



## The Richard Wagner Society of South Australia Inc.

### NEWSLETTER 316 AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2021

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

This continues to be a difficult year, and it looks as if one special event planned for later in the year will now have to be postponed until 2022, by which time we all hope that things will be more back to normal. However, the President, Dr Geoff Seidel, has organised an informal viewing of the documentary "**Max Lorenz: Wagner's Mastersinger - Hitler's Siegfried**" to be held at Living Choice Fullarton at 7.00 pm on **Friday 17 September**. See the invitation on P. 2.

The Society is obliged to hold an Annual General Meeting, and this year we are planning to hold it on the evening of Thursday 4 November. We are also hoping to get a suitable weekend booking at Living Choice Fullarton for the annual pre-Christmas lunch. More details will be given in the next Newsletter.

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At least the Society was able to present a successful Brian Coghlan Memorial Lecture on 9 August. See the reports on Pp. 2-5.

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At the Annual General Meeting all Committee positions are declared vacant and members are required to re-nominate. Some "regulars" will stand for election again, but there will also be room for new Committee members with new ideas. All financial Society members are eligible to join the Committee. Meetings are held on week nights in private homes, at irregular intervals, depending on the Society programme. A Committee nomination form will be included in the next Newsletter.

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*Friday 17 September 2021*

**Max Lorenz: Wagner's Mastersinger - Hitler's Siegfried  
in the cinema, Living Choice, Fullarton.**



You are invited to a private showing of the YouTube version of Schulz and Wischmann's documentary about the great Wagner tenor Max Lorenz, plus a few other audio highlights. The date will be the Friday evening of the cancelled State Opera performance of *Voss*. The President, Dr Geoff Seidel, discovered this documentary after reading and reviewing an article in the Metropolitan Opera's *Opera News* (see Newsletter 315). He found it a very interesting work, and feels other members would also enjoy viewing it with fellow Wagnerians. **Booking is essential, as numbers are limited for the cinema. Masks must be worn**

**If you wish to dine before the show**, you can make a reservation for Damien on Fisher Restaurant. Phone 7111 2690. The menu is available at [damienonfisher.com](http://damienonfisher.com)

The President will share a bottle of wine in the foyer at 6-30pm if you'd rather dine later.

Details

Venue:	Theatre, Living Choice Retirement Village, 123 Fisher Street, Fullarton
Date and time:	FRIDAY 17 September 7.00 pm
Transport:	Park in the street. Bus 172 goes along Duthy St. Living Choice is a short walk up Fisher St. from Stop 8.
Cost:	\$5 to cover venue hire
RSVP/Booking	<b>Please contact Geoff Seidel if you intend coming so we have an idea of numbers (limited to 26)</b> 0420997551 <a href="mailto:geoffseidel@iprimus.com.au">geoffseidel@iprimus.com.au</a>

***Report of the Brian Coghlan Memorial Lecture evening***

It was a cool night in Clayton Wesley Uniting Church on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> August as Wagner followers gathered for the annual Brian Coghlan Memorial Lecture. About 40 mask wearing Wagnerites were present in the large church to hear Dr Jim Koehne, a learned cousin of President Geoff, deliver a much researched and information packed lecture entitled "The Grand Opéra of Paris: The Lost Legacy of the Nineteenth Century Spectacular". Guests of honour were Sybil and Justin Coghlan, the widow and son of Brian. The church, with ample car parking and friendly supper hall café, was a very agreeable venue. In these days of Covid19 precautions Penny had obtained our own Wagner Society QR code for all to register as they arrived. Penny and Helen had prepared both a magnificent cake as well as cheese and biscuits for the ensuing sit down (Covid rules) supper. All the planning worked well. Excellent job committee!

