

Maximise

your enjoyment and understanding of

Wagner's music

Newsletter No. 126, September 2012

In Memoriam

DENIS CONDON

Piano Historian & Collector Dies - Article Below

President's Report

Welcome to the third newsletter for 2012.

It has been an exciting time for us Wagner lovers. First, our patron, Simone Young somehow managed to fit us into an incredibly busy schedule, and was the star of our last function, on 12 August. An unprecedented number attended the event – 160 in all - including a quite a few non-members, some of whom joined the Society on the spot. The first part of the meeting consisted of an interview between Francis Merson and Maestra Young (I refuse to call her "Maestro," so henceforth she will be "Simone"). Francis is the editor of *Limelight Magazine*, and he asked a number of interesting questions about Simone's background and her future plans. Simone, who was amazingly relaxed, given her other commitments, gave very full responses about her musical experiences, and spoke in an extremely frank and sometimes self-deprecating manner. We were treated to a number of anecdotes from her life, delivered with great humour. Some of them are described in detail later in this newsletter. As to her future plans, she is committed to remain in Hamburg until the end of the 2015 season, at which time she proposes to do freelance work. By then both her daughters will have finished school, so that her husband, Greg, will be free to travel with her.

During the last part of the session Simone took questions from the floor, and was extremely generous with her answers. She gave a fascinating exposition of how she

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PATRON:	Simone Young AM
HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS:	Prof Michael Ewans Mr Richard King Mr Horst Hoffman Mr Joseph Ferfaglia

STOP PRESS 1:

On 12 August a capacity audience of Members and guests met our Patron, Simone Young AO. A large group went north to hear the Hamburg Opera Orchestra and cast of *Das Rheingold* in two sensational performances.



Simone Young, Francis Merson and Jane Mathews at Sunday, 12 August 2012 function

STOP PRESS 2:

Sydney Symphony announces two concert performances of *Der fliegende Holländer*, starring Eric Owens (Alberich in the current Metropolitan Opera Ring Cycle) with conductor-designate David Robertson, Amber Wagner, John Daszak and Sally-Anne Russell among others.

For Your **Diary**

2013		
Sat. 13 & Sun. 14 April (and 18 April at Dendys)	<i>PARSIFAL</i> – Metropolitan Opera production	Cremorne Orpheum, Chauvel & Dendy Newtown & Opera Quays
20 and 22 July	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> - starring Eric Owens - SSO concert performances	Sydney Opera House
31 July and 1, 2 August	Extracts from <i>Meistersinger</i> and <i>Die Walküre</i> and the Sydney premiere of James Ledger's remarkable <i>The Madness and Death of King Ludwig</i> (31 July and 1 August only)	Sydney Opera House
7, 9, 10 August	<i>Wesendonck Lieder</i> – orchestrated by Felix Mottl	Sydney Opera House
18, 19, 20, 21 September	The Ring – An Orchestral Adventure – arranged de Vlieger	Sydney Opera House
Nov-December 2013	The Ring Cycle – Melbourne: Cycle 1: November 18 to 25. Cycle 2: November 27 to December 4. Cycle 3: December 6 to 13. ##	Melbourne Opera Theatre

Opera Australia has created a new website for its Melbourne Ring Cycle, including a process for registering your application for tickets, if you haven't qualified for other ticketing arrangements: http://melbourneringcycle.com.au/visit_melbourne.

Meetings **Dates** & Coming **Events**

DATE	EVENTS - 2012 EVENT STARTING TIMES MAY VARY PLEASE CHECK THE SCHEDULE FOR DETAILS	TIME & LOCATION
16 September	In Conversation with John Pickering on Life in Germany, and Lübeck and Members' Feedback: Bayreuth 2012 DVD at 12.30pm: Act 3 of <i>Tannhäuser</i> , with Stig Andersen in the title role.	Goethe Institut 2PM
21 October	In Conversation with John Wegner No DVD and early start at 1PM.	Goethe Institut 1PM
11 November	End of Year Special Event - Concert with Warwick Fyfe and Lisa Harper-Brown with accompanist Stephen Mould - AT MOSMAN ART GALLERY (corner Art Gallery Way and Myahgah Road) - catered event; no need to bring a plate. No DVD	Mosman Art Gallery
DATE	2013 Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	TIME & LOCATION
Sat & Sun 9-10 February	TBC – Ring Weekend – we hope to bring you a comprehensive series of lectures as part of our preparation for the Melbourne 2013 Ring	TBA
10 March	<i>Climbing Towards Midnight / Jack Symonds' composition referencing Parsifal Act 2</i> - Louis Garrick & Jack Symonds, Sydney Chamber Opera	Goethe Institut 2PM
14 April	Dr David Schwartz (composer, countertenor & specialist on Yiddish theatre) - <i>Wagner and Psychological Motivation in The Ring</i>	Goethe Institut 2PM
26 May	Wagner Society AGM with Special Musical Event	Goethe Institut 2PM
30 June	Tony Legge, OA, Opera Australia's Assistant Music Director	Goethe Institut 2PM
11 August	Lisa Gasteen – Professor of Opera at Queensland Conservatorium	Goethe Institut 2PM
8 September	Neil Armfield's Ring Adventure - Director of Opera Australia's 2013 Ring Cycle in Melbourne	Goethe Institut 2PM
Advice about changes to the Program will be emailed to people who have given their email addresses to the Society's Webmaster; the latest updates will also be available on the Society's webpage: www.wagner.org.au. Admission to each event will be \$20 a Member, and \$25 per non-Member, unless otherwise indicated.		
Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)		

New Members

The following people joined the Society from May 2012:

Michael Berman & Lee Berman; Jill Sullivan; Peter Bruce; David and Valerie Adamson; Wendy Atmore; Rosalind Baker; Richard Buckdale & Rong Hui Liu; Christina Busby; Chris Ford; Dianne Gallagher; Maire Glacken; Judith Gleeson-White; Joy Hanckel; Audrey Haslem; Nora Haywood; Alison Stenmark; Richard White; Donna Woodhill.



Committee 2010 - 2011

President	Jane Mathews	9360 9822
Vice President	Leona Geeves	9337 6978
Vice President & Newsletter Editor	Terence Watson	8097 9797
Treasurer & Membership Secretary	Dennis Mather	0413 156 700 or 9560 1860
Secretary	Colleen Chesterman	9360 4962
Members	Roger Cruickshank immediate past President	0414 553 282
	Tony Jones	0412 572 624
	Peter Murray	wagner_nsw@optusnet.com.au
	Mike Day	0413 807 533
	Paulo Montoya	0405 196 085
Public Officer	Alasdair Beck	9358 3922

President's Report continued

suggested a newcomer should approach the Ring. In the process, she pointed out – something I had never thought of before – that the opera *Siegfried* is a series of duets. And she was, as always, absolutely correct: when one thinks about it, there is not a single scene in the entire opera which has more than two participants.

I had (foolishly) thought that I knew a reasonable amount about Simone's past, but I was stupefied at some of her achievements, not to mention the illustrious musicians she has worked with closely over the years. She remains, incidentally, the only woman ever to have conducted a full Ring Cycle, and by now she has conducted quite a few!

All in all, it was an exceptional afternoon.

And the treats continued....at least, they did so for the many Sydneysiders who went to Brisbane where Simone conducted her Hamburg orchestra in two concert performances of *Das Rheingold*, with a Mahler 2nd symphony ("the Resurrection") thrown in for good measure. Simone conducted the orchestra (comprising well over 100 players) in thrilling performances which brought the entire audience to its feet at the end. The soloists are described later in this Newsletter, but I have to mention the Wotan, Falk Struckmann, who in my opinion is amongst the greatest Wotans singing today. The cast was the same as many of us saw in Hamburg, except for the Fricka and the Alberich, both of whom have moved onto other roles. Our own Deborah Humble was a superb Erda. Members will remember that our Society is sponsoring Deborah in the Melbourne Ring, where she will be singing both Erda and Waltraute, and will therefore be singing in all four operas.

Between the two *Rheingolds* there was a full-day *Rheingold* Symposium at the Brisbane Conservatorium, comprising many very interesting presentations. Simone gave a fascinating talk in which, amongst other things, she compared the operatic forces available in Hamburg, a medium-sized German provincial town, with those available to Opera Australia. OA has 68 full-time orchestral players and 40 choristers, while Hamburg has 128 and 70 respectively. Hamburg, with its repertory system, performs about 33 operas each year.

New productions then remain in the repertoire, and can be revived at any time in the future. The difference, of course, lies in the available funding for the arts. Would that we could approach the German model! Katie French has written a full report later in this Newsletter.

