



## The Richard Wagner Society of South Australia Inc.

### NEWSLETTER 314 MAY 2021

**Patron:**  
**Deborah Humble**

The Coriole Festival weekend clashed with the actual anniversary of Richard Wagner's birth, but we'll still be celebrating it much closer to the date than we managed to last year! As mentioned in the last Newsletter, the Society birthday event will be held on **Sunday 30 May** at **Living Choice Fullarton**, with a screening of an interesting production of *Der Rosenkavalier* in the little theatre there, and breaks for lunch and afternoon tea. As usual with longer works, we'll watch Act I before moving out into the restaurant area for a light lunch, and as Act I is quite long, we'll need to start at **11.30 am. sharp**. Also, we need numbers for seating limits and catering, so please **BOOK EARLY**. See the details on P. 2.

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We cannot give precise dates or details of any future Society events yet, although several are being planned for later in the year. It is hoped that more many details will be available for the next Newsletter.

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All going well, it looks as if Opera Australia's new high-tech Brisbane Ring Cycle will be going ahead in 2021. We're publishing the revised cast list, also details of the Brisbane Ring Symposia that are being organised by Dr Peter Bassett.

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# SUNDAY 30 May 2021

## The Richard Wagner Society of South Australia

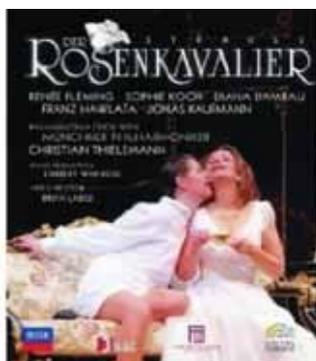
invites you and your friends

to the celebrate the 208<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Master,

## Wilhelm Richard Wagner,



(22.05.1813-13.02.1883)



Once again, we've chosen to celebrate Wagner's birthdate with an opera screening in Living Choice Fullarton's neat little cinema, with breaks between acts for a light lunch, then afternoon tea and birthday cake! A production of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* with some big names in the cast was chosen for the screening. There may still be some limitations for seating in the theatre, and Living Choice require numbers for catering well in advance, so members wishing to attend should **book as soon as possible**. The meals are to be provided by Living Choice, with urns for tea or instant coffee, other drinks to be purchased separately.

### Details

Venue:	Living Choice Fullarton Retirement Village, 123 Fisher St., Fullarton
Date and Time:	SUNDAY 30 May, <b>11.00 for 11.30 am. start</b>
Transport:	Park in the street, or Bus 172 goes along Duthy Street. Living Choice is a short walk along Fisher St. from Stop 8
Cost:	\$30 admission charge, which includes room hire and other expenses.
<b><u>RSVP/Booking.</u></b>	We need to know numbers, so IF YOU INTEND TO COME, please <b>book online</b> asap and pay immediately by VISA or Mastercard at <a href="https://www.wagnersa.net/event/2021-birthday-party/">https://www.wagnersa.net/event/2021-birthday-party/</a> or contact Lee Brauer by <u>Wednesday 26 May</u> . Phone 8353 5503, or email <a href="mailto:admin@wagnersa.net">admin@wagnersa.net</a> . You can pay on the day ( <b>cash or cheque only but not card</b> ).

# The Bayreuth Music Festival – Tchaikovsky

Konstantin Shamray's memorable and fascinating talk to us on Russian Wagnerism led me to look again at the series of articles Tchaikovsky wrote for 5 editions of *The Russian Register* between May and August 1876. The *Tchaikovsky Research* website has an English translation by Luis Sundkvist. (<http://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Bayreuth>).



In Part I he gives accounts of the history and conception of *The Ring* project and the many vicissitudes Wagner faced in completing the work and getting the theatre completed. He dates the process back to the publication of *The Ring* poem in 1862 and describes it as “a splendidly fashioned literary work” and adds Wagner's afterword that he had already given up any hope of mounting the monumental work. He had already composed much of the music but needed to divert himself on to a more realisable work by composing and mounting the popular *Meistersinger*. Unaccountably the author totally fails to mention *Tristan and Isolde*. Encouraged by the success of *Meistersinger* and the patronage of King Ludwig of Bavaria he turned his attention to the completion of the tetralogy. By 1871 his hopes of an eventual performance led Wagner to look for a site for a theatre to perform his great work. Meanwhile some supporters including Carl Tausig came up with the idea of raising funds through the formation of Richard Wagner Societies. His choice fell on the Franconian city of Bayreuth though no

mention is made of his inspection of the existing Margrave's Theatre. The author then gives a description of the principle of the unique auditorium design.

