers Award, and sings her first opera role in March as Miss Jessel in the Sydney University Opera Company's production of Britten's The Turn of the Screw at the Cleveland Street Theatre,

PRESIDENT'S REPORT continued p.3 ▶

NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

Part 1 - Herheims's Bayreuth Parsifal - Jim Leigh	P5
Wagnerian Influences In La Fanciulla Del West - Peter Bassett	P11
Katherina's Die Meistersinger - the final wrap! - Robert Lloyd/Terence Watson	P11
Hans von Bülow by Allan Walker - Colin Baskerville	P16
Holländer - Adelaide 2009 - Terence Watson	P17
The Raven's Reporting - Camron Dyer	P19
Mark Twain's Travel Letters From 1891-92	P22

PATRON:	Sir Charles Mackerras
HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS:	Prof Michael Ewans
	Mr Richard King
	Mr Horst Hoffman
	Mr Joseph Ferfoglia
	Mrs Barbara McNulty OBE

For Your **Diary**

	2010	
	see below for a number of performances in other states.	
March, 17, 18, 19	Wagner: The Ring of the Nibelung: An orchestral suite – selected by conductor Alexander Briger	SSO - Sydney Opera House
August 5, 6, 7	Lohengrin: Prelude to Act III – conducted by Simone Young (followed by Bruckner's 7th Symphony)	SSO - Sydney Opera House
October 25	Isolde's Liebestod from Tristan und Isolde, arranged for piano by Franz Liszt – played by Joyce Yang	City Recital Hall – Angel Place

Meetings **Dates** & Coming **Events**

DATE	EVENTS - 2010	TIME & LOCATION
21 February	Peter Bassett: The operas Wagner almost wrote. See more below. Preceded at 12.45 by a DVD of Act 2 of Parsifal.	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
28 March	Professor Heath Lees will be "Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano" Preceded at 12.30 by a DVD of Act 3 of Parsifal	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
18 April	Dr Terence Watson will talk about "Wagner and the Politics of Friendship" Preceded at 12.15 by a DVD of Act 1 of Tristan und Isolde	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
23 May	Annual General Meeting: a recital by Emma Moore and Simone Easthope (sopranos), and Morgan Pearse (baritone) with Sharolyn Kimmorley (piano) and a celebration of the 197th anniversary of Richard Wagner's birth (on 22 May 1813) Preceded at 12.30 by a DVD of Act 2 of Tristan und Isolde	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
June	No Meeting	
18 July	TBA	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
August	No Meeting	
19 September	TBA	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
17 October	TBA	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
21 November	Christmas Party – please bring a plate 2.00PM TBA Festivities start at 3:00PM	Goethe-Institut - 2pm

Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)
Paddington Unit Church address 395 Oxford Street, Paddington (parking behind in Gordon Street)

The Goethe Institut has advised the Society that their building will close for major reconstruction later this year or next year, and that they will let us know as soon as they have concrete dates. The Society will advise Members as soon as possible of any changes to the location for our 2009 events.



President's Report continued

199 Cleveland Street, Strawberry Hills on March 2, 4, 5 and 6. Tickets are \$30, and you can find details on the Company's website, <http://www.suopera.org.au/>, including how to book. These are extraordinarily talented young people in search of an audience, and I'd urge you to make the effort to see this performance.

The Parsifal transcriptions were a brilliant tour-de-force by Jack Symonds and Chad Vindin (who have been playing piano duets together since they were 6 years old.). The full work, with narration by Elke Neidhardt, had been part of the 2008 Utzon Concert Series at the Opera House, with two of the four hands belonging to Simone Young. Dr John Casey was not alone in his view that the Symonds/Vindin performance was the better of the two, perhaps because their playing was more immediate, youthful and vigorous, and less musicological. It wasn't an attempt to make the piano sound like an orchestra, or to copy the tempi of a live performance, but a piano performance in its own right with its own tempi and dynamics.

Later in 2010, the Sydney University Opera Company will present the world premiere of a new opera Notes from Underground, written by Jack Symonds and based on the Dostoyevsky novel. We'll let you know when more details are available.

On **Sunday 8 November**, Antony Ernst spoke about curses in Wagner, in a talk entitled 'From Malediction to Valediction - curses and dramatic resolution in Wagner.' Antony began by describing the kinds of curses Wagner uses, and then catalogued the litany of curses throughout Wagner's work. Antony's attention to detail and his intimate knowledge of these works was breathtakingly displayed.

Antony leaves the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra in early March to return to Sydney and take up the position of CEO of the Sydney Youth Orchestras. It's always a pleasure to welcome a prodigal son home, and we hope to see and hear more of him.

2010 Functions

Our first function for 2010 is on **Sunday 21 February** when Peter Bassett (who provided the following information) will give a richly illustrated talk on '**The Operas Wagner Almost Wrote**', about the great composer as he is rarely seen: the creator of such non-Wagnerian characters as the theatre prompter who can't stop sneezing, the young man who makes his living dressed as a bear, and the poet who addresses his audience from a hot air balloon. Peter will also discuss the visionary composer who planned dramas dealing with the lives of Jesus and the Buddha, and relations between the west and Islam. This talk will explore Wagner's many unfinished works and show how these anticipate dramatically and textually the great music dramas of his maturity. Peter's preparations for this talk have formed part of his research for a forthcoming book on Wagner and Verdi, whose bicentenaries will be celebrated in 2013.

Our next function is on **Sunday, 28 March** when Professor Heath Lees (who provided the following information) will be our guest speaker. Heath's presentation "Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano," covers two main aspects of the subject. The first, which might be sub-titled simply "Wagner and the Piano" shows how the young Wagner was frequently rude about the piano. Sometimes he called it more of a musical laboratory than a musical instrument, and claimed that the expressive difference between the orchestra and the piano was so great that no real comparison could be made. And yet, Wagner wrote a number of pieces for the piano, and as Heath will show, much of the music for his operas was clearly written in 'sketch' form at the piano – it seems obvious in many places that the way the notes lay under his fingers helped him to find the music that he was after. He travelled everywhere with a sturdy Erard grand piano that he had almost tricked Erard's widow into donating, and in later life, he was often pictured seated at the piano. Thanks to the equal-tempered tuning of the piano, he was able to write his most chromatic music easily by hearing it first on the piano.

In sum, it seems clear that in his youth and early manhood, Wagner had a kind of love-hate relationship with the piano, but that he came to terms with it as life went on, and by the end, came to accept it as an important musical resource for composition, and expressive in its own right, for performance.

The second aspect of the talk might be sub-titled "Wagnerism and the Piano." In other words, it explores how Wagner's music was introduced to others and spread widely through the piano, which was used to teach, to demonstrate, and to win 'converts' in private gatherings and in amateur circles. Heath will offer a brief survey of the kinds of transcriptions that people have produced, from Wagner's day (Liszt, for example) to our own day (for example Stefan Mickisch in Bayreuth). He will also relate how the wagneriste "showman-pianist" arose in many countries of Europe, where amateur pianists made a name for themselves by offering Wagner 'performances' at the piano, singing, describing, playing, and re-composing large passages of Wagner to increasingly devoted audiences.

Some hilarious send-ups of Wagner by pianists young and old will be included as well, and there will be a few examples of the way composers/performers found ways of using the piano to help them break the stranglehold that Wagner's music exercised on later generations of composers.

As usual, Heath will provide lots of examples and illustrations, with some (sometimes rare) video and audio excerpts. He will also give the impression of some live moments from the past through his frequent, dangerously impromptu piano-playing.

Lisa Gasteen

In an interview with Helen Trinca published in The Weekend Australian of November 21-22 2009, Lisa Gasteen revealed that she may never sing again. The



President's Report continued

article says that Lisa, 52, has "agonizing neck spasms that began after she pinched a nerve while picking cumquats 18 months ago..." While the neuro-muscular spasms may subside, she has cancelled forward bookings to 2012. To her legion of fans, this is awful news. My most vivid recollection is of her Isolde at a concert performance in Brisbane in 2005, with Richard Mills and the Australian Youth orchestra, which remains the most impressive Isolde I have heard live. Not everything Ms Gasteen has sung has pleased everyone, but it will be a tragedy if another great Australian voice is prematurely silenced.

Der fliegende Holländer in Adelaide

Last November, there were 4 performances of *Der fliegende Holländer* (the Wagner opera, not Andre Rieu) in Adelaide. There's a review elsewhere in this Newsletter, so I won't duplicate that material. I attended 3 of the performances, unimpressed by the continuous days of 39 degrees of dry, windy heat which accompanied them.

My first observation came when I sat down again in that Dear Hall, reflecting on the bleeding obvious. Here, in this hall, we have been able to enjoy a feast of Wagner over the past decade. First, in 1998, through the genius of Bill Gillespie, the Pierre Strosser / Jeffrey Tate Ring; in 2001, the Elke Neidhardt / Jeffrey Tate Parsifal; in 2004, the Elke Neidhardt / Asher Fisch Ring; and now in 2009 the Chris Drummond / Nicholas Braithewaite *fliegende Holländer*. (Please don't ask "who?")

What has the rest of Australia done in that period? Opera Australia has yet to stage the Ring, or Parsifal. Lyndon Terracini, who took up his four-year contract as Opera Australia's artistic director in October last year, has promised Sydney a Ring and Maureen Wheeler, co-founder of the "Lonely Planet" publishing phenomenon, is willing to put up a rumoured \$12 million to see one staged in Melbourne. But neither city has an obvious venue to fulfil these promises. While in Adelaide, slightly teary-eyed, I am sitting in the one venue in Australia which has all done this, twice, and more besides, waiting for the curtain to rise.

My second observation is more frivolous. There are those who believe that Wagner was ahead of his time in many fields. For example, his profound understanding of human psychology predates Freud, and his understanding of the space-time continuum shown in the transition music in Parsifal Acts 1 and 3, predates Einstein and relativity. In this production, we are reminded of Wagner's prescient knowledge of the very new crime of "internet grooming". Mary supplies Senta with the picture of the Holländer, and teaches her his Ballad so that, even before she first sees her spectral lover, Senta has been groomed for her role as willing redeemer, even unto death. In this production the giant video picture of John Wegner's Holländer is "alive" as his head turns, eyes following Senta as she walks across the stage singing his Ballad. He is able to inspect Mary's handiwork in grooming another potential saviour before even setting foot on land. Oddly, the Holländer only understands how well Mary has chosen in the last few bars of the opera, while we humble viewers have known since the middle of Act 2.

My final observation follows on from the first. In 2013 we will celebrate the bicentennials of the births of Verdi and Wagner. The world will be awash with Ring cycles, but what will Australia be awash with? I have no doubt that Stephen Phillips and the State Opera of South Australia are already planning a commemorative production, but what will Opera Australia provide? In the absence of a Ring, perhaps it will be world ash trays and rinse cycles?

Membership renewals

The membership renewal form for 2010 is at the back of this Newsletter, and copies are also available on our internet site. Because we no longer send membership cards and receipts for renewals, we'll publish the names of renewing members in the next issue after your renewal, along with the new members and donations.

Some of you may be surprised to find that you've already renewed for 2010, and your name is included with the renewals in this Newsletter. In most cases, it's because you renewed twice in 2009, and so we put your second renewal towards your 2010 membership.

Roger Cruickshank
31 January 2010

Committee 2009 - 2010

President and Membership Secretary	Roger Cruickshank	0414 553 282 or 9357 7631
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Redemption In Ten Dimensions. Stefan Herheims's Bayreuth *Parsifal*

- Dr Jim Leigh

Part I of a three part exposition and introduction for audience members of the current Bayreuth production

The Bayreuth Parsifal performance of 27 August 2009 was the tenth time I had seen a staged performance (not counting the 1982 Syberberg film or the Sydney 1977 concert performance under [Carlo Felice] Cillario). This time I saw the production from the centre of Row 1 in the stalls. These were the best seats I have ever had at Bayreuth. The current Bayreuth production was first seen in 2008 (Director-Stefan Herheim, Conductor-Daniele Gatti, Stage Design- Heike Scheele, Technical Direction-Kark-Heinz Matitschka, plus a very long list of other technical acknowledgements). This was the most complex opera production I have ever seen, even more complex than the Schlingensief production, with which it shares some features.