Bayreuth Tickets for 2013

We are continuing in our endeavours to persuade the Bayreuth Festival authorities to resume allocating tickets to Wagner Societies. Indeed, our Treasurer, Dennis Mather, and I went to Bayreuth for the day when we were in Munich for the Ring Cycle. We had lunch with Frau Besser-Eichler, the head of the Friends of Bayreuth. She is very sympathetic to the Wagner Societies, but is unfortunately only one voice amongst several. We cannot afford to be optimistic about the outcome. We certainly know that there will be no such allocations for the 2013 festival. However we will continue to receive a small allocation from the Friends of Bayreuth. Accordingly, there are two principal ways in which members can apply for 2013 festival tickets. First, members can apply for tickets directly from the Bayreuth box office, either by post or through the internet (postal and internet addresses are set out below). Applications must be received by 20 October

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2012. Secondly, members can apply for tickets from the Society's allocation from the Friends of Bayreuth, in the same way as they have in the past. The application form is at the back of this Newsletter. However, as indicated, not many tickets will be available by this means. These applications must be received by 5 October 2012. It might also be possible to buy tickets, although probably at inflated prices, through certain travel agents.

Postal address:

Bayreuther Festspiele Kartenburo
Postfach 10 02 62
95402 Bayreuth
GERMANY
Internet: www.bayreuther-festspiele.de

Wagner 2013 Bicentenary Donation Appeal

2013 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Richard Wagner and will be a significant international musical occasion. The Wagner Society hopes to pledge major support for the 2013 Wagner Bicentenary Celebrations. To achieve this, we have set up a 'Wagner 2013 Fund' and we need your support to help make this possible.

Making a donation to the 'Wagner 2013 Fund' will ensure the Society's contributions to the celebrations will be world class. We are considering a number of possible exciting projects. One of them involves supporting a major international artist participating in Opera Australia's Ring performances in November and December 2013. We will also continue to promote the life and works of Richard Wagner through performances and events in Sydney.

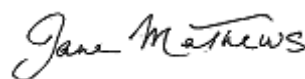
Donations are fully tax-deductible and can be made by cheque or money order by direct debit; details of the Society's bank account and postal address are given below.

BANK DETAILS

Westpac Banking Corporation,
Paddington NSW Branch
Account Name: The Wagner Society
BSB: 032040
Account Number: 911323

Our postal address is:
GPO Box 4574
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Thank you for considering this request for support - any donation to the Wagner Society's 'Wagner 2013 Fund' will make a difference.



The Hon Jane Mathews AO
President
Wagner Society in New South Wales

THE DONATION FORM IS PRINTED ON THE INSIDE BACK COVER OF THE NEWSLETTER

or can be downloaded at the Society's Website:

www.wagner.org.au/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&Itemid=68

Donations

The Society welcomes all donations and they can be addressed to the Treasurer, Wagner Society in NSW Inc., at the Society's GPO Box address shown on the back page of this Newsletter. Such donations help us to carry out our objective "to promote the music of Richard Wagner and to encourage a wider appreciation of the significance of his achievements." Donations are tax-deductible and receipts will be issued. The following donations have been received since May 2012: Jan Bowen; Colleen and Michael Chesterman; Peter Craswell; Christine Deer; Heinz Ebert; Margaret and Clare Hennessy; Douglas Jamieson; Gillian and Brian Jones; Diana McBain; Garry Richards; Mitzi Saunders; Flora and John Weickhardt; Anna Ziegler.

Email Addresses

Email is for many members the communication method of choice, and it's vital for us to have your current email address if you want to receive reminders about Society functions, or in the future to receive the Newsletter electronically. The Society's email address is info@wagner-nsw.org.au (info at wagner hyphen nsw dot org dot au).

If you'd like to receive reminders about forthcoming Society events and occasional matters of interest to members, just send us an email from your current email address, with "Email reminder service" in the "subject" line. If you'd like to take part in the pilot for electronic delivery of the Newsletter, make sure that we have your current address by enrolling (or re-enrolling) in the Email Reminder Service.

Some people have particularly avaricious anti-spam programs which devour emails from nice people like us, and each different email program (such as Outlook) has its own way of avoiding this. Some programs let you nominate the Society as a "favourite" or "trusted address", to ensure that our emails do not suffer that fate, and if you take the time to make us "trusted" you'll ensure that you receive our emails for as long as you want to.



Simone Young: A Month Of **Music-Making** In Australia for **Our Patron** - Colleen Chesterman and Terence Watson

The Wagner Society's meeting on 12 August 2012 was addressed by the Society's Patron Simone Young. In Sydney she conducted the Sydney Symphony in "Wagner Under the Sails" on 9, 10 and 11 August with the renowned US Wagnerian soprano Christine Brewer. The concert was to celebrate the first official performance by the Sydney Symphony in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House on 29 September 1973. The 1973 gala concert of Wagner's music was conducted by Charles Mackerras with Birgit Nilsson as soloist.



Pauline Holgerson, Jane Mathews (President), and Renate Junker with Patron Simone Young at afternoon tea

The 135 members and friends present broke into spontaneous applause as Society President Jane Mathews introduced Simone; many had attended all 3 of the recent concerts. Answering general questions from Francis Merson, editor of the ABC's 'Limelight' magazine, Simone showed again her intelligence, wit and deep love of Wagner's music. She had first heard Wagner's music when, as a schoolgirl she was attending music theory classes at the Conservatorium. The lecturer put on the Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* and she was 'blown away'. An early mentor, conductor Stuart Challender, encouraged her enthusiasm for Wagner, giving her records and advice on conductors (Kempe, Kleiber, Bruno Walter). He insisted she get the night bus to Melbourne to hear Mackerras conduct *Siegfried*. However, Simone early acknowledged that she disliked Wagner as a man, his politics, his behaviour towards women and his anti-Semitism, but believed that she was able to keep his music apart from her attitude to the man.

As a student, prompter and assistant conductor she developed her ability to sight read quickly and accurately. In Europe this led to her appointment as assistant conductor to Daniel Barenboim. Her first experience of conducting Wagner occurred with Barenboim at a Bayreuth Festival rehearsal. With little warning he asked her to take over conducting early in *Die Walküre* Act II, while he said he was going into the auditorium to check the sound balance for the recording he was making. He did not return till near the end of the Act.

She described her experience as the first woman to conduct the Vienna State Opera orchestra, at a time when it had no women players; she recalled some players thought an Italian man was coming! She had, however, studied the scores thoroughly, showed she understood the text and was able to impress the orchestra with her background knowledge and what she described as The Stare! She calmed herself by asking herself what was the worst thing that could happen

and realizing that, even if she DID mess up, at least she would still be the first woman to conduct the orchestra!

The record Society audience was impressed by the resources she commands in Hamburg, a city of 2 million, which provides state subsidies for three orchestras (two publicly and one privately funded), an opera with a full-time chorus, and a ballet company and two theatre companies. She suggested that, generous though German governments are with cultural funding, the financial crisis is leading to a reassessment of priorities. Nonetheless, the existence of 148 opera companies in the country provides a strong basis for steeping singers and musicians in the German Romantic repertoire. Despite the artistic rewards of her artistic commitments, Simone described her frustration at the practical demands of also being the general manager of a company and looks forward to 2015 when she will become again a free-lance conductor. Although she loves Australia, Simone acknowledged that her artistic base will have to remain in Europe.

Ms Young was generous in answering questions from the responsive and enthusiastic audience. She commented on the relaxed attitudes in Australia among performers and players and the easy camaraderie compared with the formal relationships in Germany.

One audience member asked whether German companies are also keen to attract younger audiences; Simone pointed out that the real issue was getting people with young children, demanding work and mortgages into opera houses. She did, though, describe an innovative program introduced by her Hamburg Orchestra: family concerts, where children are taken away during the first half for an introduction to the main work to be played while their parents listen to other music played by the orchestra. The children then join their parents to hear the main work in full. The program, she said, had been very successful.



She agreed with Society audience criticisms of the Sydney Opera House pit, but did not like the *Die Tote Stadt* solution of placing the orchestra in a separate room: she believes that conductor, orchestra and singers need to be in direct communication.

A student involved in the UTS *Wagner Licht* project (see article below) asked for advice on starting to listen to *The Ring*. Simone suggested ignoring *Das Rheingold* (as the plot was too complicated and the motivic structure too complex), but, rather, studying closely Act I of *Die Walküre*, then Act III, before moving to Acts II and III of *Götterdämmerung*, thus getting a sweep through the main arc of the story. She urged us not to be obsessed with identifying leitmotifs, suggesting that only a small number are really critical to the central emotional development: the Rhinegold, the curse, Valhalla, the

Siegmond-Sieglinde love-music, the sword and the spear. She left the audience with a tempting invitation to Hamburg in 2013, when the Opera will perform all 10 major Wagner operas in May-June 2012 and a concert version of *Rienzi* in February 2012.

In addition to attending the 12 August function of the Wagner Society in NSW in her capacity as Patron, Simone Young has been in Australia for a number of concerts. On 28 July 2012 she conducted the Australian Youth Orchestra at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, with soprano Lisa Gasteen in "Brünnhilde's Immolation" from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*; and Richard Strauss's "Alpine Symphony." On August 3 and 4, she conducted the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, in Brahms' *German Requiem* with bass-baritone Albert Dohmen and soprano Emma Matthews.

Simone Young's **Brisbane-Hamburg** Opera Festival

It was a memorable occasion for those Society Members who were able to attend all or some of the Brisbane concerts, in which Simone Young conducted the Hamburg State Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra in two concert performances of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* (23 and 25 August) and one performance of Mahler's Second Symphony, the "Resurrection," (24 August), with the Brisbane Mahler Chorus specially formed by the Queensland Performing Arts Centre and trained by Chorus Master Emily Cox. Ms Anna Larson, Alto, and Ms Hayoung Lee, Soprano stepped out of their roles in *Das Rheingold* as Fricka and Woglinde, respectively, for the powerful and subtly directed performance that made the most of the QPAC Concert Hall's clear and clean acoustics.