Part II was published 2 months later and this gives a very comprehensive and lucid account of the cast of characters and the plot-lines of *Rheingold* and *Walküre*. Dated the next day Part III provides equally well-told synopses of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*.

Part IV was published 10 days later on 14 August and by this stage the author had arrived in Bayreuth and attended the premiere of *Rheingold*. This article is mainly about the town, the theatre, the practical arrangements and some of the notable audience members. He finds the town itself to be very agreeable and he gives a short history of the Dukes of Lorraine and the hereditary succession of the Margrave Friedrich of Nuremberg. While describing the great buildings of the town and neighbouring country he concludes that the most impressive one is the Margrave's Theatre with its renaissance-style gilded interior. There is no sign that the author knew about Wagner's initial frustrated hope that this might serve as the venue for the first *Ring* production.

He finds the new theatre's exterior to be more striking for its colossal size rather than any beauty of architecture and likens it to a hastily rigged up huge fair-booth. He goes on to describe the amphitheatre-style auditorium and credits the technicians and artists behind the stage design, giving special mention to the splendid gas lighting installed by the Frankfurt-based firm Staudt. We then get a description of the composer's home Wahnfried.

He attends the Railway Station to observe the reception for the Emperor Wilhelm and spies various celebrities including Hans Richter and the Abbé Liszt. He noted that fairly few of his countrymen were attending although he did see Professor Klindworth and Cui, one of The Mighty Five. He also notes the absence of a number of important personages including Verdi, Gounod, Brahms and von Bülow. Finally, he sees Wagner himself arrive in a carriage, “... a hale and hearty little old man with an aquiline nose and fine, mocking lips”.

There follows an extended description of the extreme scarcity of accommodation and food and drink in the town. The latter two became so difficult to obtain that he says the main topic of conversation was “more about beefsteaks, cutlets, and fried potatoes than about Wagner's music”.

We then get a rundown on the logistics and timetable for the festival including a one-day delay in the performance of *Siegfried* because the tenor Betz was indisposed. He mentions the fanfare calling the audience to the theatre and complains of the heat and lack of shade in the grounds surrounding the edifice. After the performance there is another scramble for food and drink, “Thank God if you manage to procure a piece of cold meat and a bottle of wine or beer”.

In Part V we finally come to his assessment of the performance and the musical delights in the work. He first gives generous tribute to the great artistic ideals and the manifestation of art as a

civilizing force so evident in this mighty project. The Festival is a lesson for those enemies of art who contend that civilized people only trouble themselves with matters of direct practical use; the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure is an intrinsic human need.

He starts with a description of the new Wagnerian principles in which the traditional forms of aria, duet, ensemble and so-on are abolished to be replaced exclusively by recitative with the musical component entrusted to the orchestra. The singers are given a "colourless succession of tones ... tailored to the symphony being performed by the invisible orchestra". The music is "profoundly conceived, always interesting, often splendid and exciting, though at times also a bit dryish and unintelligible ..." but "... astonishingly rich ... and equipped with instrumentation of unprecedented beauty".

There are deviations from the system but only when there is a clear need, such as Siegfried's forging song in Act I of that opera.

He spends one short paragraph on the Leitmotiv system with each one being presented in a different form when it recurs, revealing an "astonishing richness of harmonic and polyphonic techniques".

The richness however becomes too lavish by the last opera to the point of exhaustion. Musical beauties are found in abundance but "in excess rather than in due proportion". Such a gigantic opera really needs gigantic talents but, of the major characters, only the Viennese soprano Amelie Materna as Brünnhilde was equal to the task. Smaller roles were generally very well done and he particularly mentions the Rhinemaidens and Mime. The orchestra was perfection beyond all praise and the chorus quite outstanding.

There follows a highly critical description of "the legion of false Wagnerians and especially Wagnériennes, who are as ignorant as they are intolerant of opinions that differ from theirs". Nonetheless there were many outstanding artists present who are sincerely and unconditionally devoted to Wagner's music.

The author was left with 4 indelible impressions:

1. The operas are written in symphonic style with many striking musical beauties.
2. The composer has tremendous talent and incredibly rich technique.
3. Misgivings as to whether Wagner's view of opera is correct.
4. Great exhaustion but a desire to further study the work.