Indeed, the production is so complex that books have been written about it, to explain and analyse it. One of the best is that of Susanne Vill Professor of Theatre Science at the University of Bayreuth. This was published in the middle of the Festival in 2009 and relies heavily on interviews and correspondence with Herheim and the dramaturg Alexander Meier-Dörzenbach. Much of this review will be based on Vill's detailed analysis, but before going further into this, some background material may be helpful.

Wagner's road to Parsifal

The main message of Parsifal is the rejection, in favour of fellow feeling with man and nature and of our tendency to think in terms of power and self-assertiveness. Wagner saw Parsifal as the cosmic culmination of the Ring, a recycling of nature- death and a better rebirth. He arrived at Parsifal after a long genesis, dating from his earliest familiarity with the Wolfram epic in the early 1840s in Paris, via the unwritten music dramas Jesus of Nazareth (1849) and Die Sieger (1856). The former espoused the concept that Jesus had overturned the law of history that violence could only be defeated by further violence, the latter the Schopenhauerian concept of redemption through denial of the will, specifically the will of sexual love. Schopenhauerian denial of the will for power alone (and its replacement by erotic love) is not enough to redeem the world. Denial of the erotic principle itself is also demanded. Parsifal can thus be seen as the summation of all of Wagner's lifework. This is clear from a reading of the second volume of Cosima Wagner's diaries, which is saturated with discussions on Wagner's creation of Parsifal. The final writing and composition of Parsifal took place in Wahnfried, Wagner's house in Bayreuth where he lived and worked from 1874 until his death in 1883 and which was the first house he had ever owned after years of wandering and renting.

This is not an ordinary opera and not even an ordinary music drama. It was designated a Bühnenweihfestspiel, that is, a stage dedication festival play. It was written precisely with the Bayreuth Festival Theatre in mind, after the first successful performance of the Ring there in 1876. It was a summation of all Wagner's thinking and from 1882 –1914, with one or two exceptions, could only be seen at Bayreuth, in a production barely changed from the original. Until the 1930s and Cosima's death, the production barely changed. Productions elsewhere in the world followed the Bayreuth model. Even the 1971 Parsifal at Covent Garden (the first I saw) was absolutely traditional, with the famous rolling scenery. This was actually a great production, with Jon Vickers, Donald McIntyre, Norman Bailey and Kiri Te Kanawa making her debut as a lead Flowermaiden; conductor Reginald Goodall). Attending Parsifal was more like attending a religious ceremony and even today it is customary not to clap at the end of Act 1.

In his late philosophical work Religion and Art (1880), and subsequent addenda to it, Wagner reveals a lot of his thinking that informed Parsifal. I believe some background knowledge of this work, as well as a familiarity with the Herheim and Schlingensief productions is necessary to interpret this production.

In a famous formulation, Wagner claimed that when religion became artificial it was the role of art to preserve its essence by apprehending its mystical symbols which religion believed literally true and to present their inner meaning in idealised form. When pure Christianity had become the religion of the rich and more used as a tool of political and military power and property, it was the duty of art to redeem it through music, the only art which corresponds to the true Christianity that is concerned with compassion and recognition of the frailty of the world. Wagner saw the need for the removal of racial inequality by partaking of Holy Communion, drinking the blood of Jesus and the need for regeneration following the degeneration of humanity as a result of world historical processes, mainly capitalism. In an addendum to Religion and Art, written two days before his death in 1883, Wagner had written of female emancipation, saying that it would only occur after ecstatic spasms by women in society, predicting the suffragettes.

"Erlösung den Erlöser"

The famous key phrase in Parsifal "Erlösung den Erlöser" ("redemption to the redeemer") has been subject to many interpretations. Taken as being in the present tense (ie someone or something which itself is a redeemer has himself or itself been redeemed), the following have been proposed:

1. The Grail (Christ the Redeemer's blood) redeemed from its weakened power due to its sinful guardian,



Amfortas, weakening it by contamination with Kundry.

2. Parsifal is redeemed from lack of pity, while himself redeeming Amfortas and Kundry for their sin, by denying Kundry's sexual advances). Christianity is itself redeemed from non-Aryan influences (Klingsor-Jews). Although in the text "The Redeemer" is usually to be taken as Christ, there are some points at which Gurnemanz identifies Parsifal with Christ.

Taken in the future tense (ie someone who has redeemed something will be redeemed in future or will do further acts of redemption) the following have also been proposed:

3. Parsifal, (now King of the Grail) must now seek redemption for his fellow knights in a new Grail community which will abandon masculine self-sufficiency
4. Wagner himself will redeem the world and himself with his art.

Herheim takes the concept of redemption even further, moving from redemption of the individual to the redemption of the entire German nation from its past and I think is trying to say that we, the Bayreuth audience, can redeem German history, by coming to terms with it and by so doing are redeemed from having been a party to it. Yet another interpretation will emerge later in this review.

Like Syberberg, Schlingensiefel and Eichinger, Herheim superimposes several different levels of meaning at the individual and social or national level. These concepts are only indirectly related to Wagner's Parsifal. Where Herheim greatly improves on these models is in his logic and consistency, and his much closer adherence to the score and text in his stage "happenings". He even provides linkages to guide the audience between the different levels.

The main features of the production are

1. Wagner's Parsifal told with much more stage concretisation of events past and present. This is normally only narrated or implied in the music.
2. The history of Germany 1870-1951, depicted in stage action and film.
3. The history of Wagner's creative and personal life, the establishment of the Bayreuth Festival and the building of Wahnfried are depicted in stage action and film.
4. The reception history of the opera Parsifal.
5. The unconscious, psychological development of Parsifal and Wagner is depicted on stage by symbolism, both with actors and physical symbols.
6. Direct confrontation with the audience by making them part of the production.
7. Use of parallel actions and multiple characterisations to depict the individual and collective unconscious.
8. Use of dream sequences and magical set transformations.
9. Use of simultaneous hybrid sets and stage symbolism to interrelate the Parsifal, German history, psychological and Wagner history lines.

10. Use of theatre within a theatre.

Herheim, in an analogy to a melody being transferred between different orchestral instruments in a complex score, constantly transfers the emphasis of the production between 10 dimensions. [For ease of reference the list of the Top 10 Grail Symbols has been moved here from the Appendix at the end of Dr Leigh's review.] [The film director Bernd Eichinger ("Downfall", "Elementarleichen", "Fantastic Four" and recently "The Baader Meinhof Complex") directed the 2006 Deutsche Staatsoper Parsifal that Dr Leigh reviewed in September 2006 Newsletter No.106 – or at the website www.wagner-nsw.org.au/reviews/index.html - that "overlaid world history with psychological development".]

10 Dimensions

1. Wagner's Parsifal, both the music drama itself and its reception history
2. Personality development of the human
3. Psychoanalysis, both Freudian and Jungian
4. Male/Female gender relations both individual and societal
5. Religion, in relation to society, war, race.
6. The Grail and Spear as symbols. (There are at least ten different Grail symbols)
7. Contrast between dreams and reality
8. Wahnfried
9. Bayreuth Festival
10. German History

The Top 10 Grail symbols

1. Actual grail vessel in red, rose, and white
2. Bed
3. Wagner's grave
4. Bathtub
5. Fountain
6. Altar
7. Heart of Federal German eagle
8. Speaker's desk in parliament
9. The search for immortality
10. Womanhood

WHAT HAPPENS AND WHAT IT ALL MEANS.

Prelude

The prelude to Parsifal, usually preceding the rising of the curtain, is accompanied in this production by much action on stage. The set is the downstairs main living room of Wahnfried. Today this is the library where concerts and lectures are given: I had heard the Sven Friedrich talk on Parsifal there only four hours before the performance I experienced and seeing this room again represented on the stage created a strange feeling of intimacy for the listener/spectator in the Festspielhaus.

Wagner's grave in the Wahnfried garden is in the centre in front of the Bayreuth stage (it is the prompter's box). I could almost have rested my feet on it, as it came across the orchestra pit cover. This cleverly suggests Wagner himself is running the whole production from the grave. It was also Cosima's grave after she died in 1930. On the wall on the left (from audience perspective),



over a fireplace, is the painting by Kaulbach, Deutschland 1914, depicting Germania the ancient female warrior. On her shield is the German Reich eagle. Under the painting is an elegant mantelpiece clock. The German Reich eagle is also hanging above the stage. A set of winged doors is on the right. The use of Wahnfried itself alludes to the fact the Parsifal was largely created here, and the first rehearsals were held here

The painting of Germania alludes to the warlike atmosphere in Germany in 1914. The contrast between the warlike painting and the elegant clock suggests an attempted sublimation of warlike feelings into a search for artistic beauty. Wagner after his revolutionary violent activities in 1848 sought sublimation in his new music dramatic creations

In the centre of the room is a double bed in which lies Herzeleide, Parsifal's mother, in the form of Germania. This bed is to become a central feature of the whole production. It is in bed that we give birth, make love, sleep, dream, get sick and die. The bed is also here a symbol of embrace, motherhood, womanliness, sacred love, conception and regeneration through sleep and is thus a Grail symbol (one of many as we will see)

Herzeleide is dying. A doctor, a priest and Gurnemanz (in the form of a butler) stand beside the bed. The priest is offering communion. A child, Parsifal, is on the right playing on a rocking horse. This symbolises his childhood fascination with knights. A servant, Kundry, takes Parsifal to Herzeleide who embraces him. She dies. He then runs out the door to Wagner's grave and starts to build a little wall with building blocks on it. This is projected to the back wall of the set. This symbolises Cosima's restriction of Parsifal productions to Bayreuth up to 1914. While Parsifal is building this wall, the whole room expands in size and darkens. This is the first of the many magical scenic transformations (which require massively complex stage machinery.). These scene transformations are used to shift between the conceptual domains of good and evil, dream and reality, life and death and Grail and Klingsor.

A fantasy scene now begins. Herzeleide comes to life again. She is seen dragging the Parsifal child into bed with her and making love to him. She has a red rose in her hand. The red rose is also back- projected. This scene has obvious Freudian significance in relation to Parsifal's later rejection of Kundry, but in addition it implies vampirish allusions to the blood brotherhood of the Grail knights. The red rose represents passion. There are allusions to the Love-Death of Tristan and Isolde and the connection Wagner made in his creative process between the sufferings of Amfortas and Tristan. In an early draft of Tristan, Parsifal was to have met the dying Tristan in act 3.

The building of the wall also alludes to Wagner's own childhood loss of his father and sublimation into the world of theatre and the pseudo-family of theatre folk. It may also be a reference to Ludwig's escape from the real world in castle building. **Whew! That's just the prelude. I had hardly heard it because I had to take in all of the above.**



Act 1

This takes place in the garden of Wahnfried. Five blonde boys in sailor suits are sitting on the ground. They are knights and esquires. This is a picture of happy family life at Wahnfried, firstly with Richard and Cosima and Eva, Isolde and Siegfried plus Daniela and Blandine (Cosima's daughters by von Bülow), then later Winifred and Siegfried's four children, and finally Wolfgang and Wieland's' broods. Gurnemanz comes in through the winged doors. He is wearing big dark wings.

The wings, which other characters will also wear, have many-sided significance. They can be seen as angel's wings: guardian angel, fallen angel or surrounding angel. They represent the fantasy life of humans, as in the dream of being able to fly. The Wright brothers' first attempts to fly occurred at around this time.

Birds in Wagner's Parsifal form a contrasting pair, the eagle and the swan. The eagle symbolizes strength and bravery of both men and gods. It is a Christian symbol for God's concern for Christ, for renewal of youthful power and for spiritual power. For ancient Germany it was Wotan's escort and an oracle. In 800AD, the eagle was adopted as the German emblem, as it was again in 1919 by the Weimar Republic and in 1951 by the German Federal Republic.

In the text of Parsifal, when the swan is shot, Gurnemanz asks Parsifal where he got his bow and Parsifal tells him he made it himself to shoot wild eagles. The swan is a symbol of beauty, peace, purity, true love, and the female side of men (the Jungian anima). As the only bird with a penis it has a special significance in relation to man. In the production, the eagle and swan symbols are often interchanged.

