

# SUNDAY 18 SEPTEMBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

## ROBERT GAY CONTINUED HIS TALK ON FRENCH GRAND OPERA

Robert Gay continued on from his talk to us in February and entertained a large audience once more with his witty and insightful ideas of how the conventions, themes, libretti and staging of Grand Opera in Paris in the 1820's and 30's influenced the works of Verdi and Wagner. He played many short sound clips to illustrate musical developments, including several pretty ballet divertissements which are not always included in modern productions but were such an essential part of contemporary performances in Paris. Of particular interest to Wagner lovers were the facts that while staying in Paris in 1840 and 1841 he worked on vocal scores for Donizetti and Halévy and made a special trip to Paris in 1849 to see Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*. Robert is a very animated speaker who enjoys interacting with his audience and gave us an impressive (and hilarious) demonstration of the skaters' techniques in the ballet of *Le Prophète*.

### Features of French Grand Opera

- **Historical events** used as **scenarios** for dramas **in five acts**
- Themes of **religious intolerance** or **rebellion against oppression**
- **Historically** and **geographically accurate set and costume designs**
- **Massive choral groupings**, often of opposing **nationalities or beliefs**
- Scenes and acts ending with impressive **formal tableaux**
- Spectacularly staged **marches and processions** – also **rituals and ceremonies**. These processions were often **interrupted** for dramatic effect.
- **Obligatory ballet *divertissement*** in either the **second or third act**
- Action culminating in a **spectacular final scene** depicting a **major disaster or cataclysm**