

The Wagner Society



IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Newsletter No. 121, June 2011

In Memoriam

DONALD SHANKS AO OBE (1940 - 2011) - see page 4

WAGNER 2013 BICENTENARY DONATION APPEAL - see page 4 and inside back cover

President's Report

Welcome to the second newsletter for 2011.

Annual General Meeting

The Society held its Annual General Meeting on 22nd May, the 198th birthday of the Master. Those of you who were present will know that there were a number of new members elected onto the Committee. I was honoured to be elected President. The other Committee members are set out below.

Retiring Committee Members

I know that all of you will join with me in extending our heartfelt thanks to the retiring members of the Committee: Julie Carroll, Michael Moore and Gabrielle Bremner-Moore. Each of them has put a great deal of time and energy into their role, and has contributed significantly to the causes of the Society. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

Roger Cruickshank

What can I say to express our gratitude to our outgoing President, Roger Cruickshank? Roger was President of the Society for almost ten years. During that time he has given his all for the benefit of the Society and its members, and we have been treated to a feast of fascinating events at Society functions. I am only now starting to realise and appreciate how much work Roger has been putting into the society affairs over those years. What we see at the meetings is but the tip of the iceberg.

We will sorely miss Roger's eloquence and erudition, both in these pages and at our meetings. He is a very hard act to follow. The only consolation is that he has agreed to remain on the Committee, so that we can continue to have access to his wealth of wisdom and experience, not

to mention his fresh ideas and innovative approach. Thank you for everything, Roger!

Meeting of the New Committee

The new committee met just over a week after the AGM. The only absentee was Tony Jones, who was in Singapore. However Tony had very helpfully made a number of written suggestions before he left, which were adopted with enthusiasm and thanks.

The Committee agreed that membership was a priority issue. It was proposed that we commence a drive to follow up non-financial members. It was also agreed that, by way of an additional incentive to join the Society, non-members in future will be charged \$20 to attend meetings. Members will continue to pay \$15.

The Committee has arranged to meet four times a year: in April, July, October and January. The next Committee meeting will be held on 25th July. If any of you want any matter to be raised at this meeting, please contact myself or one of the other Committee Members.

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PATRON:

HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS: Prof Michael Ewans
Mr Richard King
Mr Horst Hoffman
Mr Joseph Ferfoglja

For Your **Diary**

2011		
June: Saturday 25 at 11.30am, Sunday 26 at 1.00pm & Thursday 30 at 11.30am, & on Sunday 3 July at 12.30pm	The NY Met Die Walküre (Lepage/Levine). Running time 5 hours 55 minutes including intermission. The links are: www.palacecinemas.com.au/events/thenewyorkmetopera20102011nsw/ and http://www.dendy.com.au/event_detail.asp?Event_ID=519	Hayden Orpheum and Dendy Opera Quays (Chauvel Cinema is closed for renovations)
3 September	Robert Gibson for the Sydney Opera Society: The Ring Cycle Part 1 – enquiries to Shirley Robertson (02) 9605 5851	8 Matheson Avenue, Chatswood
2013		
Nov - Dec 2013	The Ring Cycle - Melbourne - three cycles	Melbourne Opera Theatre

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

DATE	EVENTS - 2011	TIME & LOCATION
June	No Function	
10 July	Recital by Rachel Bate, winner of the 2010 German Opera Scholarship. Members report-back from Hamburg Ring and Metropolitan Opera's Siegfried Preceded at 12:30pm by Act 2 of Bayreuth Festival's 2010 Die Walküre	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
7 August	Members report-back from Glyndebourne Mastersinger and San Francisco Ring (Colleen Chesterman and Katie French) Preceded at 12:30pm by Act 3 of Bayreuth Festival's 2010 Die Walküre	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
18 September	Report back by members attending Bayreuth 2010 Preceding DVD screening - TBA	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
16 October	Special Attraction: Lyndon Terracini, Artistic Director, Opera Australia –the Melbourne Ring Cycle. Preceding DVD screening - TBA	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
20 November	Christmas Party – please bring a plate. 2.00PM TBA Festivities start at 3:00PM	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
	Advice about changes to the Program will be emailed to people who have given their email addresses to the Society's Webmaster; the latest updates will also be available on the Society's webpage: www.wagner.org.au.	
Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)		

New Members

The following people joined the Society:

Francois Kunc (999), Rainald and Pauline Roesch (1000), Christine Shale (1001), Wilhelmina Gardner (1002), Ian MacKenzie (1003), Suzan and Gary Penny (1004), Robert Henderson (1005) and Deborah Humble (1006)



President's Report continued

Membership: A Milestone

Speaking of membership, I am delighted to report that we have recently passed a significant milestone: we have registered our thousandth member! Not all of them are current, of course, but that is a different matter. I would like to congratulate Rainald and Pauline Roesch, who have acquired an unforgettable membership number.

Sub-Committees

One of Tony Jones' recommendations was that we establish a membership committee as well as two interlocking sub-committees, for Activities and Marketing. The Committee unanimously adopted these suggestions, and the following people were voted onto the sub-committees:

Membership sub-committee: Dennis Mather (chair), Colleen Chesterman, Peter Murray

Activities (Events) sub-committee: Tony Jones (chair), Colleen Chesterman, Katie French, Leona Geeves, Jane Mathews (ex officio)

Marketing sub-committee: Tony Jones (chair), Leona Geeves, Peter Murray, Jane Mathews (ex officio)

All three sub-committees have now met, and have set their priorities and goals. The membership sub-committee has set a goal of increasing the number of current members to 500 by the end of 2013, in time for the Melbourne Ring. The Events sub-committee has the dual task of organising regular Society functions, as well as looking forward to the bicentenary celebrations, and determining where the Society should be concentrating its attentions. The marketing sub-committee determined to focus on the forthcoming Met screenings of *Die Walküre*, with an information flyer about the Society and a membership application to be distributed to patrons at the theatres.

In addition, an appeal for donations has been sent out to all members.

The following passages were written by Tony Jones, the chair of both the Events and the Marketing sub-committees:

"Both the Events and Marketing committees met over the long weekend and started gathering ideas and considering initiatives that will add to the value and enjoyment derived from being a member. We are being careful not to abandon aspects of the Society's operations that are much liked and appreciated whilst experimenting with new concepts that will create a strong sense of community, learning and enjoyment. We will be looking to increase the range of organisations we relate to and share benefits with, at the same time as creating social environments in which to meet and hear the personal experiences of other members!

"Look out for subtle changes to our calendar and new ways to participate in the activities of the Society. **Most importantly, please feel free to contribute your ideas and give feedback, as well as participating: your Committee cannot do everything alone!**"



I entirely endorse Tony's comments. In particular, I would like to emphasise that membership of the sub-committees is not restricted to Committee members. It was agreed at the meeting that interested members of the Society should be able to join any of the sub-committees. So if any of you is interested in doing so, I encourage you to contact the chair of the sub-committee you would like to join.

The Hamburg Ring Cycle

An amazing number of Australians attended the second Ring Cycle in Hamburg between 1st and 10th April 2011. Approximately 160 went with Renaissance Tours, staying in four different hotels. Numerous others attended individually, leading to a total of well over 200 Ozzies in that northern German outpost. Everywhere you turned you saw a familiar face from back home. One of the bartenders at the opera house asked why there were so many English speakers, and refused to believe that it was because the audience was dominated by Australians.

