



The Wagner Society

(Patron — Sir Charles Mackerras)

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NEWSLETTER NO. 13

15th December 1983

Patron:	Sir Charles Mackerras	<u>Committee:</u>
President:	Leonard Hansen	Michel Arnould Jean Byrne
Vice President:	Sue Kelly	Janet Wayland
Secretary:	Clare Hennessy	
Treasurer:	Murray Smith	
Editor:	Richard King	
Honorary Life Members:	Werner Baer M.B.E. Leonie Rysanek	

COMING EVENTS:

Richard Wagner (Film):

Sunday 22nd and Sunday 29th January, 1984, State Theatre, Market Street, Sydney. The cost of a ticket will include a meal during intermission. As the Society was unable to secure a reasonable deduction for a group booking we recommend members make their own arrangements. (Further details in Newsletter.)

Talk by composer, Peter Sculthorpe:

Venue: Print Room, 141 Dowling Street, Waterloo.
Tuesday, 7th February, 1984 at 6.15 pm.
(See coupon at back of Newsletter.)

Walkurie:

Sydney Opera House, Monday 27th February, 1984.
Group booking arranged.
Tickets \$30.00 each (normal \$33.00).
(See coupon at back of Newsletter.)

Talk by Sir Charles Mackerras, 27th March, 1984:
(Further details next Newsletter.)

Bayreuth Tour 1984: Details in Newsletter.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

As the end of the year draws close - this year solemnised by the centenary of Richard Wagner's death - we can certainly say that we Wagnerites have just lived through a "golden era" in the appreciation of his life and works.

Whereas only a year or so ago we were lucky to get one concert performance of an opera, this year has seen four ABC concerts featuring important Wagner works, a fully staged opera, "Die Walkure", and a film of an opera, "Parsifal". As well there was the first Wagner Society group tour to Bayreuth - highlighted by meeting the composer's Grandson, Wolfgang - and an Australian Wagner Conference in Melbourne. The impetus will carry forward into next year, with another long feature film on the life of Wagner, and two staged operas, "Die Walkure" and "Des Rheingold". Hopefully enough tickets will arrive from Bayreuth to enable another group tour, and in the meantime your committee has organised a series of very interesting guest personalities for the forthcoming meetings.

The resignation of Jean-Louis Stuurop from the committee came as a sad blow to us, as he has been such an enthusiastic worker and supporter of the ideals of the Society from its inception. Many times we have had occasion to publicly thank him, along with his able helpers Catherine and Annette, for aid given at our social functions, and especially for his "Alternative Bayreuth" recording days. Jean-Louis took over the presentation of recorded music soon after the initial music appreciation day organised by Richard King and Murray Smith at their premises, The Print Room. He moved the location to the Concordia Club, where he arranged with the management for a suitable room to be put at the Society's disposal one Sunday afternoon each month, free of charge. Jean-Louis then made up and installed very sophisticated equipment in order to produce the realistic high-fidelity sound that has given life to the opera recordings.

Fortunately Jean-Louis will be continuing his sessions next year at the Concordia Club, giving members and their friends an opportunity to improve their knowledge of Wagner's works, and a chance to socialise and enjoy the music as they perhaps cannot at home. He intends to start on Good Friday (April 20th) with "Parsifal", conducted by Georg Solti.

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ON BEHALF OF THE COMMITTEE IT IS MY PLEASURE TO WISH YOU ALL A
VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

LEONARD HANSEN

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

This Newsletter is taken up with Members' responses to Australian Opera's production of Walkurie. My personal feelings as Editor are that a start has been made at last and let's give Australian Opera all the encouragement and constructive critical support we can.

(Other letters were received but space is limited.)

Comment on "Die Walkure" - by Joseph Ferfaglia

It seems the thick ice-pack is breaking up - we are going to get an Australian Wagner consciousness at last! This year "Die Walkure", next year half a Ring! And after so many years of lethargy, the dreams become reality.