The performances of *Das Rheingold* included most of the cast that a number of Wagner Society Members had seen in 2011 in Hamburg during the first full cycles of the Ring (two singers had moved on for professional reasons). The multi-national cast in Brisbane was composed of: Wotan – Falk Struckmann, Donner – Jan Buchwald; Froh – Chris Lyck; Loge – Jürgen Sacher; Alberich – Eike Wilm Schulte (replacement); Mime – Peter Galliard; Fasolt – Tigran Martirosian; Fafner – Adrian Sâmpetean; Fricka – Anna Larson (replacement); Freia – Vida Miknevičiute; Erda – Deborah Humble; Woglinde – Hayoung Lee; Wellgunde – Marian Markina; Flosshilde.

It was a special delight for all NSW Wagnerians in Brisbane to have the chance to hear Society Member Deborah Humble singing after her recent interview by Damien Beaumont at the Society's 17 June meeting. Members now have something special to look forward to in the 2013 Melbourne Ring Cycle after hearing Deborah's rich creamy mezzo tones bringing warmth and clarity to Erda's sombre warnings to Wotan.

The whole of the cast, though, was noteworthy for the consistency of the standard of singing, with the occasional bit of by-play between the performers as moments of their stage performances crept into this concert staging, adding life to a format that sometimes can be static and

perfunctory. Wotan and Loge seemed to have a bit of a "bros" relationship, especially in the Nibelheim scene, with Wotan punching Loge in the arm as he egged Alberich on to outdo his magicking by turning himself into a toad. (This interaction became even hammier in the second performance, with Sacher and Struckmann making the most of their chance to bring some light relief to the otherwise serious subject.)

Sacher, though, overall, came close to stealing the show with his somewhat louche, insolent and sardonic attitude and richly varied vocal characterisation of this trickiest of the gods. On this appearance, Hayoung Lee and Vida Miknevičiute had by far the strongest voices or best projection, with Miknevičiute, though, also being able to project vulnerability and anguish at her fate. Larson was able to suggest a subtle power in contrast to Struckmann's Wotan by means of her stature. Struckmann's commanding bass baritone voice projected Wotan's masculine swagger while having room for some torment and frustration as his triumph in acquiring the ring is punctured by Erda's warning. Martirosian was particularly impressive with a rich and clear bass as the victim of Freia's charms. The Rhinedaughters also showed an easy interaction flowing from their stage performances that added to the pleasure of hearing their nicely differentiated voices blending. Even though he has not yet performed Alberich in the Hamburg Ring Cycle, Schulte is clearly in vocal command of this role, with his voice very effectively balancing Wotan's – and his scream of pain and anguish when Wotan tears the ring from his finger was convincingly spine-chilling. The remaining singers demonstrated the depth and evenness of talent in this team that is a great advertisement for the complete cycle in May-June 2013.

If the singing did not convince one of the quality of this Wagnerian team, then the orchestral playing certainly should have erased any doubts. Under Young's authoritative direction, showing her experience in conducting many cycles in many houses, the orchestra shone like the burnished Wagner



tubas in the brass section. In an interview before the ABC's broadcast on Sunday, 26 August 2012, Simone responded to a question about the difference between a concert and a staged performance of *Das Rheingold*, by saying that orchestra members had commented to her that it was wonderful change to be on stage to be able to hear each other more clearly and to interact more directly than when in the pit.

While the orchestra may have been making a special effort to impress their Australian audiences, they could not have achieved such an impressive impression without an underlying technical proficiency of a very high order and deep musical sensitivity. The orchestra responded almost instinctively (as one might expect after such a long association) to Young's direction that varied the

music subtly and evocatively to make the music shimmer and growl, menace and uplift to match the text's mercurial changes of mood and import. The Concert Hall's wonderfully clear and clean acoustic enabled us to hear the "innards" of Wagner's complex harmonic and structural patterns more clearly than is often the case, giving us a better understanding of how Wagner weaves his magic on our ears and minds.

All in all, if you attended the concert, your Editor thinks that you would have had an outstanding experience of Wagner's music at the highest level. The only improvement would be to see the work in a staged performance – and that is on offer during Wagner's bicentenary in Hamburg – and many other places in Europe, the USA and Australia.

“Music in the Age of Soundbites” - Ms Young's 2010 Peggy Glanville-Hicks Address

In 1999, the New Music Network instituted the Address in honour of one of Australia's great international composers. It is now an annual forum for ideas relating to the creation and performance of Australian music. The 2012 Address will be given in Melbourne at BMW Edge on 2 November by pianist Michael Kieran Harvey (see www.newmusicnetwork.com.au for further information).

Ms Young's address covered many interesting and provocative topics and demonstrates that, not only does she bring a deeply considered and incisive insights to Wagner's music-dramas, but also to the broader questions of the significance of serious music in our contemporary world characterized by instantaneous and continuous aural and visual input from a wide variety of sources and the consequent difficulty of giving full attention to any of it.

She laments the difficulties facing musicians in making the music, not for example the star quality of the performance, the story in the media that no longer has a high standard of musical literacy. On the other hand, she suggests knowledge of the history and structure of a piece of music may not have any bearing on the emotional impact of a musical work.

Ms Young also tackles the contentious matter of elitism in the arts and especially the schizoid attitudes in cultural organisations and the larger society to aiming for the highest standards and feeling that somehow that aim is discriminatory and embarrassing.

The "soundbite" reference in Ms Young's title is, somewhat controversially, to the idea of musical motifs that many musicians, especially Beethoven and Wagner, used to structure their compositions. The *Tristan und Isolde* prelude, for example, she suggests is sufficient to suggest a complex of musical and intellectual ideas and emotions, as well as, inspiring us to follow where the music leads. Such motifs as the initial notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony have entered the cultural lexicon of western societies and are recognised by many people, even if they do not know the source.

She also emphasised the need for audience members of classical music performances (including music theatre) to receive a performance to validate and bring to life a musical work; indeed the reception of the work of art can constitute the creation of that work. The role of the conductor is central to the performance through great instinct and intellect, emotion and reason, the two main parts of the experience. But that performance, if recorded and heard again by the same person or even a community, can seem to that person or community quite different many years later, because of changed life experiences.

The lecture is well worth listening to, if you have not already heard or read it. You can download or listen to our Patron's lecture on ABC FM's website at <http://www.abc.net.au/classic/content/2012/08/05/3557267.htm>.



Travelling North: Succumbing to the Lure of the Rhinemaidens - Katie French

Beguiled yet again by the promised charms of Wagner's Rhinemaidens, and with the additional prospect of being seduced once more by the spell of the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra and the Hamburg State Opera ensemble conducted by Simone Young in concert performances of *Das Rheingold*, hundreds of Sydneysiders, and many from nether regions even further south, flocked to summery Brisbane in late August for a 'long weekend' of superlative performances, and a most stimulating Symposium on that fascinating *Prologue* to the *Ring*. There we were, like elegantly black-clad wildebeest, migrating over the Brisbane River and herding down Southbank with just one thing in mind – Simone's concerts at QPAC.

These two concert performances bookended value-packed opportunities in Brisbane, including a 'blockbuster' exhibition of paintings from Madrid's Prado Museum, and a performance of Mahler's Symphony No 2, *Resurrection*.

Additionally, and of particular relevance to lovers of Wagner's music, the Wagner Society in Queensland, in co-operation with the Queensland Conservatorium, presented a full-day Symposium focussing on *Das Rheingold*. This was a significant opportunity, considering that in Simone Young's own words, the *Prologue* is considered the 'unloved' *Ring* opera, being thought to be 'too dull and too long.' Both the concert performances and the Symposium itself proved it to be otherwise.

Peter Bassett, as Symposium Co-ordinator, drew together a range of fascinating speakers and performers. In his own presentation, *What Price Love? Wagner's Ideas at the heart of Das Rheingold*, Peter outlined that this was more than a myth: this was a cosmic morality play, an allegory of politics and power, of love and vengeance, of great ideas concerning humanity - all motivated by Wagner's own politics. Swept up in the reform movements sweeping through Europe focussed on the self-interests of the state, the subversive power of the propertied classes, the rise of capitalism, and the often devastating effects of the industrial revolution, Wagner highlights the lust for wealth and power at the expense of all else, including the renunciation of love.

As the backdrop to his presentation, Peter included various images of the Industrial Revolution which had been depicted in the Opening Ceremony of the recent London Olympic Games. With their smoggy atmosphere highlighting the polluted mines and factories of the nineteenth century industrial cities, they were wonderfully evocative of the authoritarian state committing crimes against Nature, and captured so aptly the slaving dwarfs in Nibelheim, their 'home of mist'. Equally evocative was Peter's outlining of the plot as an extended metaphor for George Orwell's *1984*, the tyrannical Alberich, the epitome of that novel's terrifying Big Brother.