The magnet, of course, was Simone Young. She did a superb job of conducting the Opera Orchestra with power and precision. You will find our webmaster's assessment of the experience on the Society's website. I am in complete agreement with him. [Either click on the following website address or copy it and past it into your browser: www.wagner.org.au/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=218:hamburg-ring-april-2011&catid=80:reviews-2011&Itemid=105. Editor] Apart from the wonderful orchestral sound, there was some magnificent singing, so that musically it was a huge success. To mention a few of the more outstanding singers: Katerina Dalayman was a truly great Brünnhilde. I was amazed to discover that she had come in at very short notice. Falk Struckmann has always been a most impressive Wotan, and this was no exception. Wolfgang Koch was a great Alberich. I suspect that we will be hearing a lot more about him in the future. I see that he is scheduled to sing Hans Sachs at Covent Garden later this year. Our own Deborah Humble excelled as Erda and Waltraute. Christian Franz sang both Siegmund and Siegfried – a feat which was made easier by the fact that this was a more drawn-out Ring than many. He appeared to be straining at first, and some of us were very concerned as to how he would make it to the end, particularly in the opera Siegfried. However, to give him his due, he preformed creditably to the end.

The real talking point was the production, by Claus Guth. It had some strange features. For example, Scene 1 of *Das Rheingold* took place on a very large bed, with the three Rhinedaughters as barely pubescent nymphets having pillow fights with each other. Alberich turned up as a gardener, watering the pot plants. That was the only water you saw in the whole scene. As Katie French astutely observed, this was a metaphor for the bed of the Rhine! Some aspects of the production had many members of the audience scratching their heads with perplexity. But generally, by the end of *Götterdämmerung*, it had all come together, and there was genuinely ecstatic applause for all aspects of the experience. Most of us were truly sad that it was all over.

Wagner 2013 Bicentenary **Donation** Appeal

2013 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Richard Wagner and will be a significant international musical occasion. The Wagner Society hopes to pledge major support for the 2013 Wagner Bicentenary Celebrations. To achieve this, we have set up a 'Wagner 2013 Fund' and we need your support to help make this possible.

Making a donation to the 'Wagner 2013 Fund' will ensure the Society's contributions to the celebrations will be world class. We are considering a number of possible exciting projects. One of them involves supporting a major international artist participating in Opera Australia's Ring performances in November and December 2013. We will also continue to promote the life and works of Richard Wagner through performances and events in Sydney.

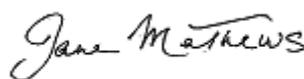
Donations are fully tax-deductible and can be made by cheque or money order by direct debit; details of the Society's bank account and postal address are given below.

BANK DETAILS

Westpac Banking Corporation,
Paddington NSW Branch
Account Name: The Wagner Society
BSB: 032040
Account Number: 911323

Our postal address is:
GPO Box 4574
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Thank you for considering this request for support - any donation to the Wagner Society's 'Wagner 2013 Fund' will make a difference.



The Hon Jane Mathews AO
President
Wagner Society in New South Wales

THE DONATION FORM IS PRINTED ON THE INSIDE BACK COVER OF THE NEWSLETTER

or can be downloaded at the Society's Website:

www.wagner.org.au/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&Itemid=68

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. The following donations have been received since February 2011: Carl Andrew, F. John Augustus and Kim Ryrie, Philip Bacon, Carole Bailey, Norma Barne, Glen Barnwell, Marlene and Paul Baumgartner, Margareta Baxter, Bill Brooks and Alasdair Beck, Sandra Beesley, Barbara and Ian Brady, Richard Burek, John Casey, Maurice Cashmere, Ann Casimir, Colleen and Michael Chesterman, T Clarke Pty Limited, Rae and Russ Cottle, Barbara and Nicholas Dorsch, Brian Ducker, Heinz Ebert, Steve Fargo, William Felbel and Peter Jenkins, Igor Ferdman, Jennifer Ferns, David and Sabina Full, Ingrid Garofali, Paola Garofali, Nance Grant M.B.E., Hugh Hallard, Wendy and Andrew Hamlin, Alan Hauserman and Janet Nash, Margaret and Clare Hennessy, Patricia and Roy Hodson, Douglas Jamieson, Brett Johnson, Anthony Jones and Julian Liga, Naomi Kaldor, Andrew Kaldor, Despina Kallinikos, Anna-Lisa Klettenberg, Annie and Terry Marshall, Dennis Mather and John Studdert, Jane Mathews, Pam and Ian McGaw, Neville Mercer, Patricia Moore, Monica and Aliro Olave, Neville Pollard, Kenneth Reed, Heather and Peter Roland, Ivan Shearer, Douglas Turkey, Terence Watson, Flora and John Weickhardt, Ann Weeden, Ross Whitelaw, Anna Ziegler

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 programs which devour emails from nice people like us, and each different email program (such as Outlook) has its own way of avoiding this. Some programs 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.



In Memoriam: **Donald** Shanks AO OBE (1940 - 2011)

"If I had stayed overseas, I would have been more typecast.
They seemed to see me more as a Wagner singer there."

Donald Shanks died from a heart attack on Friday, 8 April 2011. Shanks was born in Brisbane in 1940, where he began singing in church choirs. In 1964, at the relatively young age of 23, he joined the Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera Company (later Opera Australia). He won the 1964 Metropolitan Opera Awards (later Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship) and in 1974 the German scholarship to study with Professor Kaise Bremmer as well as the Bayreuth Opera Award. His first and, by choice, his last performances were in *The Mikado*. Shanks retired from Opera Australia in 2004.

Shanks performed major comic roles, a wide selection of the bel canto repertoire, and major dramatic roles: Lucia di Lammermoor, *Il trovatore*, *I puritani*, Hamlet and Norma with Dame Joan Sutherland, *La bohème* with Luciano Pavarotti, and was Banquo to Sherrill Milnes's *Macbeth*. On the occasion of his retirement he spoke "fondly of Sutherland. 'With some roles, ones without the same sort of nitty gritty as the Wagner ones, she'd say, "Oh, here we go with the chooky music".' He is wistful when recalling Simone Young: "I don't know the ins and outs of why she left, but she was very special."

"Shanks, armed with an unusually mature voice, was thrown into the deep end, singing Wagner at 27" and was soon a seasoned Wagnerian with roles in *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *Tristan und Isolde*. His Wagner roles included Wotan in the 1979 *Das Rheingold* in concert in the Sydney Opera House, with Mark Elder conducting. It was recorded by the ABC on 20 March 1979 and rebroadcast on 11 June 2006.

In 1988, the Australian Opera's bicentennial production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* included Donald Shanks (Pogner), along with Donald McIntyre (Hans Sachs), Paul Frey (Walther von Stolzing), Helena Döse (Eva), John Pringle (Beckmesser), Christopher Doig (David), Rosemary Gunn, (Magdalene), with Charles Mackerras conducting. In the 1989 staging of *Die Walküre* in Melbourne, Shanks sang Hunding with Marilyn Zschau as Brünnhilde, and Stuart Challendar conducted. In the Australian Opera's production of *Tristan und Isolde*, the Isolde was Marilyn Richardson, the Tristan Horst Hoffmann and the King Marke was Donald Shanks, with the conductor Carlo Felice Cillario. The production was recorded by the ABC on 12 February 1993 and rebroadcast on ABC FM on Sunday 27 August 2006.

"In 2004 I retired from the Opera Stage. I could never have imagined back in 1964 when I auditioned for the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company, as Opera Australia was then called, that I would enjoy forty years of full time work here in my own country. I have had the privilege of seeing the company grow, of seeing it go through its highs and lows as it has maintained for the most part an extremely high standard of performance."

He also performed regularly with Opera Queensland and the Victoria State Opera, as well opera companies overseas including the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, the Paris Opera (1976–77) (including the two companies' Ring Cycles, but your Editor has not been able to find any details) and the Canadian Opera (1983–86).

Not surprisingly these days, there are a few clips of Shanks on YouTube – including a section from *Meistersinger* that you can view at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVngnpjUDvE>. There are two comments about Shanks that accompany the clip that say perhaps even more about Shanks than the official obituaries!

