

# The Wagner Society



IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Newsletter No. 110, December 2007

## President's Report

Dear Members

Welcome to our fourth and final Newsletter for 2007. This issue has some very interesting reviews and commentaries from members who have returned from overseas Wagner events, including Bayreuth, and I'd like to thank all of them for sharing their insights with us, some of which have had to be held over until the first Newsletter of 2008.

### Functions in 2007

#### *Heath Lees and Mallarmé*

On Sunday, 2 September, Professor Heath Lees gave a fascinating talk on Wagner and Mallarmé, in conjunction with the launch of his new book *Mallarmé and Wagner: Music and Poetic Language*. His talk outlined the influence of Wagner's ideas, on music and text, on Mallarmé's poetry from the early 1860s onwards. Sitting at the piano where necessary to illustrate his talk, Professor Lees showed within Mallarmé's poems the musical elements that had been woven into the text. Heath introduced us to a non-musical medium where text and music worked together. For many of us, exposed to text and music through singing alone, it was the first time that we'd thought about them combining in poetry. Through his skills as a musician and presenter, Professor Lees had his audience spellbound.

#### *Bayreuth 2007*

On Sunday 21 October, members who attended the 2007 Bayreuth Festival reported back on their experiences. The group included Monica and Aliro Olave, June Donsworth, Julie and Terry Clark (whose reviews are printed elsewhere in the Newsletter), and Dennis Mather, who also showed photographs of the productions.

The general interpretation of Tankred Dorst's current Ring production is that it shows that we and the Ring characters share the same space, but for some reason we cannot see each other (unless we are part of the audience in the Festspielhaus). This makes some sense for the Gods at least – which of us can say that we have ever seen a God, except perhaps when we looked into the mirror on a good day – but it seems more unlikely that we're sharing the same space as the Vassals or the giants without knowing it. This interpretation is sometimes described as "parallel universes" which I think gives Herr Dorst's single idea an undeserved grandness and pseudo-scientific stature.

Aliro Olave had a unique theory on the meaning of Herr Dorst's production – that it was like a rehearsal in which people unrelated to the actual performance came and went, took readings from pieces of stage equipment, or just stood about watching. This seems to be a much simpler interpretation covering all the elements of the production.

The group was full of praise for the unexpected revival of Philippe Arlaud's production of *Tannhäuser*, which was John Howarded (resurrected like Lazarus with a triple bypass) to fill the gap left by the non-performance of

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<b>PATRON:</b>	Sir Charles Mackerras
<b>HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS:</b>	Prof Michael Ewans
	Mr Richard King
	Mr Horst Hoffman
	Mr Joseph Ferfaglia
	Mrs Barbara McNulty OBE

## For Your **Diary**

	<b>2008</b>	
	see below for a number of performances in other states.	

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

DATE	EVENTS - 2007	LOCATION
December 9	End of Year Function - please bring a plate	2pm Goethe Institut
<b>2008</b>		
December 17	TBA	2pm Goethe Institut
<b>Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)</b>		

## Committee **2006 - 2007**

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## **President's Report** continued

*Tristan* for another year. Arlaud is reported by the SAWF News Organisation as admitting in a recent interview that he no longer stood by his production. "It belongs more to the 20th than the 21st century. I no longer totally agree with my aesthetics," he said. "In fact, I find my *Tannhäuser* pretty crap now" (<http://news.sawf.org/Entertainment/40558.aspx>).

The group was certainly not full of praise for Katharina Wagner's new production of *Meistersinger*, and Terry Clark's review in this Newsletter is a good indication of their reaction. Given Katharina's claim on the directorship of the festival when Wolfgang Wagner steps down, hers

was both an artistic and political statement that some, most notably Barry Millington writing in Vol 1 No 3 of The Wagner Journal, saw as the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Bayreuth. While acknowledging major flaws, he writes that this production is "one of the most exhilarating and courageous ever mounted on the Green Hill, at a stroke putting down a marker for a new era sympathetic to radical ideas at the Festspielhaus." We shall see.

Interestingly, the audience for the final performance of Schlingensiefel's *Parsifal* seems to have been evenly split between clappers and boos, which shows a level of acceptance that those attending earlier festivals, where the booing was almost universal, might not have



expected. Perhaps the same grudging acceptance awaits Katharina Wagner's new *Meistersinger*?

Paul Curran, whose appointment as Artistic Director of the Norwegian Opera in January 2009 was reported in our September Newsletter, also attended the festival, and discussed the productions with other Society members while they were in Bayreuth. Paul is hitting the big time in the opera press. After the July 2007 issue of Opera magazine published an eight-page biography of Paul written by Andrew Clark, an article by one George Hall appeared on the (New York) Metropolitan Opera's site "Opera News On-Line" (November 2007, vol 72, no. 5). Ostensibly written to background Paul's current production of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, which is his debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the article contains bleeding chunks lifted from Andrew Clark's original piece, proving that plagiarism is alive and well in the highest levels of opera hagiography. See below for a brief report on the production.

### **Antony Ernst and Tristan**

On Sunday 11 November, at the Paddington Uniting Church, Antony Ernst gave a talk on *Tristan*, the only one of Wagner's operas on which he hadn't spoken at one of our functions. His talk was subtitled "Wagner, the Appian Way, and the General Theory of Relativity. The Appian Way in this case refers to the groundbreaking work of Swiss stage designer and theorist Adolphe Appia (1862-1928), and not to the Via Appia, the Roman road linking Rome with Brindisi.

Antony spoke about the way time passes in *Tristan*. Act 1, for example, begins with dawn on the horizon, and ends around mid-day (clock time of some four-and-a-half hours); time as it passes on stage (mimetic time) is only one-and-a-half hours; but the duration of events recounted in the story (diegetic time) is much longer, going back to the conflicts between Cornwall and Ireland and the wounding of Tristan at Morold's hand months or even years before. In Act 2, clock time lasts some six to eight hours from night-fall to dawn; mimetic time is around an hour and forty minutes; but diegetic time ceases to exist. Antony said that there were only three events in the opera: the taking of the poison (love potion) in Act 1, the wounding of Tristan in Act 2, and his death in Act 3. The contributed to the work's apparent lack of action.

Antony mused that one reason for this might be that the mass of the *Tristan* is usually so great that time and space both warp around him in some magical way, as Einstein predicted in his general theory. In a similar vein, Antony wondered whether anyone could endure King Mark's monologue without peeking at their watch at least once.

As always, Antony's ideas were fresh and thought-provoking and represented a new way of looking at *Tristan* and operas generally for many of us.

Because of its wonderful acoustic and ease of access for members who find the Goethe-Institut's staircase challenging, we may return to the Paddington Uniting Church for some of our functions during 2008, for example for the recital by students from the Conservatorium at the AGM in May. Final arrangements will be advised in the March 2008 Newsletter.

### **Christmas Party in December**

On Sunday December 9, we will end our 2007 cycle of functions with our traditional Christmas Party at the Goethe Institut. Barbara Brady has graciously promised to provide another of her sensational Christmas Cakes, which will be first prize in our raffle. Please bring a plate and we will provide the drinks. We will begin with a documentary on the life of Birgit Nilsson at 2pm and the party will follow.