In preparation for Simone Young's speaking to the audience of the Symposium, we then viewed excerpts from a documentary, *Simone Young: Die Dirigentin*, by German film-maker, Ralf Pleger. And what an insight it provided into the impact this talented Australian has had, and not just in Hamburg! It included an unforgettable briefing of the press, her first after her appointment in 2005 as Chief Executive and Artistic Director of the Hamburg State Opera, and the Hamburg Philharmonic. She sat confidently behind a desk, and then in German stated, 'We're going to push our sleeves up and get down to business', and then she pushed up the sleeves of her suit, and showed them all what she meant by 'meaning business'. It was masterful! And they sat, stunned.

Then, for almost an hour, it was 'Simone and the Audience'. In what proved to be virtually a Masterclass for participants, the renowned Wagner interpreter took to the keyboard and proceeded to show why those who were dismissive of *Das Rheingold* were wrong. A wonderful communicator, both verbally and at the keyboard, her fingers rippled effortlessly across the board whilst she gave us a lesson on why she sees Wagner as, (dare we say it?) 'a musical genius.' In doing so, she demonstrated early modal systems up to Monteverdi, outlined with multiple examples, the tonic dominant system, and then showed how Wagner, with that notorious 'Tristan chord', left audiences dangling with no means of anticipating where to go: and from there on we were literally in his hands. Importantly, she emphasised how Wagner used *Rheingold* to 'set up' so much of what follows – the leitmotifs for example, and the significance of certain instruments, particularly the brass, and those Wagner tubas, which she emphasised, provided 'the colour' of the entire *Ring*. It was dazzling stuff.

There was also charming 'chatty' gossip about the careers of her singers since many of us had seen them performing in her *Ring* in Hamburg, and straight 'organisational' stuff, like how she had not wanted the singers in the concert performance to sit 'like ducks in a row', but to enter and exit when appropriate, to stand, and be able to move, virtually 'in role' (which was just loved by audience members on both nights).

There were also insights into the cultural differences between conducting her orchestra in Hamburg, and conducting Australian orchestras, on the different levels of professionalism, on expectations of formality, on the German striving for perfect performances, as opposed to the Aussie attitudes of 'the show must go on'.

Dr Graham Bruce's following presentation, *The Birth of Film out of the Spirit of Music: the Cinematic in Das Rheingold*, highlighted how and why the *Ring* can be such a success in the cinema. Graham showed how Wagner's written 'instructions' for performance read like a modern Film Director's notes on stage



direction. And Wagner then proceeded to transfer these directions into music.

Wagner prided himself on his 'transmutations', on his ability to depict musically, location changes such as the movement from the bed of the Rhine to the bed of the Gods, or the trek from Nibelheim back to the world of the Gods. And we saw wonderful film depictions of such 'transmutations'.

Also highlighted was the power of Wagner's musical metaphors, his musical imagery which could see transitions from the Ring motif into the Valhalla motif, from major key to minor, used like a film editing technique – like a 'dissolve.'

Another dedicated Wagner enthusiast, Dr Stephen Emmerson from the Conservatorium, was also determined, like Simone Young, to highlight that *Das Rheingold* was not just a prologue to the *Ring*. In *A Most Original Mind – the Convergence of theory and practice in Das Rheingold*, he outlined how, in the five years between *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold*, Wagner had churned out over fifty ('largely unreadable') essays as a means of clarifying his musical ideas and their political motivation. Loathing the 'decadent triviality,' the 'entertainment' quality of French and Italian operas, he wanted his art form to say something important to society. Wagner also wanted to break away from the traditional ways of 'saying' things. He saw his libretto as poetry, and wanted to break away from the usual iambic pentameter, which he called 'five-footed monsters', and to create a new rhyme scheme. He formulated what was called *Stabreim* with its internal alliterative qualities and free rhythm, which permitted a freer, declamatory style. Such clarification of ideas saw the radical differences audiences now see and hear between *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold*. Not just a Prologue after all, it seems!

It was a relief to return to earth with the very grounded and practical Lisa Gasteen, now Professor of Opera at the Queensland Conservatorium, who took us through the nuts and bolts of it all in her conversation, *Preparing Major Wagnerian Roles*. Oh dear: who'd want to be Brünnhilde? Birgit Nilsson felt a pair of comfortable shoes did the trick. However, it seems 'monster works' require a lot of time to prepare, and the ability to dissect those works into practical 'clumps'. For an Australian, in particular, an expert in diction is vital to transform the language (and breathing) into 'Wagner Deutsch' (which, it seems, in no way resembles German), and not to destroy the vocal line! Stamina, which is a given, comes from confidence in one's good preparation, but vital is a 'thick skin'. (Just imagine preparing in front of a panel of at least twenty 'experts' – the director, the conductor, the movement specialist, wardrobe, and their assistants, often a film crew, and patrons being given an insight – all offering 'criticism', en masse.)

Her major dislike? Directors of *Regietheater*, who play 'designer tricks' on singers, such as a high gloss black stage (which forces singers to move 'blind' against reflection), a highly raked stage (which make movement difficult, and causes physical

agony), and requiring artists to 'perform silly *Regie* stuff' when they are singing really difficult, big, philosophical roles. A major problem? With her success in Wagnerian roles came 'type-casting': she was refused the roles she really wanted to sing.

Earlier, we had heard students of the Conservatorium sing *Seven Pieces for Goethe's Faust*, written in 1831 by a young Richard Wagner. One can only hope that those students stayed to hear what it really means to have a career in opera. One might also hope that they are fortunate enough to be selected for the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School, where, with the assistance of internationally renowned experts, including Siegfried Jerusalem, students are provided with both coaching, and practical tools for handling the nuts and bolts of their own future opera careers.

All of the 'Hamburg in Brisbane' activities had been brought together by 'Entrepreneur Extraordinaire,' Leo Schofield, who beamed like a Cheshire cat over the entire proceedings. And why not? He also presided over the Forum which brought the Symposium to a resounding conclusion. The panel, consisting of Professor Emeritus Colin Mackerras AO from Griffith University, Dr Robert Gibson, Dr Graham Bruce and Victoria Watson, fielded a range of intriguing questions. Was the Cult of the Director over? No, because of the limitless possibilities in Wagner's music; because such Directors can draw startling performances out of singers; because today's technological developments open the doors to interpretations so radically different.

All went swimmingly until the panel faced the question about whether Opera Australia should get over complaining about costs, and the inadequacy of the facilities at the Opera House, and just get on with putting on concert performances of Wagner, of which we had just witnessed the most splendid example! Victoria Watson offered the somewhat defensive response that opera companies should do what they are there for: present opera as it should be, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a most purist, protectionist response! (A somewhat 'precious' response one might also have thought, in a season where OA had just 'floated' *La traviata* on the Harbour, and delivered *South Pacific*, a 'miked' Broadway musical masquerading as an opera.)

Then came the moment Symposium participants yearn for: Leo Schofield delivering the proverbial broadside. Arts organisations were 'petty and bitchy' he bellowed. Their 'lack of collegiality' and 'guarding their own patch' were the reasons there was no money for the arts! They were divisive, not supportive of each other. So, SSO is presenting a concert performance of *The Flying Dutchman* in its 2013 Season. Get over competing: disrupt people's expectations!

It was wonderful, because it was heartfelt, and spoken by the voice of extensive experience. And a good time was had by all: and what a coup for the Symposium organisers.

So, what about the Concert Performances of *Das Rheingold*, which were the main reasons for our being there?



'Splendid' and 'magnificent' were the words on everyone's lips. Has anyone ever been to a Wagner 'opera' production where the reaction has been so positive? Uncluttered by Designers and Costume and Production, this wonderful concert performance permitted the audience to focus on the singers, and the magical music.

What amazingly nuanced performances they were, both musically and physically. Powerful in both voice and stature, Falk Struckmann's Wotan was a perfect foil, whilst at the same time being cunningly complicit, with the capriciously suave, mercurial Loge, in the form of Jurgen Sacher. Hayoung Lee was as delicious a pre-pubescent Rhinemaiden as she had been in Hamburg, so controversially making a jumping-castle of her bed! And members of the Wagner Society in NSW should feel very proud to be sponsoring Deborah Humble in the *Ring* in Melbourne in 2013. She has developed the most elegant gravitas in her portrayal of Erda. The delightful aspect of all the performances was the manner in which the singers 'were' the characters; just a split second before they sang, seemingly alchemically, they became the person they portrayed.

And just as magically, Simone Young and the Hamburg Philharmonic conveyed us through a whirlwind of emotions, through a range of environments, swirled us headlong through that two hours and forty-five minutes, while time just stood still. When it concluded, members of

the audience drew breath, and then leapt spontaneously out of their seats. This was no fashionable response: this was an irresistible urge to get up and cheer. We had experienced something very special indeed.

In the same week as this excitement, the SSO launched its 2013 Season, which includes a number of Wagner highlights celebrating the Wagner Bicentenary, especially the concert performance of *The flying Dutchman*, and *The Ring – An Orchestral Adventure*. Hoorah for the SSO! Opera Australia also announced its Season. There were red-tabbed pages of fabulous photographs announcing all the operas included in the 'Verdi Festival', but only a paragraph in the introduction on the presentation of the *Ring* Cycle in Melbourne. How disappointing. There was nothing fabulously pictorial to be seen! Where was the excitement and eager anticipation?