To me, any average "respectable" Opera House has staged at least one Wagner Opera every year, and Australia was really lagging far behind. I'm not interested to know the reasons, which may have been quite legitimate. But now we have fine musicians and fine singers; and it is a matter of time (and finance) to develop, mould and refine the splendid material we have at hand. Somebody may argue that we in Sydney had seen before some Wagner performance. True! But there is a saying: "One swallow does not make a summer". Now, with good will, we shall have such a swarm of swallows that will make summer (and winter) more beautiful than ever.

How was "Die Walkure" performance? Pretty good! Actually, considering the state of infancy (or rather babyhood) in the Wagnerian repertoire, and the scanty encounter of many performers with Wagner, I would say: Damn good!! Of course there is scope for improvement (there will always be). But performers and audience will grow more and more Wagner-conscious, and the mutual relationship will be really splendid.

Incidentally, I should like to quote Maestro Cillario, who said to me that at the last performance he "whipped up" the tempo a bit. To my remonstrations he explained to me that the result was an improvement due to the fact that a slower tempo has a detrimental effect with a smaller orchestra. In other words, the results are different when adopting the same tempo with orchestras of different sizes.

Applause to the Maestro, and to the magnificent effort put into the opera by all the singers and musicians, and to the production team for giving us a "traditional" production.

Ray Potter,
17 McCauley Street, Thirroul, 2515.
3rd November, 1983.

The Secretary, Dear Sir:

Having seen Die Walkure I was grateful that, at last, the Australian Opera has begun its Ring cycle (and about time too!). The production was good. The strange drawbridge in Act I seemed out of place but the other two acts were splendid - particularly the Magic Fire in Act III. The singing was very good. Bob Gard made a virile Siegmund. When will we see him as Siegfried? Donald Shanks, in fine voice, was a menacing Hunding. Bruce Martin, as Wotan, goes from strength to strength - an outstanding performance. Rita Hunter's portrayal of Brunnhilde seemed ready made for her voice. Margreta Elkins made a sympathetic and feminine Sieglinde. The Valkyries were suitably noisy - even if their Ride was disappointing. If anything was not satisfactory it was the thin sound of the orchestra - though they played well under the inspiring direction of Maestro Cillario. I came away from the performance exhilarated and enthusiastic. Onward to Das Rheingold next year.

Arthur Carter, 5th November, 1983

The Editor:

The controversy over orchestra size has masked the solid values of the A.O. production of "Die Walkure" (more fully realised in the closing two performances than earlier in its run). Andrew Sinclair's directly narrative approach enabled the audiences I sat with, to attend to the story as well as concentrate on character interactions, a welcome change from the usual audience estrangement that accompanies A.O. German language presentations. Both the music and the scenic recreation of Wagner's drama received equal attention from a public, mostly new to a staged "Ring". Some achievement for A.O. attained despite the occasional stylised or exaggerated touch, such as Sieglinde's "see-through" or Wotan's amplification.

As for the pit's contribution, let us all agree that maestro Cillario's approach was tentative, even over-awed. Yet, those loose-knit orchestral textures and tempi allowed scope for the production to find its feet, by close of season. In turn, the orchestra did come to grasp the music more assuredly. Within the scale of the reduced scoring, we heard a fair account of Wagner's musical intentions, in the matter of balance of sonorities. That is not to say it was a perfect musical realisation, only that the orchestra could assert itself in the Opera Theatre, much as Wagner might have wished.

To make comparisons with the Bayreuth acoustic and atmosphere is idle and misleading. The lack of forces in the pit did cost the audiences a grand Wagnerian experience, but we did witness Wagnerian Theatre on the improve, which wanton lack of support will only stifle.

Barry Tarver,
Box 117, P.O., Woodburn, 2472.
27th November, 1983

The Editor:

"Gunning my battered, old panel van down the Pacific Highway, with the sounds of Pink Floyd blaring, and with two tickets for Die Walkure, and three critical reviews burning a hole in my back jeans pocket, I thought of the lush vegetation, kangaroos, wallabies, and wilting vegetables I was leaving behind, and asked myself the question, as I flashed past a sumptuous setting for Brunnhilde to get laid down gently (for her 20 year wait, for Siegfried, the man with the sword), 'Surely the critics have to be wrong; surely this can't be a hick, provincial production! This 450 mile road-bash to the big smoke has just gotta be worthwhile.... I can't afford Bayreuth....'.