### **Bayreuth 2008**

There were 32 applicants for sets of tickets for Bayreuth in 2008, and we have been allocated 8 sets by the Festival Box Office. During our function on 11 November, a ballot was held and Anni Yuul, a member of the Danish Wagner Society who was visiting Sydney at the time, drew applicants' names out of a wide-brimmed straw hat, graciously lent by Colin Jones for the occasion.

Based on that ballot, the tickets received so far have been allocated as follows: Vic and Katie French (2 sets of tickets), Maxwell Grubb (1 set), Julie Carroll (1 set), Kenneth Reed (1 set), Diane Wang and Peter George (2 sets), and Brian Freestone and Charles Brady (the 1 remaining set.) If further tickets are received or become available, another set will be offered to Brian and Charles, and then to applicants in the following order: Robert Thurling, Charles Manning, Ross Whitelaw, Anne Jones, Gary Wilson, Meredith Stokes and David Bremer, and others.

It's likely that more than 20 applicants will miss out in 2008. Under our current rules, no preference is given to those who apply again next year. Each year all applicants start together from scratch. Mrs Mary Fogelberg and Ms Suzanne Williams have drafted a resolution to be put to our next AGM in May 2008, which aims to change this position:

"That from 2008 onwards, first preference in the annual ballot for tickets be given to members who have been unsuccessful in previous years' ballots."

This is an important change that should be discussed widely prior to the AGM.

### **Tannhäuser**

I hope that I don't betray any hint of bias when I say that, in my view, Opera Australia's revival of Elke Neidhardt's 1998 *Tannhäuser* was the artistic highlight of Sydney – if not Australia – for 2007. Despite the politics of casting and some awkward elements in the production,



## President's Report continued

it was sublime, ecstatic, miraculous and overall, not at all bad. My personal comments are included below in the Newsletter.

### Functions in 2008

Our first function in 2008 will be at the Goethe Institut on Sunday 17 February. At this stage, because they have other commitments around this time, we haven't finalised exactly which of our speakers will be presenting, but I'll write to you all in the new year and let you know.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter, there's a list of Wagner performances announced so far for 2008, none of which is in Sydney. The highlights include three concert performances of the *Holländer* in Melbourne in August, and two drive-by singings by Lisa Gasteen, the first at the end of February and in early March in Hobart and Perth, and the second in August in Adelaide and Melbourne, where she will sing Senta.

There are rumours of other productions, and statements in the press to the effect that, if the Federal Government matches the grant announced by the State Government of South Australia, there will be a revival of Elke Neidhardt's 2004 Ring in Adelaide, possibly in 2011. If anything crystallises, we will let you know, but now is the time to start lobbying the new Labor Government!

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a very happy New Year for 2008, Warmest regards,

**Roger Cruickshank**  
25 November 2007

## New Members

The following people joined the Society:

Tina Skidmore [961]; Hannelore Laundl [962]; and F. John Augustus and Kim Ryrle [963].

## Donations

The Society welcomes all donations and they can be addressed to the Treasurer, Wagner Society in NSW Inc, at the Society's GPO Box address shown on the back page of this Newsletter. Such donations help us to carry out our objective "to promote the music of Richard Wagner and to encourage a wider appreciation of the significance of his achievements". Donations are tax-deductible and receipts will be issued. Donations were gratefully received from the following members and supporters: Rae and Russ Cottle; Hannah and Willi Spiller; Ross Whitelaw.

## Tannhäuser

– Roger Cruickshank

Ms Neidhardt sets out to tell the story in a way that caters both for first-timers and for the jaded palettes of the cognoscenti, and she (and her production team) do this brilliantly, with humour and gravity when required, and sometimes not. In the end, only one of the cast principals as published in 2006, Janice Watson in the role of Elizabeth, sang for the whole season. Richard Berkeley-Steele sang the title role in place of the advertised Glenn Winslade, Milijana Nikolic sang Venus in place of Bernadette Cullen, Jonathan Summers sang Wolfram in place of Warwick Fyfe for all but the last two performances, from which Maestro Richard Hickox also abdicated, in favour of Alexander Ingram. As Lady Bracknell might have said, Opera Australia and its Maestro can't effectively dump three of the four lead singers without attracting some comment on the platform.

That said, the singing of the principals was magnificent. Janice Watson was an outstanding Elizabeth, with strong ringing top notes and a radiant clear voice that was never challenged by the role. Some unkind person told me that she was Richard Hickox's wife. Even if that is true, it does not diminish my admiration for her singing. At one performance I attended, when Watson hit one of her top notes, a visiting Bogong Moth died and fell from the rafters, landing at her feet, to the accompanying titters from the front rows. That's some voice!

She can also act. She was no Act 2 singing saint, but a vulnerable woman whose first encounter with sexuality at the hands of Tannhäuser had ended with his indifferent abandonment, and who now saw in Tannhäuser's return one last and unexpected chance of happiness outside the stultifying world of her uncle's court. Having been lured back into the Hall of Song she watches in dismay as her last chance for love destroys itself and towards the end of Act 2 Neidhardt has her place a cover on the now-silent on-stage harp, signifying that for her, life is over. She invests this simple act with tremendous pathos.

Milijana Nikolic's voice was also magnificent, dark and strong. I would have preferred my goddess of love to be clad in something a little more, well, sexy, not a heavy fur-trimmed coat covering the ubiquitous Keith Haring-style body-stockings that were the uniform of the denizens of the Venusberg. I guess you can't have everything. A stint on a bright red sofa in Act 3 when she welcomes Tannhäuser back to Venusberg was about as sensual as it got for Venus, but acoustically the scene was marred by the age-old problem of getting sound out into the auditorium when the singer is elevated at the back of the stage. Venus had this problem, seated on her red sofa several metres up, and Wolfram had the same problem singing from the middle tier of the rearranged Wartburg Hall set at the beginning of Act 3. There is still no sign of the much-discussed work to correct this acoustic mess starting next year.





Another problem for Nikolic, and one on which a number of members commented, was her diction. It was never clear what language she was actually singing, if in fact it was a language. One unkind member thought she was singing scat, in the manner of Ella Fitzgerald. I only went to 3 performances, so I'm not really able to say, other than that German syllables were audible from time to time, and sometimes whole words. The important thing, in the manner of Bette Midler, is that when she was near the front of the stage, you sure heard them!

My feelings for Richard Berkeley-Steele's voice were marred by the politics of his appointment, and it took me some time to warm to it. Some members commented that he nursed his voice through Acts 1 and 2 and saved his best for the Rome Narration, and I think there was some truth in that. Murray Black, writing in "The Australian" of 12 October, said: "Although his acting was sometimes unconvincing, the singing of heldentenor Richard Berkeley-Steele as Tannhäuser was impressive. His firm, youthful-sounding voice was strong across the range and he displayed remarkable stamina." I couldn't disagree.

Warwick Fyfe's Wolfram, when it was finally heard, was sensational. I have a "thing" about Warwick's voice. I think that he's the standout member of Opera Australia's ensemble, and I try to hear every role he sings, which has exposed me to some music I would never otherwise have heard. It helps that Warwick is a devoted Wagnerian (although the politics surrounding his two performances of *Tannhäuser* may have taken the gloss off that.) I hope my bias isn't showing again when I say that the loudest applause on the night of his first appearance was reserved for Warwick, and deservedly so. Maestro Hickox was no longer at the podium, so he could not hear that applause. I was therefore delighted when Opera Foundation Australia announced that Warwick was the 2007 Bayreuth Scholar.

