



The Richard Wagner Society of South Australia Inc.

NEWSLETTER 315 JUNE/JULY 2021

Patron:
Deborah Humble

We hope our members are all keeping safe, healthy and warm? The situation can change within a day, but we expect that the Society's next event, the Brian Coghlan Memorial Lecture, will be held on the evening of **Monday 9 August at 7.30 pm.** in the **Clayton Wesley Memorial Church** at Beulah Park. For this year's lecture, James Koehne is to speak on: *The Grand Opéra of Paris: The Lost Legacy of the Nineteenth Century Spectacular*. We are inviting other groups to this lecture, and some have already promoted it quite widely. Clayton Church, a new venue for the Society, is quite large, but bookings are still required. **See P. 2 for details.**

Wagner's birthday celebration with a screening of *Der Rosenkavalier* and lunch at Living Choice Fullarton proved very popular indeed. See the review of that on P.3, along with a couple of other reports.

We were hoping to hold at least one other major event later this year, but getting it organised has proved very difficult. However, the Society is obliged to have an Annual General Meeting each year, a pre-Christmas lunch is always popular, and there are plans for a casual event in warmer weather. The dates for these will be announced later. Also, while it's impossible to be certain, Opera Australia's Brisbane *Ring* Cycle will probably still be going ahead in October and November.

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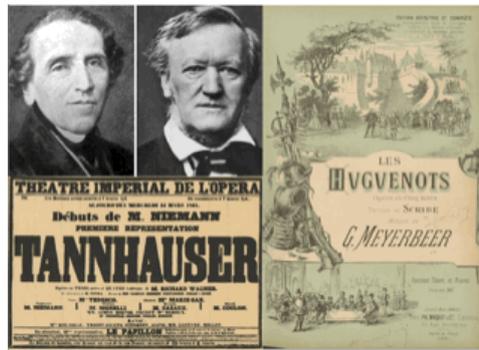
MONDAY 9 August 2021

Members and friends are invited to

The Brian Coghlan Memorial Lecture

At which James Koehne will be speaking on:

The Grand Opéra of Paris: The Lost Legacy of the Nineteenth Century Spectacular



As the Parisian bourgeois class rode the waves of 'new money' created by the Industrial Revolution, the city became the 'Capital of the Nineteenth Century'. In the middle years of the century, Paris came alive with spectacular sideshows, demonstrations and inventions which sought to expand the possibilities of human perception and experience. These new possibilities were exploited to the full in the creation of the genre of *Grand Opéra*.

Grand Opéra came about through a confluence of economic, political, and cultural circumstances, and flourished for a few decades. It created a new star in Giacomo Meyerbeer, and attracted Berlioz to undertake his most ambitious creation, *The Trojans*. Although **Wagner** found inspiration in the genre, he became its fiercest critic, accusing its creators of indulging in empty spectacle for commercial gain. As a result, this world of *Grand Opéra* is obscure to most music-lovers today.

Should we accept *Grand Opéra's* tarnished image? Could it be that rather than empty show, *Grand Opéra* was invested with meaning and vision in its own terms? Revisionist views of the artform emphasise its attempt to create a spiritual experience that was in tune with contemporary feeling, and its role as a platform in building meaning and value in European cultural life. By looking at the culture of *Grand Opéra*, we can find a fresh appreciation for the optimistic spirit which created the glories of Nineteenth Century culture.

After an active career as arts bureaucrat, administrator and programmer in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Adelaide, James Koehne completed his PhD in musicology. He lectures in music history at the University of Adelaide and is a sought-after writer and speaker on diverse musical topics.

Details

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| Venue: | Clayton Wesley Uniting Church, 280 Portrush Road, Beulah Park |
| Date and Time: | MONDAY 9 August, 7.30 pm. |
| Transport: | Park in the church grounds (there are entrances from Portrush Road and from Union Street, off the Parade). H20, H21 and H22 buses travel up the Parade, Stop 10 is just down from the church. |
| Cost: | \$20 cash (includes supper) |
| Booking/RSVP: | We need an idea of numbers for catering, so please book online and pay immediately by VISA or Mastercard at https://www.wagnersa.net/grand-opera-the-parisian-spectacular-the-brian-coghlan-lecture-2021/ or contact Lee Brauer on 8353 5503, email admin@wagnersa.net . You can pay on the day (but cash or cheque only, not card) |