"No one has ever said that Donald was especially known throughout his career for his great literacy or diplomacy when it came to offending one's sensibilities, if he felt an injustice had or was being committed. He never hesitated to resort to an idiomatic expression in vernacular, if required, thus on this occasion, by all accounts! Donald's quick wit one-liners and sense of humour and this special ability to appeal to the people made him what he was. Great story, thanks for your post" robmanrico.

"Donald Smith once was booked to sing for the Brisbane Waterside Workers who would not stop yelling ... so the orchestra could not start. Donald Smith calmly walked to the front of the stage and yelled back, "Shut-up you c...., this is Ava-f...-Maria". The wharfies exploded into a unified deafening cheer and then the band struck-up. Donald Smith was one of the best ever ... but he was also the peoples' champion" ozzsihing.

Donald Shanks was made an Officer (OBE) of the Order of the British Empire in the 1977 New Years Day Honours, and an Officer (AO) of the Order of Australia in the 1987 Australia Day Honours.

Opera Australia dedicated the opening night performance of *La bohème* in its Melbourne season on 12 April 2011 to the memory of Donald Shanks.

The following websites contain full obituaries for Donald Shanks, from which the above comments have been drawn:

www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/big-bass-voice-was-a-father-figure-for-opera/story-e6frg8n6-1226037437877

www.limelightmagazine.com.au/Article/254105,legendary-australian-opera-singer-donald-shanks-dies-of-heart-attack.aspx

www.theartscentre.com.au/Events/Imported/EventsChildDataDownloads/47/Document/Famous%20quotes.pdf

www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/10/28/1098667903841.html



Melbourne **Ring 2013** - Who's Who **and Doing** What - **A Continuing Series**

Richard Mills - Conductor for the Melbourne Ring Cycle 2013

In his 26 March 2011 article for The Australian, "In for the long haul", Matthew Westwood, records a long interview with the conductor of Opera Australia's Ring Cycle scheduled for Melbourne in 2013. Westwood notes that, though Mills has not conducted much Wagner, he is making up by listening to CDs of all the major exponents of Ring conducting, including Solti, Furtwangler, Knappertsbusch and Boulez.

In addition, Westwood points out that Mills has conducted some "big chunks" of Die Walküre, and the 2005 concert performance of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde in Brisbane with Lisa Gasteen and John Treleaven. Your Editor, along with a contingent of other Sydney Wagnerians, was very impressed by the performance of the Australian Youth Orchestra, as well as the singers and the conductor, given his newness to conducting Wagner. [The Editor's review was in the No. 101, September 2005 edition of the Newsletter.] As noted in the previous Newsletter (No. 120), Mills had to withdraw from the West Australian Opera Company's restaging of Neil Armfield's Tristan und Isolde because of illness.

Westwood comments: "So the Brisbane Tristan became his retrospective audition for The Ring." "Mills is aware that eyebrows were raised when the job was given to him..." "I think Lyndon (Terracini, OA's artistic director) had the faith in me to do it on the basis of the Tristan that I did," he says. "That was my audition, unbeknown to me at the time, unbeknown to any of us." On the strength of that performance, perhaps Opera Australia should also consider employing those wonderfully talented, enthusiastic and committed young orchestral players for their Ring Cycle: the orchestra assembled for both of the Ring Cycles in Adelaide have also set a very high bar for the Melbourne Ring Cycle orchestra to surpass. Westwood reveals that Mills had a common Wagnerian experience when he was young: he "recalls seeing a production of Tannhäuser in Brisbane.... He was at the London Coliseum for the legendary Ring conducted by Reginald Goodall, with Rita Hunter as Brünnhilde, in the early 1970s." It would appear then that Mills is not at all a Wagnerian "virgin"!

According to Westwood, "Mills has prioritised his tasks in three main groups: fidelity to Wagner's German text; the musical and dramatic structure; and understanding the importance of breath in vocal writing. Mills has indeed been engrossed in The Ring, down to the note and syllable. At the moment he is working slowly through the first instalment, Das Rheingold, singing to himself, making decisions about textual inconsistencies in different versions of the libretto. For example: Is the word nie (never) or nur (only)?"

In the article, Mills explained his very interesting approach to Wagnerian performance: "...the act of breathing is elemental in Wagner: not only in the vocal line but in the orchestra, which should sound as if it is singing."

Such sensitivity to a fundamental aspect of performance bodes well for the Cycle's success. Wagner himself was very sensitive to the need for flexible tempi that reflected, among other things, the relation of the rate of breathing (and probably heart beat) to the emotional content of the particular moment of music being performed. [Editor]

You can read the whole of this informative article on The Australian's website:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/in-for-the-long-haul/story-e6frg8n6-1226025846825>

Lyndon **Terracini** - Artistic Director **Opera Australia**

In an illuminating and provocative opinion piece for The Sydney Morning Herald (22 August 2010), "The arts will guide us through the 21st century with style and flair," Terracini, among other topics, wrote of the importance of new technology in our cultural future: "the use of new technology will play a vital role in the development of new art and in illuminating heritage art in specific cases." This sounds a little like a manifesto for the forthcoming Melbourne Ring.

However, Terracini takes an even broader view of the relationship between traditional and avant garde techniques and technologies:

New technology has always been part of the development of the operatic form and that will continue to be the case, but it would be foolish and extremely naive to believe that a new technological invention will supersede the extraordinary art that for thousands of years has been the very foundation of civilisation. We will continue to use new technology, as we have always done, to assist us to communicate great art to our audiences.

Terracini also asserts a belief with which many of us would agree and which keeps us going to Wagner performances time and again because his work transcends technological tricks, but can also be enhanced by judicious technological innovations:

Art that communicates and touches audiences over centuries is precious beyond any new invention, and we must cherish it and protect it with tremendous resolve. Great art is not a fashion – it is fundamental to our very being and it is our responsibility to protect and preserve it for future generations.

You can still read Terracini's inspirational views on the Herald's website at:

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/the-arts-will-guide-us-through-the-21st-century-with-style-and-flair-20100821-139nk.html>. [Editor]



Stuart Skelton - Melbourne's Siegmund

Skelton's star was already rising rapidly when he sang Siegmund in the 2004 Neidhardt Ring in Adelaide. His thunderous heldentenor voice delivering what seemed unending Valse! Valse! at the end of Act 1 of Die Walküre still rings in your Editor's memory. Since then, Skelton's star has firmly lodged in the higher spheres of the operatic world. His repertoire is wide and growing each year from Wagner roles: Der fliegende Holländer – Erik, Lohengrin – Lohengrin, Parsifal – Parsifal, Rienzi – Rienzi, and Die Walküre – Siegmund, to Verdi's Requiem and Mahler's Das : Lied von der Erde (two recordings Michael Tilson-Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under Vladimir Ashkenazy); from mainstream work, such as Beethoven's Fidelio – Florestan, to more adventurous works such as Berg's Lulu – Alwa and Dallapiccola's Il Prigioniero - Jailer/Inquisitor, and Mitch in Previn's A Streetcar Named Desire. He has sung in opera houses all over the world from the Sydney Opera House to Hamburg, Zurich to the English National Opera, from Vienna to the Berlin Staatsoper and the Deutscheoper, to the Metropolitan, San Francisco to Munich.

His reviews have been almost universally laudatory from his debut as Canio in Leoncavallo's Pagliacci with the West Australian Opera.

Neville Cohn, in The West Australian, 9 August 2010, wrote glowingly: "Stuart Skelton is inspired as Canio, the clown who suspects Nedda of infidelity. Even at the height of jealousy-fuelled, almost palpable rage and despair, he produced a stream of finely phrased, mellow vocal tone." That mellow vocal tone has continued to mature and grow richer.