Daniel Sumegi's Hermann was an effortless display of vocal mastery. Somehow, basses aren't in vogue at the moment, like melon and prosciutto, and we tend to listen to these streams of note-perfect sonority almost without noticing them.

The other roles were well sung, although on two of the nights I was there Matthew Clark's shepherd boy had fistful of notes that went astray. Clark was for me a better actor than he was a singer, even though as I say later I would have rather that he wasn't there beyond his anointed span. The warning about working with children and animals is uttered for a reason!

Opera Australia's male chorus, which has now transitioned to a much more youthful band, was magnificent. And they could act too. Although she keeps them moving in the Act 1 pilgrim's chorus, in their other appearances Neidhardt has them sing in a block. In the Hall of Song, they are a uniformed reactionary military force. As the returning pilgrims in Act 3, they are the ordained shock-troops of Catholic uniformity, who stand in serried ranks and deliver their message of salvation, complete with plastic shopping bags with slogans praising Urban VI etc. In 1998, from memory, their salvation was sartorial, and the Volk returned after an Armani makeover looking like

spivs from a modern production of *Rigoletto*. At Elizabeth's funeral, they stand at the back of the stage and deliver from under a false ceiling of umbrellas, which might have helped the acoustic, but seemed a pointless gesture.

I sat in the front row of the stalls one night, behind Maestro Richard Hickox's right shoulder, and was alarmed to find that he suffers from a touch of the Glenn Goulds. As he conducts, he makes an odd noise like musical heavy breathing. Not singing as such, but aspirating musically, with grunts. This was at first amusing – those around me giggled and we all looked nervously at each other - but luckily, Wagner gives us few quiet moments during which this could intrude. His opening tempo was very slow, and I kept hoping that the orgy would start early and speed up his breathing, and with it his tempo.

The awkward elements in the production for me included the shepherd boy, who is a "mini me" to Tannhäuser. His clothes are the same as Tannhäuser's, perhaps the result from a tragic accident in the front-loader in the costume department; or a uniform, since everyone except Elizabeth is dressed in a uniform of some kind; or does it mean that the shepherd is a Mystical Younger Tannhäuser? The boy has red hair that is exactly the same colour as Tannhäuser's, which supports the M. Y. T. view, although, as Elizabeth is the only other red-head on stage, could it also suggest that the boy is Tannhäuser and Elizabeth's love-child? When the boy sings "Betet für meine arme Seele!" to the departing pilgrims ("Pray for my poor soul") he impishly turns his trouser pockets inside-out to show his poverty, in contrast to the pilgrims' sturdy Burgher-ish garb and suitcases, and that irreverent pun is very like the wit of Tannhäuser.

Whatever the boy's role or meaning, in my view he overstays his welcome. He remains on stage for all of Act 1 after the Venusberg. When Wolfram persuades Tannhäuser to return with them to the Wartburg by singing "Bleib bei Elizabeth" ("Stay for Elizabeth's sake"), in this production he takes the boy by the shoulders and sings the fatal words directly to him, and through him to Tannhäuser. The boy appears again at the end of Act 2 to lead Tannhäuser out of the Hall and off to Rome, and at the end of Act 3 he helps Neidhardt out of the kitsch problem of the Newly-Sprouting Papal Staff by detaching some decoration from Elizabeth's coffin and hanging it on the staff. Neidhardt seems to have a problem depicting magic or divine action. In her Adelaide Ring production, when Wotan and Loge descend to Nibelheim and steal Alberich's Ring by tricking the boaster into changing shape so that he can be captured, Neidhardt uses mechanical solutions for the dragon and frog which are clearly man-made and manipulated, and avoids the slightest hint of magic. There will be no miraculous sprouting staff here either!

The shepherd boy is not the only actor who outstays his welcome. Neidhardt has introduced a new non-singing character in her production, Amor, a remarkably well-endowed creation who accompanies Venus throughout Act 1, is in the Hall of Song during Act 2 "high-five-ing" Tannhäuser, having a prolonged bout of frottage with the on-stage harpist, and generally having a jolly good time, returning near the end of Act 3 to conduct Tannhäuser



back to The Venusberg. By the end I would not have been surprised if Elizabeth's coffin had burst open and Amor and Elizabeth had emerged, dancing the Time Warp again. Then there are the superfluous crows/vultures, menacing thin black metal-winged creatures who have turned the empty Hall of Song into their home and only leave when the chorus arrives for the song contest, returning towards the end of Act 3 (doesn't everyone?) to engage in an awkward ballet with the inhabitants of Venusberg, who have emerged with their Queen to collect Tannhäuser.

Neidhardt's genius comes from her understanding of the text. Every person on stage has a purpose every minute that they are on stage and they are directed accordingly. For example, no one normally cares about Heinrich der Schreiber, one of the song contestants who has an ensemble role without any distinguished solo passages. But Neidhardt cares. Costumed like Flacko with a tuft of hair curling high above his head, he is a demented old pervert who wanders over to the on-stage harpist during the song contest bent on no good and, but for Wolfram's timely intervention, that lady's modesty, already sorely tested by Amor, might have been lost forever.

Another example is Walther von der Wogelweide, which is another ensemble role without any significant solo elements. Wolfram has launched into "Als du in Kuhnem Sange" etc, the longest aria in the Act 1 hunting party scene, berating Tannhäuser for winning Elizabeth's heart and then breaking it by leaving her (and them). Walther sits listening patiently, but as Wolfram sings on (and on and on) he gets bored, then impatient, and finally when Wolfram pauses for breath he leaps in with "Sei unser, Heinrich", a refrain immediately taken up by the rest of the relieved hunting party, cutting Wolfram off in mid-rant much to his (Wolfram's) annoyance. Walther was sung by Andrew Brunson, who was starring in a season of the "Gondoliers" in parallel, and his bright, cheerful and earnest face occasionally gave me unwanted musical flashbacks to that production.

Neither of the Schreiber or Wogelweide examples is vintage Wagner, but both are vintage Neidhardt. The work flows wonderfully under her direction. The opening fantasy-bacchanal was superbly choreographed and danced (and within the space limitations of the Opera Theatre stage was probably as orgiastic as it could be). Venusberg's transformation into the bucolic meadow scene with its revolving metal cow on a dais of butcher's grass (rumour has it that Opera Australia, convinced that the opera would not be restaged, had disposed of the original cow) and the trumpets which acted as blunderbusses coming in from the wings both worked better than in 1998. This time she was allowed to have the Act 1 pilgrim's chorus walk from the back of the stage out into the auditorium and exit through the back of the stalls, a *coup de Théâtre* that she was denied in 1998 by then conductor Philippe Auguin.

At the end of Act 1, instead of the hunting group processing solemnly away, Neidhardt stages a careful picnic pantomime. The rug is laid and cushions thrown down in time to the music, the party sits and eats its frankfurters, the braces of dachshunds arrive, the trumpets turn skywards

and fire a salvo and the whole party moves to the back of the stage to avoid being hit by the large dead bird which drops (cf swan in *Parsifal* Act 1?) dead on the stage with a heavy thud that closes the act, much to the delight of the audience. (Had the dead duck struck the shepherd boy we might have been spared his reappearances, but no such luck.) At moments like this, Neidhardt pokes fun at so many soft targets that she comes close to being a German-hating German, with characters falling over the edge of farce. But the audience loves it.

