

The Wagner Society



IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Newsletter No. 100, June 2005

A Letter from the President

Dear Members and Friends

Welcome to the hundredth issue of our Newsletter in this, our 25th anniversary year.

This issue has been compiled over many months by our editor, Terence Watson, and I know that you will join me in congratulating him on bringing together such an interesting Newsletter from so many distant sources.

On behalf of the present Committee, I want to thank all of you, our current and past members, committee members and officeholders, for your contribution to the Society. Without your generous help and membership, we might not be here to celebrate this anniversary, and we would not have been able to provide the funding and scholarships for artists and productions that has been possible over the past 25 years, in line with our aim of promoting Wagner's music.

Anniversaries are always personal affairs, and often they are tinged with sadness. They provide each of us with an opportunity to look forward, but they also afford a moment when we can look back and reflect on the past, on the opera performances and concerts we have attended, and on the friendships we have made, some of which are part of the Society's history too.

Newer members may wonder what the fuss is about, but as a relatively young Society, we are fortunate in having as current members many who formed or joined the Society in those early days. They provide us with a living history of things Wagnerian, both internationally and here in Australia. Many of them had become Wagnerites long before the Society was formed, and knew each other from their visits to Bayreuth and other festivals, and from their participation in the rich musical life of Australia. They were "Wagner Tragics" long before that awful term was coined!

PATRON: Sir Charles Mackerras
HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS: Prof Michael Ewans
Mr Richard King
Mr Horst Hoffman
Mr Joseph Ferfoglia

When these early members look back on the past 25 years of the Society's history, they will recall some friends who are no longer with us, and others whose health no longer allows them to participate as actively in the life of this city as they used to do.



*Reg & Betty Maloney and Leonard Hansen
in Bayreuth 1980*



1989 Bayreuth group

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A Letter from the President continued



The Society and its members have been lucky that the last 25 years or more have been such a rich period for things Wagnerian in Australia. We have seen performances of all 10 works in the Wagner canon from Opera Australia, the State Opera of South Australia, and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, among others.

In 1984, Opera Australia premiered Andrew Sinclair's production of *Das Rheingold*, the first step in a planned Ring cycle, which faltered after *Die Walküre*, although this work was restaged in 1989 in a production revised by Andrew Sharp

In 1987, Opera Australia premiered the Neidhardt *Lohengrin* under Stuart Challender, which was revived in 1990 under Carlo Felice Cillario with a young Lisa Gasteen as Elsa; in 1988 it staged the acclaimed bi-centennial *Die Meistersinger*, revived under Simone Young in 2003; in 1990 with the SSO under Stuart Challender, it staged Neil Armfield's *Tristan und Isolde* in the Concert Hall of the Opera House, where it was revived in 1993 under Carlo Felice Cillario; in 1996 it stage Barry Kosky's *Fliegende Hollander*; in 1998 the Neidhardt *Tannhauser*, with a creative team including Michael Scott-Mitchell and Nick Schlieper; in 2001 Andrew Sinclair's *Lohengrin*; and in 2004, Cathy Dadd's *Hollander*.

A staged performance of *Parsifal* has eluded Sydney audiences, but Brisbane's 1995 Biennial International Music Festival included a concert performance, and in 2001 the State Opera of South Australia premiered Elke Neidhardt's *Parsifal*, the first staging of this work in Australia. Brisbane's Biennial International Music Festival continues its

concert performances of Wagner with *Tristan und Isolde* in July 2005, with a much more internationally-recognised Lisa Gasteen as Isolde.

The SSO under Edo de Waart gave concert performances of each of the *Ring* works over a four year period, starting with *Das Rheingold* in 1997 and culminating with *Gotterdammerung* in 2000 as the centrepiece of the SSO's contribution to the Olympic Arts Festival.

In 1998 and in 2004, the State Opera of South Australia gave Australia and the world two productions of the *Ring*. In 1998, Bill Gillespie brought the Chatelet's Strosser production and gave us the first fully-staged *Ring* in Australia in almost a century. In 2004, Elke Neidhardt gave us the first "Australian" *Ring* to overwhelming critical acclaim, although those who yearn for a more traditional production with helmets and horses would have wished that Ms Neidhardt had been an American and not a European.

There have been other outstanding concert performances of the Ring operas, among them the Perth Arts Festival's multi-media concert performances of *Gotterdammerung* in 2003.

I have catalogued some of the Wagner performances in Australia over the last 25 years because it forms a prism through which the activities of our Society can be recalled, since we provided financial sponsorship for many of these and other Wagner-related events.

There are some who believe that these 25 years may come to be seen in retrospect as a sort of golden age of Australian Wagner production, the like of which we may not see for some time.

While I think that it's too early to say whether the changes in the musical directorships of both the SSO and Opera Australia will have an impact on Wagner performances, there is at least one bright light in our coming calendars. Europe will soon be awash with festivals and commemorations for the 200th anniversaries of the births of some of the artistic giants of the 19th century. In 2011 we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Franz Liszt, and in 2013 the 200th anniversary of the births of Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner.

While these events will trigger an avalanche of festivals and marketing in the recorded and live music industries overseas, I believe that they will also produce more than a trickle-down effect locally as well.

This year there are a number of events at which we will celebrate our anniversary. On 22 May, Wagner's Birthday, there is a party at the Goethe Institut following our AGM and a recital by students from the Conservatorium of Music.

On 7 August, thanks to Miriam Gordon, acclaimed dramatic soprano Deborah Polaski will talk about her career and recent productions and recordings. Many of you will remember Ms Polaski's performance in the title role of *Electra* at the Capitol Theatre under Simone Young in 2000, her Bayreuth performances, notably as Brünnhilde in the Kupfer *Ring* from 1988, and will be familiar with her more recent performances and recordings, such as the *Tristan und Isolde* highlights with Bertrand de Billy and the RSO Vienna released this year (Oehms Classic, OC602).

And as usual we will celebrate the year's ending with a party on December 11.

I hope that many of you can join us at these events, and at the Society's other functions during the year. Bonne Anniversaire. Roger Cruickshank 1 May 2005



For Your **Diary**

<i>Tristan und Isolde.</i>	Queensland Music Festival 2005 with Australian Youth Orchestra, including Brisbane's Lisa Gasteen in Queensland's premiere concert performance - see Newsletter 97 for details	Saturday 30 July 2005
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Meetings **Dates** & Coming **Events**

DATE	EVENTS - 2005	LOCATION
May 22	AGM - recital by Conservatorium German language scholarship winners, Wagner's birthday party (this is the actual birthday). This meeting will coincide with the 25 th anniversary of the Society and the 100 th Newsletter - June 2005 issue.	Goethe Institut - 2.00pm
July 17	Dr Roger Hillman, German and Film Studies, Australian National University, 'Wagner and film'	Goethe Institut - 2.00pm
September 18	TBA	Goethe Institut - 2.00pm
October 16	Composer Nigel Butterly to talk on Liszt and Wagner	Goethe Institut - 2.00pm
November 20	Alan Whelan "Perception and Reception of Wagner in the Nazi period"	Goethe Institut - 2.00pm
December 11	End of year function - <i>Please bring a plate</i>	Goethe Institut - 2.00pm
Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)		

Committee **2004 - 2005**

President and Membership Secretary	Roger Cruickshank	9357 7631
Vice President	Barbara McNulty OBE	9487 1344
Vice President	Julian Block	9337 6978
Treasurer	Michael Moore	9363 2281
Secretary	Mary Haswell	9810 5532
Members	Sandy Dudgeon	9489 0570
	Dennis Mather	9560 1860
Newsletter Editor	Terence Watson	9517 2786
Public Officer	Peter Nicholson	9436 1097

25th Anniversary **Competition**

I am delighted to introduce you to a special Competition to celebrate our 25th anniversary - details on page 4.

For some time, your Committee has been looking for ways to engage people outside the Society, especially younger people, with the works and music of Richard Wagner. A competition such as this provides an incentive for those who may not have an extensive knowledge of Wagner's works to do their own research and create an original piece of work, within the context of Wagner and Australia.

Information about this competition will be circulated as widely as possible, through the internet and in other ways, especially to educational authorities and music schools, so that anyone with an interest in music, drama, politics or any of the other things that interested Wagner, and on which he wrote extensively, can enter.

One bonus for all of us will be that we will have the opportunity to read the fruits of the competition in future issues of the Newsletter. If you're interested, or if you know anyone who would be interested in entering, please pass this information on to them - and good luck!



Wagner Society in NSW Inc - Announcement of Newsletter Article Competition

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Wagner Society in NSW Inc celebrates the 25th Anniversary of its foundation meeting in October 2005. As part of its activities to mark the occasion, the Society is announcing a competition for articles for publication in its Newsletter.

To be considered, each article will meet the following criteria:

1. Reflects the Society's objective of commitment to promoting the works of Richard Wagner.
2. Demonstrates a high standard of creativity and/or scholarship.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. The topic is "Wagner and Australia".
2. Articles are to be in English, not subject to any copyright restrictions and no more than 2500 words, although the Committee reserves the right to consider longer articles of exceptional quality. Each Article must be accompanied by a statement that the entry is the author's own work.
3. Articles selected for prize awards and/or publication will be checked against material, including on the World Wide Web, to ensure that there is no plagiarism.
4. The Management Committee of the Society will make the final decision/s, including making no award if no entry is considered to meet the criteria.
5. No correspondence will be entered into concerning the Committee's decision/s.
6. Persons submitting articles may be asked to modify their articles before being considered for shortlisting for the final decision or for publication.
7. Joint articles will be accepted, but there will only be one prize for each category of First, Second and Third place-getter.
8. Persons may enter only one article.
9. The competition is open to all except professional writers and academics.
10. The Society reserves the right to publish all or none of the articles in editions of the Newsletter.
11. The Society may also choose to use the successful article/s in other publications.
12. Members of the Management Committee of the Wagner Society in NSW Inc are not eligible to enter.

TIMELINE

Details of competition are being publicised in the May 2005 Newsletter and on the Society's Website. Submissions are to be received by 31 August 2005 either posted (with an electronic copy) to

The President
The Wagner Society in NSW Inc
GPO Box 4574, SYDNEY NSW 2001
or emailed to webmaster@wagner-nsw.org.au

The persons submitting articles must include contact details in case of a request to amend the articles and to post the cheque, if a winner.