Brian Angus

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

The President, Dr Geoff Seidel, welcomed members and guests from other groups to the Brian Coghlan Memorial Lecture, given in memory of the late Professor Brian Coghlan, who was a Life Member and President of the Richard Wagner Society of S. Aust. for many years. Geoff acknowledged the presence of his widow Sybil Coghlan and their son Justin. He then introduced the evening's speaker, musicologist James Koehne, who also happens to be his cousin. Geoff noted that several members of the Koehne and Seidel families have close connections with the arts, especially music. And, speaking of Meyerbeer, he hadn't seen any live performances of his operas until he obtained a ticket to a performance of *Les Huguenots* in Berlin.

James opened by remarking this would probably be the first time a Wagner society has been given a lecture in which the main composer mentioned would be Giacomo Meyerbeer, but then again Adelaide's founders supported tolerance! He then treated us to a fascinating and scholarly talk on why Paris, between 1815 and 1851 - after Napoleon -- became known as the "Capital of the Nineteenth Century". James felt that, while German music was still highly respected, in other aspects, especially after the development of grand opera, Paris became the opera centre of Europe and as such attracted the young composer Richard Wagner. Richard and Minna first arrived in Paris in 1839 so he was only 26 at the time. While there he finished his first major opera, *Rienzi* and started working on *Dutchman*, but financially he was obliged to turn to journalism and hack jobs to survive.

The lecture was accompanied by a selection of texts, pictures and one opera extract shown on a large screen. With a lot of information to impart, James spoke briskly, moving things on, and I was unable to note everything mentioned and shown. One text was repeated in which Wagner, writing some years later, explained the attraction Paris held for him and other young artists.

James had taken some of his ideas for why Paris rose to such prominence at this period from the writer Walter Benjamin who planned a book, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century", which was never finished but his notes were published. Benjamin wrote of six objects (states or institutions) which he felt showed examples of historical developments that contributed to this rise and James explained he would concentrate on four of these:

1. Fourier, or the Arcades. There were many developments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including new materials and technologies, while new forms of architecture led to the building of shopping arcades and large department stores - and the rise of consumerism. Charles Fourier (1772-1837) a French social theorist, wrote of "machines for human purposes" and had a view of an ideal society, with everything for the benefit of the people.

2. Louis Philippe, or the Interior. Louis Philippe, 1773-1850, was installed as King of the French after the "July Revolution" of 1830. He was supported by bankers and industrialists and became known as the King of the bourgeoisie class. This "new" monied class had different taste, which James described as ostentatious neo-classicism, and focussed on the domestic environment. An illustration from this period showed a typical interior, in classic proportions but with an opulent décor. Louis Philippe abdicated in 1848.

3. Haussmann, or the Barricades. Georges-Eugène, Baron Haussmann, 1809-1891 is remembered as the official under Napoleon III (1808-1873) who supervised the redesign of the layout of old Paris, especially the grand boulevards crossing the city. James said these changes were a mask for the purpose of social (proletarian) control. He showed a picture of medieval Paris, with its narrow, cobbled streets, houses crowded together, and a few barricades, then another of the rebuilt Paris with boulevards too wide for barricades and without cobbles to be thrown!

4. Daguerre, or the Panoramas. The creation of dioramas to bring pictures to life was more of a theatrical device, which became very popular entertainment in this period. A diorama was like a small theatre, in which a painting (or paintings) could be transformed through changes in lighting, movement, use of mirrors and other effects - battle scenes or a volcanic eruption were popular subjects. Pierre Prévost (1764-1823) promoted the use of dioramas, and also painted a famous panorama which could be viewed in the round, but the diorama was actually invented by his assistants, Charles-Marie Bouton (1781-1853) and Louis Daguerre (1787-1851) who went on to other, related pursuits. Daguerre actually installed a diorama in his local church at Bry-sur-Marne, which changed as the light inside the

church changed. New discoveries in perspective and optics made these installations possible and impressive, and James said the development of dioramas changed the way we see the world.