Happy 208th Birthday Celebration

On Sunday 30th May Living Choice Fullarton Retirement Village became the venue of our successful commemoration of 208th anniversary of Richard Wagner's birth. All very efficiently organised by Geoff and Penny. Peter, with some early assistance from Andrew and Barbara, were efficient welcomers and money collectors. Living Choice's comfortable, well appointed theatre was full for the screening of the 2009 DECCA recording of *Der Rosenkavalier* from Baden-Baden, starring Renée Fleming as a beautiful, and beautifully voiced, Marschallin and Sophie Koch as a confident Octavian. Franz Hawlata entertained as Baron Ochs, Diana Damrau as an appealing Sophie, and a surprising cameo from a very young-looking Jonas Kaufmann as the Italian Tenor. We dined on a very tasty range of finger foods from *Damien on Fisher* in the break after Act I and returned to share a beautifully rich birthday cake and coffee after Act II. Sybil Coghlan, our guest of honour, cut the cake which was soon distributed among those present. A very happy day where all went well. The Master would have been pleased.



(Photo by David Murphy)

Sybil Coghlan, our guest of honour, cut the cake which was soon distributed among those present.

Brian Angus

Wagner Singers Back at Work

In the week of 16 May I decided to take the risk of travelling interstate to visit family and catch some live opera. I was very happy to see a number of our very best Australian Wagner singers back in action on stage in Melbourne and Sydney, though not, of course, in any of the Master's works.

The daring and ambitious Melbourne Opera presented an impressive production of Verdi's *Macbeth* in which Helena Dix, who has sung Elsa for the same company, also Isabella in *Das Liebesverbot* for Chelsea Opera, sang a convincing Lady Macbeth combining vocal beauty with a touch of steel. In the same production was the fine young tenor Sam Sakker as Macduff. Sam won a lot of friends and admirers in Adelaide a couple of years ago with his Laertes in *Hamlet* and David in Act III *Meistersinger*. He was also winner of the UK Wagner Singing Competition in 2017. I was lucky enough to speak to Sam at the stage door and he told me how he suddenly lost a whole lot of promising work last year, and survived by working at St Thomas' Hospital delivering personal protective equipment during the pandemic.

Also in this production was an electrifying, if short-lived, performance of Banquo by bass-baritone Adrian Tamburini who has also sung Colonna in *Rienzi*, the Night Watchman in *Meistersinger* and Fasolt in *Das Rheingold*. This role was shared on other nights with Eddie Muliaumaseali'i who was so impressive as Wotan in Melbourne Opera's recent *Das Rheingold*.

Just to complete the *Macbeth* set, Adelaide's Robert MacFarlane, who had sung Ulrich Eisslinger in Opera Australia's *Meistersinger* and Kunz Vogelsang in Adelaide's, played the role of Malcolm.

The very versatile Jacqueline Dark, who was Fricka in both Melbourne *Rings*, I found singing multiple roles including another goddess, Venus in Pinchgut Opera's *The Loves of Apollo and Daphne* performed at the Angel Place Recital Hall in Sydney.

Geoff Seidel

Die Walküre Act I.

The President, Dr Geoff Seidel, had booked the little theatre at Living Choice Fullarton from 6.30 pm on Friday 11 June to view the recently screened concert performance of Act I of *Die Walküre* from the Bavarian Staatsoper, and invited interested members and friends to join him. Those who could were well rewarded by wonderful performances from Jonas Kaufmann, Lisa Davidsen and Georg Zeppenfeld, with Asher Fisch conducting. While the concert version was, naturally, more static, there were subtitles as well excellent singers to carry the story on. Also, during the orchestral interludes, the cameras moved to the orchestra, concentrating especially on solo instrument groups, which added a slightly different perspective to the performance. It was a real pleasure to watch and hear, especially in the comfort (and with the larger screen) of the theatre.

Fortunately, in this time of travel restrictions, a variety of live and historical performances of Wagner works as well as many other operas, concerts, plays, etc., can be found online for members who have the time and technical equipment and know-how to take advantage of this.

Lee Brauer

Max Lorenz

In the June edition of the Metropolitan Opera journal *Opera News* there is an interesting article by David J Baker on the great German tenor Max Lorenz titled "Survival at a Price: The Bitter Saga of 'Hitler's Favorite Tenor' ". Lorenz, along with Lauritz Melchior, was one of the leading heldentenors of his day. Winifred Wagner, Director of The Bayreuth Festival in 1930s, called him "the Siegfried of the age" but, despite the Fuhrer's admiration, his personal life put him on a collision course with Nazi authority.

He was born Max Sülzenfuss in 1901 in Düsseldorf, son of a butcher. He studied in Cologne and Berlin before obtaining a position in Dresden where he sang Menelaus in Strauss' opera *Die ägyptische Helena*. Debuts followed in Berlin and Vienna and he then became a fixture at the Bayreuth Festival, singing six roles including Siegfried in every season between 1933 and 1942. He made his Met debut as Walter in *Die Meistersinger* in 1931 and then appeared in a series of mostly Wagner roles until 1950. He also sang in Salzburg, Milan, London, Munich, Paris and Buenos Aires.