The winner/s will be announced at the October 2005 function and thereafter at the October function for the continuing annual competition. The Articles will then be published in subsequent editions of the Newsletter.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Articles will be considered by the Management Committee, which will then make the final decision.

The Management Committee, or its delegate/s, will apply the selection criteria listed above to compile the shortlist and make a final decision.

The Management Committee may ask authors to consider modifications before a final decision is made.

PRIZE/S

The prizes for the 2005 competition will be AUD\$1000 First Prize, AUD\$200 Second Prize and AUD\$100 Third Prize.

For more information about the Wagner Society in NSW Inc, please visit our website at www.wagner-nsw.org.au



The Formation of the Wagner Society in New South Wales

– Betty Maloney, Member 1

It was always our ambition to go to Bayreuth. Numerous inquiries about obtaining tickets were always met with negative replies. Our friend, Richard King, the owner of the Print Room Gallery, had attended Bayreuth numerous times by travelling with Lufthansa German Airlines and obtaining extra tickets by standing patiently outside the Festspielhaus waving a little banner.

It was not until our friend Jenny made us aware of the Henebery Personal Tours (Opera and Music Festival Holidays) in Oxford that our hopes were raised. In 1980 we were allotted three tickets through them to three Wagner operas. By coincidence Jenny also recommended that her friend Len Hansen should contact Oxford and when he was successful suggested that he travel with us. This he did.

Thoughts were bandied around between Reg and myself about a Wagner Society in Sydney. There had been a society previously which had folded, so we felt we needed some support to get the scheme going. We talked of this in Bayreuth and asked Len if he would be president if a society were formed. He agreed. Also in Bayreuth at the same time were Clare and Margaret Hennessy, Joan Klein and Sue Kelly - who were all equally enthusiastic about the formation of a society.

Len had met Richard King through our instigation and visited him at the gallery to ask about touting for tickets at Bayreuth. He must have been well instructed as Len did get tickets for Ring operas.

Reg visited the Friends of Bayreuth office and told them of our proposal and their enthusiasm was great. We were returning to London to see the Götz Friedrich Ring while Len was returning to Sydney. We undertook to contact the president of the London Wagner Society and Len undertook to visit Richard King again to ask if an inaugural meeting to create a Society could be held in his gallery. Meantime, the president of the London society visited our flat in Floral Street, London, had lunch with Reg and promised to forward their Constitution onto us. This he did.

The inaugural meeting was held at the Print Room Gallery on 26th October 1980 and was attended by 15 people. Of those I can recall only 11 names: Dr Leonard Hansen, Dr Susan Kelly, Michel Arnould, Richard King, Clare Hennessy, Murray Smith, Reg Maloney, Betty Maloney, Margaret Hennessy, Barbara Mitchell, Joan Klein. At this meeting an interim committee was formed to report back, and so the Wagner Society was formed in 1980/81.

Richard King: The Wagner Society - 20 Years On

– Richard King, Member No. 15 Past President & Honorary Life Member

Through the wonderful synchronicity of life, a chance remark opens doors and creates a new realm of experience. Dr Leonard Hansen, making his first visit to Bayreuth in 1980, asked the Lufthansa staff if they knew of other Aussies making the pilgrimage, preferably someone who had been there before. My friends at the airline mention Murray Smith and me as regular visitors, although we were not booked for that year. We already knew Leonard through our work, but we were unaware of his interest in Wagner. During his visit to our gallery, we discussed starting a Society in Australia with the principle aims of promoting Wagner's work, of encouraging singers and musicians, and of demonstrating to our friends at the (then) Australian Opera that there was an audience for Wagner's music dramas.

I had been a member of the British Wagner Society since 1966, but I had failed to obtain any Bayreuth tickets through them. A chance remark at dinner one evening with a friend from Lufthansa enabled me to obtain tickets by flying with that airline. I suggested to Leonard that he obtain a copy of the British Society's constitution and talk with the "Friends of Bayreuth" people during his visit to Europe. We would launch our society on his return.

Leonard was very enthusiastic and convened the first meeting in Bayreuth with several Aussies he had met on the trip. From memory, these were Betty Berryman, Reg and Betty Maloney, Margaret and Clare Hennessey, and Leonard's life partner, Michele Arnould. The gallery, "The Print Room", became our venue for events and the registered office of the Society. At that stage, the thought of incorporation had not been developed, although we were aware of the legal implications should anyone injure themselves while on our premises or participating in an event.

It was a time of "much enthusiasm". Our first public meeting was publicised mainly by word of mouth and a small advert in the Sydney Morning Herald, attracting about thirty people. Many gave extra money to become "foundation members". A few weeks later we had public screening of Wagnerian documentaries at the AMP theatre at Circular Quay. The crowd was so big that many were turned away. The Society was born.

It became a standard joke that we had a business called the Wagner Society and a hobby called The Print Room! We had lectures by our patron, Charles Mackerras (later Sir) picnics, theatre parties, fundraisers, and recording afternoons at the Concordia (German) Club and the gallery. Annual dinners were arranged on or near the Master's birthday.



The membership continued to expand and our reputation, too. Knowledge of our existence and endeavours began to spread interstate with various people taking on the task of forming their own state Societies. As far as I know, all are still in existence and thriving, as is our group. Our friends at the Australian Opera began to realise we were a force to be reckoned with. One evening, for example, a group of us went to a restaurant at Darlinghurst frequented by the Opera's top brass and singers. As we walked in, Moffat Oxenbould said "Look out! Here's the Wagner mafia!"

We sponsored the Bayreuth Scholarship, but later provided the airfare for the Scholarship winner. Sponsorship of headline singers in AO productions also gave the Society a high profile by being acknowledged in the programs and, often, by having "flyers" placed on the seats, thus encouraging more people to join. Leonard would often match, dollar for dollar, the amount the Society would donate to AO productions. He dearly loved the Society, giving all his spare time to running it, as did our Committee members. There was always a lot of paperwork, as well as the constant demands of making good contacts.

Our guests of honour at our annual dinners regaled us with song or repartee. Werner Bauer, for example, gave very generously of his time and experience, accompanying our singers and finishing with a rendition of Happy Birthday as though composed by Wagner himself.

Leonard became unwell in the late 1980s and stood down as President. I succeeded him for a number of years. The indomitable Olive Coonan then followed and, through her tenacity, continued our steady growth. The Goethe Institut in Woollahra became our second home. Jessie Anderson's memorable spreads of fine food in excellent quantities have passed into folklore. Jessie and Keith have retired to the country, as have I.

When Leonard was President he would not keep the Committee members disciplined and on the subject. He loved hearing about everyone's experiences of all subjects. On the other hand, Olive would only allow a short time to outline the agenda item; no one was allowed to interrupt. The Chairman of the British Society sat in on a meeting one evening. Leonard later asked him how our meetings compared with theirs. The visitor said he was amazed by the amount of material the Committee got through in such a short time. Olive would say of me: "He doesn't even butter you up, before he tells you off!" By and large, we had great fun at these meetings with only the odd occasion when "ideologies" clashed.

No Committee members were reimbursed. When a member would continually criticise or complain about our way of working, I would always invite them onto the Committee. Our secretaries have done a wonderful job of keeping minutes, typing correspondence, etc. Keeping the membership records was a particularly onerous task. The ticketing for theatre parties and Bayreuth was very time consuming. All those who have resigned or passed on over the years gave their all. We were very fortunate to have such great people on board.

As I used to say at many gatherings of members and friends, there are people being born into the physical realm and then dying without ever experiencing the spiritual journey of Wagner. To me, life would not have been complete if I had never turned the handle and opened the door to something so life enhancing. Here's to the Wagner Society in NSW (and like Societies elsewhere)! May it continue to grow and prosper!

(Clare Hennessey asked me to write this memoir and if I have not mentioned someone, who should have been recognised, please forgive; it is not intentional.)



Leonard Hansen at Sir Charles Mackerras's Meistersinger seminar 1988

WAGNER SOCIETY CHRONOLOGY AND SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

President's Introduction

Our Newsletter editor, Terence Watson, has scoured our Newsletters and produced a list of committee members and officeholders and related historical information from the Society's beginning to the present. I had hoped that we could also publish a complete list of all the Society's members, from Betty Maloney (member number 1) to Tim Green (our newest member, number 933), but unfortunately our recent past includes a period in which records were misplaced or destroyed, and this has not been possible.

Overview

The Society held its first General Meeting in March 1983. The Society was established as an incorporated association on 15 December 1986 (with alteration of the original Objects and Rules accepted on 31 August 1987).

In June 1993, the Federal Government agreed to list the Society on the Register of Cultural Organisations, entitling donations to the Society's Public Donation Account to be tax deductible for the donors. This was a significant achievement for the Society as it enabled it to add an incentive to its appeals to people to donate money to be used in supporting Wagner-related activities and purposes, such as sponsoring productions and



supporting singers. Prior to this, from February 1982, tax deductible donations could only be made to the Society through the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust.

The Public Donation Account is still one of the key mechanisms by which the Society seeks to raise the profile of Wagner and his works in Australia. AND the Society still needs donations to achieve this objective, so, please, consider making a special donation during this significant year and make sure the Society continues its important work.

On 22 May 1994, the Society had its first Wagner birthday lunch after thirteen years of celebrating the event with a formal dinner. In both cases, there were many distinguished guests invited to address the assembled diners. Special guests over the years have included Sir Charles Mackerras, Patrick Veitch, Rita Hunter, Leonie Rysanek, Raymond Myers, Stuart Challender, Horst Hoffman, Ken Neate, Professor Michael Ewans, Ronald Dowd, Alberto Remedios, Bernadette Cullen, John Wegner, John Pringle, Robert Allman, Robert Carr MP, Moffat Oxenbould, Donald McDonald, Simone Young, Andrew Reimer, Bill Gillespie, Antony Ernst, Oswald Georg Baur, Stephen Phillips, Peter Nicholson, Adrian Collette, Warwick Fyfe, Stephen Mould, Paul Curran, Tim Calnin, Adele Johnston, Professor Nicolas Routley, Professor Simon Williams,

In late 1992, it appears that the Society started its practice of applying for Bayreuth Festival tickets on behalf of its members – for the 1993 Festival. In preceding years, one had to either take one's chances with the Bayreuth box office or join an organised tour with a company that had access to tickets. In March 1993, the Newsletter reports that the Society had received 15 sets of tickets. In December 1993, the Management Committee published a set of Rules to govern the application for and allocation of Bayreuth tickets. These Rules were revised in February 2001.