Even if it "seems boring in places", is too intricate to be comprehensible, and even if Wagner's theory is mistaken and *The Ring* is destined to eternal sleep in the deserted theatre vaults, it will still be the case that this was "one of the most significant phenomena in the history of art".

The small amount of reading I have done around Tchaikovsky suggests that his real critical views were toned down as he wanted to avoid offending Professor Klindworth from the Moscow Conservatorium. Still, despite his misgivings he was well aware that this project was one of great artistic historical importance.

Geoff Seidel



## News from the Norns

On Monday 26 April Radio Station 5MBS scheduled a program "In the Spotlight – Classical, with Christopher Stone", which featured baritone John Wegner (1950-2019), late Patron of the Richard Wagner Society of South Australia. Most of the pieces listed were excerpts from Wagner works. The program will also be available live stream. See details on [www.5mbs.com](http://www.5mbs.com)

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The Bayreuth Festival is still scheduled to run from 25 July until 25 August this year. The programme lists performances of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Tannhäuser*, *Die Walküre*, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, a concert *Parsifal* and two concerts conducted by Andris Nelsons. Tickets will be offered exclusively via online instant purchase, and all information on that will be published on the Festival homepage [www.bayreuther-festspiele.de](http://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de).



## The Brisbane Ring Cycle 2021

The updated cast for this production has been released:

Conductor: Philippe Augin  
Director and Production Designer: Chen Shi-Zheng  
Opera Australia Chorus & Opera Queensland Chorus  
Queensland Symphony Ring Cycle Orchestra

Wotan/Wanderer	Daniel Sumegi
Brünnhilde	Lise Lindstrom (Cycles 1 and 2) Anna-Louise Cole (Cycle 3)
Siegfried	Stefan Vinke
Alberich	Warwick Fyfe
Mime	Andreas Conrad
Siegmund	Rosario La Spina
Sieglinde	Anna-Louise Cole (Cycles 1 and 2) Olivia Cranwell (Cycle 3)
Fasolt	David Parkin
Gunther	Luke Gabbedy
Gutrune	Maija Kovalevska
Loge	Hubert Francis
Fricka	Jacqueline Dark
Fafner/Hunding/Hagen	Andrea Silvestrelli
Donner	Andrew Moran
Froh	Dean Bassett
Freia/Helmwige	Mariana Hong
Erda	Liane Keegan
Woglinde	Eva Kong
Wellgunde/Gerhilde	Jane Ede
Flosshilde/Schwertleite	Dominica Matthews
Ortlinde	Jennifer Black
Third Norn	Olivia Cranwell
Waltraute	Deborah Humble
Rosswaise	Sian Sharp
Siegrune	Agnes Sarkis
Grimgerde/Second Norn	Angela Hogan
Woodbird	Stacey Alleaume
First Norn	Chanyang Choi

For more details of this production, see the Opera Australia website: <https://www.opera.org.au>

# Brisbane Ring Symposia 2021

During the three Cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Brisbane in 2021, these Symposia will feature Wagner Scholars, the *Ring* Creative Team, Musical & Production Staff, Singers, and Members of the *Ring* Orchestra.