The characters with dark wings are all prepared for death. Kundry, who also wears dark wings and later dark (male) evening dress, is associated with the "Blue Angel" as played by Marlene Dietrich. She was the first German to act in anti-Nazi films in Hollywood and sing for US troops. The contrast between Dietrich in seducing US soldiers for good purposes and Kundry in seducing Grail knights for bad purposes is established.

A further dimension of the angel wings is the idea of "the angel of history". This angel restores the memory of the past to the present. However, the force of progress blasts his wings and forces him into the future, requiring a revision of the past. The wearing of wings by characters signifies that history is not unalterable and that there are ways that Germany can come to terms with its past.

Children with little bows are seen kneeling on the grave and the child Parsifal, in sailor suit, is now seen in the bed. The German eagle above the stage has changed into a swan.

The sailor suits illustrate the dress of the time, but also allude to the sailors on the battleship Potemkin, associated with the outbreak of the Russian revolution in 1917. The appearance of the swan alludes to the change in emphasis in the Grail knights from warlike behaviour to spirituality and also to the future Lohengrin as son of Parsifal.

A doctor and priest, both with dark wings, enter in preparation for the arrival of Amfortas. Gurnemanz bows towards Parsifal. Women enter. Normally no women, apart from Kundry, enter the Grail realm. However, the appearance of women here symbolizes the overtaking of Grail legends by later Celtic rites involving women as mother gods and fertility symbols. It also alludes to Wagner accepting women into his household as intellectual equals at a time when this was not common, illustrating his early support for female emancipation (eg Mathilde Wesendonck, Malwida von Meysenbug, Judith Gautier, and of course Cosima).

Kundry comes in wearing large dark wings and goes to Parsifal, protecting him with her wings. More men and women enter in the costumes of the late 19th century. They also have dark wings. They bring Amfortas, wearing a bloodstained white smock, and cover him with the royal cloak of King Ludwig II of Bavaria. The smock shows Amfortas as a perverted Christ. A connection is made of the suffering, sexually ambiguous Ludwig, with the genitally wounded Amfortas. Ludwig's role as Wagner's patron at the time is emphasized.

A bathtub is bought out of the fireplace on the left. The bathtub, where Amfortas will soothe his wound, is a domestic symbol of a lake of spiritual rebirth, a uterus, or a holy lake. It also alludes to the little lake in the Bayreuth, 1999, Keith Warner Lohengrin production where Gottfried reappears. It relates to Wagner's own predilection for taking the waters at numerous spas. Wagner first read the Wolfram Parsifal legends in depth at the spa in Marienbad. The bathtub is also a Grail symbol.

Amfortas then sits on the wall around the fountain behind the bed. In the centre of the fountain there is an altar, piled with cannon balls. This is a reference to the practice of religious knightly orders (eg Crusaders, Knights Templar) to justify the rightness of their military activities on the basis of their faith. It has modern resonances in "Indiana Jones" and the "Da Vinci Code". Pure fools justify themselves in wars for economic gain or religious conversion.

Amfortas goes to the grave and sings for the first time the words "Durch Mitleid wissend...der reine Tor" ('the pure fool, made wise through pity'). Gurnemanz gives him the balsam. Kundry gets into the bed. As Amfortas sits on the bed, Kundry covers him with her wings. The 1st and 2nd knights, in student fraternity costume, draw their swords against Amfortas. Kundry protects Amfortas by attempting to seduce the knights, lifting her skirt and exposing her breasts. The knights then attack her

This scene is a reminiscence of Kundry's original seduction of Amfortas when she served Klingsor and of her guilt in this. It is also a flash-forward to the cowardly behaviour of Parsifal's companions in the Magic Garden of Act 2. Kundry uses woman's weapons to combat the knights' aggression. Kundry is torn between her two roles although she always has knowledge of them, in spite of the death-like trances she goes into.

The child Parsifal washes himself in the bathtub. Kundry goes to the grave and makes ecstatic, wild hand gestures to the grave. This is a reference to Wagner's late writings on

female emancipation (see above) where ecstatic behavior of woman must precede emancipation.

As Gurnemanz sings of Titurel, the child Parsifal in the bathtub disappears and is suddenly replaced by an old man (Titurel). This symbolizes the life sustaining power of the Grail and has allusions to the ending of Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey where the recycling of life occurs. It also alludes to Kundry's reincarnations.

As Gurnemanz sings of the lost spear, Kundry shrinks from the look of Titurel as she recognizes her duty to him and exits. Titurel points past Gurnemanz to the picture of Germania, alluding to his (Titurel's) magical powers and presaging the imminent magical appearance of his opposite, Klingsor, here in Act 1 (not where he usually appears).

The picture now is reflected in a mirror while a bridge appears on which Klingsor enters as a transvestite wearing male evening coat and shirt, black frilly female undies, fishnet tights and a red cape (think Dr Frank'n'furter, "Rocky Horror Show"). He is carrying a spear, ready to throw. Gurnemanz' narration of Amfortas' original loss of the spear is acted out.

Amfortas enters through the winged doors dressed as Germania, carrying the holy spear and wearing the German Kaiser's crown and Ludwig's cloak. Kundry appears in the bed and drags Amfortas into it and they embrace, sinking down into the bed. Klingsor takes the holy spear and disappears. Gurnemanz takes the Ludwig cloak from the bed.

The men, women and children now gather again around the bed. In the bed is now the child Parsifal. With his words "How is the King going?" Gurnemanz puts the Ludwig cloak around the child. He is to be the future Grail King. The "other" Parsifal steps out of the bathtub and goes to the grave. This sequence reflects both Gottfried in Lohengrin, with Lohengrin as future king of the Brabantians plus the establishment of Parsifal as a uniquely Bayreuth opera and the beginning of the Bayreuth mythos. It also illustrates the first use in this production of multiple depictions of the same character, a device used extensively by Syberberg in his 1982 Parsifal film.

At this point it is worth noting that all these magical transformations were very smooth and silent, even from row 1, and totally convinced the eye.

As Gurnemanz sings of Titurel's creation of a shrine to protect the Grail and Spear in Montsalvat, a Christmas tree appears in the Wahnfried window and snow falls inside Wahnfried. Gurnemanz stands behind the child Parsifal at the grave and a row of women carrying red lights form around them. Light shines on the theatre audience. We are the Bayreuth faithful.

This scene equates the establishment of Montsalvat with the birth of Christ and the birth of the art religion of Parsifal at Bayreuth. The Christmas tree in the room is an allusion the Christmas celebrations at Wahnfried in Wagner's time when the Parsifal prelude was played by Wagner to Cosima. It represents 6 or 7 dimensions of interpretation at once.



As Gurnemanz goes on to tell of Klingsor and his Magic Garden, the fountain starts to throw water and flowers appear in the window of Wahnfried.

When he sings of the spear being now in Klingsor's hands, Gurnemanz pulls the Ludwig cloak from Parsifal, revealing him in a white sailor suit. Amfortas now appears on the fountain and another Parsifal, a youth of nineteen or so, appears on the Wahnfried balcony. The child Parsifal shoots at Amfortas. As the swan falls into the bed Amfortas disappears. The child Parsifal is now in the bed with a mortal wound. The youth Parsifal comes down to collect his booty. The esquires threaten the child Parsifal with their bows, while the youth Parsifal also raises his bow.

This action is a good example of Herheim's vision of all the male characters representing a part of each other, as in Jungian psychology. Parsifal's shot at Amfortas is an attempt to eliminate guilt. The two different Parsifals allude to Parsifal's personality development. The artificial action of the child Parsifal shooting at Amfortas uses two different characters to draw together the guilt of both.

As Gurnemanz sings of the swan, the women around the fountain make flying movements. A doctor brings the now dead child Parsifal to the youth Parsifal. This is interpreted as a reference to Lohengrin's failure to enter the world of men, the end of Romantic opera for Wagner and the beginning of his new music drama, and the end of Parsifal's childhood. The death of the swan in the bed refers to Parsifal's original psychosexual relation to his mother. Ludwig II of Bavaria (the swan king) had great belief in and (? sexual love) for Wagner as a composer but gradually became disillusioned with him when he (Wagner) became progressively involved with Cosima von Bülow while the first prose draft of Parsifal was being written in 1865. The dead swan in the bed symbolises the loss of Ludwig's confidence in Wagner because of Wagner's sexual relation to Cosima. When Gurnemanz asks Parsifal whether he understands the sight of the dead swan, a film projection of a waterfall is seen inside Wahnfried. Water is the source of life and a symbol of the unconscious. It relates here to Parsifal's developing sense of guilt.

The priests come in with Ludwig's cloak. The youth Parsifal goes behind the child Parsifal who is now carried off in procession. The youth Parsifal gets on the bed. As he recalls his mother Herzeleide, Kundry, as a serving girl, brings food and a glass of milk to him, just as she did to the child Parsifal in the prelude. She gets into bed with Parsifal and they fall into a death-like embrace. This provides a link between the mother love of Parsifal in the prelude and the later seduction by Kundry in Act 2. It relates to the social history of the time when upper class young men often got their first sexual experience with servant girls. The death-like embrace relates to Herzeleide's death, the anxiety of love, the love-death of Tristan and la petite mort of orgasm.

When Parsifal sings of his shame he gives Kundry the milk. She drinks, thanks him and sinks back in the bed finding the red rose that Herzeleide had in the prelude. Kundry gets up and exits robot-like through the winged doors with the rose in her hand while Parsifal lies on

the pillow. This symbolizes the automaton-like switch in Kundry's allegiance between the Grail brotherhood and Klingsor.

As Gurnemanz sings of the difficulty in finding the way to Montsalvat he leads the youth Parsifal to the grave. Projections of Gurnemanz and Parsifal at the grave are seen projected in the Wahnfried room. Amfortas leaves the room wearing the Ludwig cloak. The whole set now transforms from the exterior garden to an interior room. In the window is a picture of the child Parsifal, dead. Images of the youth Parsifal playing with the little bricks on the grave are superimposed on it. This action symbolizes Parsifal's turnaround from the past and the necessity of obtaining a new awareness in the future.

As Gurnemanz sings "zum Raum wird hier die Zeit" ("here time and space become one"), the set transforms again and the cupola of the Grail temple, as in the original Bayreuth 1882 production, descends over the room. In the bed, a woman, Herzeleide, is giving birth. All the men and women surround the bed. Kundry is the midwife. This birth scene is projected on the wall and the birth is timed to the transformation music. As Kundry delivers the bloody newborn, Herzeleide reaches her arms out for her baby. However, it is Gurnemanz who takes the baby from Kundry.

This birth scene, with all society looking on, is a reference to the functionalisation of women in a religious society at the time—to produce males as future soldiers for the state and to the later role of women in Nazi society to produce a child for Hitler. This is further explored in Act 2. It is also obviously the beginning of Parsifal's psychic rebirth in becoming wise and, with the descent of the cupola, also represents the birth of Christ. As Gurnemanz sings "you are a pure fool" to Parsifal, Gurnemanz lifts the baby high and takes it to the grave. Amfortas is now in the bed. The doctor and priests lay out white towels on the altar/tabernacle while the Grail community protects the altar with their wings. Gurnemanz raises the baby's arm. This is a reference to Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*, raising his arm after death to show supernatural power.

Amfortas, with his bloody wound visible, cries out. The altar begins to shine. The towels are lifted and three communion vessels are seen. The Grail community is dressed in late 19th Century uniforms, some in tropical wear. This, as in *Schlingensiefel*, is meant to suggest the era of African Colonial expansion and the later use by the Nazis of African specimens as a basis for their Aryan anthropometry policies.

As Titurel sings "my son Amfortas, do your duty," Parsifal, still at the grave, lifts up his head. Amfortas now stands on the ramp leading to the grave and Parsifal goes to the bed and replaces him in the bed. The ambivalence between the grave and bed as Grail symbols alludes to the contrast between sacred love and sexual love, so typical of the period and very dear to Wagner in his early operas.