Wagner Society Honorary Life Members:

Werner Baer, Leonie Rysanek, Rita Hunter, Michael Ewans, Richard King, Reg Maloney, Horst Hoffmann, Joseph Ferfaglia.

Presidents:

Leonard Hansen 1981-1986, Richard King 1986-1990, Olive Coonan 1990-1994, Ramon Josey 1994-1995, Paul Lehmann 1995-1997, Barbara McNulty 1997-2002, Roger Cruickshank 2002 – to present.

Public Officers:

Richard King (inauguration as Incorporated entity in December 1886 to February 1990, Reg Maloney from September 1994, Olive Coonan from September 2000, Roger Cruickshank from June 2001, Peter Nicholson from September 2001.

Committee Members:

Sue Kelly, Richard King, Clare Hennessy, Cedric Falconer, Ian Hopkins, Margaret Suther, Jean-Louis Stuurop, Janet Wayland, Michel Arnold, Jean Byrne, Murray Smith, Judy and Joseph Forfarshire, Heike Knoke Pamela Dunsford, Olive Coonan, Leonard Hansen,

Jessie Anderson, David McCulloch, Leith Anderson, Anette Marshall, Margaret Budge, Alma Straub, Patricia Moore, Richard Steele, Paul Lehmann, Arthur Carter, William Watson, Ramon Josey, Ira Kowalski, Barbara McNulty, Barbara Brady, Shirley Robertson, Ivor Zetler, Barry Walters, Terence Watson, Onofreo Ferrara, Roger Cruickshank, Lindsay Knight, Dennis Mather, Julian Block, Sandy Dudgeon, Colin Jones, Elle Rasink, Monica Olave, Mary Haswell, Michael Moore.

Tapes & Teas:

A crucial element of the Society's functions is its social events * the regular Sunday functions at which a band of people has been responsible for providing either the content or the sustenance. For the content, a number of members used (and continue to use) their own cassette tapes, then CDs then videotapes then DVDs to bring the latest recordings of Wagner performances to their fellow members: Jean-Louis Stuurop (for many years at the Concordia Club), Michele Arnould, Jessie and Keith Anderson, Clare and Margaret Hennessy, Shirley Robertson and Cecilia Segura.

For the sustenance we have to thank a number of members who provided tasty and nutritious afternoon teas during which members could get to know each other, discuss their mutual Wagnerian passions and debate the merits of performances that they might have heard and/or seen, and analyse the many talks they had heard. These valiant caterers have included: Janet Wayland, Jessie and Keith Anderson, Margaret Budge, Shirley Robertson, and more recently Terence Watson and Elle Rasink. Not to forget, of course, the wonderful offering provided by members for the Society's annual End of Year function. And a special mention to Barbara Brady and the wonderful cakes that she has made since at least 1993 for the end of year raffle and for consumption at the party.

The Ravens Reporting and Webmasters:

From its first appearance in Newsletter No. 46 March 1992, this regular update of Wagner performances around the world has grown ever more comprehensive under the indefatigable sleuthing of Camron Dyer.

The Society established a website in early 1999 that was uploaded in March 1999 with Marc Greyling as the inaugural Webmaster, John Studdert took over from September 2002 and is still maintaining and improving the site regularly.

Significant Achievements in meeting the Society's Objectives

Providing financial support for performances of Wagner's works, including the sponsoring of individual artists in Australia, for example the:

- ♪ August 1982 production of *Tristan und Isolde* (Australian Opera)
- ♪ Statement of congratulations for the Australian Opera October 1983 production of *Die Walküre*
- ♪ Statement of congratulations for the June-August Australian Opera 1984 production of *Das Rheingold*



- ♪ Australian Opera 1985 Melbourne performances of *Lohengrin*
- ♪ Australian Opera productions of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* (donation toward the set of posters)
- ♪ August-September 1987 Australian Opera production of *Lohengrin* (Stella Axarlis)
- ♪ September-October 1988 Australian Opera production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Donald MacIntyre)
- ♪ July-August 1989 Australian Opera production of *Die Walküre* (Donald MacIntyre)
- ♪ February 1990 Australian Opera production of *Tristan und Isolde*
- ♪ 1993 Opera Australia production of *Tristan und Isolde* (the Society had planned to donate to the Company's production of *Parsifal* planned for 1993, but terminated in the great fire in the Company's storage facility)
- ♪ 1995 Sydney Symphony Orchestra concert performance of *Das Rheingold* (Bernadette Cullen)
- ♪ 1996 Sydney Symphony Orchestra's 50th Annual Gala Wagner concert (assistance in cost of copying scores)
- ♪ 1998 State Opera of South Australia production of the Opera Chatelet's Ring Cycle (John Wegner)
- ♪ 1998 Opera Australia production of *Tannhäuser*
- ♪ 1999 Sydney Symphony Orchestra concert performance of *Das Rheingold* (Daniel Sumegi)
- ♪ February 2003 50th Anniversary Festival of Perth concert performance of *Götterdämmerung*
- ♪ September 2001 State Opera of South Australia production of *Parsifal*
- ♪ The 2004 Opera Australia production of *Der fliegende Holländer*
- ♪ The 2004 State Opera of South Australia production of The Ring Cycle
- ♪ 1996 Australian Opera production of *Der fliegende Holländer* was sponsored from the estate of the founding President of the Wagner Society – Dr Leonard Hansen.

Bayreuth Scholarship

Another important mechanism for the Society to meet its objectives is by providing a return international airfare to the winner of the Australian Opera Foundation's Annual Bayreuth Scholarship each year since the offer was first taken up by the winner of the Bayreuth Scholarship.

Mr John Wregg , John Wegner, Bernadette Cullen, Rosemary Gunn, Richard Divall, Roland Peelman, Stephen Bennet, 1992-93 no Scholarships taken up, David Stanhope, Stephen Walters, , Geoffrey Harris, Elizabeth Campbell, Stephen Mould, Lisa Gasteen, Michael Black, Francis Greep, Natalie Jones, Sharolyn Kimmorley, Cathy Dadd, Kate Golla.



Alberto Remedios Society dinner guest May 1987

Another Page from the History of Wagner in Australia

— By Kevin Mills

We are pleased to be able to present another chapter in our continuing occasional series on the impact of Wagner on the lives of people in and around Sydney. This issue's story is from a now retired singer who worked for many years with the Australian Opera as well as in overseas companies. As with Phillip Bennett from Newsletter No. 99, Kevin Mills stumbled onto Wagner at an early age and was also transformed for life by the experience.

The following are extracts from Kevin's Biography. For those of you who are interested in reading more about Kevin's eventful, but not always operatically rewarding, life, the full Synopsis from his biography is available on the Society's website (www.wagner-nsw.org.au). I trust that you will find Kevin's story interesting and worth thinking about. [Ed.]

A Synopsis from THE BIOGRAPHY: "NOT ALWAYS THE UNDERSTUDY". The influence of Richard Wagner on my Career and my development as a Heldentenor. (Heldentenor: n (German). A singer with a powerful voice suitable for operatic parts. Also called "heroic tenor.") By KEVIN MILLS.

About fifty-five years ago, as a naïve country lad, my first Singing Teacher gave me a lovely gift. It was



Christmas. The gift was a large album of Wagnerian Music Treasures. Beautifully bound and illustrated, the book stimulated my imagination and instilled in me an ambition to become an Opera Singer. At fifteen years of age I had no conception of the difficult career path that lay ahead.

In those times there were only wax recordings or radio to listen to. My favourite item was the Pilgrim's Chorus from *Tannhäuser*. Wagner was considered to be 'highbrow'. The culturally deprived still consider that to be so, even today. Fortunately Wagner's music is more accessible now and those who appreciate his legacy can delight in his music whenever we desire it.

Two years later I found myself a new teacher in Sydney. That is where my realistic mind told me I should go if ever I was to realise my ambitions. The highly regarded Richard G. Thew O.B.E. took me on and guided my progress for 10 years and more, until 1957 when I won the Sydney "Sun" Aria Competition. Also that year I was the NSW. Winner and a Commonwealth Finalist in the A.B.C. Vocal Competition. The previous year 1956 I was the NSW. Winner and Commonwealth Finalist in "Mobil Quest". I have also won the Adelaide Vocal Championship, which embraced the whole field of vocal endeavour: English Art Song, Oratorio, French-song, and German Lieder.

As a student in Australia I was known as an Eisteddfod singer. One of the many who entered voice competitions anywhere, whether it was in the country, the metropolitan areas, or interstate. It could be a costly way of becoming known to the public while enjoying the vocal sounds and skills we assumed that we had. Prize money, (if one was fortunate to win a placing), rarely covered the preparation cost for the event. We did it for the love of singing! Perhaps too, for a fleeting glimpse of glory.

Striving to make one's advancement, as a singer is not an easy task in Australia. An operatic career is a rough road to travel no matter what country one is born into. Fortunately there are better conditions and better circumstances now-a-days than existed half a century ago. If an Australian Singer wanted a career in Opera, it was imperative to go abroad for it. The cultural differences in languages and educational backgrounds were then a big challenge to the 'Aussie Battler.' That some young singers overcame these difficulties is a great credit to them. We now have had a few homegrown Australian National and Regional Opera Companies presenting world-class productions on a regular basis. Thus giving local talent a small opportunity, if only for a while, to work in their own country.

My first introduction to Wagnerian Opera was as a supernumerary in "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg" at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 1950. Richard, (or Mr. Thew), as we all addressed him, told me it would add to my stage experience. It was a short season of six performances, conducted by Sir Eugene Goossens who was the Director of the 'con' as well as the conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. The production contained singers of the calibre of the Bass, James Wilson, and the tenor, Alan Ferris. It was a gigantic

effort to present this opera in such an unsuitable venue. In hindsight, the production left much to be desired, but the experience gained was considerable.