It was also the week when Tourism Research Australia submitted its report on the impact of Major Blockbuster Events (in the ACT). The Report quantified how cities presenting remarkable, world-class events, such as we had just experienced in Brisbane, attract visitors from all parts of Australia. (SMH p12, Wed, 22/8/2012.) Maybe, as Leo Schofield suggests, if only these two arts organisations could show more 'collegiality,' lovers of Wagner's operas from all around the country might flock to Sydney, as we had to Brisbane, to experience equally outstanding concert performances of those major works.

Thanks to Goethe Institut for Help with Record Attendance for Simone Young

On behalf of the Society, the Secretary, Colleen Chesterman, wrote to the Goethe to thank them for the generous assistance to the Society in making welcome and accommodating the record attendance of 160 Members and guests for this special occasion. It is worth noting that Ms Young is a recipient of a Goethe Medal. Jochen Gutsch's response is also included below.

Dear Jochen,

I write on behalf of the Wagner Society in NSW regarding the meeting last Sunday with the presentation by Simone Young.

As you have probably heard, the meeting was extraordinarily well attended, much more in fact than we had expected. We thank you and your staff for the assistance given to us. In particular Michael Abicht helped in many ways. He had involved other staff on Saturday in putting out chairs, as well as assisting with the table arrangements and catering on the day.

We do hope you have heard that Simone Young praised German governments and their commitment to the arts as well as the wonderful musicians and singers she is able to draw to Hamburg. The audience of Wagner

lovers was well aware of the sad lack in Australia of a tradition in playing German Romantic repertoire. To be able to hear one of our own who has steeped herself in German music is a rare privilege.

We look forward to further cooperation with you and your staff in advancing our aim to widen the appreciation of Wagner and his contemporaries in NSW.

Yours sincerely,
Colleen Chesterman
15 August 2012

Dear Colleen,

Thank you for the kind words. You are right, Michael Abicht is always of great assistance during the events in the hall. Marina Shine was there and she told me enthusiastically about the event, leaving me a little sad that I missed it.

We also look forward to continue our cooperation with Wagner Society. It's great to see you featured such a high-profile guest, and I guess the strong interest from the public speaks for itself.

Best regards,
Jochen Gutsch
Goethe-Institut Australien



John Pickering, Melbourne Tenor (& Architect) Appears As **Herod** In Opera Australia's **Salome** - Our Guest At **16 September** Function - Leona Geeves

I first read about John Pickering in a copy of OPERA NOW on a flight to Germany some years ago. It mentioned leading Australian Heldentenor, John Pickering! Since I didn't know the name, I googled him on arrival and found many articles in German. But also on checking back home, I found his name appears among the singers supported by various opera foundations.

John is appearing for the first time in Sydney as Herod in Opera Australia's new production of *Salome*. You may well have seen him in Bayreuth as Heinrich der Schreiber in Götz Friedrich's *Tannhäuser* in the 1970s, or in *Parsifal* or indeed as Loge in the recent Lübeck Ring Cycle.

John is a multi-skilled – during his architectural studies at Melbourne University, he also graduated in singing, trumpet and piano! He has won most major singing competitions in Australia, including the Melbourne Sun, Adelaide Advertiser, Canberra Shell Aria, Metropolitan Opera auditions and the ABC's Vocal and Concerto competition. After several years as an architect, he moved to Munich in the 1970s to further his vocal studies with Ernst Haefliger.

July 1974 marked his stage debut in Germany when he began singing most of the lyric-spinto tenor operatic repertoire and many operettas including *The Merry Widow*, *Land of Smiles* (over 360 Performances), *Fledermaus*, *Die Csardasfürstin*, and *Der Vogelhändler*. His repertoire extended also to musicals such as *Evita*, and *Lend me a Tenor*, oratorios (*Messiah*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Bach's *St. John Passion*, Haydn's *Creation*) and Mahler 8th symphony, and lieder including *Die Schöne Muelllerin*.

In recent years he has successfully moved into the character tenor repertoire with such roles as the Witch in *Hänsel und Gretel*, Loge and Mime in *Das Rheingold*, Altum in *Turandot*, Benoît and Alcindoro in *La Bohème* and Herod in *Salome*. In fact it would have been easier to list what John hasn't sung!! John has sung roles in Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne from 1981 in *Faust*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Don Pasquale*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, and *Madama Butterfly*. As well as singing in over 50 opera houses of Germany, his career took him to Austria, The Netherlands and Switzerland. His roles include Rudolfo, Alfredo, Duc, Des Grieux, Froh, as well as Loge and Mime in many productions of *Das Rheingold*, Walther in *Tannhäuser*, Narraboth in *Salome*, the Baron in Lortzing's *Der Wildschütz*, Paul in *Die Tote Stadt*, Pluto and Jupiter in *Orpheus in the Underworld*, The Singer in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Don Jose in *Carmen*. Many operas have been performed in 3 languages.

He was cast in many world and German premiers such as Mao in John Adams' *Nixon*



in China. and The Man in Michael Nyman's *Man and Boy*. Some of the more notable appearances were in houses such as Frankfurt, Hamburg, Berlin, Freiburg, Leipzig, Köln, Kassel, Nürnberg, Saarbrücken, Darmstadt, and Munchen. Recent DVD productions have included Dr Cajus in Verdi's *Falstaff* in a production directed by Bernd Weikl, who also sang Falstaff, and Loge in the highly acclaimed Lübeck Ring Cycle.

A part of the European cultural scene is the summer festival; John has appeared at Bad Ischl in the Lehar Festival as Paganini, and in Bayreuth in 1977 and 1978 as Heinrich der Schreiber in the pilot filming of *Tannhäuser*, where he was also cast as Erste Ritter in *Parsifal* and covered Der Steuermann in *Der fliegende Holländer*. He also enjoyed two seasons in Amsterdam as the Duke in *Night in Venice*, and Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus*.

You may have seen John's son-in-law, Christopher Tonkin, as the Count in Opera Australia's recent *Capriccio*. John's daughter, is also an architect, and a singer. We look forward to hearing John's life story, particularly his views and comments on Wagner's music and how a Melbourne architect managed to spend the greater part of his life singing in Germany!



'Wagner Licht' Update - Mike Day, Society Committee Member

In the December 2011 Newsletter, Katie French introduced the Society to what I and a group of UTS students were planning for the Richard Wagner bicentenary celebrations. I'm happy to inform members that the 'Wagner Licht' project is humming along nicely with more undergraduate and postgraduate students and artists in Sydney, Melbourne and Germany working on an amazing range of creative ideas inspired by The Ring.

Details of exact dates and venues have yet to be finalised but we are planning to unveil the first iteration of the installation on Wagner's birthday in May 2013 as part of the Vivid Sydney Festival of Music, Light and Ideas. We will then travel to Germany in July and return for the Melbourne Ring in November. At each stop more elements will be added by the host institution (various design and music schools) and more cities will be visited until the final show in Prague in 2015, where hopefully about 30 of our 'light boxes' will form a total immersive interactive environment that will give participants a unique overview of the extraordinary creation that is The Ring.

The experience so far has been especially gratifying to me as I introduce the work to a generation whose only

contact to date has been 'The Ride'. We have together seen 'Wagner's Dream', watched parts of the videos of the Met, Copenhagen and Valencia productions, discussed Deryck Cooke's understanding of the leitmotifs, been inspired by Stephen Fry's enthusiasm and most recently (August 2012) been swept away at Simone's SOH concert. The students found the experience of their first live Wagner performance to be exhilarating and are coming up with some wonderfully creative responses to Wagner's ideas as well as the music. Sound design students are designing and making new musical instruments to project the ideas in a fresh and provocative way and Design students are experimenting with new media, networking and sensor technology that appeal to their generation and that will attract a new young audience to experience the magical theatre world of Wagner.

We will need help to realise our dreams in terms of sponsorship to pay for fabrication and shipping. We are open to suggestions about how to deepen the content and meaning of what we hope to achieve and will be happy to invite anyone with new ideas to join our team. If you can help or wish to participate please feel free to contact me at Michael.day-1@uts.edu.au.

Götterdämmerung In The Cotswolds - Terry Clarke

Now this was more like it. After a frankly rather disappointing Ring in Munich where we witnessed the distraction of 80 dancers waving, writhing and prancing in every scene, we returned to the converted barn, which is the Opera House at Longborough, in the beautiful English countryside. Here we witnessed a chamber *Götterdämmerung* that was superbly sung and acted and allowed the music to speak for itself without any directorial interference.

The set was simple but effective. A high barred double gate and a tilted circular disc (shades of Wieland Wagner) framed the drama satisfactorily. By nature of the space the orchestra is smaller than major houses but nonetheless 80 musicians squeezed into the pit and made a mighty sound in the 400 seat auditorium.