Amfortas goes to Parsifal, lifts up his gown, and places Parsifal's hand on the wound. He then drags him back to the grave. Amfortas' great cries of "Erbarmen" are uttered with Amfortas directly superimposed on Parsifal.



This whole sequence of direct physical juxtaposition of characters, to show the acquisition of feelings of pity and sympathy for one another, is in direct contrast to Wagner's Parsifal where Parsifal just sits on the side and watches the Grail ceremony and in contrast also to Wolfram's original Fisher King who just quietly waits for events to happen. It is a confrontational technique of Herheim that is seen again in Act 2 when Parsifal himself is seen to have a wound as he recalls Amfortas during Kundry's seduction.

Parsifal goes back and stands behind the bed. The Grail community disappears and only Parsifal is left. Amfortas uncovers the Grail (which he takes from the grave). It emits a rose light. He goes to the bed, which now contains Herzeleide. She drinks from the Grail. Parsifal goes to the bed and embraces Herzeleide passionately. They have the red rose. A red light shines on the lovers, but the Grail shines white. As the pair in bed disappears, Amfortas places the now rose-coloured Grail on the altar and staggers toward the bed. His wound bleeds.

The actual Grail in this production emits three colours, red for passionate love, royalty, fire, war, danger and power; rose for tender, brotherly love and white for purity, peace, innocence and goodness. This is a further development on Wolfgang Wagner's two-coloured Grail in his last Bayreuth traditional production, which I saw in 1998 (twice) and in 2000. The changing colours of the Grail mirror Wagner's leitmotif technique in the music, acting as visual leitmotifs.

We now see film of World War 1 projected on the window. There are marching soldiers, soldiers in trenches, Big Bertha cannons, Zeppelins, a Fokker triplane and extracts from Eisenstein's 1925 film "Battleship Potemkin". Troops also enter on the stage, in naval uniforms. The intertext here is the anxiety of the Grail knights for their renewal through the food of the Grail compared with that of the Russian sailors on the Potemkin starting the revolution through their strike over their mouldy meat rations. Amfortas kneels at the altar. The Grail glows rose. Further images of World War 1 are projected and the troops on stage take their "bread" from the altar and embrace each other. They then file out. This is an allusion to the idea of the "goodness" of war. Tolkien used it in his "Lord of the Rings". War can create brotherly love and friendship between men.

The Grail temple cupola vanishes and the room is transformed back to the Wahnfried living room. Amfortas puts the Grail back in the grave. He disappears into the bed. The Reich eagle emblem descends. In the bed now lies the child Parsifal with the Ludwig cloak. Gurnemanz has lost his wings. The child Parsifal gets out of bed and taking his bow and arrows, exits through the winged doors. As the pure fool motif sounds in the orchestra, Gurnemanz gets into the bed and covers himself with the cloak.

This whole Grail scene has all been a dream of Gurnemanz. The audience was stunned and did not know whether to remain silent, as is customary, or to give some acknowledgement of the incredible theatric happening that it had just been part of. There was in fact some modest applause but there were no curtain calls.

The above analysis is perhaps over-detailed, but I believe necessary to give an idea of just how ambitious this production really is. It won 2009 production of the year in Opernwelt. The mechanics of it are enormously complex but, unlike the Schlingensiefel production, it does hang together and is closely tied to the music. The first Act is the most complex and it certainly puts a new light on Gurnemanz' sometimes tedious narrations.

However, taking it all in still distracts one significantly from appreciating Wagner's Bühnenweihfestspiel. To give concrete visualizations of things which can be imagined from the poem or the music is a bit of a dumbing down, in much the same way that TV news cannot say "the car went to Lindfield over the Bridge" without showing pictures of a car, Lindfield Station and the Bridge". It demeans our imaginative sensibilities.

Part Two will be in the next issue. If you would like to read the whole essay, it will be available on the Society's website at www.wagner-nsw.org.au.

Donations

The Society welcomes all donations and they can be addressed to the Treasurer, Wagner Society in NSW Inc, at the Society's GPO Box address shown on the back page of this Newsletter. Such donations help us to carry out our objective "to promote the music of Richard Wagner and to encourage a wider appreciation of the significance of his achievements." Donations are tax-deductible and receipts will be issued.

Since 1 September 2009, donations have been received from: Marie Hiscock, Dennis Mather, and Robyn Richards.

New and Renewing Members

The following people joined the Society:

Nicholas Wai [0983], Jack Symonds [0984] and Jane Beeby [0985]

Renewing Members

(a) renewals for the 2009 financial year

Jennifer Manton [0718], John McGrath [0310], Kay Abrahams [0966], Marie Hiscock [0249]

(b) renewals for the 2010 financial year

Brian Freestone and Charlie Brady [0840], Greg Watters [0892], Ivan Shearer [0954], Jack Symonds [0984], Jane Beeby [0985], Jeffrey Smart and Ermes de Zan [0865], Jennifer Manton [0718], Nicholas Wai [0983], Robyn Richards [0980], and Sharon Zelei [0937]



Wagnerian Influences On La Fanciulla Del West

- Peter Bassett

La fanciulla del West, Giacomo Puccini's Californian gold rush opera of 1910, will be returning to Opera Australia's stage next July in a new production commissioned by the Opera Conference. Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'borrowings' from Puccini's score are well documented, but it has to be said that the maestro of Torre del Lago himself drew more than a little inspiration from the 'old magician' of Bayreuth.

Puccini was introduced to the music of Richard Wagner at the Milan Conservatory, and he attended the Bayreuth Festivals of 1888 and 1889. He once observed: 'Nothing of Richard Wagner has died: his opera is the yeast of all contemporary music, and there is yet something to germinate, later, in happier artistic times.' In fanciulla he made his own use of leitmotifs, notably in relation to Minnie and the miners, and he used a form of 'endless melody' instead of set 'numbers'—something that admirers of his earlier operas did not necessarily welcome.

Of special significance from a musical point of view, is a four-note motive that appears in the orchestra when Minnie decides to hide the wounded Johnson. This is repeated a number of times. It is a reference to the famous

chromatic motive that opens Tristan und Isolde, through which Wagner expresses the inter-relationship of suffering and desire. Now harmonized in E-flat minor, Puccini uses it to describe the pain of Minnie and Johnson that is part and parcel of their love.

There are other parallels too: in the theme of the destructive consequences of a lust for gold, the redemptive role of a woman (Puccini deliberately strengthened this aspect of Minnie's character over Belasco's model); the awakening of the shared past of Minnie and Johnson à la Siegmund and Sieglinde; Rance's Hunding-like involvement; the symbolism of a door suddenly blowing open as an expression of the coming of love; Minnie's Act 2 response to the wounding of Johnson, reminiscent of Sieglinde's Act 2 delirium; Puccini's direction for 'eight to ten' horses in Act 3 paralleling Act 3 of Die Walküre, and Minnie's Valkyrie-like cry as she rides to Johnson's rescue. The radiant ending offers more than a nod to Parsifal, one of Puccini's favourite operas, an association reinforced by Minnie's words: 'Brothers, there isn't a sinner in the world to whom the path of redemption is not open!' **Now there's a thought.**

Katherina Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* - The Final Wrap!

- Robert Lloyd

Having been handed the baton held since 1966 by her Father Wolfgang, Katherina Wagner has inherited a position of great influence and authority. Although sharing the administrative responsibilities as an Opera Director, it falls on her to maintain the creative standards that have made the Bayreuth Festival unique in the musical world. As I see it, her duty of care is to uphold the status of the Festival, enhance its prestige and, above all, safeguard its survival in the challenging, uncertain world of the 21st century. With respect for the past, the new and exciting advances in today's technology allow an almost unlimited freedom of expression. Like the members of her illustrious family who have preceded her, Katherina Wagner faces unpredictable obstacles—none more than Richard Wagner himself. Each has needed to establish their personal imprimatur on the Festival—expand its sphere of influence while keeping the Wagner repertoire always innovative and constantly refreshed.

Before viewing the "Baptism of Fire" documentary and knowing nothing of her credentials, I anticipated a fresh, new broom approach—a young Director's interpretation. At the same time, I feared her interpretation might be dripping with stultifying reverential awe. Either way, I needn't have worried! Aware that first impressions can be misleading, the engrossing "Baptism of Fire" alerted me to the shock tactics she employed to present her iconoclastic, insensitive offering. With culpable indifference and questionable taste, Katherina Wagner has marshalled the worst aspects of

today's popular culture in trying to "communicate" and be relevant to a so-called modern audience. Having now seen the entire production on DVD, I feel more entitled to express what is a very personal view—one which I hope will be challenged with passion.

Surely it is the timeless universality of the Wagner repertoire that encourages new exploration and freedom of interpretation. The foundation, the Director's starting point, is the score: the orchestration answers every question. To impose a too rigid or fixed concept is to conflict with the basic musical structure. Whether viewing a DVD screening or attending a live performance, this balance between score and interpretation is especially important if it happens to be an audience member's first experience of the work. Right or wrong, good or bad—the impression left is usually indelible, possibly damaging. Evaluating the merit of a given production—either as a shared experience surrounded by the collective energy of fellow Audience member, or on DVD as a record of the performance, restricted by stage lighting and selective camera work—we are dealing with two quite different productions. In this case, it is only on the DVD that I can make any judgement.

Katie French's excellent and informative article in our last Newsletter pointed out these details with great perception and clarity. Having the advantage of attending the Production in the Festspielhaus, she experienced much in Katherina Wagner's production that pleased her and thus



was able to make a valuable comparison. My appreciation of her opinion has tempered my extreme reaction into a manageable and enjoyable outrage.

Long after this production has been removed from the Festspielhaus' repertoire, this record will remain; its importance should not be underestimated.

Lapping up the performance Act by Act and with only the DVD to consider, I sincerely hoped that my personal bias and jaundiced eye didn't prevent my seeing any hint of beauty or wit. There were some promising moments captured, but these were sadly elusive. A commendable decision by the Director was to appoint Christian Thielemann as her Music Director. The music, the orchestra and the singing kept my spirit afloat.

On the technical problems associated with video productions, I can speak with some assurance, having directed and edited a number of live musical performances—often on location, using a multi-camera set-up linked to corresponding monitors; literally “calling the shots.” Careful preparation and attending the rehearsals with the crew gives one the structure needed to plan the operation, with the cameramen taking instructions by linked headphones, being alerted to prepare for a change in position or angle. Editing live is an adrenalin-charged exercise and success depends on team work and trust: it is a very shared experience.

What gave the “Baptism of Fire” documentary such energy and immediacy was the excellent hand-held camera work. Known fondly as “Wobbly Cam”, operators hopefully can add pace and interesting angles as against static fixed camera positions. While not appropriate—or easy—in the Festspielhaus, in the DVD version one frequently needed shots showing audience reaction and involvement. Mind you, pictures of an outraged audience throwing their cushions and handbags at the stage might have added a certain frisson to the proceedings. Only joking-honestly.

Katherina Wagner's demands on the cast, often requiring them to handle difficult business, awkward positions and almost unmanageable props, would have made taping her production additionally difficult for the Camera Director. In constantly focusing on close ups, usually to the detriment of the general action, he had little choice. A good example of this is in Act 2 where poor little Eva, wearing her simple blue drip dry shift is being graffitied by the dreaded Walter wielding his lethal paintbrush. She had to hold a series of positions for agonizing minutes on end. Fortunately, she didn't have to sing. What Hans Sachs was doing, I can't remember. Frequent wide shots of the entire stage would have been useless because of the impenetrable gloom that seemed to dominate this production. A friendly Labrador and/or a white stick might have helped the unfortunate cast.

Unlike the little black dress, I for one will be glad when the new fashionable black, so loved by Designers and Directors alike, is no longer fashionable. We are supposedly dealing with what is laughingly called a Comedy! In all fairness, I imagine this was not the case when seeing the production in the Festspielhaus. I have to confess that the scene with the inflatable sex doll, seen in the 2007 documentary tended to disturb my concentration when

viewing the entire DVD production; I was never sure when she was likely to literally “pop up”. Mercifully, this Plastic Floozy had either exploded or been pensioned off for the 2008 production. The scene that replaced it is, predictably, equally repugnant.