After my "Sun" Aria success, I headed for London with aspirations to study further and work in Opera if possible. I had a few introductions, but not all brought a positive result. Richard Thew had given me the price of two tickets to Covent Garden Opera House. I was to spend my first night in London at the opera.

The opera was *Parsifal* with the Canadian tenor Jon Vickers singing the title role. *Tristan und Isolde* was my next Wagnerian 'treat' among many other operas in the repertoire. Perhaps the most memorable performance I ever saw at Covent Garden was that of Gedda Lamars as *Electra*. She had been flown in at the last moment to replace the scheduled artist. It was an electrifying performance I will never forget.

For two years I submerged myself in studies with such teachers as Clive Carey and Gustave Sacher. I also had regular coaching sessions with Paul Hamburger, Geoffrey Parsons, Ivor Newton and others. Sacher's method of teaching was a revelation. In those two years he had changed my voice from a Baritone to a voice with potential to cover a three-octave range and beyond. My voice grew in size, but also I was capable of pianissimo singing that could project to the back rows of any Theatre or Concert Hall while maintaining an excellent quality of sound.

Funds were running out after six months of daily tuition. I had auditioned for Covent Garden and Sadlers Wells Opera Companies, but nothing had been offered to me. Naturally enough I was becoming a little disappointed and disillusioned.

For the next few years Kevin grabbed opportunities when and where he could from sharing a recital at Australia House with Beryl Kimber the Australian Violinist to working as a featured Vocalist in Seaside Revue with "The Fol de Rols," a famous Revue Company throughout England for more than twenty-five years, and the Carl Rosa Opera Chorus, recently been taken over by Sadlers Wells Opera as its touring component with proposed productions of "The Merry Widow", "Land of Smiles" and "Orpheus in the Underworld." Kevin was also called upon as Understudy of Yamadori in "Madam Butterfly" with the illustrious Dame Joan Hammond. [Ed.]

I believed I had 'made it' in London's West End when I got the opportunity to perform the juvenile male lead of Count Gustl opposite June Bronhill as Lisa in Lehar's lovely operetta, "Land of Smiles". Peter Grant was performing the role of Gustl when he became ill. I replaced him for the last eight performances of the London season.

On returning to Australia for a holiday at Christmas 1959, I made a decision to remain.

In the following years, Kevin worked again with the Sadlers Wells Opera Company presented productions of "The Merry Widow", starring June Bronhill in Australia, and "Orpheus in the Underworld" and with the Tivoli



Circuit, which had asked him to join their production of "The Student Prince" and, for the Tivoli Circuit in 1961, he also played Franz Schubert in "Lilac Time". Later, during 1965 Kevin had a very diverse year, but fortunately, the Federated Music Clubs enabled him to continue singing regularly in Recitals and Concerts. There was also a period when he drove Tourist Coaches! [Ed.]

I produced and directed "The King & I" in Wingham and Wauchope for the Wingham Dramatic Art and Musical Company. The experience of conducting the pit band was another string I added to my bow. I was very much a 'one man band' in bringing the show together. In the years that followed I was to produce and direct many musicals in Wingham and Taree. Among them were Victor Herbert's "Sweethearts", "The Glass Slipper", (a musical based on the Cinderella story), "Carousel" and "Music Man". As well I was the founder of the Manning Valley Festival of Music in 1974, which resulted from the formation of the Manning Valley Youth Choir and The Manning Valley Choral Society. Later it was renamed The City of Greater Taree Choral Society.

I instigated and made a suggestion to Taree City Council and the Public in 1974, that an Entertainment Centre should be built to accommodate the many music functions and activities of a growing Society. Leading on from this The Manning Entertainment Centre was built. It opened in 1988 with my spectacular production of "The Best of Times" Grand Variety Concert and in 1989 another production of "The King and I" involving a double cast and over 200 performers. In my capacity as a Choral Conductor there were many Sacred Cantatas performed locally, on tours to neighbouring towns, to the Cities of Newcastle and Central Sydney. There was a Concert version of Bizet's opera, "Carmen" and the Oratorios "Requiem" by Gabriel Faure and "Messiah" by Handel and Benjamin Britten's "Saint Nicholas." There was also a locally composed work, "In Praise of Wisdom".

I return now to 1966 when I first joined the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company to sing Figaro in "The Barber of Seville" on an Arts Council Tour of 4 States and lasting six months. The roles were shared to enable singers to rest every second day. Returning to Sydney I sang performances of Count di Luna in "Il Trovatore" and also in Melbourne. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation recorded the performance with me singing di Luna and it was broadcast on the National Programme. There were also Figaro performances that Season in Sydney and Melbourne.

"Don Pasquale" in 1967, featured June Bronhill singing the Norina role. I sang the role of Dr Malatesta on a shared basis with Ron Maconachie. The Arts Council (Queensland Division) toured the opera in two separate periods. Rehearsals and the main Repertory Opera Season Tour was sandwiched in between.

I was required to sing Marullo in "Rigoletto" and a few scheduled performances of Figaro and Dr Malatesta in Sydney and Melbourne before resuming the "Don Pasquale" tour in Queensland. The Understudies I took on in 1967 were: Guglielmo in "Cosi fan Tutte", Rodrigo

in "Don Carlos", Bitterolf in *Tannhäuser*, Wolfram in *Tannhäuser*, and Tannhäuser. All this, in addition to my regular responsibilities in the Chorus, whenever required.

As a means to 'proving one's worth' in a repertory opera company, it is normally essential to agree to sing as a chorister for a period of time. One has to be careful not to get 'stuck' there in the Chorus for several years. But that predicament can suit a lot of less ambitious singers. Small parts, principal understudies and minor roles are often filled by choristers if that person has potential and can handle the responsibility. When one is contracted, the 'small print' can often tell you that you are "to perform as directed" by the Management! Managements will use that advantage!!

Our tour manager for the Arts Council Tours was a German man named Wolfgang Seyd. He was the first to tell me that he could hear a Heldentenor quality developing in my voice. I had mostly sung as a Baritone all my life up to this moment. Some considered me to be a very good Baritone and should never have considered a change. I was about the right age for a change to take place. Heldentenors usually develop from the High Baritone voice at thirty-five years of age. I had just reached 35! To back up Wolfgang's statement, I received a similar opinion from Stephen Beinl who was a Producer with the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company. He was working on the production of *Tannhäuser* in 1967. Kenneth Neate was to sing the title role.

Ken, an Australian, had established himself in Europe over many years and was a regular artist in Wagnerian Opera at Bayreuth. [See below for more information on Mr Neate. Ed.] I never considered him to have a true Heldentenor voice. His sound had a lighter lyrical quality. But Ken was versatile in the roles he performed. One needs to be if one wants to make a living. So, returning to Australia to sing *Tannhäuser*, Ken's voice was showing signs of degeneration near the end of a vibrant career. His voice sounded tired.

Consider my heavy workload for the year, as listed [above]. My workload was about to be increased again. The Opera Company was certainly getting good value for my services! Raymond Myers was to sing the role of Wolfram. As his Understudy I knew he would never give me an opportunity to replace him.

One sunny day at the Rehearsal Studios that were located in Dowling Street, Sydney, I was rehearsing my understudy role of Wolfram with Henri Penn. I felt I knew the music very well. I confidently said to Henri, "I know this role pretty well, let me have a go at *Tannhäuser* for a change!" I was singing for a little while when the door was flung open and into the room flowed Stephen Hagg, John Young and Stephen Beinl. They had rushed down from the Administration floor above to hear whom it was that was singing *Tannhäuser*. Two weeks later I was officially notified that I was no longer the understudy of Wolfram. I was now the Understudy of *Tannhäuser* and was advised to concentrate all my effort in that direction. I was told also that the



man who had been covering the role had had a nervous breakdown while trying to prepare it and he had since left the company.

Predictably, an Understudy rarely, is given production calls sufficient to the needs of the role. In the course of working in other productions, one is expected to observe the moves of the person chosen to sing the role. Be it in the rehearsal room, while performing onstage or observing from the wings. Somehow you are not expected to get an opportunity to replace the star that might or might not be getting a good monetary reward for his services. So it was that I became Kenneth Neate's Understudy. I had only been given production rehearsals on Tannhäuser's first scene in Act 1, when I was called upon to take over his role.

It happened in 1968. I was undertaking the roles of Scharrone in "Tosca", Sid in "Girl of the Golden West", Ping in "Turandot". I was also the Understudy of the principal tenor role of Calif in "Turandot" and still performing my duties as a Chorister.

I had arrived at Her Majesty's Theatre in Brisbane to sing in *Tannhäuser* as a Chorister. It was Saturday evening 25th May 1968. The Stage-Door man told me that Kenneth Neate wished to speak to me in his dressing room. Ken warned me that he was not feeling well. I should prepare myself to sing his role the following Monday evening. I should see the Company Manager, Doug Abbott, to get permission to watch tonight's performance from the audience. I was filled with dread!

Seating myself in the front stalls I endured the rise of the House Curtain to hear Ken's first vocal utterance. It was a horrible sound. I slid from my seat and under the row of seats in front of me. I knew Ken would not be able to complete the opera. Very soon Doug Abbott came to the row of seats where I had slid to the floor and he beckoned me to follow him back-stage. I was hastily dressed in Ken's Tannhäuser costume. Ken had struggled through his first scene. No one knew how he got through it! It was the only scene I had been rehearsed in. Now I was to complete the opera not knowing the stage plot or the complete text.

The performance was sung in German. What I couldn't remember, I invented. I took some consolation in the probability that few in a Brisbane audience would understand German. The music I knew very well and that supplied me with the drama to interpret my way to the end. By the time I rendered the Rome Narration (which takes 40 minutes to sing), I was starting to feel I was meant to sing the role. I could feel that my colleagues were helping me through by subtle support from their glances, indicating that I should be in another part of the stage. When they were not themselves required on stage they were taking a 'peek' from the wings. At the conclusion, the conductor, Maestro Carlo Felice Cillario swept me into his arms and gave me a big hug. I must have given him some anxious moments for which he granted me his forgiveness.