## 1. Saturday 30 October

Cycle 1, between *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*

## 2. Tuesday 9 November

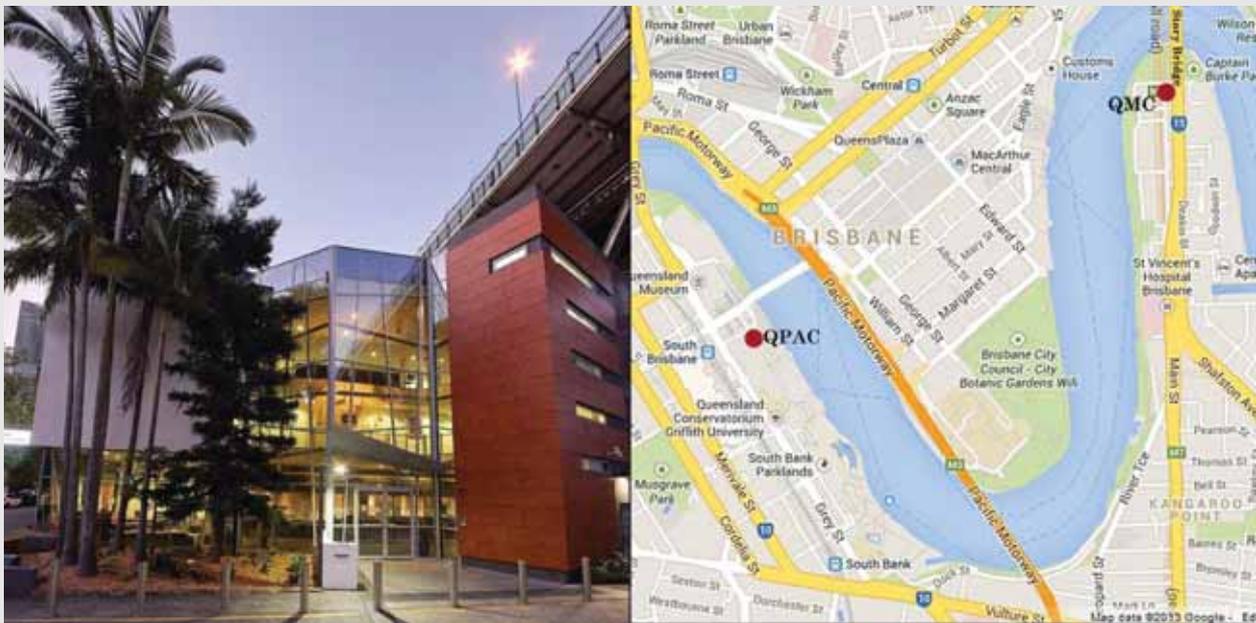
Cycle 2, between *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*

## 3. Monday 15 November

Cycle 3, between *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*

10.00 am to 1.00 pm each day. Symposia programs will vary.

Queensland Multicultural Centre (QMC), 102 Main Street, Kangaroo Point, Brisbane



**Register your interest now at: [www.peterbassett.com.au](http://www.peterbassett.com.au)**

Receive early advice and program details when tickets go on sale.

The ticket price is \$40 per person per Symposium including Morning Tea, or \$30 pp for groups of 10 or more, or \$30 pp per Symposium for 2 or more Symposia.

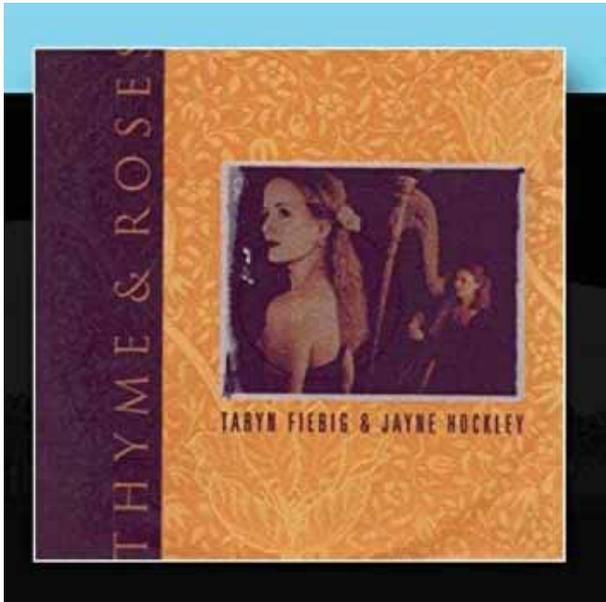
Conceived and chaired by Peter Bassett - Wagner Scholar, Writer, Speaker, Broadcaster and Dramaturg.



The Auditorium of the Queensland Multicultural Centre

**Australia has recently lost a couple of well-loved opera singers, and Penny Hewson has written the following tributes ...**

## **The wonder of Taryn Fiebig, 1 February 1972-20 March 2021**



So much has been written and said about Taryn since she died on 20<sup>th</sup> March this year from ovarian cancer. The *Limelight* article (April, 2021) refers to her as 'The Luminous Soprano' and indeed she was. To say she could put her voice and acting ability to any genre is an understatement. Her voice was pure gold, with a perfect vocal line for the baroque repertoire, of which she did so much with Pinchgut Opera. But just as ably she played Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* in 2008 and 2009 with Richard E. Grant playing Henry Higgins. This toured nationally.

Taryn played many Mozart roles, namely Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* and Pamina and Papagena in *The Magic Flute*. Then there were the Gilbert and Sullivan's, often televised. She applied enormous aplomb and enthusiasm with whatever she did and with whom she worked.