In his February 2011 review for the New York Times of the ENO's Parsifal (the Lehnhoff production, first produced at the ENO in 1999), "A Wagnerian Quest in Proper English", Anthony Tommasini, wrote: "As Parsifal, the clueless young man who chances upon the knights and comes to understand that he is the innocent fool prophesied as their savior, Mr. Skelton sang with ample sound, burnished colorings and comprehensible diction (the latter point being one of the casts' strong points, with the music-drama sung, as usual, in English in the ENO).

In his review, "The Tenor From Down Under Heads for Kareol: Stuart Skelton - the Boris in ENO's Katya Kabanova," Jim Pritchard summarised Skelton's career to date: "At the Easter Wagner Festival in Berlin in 2002 a young Heldentenor caught my attention singing the diverse roles of Erik and Lohengrin. His name was Stuart Skelton and in the intervening years this Australian born singer has emerged as one of the leading exponents of some of opera's most challenging roles. I saw him recently in Die Walküre in the developing Hamburg Opera Ring cycle and said in my review that he was a 'lyrical, effortless Siegmund'. In May 2009 he gave a remarkable interpretation of Peter

Grimes for English National Opera and it caused Edward Seckerson (The Independent) to write 'If ever a singing actor combined the elemental force of a Jon Vickers with the crazed inwardness of Pears, it is he.'"

Pritchard's interview with Skelton is well worth reading as it covers a wide range of topics and offers many insights into Skelton's love of opera, his future plans and the kinds of Wagnerian roles to which he believes his voice can do justice:

"I can't see myself singing both Siegfrieds though the more I think about it, Tristan becomes an inevitability [sic] but I am not going to rush to explore that. Mind you I do know the role and have on occasions taken the score out and had a bit of a sing through it - though just remembering Act III is a gargantuan task and that would be my first job.

For me the Siegfrieds require a completely different quality of voice and it is something I just don't have. The younger Siegfried doesn't necessarily fit with the bronzy rounded James King type of voice production. I would have loved to have heard Melchior sing the role in the theatre because he was the Siegfrieds par excellence but then again Melchior's voice, though baritone, hadn't this rounded sound but a genuine edge to it and the steel that a Siegfried has to have. Another reason to keep trying to avoid this role is that once you've done it people tend not to ask you for anything else.

Not surprisingly, you can see a number of video clips of Skelton singing on YouTube. For instance his account of 'Now the Great Bear ...' **from** Peter Grimes for Opera Australia: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BI53D2hil>

You can also see a trailer for ENO's Parsifal at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egLt26eZUXA>.

The Opus Arte website also has an excerpt from the "full and original" version of Albéniz's much under-rated, Parsifal-influenced Merlin in which Skelton plays King Arthur:

<http://www.opusarte.com/en/video/opera/albeniz-merlin-831d.html>.

Jim Pritchard's illuminating interview can be read on the Music Web at:

http://www.musicweb-international.com/SandH/2010/Jan-Jun10/skelton_interview.htm

Neville Cohn's full review is still available on the West Australian newspaper's website:

<http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/entertainment/a/-/arts/7730849/opera-review-cavalleria-rusticana-pagliacci>. [Editor]



Biographies of Cosima Wagner: An Outline by Colin Baskerville

Hilmes, Oliver: *Cosima Wagner The Lady of Bayreuth*; Translated by Stewart Spencer; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010, AUD \$69.95.

Cosima Wagner was of considerable interest to the English speaking world at the time of her death in April, 1930. The astute New York publisher Alfred A. Knopf had commissioned the budding Wagner writer, Ernest Newman, to write an introduction and Catherine Alison Phillips to translate a two volume biography. This had been published in Munich in 1929 by Drei Masken Verlag AG. The author's name was hard to find in the English language edition but was Du Moulin-Eckart, Richard Maria Ferdinand, Graf (1864-1938). He was both a Count and History Professor.

Du-Moulin-Eckart's biography is surprisingly personal, chatty and packed with fascinating and informative anecdotes about people now of interest. The author had access to unpublished correspondence from and to Cosima, but not all. This is a limitation when relying on primary source documents. The key question is: what is missing? He also shared her prejudices about aspects of her childhood upbringing from her distant father, Franz Liszt. The two volume work ends in "mid career," as it were, whereas the latest biography encompasses her entire life. The author, Du Moulin-Eckart, was under a "sacred obligation," which required respecting the Bayreuth family censorship of all documents. Otherwise he risked ostracism as well as a sense of disloyalty.¹

The Australian author of *The Young Cosima* bought a copy, which is now held in the National Library Australia's Henry Handel Richardson Collection. Her novel, first published in 1939, treats Cosima as a Powerful Woman.

Alice Hunt Sokoloff, a distinguished U.S. biographer, published *Cosima Wagner: Extraordinary Daughter of Franz Liszt* (U.S title) in N.Y. 1969. The UK title was simply *Cosima Wagner: a Biography* and published in London in 1970. She studied the piano under Alexander Siloti, who in turn was a student of Franz Liszt. One can speculate that Siloti was a primary source and inspiration for her biography. This biography was held in such high regard that it was translated and published in Germany.

George Richard Marek published *Cosima Wagner* in N.Y. and London in 1981 and 1983. Geoffrey Skelton's 1982 book *Richard and Cosima Wagner: Biography of a Marriage* is restricted to their marriage. Françoise Giroud published *Cosima la sublime* in French in Paris in 1996. Madame Giroud was an important figure in French literary circles, co-founding "L'Express," and a member of parliament.

The latest biography, Oliver Hilmes's, published in Germany in 2007, is impeccably researched. He was given access to the legendary National Archives of the Richard Wagner Foundation in Bayreuth. There are thirty eight pages of Notes and Bibliography. The biographer's challenge lies in the selection of key items from hard-copy material. The emphasis on assessing primary source material has many limitations. Cosima was uncomfortable about

publications—especially of correspondence—in which she was mentioned; she besieged publishers to stop publication. She had a reputation for purging documents. In the case of Nietzsche, very few documents have surfaced in any archives. In the light of his infatuation, it is apparent that Cosima was one of the key women in Nietzsche's life. Hilmes's biography gives a brief summary of Nietzsche's complex relations with Richard, but misses the intensity of Nietzsche's feelings for Cosima. A contemporary reader has to take things on trust: for example, that Oliver Hilmes has taken into account the fact that revealing items may be missing from the archives, withheld for censorship reasons or simply not archived correctly. There is an additional issue relating to material, such as conversations, which may not be formally documented in hard-copy or other formats. Du Moulin-Eckart's biography is packed with such conversations.

Contemporary readers expect a biography to be put in context. In Cosima's case, this means the rise of the German nation. Bismarck, who was the well-known imperial chancellor, loathed Wagner's music—indeed Bismarck was renowned for his "lack of culture," in Hilmes's words. Consequently, when Cosima tried to enlist the Kaiser, Wilhelm 11, as the Festival's royal patron, Bismarck emphatically advised the Kaiser against it. Luitpold of Bavaria, the prince regent, accepted the patronage. The fact that the Festival attracted such powerful enemies as Bismarck is an indication of the Festival's rising importance in German cultural and political life.

The Wagner household, as well as the Bayreuth clique, sympathetically absorbed "flawed" ideas about the German Identity and Race from Houston Stewart Chamberlain who married Eva, Cosima's daughter, on 26 December 1908. Chamberlain also praised Du Moulin-Eckart's biography of Hans von Bülow (Cosima's first husband and father of some of her children) as a "tour de force".²

Yale University Press has chosen to allocate sixteen pages for black and white photographs. The back photo has been reproduced many times—Cosima, seated, is holding hands with her beloved Wagner. It's disappointing that this is the only visual material in a very wordy, substantial book.