On the following Monday evening the 27th May I did it all again in its entirety.

Three weeks later the Company was back in Sydney. On 22nd June at a Matinee in the old Empire Theatre off Railway Square, a performance was rescheduled and I sang the role again to enable the bosses to see me perform the role. Having been given a producer to work with for a week, I at last had direction that gave historical detail and the role became understandable to me. The audience gave me a prolonged ovation, which must have lasted at least ten minutes.

In an article published in "The Sydney Morning Herald" on Wednesday 3rd July 1968 the music critic Roger Covell wrote the following extract:

"Kevin Mills, singing the title role in a matinee performance of "Tannhäuser" had a voice of considerable fresher timbre than Ken Neate and needed less audible effort to maintain the flow of a phrase. The baritonal colouring of his tenor (he was a baritone before retraining himself as a tenor) makes him potentially apt for the special tone qualities of heroic Wagner singing.

It was in the third act, as if releasing himself from nervousness or apprehension that he began at an altogether higher level of accomplishment. His narration of Tannhäuser's Rome pilgrimage was especially impressive in its promise of future development."

For the following two years I believe I became an embarrassment to the opera company. There were no plans to present Wagnerian opera in the near future. Virtually I became what's known as a "walking understudy". For two years I was on salary but not required to perform very much—just learn roles suitable to a tenor. I did sing a few minor parts in 1968/9 including Ping in "Turandot". ...There was Florestan in "Fidelio" in 1970 conducted by Warwick Braithwaite, who told me he considered my performance of Florestan to be the best he had heard. That comment from such a great conductor was very humbling!

In 1971 I was the Understudy of Otello in "Otello" and was scheduled to sing the role in the ACT in the Canberra Theatre Season. I was visiting my family for the weekend when I heard on the news that Her Majesty's Theatre in Sydney had burnt to the ground and all sets and costumes in the current Opera Season had been destroyed in the fire. The "Otello" production was included in the fire and the remainder of the Sydney Season was cancelled. So too, was my opportunity to sing Otello. The opera was cancelled in Canberra and the great chance to launch my career to a higher level of distinction never eventuated.

In reconciliation to the Sydney public for the disruption and abandonment of the Opera Season at Her Majesty's Theatre in Sydney, there were instead Operatic Concerts at the Capital Theatre in the Haymarket area of the city. Later a similar series of Opera Concerts were given in the Palais Theatre at St. Kilda, Melbourne. My contributions to these concerts were two arias by Richard Wagner: Sigmund's Love Song 'Wintersturme wichen dem Wonnemond' from "Die Walküre" and Walter's Prize



Song 'Morgenlich leuchtwend inrosigen Schine' from "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg".

It was perhaps a realistic time for renaming the company as The Australian Opera. Not knowing what to do with me, the opera management offered me a small scholarship to help me go to Europe for further study. With sufficient cash to buy a return air ticket and my salary reduced by half, I was to consider myself still under contract to The Australian Opera. Off I embarked to Europe.

I was committed to use some of my Scholarship money by having some coaching with Jani Strasser of Glyndbourne Opera. I had worked with Jani when he was in Sydney as a Guest Repetiteur coaching singers for The Australian Opera. When I contacted him in London, Jani was going through a period of illness. Consequently my work with him was disrupted and in many respects most disappointing in view of his considerable reputation.

Before I started working with Jani I visited Sadlers Wells Opera at the Coliseum Theatre where I had worked for them in 1959. My intention was to say 'hello' to any former colleagues I might find there. ...Within two weeks I was working with Tom Hammond, Head of Music Staff, on the role of Canio in "Pagliacci". Donald Smith had been offered the role but he was not able to accept it. It was now offered to me...

Having made preliminary arrangements for the proposed "Pagliacci" engagement during the two and a half week period after my arrival in England, I took a train to Glasgow, Scotland, to audition for Peter Hemmings who was then the Director of Scottish Opera. (Later he became a General Manager of The Australian Opera for a limited time.) The Scottish Opera was presenting *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried*. I was invited to attend the performances. They did not make a lasting impression on me. I was too tired to enjoy them?

The Australian Baritone Raymond Myers had invited me to stay for a time in his home at Belsize Park. I was there when negotiating my fees for the "Pagliacci" performances on the telephone with Edward Renton. I became aware that Ray was listening in on our conversation. He became furious when he heard me negotiate a fee that was three times higher than the fee Sadlers Wells was paying him per performance. I had not expected to be vetted! Ray in a vile mood of jealousy and pique evicted me from his home! It was time to move on.

The Canio performances in London were a few months distant; there was plenty of time to take up my studies in Germany. Taking a train from London on Saturday 12th June 1971 I connected with the ferry to cross the Channel and then caught another train to Nuremberg. I booked into Adelman Pension the next day.

On Monday 14th June I had an appointment with Erich Riede at 11 a.m. Herr Riede was a prominent Opera conductor throughout Europe. He was to coach me in Wagnerian opera roles at 20 DM per hour. I worked with him each day for two weeks. At that time he was conducting "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg" in the local Opera House. I attended a performance the night I

arrived in Nuremberg. It was some-what provincial in its conception, but I was amazed by the size of the Chorus. I counted six hundred bodies on stage at one time. The singers were drawn from a dozen or more choral groups from the surrounding countryside. I was very impressed with their enthusiasm and vocal ability.

Erich Riede was an associate and friend of Max Lorenz. Lorenz was famous as a Heldentenor. He had sung regularly over many years at Bayreuth and the Metropolitan Opera in New York. At Bayreuth he was particularly a favourite singer of the German Dictator, Adolph Hitler. Kenneth Neate had put me in touch with this renowned Heldentenor. Ken himself had studied Wagnerian roles with Max. Considering this, I assumed some political politeness was warranted to Ken, so I chose to have a few lessons with him while waiting to start with Lorenz. The experience was of no particular benefit to me in the short or long term.

Lorenz was by now retired from the opera stage and was teaching and coaching Wagner roles to singers, from his home in München and from his holiday house on the fringe of Salzburg. On auditioning for him I was immediately accepted as a pupil. Excitedly he telephoned Bayreuth and told someone that he had discovered a new Tannhäuser. He wanted to know if the person on the other end of the telephone line could call into Salzburg to hear me sing. I was soon to be in Salzburg. It was holiday time and as fortune will dictate, it was not possible to arrange a meeting.

Over a period of four months I had lessons with Lorenz four and five days each week. Soon I had to send home for more money to pay Max's fees of 25 DM per hour of each lesson.

My work with Max Lorenz was greatly beneficial to the expansion of my voice. I mainly worked on vocal technique and studied in particular, the Siegmund role in *Die Walküre*.

A big man, Lorenz had a large stature and a jovial personality. Singing Lessons were never dull. Always there was a laugh to be enjoyed. One day when attending lessons Max was in a flamboyant mood. He appeared with what appeared to be his arms full of jewellery that he then proceeded to drape around himself. There were long strings of pearls, diamonds, rubies, sapphires and all manner of treasure. It reminded me of the Jewel Box scene from Gounod's "Faust". I could tell that the jewels were real and not imitation stage props. Max said Adolph Hitler had given him the jewellery. It was then to be given to Max's wife, now deceased. (Spoils of War, I wonder?) Max's wife was Jewish and Max claimed that she was spared from the Gas Chambers because of Hitler's love of Wagner and Max's singing of it. It is not certain that Max Lorenz was a Nazi. I doubt that he was. But his close association with the Bayreuth Wagner family brought him into the social circle of Adolph Hitler and the Third Reich.

By 14th August 1971 I was back in London, and had moved into a flat in Sussex Street S.W.1.



Rehearsals were soon to commence for "Pagliacci" and the opera opened at the London Coliseum on the 29th September. The Sadlers Wells Opera Company was now renamed The English National Opera.

In 1971, Kevin returned to Australia for performances of "Pagliacci" (Stephen Hall's in Sydney), with the singer playing Nedda, complaining to the management that he was too violent in the role of Canio. "I frightened her, she objected!", Kevin writes. [Ed.]

Wishing I had stayed on in England in view of the five year Contract that Edward Renton had advised me to accept, I was keen to clarify my position with The Australian Opera. The AO Administrators, had made a promise to me that I would be declared to be a Principal Singer with the Company on my return from my studies in Europe. Now that I had returned, they told me the Company ...were unable to take me on as a Principal! If I wished to remain with the Company I would be required to resume my position as a Chorister in the Australian Opera Chorus! Ironically my so-called Contract that they had used against me to bring me back to Australia was about to expire. I resigned!!

Kevin moved to Brisbane in Queensland and took a position as a Tenor and as a trainee in Opera Administration with The Queensland Opera Company and his new boss to be, John Thompson the Manager of Queensland Opera, arranged for him to obtain work with Twelfth Night Theatre as Stage Director for their production of "Winnie the Pooh". [Ed.] "Another experience and another string added to my bow!"

From 1974, Kevin again undertook a variety of tasks, from the tenor role of Saint Nicholas in Benjamin Britten's oratorio "Saint Nicholas" in Brisbane, to presenting that oratorio in Taree, singing the title role while also conducting his City of Greater Taree Choral Society. Then there were Gilbert & Sullivan Operas with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra at Brisbane City Hall; the Watkin Shaw version of "Messiah" with Queensland Symphony Orchestra; several opportunities to sing both the Bass and the Tenor solos in Handel's "Messiah" between 1974 and 1992. [Ed.]

Eventually I returned to The Australian Opera where I remained for several years. I was granted one month's 'leave of absence' during 1983 to attend the Bayreuther Festspiele in Germany. As a member of the Sydney Wagnerian Society at that time, I was accorded tickets to the Season of Richard Wagner Operas at Bayreuth. Werner Baer and his wife Sybil were our Escorts and the Tour was a wonderful experience for all who participated in it. For the first time I was able to see the entire "Ring Cycle" plus *Parsifal* and "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg". The treasured memory of that occasion will last forever!