Collaborating with Neidhardt in this production are the usual suspects, Michael Scott-Mitchell (set designer) and Nick Schlieper (lighting designer). Scott-Mitchell's set-piece for Act 2, a 3-tiered brutalist concrete semicircle, is another stroke of genius, and I think that it is the best piece of his work that I've seen, far surpassing his 2004 Adelaide Ring work. The semicircle splits in the middle and the two curved arms swing back to reveal a third piece – the Ladies Stand, complete with a balcony and red sofa for Hermann and Elizabeth, reached by twin staircases - which moves forward to join the wings and define the space of the Hall. At one performance, the audience applauded the advancing set, which horrified me as much as the applause given by audiences in Adelaide in 2004 for Scott-Mitchell's "Wunderbar" set in Walküre Act 3. At the time I wrote that clapping sets made sense in *Traviata*, because there was nothing else worth clapping, but in Wagner? However, following some intense fraternal criticism at the time, I've got enough sense not to repeat that statement.

After Tannhäuser tells the increasingly agitated throng that they all need a good spell in "den Berg der Venus", the ladies "retire horrified", which is achieved by the "Ladies Stand" detaching itself from the enfolding arms holding the male chorus and moving quickly back away from the wretched creature, leaving the male arms to swing back and enclose Tannhäuser in their disapproving embrace. (Kevin Rudd's 15 minutes of infamy at a New York nightclub caused a similar reaction in some quarters centuries later.) This "withdrawing ladies" moment is another *coup de Théâtre* and elevates the set to the level of a character within the work.

In Act 3, the set reflects the disintegrating worlds of Elizabeth and Tannhäuser by itself fracturing, operating as a boarded-up street scene and variously opening and closing. Venus sings from the same red sofa on the same balcony that had supported Hermann and Elizabeth during the Song Contest, but this is now a darkened and dismantled version of the once-triumphant Ladies Stand.

Nick Schlieper's lighting is a far more nebulous thing, but equally affecting. Schlieper's lighting in the Adelaide Ring was always for me more thoughtful and moving than the "big ticket" set pieces that are so much easier to remember. There were wonderful scenes where the huge Festival Hall stage was effectively empty except for the singers and Schlieper's subtle lighting, contrasting with the busy sets in other scenes. Unfortunately, Sydney's Opera Theatre didn't allow that level of craftsmanship. I particularly liked Schlieper's lighting for the Rome Narration, a scene where there is intense blackness mirroring Tannhäuser's mental state. Wolfram has drawn a curtain



across the middle stage (as Wotan did in the Adelaide Ring *Walküre* Act 1 for his twins in "Winterstürme") and the light at the back of the stage has dimmed and finally disappeared completely (which also nicely allows the area to be set up for Venus's reappearance).

And what of the music? Murray Black, writing in "The Australian" of 12 October said of the orchestral playing "This performance was dedicated to the Australian Opera

and Ballet Orchestra's 40th birthday, but it took time for the orchestra to hit its stride. Initially sounding thin and listless in the Overture and Venusberg Music, the playing developed weight and definition." One member told me that she was relieved when Alexander Ingram took over from Maestro Hickox to conduct the final performances, because Hickox had no musical sympathy for the music. I couldn't disagree with either comment.

## REPORTS FROM BAYREUTH

### Ring Cycle – First Cycle 2007

- Glen Barnwell

After the usual wait of many years, I was offered tickets to the first Ring Cycle of 2007 in Bayreuth. I went along armed with reviews from last year in anticipation of fine performances. This expectation was met. To quote from Jim Leigh in 2006, the music was "perfection". It was disconcerting at first to see neither conductor nor orchestra and yet hear sublime sounds coming from under the floor. The orchestra appeared to be at one with the singers, supporting as well as leading them and telling the story in its own superb style. Each night, Christian Thielemann received a rapturous ovation, along with the orchestra on the last night. (To this neophyte, it was unusual to see the orchestra in mufti and the audience in evening dress!)

The standard of singing overall was high. Linda Watson as Brünnhilde started with a lot of vibrato in her voice, but as the evenings progressed she moved from "fine to dandy to wow" to quote a review of last year by F Peter Phillips. Albert Dohmen, replacing the well-received Falk Strukman from 2006, was a fine Wotan. Unfortunately in *Rheingold* he was hampered by an awkward costume and the constant carriage of a very long spear which restricted his mobility.

Adriane Pieczonka was superb as Sieglinde, not matched by Erik Wottrich as Siegmund. Stephen Gould was a strong Siegfried, but his gyrations in *Siegfried* may have left him a little tired in *Götterdämmerung*. Kwangchul Youn as Fasolt and Hunding was a favourite with the audience, as was Gerhard Seigel as Mime.

Much has been already been said and written about the production, the sets and the costumes. The first cycle audience, which was mainly German, made its displeasure on these aspects known in no uncertain terms. On the final night, Tankred Dorst, his assistant, and two other people who I assume were the set and the costume designer came on stage as a foursome, to be met by a tsunami of boos, which was painful to experience for someone who did not want to join in. Inexplicably, the group chose to come back for a second dose. On this occasion, Tankred looked defiant; his assistant covered against his arm, and the other two, one of whom had a darkly

flushed face, clung together as if for support. The boos were repeated and they scuttled behind the curtain. I remarked afterwards to some German colleagues that it must have been an upsetting experience for those on the stage, but they had no sympathy with that wimpish view, declaring that the people have a right to make their views known.

Tankred is the chief Dramaturg in Frankfurt. His background is in Ionesco and the Theatre of the Absurd, so it was inevitable that he would come up with a non-traditional production. There was an expectation of some changes this year because of the short time he had had for preparation before 2006. As far as I could see, (with a slightly obscured view of the left side of the stage) these changes were not great. There was less use of children eg there were no children with bicycles when Siegmund and Sieglinde were in flight, nor on the overpass in *Siegfried* Act 2. The two scenes which distracted me the most were the inspection of the overpass by road workers while Siegfried was singing in a scorched earth forest and the burning of the Gibichung Hall rather than Valhalla – and I saw no evidence of renewal, just two cyclists staring at the ruins. However, these were quibbles in an otherwise gripping production.

In spite of having no German and in the absence of English lectures, I attended the enjoyable lectures/concerts on the day of the performances given by Stephan Mikisch. If nothing else, it was delightful to hear him play Wagner on the piano for nigh on two hours for only 10 Euros. His thesis was that all composers use similar keys to convey certain concepts. He compared Wagner and other composers by playing examples of music from each of them using the same key. Afterwards, there was informal discussion about his lectures during the second cycle that were to be on the topic of Wagner through the Cosmos, based on the metaphysical idea that music is part of the cosmos. (There is an interesting relationship between this thesis and Professor Heath Lees' recent lecture on poetry and/as music).

Anecdotes about behind the scenes matters abound, but I had some inside ones from a seatmate who is a Belgian soprano. She and her family had received tickets because of her friendship with one of the Valkyries. They had planned to see the final dress rehearsal in 2006, but this was closed because of the conflicts going on behind





the scenes. I asked why Falk Strukman was not singing Wotan again and was told it was because he found Tankred Dorst difficult to work with. When asked for instructions, Tankred was apt to say, "Do whatever you like". Rumour had it that Christian Thielemann did not get on with Tankred Dorst and he had decided that he and the orchestra would "do their own thing".