Hilmes' biography consists of three hundred and sixty pages packed with detail, but it is a heavy read. Other reviewers beg to differ. Maybe this biography needs to be read side by side with Cosima's own diaries. When the reader asks such questions as "what was Cosima's favourite Wagner opera/character etc?" there is no clarification. Maybe it doesn't matter: she kept the Bayreuth Festival thriving, especially during periods of economic downturn. Today she would be considered a superb networker and fund-raiser.

It is interesting to question the musical literacy and response of the audiences who were hearing Wagner's operas for the first time. Hilmes's biography suggests that King Ludwig himself and the Wilhelm II had major limitations in their appreciation of the music.³ By comparison, today's audiences are well-informed about the operas, either by seeing them live, or on DVD/ TV etc, or by listening to CDs/ radio broadcasts.



The biography is useful in illuminating the issue of Copyright. In Cosima's time the Copyright within Germany was legislated by a German parliament. Cosima was concerned with two major copyright issues: the first was that copyright expired thirty years after the date of the artist's death—she hoped for fifty years; and the second, she wanted Bayreuth to keep a monopoly on performance of Parsifal. She was unable to prevent a New York performance, as German Copyright law did not apply in the U.S. Closer to home, the Munich Opera scheduled other Wagner operas in accordance with the thirty year ruling. At the time, Cosima saw this as a threat to the financial viability of the Bayreuth Festival. Copyright issues still bedevil the artistic world today.

It's unlikely that there will be another biography of Cosima Wagner published in English. Readers are encouraged to engage with Oliver Hilmes's biography, but cautioned to exercise critical judgment. There are many political threads that will remain a mystery to the English language world—for example, Du Moulin-Eckart's son, Karl Leon, was a conspirator and participant in the November 1923 Hitler

putsch in Munich. This raises a big question mark: was the elderly Cosima following political events? To what extent was the Bayreuth clique involved?

It's ironic that this biography, which drowns the reader in "facts," glosses over or omits such key items. However, by its very nature, a written biography must be a selection of items. By way of comparison, great conductors at Bayreuth performed Wagner's operas and brought out different aspects of his music.

In 2011, the director Tony Palmer is remastering and re-releasing his epic Wagner on DVD. Vanessa Redgrave stars as Cosima with Richard Burton as Wagner. Vanessa brings Cosima "to visual life" in a stunning performance.

(Endnotes)

1 Grove Music Online, Oxford University Press, Oxford Journals, Humanities, Music and Letters, Volume X11 Issue 1, p87.

2 Chamberlain, Houston Stewart, Briefe 1882-1924, Volume 11, letter 113, 10/2.21, Bayreuth.

3 Hilmes, Oliver, Cosima Wagner The Lady of Bayreuth, Yale University Press, 2010, p193.

Wagner As A Revolutionary: Dora B. Montefiore 1902

Websurfing can be a great waste of time, but every now and then one stumbles on gems of information that shine light in many directions on seemingly unrelated topics. In the following case, it is Wagner's relationship to British and Australian feminist socialism and the life of an unknown (to me – and I presume to assume most of our readers), but historically significant figure. I was delighted to read about Mrs Montefiore's exciting and politically and socially committed life in Australia and many other countries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But there was an additional interest in her evident knowledge of and love for Wagner's ideas, if not for Wagner's artistic compositions. It

may be that there were not very many occasions in Britain, and certainly not in Australia of that period, to hear and see performances of Wagner's operas.

The following is the second part of a two part report on Ms Montefiore composed first of some of her biography to give some context to the following 1902 article by Montefiore on the link between Wagner's radical socialistic ideas of the 1840-50s and her contemporary world . The first part was printed in the last newsletter No 120. I hope that it is of interest to you – send me your comments – Editor.

Dora B Montefiore Biography by Sean Matgamna: Dora B Montefiore: A Half-Forgotten Socialist Feminist

Dora Montefiore was jailed in 1906 for participating in a suffrage demonstration in the Lobby of the House of Commons. In the same year, taking up the old revolutionary democratic rallying cry, "no taxation without representation," Montefiore protested against the denial of the Parliamentary vote to women by refusing to pay taxes. She barricaded herself in her house at Hammersmith, and for a number of weeks, held off the bailiffs sent to seize her furniture, in lieu of taxes.

Montefiore – as a member of the anti-war BSP executive – had to go into hiding in 1918 to escape the police, who persecuted and jailed anti-war socialists under the notorious "Defence of the Realm Act." (We will see what war time jailing did to the most prominent of its anti-war socialist victims – John Maclean.)

This was the heroic age of British Communism, if ever there was one, the period before and immediately after the Russian Revolution. After that, from the mid '20s onwards, everything was poisoned by Stalinism.

It was the period of John Maclean, Britain's Karl Liebknecht, who stood out like a mythic hero against the First World War and went to jail for it. He came out psychologically mutilated and ruined.

Dora Montefiore was there with the immense crowd of Clydeside workers who greeted Maclean on his release from jail in 1918. She travelled with him to his home in the carriage from which the workers unhitched the horses, to pull it themselves through the streets, John Maclean standing up on the seat waving a large red flag. She describes what prison had done to poor John Maclean.

"His thoughts are now disconnected, his speech was irresponsible, his mind, from solitary confinement, was absolutely self centred. In a word, prison life had done its work on a delicately balanced psychology, and our unfortunate comrade was now a mental wreck... When I stayed at his home after his second term of imprisonment, witnessed the agony of his wife and the sorrow of his relatives. [I] realised, more than ever I had done before,



the refined and machine-made tortures of a prison system which takes the souls of men and of women and leaves them wrung out rags of humanity.”

Montefiore was a delegate to various international Socialist conferences. She was at the Basle Congress of 1912 representing the BSP. There, the international socialist movement passed the famous Basle ‘Anti-war Manifesto’, which became a dead letter immediately the war broke out in 1914. She was not impressed by Basle – a scheduled three-day event, cut down to one day of rubber-stamping and resolution-passing, with almost no discussion. She saw that it did not commit its participants to a serious struggle against war (she was one of those who favoured an attempt to call an international General Strike to stop war).

Back in Britain, she expressed her opinion about it in George Lansbury’s Daily Herald, and left the BSP when the British nationalist leadership of that organisation pointedly disagreed. She rejoined it in 1916, after the patriotic minority – led by HM Hyndman, the founder of the British Marxist movement – had left the BSP. The BSP would be by far the largest component of the Communist Party founded in 1920-21.

In 1923 she was 72 years old and suffering from chronic bronchial asthma. Still, the Australian Government did not dare let her, an Australian citizen by marriage, return to Australia to visit her son’s grave – gassed in the World War, he died soon afterwards – and her grandchildren, until she promised not to engage in political agitation or communist propaganda while there! Once she was in Australia, she ignored the agreement she had been forced to sign.

Montefiore represented the Australian Communist Party in Moscow at the Fifth World Congress of the Communist International in 1924. She died at the age of 82, in Hastings, England, in December 1933.

Dora Montefiore belonged, perhaps, to that type of old-style socialist leaders whom the American Trotskyist J.P. Cannon would retrospectively denounce as well-off, bourgeois dilettantes. She was always able to take the doctor’s advice to restore her health with a long sea-voyage to South Africa, or wherever. Yet she was solidly committed and, once committed, stayed with the working class movement, and, at each turning point, with its best elements, all the way through into old age. And she was, again and again, in the thick of the fight, despite inconvenience, ill-health, or danger. We need more such dilettantes!

I sought out her autobiography (From a Victorian to a Modern, 1927) because I knew she had played an important part in one such fight – the 1913-14 Labour War in Dublin.

It was Dora Montefiore who conceived the idea of evacuating the starving children of working class Dublin to more prosperous homes in Britain for the duration of the Dublin fight, and Montefiore – aged 62 – who went to Dublin to try to get them out.