The wonder of the evening was the gorgeous singing of Rachel Nicholls as Brünnhilde. She is quite an experienced singer in other operatic fields but this was her first attempt at this role and from the moment she stepped on stage her performance was totally riveting and she maintained it right to the ending, attacking the immolation as if it was the start of Act 1. She was ably assisted by the Siegfried of Estonian, Mati Turi, also his first time in the role. He is a big chap but mobile with it and brim full of enthusiasm. Their opening duet electrified the house and the confrontation with Waltraute, Alison Kettlewell, was equally dramatic.

Hagen was portrayed as a thin intellectual who started rather benignly but became progressively more evil as the evening progressed. The rather light bass baritone of Stuart Pendred might be lost in a larger house. The Gibichung siblings of Eddie Wade and Lee Bisset were in fine voice and convincing in their roles. Strangely, to begin with, Gunther was pushed on to the stage sitting in a wheelchair. We debated the meaning of this, one critic thought it signified his weakness, however he jumped out of it most athletically on the arrival of Siegfried; both Hagen and Siegfried had a turn in it and it was never seen again.

Longborough receives no state funding and thus some economies have to be made, so there was no disguising the fact that there were only 11 vassals and they sounded a bit thin, despite their enthusiastic singing and movement. Two of the Rhinemaidens doubled as Norns but who cared? They sang beautifully and looked delicious.

This is the completion of the Longborough Ring, which has been in development since 2007, conducted by Anthony Negus and directed by Alan Privett and which will be presented in full cycle in June and July 2013. So for 2013, take my advice, as well as Melbourne, ignore all others and beg, borrow or steal tickets to the Longborough Ring, enjoy the fabulous views over the Cotswolds and the picnic in the car park, and just pray that Rachel Nicholls is Brünnhilde.



In Memorium: Denis Condon, Piano Historian and Collector Dies

1933 -2012

Terence Watson

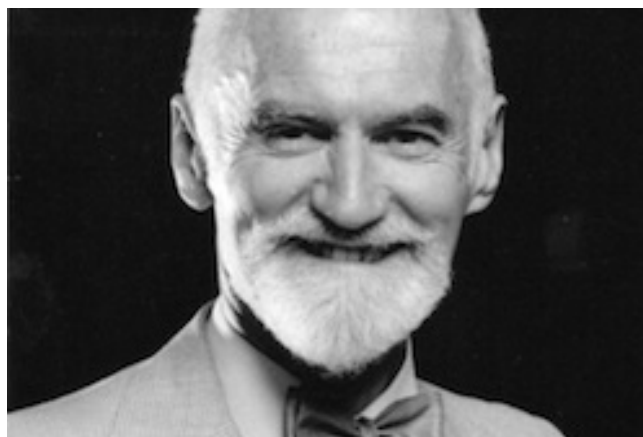
Limelight magazine has reported the sad news of the death on 31 August 2012 of the "world's leading authority on piano rolls, Australian Denis Condon...leaving as his legacy a vast archive of rare rolls, recordings and reproducing pianos from the early 1900s." Many Wagner Society Members will remember Denis's charm, wicked wit and vast erudition on matters pianistic, especially when he was the expert commentator on competitors in the Sydney International Piano Competition. Many Members, including your Editor, will also remember the special Wagner recitals at his Newtown home for seven reproducing pianos, including a Steinway grand, for which he would cull his world famous collections of piano rolls of illustrious pianists to play their versions of excerpts from Wagner operas.

Limelight also reports that "Condon had previously stated he intended to leave instructions to auction the collection when he died, with proceeds funding a piano scholarship. Dr Robert Mitchell, Condon's partner of 47 years, is custodian of the archive, which resides at his home in Newtown. He said that, although several American universities have expressed interest in acquiring it, he hopes that "a local institution will come out the woodwork. This collection shouldn't leave Australia." Your Editor is sure that many Members would also like to see the collection remain close to its home for so many years.

In his 18 July 2007 Sydney Morning Herald report for "Business Day," James Cockington reported: "Condon now has more than 7000 rolls, including rare examples by Stravinsky, Gershwin, Debussy and Percy Grainger, plus a large selection of popular songs from the Tin Pan Alley period. Like many collectors he transfers most of his recordings onto computer to avoid damage while playing. Still, those that are now more than 100-year-old are robust enough to be played in the original format."

The following is part of an online review of Denis's "The Condon Collection," "There is something magical and truly incredible about this whole series from the collection of Australian collector Denis Condon. When we collectors and amateurs of historical recordings listen to reissues of the old recordings from the early decades of the 20th century, acoustic or early electric, our mind is used to and set to digging down to the music through the layers of surface noise, swish, clicks, pops, recessed presence and compressed dynamics. Without even being aware that we are doing it, there is much in fact that we reconstruct in our auditive imagination, based on the sometimes very faint traces of music that all those extraneous noises allow to come through.

And, if you think about it, it is precisely these



noises that give these recordings their very reality as old recordings. We know they are REAL old recordings not in spite but BECAUSE of all the surface noise. It is like looking at old sepia photographs: we know it is the past BECAUSE their texture and colors are so different. But this here is something else entirely."

There is extensive coverage of Denis's "Collection" on the website Efemera, including this moving comment, all the more poignant as many of these performances will always remain accessible thanks to Denis's work:

In the 1920s customers visiting the opulent showrooms of Steinway, Bechstein or any of the great piano makers could listen to Debussy, Prokofieff or, indeed, every famous pianist of the day playing the best of their concert repertoire via the reproducing piano. The music rolls used by these pianos comprised some of the earliest recordings ever made by master musicians of the time, and these original recordings survive today because of historians such as Denis Condon.

Limelight also reports "Condon's grand-niece, conductor Jennifer Condon", saying, "Thanks to Great Uncle Denis, I will forever have Copeland, Rubinstein, Busoni, Schnabel, Dohnanyi, Horowitz, Paderewski, Debussy, Rachmaninov and others to play on the piano in my living room." Ms Condon's own work in rescuing an overlooked masterpiece of music is the subject of the next article.

<http://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/Article/313933,australian-piano-historian-and-collector-denis-condon-has-died.aspx>

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Great-Pianists-Vol-Ferruccio/product-reviews/B000WM714O>

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/planning/a-life-of-their-own/2007/07/16/1184559700306.html>

<http://efemera-ephemera.org/CondonCollection>



Jennifer Condon and the Sappho Project - Terence Watson

In his Sydney Morning Herald of 1 August 2012, article, "Forgotten opera rises from ruins," Steve Dow detailed Ms Condon's work in reviving and recording Peggy Glanville-Hicks's 1963 opera Sappho: "Sappho the ancient Greek poet lives, breathes and sings her ambivalence about fame, thanks to a young Australian conductor who has brought to life a longshunned opera in time for the centenary of its Melbourne-born composer's birth. As the Herald reported last December, Condon had been on a crusade to conduct the opera's first recorded performance."

"Condon finished recording the full opera recently in Lisbon. Donors provided only some of the A300,000 (\$353,940) recording costs. Those costs had been kept low because all the performers, including Wagnerian soprano Deborah Polaski, in the title role, and Sir John Tomlinson, as her husband Kreon, were persuaded to work for free."

With the recording complete, Condon is trying to sell the idea of staging the world premiere of Sappho in Australia. While Polaski's schedule means she can't perform Sappho on stage, Condon, who works as a souffléuse (prompt) to Australian conductor Simone Young at the Hamburg State Opera, has compiled a list of singers clamouring to play Sappho and the supporting roles.

According to an article, "Lawrence Durrell and Peggy Glanville-Hicks: a song for Sappho" by Sam Jordison for the 22 August 2012 Guardian online, "While still a schoolgirl [in Wollongong], Condon wrote to Simone Young, then a conductor at Sydney Opera House, and won her permission to sit in on rehearsals. At Young's suggestion, she learned to speak German and spent weekends marking up orchestral

parts for her mentor. In 2001, one of those pieces was the final aria for Sappho. When she discovered that most of the rest had never been played, Condon dedicated herself to bringing it into the light."

"First, she had to persuade the Glanville-Hicks estate. "It turned out they had been turning people down for decades." It took her nine years to convince them. On the way, she began a doctoral thesis on the score and, crucially, got a job as a prompt at Hamburg State Opera. Eventually, the estate relented." And the rest is working out very well. The CD will be released in November, weeks before Glanville-Hicks's birthday. However, Ms Condon is still seeking support for the project – if you would like to donate, you can go to www.sappho.com.au.

Ms Condon moved to Europe in 2005 to study operatic conducting in Vienna. She attended masterclasses throughout Europe and worked as a free-lance vocal coach in Austria and Germany. Since 2008, Ms Condon has been employed as Souffléuse at the Hamburg State Opera, where her repertoire includes over 40 operas. In recognition of Ms Condon's work with our Patron Simone Young on Wagner operas with the Hamburg Opera, the Wagner Society in NSW agreed to make an award to support her "ongoing interest and involvement in Wagner's music."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2012/aug/22/lawrence-durrell-glanville-hicks-sappho?newsfeed=true>

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/opera/forgotten-opera-rises-from-ruins-20120731-23cs1.html#ixzz22exmVTs1>

Bayreuth's Margrave Opera Has Been Named A World Heritage Site by Unesco

Many Members would have taken a tour, if not actually attended a performance at the "other" opera house in Bayreuth, the exquisite baroque counterpart to the Wagner designed Festspielhaus.