Gloom-laden, the Act I set resembled the exercise yard of a less than salubrious prison. The glum chorus, drilled into submission, when not marching in single file, spent their time building tables. Wearing strange grey wigs and stranger short pants, they resembled inmates from a Dickensian Reformatory, seconded for the occasion. Set in the present day, with the cast in modern dress, made identifying the different characters rather confusing; and the gloom didn't help. Hans Sachs—chain smoking and shoeless was a delightful idea—a gentle comment on the Cobbler's profession. Also, the ceiling frescos and duelling jigsaw puzzles were a sensitive reminder of the Opera's genesis.

Walter was another matter; with obvious “street cred”, he, a Graffiti Artist, looked like someone to be avoided at any cost. Armed with a bucket of paint and lethal paintbrush, he daubed anything or anyone who stood still long enough to express his desperate need to be creative. No surface escaped his attention, including a cello. Eva and Magdalena looked sadly less than chic or remotely desirable, dressed as they were in a style best described as early Schindler's List. Targeting Eva, her appearance only encouraged Walter's ardour; he also sang.

The tables, once built and placed together to form one huge rostrum, gave the now manic Walter yet another tempting surface, a new blank canvas, to express his dubious talent. Paint splattered, the Boardroom meeting ended with the grey Reformatory Inmates clearing up the mess. With all the business suits, Beckmesser and David were often lost in the crowd. Hans was always easy to spot—the only one on stage not wearing shoes. But it was the glorious music and equally lovely singing that enabled easier identification.

The Act 2 setting—the “genial summer evening” with the Elder and Linden trees sadly missing and the stage predictably gloomy—had all the charm and comfort one enjoys astride a milk crate on the pavement outside Bar Coluzzi on a wet afternoon. Hans was there, his typewriter at the ready. David was busy doing something, but I'm not sure what. A huge hand dominated the stage, but its importance escaped me; then it fell down, which was probably meaningful. This did however provide an elevated position for Walther to graffiti Eva, now wearing her simple blue drip dry dress. She had to hold artistic poses for agonising minutes on end, while Walter, wielding his dripping paint brush expressed himself yet again.

Instead of Manna from heaven, a deluge of Dunlop shoes rained down; multi-coloured, they certainly added welcome colour and movement to the scene. A lute-less Beckmesser was accompanied in his wonderfully grotesque serenade by Hans tapping away on his typewriter. A highlight of this Act was the beautifully choreographed and performed riot scene. That was until the Andy Warhol moment. Another deluge. This time, suspiciously coloured Campbell's Soup poured down on the hapless



cast. I interpreted this to be a condemnation of American Popular Art and its debilitating influence on the cultural world. I got the message, I think. It took the hour interval and an army of resolute cleaners to wipe up the mess.

Act 3 was equally puzzling, with Hans' simple workshop now resembling the Waiting Lounge of a cut-price airline. Walter, now trying his hand at stage design with predictably little success, spent an inordinate amount of time cutting up cardboard and endlessly toying with his model stage. Constantly wandering in search for excitement, he also had fun with a large soup can. By now, Hans was wearing shoes. Neither dripped, nor dried, Eva was still to be seen in her favourite Blue Dress from the day before. She also wore sandals—one red, the other, green which, while showing originality, revealed that she was colour blind and lacking a certain fashion sense.

During the usually lovely and touching shoe fitting scene, Eva had to endure very inappropriate touching by an ardent Hans. I feared the worst. It's not easy fitting sandals; one can easily get carried away. The sly Beckmesser, opera's favourite pedant and ever the deluded optimist, lurked with admirable stealth.

The scene in the emotionally charged, almost claustrophobic, confines of Sachs's workshop ended with the glorious quintet. This wonderful moment was beautiful realised. Large gold picture frames lowered, left and right, to frame family portraits; a prophetic glimpse of the future awaiting our now married couples, their respective children sharing the moment with doting parents. The pleasure generated by this touching scene was soon shattered when Magdalena's young son showed the telltale sign of an unfortunate bladder condition. That brought us down with a thud.

Anticipation of the always spectacular scene change to the open meadow—the breath of fresh air, sunlight, the sheer exuberance, and proud dignity of the Guilds—makes this one of the great moments in all opera. Tinged with a little sadness, knowing this delight will soon come to an end, a ripple of excitement envelopes the audience. We become active participants sharing the joy—personally involved. So what did we see? A disappointingly dark stage and a row of dead composers with big heads thinking they were the New York Rockettes. The suitably morose chorus, jam-packed into stadium-style seating which slowly rose up from the Stage floor. Technically very impressive; the result was less than joyous. Eva had at last changed her dress, which was a decided plus—things were looking up! The doll-like dancing girls that so excited David's interest also had big heads and made one wonder what his problem was. I couldn't find Magdalena; Hans was wearing shoes for the occasion.

To my relief, the scene where previously the desperate Beckmesser has a dalliance with our accommodating Plastic Floozy, the inflatable sex doll, didn't eventuate. Whether she exploded, was punctured or simply past her "use by" date, one hardly cared. The scene that replaced these former high jinks was equally turgid and gave new meaning to the word gratuitous. Beckmesser, still lute-less, as well as clueless, rendered his tortured offering to the contest audience. A large surgical

trolley was wheeled on stage, piled high with what looked like potting mix. After some time, an excrement-smearing gentleman emerged alive and well—and totally naked. He proudly revealed all, first to the audience then turned around to the now more animated chorus. With that, he walked off, followed by the trolley. Sandals might have helped. As if Beckmesser's song isn't enough, at this point I gave up, no longer caring who won who or what. In trying to fathom the meaning behind this concept, I thought it best left to Sigmund Freud. Taking my brick-bat, I went home.

Still happily Outraged of Elizabeth Bay.

Terence Watson

My first performance at the 2009 Bayreuther Festspiele was the notorious debut production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* by the new Festival Director, Katherina Wagner (premiered 2007), but I found it in parts interesting, with a serious point of view, and in parts stupid and crass.

All of the current Bayreuth productions have made me think about the paradox that performing Wagner seems to engender in many directors these days. Wagner spent all his life extracting all the local, identifiable historical detail from his libretti to turn them into mythic statements about human nature, while almost all contemporary directors spend vast amounts of energy working out how to import history of one sort or another into their productions. At Bayreuth we have good selection of strategies, of which Stefan Herheim's for *Parsifal* is the most successful. (As the first part of Dr Jim Leigh's review in this Newsletter shows.) *Meistersinger* is, of course, the exception in Wagner's later work and perhaps accounts for its popularity: one doesn't need to deal with layers of symbolism and mythology.

In *Meistersinger*, Katharina Wagner and her sidekick dramaturg Robert Sollich, have decided that the setting is more or less contemporary Nuremberg, though the setting seems to have changed from a church to a small auditorium in the local conservatorium. The time depends on one's view of when abstract expressionism / action painting / performance art / graffiti-as-art may have arrived in the town, since Walther seems to be an fervent if untalented practitioner. Wagner's and Sollich's conception of his character is central to the production. When he emerges from inside a grand piano, a little like Venus emerging from the sea in Botticelli's famous painting, Walther is clearly being presented as the Ur-painter, wild, romantic, untrammelled by conventions, effectively a kindergarten kid with an endless supply of paint that he uses to liberally daub the environment with adolescent graffiti and protest slogans. He demonstrates his talent by tagging some of the busts of Dürer, Hölderlin and other revered German artists that line the Con's walls. The point in Act 1 seems to be to establish him as behaving without rules of any kind, and hence an (infantile) archetype of the rebel. Acts 2 and 3 present him as gradually being brought "under control" through Hans Sachs's inculcation of the rules of the *Meistersingers*, at the same time as Sachs is shown becoming even more rule-bound and "bourgeoisified" (demonstrated in his putting on shoes and jackets!), so that he ends up as an incarnation of conservatism.



The Meistersingers are depicted as boring pedants rigidified by their obsession with the rules into parodies of artists. Their protégés, the apprentices (played by male and female chorus members of incongruous ages and builds), are very amusingly depicted in what I took to be quasi-mediaeval page-boy bobs and standard gray school uniforms, with shorts not long trousers – another dig at the conservatism of the conservatorium. They are made to carry out a rather pointless, if clever, ritual for most of Act 1 of carrying what seem to be candlesticks that turn into table legs for the Meistersingers' tables for their meeting after the church service.

Beckmesser is as young as Walther, in itself an innovation, since most productions cast him as middle-aged at least – but already a rule-bound, prissy fuddy-duddy, completely out of place with both the Meistersingers and the younger crowd who frequent the Con's coffeehouse of Act 2. When he is humiliated in Act 2 by the outrageous behaviour of Walther and dismayed by Eva's obvious preference for Walther, he decides on a parallel but inverse reaction to the direction Walther and Sachs are taking, ie to rebellion.

As they become more conventional and traditional, Beckmesser launches into the same sort of Ur-painter, wild, romantic, graffiti artist role that Walther is abandoning. As an illustration of his new artistic edginess, Beckmesser turns Sachs's bookcase into a satirical naked installation, complete with dangly bits.

Instead of the procession of the Meistersingers and the dance of the apprentices, that, admittedly, can be pompous and/or awkwardly kitsch-neo-volkisch, Wagner gives us a "statues" (parodic puppets of German greats, such as Goethe, Schiller, Bach, Kleist, Lessing, Dürer, Beethoven, Hölderlin – and others less familiar to English speakers, such as Schadow, von Knobelsdorff, Schinkel, with exaggerated heads and appendages) who carry on a mixture of artistic activities and ordinary domestic business (such as reading the newspaper on the toilet) – all to remind us of the rather trite point, I take it, that artists can be boring people too, with peccadilloes and festishes. But, they all take their turns upstaging each other in the lead up to the competition – even doing a Rockettes high-kick routine – and take their bows at the end of the night, before being consigned to the rubbish bin.

During the prize-song competition itself, which is recast as a bizarre Idol singing competition, Beckmesser turns to shock-artist (or Dadaist, according to some reports) tactics by unburying a naked man from a pile of dirt (perhaps a reference to the Jewish Golem story) while bemused then increasingly outraged Nurembergers look on and boo, although a few progressive (or just more fashion/dad conscious) members applaud – another dig at the mixed nature of Bayreuth audiences. To complete Beckmesser's piece of rebellious performance art, a member of the stage audience strips and dances with the Golem (but doesn't simulate sex as in the premiere). For his part, Walther creates a kitschy stage set (possibly for Tristan und Isolde), complete with fairy lights and a mediaeval prince and princess who mime badly around a pond while Walther, now in a full business suit, serenades them and the mostly

entranced bourgeois Nurembergers, as if he were Barry Manilow (or perhaps Peter Hoffmann in his pre-Wagnerian career) – a little dig at the conservative audiences who prefer the works to be done "as Wagner intended" and have booed Katherina Wagner's productions elsewhere?

To put a final point on their production, Wagner and Sollich show how far to the conservative side of art they contend Sachs has moved during his education of Walther in the Meistersinger rules. To place his Deutsche Art outburst in what they see as a relevant context, the director has two huge torsos of Goethe and Schiller in pseudo-Greek style emerge from the stage floor (reminding Sydney-siders of the woeful inadequacies of our pretend opera theatre) to flank Sachs, who they light with intense white light from below, so he looks very sinister. It is surprising to me that Goethe and Schiller were selected to represent the forces of reaction, since, in many ways, they were liberating influences who pointed to the imprisoning effects of the rationalist movement in Europe.

In another ploy that has become almost de rigueur at Bayreuth, Wagner had the chorus who were on stage in bleacher seats behind the action and dressed in contemporary street clothes suddenly strip of their clothes to reveal their evening dress - ie a fairly clumsy reminder to the audience on the other side of the footlights that YOU are part of this continuous battle of the conservatives and progressives in art, as well in politics and all other aspects of life.