This is the website - www.marxists.org/archive/montefiore/biography.htm - if you want to follow up related links – [EDITOR]

Wagner as a Revolutionary: Part 2

Wagner was forced to fly from Saxony, and took refuge in Weimar. For many years after this, financial difficulties hindered his artistic work, and he shared the fate of Balzac, Beethoven, and many other luminaries, who, under a capitalist regime, have to write, not what their soul craves to express, but what will earn for them daily bread. Finally, as we know, after long and weary struggles for recognition and support from the musical public, Richard Wagner found artistic understanding and intellectual sympathy in the young King of Bavaria, who had just succeeded to that throne, and who, ever since the age of fifteen, when he first heard an opera by the Master, had been an ardent Wagnerite. Henceforth real art expression was no longer to be hampered by carping material considerations, and pursuing creditors; and the world’s joy was to be increased by the production of the life-work of a man of genius.

But Wagner himself had no illusions about the social and economic conditions which left the production of his work to the tender mercies of chance, and the romantic admiration of a royal youth. He knew that, like feudalism, the royal and ecclesiastic art patron were things of the past, and that the future of Art and Literature must depend on the verdict of a people as economically independent as the Prince and the Pope. Modern socialism, the socialism preached by Marx and his disciples, was just then much in the air, and was then, as now, often misrepresented and misinterpreted. One of these misinterpretations seems at first to have influenced Wagner in his conception of socialism, for he wrote in one of his essays: “The desire

of the working man to force the rich to work like him by the sweat of his brow to gain his daily bread might make of Art an impossibility for all time.” Later do he wrote, fully acknowledging his misconception of socialistic aims, and adding: “What I feared meant equally allotted toil, I found, to wit, that, when equally divided among all, actual labour, with its crippling burthen and fatigue, would be downright done away with, leaving nothing in its stead but an occupation which necessarily must assume an artistic character of itself.”

In his article, “Art and. Revolution,” Wagner wrote: “Only the great revolution of mankind, whose beginnings erstwhile shattered Grecian tragedy, can win for us this Art work. For only this revolution can bring forth from its hidden depths, in the new beauty of a nobler Universalism, that which it once tore from the conservative spirit of a true and beautiful, but narrow-meted, culture; and tearing it engulfed.” He further on asks a question, which we are still asking ourselves, but are answering it perhaps with less faith and enthusiasm than they did fifty years ago. “Whence,” he wrote, “shall we get the force for this revolution in our present state of utmost weakness? Whence the manly strength against the crushing pressure of a civilisation which disowns all mankind, against the arrogance of a culture which employs the human mind as naught but steam power for its machinery? Whence the light to illumine the gruesome human heresy that this civilisation and this culture are of more value in themselves than the true living man? That



man has worth and value only as a tool of these despotic, abstract powers, and not by virtue of his manhood!" Shall we obtain the light or the strength, we may well ask now, from meaningless and discouraging street shows, inspired, it would seem, by the same motives that led the governing bodies in times of Roman imperial decadence to toss as bribes to a demoralised populace "bread and circuses"? Shall we obtain them from wars of aggression, immoral in their inception, inept in their execution, and inglorious and futile in their issue? Shall we obtain them whilst the cancers of degraded poverty, of carefully-enforced ignorance, of physical conditions inferior to those of the beasts of burden fortunate enough to be owned by the upper middle classes and the aristocracy of this "great Empire"; while these malign cancers are eating out the vital forces of Great Britain's population? Is it not a fact that while a House of Commons elected on the principle of how not to represent the people, is engaged in meaningless discussions on a Bill intended to curtail the small amount of education already granted to that same people, thousands of our children still escape the meshes even of our primary education net, and England and Wales are in the proud, position of having the standard of education of their people lower than that of the Colonies, or than that of any civilised nation of the world?

Education as a means, and education as an end, should be one of the mainstays of socialist propaganda, and Wagner has a fine passage, which might serve us as text in such propaganda: "Whatsoever we deem the goal of life, to that we train ourselves and children. The Goth was bred to battle, and to chase; the genuine Christian to abstinence and humility; while the liegeman of the modern state is bred to seek industrial gain, be it even in the exercise of Art and Science. But when life's maintenance is no longer the exclusive aim of life, and the freeman of the future, inspired by a new and deed-begetting faith, or better knowledge, finds the means of life assured by payment of a natural and reasonable energy; in short, when Industry is no longer our mistress but our handmaid; then shall we set the goal of life in joy of life, and strive to rear our children to be fit and worthy partners in this joy!"

As regards the influence of Art on the spirituality of the people—a spirituality worth cultivating as a corrective to crass middle-class materialism—Mr. William Archer called attention lately, in the columns of the "Morning Leader," to an interesting article on "The Play and the Gallery," by Miss McCracken, in an American monthly; and he quotes Mr. Bernard Shaw in support of Miss McCracken's conclusion that the Stage, and Art generally, under right conditions, might mean much more to the people morally and spiritually than they do under conditions which are bound by the present nature of things to spell "profits." Mr. Shaw wrote in his preface to "Mrs. Warren's Profession": "I am convinced that Fine Art is the subtlest, the most educative, the most effective means of moral propagandism in the world, excepting only the example of personal conduct." And Miss McCracken tells a touching story of a woman, whose life had been of the hardest, living as she did in one of the least model of the tenements, but who warmed to moral enthusiasm over a magazine portrait of Ellen Terry as Portia. "Yes," said the woman, "once I saw her. I saw the 'Merchant of Venice,' and she was in it; she was Portia. It's a long time since, I saw her, but I've

never forgot the things she said 'bout havin' mercy, and how she looked when she said 'em. People ain't always had mercy for me, and when I've wanted to pay 'em back for it, or to be mean to anybody, I jes' remember her, and what she said 'bout havin' mercy, and I don't want to be mean cos of her," she concluded, almost shyly.

Miss McCracken evidently possesses the conscious abstract knowledge of the essence of the world of which Wagner, the artist and poet, had the intuition when he wrote of what socialism might do for Art and for the spiritual life of the people: "It is for Art, therefore, to teach this social impulse its noblest meaning, and guide it towards its true direction. Only on the shoulders of this great social movement can true Art lift itself from its present state of civilised barbarism, and take its post of honour. Each has a common goal, and the twain can only reach it when they recognise it jointly." Then, in a burst of poetic metaphor, in which lovers of Wagner's music will recognise the leit-motiv of some of his best work, he adds: "This goal is the strong, fair Man, to whom Revolution shall give his strength, and Art his Beauty!"

The full article is on the Marxist website: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/montefiore/1902/07/wagner.htm>. Dora Montefiore Archive: The Social Democrat; Source: The Social Democrat, Vol. VI No. 7 July 1902, pp. 202-205; Transcription: Ted Crawford. HTML Markup: Brian Reid. Public Domain: Marxists Internet Archive (2007). [EDITOR]

Vale Adelaide/Neidhart Ring Cycle

On 19 March 2011, the State Opera of South Australia (SOSA) held an auction to dispose of much of the stage machinery, props and costumes from its historic and critically-acclaimed Ring Cycle of 2004. Your Editor, like many other Australian Wagnerians, regrets that SOSA was not able to persuade the Federal Government, particularly then arts minister, Peter Garrett, to support financially a revival of The Ring Cycle; it would no doubt have been as successful and economically beneficial for South Australia as the premiere season.

As Matthew Westwood for The Australian wrote, under the sad but appropriate title Adelaide's Ring cycle limps off to Valhalla: "Storage costs [amounting to \$400,000], lack of funds and interstate rivalry mean there is no hope of a remount of the \$15 million epic, whose hi-tech stage design included a water wall and a ring of fire." "Designer chairs that furnished the mythical Valhalla - made for \$2500 each - have been discounted to \$500. Sixteen transparent replicas of Michelangelo's David, meant to symbolise fallen heroes and made at a total cost of \$90,000, are being offered for \$1500. The funky Wunderbar nightclub set - which caused whoops of delight in the famous Ride of the Valkyries scene - may find a second home as a cabaret venue at the Brisbane Festival."