James then went on to discuss at some length the book: "The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoleon" by John Tresch, who wrote of "mechanical romanticism"; an extraordinary time in Paris between 1815-1851 when there were so many scientific discoveries by people like André-Marie Ampère, Alexander von Humboldt and François Arago – the scientific romantics. They were scientists, not nationalists. It wasn't just hard scientific facts, but all about the senses and harmony. And with all the new developments, the rise of the affluent bourgeoisie and the new spectacular shows like the diorama, expectations of what to expect in opera changed. The result was the rise of grand opera. This term is used carelessly – it originally meant the Paris Opéra between the 1820s and 1860s. In the 1830s the Paris Opéra had a huge deficit, and in 1831 plans were put in place to fix this. A director/entrepreneur was to be put in charge, he was to put his own money into the productions, and if the productions went well, he would make a profit!

The first director appointed under this new scheme was Louis-Desiré Véron (1798-1867) and in five years he turned the Paris Opéra around, it became the "Versailles of the Bourgeoisie". He changed the seating within the building and the style of productions. In the seating, for example, he arranged cheaper seats in a position that allowed men to look at the ballet dancers' legs! Certain men were also permitted to watch the ballet warming up. Under Véron the style of productions offered were shows with visual excitement and very lavish sets and costumery, while classical stories were not used. James showed a scene from *La muette de Portici* by Daniel Auber, 1828, considered the earliest French grand opera. The idea was for entertainment, to give pleasure, with stories the audience understood.

Véron had a "formula". The operas were to contain five acts, be dramatic and involving the grandest human emotions, with stories of powerful historic interest, to be understood by the eyes, to include ballet, have a vast stage, with a large chorus and orchestra – apparently 60 machinists were employed backstage!

Richard Wagner was very impressed by this grand opera. James read out some extracts from Wagner's notes. He reflected on the money-making aspects of these productions! The Paris Opéra was a big deal. There was a huge bureaucracy, excellent staging, world class scenery, high levels of accuracy and realism. Rossini's *William Tell* was an early example. The designer travelled to the Swiss Alps first! But it did depend on the composer. The main one was Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1884), German-born and educated, but he had travelled into Italy and was in the opera scene there for some years. He followed Rossini to Paris, going first to the Opéra Comique. However, Véron encouraged Meyerbeer to enlarge his opera *Robert le Diable*, which was a gothic story like *Der Freischütz*, into a style more suited for the Opéra Comique. Meyerbeer and his librettists, Eugène Scribe and Casimir Delavigne enlarged and rewrote the story, settings and music. The real success was the ballet – of dead nuns! James then screened and read an enthusiastic report on the opera written by Chopin! This was followed by pictures of a crowd at the Paris Opéra and of the famous dead nuns' ballet. Degas also painted this subject.

James spoke briefly of the other famous Meyerbeer grand operas, *Les Huguenots* (1836), a humanist opera set around an historical event, *Le Propète* (1849) a psychological opera with dark themes and another historical event concerning the Anabaptists, while *L'Africaine* (1865) had a more exotic setting, featuring Vasco da Gama. This premiered after Meyerbeer's death. Things were changing.

And what did Meyerbeer's music sound like? James screened an example, the end of Act II of *Les Huguenots*, Opera Australia's 1990 production featuring Dame Joan Sutherland.

Meyerbeer had a meteorlike success in his lifetime, but his reputation was undermined by Wagner and Schumann who claimed his works were superficial "effects without causes" and that Meyerbeer's dramas were false spectacles uncommitted to the spirit or the soul. Wagner's criticism of Meyerbeer's works was partly based on his anti-semitism, and some of his writings became a basis for ideas leading to the development of fascism, but they were also based on personal envy.

However, Meyerbeer did have an influence on Richard Wagner, for example the idea of the "gesamtkunstwerk", and the model of the role of the composer being engaged with every aspect of the production. There were melodic passages, leitmotifs and extended scenes, as well as consideration of the mechanics, which influenced the machinery that was built in Bayreuth. However, in James's opinion, Wagner's musical imagination was unique, and exceeded that of Meyerbeer.