She came from Perth, carried through her Music Degree at the University of Western Australia, but with the cello as her main instrument and vocals as her secondary. She was dragged almost by blackmail by one of her best friends to audition for Opera Australia and the rest is history. She became a principal singer for Opera Australia in 2005 and her roles were numerous. She won two Helpmann Awards for playing Lisa in *La Sonnambula* and the role of Lucy in Brett Dean's *Bliss*. In 2016 she sang the role of Guttrune in *Gotterdammerung* for Opera Australia.

Taryn loved her cello and in 2015 she was invited by Prince Charles to sing at Buckingham Palace. Unfortunately, her own cello needed repairs, so Prince Charles offered his own. She sang as she played the cello and Prince Charles was so moved that he was seen to shed a tear. She sang alongside Samuel Sakker and Kiandra Howarth, both from Australia and at the time carrying through their year as the Jette Parker Young Artists at the Royal Opera House. Samuel has sung twice for us here in Adelaide in recent years.

She was first married to the renowned composer from Perth, Ian Grandage, but in the past 6 years has been married to the bass baritone Jud Arthur. She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2017 and after undergoing treatment returned to the stage in 2018. She worked right up to the end of last year, with her last work being a CD of her singing Schumann's Lieder with Scott Davie accompanying her on the piano.

A scholarship has been established by Pinchgut Opera in her name, to support new singers in vocal and dramatic attainment. Pinchgut's Artistic Director, Erin Helyard issued this statement following her death 'Taryn Fiebig was without question one of Australia's greatest sopranos and she will forever be remembered'.

A three-hour homage to Taryn can be heard on ABC Classic FM with Mairi Nicholson. Go to 'Listen Up' and relive the life and voice of this amazing and beautiful singer.

# The Death of Robert Gard, OBE, 7 March 1927-20 March 2021

I have been privileged to witness and meet Robert Gard on several occasions. He had the most engaging personality, full of wit and exuberance. He performed frequently for State Opera of South Australia, the first opera being *Don Pasquale*. His defining role as Aschenbach in Britten's *Death in Venice*, the lead opera for the Adelaide Festival in 1980, was the highlight of his career. Subsequently, he was asked by the great operatic film director, Tony Palmer, to replace Peter Pears in playing the same role in his film of *Death in Venice*. Anyone who saw him in the opera, either here or with Opera Australia, as well as the film, would agree, he was outstanding in every way. His pathos, his longing, his wistfulness with his beautiful tenor line, made it the role of which he was most proud.

He came to Australia, from Great Britain, first in 1961, to sing *Lock up Your Daughters* and later, *Kismet* and *Showboat*. Opera Australia engaged him in 1963 for *The Merry Widow* then *The Barber of Seville* and he became a lead singer for the organisation from then on, until his retirement. He had a natural ability on stage, playing serious and troubled men, comedic roles, or the lecherous philanderer! His roles were many and spanned a wide range of repertoire from *The Magic Flute*, *Salome* and *The Rake's Progress*, *Voss* and *The Eighth Wonder*. Likewise, he enjoyed Wagnerian roles in *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Tristan und Isolde*. He showed utter class in whatever role he undertook. To see him in action, go to YouTube to see Joan Sutherland and Robert try to outwit each other in *Die Fledermaus*. Delicious!

As Brian Castles-Onion AM said of him on Facebook for the Wagner Society NSW,

"His affinity with the operas of Britten, combined with a Leading Man status in operetta, brilliance in character roles along with his excursions as a Wagnerian tenor displayed his total command of his art. We remember him for so many things. We loved him. He is in our hearts"

Robert Gard retired from Opera Australia in 2008 with *The Makropoulos Secret*. He died on the same day as Taryn Fiebig. Two of Opera Australia's GREATS!



	PROGRAMME FOR 2021	
Dates to be announced	Festival Theatre, Adelaide	ASO "Classical Hits" c. Guy Noble. Includes Wagner's <i>Ride of the Valkyries</i>
3,5,7 February	Regent Theatre, Melbourne	Melbourne Opera <i>Das Rheingold</i>
SUNDAY 23 May	t.b.a.	Celebration of Richard Wagner's birthday
29, 31 October, 2, 4 November; 6, 8, 10, 12 November; 14, 16, 18, 20 November	Lyric Theatre, QPAC, Brisbane	Opera Australia ...et al... present three Wagner <i>Ring</i> Cycles
Saturday 30 October, Tuesday 9 November, Monday 15 November	Queensland Multicultural Centre, Brisbane	Brisbane <i>Ring</i> Symposia

## The Richard Wagner Society of South Australia

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ISSN 2208-2638 (Online)