I took it that Wagner had a serious point about the nature of art and its audiences, but all the stage busyness often distracted one's attention from the point or buried it under cleverness. Perhaps the most serious accusation that could be levelled at the production is that, while making a point about modern painting and painters, Wagner trivialises her great-grandfather's own points about the value of poetry and music. Clearly, one cannot muck around with the poetry and music, otherwise the work becomes something else, so the director had to deploy the metaphor of painters and paintings to make her point. This overlay Wagner's work of art with a coating of metaphor that was not always relevant to his intentions. The equivalent of what the director was doing to her great-grandfather's work was what Marcel Duchamp did in painting a moustache on the Mona Lisa. However, Duchamp's action was very targeted and restrained in comparison with the uncontrolled romp into which Katherina Wagner turned Meistersinger.

As Patricia Baillie lamented in the last issue of the Newsletter, the quintet was one of the major casualties, as the singers were not only framed in huge kitsch gilt frames (admittedly in keeping with the painting-metaphor), but also decked out with suddenly-created children in an obvious parody of happy families. The contortions in literalising the metaphor in this situation simply made the music and sentiments of the characters seem trifling, rather than one of the greatest achievements in western operatic writing.

Similarly, Walther's final prize song, addressed to the faux prince and princess, and delivered by a faux pop singer reduced the stature of the music sadly. In fact, however, the director's choice on this point



seriously called into question her own logic. Surely, if she were lamenting Walther's loss of primal spontaneity and creativity as the original performance artist, through Sachs' education process, and wanted to create an equivalently spontaneous and creative version of the prize song, she would have had Walther sing it in a punk rock or head-banging heavy metal version? But, of course, this brings us back to the limitation of the initial conception—even the composer's great-granddaughter would not dare to meddle with the poetry and music.

In short, while I had much sympathy for the director's exploration of the age-old tussle between conservatism and change in the arts, which was part of Wagner's own story in his *Meistersinger*, the parallels between the plastic arts and the musical and dramatic arts that Wagner would have found interesting were buried in often confusing and over-produced stage business. Ironically, Kate Connolly in the *Guardian* of 27 July 2009 reported that: The enfant terrible of German theatre, director Christoph Schlingensiefel, delivered a harsh verdict on Deutschland Radio, saying it felt like she had set the opera in a "fitness studio or a porn shop" (www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jul/27/germany.classicalmusic). I have to agree with Shirley Apthorp's summary from her review on the Bloomberg website: "Katharina's calculated subversion of the plot could have been brilliant if it had been more sparingly realized. In her frenetic struggle to prove herself clever enough, presumably aided by intellectual dramaturge Robert Sollich, a few good ideas and strong images are lost in the dross" (www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601088&refer=home&sid=apZfndfDH0yc).

Without doubt, Klaus-Florian Voigt as Walther is as good to look as Peter Hoffmann was and with a similar voice, and with the likelihood that he also will not last, as his voice does not seem to have Wagnerian strength and heft. Alan Titus as Sachs was, according to friends who saw it last year, in better voice, but he had problems maintaining volume and focus, and his acting seemed a little less than fully committed. Michaela Kaune as Eva was perfectly adequate, and my sympathy went out to her as she had to put up with Walther's feeble attempts to turn her into a human canvass, and his paintbrush tickling her "under the ribs." Most impressive, however, was the relative newcomer, Adrian Eroed as Beckmesser. As young as, if not actually younger than, Voigt, he brought a welcome freshness to both the character and the singing, with a rich, resonant tenor voice that belied his small stature. I see that Jan Bowen was equally impressed by him as Siegmund in the Vienna Ring Cycle (in the September 2009 Newsletter No. 116 - www.wagner-nsw.org.au/reviews/r09/r09_013_polished.html).

My final comment about the performance is on the quality of the orchestral sound. It may be an illusion, or my poor memory of previous visits, but I felt that each of the conductors, who are of a younger generation - Sebastien Weigle for *Meistersinger*, Danielle Gatti for *Parsifal*, Christian Thielemann for *The Ring Cycle* - and even Peter Schneider, a slightly older conductor, for *Tristan* - were achieving a quite different sound from such conductors I've heard there previously,

as James Levine and Daniel Barenboim. It occurred to me that the latter conductors were more likely to bring to Bayreuth the "soundscape" that they had created over many years in their home theatres than the younger ones who may have been more interested in and susceptible to the special qualities of the Festspielhaus.

It may be also that Pierre Boulez's conducting of the Centennial Ring in 1976, which was heavily criticised for being "too light" or "too thin" to do justice to Wagner's score, set some people thinking, and his 2004 *Parsifal* particularly in the light of the period instrument movement. Boulez is reported as considering that "To conduct *Parsifal* as a slow, grandiose celebration of religiosity could all too easily turn into a proto-nationalist ritual, so it's no wonder Boulez wanted to strip away these connotations (*The Guardian*, Friday 23 July 2004 or at the website: www.guardian.co.uk/music/2004/jul/23/classicalmusicandopera). I have heard some performances of Wagner and Bruckner, for example, by Roger Norrington and others of the period instrument movement, that have been ear-opening in the clarity and precision of the playing, without sacrificing the bigness of the sound, when needed.

Boulez's conducting of *Parsifal* was praised for bringing a glistening subtlety and suppleness to the score - no mention of being too light. Perhaps the younger conductors, taking their lead from Boulez and the period instrument movement, are re-thinking their approach to Wagner. On top of this, the acoustics of the Festspielhaus clearly respond to a "thinning out" of the overall texture of the music in the sense of holding back some of the lesser instruments in climaxes so that one is not overwhelmed by the total volume, but can hear the inner voices more clearly and consistently. In passages of *Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*, I was astonished by the silky satiny sound the orchestras produced when the conductors balanced the parts more delicately than Levine or Barenboim, who seem more to aim for the total soundscape and so sometimes sacrifice clarity of instrumentation and part-writing. Wagner, after all, learned a lot from Bach in polyphonic writing and it is worth being able to hear more of it.

On the basis of hearing his Ring Cycle, Thielemann deserves his Wunderkind reputation. Thielemann did amazing things with the Bayreuth orchestra. He had them stop climaxes on a pfennig and drop to the lowest pianissimo, creating breathtaking effects. He also held the louder instruments back so that the inner voices shone through—a definite tribute to Boulez's approach in his Centennial Ring, to my mind. All in all, I would love the opportunity to hear these conductors again exploring the wonderful sound that the Festspielhaus is capable of producing from perfectly honed orchestras under sensitive and insightful direction. It also make me wonder if I really want to hear the Met Orchestra under Levine do its next Ring when there are such innovative conductors in other places doing such wonderful things with the music. Nevertheless, Bayreuth is still so much the Mecca for lovers of Wagner's works, in some cases in spite of their production values in the Festspielhaus, that some 438, 136 people from 80 countries applied for 53, 900 tickets – so now you know your chances!



Hans von Bülow A Life and Times by Alan Walker

- a review by Colin Baskerville (New York: Oxford University Press, isbn 9780-19-536868-0. 510pp.)

The conductor's second wife, Marie von Bülow, deposited the largest Bülow archive in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. This survived the 1945 Fall of Berlin, but remains largely uncatalogued. Alan Walker, the author of a major biography of Franz Liszt, has been able to build on the research required for that study. The task was daunting partly because the 1830 Dresden-born subject led a full life.

Bülow's conducting career included being appointed the "director" of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (1887-1892). A contemporary reader would consider this a pinnacle of achievement, but at the time his conducting of the Meiningen Court Orchestra (1880-1885) attracted high praise. He appointed the twenty-one year old Richard Strauss as assistant conductor in 1885. The author is skilled in presenting detail of great interest to us. For example, the virtuoso clarinetist in the Meiningen Court Orchestra was Richard Muhlfeld for whom Brahms would write his Clarinet Quintet and the two Clarinet Sonatas. Brahms was invited to use the orchestra to rehearse his own music.

The conductor not only came into contact with the musical celebrities of the time, but inspired the younger generation of conductor/composers, such as Gustav Mahler. In fact the Klopstock poem *Auferstehen* [to be resurrected], sung at the conductor's funeral, inspired Mahler for the completion of his 2nd symphony, the "Resurrection".

The piano was his first musical love. The author is able to retrace von Bülow's distinguished career as a concert pianist, as the press covered all piano items of interest. The author is particularly sound in bringing this aspect of Bülow's musical career to life. He had important relationships with piano builders and manufacturers, such as Carl Bechstein. He played the public premiere of Franz Liszt's Sonata in B minor in Berlin on January 22, 1857 on the Bechstein grand piano. The Berlin critics hated the work. The author makes a case for the 19th Century musical ascendancy of Dresden, Leipzig, Weimar, Meiningen and Hamburg above Berlin, (von Bülow doesn't seem to have liked Berlin the city at all [neither did Wagner – Ed.]). Another significant premiere was Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No.1 in Boston, USA. The pianist pioneered concert programs devoted to the works of a single composer. For example, he played the last five Beethoven sonatas in prestigious venues, such as the Musikverein in Vienna. In addition to these highly publicised piano recitals, he published editions of music scores, such as the Beethoven sonatas, with extensive annotation. Clara Schumann objected vehemently to his "editions". From 1884-1887 he gave piano master classes at the Raff Conservatory in Frankfurt-am-Main, in aid of the Raff Memorial Foundation. This institution was in direct opposition to the Hoch Conservatory of Music

of which Clara Schumann was a faculty member. She forbade her students to use Bulow's edition of Bach and Beethoven; for good measure she denounced the music of Richard Wagner to the Frankfurt musical public.

During his Dresden childhood, he attended the premiere of Richard Wagner's *Rienzi* (October 20, 1842) in the Dresden Royal Opera House. Wagner's music aroused his enthusiasm, and Wagner's conducting of Beethoven's 9th symphony inflamed him with a life-long passion for the work. In August 1850, he attended the world premiere of *Lohengrin* conducted by Franz Liszt. In hindsight, a contemporary reader would consider it ironic that Wagner, who gave him his first assistant conducting job in Zurich's opera house, would turn on him in later life. Von Bülow's parents were very negative about their son consorting with Wagner who was politically on the nose with the Dresden authorities after the 1849 riots. In addition they opposed his choice of music as a profession. Both Wagner and Liszt wrote letters to Franziska, the pianist's mother, extolling the musical promise of her son. Imagine receiving letters from two great 19th century musical celebrities!

Hans von Bülow's life exposed him to the key dramas of the German states in the 19th century. For example, he experienced the Dresden uprising of 1849, from which Richard Wagner fled into exile; the Franco-Prussian War, in which a relative was killed in battle; and the rise and fall of Prince Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898). He dedicated orchestral concerts in Berlin and Hamburg to Bismarck: the Kaiser had sacked the Chancellor. Von Bülow addressed the audience after the concerts and spoke up for Bismarck. This was courageous considering the rigid authority exercised over the German people by the Kaiser. Once again von Bülow's personal life became entwined in affairs of State; the crisis moved from the domain of the Bavarian state to the affairs of the unified Germany.

He married Cosima, one of Liszt's daughters. One would have thought that the marriage with children would have satisfied both parties, but Cosima fell irretrievably in love with Richard Wagner. Munich scandal mongers had a field day speculating about the pregnant Cosima. King Ludwig was unable to arrest the scandal mongering. Nevertheless, the conductor prepared and conducted the premiere of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in 1865. A DNA test in 2010 can now establish the paternity of a child, but Isolde, Cosima's latest child, was unable to establish in a Munich court in 1910 whether her father was Richard Wagner or Hans von Bülow. Cosima, we know now, eloped with Wagner to Lucerne where she bore him a son, Siegfried. Hans von Bülow filed for divorce, but the breakdown in interpersonal relations marred his ongoing relationship with his own daughters.



Cosima effectively forbade him to set foot in Bayreuth; one daughter got married in Bayreuth a fortnight before the opening performances of Parsifal. It was a bitter pill for the conductor of both *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* to miss both his daughter's marriage and the premiere of Parsifal. In addition, the public speculated why Felix Mottl and not he would conduct the first Bayreuth performances of *Tristan und Isolde*. If Cosima was resolute, Wagner was even more difficult; he wouldn't accept any money from Cosima's first husband. It wasn't exactly a state secret that the Bayreuth Festival was running at a deficit. Hans von Bülow conducted fund-raising concerts throughout the land and promoted Wagner's music.