Wagner's poor opinion of Meyerbeer's works was shared by others, who objected to the reliance on spectacle, money and prestige. There was a debate about music versus expressionism, with the idea

that music should engage the listener. Berlioz had a suspicion of grand opera, wrote instead *Les Troyens* based on the story of Dido and Aeneas. He got his ideas from Spontini who had a love for the classics, and there was talk of unadorned truth and work dictated from the heart. However, these days some people are trying to reinstate Meyerbeer, his sensibility and humanism.

Summarising Paris opera of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: there was some talk of the “opera machine”. Balzac, who appreciated music, wrote that it was artificial and needed machines to make it visible, and spoke of the material and spiritual domains. James felt that grand opera’s cultural world was in the spirit of the cosmopolitanism ideas and attitude held in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in the character of 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris. Culture was the means of promoting social values and the Paris Opéra represented the aspirations of Paris. James showed a picture and spoke briefly of the singer Pauline Viardot who held a renowned music salon. After 1848 came the rise of nationalism, and changes. Once again James showed the piece written by Richard Wagner which described the attraction that Paris had held for him.

When Meyerbeer died in Paris, his body was sent to Berlin for burial: thousands lined the route. At the conclusion, Penny Hewson thanked Jim Koehne for his stimulating talk, which gave such insights into the influence of Paris on Richard Wagner.

With current covid restrictions and a new venue, this particular event involved quite a lot of extra work behind the scenes. Thanks to all those who helped things go reasonably smoothly and ensured that the 2021 Brian Coghlan Memorial Lecture was a special occasion. Lee Brauer

## *From the Reviews*

As Europe hopefully starts coming out of prolonged lockdowns and closures it is exciting to see some luxuriously cast new productions of Wagner operas. First there was the radical new production of *Parsifal* by Kirill Serebrennikov at the Vienna Staatsoper performed for TV and streaming in an empty theatre. But now there have been in July not one, but two *Tristans*, both in new productions in populated theatres and with top shelf casts.

On 29 June the Bavarian Staatsoper uncovered a new production by Krzysztof Warlikowski, conducted by Music Director Kirill Petrenko and featuring the long-awaited role debuts by the “dream team” of Jonas Kaufmann and Anja Harteros. Kaufmann had sung a concert performance of *Tristan* Act II with The Boston Symphony in 2018, but never the whole role on stage. Joshua Barone writing in *The New York Times* says that Warlikowski remains firmly fixed on the concept of Freud’s death drive with the constant presence, in changing sets, of an analyst’s divan and cabinet full of deadly instruments including the death potion. The lead characters are traumatised by the bloody events preceding the action and attempt suicide in each act. The protagonists were at their best vocally in the prolonged love duet in Act II with Harteros achieving a “delicate beauty” and Kaufmann “calm yet crushing”. Susan Hall for *ConcertoNet* finds that the production elements, including the final drowning death of the lovers, fit the story well. Kaufmann is now the master of a number of the biggest Wagner tenor roles and his singing was “smooth...masterful and moving”. She assesses the supporting role of Okka von der Damerau (Brangäne), Wolfgang Koch (Kurwenal) and Mika Kares (Marke) as “superb”.

The experienced duo of Nina Stemme and Stuart Skelton opened in Simon Stone’s production at the Aix-en-Provence Festival on July 2nd with the London Symphony conducted by Sir Simon Rattle. The production sounds fairly bewildering with the lead characters apparently in a crumbling marriage and the action taking place by act, in a luxury apartment, an architect’s design office in Paris, and a graffitied Metro carriage travelling from Porte de Lilas to Châtelet. Jim Pritchard writing for *Seen and Heard International* says it makes little sense in relation to what Wagner wrote and comments generally on an increase in *Konzept* productions with the age of lockdowns. He praises Rattle’s nuanced and intense conducting of the “wonderfully virtuosic” London Symphony Orchestra but surprisingly opines that the lead duo are “past their better days” in these roles. On the other hand, Barone in *The New York Times* says Skelton delivered a performance of “herculean grit and shattering dramatic acuity” and Romain Daroles for *Bachtrack* describes the pair as “stratospheric” with “Breadth, nuance, emotion, power, correctness of sound emission, yet more emotion”. Jamie Barton as Brangäne gets universal praise and Barone comments on Franz-Josef Selig’s “vigorous but touching” Marke.