Surviving relatively crude recordings show a voice with explosive delivery, power and steel, combined with warmth and tenderness.

But he is also known for a scandal that engulfed Bayreuth when he was charged with breaching the Nazi "Paragraph 175" which banned homosexual intercourse. He was allegedly discovered in the act backstage with a vocal coach. Hitler told Winifred Wagner he could not sing in the Festival to which she replied, "Fine, that means I can close the place down, because Bayreuth is impossible without Lorenz". Hitler soon relented and the charges were dropped, but not before causing the great singer enormous fear.

He was married to his agent Lotte (Appel) who accepted his sexuality and she and her mother were Jews. They were untouched until 1943 when both were facing arrest until Lorenz's standing as a singer ensured Hitler's protection.

There is a documentary film by Eric Schulz and Claus Wischmann titled "Wagner's Mastersinger, Hitler's Siegfried: The Life and Times of Max Lorenz". This includes segments from Winifred's interview in 1975 with film-maker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. American playwright and tenor Marc Deaton created a one-man show in 2018 titled "We Lived Only for the Music: Max Lorenz and the Third Reich". Baker says that this show looks more intensely at Lorenz's personal life and relationships.

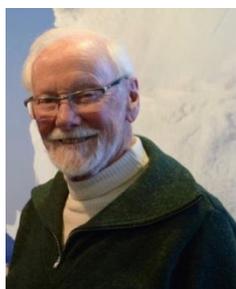
His career faded in the 1950s with producers becoming reluctant to cast him in the traditional heldentenor roles and his last performance was as Herodes in *Salome*.

I have the DVD of the Schulz and Wischmann film and I welcome members' comments on whether it is worth a Society showing?

Geoff Seidel



Dr Richard Lyall Willing OAM



We congratulate Dr Richard Willing, who was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the 2021 Queen's Birthday Honours "for service to conservation and the environment." A retired gastroenterologist and long-time farmer promoting scrub retention and sustainable grazing, Richard hasn't attended that many Society events over the many years he's been a member of the RWS of SA -- he's been too busy! We were aware that he and his late wife Gwen were keen conservationists, involved in various organisations, and were also great supporters of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra -- the May ASO "Grace Notes" has an article about Richard finding a box containing programs, ticket stubs, etc. dating from his first concert in 1942! However, we have also found that, apart from his medical career, which included close association with Flinders Medical Centre and Flinders University, Richard has been very active in and recognised by Scouts Australia as well as working with other bodies, such as the Scientific Expedition Group. He served as Medical Officer for the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions, Mawson from 1956-1958 -- and Mount Willing in the Prince Charles Mountains, Antarctica, was named in his honour! An OAM seems barely adequate.

Lee Brauer

'The Ringheads'

In 2000 in June, nineteen members of the Richard Wagner Society of SA chose to go to Helsinki in Finland to see Wagner's *Ring* Cycle. It was part of the celebrations of the 450th year of Helsinki and was part of a range of celebrations and exhibitions on show in Helsinki. Christine Rothauser, with the help of the Finnish Travel business in Sydney, put together a wonderful ten-day holiday for us in June, 2000. We were not particularly familiar with each other before the holiday, but that all changed in an instant once we arrived in Helsinki – by plane, or in my case by boat from Sweden. So many glorious experiences were part of the trip – by boat to St Petersburg, flying to Lapland at the northern most tip of Finland, sailing over to Tallin in Estonia and travelling by bus up to the centre of Finland where an opera festival is held at Savonlinna, every year at Midsummer. We also travelled to Sibelius's first home when he was a child and then an afternoon at Ainola, near Lake Tuusula, where he lived most of his life with his wife Aino and six daughters. He is buried alongside his wife, right next to the house.

We were looked after wonderfully by the Finnish Wagner Society. We shared a dinner with them looking onto a lake that took your breath away. And then there was the *Ring*. It was the second showing of the Götz Friedrich production, with Finnish surtitles!! The singing was simply first rate, with only one recognisable name, Matti Salminen, playing Hagen. The Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by Leif Segerstam, who looked the image of the older Brahms!

And now, twenty-one years later, we celebrate our togetherness by having lunches every three or so months, minus last year, due to the pandemic. We have lost five members, these being Kemerli and Eric Murray, David Gallasch, Jill Pitchon and Gwen Willing. Others have chosen not to continue, due to travel or other reasons, but now a steady group of 10 meet and share our musical happenings and interests. So, this year, twenty-one years later, we have enjoyed a special lunch, looking back on that marvellous time in Helsinki. Many of us travelled again in 2005 to see the *Ring* in Liège, in Belgium. All those years ago!

