

THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC
NEWSLETTER

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October 15—Wagner Society 20th Anniversary

For the Wagner Society 20th Anniversary celebration on October 15, the Society was privileged to have as its Guest of Honour, Herr Horst Hoffmann, Australia's renowned *heldentenor*, and Society Life Member, for his premiere performance with the Society. Herr Hoffmann was joined in recital by Ms Adele Johnston (soprano) and Ms Fiona McCabe (pianist). The wide-ranging recital showed many aspects of both Wagner and the performers and threw in a few unexpected bonuses as well.

Ms Johnston sang the *Wesendonck Lieder* as a substantial and deeply moving start. It reminded one that these songs were intended for an intimate (perhaps *very* intimate) performance rather than a large concert hall. Ms Johnston brought a rich, warm to the songs and was supported by a supple and sympathetic piano line from Ms McCabe. Ms McCabe brought to light three rarely heard piano piece of Wagner's which, despite her performance, suggested that Wagner would have been very unlikely to rival Liszt as a piano composer.

Ms Johnston returned to introduce the *Lohengrin* segment of the recital with Elsa's *Traum* ("Lonely, in troubled days..."). Herr Hoffmann then sang the grail narrative in ringing tones and nuanced declamation showing his wealth of experience in this and other Wagnerian roles. Ms Johnston then followed with another aria from Elsa, *Euch lüften, die mein Klagen*. The cumulative impact of these three extracts was powerful and surely whetted the appetite for Opera Australia's performances of *Lohengrin* in Sydney in August next year. One cannot forget also Herr Hoffmann's own appearances (regrettably his farewell performances) in *Tristan und Isolde* in Melbourne in November next year.

After the drama and passion of *Lohengrin*, Herr Hoffmann and Ms Johnston took a lighter direction to finish with extracts from operettas of Franz Lehar, *Giudita* by Ms Johnston, and *Das Land des Lächelns* and *Die Lustige Witwe*, duets by Herr Hoffmann and Ms Johnston.

Judging by the applause for all the music performed, the celebration achieved its purpose and members were richly rewarded for their support and interest. The President, Mrs McNulty, expressed the audience's feeling in thanking the performers for their generosity and the wonderful quality of their performances. As a final surprise for the Society at large, the three artists gave us a delightfully spontaneous rendition of "Happy Birthday", reminding us of the heritage of the Society in which all members could take pride.