I had a lighthearted discussion about desirable changes to the staging of *Siegfried* with a person who turned out to be Richard Schacht, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Illinois and the Executive Director of the American Nietzsche Society. He has written a book about the Ring and in case anyone is interested it is *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring*, with Philip Kitcher (Oxford University Press, 2004). But he and his wife still had to wait 10 years for their tickets, so it pays to know a Valkyrie!

## ***Die Meistersinger Von Nürnberg***

**- Tuesday 28 August 2007**

– Terry Clarke

This was a wild one. Katharina Wagner, the 29 year old beautiful blond daughter of Wolfgang by his second wife, under the influence of a number of German philosophers and other strange types, and having been given carte blanche to do what she liked, has come up with the weirdest, wackiest *Meistersinger* you can imagine. They played the music and sang the text exactly as written in the score but excised every one of Wagner's lengthy and precise stage directions and substituted so much different action that it was virtually unrecognisable. Stage business was constant and thus it was impossible to take in all the activity, so my memory only retains a small proportion of the innumerable liberties taken.

Act One opened in a schoolroom, which was formal enough to be taken as a church and thus lull us into the false sense of security. A procession of apprentices, dressed as schoolchildren, carried before them with great reverence what appeared to be candles which they placed with great solemnity before an altar. This altar was, in fact, a work of art, not very distinguished, and the votive candles subsequently were used as table legs. There were more incomprehensible allusions to come. The wild action started when Walther (Klaus Florian Vogt) emerged from within a grand piano and, turning out to be a painter rather than a singer, demonstrated this by flailing around with a brush and a pot of whitewash that he daubed liberally all over a cello. Eva (Amanda Mace) and Magdalene (Carola Guber) were portrayed as silly 12 year olds, bouncing around with glee and rubbing their bottoms together.

The masters were donnish, fusty, schoolmasters and Hans Sachs (Franz Hawlata) was a barefoot, chain-smoking, rebel writer. There was no visual reference to shoemaking throughout the opera. Walther's attempted prize song in the first act was dramatised as an artistic competition with Beckmesser (Michael Volle). Both had

a large whiteboard and competed to complete a jigsaw depicting the old town of Nuremberg. The Marker got his correct whereas Walther's was upside down and he stormed off in a huff.

Act Two appeared to be in the school cafeteria with Hans Sachs having a table and a typewriter. There was also an enormous, black hand with fingers pointed upwards that from time to time Walter would paint with his whitewash. Beckmesser came on wearing a black T-shirt that had written upon it 'Becks is back'. The whole serenade scene was completely missing, with Eva and Walter canoodling on the black hand, whilst Magdalene slept with her head on a table. The final riot scene was truly that, with the white marble busts that stood at the side walls of the room coming to life and dancing around the stage together with all the cast and a few of the stage hands too – we recognised the assistant stage manager up there as well. Mind you they were still jiggling around while the Night Watchman (Friedemann Rohlig) was singing that everything was quiet in town.

The wildness redoubled in Act Three. The curtain opened to reveal twelve men in the background with enormous plastic heads some of which were recognisable as Wagner himself, Liszt, Beethoven, Goethe and many more that we failed to recognise. The main thrust of the act was that Eva and Magdalene were going to marry their artists and turn them into dull family men with themselves as typical hausfrau. So the quintet was played with them and their five children within picture frames dressed for church. The scene was further enlivened by one of the smaller children having to dash off to the toilet. The prize song was prepared in the guise of a painting and a self-portrait by Walter that Beckmesser found and stole away.

The long musical interlude prior to the final scene was done by these enormous heads who cavorted around in strange and occasionally lewd fashion. When the girls came on we had three Miss Piggies who proceeded to strip to the waist, one of them burying Sach's head in her, admittedly, very agreeable bosom. Of course, he was tied up in a chair at this time. Towards the end of the interlude a trio of what appeared to be the executive team ie a blond girl (Katharina), the conductor in evening dress with baton and, presumably, the designer came on and applauded each of the prancing heads off the stage. These three then entered a large crate into which Sachs and David collected all the debris lying around the stage. They then set the contents of the crate on fire and warmed their hands at the flames as the Master's music finally faded away for the last scene.

Now we come to the prize song. Beckmesser arrived dragging behind him another crate on wheels. He sang his song to the general approval of the 180 strong chorus who were ranged in everyday clothes on tiers at the back of the stage. When he came to the conclusion, getting more and more excited, the crate flew open to reveal a stark naked man and a blow up female sex toy. Beckmesser pulled a long snake from his fly and poked it into the sex toy that blew up. The stark naked man ran off with the remains.





When Walther arrived for his song the chorus all tore their outer clothes off to reveal themselves dressed in matching evening clothes, although the women had their white bra' straps all visible for some reason. His song was greeted with less fervour than Beckmesser's, but he won the prize, which was a huge cheque presented by Pogner together with a couple of glamorous game show hostesses. Walther, however, rejected it and stormed off never to be seen again.

The finale was Hans Sachs giving his paeon to German art standing mid-stage at attention, strongly lit from below and looking for all the world like Hitler at Nuremberg. In an inversion of the normal story, Beckmesser appeared to be the big winner and hero of the whole thing.

In the middle of the third act a bat got into the auditorium and flew around for the remainder of the piece, this just added another layer of surrealism to this weird, wild, and perhaps batty experience. Like it or loath it, and the consensus was definitely against, the one thing you could not be was bored.

## Impressions **Of Die Meistersinger Von Nürnberg - 28 August 2007** - Julie Clark

I approached this reputedly contentious production with an open mind. These are a few impressions I came away with:

Eva and Magdalene – Act 1 opened with them cast as red haired identical schoolgirls with none of the poise one expects. Eva then becomes what can only be described as a fat frau. Both were chosen for their shape (short and rotund) rather than their voices, particularly Eva who was very weak. Magdalene's role seemed to slip into obscurity; I don't recall any interaction between she and David at all.

Walther – a petulant, destructive young man prancing around an art studio, pulling keys off a piano and throwing paint over everyone. Certainly the last person one would want for one's treasured daughter. By Act 3 he had "matured" into rather a more "dishy" prospect, and Klaus certainly looks the part and when you could get away from his ridiculous high jinks he produced the most beautiful sound. Hans Sachs – smoked incessantly in Act 1, no wonder he couldn't reach the notes by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Act. He was certainly not cast as the loveable, wise confidant.

Beckmesser – cast as a jolly, likeable, aggrieved suitor in Act 1. He sang well during the entire performance, which was heroic of him when one considers the ridiculous antics he was required to get up to in the last scene. How can any opera singer be expected to concentrate on the "job" with a nude man grabbing at a naked female dummy? Then Beckmesser, himself, pulling a snake-like penis from his trousers and cavorting around the stage leering at bare breasted women...

and worse!! There was so much going on, on stage, the other mastersingers really paled into obscurity.