The truth is that the conductor made many enemies in Berlin, England and the USA. His obsessive personality demanded standards of musical perfection that few could meet. The evidence proves that he was incapable of handling the media in New York and Boston on his American tours; earlier Berlin fiascos soured his career there. He had a remarkable memory for musical scores and insisted on performances without scores, but mere

mortal performers found these standards too exacting. It is true, though, that he could recognise an error of judgment. He published a scathing review of Verdi's *Requiem* denouncing it; in the long run his opinion could not be substantiated in the face of the popularity and critical acclaim for the score. He had to meekly write to Verdi apologising.

Physically his health was constantly failing. The author is unable to establish an accurate assessment of his medical failings against his musical accomplishments. His second wife published the *Autopsy Report* as a way of curbing speculation that he was mentally unsound in his later years. The author publishes this as Appendix 1 in the book.

In 1978 thirty leading conductors financed the restoration of Bülow's memorial stone in the Ohlsdorf Cemetery, Hamburg. They published a book *Hans von Bülow as Famous Conductors See Him*. This latest book is a worthy tribute to remind the world's music lovers of one of the most extraordinary figures in 19th century music.

***Der Fliegende Holländer* - Adelaide 2009**

- Terence Watson

For me, the most arresting and memorable Dutchman I've seen live was the 2003 Bayreuth production directed by Claus Guth, conducted electrifyingly by Marc Albrecht, but sung with mixed results by Jukka Rasilainen (Dutchman), Jaako Rhyänen (Daland), Adrienne Dugger (Senta - the best voice by far), Endrik Wottrich (Erik - hunky to look at, but not a patch on Stuart Skelton's power, lyricism and accuracy), Uta Prew (Mary - a bit past it) and Norbert Ernst (the helmsman - had a much bigger, rather scary, acting part than usual). I reviewed this production for the Wagner Society in 2004 (www.wagner-nsw.org.au/reviews/004_review02.html). In short, it had an intelligent, if somewhat old-fashioned Freudian, interpretation to offer, plus some very scary marionettish Dutch sailors singing and dancing like demented automatons at the end.

The Adelaide production tried to create interesting atmospheric effects with blue & green lasers for the sea and a red one for the Dutchman, although I'm sure that the red laser failed at the moment of the Dutchman's final entrance in the Saturday night finale. However, when the lasers weren't being used, the very bare stage for the rest of the time was anti-climactic. I should mention the treasure-chest that rose from under the stage radiating golden light when the Dutchman tempted Daland with an offer he couldn't refuse - and then got the extra offer of his daughter's hand as well as a place to stay! Very effective. The most obvious "interpretation" offered by Chris Drummond, the director, was to make more explicit the sexual element in the story line. While it is often present in other productions, memorably in

the Vulva figurehead for the Dutchman's ship in the 1978 Bayreuth production (recorded on film in 1985 - Director Harry Kupfer) out of which Simon Estes dramatically makes his appearance - births onto land again.

In the Adelaide production, the sexual element manifested itself fleetingly in the passionate kisses Wegner plants on the rather wooden Medlyn when Senta agrees to marry him - and then again as they leave at the end of act 2. The poor sexually deprived Dutch sailors get to have a grope with a few of the female townspeople - a bit unrealistic perhaps given what traditionally happens between sailors on long (7 years in their case) voyages!? And not very sexual - more like harassment. Anyhow, this element of sex in the production seemed a rather lukewarm afterthought. In fact, I wondered whether the very down-to-earth Wegner was trying to inject an element of his raunchy Alberich in the Ring into this otherwise very unerotic production.

The other intriguing, but ultimately jarring, new element (to me at least), was Drummond giving the Dutchman magical powers that are used mainly to fend off Erik's threatening advances in their final encounter. As Erik approaches the Dutchman to rescue Senta, the Dutchman throws a spell at him that knocks him to his knees and keeps him there until Senta and he leave. Exactly what Drummond is suggesting about the Dutchman is not clear to me as it confused me about the Dutchman's status. Is he just a cursed man, or is he a subject of Satan now endowed with some of the Devil's power? I thought he was the former, but if he is the latter, it begs questions



about the extent of his magical powers. Why, for example, couldn't he cast a love spell to bring a woman to love him and so free him?

Of the performances, only Skelton (Erik) brought any evident passion and commitment to his performance. Wegner relied on intense gazes and dramatic flourishes (and the odd magical gesture) and Medlyn on a bit of old-fashioned simpering at times. Sumegi, fortunately, brought an element of humour to his performance, in recognition, perhaps, of Wagner's apparent intention to satirise such naive opportunism and greed. Katherine Tier (Mary) has such a little role that it is hard to make an impression—maybe that's why she "volunteered" to be the main gropee in the Dutch sailors' excursion onto land. Angus Wood as the Steersman at least gets to dance with Mary, as well as sing his sleepy song at the beginning.

Of the voices, Skelton was a joy to listen to, as he was as Siegmund in the Adelaide Ring, with a lyrical line and accurate intonation and dramatic delivery. Next was Sumegi, although he began on our first night (Thursday, 12 November) with a bit of a wobble and indistinct articulation. However, for most of the final performance (Saturday, 14 November 2009), he was much more secure and relaxed and easier to understand. Next, I thought, was Wood, with his relatively clean and accurate light tenor, although he was straining a little with the higher notes. Although Wegner puts much passion into his delivery, his voice is very gruff these days, as if paying for years of smoking. The gruffness adds much to the characterisation, but not to the pleasure of listening to the sound as there is little lyrical line left. Wegner appeared to relax a little more on the final night as well, and some of his old familiar ringing notes found their way into the hall. Medlyn was very disappointing, with many notes either not there, glancingly hit or, according to some reports I heard, dropped down an octave so they could be made at all! At times on the final night she relaxed enough for some of the fine voice that I remember from Parsifals in Adelaide and Wellington to re-emerge, but in between it was a struggle that she didn't win. Tier seemed to have a pleasant, but not very strong voice that was often drowned by the orchestra, despite the fine acoustics of the Festival Hall.

The chorus deserves a special mention—at least they all seemed to be having fun and singing cleanly, clearly and accurately and with impressive volume for a relatively small group. (In comparison, there seemed to be many dozens on stage for the Bayreuth production!) The spinning chorus was a kind of circle dance with the women each twirling a string of fairy lights. Initially, in the dark it was quite pretty, but, after the third repeat of the chorus, one began to wonder if the effect was not sliding into kitsch. Maybe the spinners saved it by their evident naïveté and delight in just singing the lovely melody. When they joined their menfolk to taunt the skeleton Dutch sailors, their combined "Wachet auf!" was one of the most thrilling moments of the whole production.

Now for the orchestra—I'm sure that they would have been better without a conductor at all! While the overture began well, with nice forward momentum, the slow section following (the love theme) nearly died of inertia and didn't bode well for a well-balanced performance. Indeed, this pattern was followed for the whole opera: as soon as the markings changed to *lento* or *largo* or similar slow tempi, the music almost ground to a halt. The slow tempi certainly didn't make for gripping, emotionally-charged music-making. As one of my friends said afterwards, these sudden slowdowns really showed up the stitching between arias and scenes that isn't as evident in Wagner's later works. I thought the orchestra generally played very well, with only a few brass fluffs. Another friend thought that some of the entries of various sections were a bit ragged, but I felt that if that were happening it was probably because of the erratic conducting and the musicians not being sure when their cue would arrive.

Despite all my reservations, I am grateful to the State Opera of South Australia for putting on another Wagner opera. I hope that they will continue this fine tradition and that some godfather/sugar daddy will rapidly emerge to pay for the Ring Cycle to be restaged before the sets disintegrate or are sent to the tip.

Email Addresses

Email is for many members the communication method of choice, and it's vital for us to have your current email address if you want to receive reminders about Society functions, or in the future to receive the Newsletter electronically. The Society's email address is info@wagner-nsw.org.au (info at wagner hyphen nsw dot org dot au).

If you'd like to receive reminders about forthcoming Society events and occasional matters of interest to members, just send us an email from your current email address, with "Email reminder service" in the "subject" line. If you'd like to take part in the pilot for electronic delivery of the Newsletter, make sure that we have your current address by enrolling (or re-enrolling) in the Email Reminder Service.

Some people have particularly avaricious anti-spam programmes which devour emails from nice people like us, and each different email programme (such as Outlook) has its own way of avoiding this. Some programmes let you nominate the Society as a "favourite" or "trusted address", to ensure that our emails do not suffer that fate, and if you take the time to make us "trusted" you'll ensure that you receive our emails for as long as you want to.



The Raven's Reporting - Compiled by Camron Dyer

There is a regularly updated comprehensive list on the Society's Website <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au> that takes the list to 2013.

April 2010

Berlin	Staatsoper Fesstage Tristan und Isolde – April 5. Deutsche Oper Rienzi – April 5, 11. The Ring – April 17, 18, 21, 25; 28, 29, 30, May 2. Parsifal – April 2, 10. Die Meistersinger – April 5, 25. Parsifal – April 2. Lohengrin – April 3 2009. The Ring – March 28, 30, April 1, 4. Lohengrin – April 2, 18. Parsifal – April 2, 5. Parsifal – April 2, 5. Parsifal – April 2, 5. Parsifal – April 2. Tannhäuser – April 3, 18. Holländer – April 17. Holländer – April 17, 21, 25. Die Meistersinger – April 5. Holländer – April 16. Die Meistersinger – April 4. Rienzi – April 2, 18. Das Rheingold – April 24. Das Rheingold – April 25. Tannhäuser – April 10, 17, 28. Tannhäuser – April 2. The Met Holländer – April 23, 26, 30. Tannhäuser – March 6 – April 10, [no other dates]. Easter Festival Götterdämmerung - April 5. Parsifal – April 1, 5, 11, 25. Staatsoper Parsifal – April 1, 4, 7. Die Meistersinger – April 10, 17.
Budapest	
Cologne	
Darmstadt	
Dessau	
Detmold	
Dortmund	
Dresden	
Düsseldorf	
Frankfurt	
Geneva	
Gera	
Greifswald	
Hamburg	
Hildesheim	
Kaiserslautern	
Kiel	
Leipzig	
Lübeck	
Meiningen	
Milan	
New York	
Oslo	
Salzburg	
Stuttgart	
Vienna	
Zurich	

May 2010

Berlin	Deutsche Oper The Ring – April 28, 29, 30, May 2. Tristan und Isolde – May 29. Tannhäuser – May 14. Lohengrin – May 13 2009. Lohengrin – May 16. Tristan und Isolde – May 29. Die Walküre – May 13, 16. Siegfried – May 23. Das Rheingold – May 2, 7, 15, 22. Tannhäuser – May 9. Lohengrin – May 23. Die Walküre – May 23, 30.
Budapest	
Chemnitz	
Dessau	
Dortmund	
Düsseldorf	
Essen	
Frankfurt	
Gera	
Hamburg	
Hanover	

Hildesheim	Die Meistersinger – May 13.
Kaiserslautern	Holländer – May 9, 15.
Kiel	Die Meistersinger – May 13, 29.
Leipzig	Das Rheingold – May 2.
Los Angeles	The Ring – May 29, 30, June 3, 6.
Meiningen	Tannhäuser – May 9, 20, 23.
Milan	Das Rheingold – May 13, 16, 19, 22, 26, 29.
New York	The Met Holländer – May 3, 6, 10, 14.
Paris	Opéra Bastille Die Walküre – May 31.
Stralsund	Holländer – May 8.
Vienna	Staatsoper Lohengrin – May 30.
Zurich	Die Meistersinger – May 1, 8.