One funny story that always makes us laugh is what happened on the bus to Ainola. Richard Willing's phone rang, with the Yankalilla Council on the other end. His dog Sam had strayed from the farm in Hindmarsh Tiers and was now in safe hands at the Council and would he be able to pick him up? Just a little hard, for us being in Finland!!

We thank Christine for setting up this wonderful holiday. She was meant to be our leader, but her mother's illness at the last minute prevented her from travelling with us. So we managed, by hook or by crook, and had the most marvellous time.

Penny Hewson



News from the Norns

The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra's season for the remainder of 2021 includes one Wagner work. As part of the Matinee Series in Elder Hall, the program for "Immortal Serenade" on 22 September includes *The Siegfried Idyll* with conductor Nicholas Braithwaite. There will be two performances, at 11.30 am and 2.00 pm. See details on www.aso.com.au.

Obituary: Christa Ludwig (16 March 1928 – 24 April 2021)

Acclaimed German mezzo soprano Christa Ludwig, who recently died at the age of 93, had an illustrious career of nearly 50 years. Born in Berlin to singer and opera director/administrator father Anton and mezzo mother, Eugenie Besalla-Ludwig, Christa grew up in Aachen and began voice studies early with her mother, who became a well-known voice teacher in Germany and Austria. It is reported that at the age of 8, Christa sang a Queen of the Night aria! She studied piano, cello, flute and music theory at the Aachen Conservatory and later, voice at the Frankfurt Musikhochschule. During World War II the family moved a couple of times, once having been bombed out. Money was short, and later the teenage Christa sang to American soldiers to help the family budget.



In 1946 the young singer made her operatic stage debut at Opera Frankfurt, playing Orlovsky in *Die Fledermaus*. She sang with Opera Frankfurt until 1952, then moved on to other German opera houses, and joined the Vienna State Opera in 1955. She was connected with this house for more than thirty years, was awarded the title *Kammersängerin* in 1962, and in 1971 she created the title role in Gottfried von Einem's *Der Besuch der alten Dame* there. As a mezzo soprano, Christa Ludwig usually made her debut in roles like Cherubino (*The Marriage of Figaro*) at the Salzburg Festival in 1954, in the same role at the Metropolitan Opera in 1959, as Brangäne in *Tristan und Isolde* at the Bayreuth Festival in 1966 and first appeared at the Royal Opera House in London in 1968 as Amneris in Verdi's *Aida*. She was also acclaimed as Dorabella (*Così fan tutti*), Octavian (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Charlotte (*Werther*), etc., but as her voice developed under her mother's guidance, she took on other roles more in the dramatic and soprano range, and over the years developed a very wide repertoire, such as Leonore in *Fidelio*, the title role in *Carmen*, Ulrica in *Un ballo in maschera*, Octavia in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, the Dyers' Wife in R. Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*. Apart from Brangäne, her Wagner roles listed were Ortrud in *Lohengrin*, Fricka in both *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung* and Kundry in *Parsifal*, as well as others sung during her long career as a recording artist.

Apart from opera, Christa Ludwig regularly gave recitals of Lieder, including Schubert's *Winterreise* and Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*, also performed as soloist in oratorios, especially those of Bach, as well as in works by Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, Mahler and Strauss. Many of these performances were also recorded. In interviews, she spoke of "her three conductors" who had most influenced her, both on stage and in the recording studio, Karl Böhm, Herbert von Karajan and Leonard Bernstein, but she of course sang with many other renowned conductors. The large number of recordings she made include several Wagner *Ring*

Cycles! Among the wide assortment of awards from around Europe that she received during her life was the U.K. Gramophone magazine Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016.

Christa Ludwig retired from the stage in 1994, but continued to give masterclasses and some interviews. She had married Austrian bass-baritone Walter Berry in 1957, and they frequently performed together on stage and in recordings. They had one son. However, they divorced in 1970, and in 1972 she married French theatre actor Paul-Emile Deiber, who died in 2011. Her 1994 memoir was translated into English as *In My Own Voice*. Christa Ludwig died at her home in Klosterneuberg, Austria, and there have been many tributes. Vale.



| PROGRAMME FOR 2021 | | |
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| MONDAY 9 August 7.30 pm. | Clayton Wesley Uniting Church, Beulah Park | The Brian Coghlan Memorial Lecture. James Koehne on "The Grand Opéra of Paris ..." |
| Wednesday 22 September, 11.30 am, and 2.00 pm | Elder Hall, Adelaide | ASO Matinee Series c. Nicholas Braithwaite. Includes Wagner's <i>Siegfried Idyll</i> |
| 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 |

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