Geoff Seidel

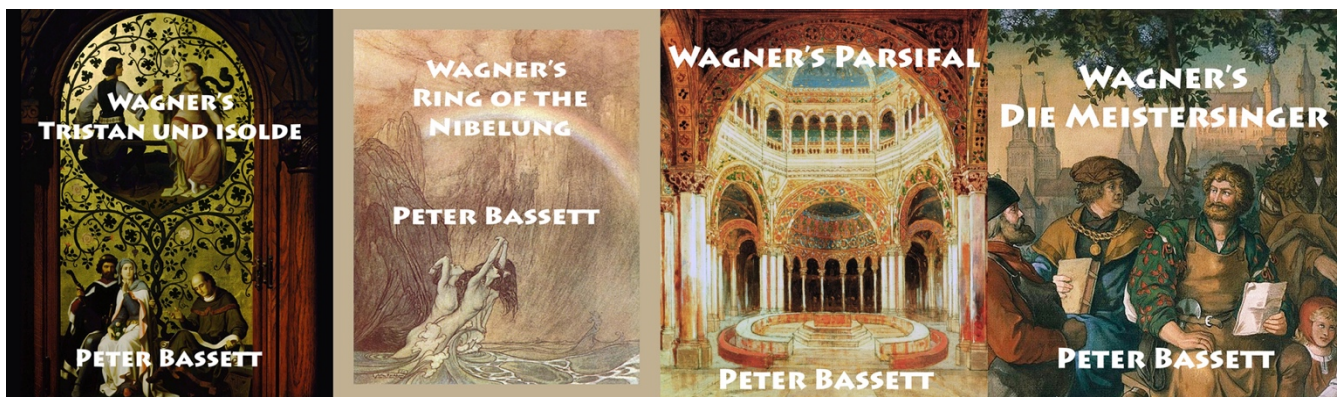


## News from the Norns

All members must surely know by now that Opera Australia had to postpone the Brisbane Ring Cycle yet again! It must have been such a disappointment for everyone involved. New dates have yet to be announced. Peter Jakobsen had a few thoughts on the postponement at: <http://www.thevarnishedculture.com/for-whom-the-bell-rings/>

This year's Bayreuth Festival went ahead from 25 July until 25 August, under tight restrictions with half capacity audiences. Seats were restricted to those who were vaccinated against the coronavirus, had recovered from the virus or had a negative test. The Festival was opened with a performance of *Der fliegende Holländer*, conducted by Ukrainian Oksana Lyniv, the first female conductor in the history of the Festival. Among the audience was the German Chancellor and her husband.

Dr Peter Bassett has sent details of four eBooks, digital versions of some of his publications, which can be accessed and downloaded at: [www.wagnerebooks.com](http://www.wagnerebooks.com) at the reasonable price of \$14.95 each. For members who don't know of Dr Bassett, President of the Wagner Society of Queensland, he was closely associated with the "Adelaide Wagner Decade" (1995-2005), completing his PhD thesis on the topic, has published numerous books and articles on opera in general and those of Richard Wagner in particular. He has organised Wagner conferences, gives lectures and broadcasts on Wagner and has led many opera tours in Australia and around the world. On behalf of the Wagner Society of Qld. he had organised two events to accompany each of the Brisbane Ring Cycles in 2020, and when these had to be cancelled, organised three symposia in 2021!



	PROGRAMME FOR 2021	
FRIDAY 17 September 7.00 pm.	Living Choice Fullarton	Screening of documentary: "Max Lorenz: Wagner's Mastersinger - Hitler's Siegfried"
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>

### The Richard Wagner Society of South Australia

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