"Wilhemine of Prussia had a difficult start in life. Her father, King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm I, was a brutal tyrant who abused his children. Wilhelmine, as a child of the court, experienced little love or warmth. Then at the age of 22, she was forced to marry an unsuccessful Margrave and live in the desolate, provincial town of Bayreuth. But Wilhemine did not let this bother her. An avid composer, painter and author, she wanted to compete with the palaces of Sanssouci in Potsdam and Versailles. In 1748. She decided to build Bayreuth's Opera House which became one of the most breathtaking theaters of its time. This magnificent building, constructed in the Italian Baroque style served as Wilhelmine's "golden armor against life," according to expert Barbara Bogen."

"Among Germany's 37 sites are the cathedrals of Aachen, Speyer, Cologne and Hildesheim and the palaces in Potsdam. The renowned Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria does not have UNESCO World Heritage status, but did have 4 million tourists visiting it in 2011." In view of King Ludwig II's importance to Wagner's life and career, Members might like to lobby UNESCO for the inclusion of Neuschwanstein Castle on the register.

Source: Deutsche Welle - <http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,16067356,00.html> 2 July 2012.



Metropolitan Opera's Ring Cycle - Second Cycle

April-May 2012 - Terence Watson

I won't go into detail with the production, because many of you will have seen one or both of the HD broadcasts to cinemas from the Met Opera. The main pleasure was the singing and, surprisingly, the acting, given that there was little acting in the earlier broadcasts. Bryn Terfel has really taken over the role of Wotan and seems to be taking pleasure in giving us his idea of how a god might act (in spite of his silly costume and wig!). His singing matches the subtlety and variety of his acting – or is it vice versa? He wasn't afraid to growl, howl, bellow or sing lyrically as the moment demanded – often all together, as when he unburdens his soul to Brünnhilde in Act II of *Walküre*. He brought out the emotional, loving side of Wotan much more than any other portrayal I've seen. He wasn't afraid to show vulnerability or fear and often reached out to touch a loved one, pulling back at the last moment – out of fear or pride? His scene with Erda in Act III of *Walküre* was one of the most physically intimate moment he allows himself to have with anyone, except the dying Siegmund, and of course the banished Brünnhilde. He was a joy to see and hear.

Despite her size and lack of physical agility, Stephanie Blyth was impressive as Fricka, with enormous power for Wagner's coloratura demands on her in Act II of *Walküre*. Unfortunately, Jonas Kaufmann was ill, so he was replaced at very short notice by Frank van Aken as Siegmund. There was some sentimental compensation in that Aken is the husband of Eva-Maria Westbroek, the Sieglinde, and was only in the audience to see his wife sing, so the Met had the first husband and wife team ever playing the two characters. It added some intimacy to their acting, but Aken's voice was not big enough for a huge house like the Met and he was soon struggling. I was glad that I had decided to go to the *Walküre* from the 1st Cycle to hear Stuart Skelton who was mightily impressive, as well as Voigt. In both cases, Westbroek was a joy to hear and watch as well – a complete singing actress.

Another, somewhat less disappointing, replacement was Richard Fink for Eric Owens as Alberich in *Götterdämmerung*. However, even though Fink walked through the role (since he came in at short notice as well), he sang very well. Katharina Dalayman was a mixed bag – a nice rich, warm middle register, but her higher register tended to a shriek whenever it was under pressure (which is a lot of the time). However, her acting was more spontaneous than Deborah Voigt, who, I think, spent a lot of her time making sure that her voice was going to hit the right note with good quality and so her acting was somewhat understated. So, a combination of the two would be ideal – sounds a lot like Nina Stemme!!

Jay Hunter Morris in real life matched up with his performances in the HD broadcasts. He is remarkably convincing as Siegfried, making him the most credible I have ever seen the character

portrayed. He has an easy stage presence, warm rapport with his Brünnhilde, and athletic agility in moving around the Machine. His voice held out all the way through Act III of *Siegfried* and he made all of the terrible high notes in both his operas bar one when he cracked a little. What he lacks at the moment, but should be able to develop as he matures, is more colour and variety in his voice. Given that he hadn't sung the role before the San Francisco Ring last year, he has achieved a great deal already. Let's hope he doesn't burn out before he achieves his potential.

I should also mention Eric Owens as Alberich in *Rheingold*, who magnificently reprised his scene-stealing performance from the HD broadcasts. He will be well worth a ticket to Sydney Symphony's *Der fliegende Holländer* next year. And also Hans Peter Koenig as Hagen – wonderfully sardonic and almost gleefully manipulative, with a wonderful rich bass. All the other performers were more than creditable in their roles, which is the least one could expect from one of the major opera houses.

Which brings me to the Machine! It was less noisy than I had feared, but still creaked a lot and occasionally planks stuck. However, what was less obvious in the HD broadcasts are the stage pictures that the Machine is capable of generating. At its best, such as the monumentally intimidating (even Fascist-like) concentric orange circles of the Gibichung palace, or the stream and forest scenes of *Siegfried*, or the magic fire, or (one of my favourites) Wotan raising the earth out of the ocean at the beginning of Act III of *Walküre*, or the cascading streams of *Rheingold* and the Rhinedaughter scene in *Götterdämmerung*, the Machine enables projections of great beauty and subtlety. At other times, such as many of the transitions scenes in *Götterdämmerung*, the abstract patterns being projected (borrowed, it seemed, from the iTunes or Windows Media Player visualisation patterns) seemed to be designed only to fill in the blank planks, because no one could think of a dramatically relevant image to use. Sadly, Robert Lepage chose not to remove the sillier elements of his conception for the full Cycles: Fricka's ram chair, the Valkyries' wooden plank horses, the mechanical horse, the funeral pyre, the exploding heads of the statues of the gods, etc. Despite the barrage of criticism the production has received, Lepage and Peter Gelb have defended his "interpretation" as one of the greatest!!

In passing, I saw the Met's production from 1978 of Billy Budd, which also employs an impressive "machine:" a full size ship cut through the middle so we see a cross-section of the upper, main and lower decks. Part of the deck moves up so that we can enter Captain Vere's cabin. When the ship attempts to engage the French warship, the whole set rises up so that it seems to fill the entire proscenium of the Met's stage – truly awe-inspiring – and then the cannons actually fire! When the scene of Billy's incarceration in the bilge arrives, the set again rises to its highest extent to



reveal Billy chained in the cramped space way way down below the main deck. This set demonstrated to me how a truly ingenious solution can be found for demanding dramatic situations. Lepage could learn a lot from the set designer William Dudley. The cast was very impressive: Captain Vere: John Daszak (a superb voice – a true lyric tenor, not the strangled English tenor of Peter Pears), Billy Budd: Nathan Gunn (the production was revived for three performances just for Gunn's debut in the role – like Jay Hunter Morris, almost ideal for the character), Claggart: James Morris (his voice a little worn after years of Wotan, but the raggedness seemed appropriate to the evilness of the character).

Finally, it was interesting listening to the orchestra and its conductor working its way to a new soundscape for the Met Ring that is quite different from the heavier, more traditionally "Germanic" style of Levine. Fabio Luisi has also re-arranged the orchestra in the pit into a more conventional European pattern, with the brass on stage left and divided strings, so unlike with Levine sitting down, all the orchestra can see Luisi. While this probably leads to some imbalance down in the stalls, in the Grand Tier, where I was sitting, the sound had blended beautifully. I felt that, by the middle of *Siegfried*, they had reached a consensus on the sound they wanted, that was more in keeping with the approach of Boulez and others recently at Bayreuth: less emphasis on the brass, more attention to the inner voices, greater clarity overall. One curious thing I noticed – or it seemed to me – that Luisi had to slow down the orchestra during a number of the scene transitions to accommodate the slowness with which the Machine changed its configuration – something that I'm sure didn't happen with the *Billy Budd* scene transitions that were so smooth, quick and seamless with the action.

Overall, I was disappointed with the Machine; it seemed to impose more limitations than creating opportunities. It reduces the stage to the front half, although it also usefully functions as a sound board for the singers most of the time. It sometimes changes configuration with miraculous effect, but many other times it moves perfunctorily and distracts from the performers, although most of them seemed to have adjusted to moving around on the Machine when they had to. Terfel and Hunter Morris were the most athletic in moving over it. Indeed, Terfel seems to have lost quite a bit of weight, without it affecting his voice.

Another annoying feature of the production that reflects poorly on Lepage as director is his clumsiness in getting his performers on and off stage; so many times the characters just mosey on off into the wings or, in clear sight of anyone above the stalls, walk up or down steps or ride a lift up or down behind the Machine creating many little anti-climaxes and very dated, mechanical entrances or exits that are not integrated into the drama. It seems that, having committed to the Machine, any other dramatic element has to take second place to its demands. This all seems to suggest that the Machine doesn't really solve many technical problems of performer placement and movement, especially when compared to the effectiveness of the Billy Budd set.

The **Raven's** Reporting

- Compiled by Camron Dyer

There is a regularly updated comprehensive list on the Society's Website <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au> that takes the list to 2014.