My quest to be recognised as a Heldentenor capable of singing principal Wagnerian Roles had by now become eroded. Since my Tannhäuser induction in 1968 there had been many opportunities to sing as a Tenor for almost twenty years. The Australian Opera seemed

determined to use me mainly as a principal Understudy. Prior to my trip to Bayreuth in 1983 there was a long list of understudies as well as small parts and occasionally, major ones. Among them were: Arnfelt in "A Masked Ball" 1976, The Innkeeper (Understudy) in "The Cunning Little Vixen" 1976, The Innkeeper, also Marschallin's Major Domo in "Der Rosencavalier" 1976, Fortune Teller in "Lakme" 1976, Messenger in "Aida" 1977. Both Registrar and Goro in "Madam Butterfly" 1977 & 1979, Abdullo in "Nabucco" 1978 & 1980.

It was not until 1978 & 1979 that I was involved again in a Wagnerian Opera. This was again "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg" in which I jokingly complied with filling a space on-stage as Eislinger, one of the Mastersingers. He had comparatively little to do, or sing!

I covered the role of Siegfried for the ABC Concert performance of *Götterdämmerung* at the Sydney Opera House. I almost got the opportunity of singing the role. Another missed opportunity!

After my visit to Bayreuth it was potently clear to me that my work and loyalty to The Australian Opera over nearly twenty years was not about to be rewarded by their further support of any potential that I might have to be a prominent singer of Wagnerian Opera. When setting out on the long career road in pursuit of my original aim to become a leading Operatic Artist, I was unaware of the many deviations and obstructions there were to be encountered along the way. I concluded that there must be another way of life for me to enjoy outside the disciplines and the dedication required of an operatic career. Considering the twilight years now approaching apace, I again tendered my resignation from The Australian Opera on 4th March 1984. Six months' notice was required, but by mutual agreement the time was reduced to about three months.

I was then offered a position [in 1994] as a Singing Teacher at NASDA (National Academy of Singing and Dramatic Art) in Christchurch, New Zealand. I worked with some of that country's finest young singers in my capacity as Lecturer in Voice and Musical Theatre Repertoire. I returned to Australia in 1997 where, encouraged by my family, I again took up residence in Taree. I remain there today in retirement.

Looking back over more than seventy years, I have not been able to achieve all that I wished to do when I was young and naïve with aspirations to succeed in my chosen quest. There have been many disappointments and 'bumps' along the roads I have travelled. But ultimately, I achieved far more than I originally intended or imagined.

At the Manning Entertainment Centre Taree, on the 10th June 2004, during the Manning Valley Festival of Arts 2004, Dame Joan Sutherland made a public presentation to KEVIN MILLS on behalf of Greater Taree City Council. The "Visual and Performing Arts Award" was presented in recognition of his special contributions to Cultural Development in the City of Greater Taree.

The end, and a new beginning



A Wagner Connection

It may be appropriate to recall also that once upon a time, the Society numbered among its members a descendent of that Wagner family by reprinting this interesting article from an early Newsletter.

The Wagner Society can now list among its members a relative of its namesake, Richard Wagner. In an interesting family tree Mr. Frank Keep of Wollongong can trace his ancestry through five generations to Carl Friedrich Wagner and his wife Johanna Rosina (nee Patz), the parents of Wilhelm Richard and - amongst others - Carl Albert. It is from this Albert - by 14 years 'Richard's elder brother - that Mr. Keep descends, being the great-great-grandson. The lineage has been authenticated by the Bayreuth establishment and Wolfgang Wagner, the present head of the family, has himself acknowledged the connection in a personal letter.'

Mr. Keep, now 68 years of age, had suspected a link with his illustrious forebear for many years, as his mother's middle name was "Wagner"; but it is only recently the vital proof of the interesting generations was confirmed.' We give Frank a warm welcome to the Society.... [From Newsletter No. 20, September 1985 - Ed.]

The ABC and the Bayreuth Centenary production of the Ring Cycle

Also from an earlier Newsletter - a reminder of the excitement produced in Australian Wagnerians with the ABC's broadcast over 10 weeks from 4 May of the Bayreuth Centenary production of the Ring Cycle, directed by Patrice Chereau and conducted by Pierre Boulez. Many of us now have this production on DVD. [From Newsletter No. 22 March 1986 - Ed.]

Australians and Wagner Performances.

Simone Young, Australian "maestra" (as the report puts it) will be conducting Janáček's *Osud* (sung in a German translation) and Puccini's *Le villi* at the Wiener Staatsoper. Each opera has a different production team: David Pountney directs *Osud* with sets by Stefanos Lazaridis; Karoline Gruber directs *Le villi* with sets by Johan Engels. Jorma Silvasti, Cornelia Salje and Anja Silja star in the Janáček; Grundheber, Krassimira Stoyanova and José Cura perform the Puccini.

Barry Kosky, also at the Wiener Staatsoper will work with Semyon Bychkov in a new *Lohengrin* premiering on 3 December. Botha takes the title role alongside Isokoski as Elsa, Struckmann as Telramund and Baltsa as Ortrud.

After Lisa Gasteen's performances in Adelaide as Brünnhilde, it would be remiss of us not to notice her performances - actual and forthcoming - in Wagner operas. As a short introduction, here is a quote from an interview with her, called "Wild side of the Valkyrie" (The Daily Telegraph [London] 17 Feb 2005):

"Her relations with Opera Australia aren't currently so happy. "I adored the last music director, Simone Young. She put her money where her mouth was, and she was a wonderful Wagner conductor. Let's just say that now that's she's gone [after arguments over budgets], I don't have any plans to sing there." Despite their sublime music, Verdi heroines are women she finds "pretty dopey, always lamenting and complaining, instead of getting on with it".

Brünnhilde, she says, is more her kind of a girl. "A joyful outdoor type, with that typical teenage trait of thinking that she knows best. When I remember what it was like to be 16, riding my horse recklessly through the bush, I can identify with her."

In his review of *Die Walküre*, Robert Thicknesse (The Times - 7 March 2005) writes:

"Brünnhilde, Sieglinde and Hunding are all played by intelligent, misused singers who - as a result - bellow and shriek.

"Jorma Silvasti's lyrical Siegmund is really the only vocal relief, apart from Terfel.

"Otherwise, this staging, full of padding and smart-aleck references, diffuses Wagner's musical power: it is an elemental drama gelded by unasked questions and a lack of ambition."

Again, from another point of view, Andrew Clements (The Guardian March 7, 2005) writes:

"A conductor with an over-arching sense of the Walküre architecture might have supplied the dramatic continuity so signally lacking. Antonio Pappano deals in short-breathed paragraphs that are convincing enough in their own right but never combine into something bigger and better. As in Rheingold, it is left to Bryn Terfel's Wotan to lift the performance.

"In the second act his voice sounded a little tired and worn - but, by the time he reached his confrontation with Lisa Gasteen's Brünnhilde in the third, he was in glorious form, and his rapt account of the Farewell, every word glowing and intense, was enough almost to erase memories of the ludicrous, infantile way in which his first scene with his daughter is directed. Gasteen's performance is admirable and tireless, and there is clearly more to come in the rest of the cycle.

"Katarina Dalayman sings gloriously, though we have seen the dowdy and downtrodden character



she creates for Sieglinde at Covent Garden in both Wozzeck and Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk. Neither Jorma Silvasti's Siegmund nor Stephen Milling's axe-wielding Hunding projects much of a personality, though that is partly the way in which they are directed, while, as Fricka, Rosalind Plowright attempts to fill that void with some grand Guignol acting of her own; it doesn't work, but at least she tries."

Another reviewer, Edward Seckerson writing about "Covent Garden's Ring Cycle Comes Into Its Own with *Die Walküre*" (The Independent [London] - 9 March 2005) says:

"...into this sad, dispiriting scene strides Wotan's favourite daughter, the headstrong Brünnhilde (the feisty Lisa Gasteen). She makes her entrance, in full battle-cry, down one of the ladders from Valhalla and Warner deliciously points up the horseplay between father and daughter by having Wotan goose her with his spear to assist in those top notes. And, it has to be said, Gasteen needs the assistance — she's a little short at the top of the voice. But she's her father's daughter all right, and Warner could not be clearer that in her rebelliousness and defiance lies the free will that Wotan so craves. Warner even blocks them like mirror images of each other. The contrast between this scene and the one that follows between Wotan and his wife Fricka is dramatic. Suddenly, we're into stifling Ibsen territory.

"But what a scene and how wonderfully it is played. Rosalind Plowright's imperious Fricka is scarily impressive, withering with her words and actions — a borderline dominatrix. And Bryn Terfel's Wotan is simply magnificent.

"Antonio Pappano and the orchestra rose to that moment as they rose to every moment of this most impassioned segment of the Ring — with heart and soul. Katarina Dalayman's Sieglinde did much the same with her "redemption of love" moment in Act III — she was terrific. And though Jorma Silvasti's rapid vibrato is not to everyone's taste, he was a sensitive and immensely lyrical Siegmund."

Finally, Paul Griffiths (New York Times March 7, 2005), in his review "Terfel's First Wotan as Horns and Hounds Bay" writes

"Mr. Pappano has his musicians fully committed. The brass sections, in particular, bring Wagner's musical onomatopoeia to life: the baying of Hunding's hounds, the snorting of Wotan's war steed, the bitter cosmic laughter. The strings beautifully underscore the tentative burgeoning of desire and recognition in the first act, with phrases caressingly dovetailed into silence. In the final scene, as Brünnhilde quietly starts to turn the mind of her father, Wotan, from fury, the woodwind counterpoint is delicately but firmly in support, with all its effects of color, contour and harmonic surprise on view.

"But the essence of Mr. Pappano's work is dynamic, not only in the general briskness of his tempos and

the thrust of his forward motion but also in his careful staging of the moments of orchestral outburst.

"His rage as he enters in the last act is stark, a rage Wotan is directing at himself, for his powerlessness. At the end he reaches up to magnificent pride. Wotan's farewell to Brünnhilde is also a farewell to his own divinity, yet he goes like a god.

"His Brünnhilde, Lisa Gasteen, is human all through. Her voice is rich and rounded, and she uses it to create a character of loveliness and eager sympathies. She does not need to learn from Siegmund and Sieglinde what it is to feel: she knows, and responds. The flame in her voice is warm, not hot, and easily blown by emotional circumstances.

