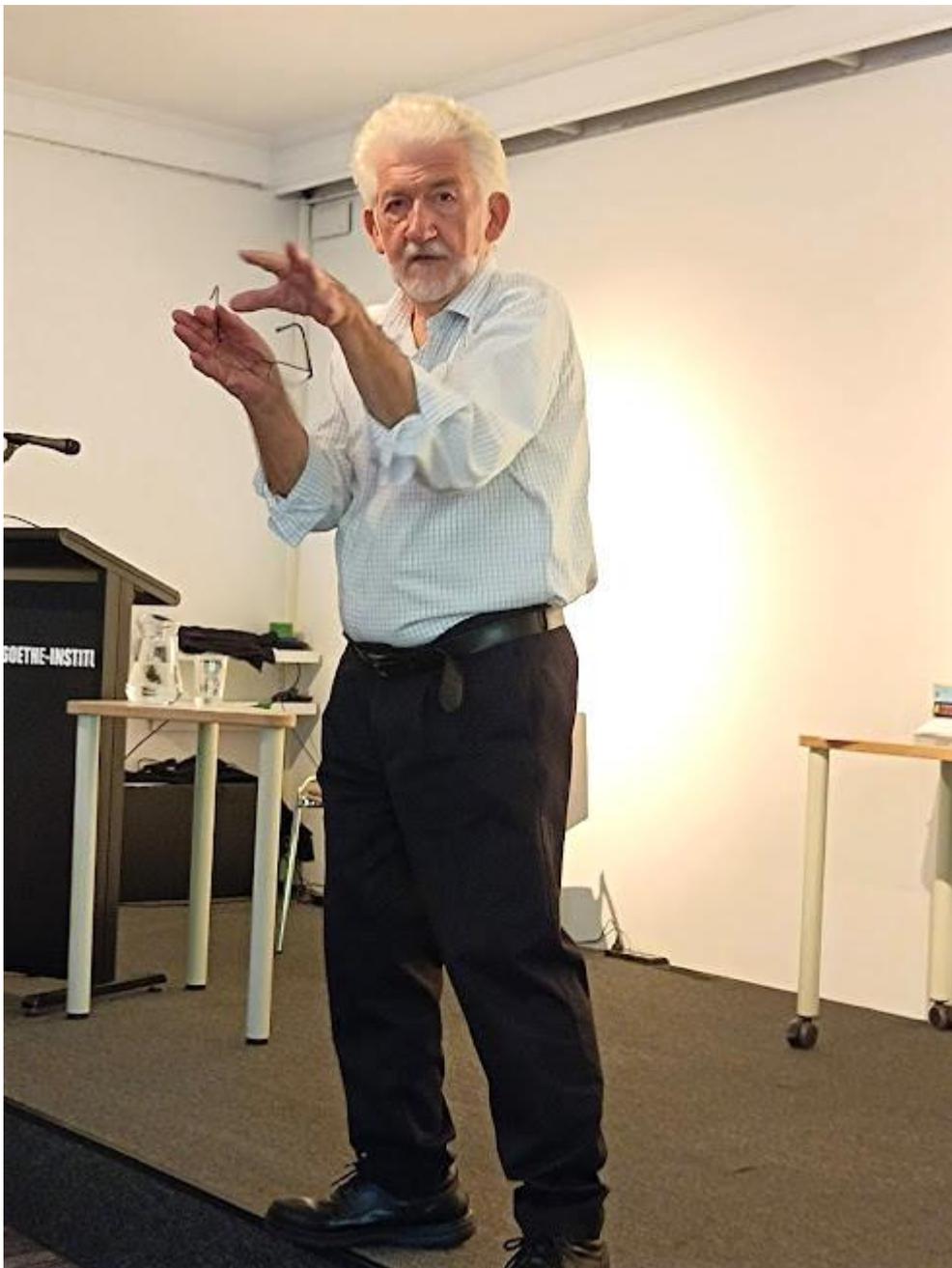
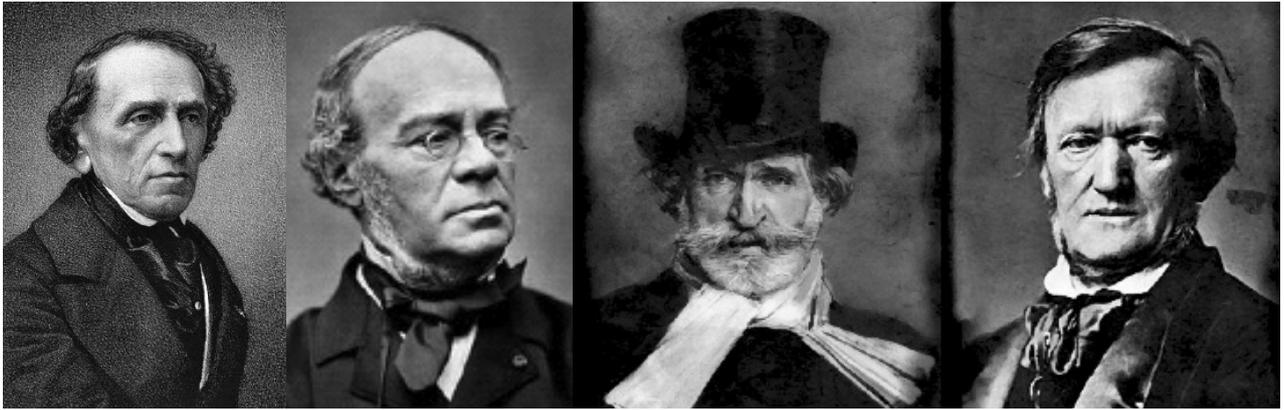


