

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

In December, we had our usual very successful Christmas Party. Fortunately for us it was held at the Goethe Institute on a very bright and sunny day. I think it would be difficult not to have satisfied everybody present with the quality of our endeavour to please.

We obtained 15 seats for Bayreuth for 1993 and every member who applied for seats to the Society this year has been successfully accommodated.

Paul Lehmann, our Vice President, has nearly finalised our application for Tax Exemption Benefits, so in future donations to the Society will be a tax deduction.

Thank you, Members, for supporting our February function at the Goethe Institute which has given the Committee Members new hope for the success of our future get-togethers, financially as well as socially.

The following few lines below give you one of the reasons why I agreed to another seminar to be jointly held with the Friends of the Australian Opera.

Wagner and Strauss or 'Richard the Third'

When Richard Wagner died in 1883 it was unclear who would assume the operatic mantle of the great master, whose music dramas had towered above the achievements of his contemporaries. Would Anton Bruckner, a great admirer of Wagner, turn his attention to opera, or would the young Gustav Mahler, who showed such an affinity for conducting opera, compose for the lyric stage? Or would it be Englebert Humperdinck, Wagner's assistant at Bayreuth for the preparation of the last music drama *Parsifal*, who would take over? For a while it looked as though it would be Humperdinck. His fairytale opera *Hänsel und Gretel* which premiered in 1893, a decade after Wagner's death, was highly successful but he never managed to consolidate his claim with a follow-up success. Ironically, it was to be the young man who had conducted the premiere of Humperdinck's opera in Weimar who was ultimately to claim the crown. His name was Richard Strauss.

Strauss had begun by composing a series of fine symphonic poems in the post-Liszt style. During the 1890s he had produced such masterpieces of the genre as *Don Juan*, *Don Quixote*, *Death and Transfiguration* and *Till Eulenspiegel*. Then, as the century drew to a close, he turned to opera. His first operatic effort was *Guntram*, a story set in medieval Germany telling of the love of the Minnesinger Guntram for the lady Freihild, and clearly showing a strong debt to Wagner both in storyline and harmonic language. Around this time Hans von Bülow, the great conductor and pianist who had been so intimately connected with Wagner, jokingly referred to Strauss as 'Richard the Third' because he said that after Richard the First (Wagner) there could be no Second.

Strauss went on to reach the zenith of his achievement in the early years of the new century with the modernist masterpieces *Salome* and *Elektra* in which he truly proved himself to be an original and brilliant composer of opera and a worthy successor to the great Richard Wagner whose works had shocked and amazed audiences in a similar way two generations before.

Olive Coonan
President