The answer? Thumbs up, for the sets, to the singers, and to that half of the orchestra that managed to escape decimation from the flu, and arrived and played! And thumbs down to the critics! But please, next time in English, and don't run out of programs!"

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

Jim Leigh comments

After Roger Covell's reviews and Raymond Myer's warnings at the Wagner Society dinner, my expectations for Die Walkure were not high but I was determined to keep an open mind in both my objective and subjective responses to the work. I saw the last performance with Robert Gard as Siegmund and Donald Shanks as Hunding. My previous experiences of Die Walkure were the 1972 and 1980 Covent Garden Productions, the English National Opera Production, a 1982 performance at Mannheim and the recent ABC Concert performance in Melbourne.

The most obvious failing, and one for which I was prepared, was the orchestral sound. In spite of some very good playing for the most part, the orchestral texture was just not adequate and vastly inferior to all the above experiences.

Therefore, it was necessary to make allowances for this weakness and to try and enjoy the remainder. After this adjustment I did enjoy the overall performance. The sets were close to the old-fashioned Bayreuth style in many respects, creating the dark Nordic mythological element very well, in welcome contrast to space-age and political allegorical representations. The drawbridge in Act I was dramatically effective, particularly for the entrance of Hunding and the passionate final exit of Sieglinde and Siegmund. The tree was magnificent. I can safely say I have never seen Fricka's rams before in Act II. The lighting effects, turning the sky into an overhang on the right of the stage (as seen by the audience), were unusual and a bit distracting.

... Cont.

Jim Leigh ... Cont.

To depict the skulls of dead heroes explicitly on the Walkure rock was dramatically valid and this scene was the best in the whole production. I have also not seen Walkures riding through the sky so well represented before. The magic fire scene started well but was too technicolour at the end. The general use of mist effects was also a step back towards traditional productions of 50 years ago.

Apart from Robert Gard, who was having an off night, the singing was magnificent all round. The costumes and acting, however, left a bit to be desired, particularly Rita Hunter's helmet, Fricka's whole get-up, and Robert Gard's stage movement.

The general control of the work was good and at no point did I feel bored or lose concentration. The playing time is said to have shortened by 20 minutes since the "funereal" first performances but I still thought Cillario's conducting conveyed a proper sense of the epic proportions of this work and whetted the appetite for a proper production with a decent-sized orchestra with adequate string tone and brass sonority. The scaled down orchestration did allow us to hear some excellent woodwind playing and those who like Karajan's methods may well have preferred this.

In summary; much better than I'd expected, but please do not attempt the rest of the Ring until something is done about the orchestra pit.

WAGNER (FILM) STATE THEATRE, SYDNEY

Starring Richard Burton and Vanessa Redgrave.
Music conducted by Sir Georg Solti.
Ticket prices including a meal \$30 - \$25 - \$20.
Pensioner and Students concessions are available.

The script was written in full co-operation with Wolfgang Wagner. Filming took place in more than 200 locations over several months including Ludwig's castles and Wagner's hotel rooms in Venice where he wrote Tristan and Isolde. It is filmed in wide screen 35 mm Dolby Stereo and directed by Tony Palmer, the only man to ever win television's most prestigious award, Prix Italia, twice. It is five hours duration beginning at 3.30 pm. Tickets from the theatre or Mitchells Bass.

BAYREUTH TOUR 1984

Neutral Bay Travel expects to operate a tour to Bayreuth again in August 1984. Details will be available when information on Festival ticket allocation is received in December.

In the meantime registration deposits are being accepted.
If you are interested, contact: Neutral Bay Travel, (Dawn Moss),
93 Military Road,
Neutral Bay, NSW, 2089,
Phone: (02) 909.8644.