Australian Wagnerians wish Opera Australia and the Melbourne Ring Cycle einer glücklicheren Zukunft [EDITOR].



Brünnhilde's Trials Beyond Wagner's Dreams

Anthony Tommasini, on 23 April 2011 in another of his always thoughtful reviews for The New York Times reported on the next instalment in the Metropolitan Opera's Ring Cycle. He drew attention to **the wonders** and **pitfalls** of Robert Lepage's evolving production. His account gives us some idea of the challenges facing the performers in negotiating their way around, along, over and on top of the innovative set. Tommasini's first memorable moment recalled for your Editor the opening of Das Rheingold, in which the sinuous movement of the planks, together with the evocative lighting, brilliantly suggested the flowing of the Rhine River:

"During the opening storm scene, the 24 movable planks of the imposing set by Carl Fillion that dominates the production (which the cast and crew call the machine) rose upright (with, as always, some audible creaking) to become a wall for video images of gusting, snow-flecked winds. Then the images and beams morphed into a forest of ominous gray trees through which you could see young Siegmund (the tenor Jonas Kaufmann), exhausted and injured, fleeing an avenging band of sword-wielding clansman as they searched for him with lanterns. It was an arresting realization of action depicted in the opera only in fitful orchestral music."

The second shows a highly experienced actor-singer recovering from a potentially dangerous misstep:

"As Ms. Voigt started to climb the planks that evoke the hillside, she lost her footing and slid to the floor.

Fortunately Mr. Lepage and the cast had correctly decided to play this scene for its humor. Brünnhilde, a warrior maiden who wants nothing to do with marital ties, has come to tease her father and alert him that his bossy wife, Fricka, is fast approaching. So Ms. Voigt rescued the moment by laughing at herself. She stayed put on the row of flat, fixed beams at the front of the stage and tossed off Brünnhilde's "Hojotoho" cries."

For those of us who have not yet seen the production, Tommasini is highly complimentary of James Levine's conducting – a welcome encouragement to those who find that The Machine of planks distracts from the Ring's wondrous music and the singers:

"What moved me about this 'Walküre' and made the five-hour-plus evening seem to whisk by was the exciting, wondrously natural playing that James Levine drew from the great Met orchestra and the involving singing of the impressive cast."

You can read Tommasini's full review at The New York Times' website www.nytimes.com/2011/04/25/arts/music/walkure-opera-review.html?_r=1.

Wagner Society Members Financial As At 31 December 2010

Ivan Shearer (954), Greg Watters (892), Brian Freestone and Charles Brady (840), Jeffrey Smart and Ermes de Zan (865), Jennifer Manton (718), Richard King (15), Horst Hoffmann (0.3), Michael Ewans (0.2), Robyn Richards (980), Jane Beeby (985), Sharon Zelei (937), Dennis Mather and John Studdert (696), Alfredo Zaniboni (946), Warwick Fyfe (755), John Casey (114), Damien Pignolet (969), Brett Johnson (9779), Marlene and Paul Baumgartner (393), Diana McBain (419), Paola Garofali (914), Ingrid Garofali (778), Jane Walters (655), Phillip Bennett (925), Heather and Peter Roland (855), Margaret and Bill Suthers (14), Lynette Longfoot (922), Pauline Holgerson (863), Ross Steele (838), Colin Baskerville (817), Monica and Aliro Olave (735), Ann Weeden (561), Theo Hudson (489), Kay Abrahams (966), Charles Manning (940), Renate and Herman Junker (866), Sandra Beesley (759), Patricia Moore (515), Jean Louis Stuurop (75), Julie Carroll (928), Allan Freeman (986), Patricia Benjamin and Roger Smalley (987), Siss Hartnett and Britt Hartnett (667), Marian and Rodney Purvis (874), Maurice Cashmere (877), Hugh Hallard (799), Michael Day and Philip Cornwell (606), Iphigenia Kallinikos (596.2), Despina Kallinikos (596.1), Sandy and Phil Dudgeon (788), Sylvia and Karl Koller (52), Kenneth Reed (41), Jennifer Ferns (34), Irvine Hunter (744), Mitzi Saunders (683), Pam and Ian McGaw (548), Naomi Kaldor (796), Elizabeth Moser (659), Anthony McDonald (420), Neville Pollard (856), Annie and Terry Marshall (403), Brian Ducker (487), Glen Barnwell (944), Alan Freeman (974), Keith Elvy and Peter Dunphy (988), William Gillespie OAM (9776), Camron Dyer (544), Carole and Jim Leigh (452), Agnes Brejzek and Esteban Insausti (433), Julie and Terry Clarke (496), Patricia and Roy Hodson (894), Alexander Cozzolino (930), Robert Graham (904), Angela Kayser (845), Neville Mercer (737), Ross Whitelaw (527), Garry Richards (366), Paulo Montoya (989), Max Grubb (858), Sam Sheffer (101), Jane Mathews (622), Gabriella Bremner-Moore and Michael Moore (819), Margaret Hennessy (19.2), Clare Hennessy (19.1), Paul Alger (255), Nance Grant (120), Humphrey Charles and Pauline Alexander (951), Jan Bowen (743), Bill Brooks and Alasdair Beck (765), Suzanne Williams (929), Terence Watson (657), Marie Leech (916), Colin Piper (222), Barbara and Nicholas Dorsch (154), Hannelore Laundl (962), Hugh Taylor (990), Ira Kowalski (536), Barbara and Ian Brady (380), Douglas Barry (942), Heinz Ebert (378), Amanda and George Rosenberg (943), Roger Cruickshank (669), Tim Green (933), Diana-Rose Orr (844), Richard Gastineau-Hills (68), Isolde Sültemeyer (978), June Donsworth (884), Leona Geeves (87), Joan Griffin (540), Shirley Robertson (416), Meredith Stokes and David Bremer (885), Deanne Whittleston and Anthony Gregg (839), Victoria Watson (992), Richard Burek (982), Andrew and Renata Kaldor (991), David Prichard (993), Kim Knudsen (994), Peter Murray and Andrew Laughlin (958), Peter Mason and Henry Burmester (997), John Kaldor (996), Heinz Kestermann (995), Barbara de Rome (207), John Sanders (972), Barbara and Peter Nicholson (704), Mary Meppem (912), Anne Jones (861), Susan Kelly (4), Alan Hauserman and Janet Nash (876).



Music, The Most Abstract of the Arts, Is Mathematics on the Move - David Malouf

In this opinion piece in the Sydney Morning Herald on 15 May 2010, David Malouf, in his typically poetic style, celebrated the value of music against the tendency to devalue it in the "background noise" that passes for music in so many parts of our lives. EDITOR

We live in an age when disembodied music is all around us as if it were a quality of the air itself: in lifts, in supermarkets, coffee shops, shoe shops, restaurants, in snatches as we wait at the end of a phone to be connected to ticket agencies or taxi companies.

So what is music for? What does it do to us or for us? What happens when we give ourselves over to actually listening to it?

Music vibrates in the air around us and involves us; it touches and moves us. Its rhythms take us back to primitive foot-tapping and finger-clicking or clapping; the regularity of its beat echoes our heartbeats and pleases us with its natural order; it invites the body, even when the body remains still, to sway and dance. All music takes us back to the body; all instruments discover what they do in what the body does.

When instruments play in consort they create a society, small or large, and engage in ideal conversations in which the various voices go their own way but also combine, echo one another or compete, but are always in harmony. Ideal conversations, model societies. All this before we have come to the real mystery: why it is, in our animal nature, that certain timbres and the shift from one sounded note to another creates emotion in us; soothes or stirs us, opens our hearts, moves us to tears.