The touch I did find mildly amusing was the "family portrait" – a flash into Beckmesser's wished for future with Eva. Mum, Dad, 2 boys and 1 girl. The 2<sup>nd</sup> son's face changed from the photo smile into a grimace, eventually clutching his lower abdomen. I was watching through my opera glasses and was completely "sucked in" by the great performance of this young man who eventually ran from the stage on the pretext of relieving himself. A clever piece of theatre, however it bore no relevance to the Mastersingers at all!

The final scene I liked. The chorus sat on 10 vertical rows of benches, which rose up from beneath the stage high into the rafters, dressed in casual clothes for Beckmesser's song then threw them off to show evening dress underneath for Walther's song. Their sound was breathtaking as was the orchestra's throughout the entire performance.

An irreverent production, over the top, slapstick comedy that will be remembered for its absurdity rather than amusement, more suited to vaudeville. One finds it hard to relate the sublime music of this opera to such a puerile production. Of Katharina Wagner... she certainly has an amazing imagination but one wonders if that is enough to inherit the Empire.

## **Royal Opera House Covent Garden Ring Cycle -** **1 October 2007** – Richard Mason

This was the first new Covent Garden Ring cycle since Götz Friedrich's Time Tunnel of 1976 (discounting the disastrous audience-papered Richard Jones fiasco of the mid-90s). The advance billing for the cycle promised Bryn Terfel's first complete Wotan, and Lisa Gasteen's Brünnhilde. In the event, Terfel cancelled as rehearsals started, on suspiciously flimsy grounds, so a reportedly furious management turned to the veteran Sir John Tomlinson as a replacement.

Tomlinson's voice was certainly loud, if rather crude, with some musical sounds in the lower  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the voice, but highly approximate pitch in the upper  $\frac{1}{4}$ . He ran around the stage a great deal, which at first was dramatic but eventually tiresome. His Wotan was a strange and deliberately weak interpretation, being slapped by Fricka, pushed around by Brünnhilde. Whilst there might (just) be textual justification for some of this, the musical disparity was often embarrassing. He was strongest in the riddle scene of *Siegfried*, weakest in the Act II *Walküre* monologue that was never more tedious. By Act III of *Siegfried* his voice had deteriorated to a shout, so it was a relief to see him leave the stage.



Lisa Gasteen promised much as Brünnhilde, but fell short of high expectations. In *Die Walküre* she never seemed comfortable, struggling with the Annunciation of Death pronouncements. In *Siegfried* her exposed notes revealed an unpleasant harshness. *Götterdämmerung* suited her voice better, with a strong interpretation, notwithstanding some more harsh sounds. An unpleasant wobble is appearing on some of her exposed notes. Overall her interpretation was interesting, although there was no real character development between the operas. John Treleven was carefully economical with his voice. At times he deteriorated into a parlando [recitative] style, but he had enough strong high notes for the highlighted moments. He looked generally embarrassed - a perfect fool (?) - throughout.

Peter Sidhom was a dramatic Alberich with a rough edge to the voice and a tendency, like Tomlinson, to push the voice so much it bordered on shouting. The veteran Rosalind Plowright was a strident if powerful Fricka. Philip Langridge was a crafty insinuating Loge. Emily Magee sang beautifully in both her roles, perhaps the finest singing in the cycle, with strong interpretations also. (Her Guttrune, incestuously flirting with both Gunther and Hagen, so convinced one audience member that they were heard in the interval denouncing her as a damned harlot.) Peter Coleman-Wright was a slippery Gunther and a strong Donner. Philip Ens seemed a bit uncomfortable with Fafner's part in *Das Rheingold*, but improved in *Siegfried* with some fine low notes. Franz-Josef Selig was a strong musical Fasolt.

Simon O'Neill [as Siegmund] had an imperfect technique: the voice very thin and colourless on short notes, but able to open up with blazing longer notes, and the best "Wälse" since Domingo in 1997/2000. Eva-Marie Westbroek was both dramatic and colourful, with a fine musical line. Stephen Milling couldn't sing and his cover, Clive Bayley from ENO, had broken his arm, so Bayley sang a powerful Hunding from the side of the stage whilst Milling acted, a reasonable compromise. Gerhard Siegel was a very strong and colourful Mime. Ailish Tynan was a sparkling acrobatic Woodbird. Jane Henschel was a colourful doom-laden Erda. The 3rd Norn Marina Poplavskaya was particularly strong and both teams of Norns and Rhinemaidens were good, the latter even managing rarely heard trills. Kurt Rydl had an extraordinarily black sound as Hagen, highly dramatic notwithstanding a strong wobble. Mihoko Fujimura [Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung*] was rather harsh in higher notes but some wonderful low notes.

The best part of the performances was the conducting of Antonio Pappano: dramatic, extremely colourful, crisp and exciting with a fine sweep. The orchestra played well, notwithstanding a few fluffs from the brass in *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*.

The staging was extremely and often unnecessarily violent: Alberich stabs out his own eye with Wotan's spear, whilst Wotan shafts Erda as well as Siegmund. Some ideas were simply odd - Freia in love with Fasolt - whilst others were tedious - Mime putting on a goat/wolf headpiece at each

lie in Act II of *Siegfried*. There was an irritating tendency towards excessive literalism, so when Siegfried sang of his mother's eyes looking like those of the roe deer, a white stag was clumsily wheeled around the stage (the stag was shot and eaten in Act III of *Götterdämmerung*). Having both Gunther and Siegfried on stage at the end of Act I of *Götterdämmerung* was simply confusing.

However, if one excludes Act III of *Die Walküre*, dominated by a spinning white wall, and Act II of *Siegfried*, where the literalism was simply silly, the production was reasonably effective and clear in its narrative, with consistent symbolism throughout. Thus there was a drop curtain with mathematical equations throughout; Alberich had a rowing boat in *Rheingold*, which became a flying boat in Act II of *Götterdämmerung*; Gunther's palace was a giant Tarnhelm, etc.

Overall, then, a noble effort, but significant improvements in casting and some tidying up of the production are necessary to lift it to the ranks of memorable Rings.

Other singers and creative cast: Sarah Fox [Woglinde], Heather Shipp [Wellgunde], Sarah Castle [Flosshilde], Catherine Wyn-Rogers [1<sup>st</sup> Norn], Yvonne Howard [2<sup>nd</sup> Norn], Geraldine McGreevy [Gerhilde], Elaine McKrill [Ortlinde], Claire Powell [Waltraute], Rebecca de Pont Davies [Schwertleite], Irène Theorin [Helmwige], Sarah Castle [Siegrune] Claire Shearer [Grimgerde], Elizabeth Sikora [Rosswesse], Philip Ens [Fafner], Will Hartmann [Froh], director Keith Warner, sets Stefanos Lazaridis, costumes Marie-Jeanne Lecca.

## Wagner Performances In England – Terry Clarke

I attach some reviews of performances we attended in England.... They were all good fun unlike much of what you see here [in Bayreuth]. However there are so many lovely people [in Bayreuth] and it is all such fun there is nowhere in the world quite like it.

### **DAS RHEINGOLD - SATURDAY 23 JUNE 2007**

The Old Rectory at Longborough stands on a slight rise in the English Cotswolds and affords a clear view over twenty miles of rolling countryside. As far as the eye can see the green fields are dotted by church spires giving a view that has probably not changed for three hundred years. A life size terracotta statue of Richard Wagner stands facing the house with his back to this fabulous prospect. It is here that the vision of Martin and Lizzie Graham to build a country opera house on the Glyndebourne model has taken shape. They have converted a large chicken shed into a stage and auditorium and furnished it with seating from the old Covent Garden. Like so many, they were brought to Wagner by the televising of the Boulez / Chéreau Ring and their dream has been to stage a



complete Ring in their own home. Both Sir Georg Solti and Sir George Christie told them it was impossible but they have persisted in the endeavour.