"Jorma Silvasti offers a nicely gentle Siegmund, but one who can rise to the certainty of selfhood in the second act. Stephen Milling is the boorish, malevolent Hunding to the life, physically and in the superb rippling muscles of his singing.

"Alas, as in "Rheingold," Keith Warner's direction is weak and sometimes vulgar.

So, with any reviews/reviewers – you takes your pick and pays your money! If you know the values (or quirks or idiosyncrasies) of your favourite reviewer/s then, at least you know where you stand. Otherwise, one sometime wonders if these people were at the same production. Nevertheless, all the reviews, collectively, make it appear that the ENO's Ring Cycle is far better received than the one running almost concurrently at The Royal Opera House. Your next chance to check your assessment of Ms Gasteen vocal qualities would seem to be when she debuts at the Wiener Staatsoper as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* on 17 April and will also appear in the following parts of the RING (*Siegfried*: 24 April, *Götterdämmerung*: 1 May).

On a completely different note Tim Ashley (The Guardian Tuesday April 19, 2005) reviews *Tristan und Isolde* from the Opéra Bastille, Paris, under the byline "Peter Sellars at his best":

"We hear the celestial voice of compassion expounding Buddha's four noble truths to mortals," is how Peter Sellars describes the love duet from *Tristan und Isolde* in a programme note for his new production of Wagner's masterpiece. Once regarded as a great exploration of sex, *Tristan* has been re-evaluated as primarily a spiritual work of late, as directors and critics stress the influence on Wagner of Schopenhauer and eastern philosophy.

"Sellars' collaborator is video artist Bill Viola, whose film, projected on a colossal screen above the singers' heads, serves as both the set and as a commentary on the work's emotional progress. The images are frequently stunning.

"Musically, it's stupendous. Meier and Heppner sing like gods. Selig is infinitely harrowing, while Yvonne Naef is the most intense Brangäne imaginable. Esa-Pekka Salonen's conducting is flawless in its combination of



clarity, sweep and exaltation, holding the score's erotic and transcendental elements in perfect balance. Despite its flaws, the overall impact is shattering. A great occasion, no question.

"Again, there is a contrasting point of view (from an unnamed reviewer) "Review: 'Tristan' Is a Stunner in Paris" [Associated Press]:

"What is being billed as a "Tristan und Isolde" for the 21st century is in many ways timeless. The Peter Sellars production at the Paris Opera, dominated by Bill Viola's video, is an extraordinary evening of theater, aimed at the essential emotions of Wagner's great love story.

"That it uses modern technology in an attempt to envelop the audience would no doubt please the composer, one of music's great innovators.

"Viola's video runs the length of the opera except for the preludes, and it overwhelms, distracting from the performances by Ben Heppner (Tristan), Waltraud Meier (Isolde) and Franz-Josef Selig (King Marke). Many times, it's unclear where the eye should focus: the singers or the large screen above them in the center of the stage.

"In this version, Tristan and Marke are former lovers, lending another level to Tristan's betrayal of the king, who kisses him tenderly.

"Heppner, the great Tristan of this generation, sings with uncommon lyricism, especially in the quiet moments, and he has the stamina to keep his voice fluid to the finish. Meier has a great ability to convey emotions with her face, although her voice at times can be more strident than soft.

"Also in the strong cast were Yvonne Naef (Brangäne), Jukka Rasilainen (Kurwenal) and Alexander Marco-Buhrmester (Melot). Adding a sense of spaciousness was the decision to place the chorus, some horns and a few of the secondary singers in the higher levels of the house.

"Esa-Pekka Salonen, conducting as he did in Los Angeles, kept the volume down, concentrating on the emotion rather than sonic beauty, and led an intense account of the 4-hour score."

Unsettling Scores German Film, Music, and Ideology

Roger Hillman Interprets the use of
classical music in postwar German
cinema.

[Dr Hillman is giving the Society's July 17 presentation on 'Wagner and film'.]

"Hillman's groundbreaking study enables both serious and casual film students to approach these works with sharpened vision and improved hearing." —Klaus Phillips, Hollins University .

Unsettling Scores: German Film, Music, and Ideology examines the use of classical music in film, particularly in the New German Cinema of the 1970s and early 80s. By integrating the music of Beethoven, Mahler, and others into their films, directors such as Fassbinder, Kluge, and Syberberg consciously called attention to its cultural significance. Through this music their films could reference and, in some cases, explore an embedded cultural tradition that included German nationalism and the rise of Nazism, especially during a period when German films were gaining international attention for the first time since the 1920s. Classical music conditioned the responses of German audiences and was, in turn, reinterpreted in new cinematic contexts. In this pioneering volume, Hillman enriches our understanding of the powerful effects of music in cinema and the aesthetic and dramatic concerns of postwar German filmmakers.

Roger Hillman heads the Film Studies Program and convenes the German Studies Program at the Australian National University. **cloth** 0-253-34537-5 USD\$50.00 **paper** 0-253-21754-7 USD\$19.95

By Leona Geeves From Newsletter No. 12, September 1983

Mr Neate - 28 July 1914 - 26 June 1997

Ken Neate, currently in Australia to adjudicate at the Metropolitan Opera Auditions, spoke to members of the Sydney Wagner society at their headquarters, the Print Room. He spoke about the Wagner Voice, a subject about which, he said, it is hard to be dispassionate. Ken Neate, the boy from Cessnock, started his career as a lyric tenor in Miss Drummond's Sydney concerts which often contained compressed operas. Shortly after singing the Prize Song, the A.B.C.'s Dr. Keith Barry asked him to audition for the forthcoming broadcast [of *sic*] *Lohengrin*. The A.B.C. in fine form had scheduled the performance without knowing whether suitable vocalists were available.

At the audition Ken sang: the Narration and both parts of the duet. Barry was delighted and Ken postponed his overseas study plans. The production featured the conductor Joseph Post with Thea Phillips and Fred Collier singing the major roles. Mr. Neate now considers this a baptism of fire for his Bayreuth performance of Loge, some thirty years later.



LIST OF FINANCIAL MEMBERS

In a change from our usual presentation of our financial members (alphabetical),
we present our members by joining order:

Susan Kelly (4); Julie and Denis King (7); Janet and Hugh Wayland (10); Margaret and William Suthers (14); Richard King (Honorary Life Member) (15); Clare Hennessy (19); Margaret Hennessy (19A); Arthur Carter (28); Jennifer Ferns (34); Kenneth Reed (41); Joseph Ferfaglia (Honorary Life Member) and Judy Ferfaglia (45); Sylvia and Karl Koller (52); Ley Webster (64); Ruth Bridges (65); Richard Gastineau-Hills (68); Jean Louis Stuurrop (75); Leona Geeves (87); Douglas Jamieson (90); Sam Sheffer (101); Patricia Baillie (108); Jessie Anderson (110); John Casey (114); Irene and Wolfgang Merretz (115); Harry Donaldson (117); Nance Grant (120); Bruce Boman (139); Barbara and Nicholas Dorsch (154); Cynthia Hughes (189); Walter Norris (204); Barbara de Rome (207); Colin Piper (222); David Triggs (223); Miriam Harris (243); Marie Hiscock (249); Paul Alger (255); Margaret Budge (275); Vanessa King (306); John McGrath (310); Margaret Whitlam (325); Richard Steele (327); Simon Hatcher (333); Joan and Maxwell Connery (334); Aviva and Alec Cohen (355); Pauline Thompson (357); Garry Richards (366); Heinz Ebert (378); Barbara and Ian Brady (380); Ian Maxwell (383); Marlene Baumgartner (393); Annie Marshall (403); Maire Glacken (406); Shirley Robertson (416); Sybil Baer (418); Diana McBain (419); Tony McDonald (420); Susan and James Buchanan (423); Pat and Frank Harvey (427); Esteban Insausti (433); David Mutton (437); Charles Terrason (439); Cherry Jackaman (441); Anna Ziegler (443); Carole and Jim Leigh (452); Anthony Jones (455); Bruce Love (468); Paul Lehmann (471); Annemarie Swebbs (476); Brian Ducker (487); Helen Dunlop (488); Theo Hudson (489); Julie and Terry Clarke (496); Ann Casimir (501); Sue Gillies (514); Patricia Moore (515); Ross Whitelaw (527); Ira Kowalski (536); Joan Griffin (540); Richard Mason and Camron Dyer (544); Moya Crane (545); Pam and Ian McGaw (548); Ann Weeden (561); John Iredale (565); Stephen Freiberg and Donald Campbell (585); Wendy and Andrew Hamlin (593); Despina Kallinikos and Iphygenia Kallinikos (596); Judith Mulveney (599); Barbara McNulty OBE (601); Michael Day and Philip Cornwell (606); Britta and Harry Littman (610); Judi Mitchell (613); Richard Stone and John Thomson (615); Nizza Siano (619); Jane Mathews (622); Clive Evatt (624); Judith Jacks (637); Alexander Cater and Rosemary Cater-Smith (638); Helen and Bill Naylor (643); Brenda and Brian Donovan (645); Susan and John Sutton (647); David McCarthy (648); Jane and Barry Walters (655); Terence Watson (657); Elizabeth Moser (659); Charlotte and Hartmut Derichs (661); Carole Bailey (663); Siss Hartnett and Britt Hartnett (667); Roger Cruickshank (669); Nancy Fleming (670); Hannah and Willi Spiller (671); Margery and Geoffrey Nicoll (672); Helen and Kevin Grant (681); Mitzi Saunders (683); Terry and Greg Chesher (685); Elizabeth Long (691); Gertraud and Richard Cohen (693); Dennis Mather and John Studdert (696); Barbara and Peter Nicholson (704); Michele and Onofrio Ferrara (706); Jennifer Manton (718); Andrew Goy (723); Helen and Peter Hall (727); Daryl Colquhoun (732); Adrian Collette (734); Monica and Aliro Olave (735); Neville Mercer (737); Joan MacKenzie (739); Gretchen Dechert (740); Jan Bowen (743); Lydia and Irvine Hunter (744); Rosemary and Julian Block (745); Peter Thompson (746); John Gregory-Roberts (748); Colin Jones and Paul Curran (749); Gillian and Brian Jones (751); Winifred Hinds (753); Warwick Fyfe (755); Melinda Hayton (757); Cecilia Segura (758); Sandra Beesley (759); Esther Janssen (760); Bill Brooks and Alasdair Beck (765); David Delany and Alister Wong (766); Erika Jumikis (768); Carl Andrew (772); Margareta Baxter (775); William Gillespie OAM (776); Richard Buckdale and Murray Johnstone (777); Ingrid Garofali (778); Brett Johnson (779); Penelope Seidler (781); Ian Hutchison (783); Janette Bates (785); Sandy and Phil Dudgeon (788); Alastair Martin and Julian Lockyer (790); Robert Lloyd (795); Naomi Kaldor (796); Sir Nicholas and Lady Shehadie (798); Hugh Hallard (799); Isolde Tornya (800); Susan Condon (804); Jennifer Condon (805); Elle Rasink (806); Clyde Dominish (807); Elsie and James Moore (811); Mary Jo and Lloyd Capps (812); Christopher Coffey (816); Colin Baskerville (817); Gabriella Bremner-Moore and Michael Moore (819); Diana Heath (821); Lorraine Royds (823); Monica Craston (824); James Henningham (825); Peter Bassett (826); Patricia Bellamy and Carolyn Bloch (827); Robert Thurling (830); Gary Wilson (834); Elizabeth Fletcher (837); Ross Steele (838); Deanne Whittleston and Anthony Gregg (839); Brian Freestone and Charles Brady (840); Rae and Russ Cottle (843); Diana-Rose Orr (844); Angela Kayser (845); Anna-Lisa Klettenberg (847); Jennifer and Maxwell Herford (848); Noelene Brasche (849); Bob Foster (850); Alan Salter (851); Gunter Slamer (852); Jessica Block (853); John Vallentine (854); Heather and Peter Roland (855); Neville Pollard (856); Mary Haswell (857); Maxwell Grubb (858); Colin Mackerras (859); Armand Bartos (860); Anne Jones (861); Peter Jenkins (862); Pauline Holgerson (863); Mary Wallach (864); Jeffrey Smart and Ermes de Zan (865); Renate and Herman Junker (866); Stephen Carroll (867); Eloise Evans (868); Barbara and Andrew Dowe (870); Susan Upton (871); Desmond Murphy (872); Diana Wang and Peter George (873); Marian and Rodney Purvis (874); Murray Fraser (875); Alan Hauserman and Janet Nash (876); Maurice Cashmere (877); Elizabeth Gordon-Werner (878); John Snelling (879); Mary Adelstein (880); Audrey and John Palmer (882); David and Sabina Full (883); June Donsworth (884); Meredith Stokes (885); Marie McCann (886); Robert Hampshire (887); Michael Millard (889); Philip Bacon (890); Lorna Martin (891); Greg Watters (892); William Felbel (893); Patricia and Roy Hodson (894); Lourdes St George (895); Margot Buttrose (896); Ian Dicker (897); Elizabeth Jacka (898); Juliet Richters and Alan Whelan (899); Lorenza dei Medici (900); Colleen and Michael Chesterman (901); Douglas Sturkey (902); Michael Smyth (903); Robert Graham (904); Susan Conrade (905); John Byrne (906); Edith and Hans Freeman (907); John Pearce (908); Jorge Rodrigues (909); Tony Bonin (910); Robert McHugh (911); Mary Meppem (912); Joe Kelleher (913); Paola Garofali (914); John Small (915); Marie Leech (916); Robert Spillane (917); Frances Butcher (918); David Brown (919); Ruth Shane (920); Catherine Davies (921); Lynette Longfoot (922)