There is a paradox here. Music is the most abstract of

the arts, it is mathematics on the move. It is also the art that brings us closest to the body. It is mathematics that breathes.

One of the opportunities art offers us is simply to stand still for a moment and look, or to sit still and listen: the pleasure of being fully present while the ego goes absent and our consciousness is filled with something other than ourselves. For some reason, losing ourselves in this way is a form of self-discovery. Going passive and absent energises us, gives us a renewed sense of presence.

One way of doing this when we listen to music is to sit back, close our eyes and give ourselves up in perfect isolation to a CD. The disembodied sounds that come to us then appear to have no human agency we need consider. What we get is pure, fixed, invariable, infinitely repeatable, a condition, we might think, to which music has always aspired and which technology has at last achieved.

Surely something so human, and which only humans can produce, exists at its fullest when we and the makers of it are in the same time and body-space, at a live performance.

Perfection cannot be guaranteed under such conditions - which is just what makes these occasions so excitingly suspenseful - but the promise is there, and is sometimes, often enough to be worth the hoping, miraculously made good.

You can read Malouf's article in full at the Sydney Morning Herald's website:

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/music-the-most-abstract-of-the-arts-is-mathematics-on-the-move-20100514-v4ck.html>

Summary of Financial Reports

The financial reports for the 2010 calendar year were received and approved at the 2011 Annual General Meeting, and have been posted on the website for registered members to view. Here is a summary of the key results from each report, with comments where necessary. When comparing 2010 results with 2009, some figures have been rounded to the nearest \$100.

Income and Expenditure Statement for the year ended 31 December 2010

Income from membership renewals fell 26% (\$7,900 in 2010 compared to \$10,700 in 2009) and to arrest this decline, members who haven't renewed in 2011 are being followed up by mail, email and telephone;

- Income from lectures and functions fell 20% (\$4,100 in 2010, \$5,100 in 2009) while the cost of lectures and functions fell 8% (\$6,000 in 2010, \$6,500 in 2009);
- Donations from members fell 56% (\$2,700 in 2010, \$6,100 in 2009), but the awards and scholarships we gave out increased by 74% (\$5,200 in 2010, \$3,000 in 2009). The difference was made up from funds in the Society's accounts;

- The cost of Newsletter printing and mailing rose 17% (\$4,800 in 2010, \$4,100 in 2009);
- In total, (excluding the money which passes through our bank accounts for the Bayreuth festival tickets), the Society's income fell 30% (\$15,600 in 2010, \$22,200 in 2009) and our costs including awards and scholarships rose 9% (\$17,300 in 2010, \$16,000 in 2009);
- Including the money for Bayreuth festival tickets, there was a deficit in 2010 of \$871, where in 2009 there had been a surplus of \$6,314; and
- As a result of this deficit, the retained profits at year end stood at \$8,022, compared with \$8,893 at the end of 2009, a reduction of 10%.

Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2010

- The total current assets (which are our cash in bank) fell 12% (\$8,100 in 2010, \$9,300 in 2009);
- The total current liabilities (prepaid membership subscriptions) were not significant (\$100 in 2010, \$400 in 2009); and

The total equity at year end stood at \$8,022, compared with \$8,893 at the end of 2009, a reduction of 10%.



Wim Wenders “Quits” Bayreuth Anniversary Ring Cycle - **Even Before** His Appointment **Was Officially** Announced!

On 6 April 2011, a number of German newspapers and other media – and their English translators – reported that negotiations between Wim Wenders and the Bayreuth Festival over the 2013 Ring Cycle had broken down. According to earlier reports, Wenders had been the main contender to direct the new production to première as part of Wagner’s 200th anniversary.

“The two parties had earlier seemed close to agreement, with set designs already in progress. But the main sticking point was a proposed 3-D film of the production. Wenders wanted the Bayreuth Festival to provide millions in financing, and wouldn’t have been able come up with a finished movie until 2015-16. It was reported that Katharina Wagner wouldn’t tolerate this sort of ‘arrogance’.” Another report has the cost of the 3-D movie as needing “3.5 million euros in pre-finance.” “World online” learned from well informed circles, that Wenders wanted to abuse the Festspielhaus primarily as a film Studio.” World online reports Wenders as saying he “would not invest one and a half years life in only a production of the Opera”.

Given the moves to the use of 3-D recording in the Metropolitan and Royal Covent Garden opera houses, as mentioned in the following article, this may be a short-sighted move on the part of Bayreuth, with other major companies stealing a march on the home of Wagner.

“The directorial vacancy opens up the possibility of Katharina Wagner taking up the project herself. Given her radical reinterpretation of Die Meistersinger, that could make for a very interesting production, although it is unlikely to generate the same kind of excitement as the proposed Wenders collaboration.” The scenery designs must be submitted by someone by this Autumn!!

World online suggests that there may be other contenders: “The Bayreuth Festival is not the first victim of the film trap... Because the staging of the Opera [The Ring Cycle] attracts growing crowds of people hungry for a world famous name, more film directors are moving onto the stage. Possibly on the list might be: Roman Polanski, William Friedkin, Woody Allen, Ken Russell, István Szabó, Anthony Minghella, and Volker Schlöndorff, however usually only conservative and rarely technically perfect productions come out here [Bayreuth].”

According to the publicity material for Wender’s 3-D film about the life and dance of Pina Bausch in the Goethe Institut’s German Film Festival, “Pina is an exhilarating documentary - and the world’s first 3D art film - about Pina Bausch, the great choreographer who died in 2009 after one of the most brilliant careers of any German performance artist. Wim Wenders invites viewers on a visually stunning journey into the life of Pina and onto the stage of her internationally acclaimed Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch. Accompanying dancers into the city and surrounding industrial landscape, Wenders has composed a moving tribute to his long-standing friend.

Highlights include performances of Pina’s legendary works Café Müller, Le Sacre du Printemps, Vollmond and Kontakthof.”

<http://www.classicalmusic.org.uk/2011/04/wim-wenders-quits-bayreuth-anniversary-ring-cycle.html>

<http://intermezzo.typepad.com/intermezzo/2011/04/wim-wenders-out-of-bayreuth-ring.html>

<http://www.welt.de/kultur/article13074194/Wim-Wenders-sagt-seine-Mitwirkung-in-Bayreuth-ab.html>

<http://www.welt.de/kultur/article13075510/Bayreuth-will-keine-Produktionsfirma-fuer-Wenders-sein.html?wtmc=plista> [EDITOR]

Music: Cosima Wagner: The Times Saturday, March 10, 1923

The Times magazine archives have an amazing treasure trove of historical articles, including ones about Richard Wagner – and his poor widow. The following is an abbreviated version of one of these reports.

“Frau Cosima Wagner—widow of the pre-eminent German musical composer, Wilhelm Richard Wagner, and daughter of Franz Liszt, of the Hungarian rhapsodies—is reduced to selling a number of her late husband’s most valuable relics to keep the wolf from the door. Paris newspapers have had a good deal to say about the shame Germany ought to feel for letting her sink to penury. The fame of both Wagner and Liszt is international, and if the companion of one and the daughter of the other is left in indigenious circumstances, should not the whole world be stigmatized as shameless? Happily, reports have come to hand that many cities in Germany are giving performances of Wagner operas for the benefit of the widow. Vienna is also arranging similar performances in its great Opernhaus, where Wagner first heard his Lohengrin.

“The Wagnerian Opera Festival, German company now touring America, will continue their performances at the Lexington Theatre, leaving the Manhattan Opera House, where they are now.”

Read the full article at The Times website:
www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,846441,00.html#ixzz1PiReZINW.

[EDITOR]





Wagner 2013

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(All website addresses used in this Newsletter are reproduced in the PDF version of the newsletter on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article - Members Area)

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