Other Society Meetings - Colleen Chesterman

On 8 July 2012, 45 members of the Society welcomed well-known Wagner enthusiast Peter Bassett. Peter has marked the imminent 1813 celebrations by self-publishing Wagner and Verdi -1813: A Celebration. He explained, however, that he saw the supposed rivalry between the two great composers as a false dichotomy. Showing reproductions of the lavish illustrations in his book, he described the key differences in the circumstances of these two, linked together by their year of birth in two countries racked by war and political turbulence.

He discussed three key areas of their backgrounds. First, the political circumstances in the countries of their birth were strong influences. Parma, near Verdi's birthplace, was under Austrian rule, until 'liberation' by Napoleon's French forces. Verdi's political sympathies were for Italian independence and for unity between the different kingdoms and states; he was seen as a patriot. Wagner's birthplace in Dresden was also under Austrian rule, but Saxony welcomed the Napoleonic conquest and was isolated after his defeat. Wagner was a revolutionary and anarchist in his early politics. Second, Peter discussed the different musical traditions in which they worked. Verdi was influenced by the Italian operatic tradition, particularly Rossini and Donizetti. He was a consummate operatic and theatrical professional. He recycled tunes and at times whole operas, changing his plots to respond to different circumstances.

Wagner was influenced by the German Romantic tradition and composition was seen as a means of extending his theoretical and dramatic perspectives. Third Peter compared their views of opera. Verdi wanted success and full houses, Wagner on the other hand saw it as a means of developing social and religious themes. Peter's talk ended in a most interesting discussion of the early reception of the works of these composers in Australia.



Wagner, Beethoven & Mozart Operas In Amsterdam and Dresden - Rosamund Dallow-Smith

During recent travels in Europe, my husband Gavin and I heard 3 opera performances, each memorable for different reasons. *Parsifal* at the Amsterdam Musiektheater, in June, was a deeply moving experience. Not just for the vocal strength and sincere portrayals by the ensemble, but also the atmospheric production by Pierre Audi. Nothing detracted from the story of the Grail, containing the blood of Christ, and the spear which pierced his side- the holy relics, guarded by King Titurel and the Knights at Montsalvat. The sombre lighting and minimal sets were the canvas for conductor Ivan Fisher's ethereal brush strokes and heartstopping climaxes. The music said it all, from Gurnemanz's tale, to Kundry's lament, to the entry of Parsifal, the holy fool and child of nature. The stranger was sung by a young and fresh voiced Christopher Ventris.

Amfortas, Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester, a tormented figure from Albrecht Durer, was totally convincing. A subdued audience seemed not to breathe, during the last ecstatic moments of the opera, as Parsifal climbed the steps above the assembly to reveal the Grail. A jagged blood red spear appeared, and the wonderful choir and singers greeted the Redeemer. It was great, unforgettable Wagner.

The following night, *Fidelio*, at Dresden's beautiful Semperoper, was set in a grimly modern and driven Stasiland. It was claustrophobic and menacing, with a powerful and believable Leonora, Evelyn Herlitzius. The cast was tightly knit, and conducted skillfully by John Fiore. The first act quartet, with its barely suppressed

emotions, was beautifully sung. Jaquino, Timothy Oliver, was a darker suitor for Marzeline than usual, with his suppressed frustration breaking through the veneer. The exception to the fine singing was the doubly unfortunate Florestan, Jürgen Müller, who stepped into Gary Lehmann's shoes, but looked more like Leonora's father than her husband. Unfortunately, his voice cracked on the top notes in his second act recitative and aria, and he was soundly booed at the curtain call.

The next evening, the theatre presented *The Magic Flute*, played as 'full on' Pantomime. Schikaneder would have loved it. There were whitened faces, bare feet, a steeply raked set, and a strange long piece of hair dangling over Tamino's face; all rather puzzling. So, too, were Sarastro's stilts, and the Queen of the Night's circus-type sequined costumes.

There was a lack of the usual gentle comedy, and the whole experience left very little impression, except for Mozart's music, enchanting as always, and the strong vocal ensemble.

1813 Wagner & Verdi: A Celebration By Peter Bassett

Dear editor,

It was a real pleasure to read Katie French's review of *1813-Verdi and Wagner, a Celebration*. I re-read the first few pages of my Verdi biography by George Martin-Macmillan, 1965 - to check the following details.

There may not have been seismic or other incidents as a portent of Verdi's genius, but the baby's name was registered three days later in Busseto - as Joseph Fortunin Francois- a Frenchman, under the rule of Napoleon's second wife, the Austrian Empress Marie Louise.

His first funeral, as stipulated in his will, was modest - at dawn, and without music or singing. Some, at the graveside, couldn't help themselves and "a sort of chorale was heard. "It was Va Pensiero." At the second, state interment, there were no restrictions on the outpouring of grief and loss, from the 200.000 Milanese lining the streets. Many hummed or sang their favourite Verdi melodies as he passed— the embodiment of a new Italy

Rosamund Dallow-Smith

A Barenboim Ring Cycle Will Crown the Proms In 2013 - But What About Britten?

Michael White in his 14 July 2011 article in The Telegraph has reported "word is out that the highlight of the Proms that year will be a complete Ring Cycle – brought here by Daniel Barenboim and the Berlin Staatsoper." [Dare one say who cares about Britten? Or is that too partisan?? Editor] You can read White's comments in <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/michaelwhite/100054810/a-barenboim-ring-cycle-will-crown-the-proms-in-2013-but-what-about-britten/>.



The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated
Application Form for Tickets to the Bayreuth Festival in August 2013

	Applicant 1	Applicant 2
Name		
Email Address		
Mobile Phone		
Membership No		
Signature/s		
<input type="checkbox"/> Tick this box if you wish to be allocated less expensive tickets		

Online Applications

You can apply online for tickets to the 2013 Bayreuth Festival at the Festival's English-language website, https://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/english/english_156.html. This will have details of the 2013 programme and ticket-services. Successful applicants may be able to pay by credit card. You may also be able to buy tickets through travel agents, which for example advertise in overseas opera magazines. Good luck!

Applying for tickets through the Wagner Society in NSW

- Each year, we apply through the Society of Friends of Bayreuth for an allocation of tickets, which are then balloted among financial members of our Society who have applied using this form.
- Any current financial member of the Society may apply for one set of tickets in her or his own name, and any two current financial members with a shared membership may apply for one set of tickets in each of their names (i.e. two sets of tickets for the two members);
- Applications on this form must reach the Society by Friday 5 October 2012, posted to
 The Wagner Society,
 GPO Box 4574,
 Sydney NSW 2001.

Allocation of tickets

- Normally in November or December each year, we find out the number of sets of tickets that we have been allocated for the following year's festival. We will email these details to applicants, with an approximate A\$ cost for each set of tickets, including a processing fee of A\$100 per set which the Society retains, and part of our annual membership fee for the Society of Friends of Bayreuth.

- Where there are more applicants than sets of tickets, a ballot is conducted on the following basis:
 - applicants who have been financial members of the Society for two or more years and who have not within the past five years (for the Bayreuth Festivals in 2008 to 2012) received tickets through the Society will be balloted first;
 - other applicants who have been financial members of the Society for two or more years will be balloted second; and
 - all remaining applicants (including late applications received after Friday 5 October 2012) will be balloted last.
- Allocation of seating is at the discretion of the Society, and we will attempt to give each member attending the festival a range of seating locations according to our allocation. Shared members will be seated together wherever possible.

Payment for tickets (and other charges)

- After that ballot, we will contact successful applicants and arrange for their payment to be transferred to our bank account so that we can send the full payment to the Festival by the due date. It's vital that we are able to contact you quickly, so you need to make sure that if you're away at this time we have reliable contact details or the name of someone who can make the payment on your behalf.
- If we have not received a response within 48 hours of our attempt to contact you, your application will be deemed to have been withdrawn and we will approach the next applicant on the ballot list.
- If you are unable to transfer your payment within 5 business days of our request, your application will also be deemed to have been withdrawn and we will approach the next applicant on the ballot list.





Wagner 2013

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 Donations are tax-deductible, and receipts will be issued.
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GPO Box 4574
Sydney NSW 2001

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BSB: 032040
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 (This will be printed on the Wagner Society's bank statement)

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Signature

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Name in BLOCK LETTERS

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ADDRESS

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence:

The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc

GPO Box 4574 SYDNEY NSW 2001

Telephone: 9360 9822 (Jane Matthews, President)

Website: www.wagner.org.au | Website enquiries: wagner_nsw@optusnet.com.au

(All website addresses used in this Newsletter are reproduced in the PDF version of the newsletter on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article - Members Area)



Some of the capacity audience for Simone Young's appearance for the Wagner Society on 12 August 20012



6, 8, 9 & 10 DECEMBER CITY RECITAL HALL ANGEL PLACE

PINCHGUT OPERA has generously donated to the Wagner Society tickets for Castor and Pollux to be raffled during our end of year celebrations – at the Mosman Art Gallery on 1 November 2012

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The Wagner Society Management Committee has negotiated a 10% discount for Wagner Society members: just mention that you are a member!



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~ o f O r a n g e ~

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Address for Sunday Functions

Goethe Institut, 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)