June 2010

Budapest	Tristan und Isolde – June 1, 16. Die Meistersinger – June 20, 24, 27. Meistersinger – June 19, 23, 26, 29. Tannhäuser – June 19.
Cardiff	The Ring – June 1, 2, 4, 6; 8, 9, 11, 13.
Chemnitz	Tristan und Isolde – June 3, 20, 26.
Cologne	Das Rheingold – June 10.
Düsseldorf	Das Rheingold – June 3, 6, 12.
Essen	Tannhäuser – June 30.
Frankfurt	Die Meistersinger – no actual dates.
Gera	Lohengrin – June 6.
Glyndebourne	Die Walküre – June 4, 18, 20, 24.
Hamburg	Die Meistersinger – June 27.
Hanover	The Ring – May 29, 30, June 3, 6; 8, 10, 13, 16; 18, 20, 23, 26.
Kiel	Opéra Bastille Die Walküre – June 5, 9, 13, 16, 20, 23, 26, 29.
Los Angeles	Die Walküre – June 10, 13, 19, 22, 25, 30.
Paris	Staatsoper Lohengrin – June 3, 6. Tannhäuser – June 16, 20, 24, 27. Parsifal – June 30.
San Francisco	
Vienna	

July 2010

Birmingham	WNO Die Meistersinger – July 6, 10. Die Meistersinger – July 3.
Cardiff	Tristan und Isolde – July 11, 18.
Düsseldorf	Das Rheingold – July 1, 15.
Essen	Die Walküre – July 10. Siegfried – July 17.
Las Palmas	de Gran Canaria – Teatro Pérez Galdós Holländer – July 17, 20, 23.



Mannheim **Götterdämmerung** – July 11
 Munich **Lohengrin** – July 25, 29.
Tannhäuser – July 28, 31.
 Zurich **Die Meistersinger** – July 3.

Season 2010/11

Amsterdam **The Ring** - New production begins.
 Berlin Staatsoper
The Ring [no actual dates].
 Hamburg **The Ring** – 2 cycles [no actual dates].
 Milan **The Ring** [no actual dates].
 New York The Met
The Ring - New production begins.

September 2010

Enschede **Die Walküre** – [no actual dates].
 Lübeck **Götterdämmerung** – September
 [no actual dates].

October 2010

Enschede **Die Walküre** – [no actual dates].
 Hamburg **Götterdämmerung** – October 17
 [no other dates].

December 2010

Milan **Die Walküre** – December 7, 2010
 [no other dates].

2011

Baden-Baden **The Ring** – [no actual dates].
 Barcelona **Parsifal** – [no actual dates].

April 2011

Hanover **Siegfried** – [no actual dates].

June 2011

Berlin Deutsche Oper
Parsifal – June 26, 29.
 Hanover **Götterdämmerung** – [no actual dates].
 Lübeck **The Ring** – June 2011 [no actual dates].
 San Francisco **The Ring** – June 14, 15, 17, 19, 21,
 22, 24, 26; 28, 29, July 1, 3.

July 2011

Berlin Deutsche Oper
Parsifal – July 1, 3, 6, 9.
 San Francisco **The Ring** – June 28, 29, July 1, 3.

Season 2011/12

New York The Met
The Ring - 3 cycles [no actual dates].

September 2011

Enschede **Siegfried** – [no actual dates].

October 2011

Enschede **Siegfried** – [no actual dates].

February 2012

Munich **Das Rheingold** – February 5, 9, 12.

May 2012

Munich **Siegfried** – May 27, 31.

June 2012

Munich **Siegfried** – June 3.

July 2012

Munich **Das Rheingold** – July 10.
Siegfried – July 6, 13.

Summer 2012

Toulouse **Tannhäuser** – [no actual dates].

September 2012

Enschede **Götterdämmerung** –
 [no actual dates].

October 2012

Enschede **Götterdämmerung** –
 [no actual dates].

December 2012

Milan **Siegfried** – December 7, 2012
 [no other dates].

2013

Amsterdam **The Ring** - [no actual dates].
 Baden-Baden **The Ring** - [no actual dates].
 Milan **Götterdämmerung** – Spring 2013
 [no actual dates].

April 2013

Munich **Holländer** – April 14, 17, 20.

June 2013

Milan **The Ring** - [no actual dates].
 Munich **Holländer** – June 28.

July 2013

Munich **Das Rheingold** – July 13.

August 2013

Seattle **The Ring** - 3 cycles [no actual dates].

September 2013

Enschede **The Ring** - [no actual dates].

October 2013

Enschede **The Ring** - [no actual dates].



Der Ring Des Nibelungen

Performances- 2010 - 2013

Opera House and Cycle	Rheingold	Walküre	Siegfried	Götterdämmerung
2010				
April-May 2010 Berlin Deutsche Oper	April 28	April 29	April 30	April 30
Los Angeles Ring Cycle 1	Saturday 29 May	Sunday 30 May	Thursday 3 June	Sunday 6 June
Los Angeles Ring Cycle 2	Tuesday 8 June	Thursday 10 June	Sunday 13 June	Wednesday 16 June
Los Angeles Ring Cycle 3	Friday 18 June	Sunday 20 June	Wednesday 23 June	Saturday 26 June
Berlin Staatsoper 2010/11 season [no actual dates].				
2011				
Hamburg Ring (Simone Young) Cycle 1	Sunday 13 March	Friday 18 March	Thursday 24 March	Tuesday 29 March
Hamburg Ring (Simone Young) Cycle 2	Friday 1 April	Sunday 3 April	Wednesday 6 April	Sunday 10 April
2011				
San Francisco Cycle 1	Tuesday 14 June	Wednesday 15 June	Friday 17 June	Sunday 19 June
San Francisco Cycle 2	Tuesday 21 June	Wednesday 22 June	Friday 24 June	Sunday 26 June
San Francisco Cycle 3	Tuesday 28 June	Wednesday 29 June	Friday 1 July	Sunday 3 July
Lübeck June 2011 [no actual dates].				
Cologne	June 1	June 2	June 4	June 6
Cologne	June 8	June 9	June 11	June 13
Baden-Baden	[no actual dates]			
2011/12				
New York - The Met	3 cycles [no actual dates]			
Baden-Baden	[no actual dates]			
2013 Amsterdam	[no actual dates]			
June 2013 Milan - The complete cycle is scheduled be performed in June 2013	Das Rheingold opens on 13 May 2010	Die Walküre will open the 2010-11season	Siegfried will open the 2012-13 season	Götterdämmerung in spring 2013.
August 2013 Seattle	3 cycles [no actual dates]			
September 2013 Enschede	[no actual dates]			
October 2013 Enschede	[no actual dates]			



Mark Twain's Travel Letters From 1891-92

Extracted from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 6, 1891

[Often retitled "At the Shrine of St. Wagner"] A report on *Parsifal*.

We may not have to endure such privations in arriving at Bayreuth, with airlights to Germany and fast trains to Nuremberg:

It was at Nuremberg that we struck the inundation of music-mad strangers that was rolling down upon Bayreuth. It had been long since we had seen such multitudes of excited and struggling people. It took a good half-hour to pack them and pair them into the train--and it was the longest train we have yet seen in Europe.... It gives one an impressive sense of the magnitude of this biennial pilgrimage. For a pilgrimage is what it is.

But we have similar problems getting tickets and organising tickets:

If you are living in New York or San Francisco or Chicago or anywhere else in America, and you conclude, by the middle of May, that you would like to attend the Bayreuth opera two months and a half later, you must use the cable and get about it immediately or you will get no seats, and you must cable for lodgings, too. Then if you are lucky you will get seats in the last row and lodgings in the fringe of the town. If you stop to write you will get nothing. There were plenty of people in Nuremberg when we passed through who had come on pilgrimage without first securing seats and lodgings.

Some traditions stay; others have changed:

Next day, which was Sunday, we left for the opera-house--that is to say, the Wagner temple--a little after the middle of the afternoon. The great building stands all by itself, grand and lonely, on a high ground outside the town. We were warned that if we arrived after 4 o'clock we should be obliged to pay \$2.50 apiece by way of fine.

I am not a musical critic, and did not come here to write essays about the operas and deliver judgment upon their merits.

All the lights were turned low, so low that the congregation sat in a deep and solemn gloom. The funereal rustling of dresses and the low buzz of conversation began to die swiftly down, and presently not the ghost of a sound was left. This profound and increasingly impressive stillness endured for some time--the best preparation for music, spectacle, or speech conceivable. I should think our show people would have invented or imported that simple and impressive device for securing and solidifying the attention of an audience long ago; instead of which there continue to this day to open a performance against a deadly competition in the form of noise, confusion, and a scattered interest.

Finally, out of darkness and distance and mystery soft rich notes rose upon the stillness, and from his grave the dead magician began to weave his spells about his disciples and steep their souls in his enchantments. There was something strangely impressive in the fancy which kept intruding

itself that the composer was conscious in his grave of what was going on here, and that these divine souls were the clothing of thoughts which were at this moment passing through his brain, and not recognized and familiar ones which had issued from it at some former time.

Twain suggests an approach to Wagner opera performance that many not-so-keen opera-goers would endorse:

I wish I could see a Wagner opera done in pantomime once. Then one would have the lovely orchestration unvexed to listen to and bathe his spirit in, and the bewildering beautiful scenery to intoxicate his eyes with, and the dumb acting couldn't mar these pleasures, because there isn't often anything in the Wagner opera that one would call by such a violent name as acting; as a rule all you would see would be a couple of silent people, one of them standing still, the other catching flies.

This present opera was "Parsifal." Madame Wagner does not permit its representation anywhere but in Bayreuth. The first act of the three occupied two hours, and I enjoyed that in spite of the singing.

I trust that I know as well as anybody that singing is one of the most entrancing and bewitching and moving and eloquent of all the vehicles invented by man for the conveying of feeling; but it seems to me that the chief virtue in song is melody, air, tune, rhythm, or what you please to call it, and that when this feature is absent what remains is a picture with the color left out. I was not able to detect in the vocal parts of "Parsifal" anything that might with confidence be called rhythm or tune or melody; one person performed at a time--and a long time, too--often in a noble, and always in a high-toned, voice; but he only pulled out long notes, then some short ones, then another long one, then a sharp, quick, peremptory bark or two--and so on and so on; and when he was done you saw that the information which he had conveyed had not compensated for the disturbance.... If two of them would but put in a duet occasionally and blend the voices; but no, they don't do that. The great master, who knew so well how to make a hundred instruments rejoice in unison and pour out their souls in mingled and melodious tides of delicious sound, deals only in barren solos when he puts in the vocal parts. It may be that he was deep, and only added the singing to his operas for the sake of the contrast it would make with the music. Singing! It does seem the wrong name to apply to it. Strictly described, it is a practicing of difficult and unpleasant intervals, mainly.

The full series of Mark Twain's travel diaries is at www.twainquotes.com/Travel1891/Travel1891index.html

[Ed.]





The Wagner Society

in N.S.W. Inc.

(Patron — Sir Charles Mackerras)

Postal Address: Box 4574 GPO Sydney 2001

Application **For Membership** of The **Wagner Society** In New South **Wales** Incorporated

(Incorporated Under The Associations Incorporation Act 1984.)

Please complete this form, and mail it with a cheque or money order for your annual membership fee to The Wagner Society, GPO Box 4574, Sydney NSW 2001.

Prof Dr Ms Mrs Mr (Please circle)
(full name of applicant)

and Prof Dr Ms Mrs Mr (Please circle)
(full name of second applicant for a shared membership)

of
(single mailing address for notices, copies of the Newsletter, etc)

(City)..... (State)..... (Postcode)

hereby apply to become a single / shared / pensioner / shared pensioner / student member/s (please circle one) of The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated. In the event of my/our admission as a member/s, I/we agree to promote the objects of the association and to be bound by the rules of the association for the time being in force.

	Applicant	Second Applicant for a shared membership
Signatures		
Daytime Contact Phone No.(optional)		
Evening and Weekend Phone No (optional)		

E-mail Reminder Service The Society offers an E-mail reminder service for forthcoming events and matters the Committee believes will be of interest to members. If you would like to subscribe to this service please send an email to info@wagner-nsw.org.au. You can unsubscribe from this service at any time.

Schedule of annual membership fees for the financial year 1 January - 31 December:

Single membership	\$60.00	
Single pensioner membership	\$35.00	
Shared membership	\$90.00	same mailing address and contact numbers
Shared Pensioner membership	\$55.00	same mailing address and contact numbers
Student membership	\$25.00	please provide proof of student status



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(most website addresses used in this Newsletter will be on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article)

**Address for Sunday Functions
Goethe Institut
90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)**