**Sunday 20 February 2022, 1.30pm**

**Talk by Robert Gay on The impact of  
French Grand Opera on the works of Verdi &  
Wagner**

*A Wagner Society in NSW in-person event at  
the Goethe Institut, Woollahra*





L-R: Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791 – 1864); Fromental Halévy (1799 – 1862); Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901) and Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883)

## Report

60 members enthusiastically acclaimed popular music educator and favourite tour-guide Robert Gay after his very entertaining stroll through the extravagant world of the Paris Opera in the 1830s and 1840's. Robert spoke for nearly 3 hours, with a break for Champagne and French cheeses, but didn't actually get through his entire talk, or play all the planned musical examples. At the end he broke into a canter and drew his themes together to illustrate his ideas about how Verdi and Wagner were influenced by the earlier composers writing for the Paris Opera. He will be coming back to us later this year to finish it off. He handed out notes outlining the main features of French Grand Opera and the principal composers. These notes are available in our E-News. Robert played recordings of very beautiful and dramatic scenes by Auber, Rossini, Halévy and Meyerbeer and performed hilarious impressions of the exhausted pilgrims in *Tannhäuser*, plus a duet between a soprano and a mute ballerina, from Auber's *La Muette de Portici*. The talk was especially useful as an introduction to Halévy's *La Juive*, which Opera Australia is staging in March 2022.

## About the talk

French Grand Opera sprang into vigorous life in Paris during the 1830s, with hugely successful works by Meyerbeer, Halévy and others magnificently staged at the Paris Opéra.

The early heyday of this new operatic genre marked a formative period for both Verdi and Wagner who were about to embark on their first operatic ventures, culminating for Wagner in the huge success of *Rienzi* – a French Grand Opera in all but language – in Dresden in 1842, and for Verdi with the favourable reception in Paris of *Jérusalem* – a hastily organised rewrite in French of his earlier *I lombardi* – which premiered at the Opéra in 1847.

Verdi went on to compose *Les Vêpres siciliennes* and *Don Carlos* for two of the Paris Expositions Universelles, while Wagner unfairly suffered the indignity of a fiasco at the Opéra with his revised 'Paris version' of *Tannhäuser* in 1861. Nevertheless, many features of French Grand Opera can be clearly discerned in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and perhaps even more surprisingly in *Götterdämmerung* and *Parsifal*.

### About Robert Gay



After gaining a BA, Dip. Ed. from the University of Sydney, Robert trained as a lyric baritone in London and Munich before turning to the field of music education with a position at 2MBS-FM. He has taught music history courses at Sydney University's Centre for Continuing Education since 1985. Robert's musical expertise ranges wide, from baroque to modern. He particularly enjoys placing works in their larger contexts – musical, biographical, social and historical. Since 1987, Robert Gay has managed to combine his passion for music and his love of teaching with his enthusiasm for travel. He has visited the great opera houses and concert halls of Europe and America and heard most of the great singers and instrumentalists of the last half-century. Robert was President of the Sydney Schubert Society for eighteen years, and for several years was a guest lecturer for ADFAS.