We attended the opening night of their first complete production of *Das Rheingold* on June 23<sup>rd</sup> and were treated to a performance of unexpectedly high professionalism. The production was straightforward, no deep political meaning or social comment. A sloping disc and two large gates across the front of the stage was the scenic furniture. Three dancers, dressed in black, skilfully manipulated the scenery and were also responsible for the effects of the dragon, the toad and the rainbow bridge. The problem of representation of the gold was neatly solved by the use of a long golden silk sheet that fell from the sky into the Rhine in the first scene. It was easy to transport to and from Nibelheim and was used to wrap and thus conceal Freia from the Giants.

The orchestra of 44 players was obviously somewhat under strength in this small venue and lacking in some of the major climaxes, however they did manage plenty of anvils. The conductor was Anthony Negus, long associated with this festival, who held them tightly together and inspired a constant flow of beautiful sound. We saw the Wotan of Philip Joll twenty years ago and he has sung it many times since. He was a commanding presence on stage and sang robustly if not always tunefully. The Alberich was Nicholas Folwell who took the part with great menace and fine voice and strangely took the final curtain call. The Loge was Peter Bronder who impishly climbed all over the scenery and played the part of the cunning schemer very well. Other standout performances were Kate Radmilovic as Freia and John Milne as Fasolt, both promising young singers at the start of their careers.

For people like us, who favour a well sung, simply constructed Ring, with no directorial nonsense in a most elegant English setting, you can do no better than take your picnic to Longborough in the coming years.

#### **AN ISOLDE TO DIE FOR - GLYNDEBOURNE - 10 AUGUST 2007**

Twelve hundred Wagner lovers experienced an evening of pure perfection when they attended the performance of *Tristan und Isolde* at Glyndebourne on August 10<sup>th</sup>. Nina Stemme was the ultimate Isolde, slim and beautiful, commanding and yet tender, she sang with radiant clarity and, apparently, effortless power throughout the evening. The Liebestod, sung standing at attention at the back of the stage with all the lighting concentrating on her and then fading to black was so affecting that the audience applause at the final chord was significantly delayed. Her Tristan, the American Robert Gambill, provided a superb counterpart and the great love duet in Act 2 was beautifully balanced. The veteran René Pape played the heart-broken King Marke with pathos and dignity and Katarina Karnéus and Bo Skovhus maintained the standard with a supportive Brangäne and a tender, new age, Kurwenal.

The production by Nikolaus Lehnhof showed a scene of a series of concentric curves roughly representing the frames of a huge sailing ship which changed their positions and colour in each act to represent the different locales. Special mention must be given to Robin Carter whose superb lighting framed and enhanced the action.

The LPO under Jirí Belohlávek played with precision and beauty throughout the whole evening, the only jarring note being their excessively rapid departure of the orchestral players at the end leaving the cast somewhat stranded on the stage to take their curtain calls.

This magnificent performance was further enhanced by the setting of Glyndebourne. A perfect summer evening, of which there have recently been few in England, allowed the audience to picnic in the intervals in the gardens of this gracious country mansion.

A superb performance of this towering opera in this magical setting made this, for me, a benchmark for all time.

A serendipitous pleasure prior to the performance was, on passing the high ceilinged organ room in the main house, to hear the strains of the overture to *Tannhäuser* being played on the grand piano by Russian pianist Alexander Markovitch. He played further Wagner transcriptions with great verve and panache and this recital provided an excellent prelude to a fabulous evening.

#### **GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG - PROMENADE CONCERT AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL - 12 AUGUST 2007**

After the boutique performance of *Rheingold* at Longborough, it was a complete contrast to attend the bold, very brassy and totally magnificent concert performance of *Götterdämmerung* at the Royal Albert Hall. Donald Runnicles conducted a six harp BBC Symphony orchestra and his dramatic style drew wonderfully precise playing and fabulous climaxes. Perhaps the singer of note was John Tomlinson whose Hagen was a triumph of power and malevolence. A concert performance favours singers of the size of Christine Brewer who sang Brünnhilde with great verve and accuracy and paced herself very well to give the final scene everything it requires. The Siegfried of Stig Andersen was suitably heroic in looks and his resounding heldentenor rose effortlessly above the sound of the massive orchestra. Another standout performance came from the young Scottish mezzo, Karen Cargill, who made a splendid debut as Waltraute. All the minor parts were sung with vigour and commitment. The standing ovation from the huge audience, including those who stood for the whole duration in the arena and the galleries, testified to the quality of the performance and the pleasure obtained from this wonderful music in this spectacular setting.

The director of the performance was Paul Curran, a member of the NSW Wagner Society, whose plans for the advertised semi-staged production had to be shelved because Brünnhilde, having not sung the part before, needed to have the score available.



# A Feast of Wagner Around Australia in 2008 – Featuring Australian Wagnerian Soprano Lisa Gasteen

## HOBART

28 February

Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra  
Sebastian Lang-Lessing, cond.  
Lisa Gasteen

**Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde* - Prelude and Liebestod  
*Tristan und Isolde* - Prelude, Act III  
*Wesendonck Lieder***

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No.6, *Pathétique*

## BRISBANE

29 March

The Queensland Orchestra  
Johannes Fritzsich, cond.  
Deborah Riedel  
Christian Elsner  
Philip Kang

Messiaen: *Les Offrandes Oubliées*  
Howard: *Gravity's Rainbow* (Premiere)

**Wagner: *Die Walküre* Act 1**

28, 29 November

The Queensland Orchestra  
Muhai Tang, cond.  
Cyprien Katsaris, piano

**Wagner: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*,  
Prelude Act I**

Beethoven: Piano Concerto No 3  
Liszt: *Mephisto Waltz*  
R. Strauss: *Also Sprach Zarathustra*

## PERTH

7, 8 March (Gala opening to WASO's 2008 season)

West Australian Symphony Orchestra  
Asher Fisch, cond.  
Lisa Gasteen  
Harry Peeters  
Kirsti Harms

Ledger: *The Madness and Death of King Ludwig*  
(Premiere)

**Wagner: *Götterdämmerung*, *Siegfried's Rhine  
Journey*, *Funeral Music*.  
*Die Walküre*, Act III**

13, 14 June

West Australian Symphony Orchestra  
Tadaaki Otaka, cond.  
Christianne Stotijn

**Wagner: *Tannhäuser* Overture and *Venusberg  
Music***

**Wesendonck Lieder**

R. Strauss: *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life)

## ADELAIDE

9 August

Adelaide Symphony Orchestra  
Arvo Volmer, cond.  
Lisa Gasteen

**Wagner: *Tannhäuser* "Dich, teure  
Halle..."**

***Lohengrin*, Preludes to  
Act I and Act 3, and *Elsa's  
Dream***

***Tristan und Isolde*, Prelude  
and Liebestod**

R. Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier* Suite  
*Salomé*, closing scene.

