

# **'Wagner And The Fairies' By Barbara Brady, And Champagne Celebration Of Wagner's Birthday, 21 May 2017**

**2.00pm: Presentation by Barbara Brady  
followed by Wagner's birthday champagne celebration**

On 21 May 2017, long-term Society Member Barbara Brady introduced Society members to Wagner's first opera 'Die Feen', or 'The Fairies'. Barbara and her husband Ian joined the Wagner Society in 1987. She was a member of the Society's management committee for five years and newsletter editor before Terence Watson. She and Ian have had one visit to Bayreuth with the Society. She has been a long-term volunteer at 2MBS-FM, now called Fine Music. In 2008 she prepared a series called Wagner and Friends, supported by the Wagner Society. The series was repeated in 2013 for Wagner's bicentenary, again supported by the Society, together with the presentation of Wagner's 10 major operas, programmed by Colleen Chesterman in At the Opera on Wednesday nights.

In 2013, Barbara and Ian went to Leipzig to see Wagner's first three operas performed. She became enthusiastic about 'Die Feen', 'Das Liebesverbot' and 'Rienzi', believing they have been unjustly neglected; for example they are never performed at Bayreuth. In 2016, she returned to Leipzig to see the operas when they were repeated. Barbara presented us with photographs and some film of the opera, as well as excerpts from recordings.

'Die Feen' is Wagner's first completed opera, in three acts, composed in Würzburg in 1833, when he was 20 and working at the opera as chorus-master. He could not find any satisfactory German libretti, so he translated Carlo Gozzi's 'La donna serpente' from the Italian. Wagner revised the opera in 1834, adding some crucial scenes, but there was still no production. It was first performed in Munich in 1888, 5 years after Wagner's death.

In Wagner's adaptation, the opera tells of the love of Ada, who has fairy blood, for a mortal Arindal, son of a king. Barbara described echoes from later Wagner: for example renunciation. Ada forbids Arindal to ask her name for eight years. He cannot keep this oath and is abandoned. The plot also involves redemption, particularly Ada's readiness to renounce

her immortality and the eventual redemption of the two lovers as immortals ruling fairyland. The scenes shown by Barbara demonstrated how imaginative many productions are. Barbara showed scenes from the Leipzig production which demonstrated how imaginative the production was. She also played a conversation between the producer and the designer about how they arrived at this unique production which could only be done in Leipzig because of the stage machinery it offers.

Barbara showed how the opera builds on the German Romantic tradition, with scenes from the operas of Marschner and von Weber, which also move between fantasy and magic into reality.

In discussion, members pointed to scenes which looked forward to later Wagner. Ada's major aria for example prefigured the demands made by Wagner on his dramatic soprano female leads. Barbara was keen to know if members agreed with her view that these early operas should be staged at Bayreuth; there was general agreement that they offered an interesting example of Wagner's development and should not be excluded. Florian Hammerbacher disagreed on the grounds that 'Die Feen' was not a 'through production' and thus differed from Wagner's distinctive style in his major operas.

It was a small audience of 25. We had messages later from members who had been unable to get trains from the Western Suburbs where there were cancellations. But we had an enthusiastic champagne toast for Wagner's birthday, a fine example of Barbara's famous birthday fruit cake and other delicious cakes provided by Roswitha Wolff, Mailis Wakeham and others.

By Colleen Chesterman