Charles MacKerras (Patron); Michael Ewans (Honorary Life Member); and Horst Hoffmann (Honorary Life Member).





THE WAGNER SOCIETY
(Patron - Sir Charles Mackerras)

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NEWS LETTER

NO.1

5th February 1981.

Dear Music Lover,

Since our first public meeting on 26th October 1980, the steering committee has been working steadily on the many small details of administration and organisation, and we are now established as an unincorporated society, with our own constitution. At the same time it has been possible to devise a most interesting program for the coming year.

As our membership is still fairly small, our first function will be a rather low-key affair, to test the public's reaction to the society's existence, and to not over-extend ourselves financially. It will take the form of a short film night, on Monday, 9th March at 6.00p.m. The venue is the A.M.P. Theatrette, Circular Quay, and the film covers the Bayreuth Centenary. There will be no entrance fee charged, but a small donation towards the cost of refreshments will be appreciated.

The first Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held at 7.00 p.m. on Friday, 22nd May, when elections will be held for Committee. The members of the interim Committee will stand down, and whilst making themselves available for re-election, they will encourage interested and enthusiastic subscribers to stand for office.

After the business of the meeting, at about 8.00 p.m., a celebration party will be held in honour of Richard Wagner's Birthday. Presentations will be made on this occasion to the foundation members who have so generously helped the Society in its infancy.

The long awaited concert performance of *Götterdämmerung* is coming this year and to prepare us for it an evening is being arranged on Monday, 8th July. Mr. Warner Baer, Sydney's foremost Wagner authority, will give a talk on the musical analysis of this great work. An accomplished musician, Mr. Baer will illustrate his explanation of the important themes on the piano. *Götterdämmerung* is being performed on September 30th and October 3rd and the Wagner Society will be making block bookings for its members' benefit. On the Saturday performance which starts at 4.30 p.m., in the long first interval, a light meal has been arranged in a private room at the Opera House for Wagner Society members. It is hoped our Patron, Sir Charles Mackerras, will be able to join us on this occasion and meet members of the Society. Members should let the Committee know as soon as possible of their intention to attend these performances - as well as those of *Die Walküre* in Melbourne on 25th and 27th August - so that tickets can be organised.

Note those dates in your diary now so that you do not miss out on these exciting events. More details will be sent in future News Letters. The Committee is confident that the formation of the Wagner Society has been worthwhile and will fill a big need in the local music scene.

Leonard Hansen - President. Sue Kelly - Vice President. Richard King -
Secretary/Treasurer.



Brief review of the new production of **Rheingold** in the **Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe.**

We are happy to include another report from our sometime reporter from Germany - Mac Greyling (acknowledged elsewhere in this newsletter as the constructor of the Society's website), who is now resident in Karlsruhe and took the opportunity to attend the start of the Karlsruhe Ring Cycle in October 2004. It may be of interest to compare the reviews of the Ring from the ENO and Covent Garden in this newsletter.

Stage Director: Denis Krief.

Musical Director: Anthony Bramall
(with the Badische Staatskapelle Orchestra)

CAST

Wotan: Bjarni Thor Kristinsson
Donner: Klemens Sander
Froh: Bernhard Berchtold
Loge: Matthias Wohlbrecht
Alberich: Stefan Stoll
Mime: John Pickering
Fasolt: Ulrich Schneider
Fafner: Peter Lobert
Fricka: Ursula Hesse von den Steinen
Freia: Rosita Kekyte
Erda: Ewa Wolak
Woglinde: Ina Schlingensiepen
Wellgunde: Janja Vuletic
Floßhilde: Sabrina Kögel



Horst Hoffman, Barbara McNulty (past President) and Fiona McCabe - 20th Anniversary performance.

The rather modest Badisches Staatstheater in the provincial city of Karlsruhe in the upper Rhine region of Germany is ambitiously forging its Ring. Currently the new Krieff/ Bramall Rheingold is in performance and this house's production of the tetralogy, for the first time here in about 10 years, is expected to culminate in the 2006/2007 season.

It is all the more ambitious because in the

opera theatres of the nearby cities of Mannheim, Stuttgart and Baden-Baden, the Ring is an established part of the repertoire.

The French-trained Italian-resident, Denis Krief, is the producer-director and is largely unknown in Germany. In his own words, his production is limited to the essential. His staging is rather sombre, austere and dark and the costumes of the gods and Nibelungen are shabby¹ alike. Valhalla is as bleak and desolate as the underworld. Wotan and Alberich, deliberately twinned, are made to resemble, in the words of one commentator, Meatloaf² (the singer, not the cuisine). Only the Rhine maidens make something of an impression of elegance, yet are comically dressed like contemporary bridesmaids or coming-out debutantes. All the figures cast a harsh appearance owing to the contrast created by their bright white made-up faces against the dark background and costumes. This overall harshness is emphasised by the actors moving only when necessary yet all the while making jerky and dramatic gestures. The use of projected video imagery provides additional metaphorical suggestions. An ultrasound of a moving human foetus plays on the backdrop of

a completely empty stage during the opening arpeggios. Later, a video projection of water and fire suggest more obviously the Rhine and Loge's arrival respectively. Krief admits his version is more a story of the individual's angst and dreams and not a deep critique of capitalism and society.

The Badische Staatskapelle orchestra of the resident musical director, Anthony Bramall, is small but delivers an energetic sound. The music from the pit is strident and the pace swift, yet it does not block out the singing. The singers all deliver very clear vocal performances, concentrating clearly on the unusual consonantal-rich text, all of which almost make the surtitles (in German) superfluous.

The theatre itself is a modern, uninspiring building. Small but seemingly well-equipped. The audience in the performance I attended (the first after the première) was enthusiastic, and much fuss was made of the fact that Wolfgang Wagner was in attendance. The production has received good reviews in the

press and as such is proudly promoted by the Karlsruhe city, which is vying for the place as European cultural capital.

I am looking forward to the next operas in this Karlsruher forging of the Ring.

Marc Greyling

Karlsruhe, November 2004





Richard King Leonard Hansen with birthday presentation to Wolfgang Wagner - 1989



Justice Jane Matthews, Antony Ernst, Jessica Pratt - Wagner Society March 2005



Betty Maloney cuts Society's 2000 20th Anniversary cake (made by Barbara Brady)



Wagner Society's 20th Anniversary early members:

Front (L to R): Betty and Reg Maloney

Back (L to R): Ruth Bridges, Clare Hennessy, Jim Leigh, Margaret Hennessy