## MELBOURNE

25, 28, 30 August

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra  
Oleg Caetani, cond.  
Bjarni Kristinsson  
Lisa Gasteen  
Stuart Skelton  
John Wegner  
Sian Pendry  
Adrian Dwyer

**Wagner: *Der fliegende Holländer***

23, 24 November

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

**Sir Charles Mackerras, cond.**

**Wagner: *Tannhäuser*. Overture and *Venusberg  
Music***

Dvorak: *Serenade for Strings* in E major, Op.22  
Delius: *The Walk to the Paradise Garden*  
Elgar: 'Enigma' Variations, Op.36

## The Raven's Reporting - Compiled by Camron Dyer

There is a regularly updated comprehensive list on the Society's Website: <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au>  
that takes the list to 2013





# Chicago's *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*

- Paul Curran Stage Director And Choreographer

Hugh Canning, in a review of 25 November 2007 for the Times Online, titled "Scottish mystery man Paul Curran brings real razzle-dazzle to Strauss in Chicago" explains his title as follows: "The Lyric Opera of Chicago has just staged its first in 23 years, conducted by its British music director, Andrew Davis, and staged by a Scot, Paul Curran. For UK audiences, this former dancer is something of a mystery man. His most prominent work here has been with the Royal College of Music and Garsington Opera, but internationally he is now working at the highest level – Wagner's *Tannhäuser* at La Scala, Milan; this *Frau*; Britten's *Peter Grimes* and a forthcoming *Billy Budd* in Santa Fe – which makes his peripheral presence in British opera all the more baffling.

Of the Chicago production, Canning says that "Curran and his set and costume designer, Kevin Knight, have devised a grand but practical *Frau ohne Schatten*, with essentially two sets: a semicircular wall, which does double duty for the Emperor's palace and Keikobad's magical realm, and a wooden structure with a footbridge, suggesting oriental theatre, for the Dyer's workshop. Descending luminous globes and neon strip lights suggest the other-worldliness of the milieu, in which the two principal women struggle with their consciences and seek to find reconciliation with their men without compromising their own personalities. In summary he is very complimentary: "It's a musical triumph for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the rest of the world will rejoice that such a top-flight *Frau* cast is available once again".

Similarly, Barbara Keer, in her review of the production for Splash Magazines Worldwide on 25 November 2007 considered that it "is spectacular with powerful drama and many surprising effects on stage. Experiencing this opera was like entering another time and space: the music, singing, sets, action completely drew us into this production. It felt like being transported to a "new" realm unlike other places you have been.

Stage director, Paul Curran, created staging that was elaborate and beyond what one would expect. I wondered if it would be a contender for movie special effects. The effects, however, completely supported and enhanced the flow of the story line, totally focused our attention, and provided pleasure." Some pictures accompanying the review on the Splash website give an indication of the colour and fantastical style of the design ([http://www.lasplash.com/publish/main\\_feature/cat\\_main\\_chicago/Die\\_Frau\\_ohne\\_Schatten\\_Review\\_-\\_Lyric\\_Opera\\_of\\_Chicago.php](http://www.lasplash.com/publish/main_feature/cat_main_chicago/Die_Frau_ohne_Schatten_Review_-_Lyric_Opera_of_Chicago.php)).

In his review, "Opera doesn't sit in shadows," Bill Gowen in the Daily Herald of 11/17/2007 agrees that this " is a stunning, visually creative new production

designed by Kevin Knight who, along with stage director Paul Curran, are making auspicious Lyric Opera debuts." Gowen notes that the "Lyric has come up with a cast not likely to be equaled anywhere: American sopranos Deborah Voigt (*Empress*), Christine Brewer (*Dyer's Wife*, Lyric Opera debut) and mezzo-soprano Jill Grove (*Nurse*); along with tenor Robert Dean Smith in a most impressive Lyric debut as the Emperor, and German bass Franz Hawlata as Barak. This opera celebrates Voigt's return to the Lyric following last season's triumphant title-role debut as Strauss' *Salome*. Brewer's many Strauss roles around the world include the title role in 'Ariadne auf Naxos' and Chrysothemis in 'Elektra'".

For the record, the cast and other creative team members included: Sir Andrew Davis, conductor, Donald Nally, chorus master, August Tye, ballet mistress, *Empress*: Deborah Voigt, *Dyer's Wife*: Christine Brewer, *Emperor*: Robert Dean Smith, *Barak*: Franz Hawlata.

## Seattle Opera Announces 2009 *Ring* Cast

**Debuts Include:** Janice Baird as Brünnhilde, Stig Fogh Andersen as Siegfried, **Stuart Skelton** as Siegmund.

**Returning Cast Members Include:** Greer Grimsley as Wotan, Margaret Jane Wray as Sieglinde, Richard Paul Fink as Alberich, Stephanie Blythe as Fricka/First Norn/Waltraute (*Götterdämmerung*).

**Robert Spano Conducts**

## Opera Cycle I Cycle II Cycle III

*Das Rheingold:*

(7:00 p.m.) (Sun) August 9 (Mon) August 17  
(Tues) August 25

*Die Walküre:*

(6:00 p.m.) (Mon) August 10 (Tues) August 18  
(Wed) August 26

*Siegfried :*

6:00 p.m.) (Wed) August 12 (Thurs) August 20  
(Fri) August 28

*Götterdämmerung:*

(6:00 p.m.) (Fri) August 14 (Sat) August 22 (Sun)  
August 30





# Annual Membership Renewal for 2008

1. Please provide your name, address and membership number.			
Name	.....		
Address	Street .....		
	City .....	State .....	P'Code .....
Membership Number	.....		
2. Please renew my/our membership from 1 January to 31 December 2008 on the following basis ( <i>please tick one</i> )			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Single member \$50 (single pensioner member \$30)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shared members \$75 (shared pensioner members \$50)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Students \$20 ( <i>include a copy of your current ID Card</i> )	\$ .....	
3. I/We wish to donate the following amount to the Society. ( <i>Donations of \$2 or more are tax-deductible, and receipts will be issued. All donations are acknowledged in our Newsletter*.</i> )		\$ .....	
4. Please post this form to <b>The Treasurer The Wagner Society in NSW Inc GPO Box 4574 Sydney NSW 2001</b>		\$ ..... Total Sent	
5. Please make your payment by posting your cheque or money order made payable to <b>The Wagner Society</b> along with this form to the address above, or <i>Use your bank's internet banking facilities to send your payment electronically to:</i> <b>Westpac Banking Corporation, Paddington NSW Branch</b> <b>Account Name: The Wagner Society</b> <b>BSB: 032040</b> <b>Account Number: 911323</b>			
<b>Please Tick One:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Cheque enclosed</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Electronic payment made</b>
<b>6. Signatures</b>			
	..... Signature	..... Signature	
...../...../2008 Date renewed	..... Name in BLOCK LETTERS	..... Name in BLOCK LETTERS	



## **ADDRESS**

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence

The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc

GPO Box 4574 SYDNEY NSW 2001

Telephone: 9357 7631 (Roger Cruickshank, President)

Website: <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au>

Website enquiries: [webmaster@wagner-nsw.org.au](mailto:webmaster@wagner-nsw.org.au)

(most website addresses used in this Newsletter will be on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article)

**Address for Sunday Functions  
Goethe Institut  
90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)**