

# The Wagner Society



IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Newsletter No. 112, July 2008

## President's Report

Dear Members

Welcome to our mid-year Newsletter for 2008.

### Past Functions

#### (1) March – Warwick Fyfe

On Sunday 16 March, Warwick Fyfe delivered an immensely entertaining illustrated talk on his study tour in Europe last November as the 2007 Bayreuth Scholar.

While some Bayreuth scholars return from their travels and are never heard of again, most provide a short written account to Opera Foundation Australia of their itinerary abroad. Warwick's report of around 90 pages, with many photographs, is an open diary of his study tour which tells the tale of his travels -the musicians and friends he met, the places he went, the rehearsals and concerts he attended, the art galleries he visited, his auditions, his pilgrimages.

Warwick's talk covered many of the highlights (and with some unfortunate experiences with food, the low lights) of his travels, with his wife Ruth Frances in charge of the overheads and photographs, and was the best "thank you" a Scholar has ever given the Society.

We've posted Warwick's report on our website and the Editor has extracted a "teaser" printed below to entice you to read his report, and although there may still be an annoying problem with words with umlauts (apparently I have the "wrong character set") it's well worth downloading and reading. At over 250Mb with photos, it proved something of a monster, and in keeping with our new "small footprint" age, only the text is online. Walking in Warwick's footsteps through each room of a gallery you've visited and seeing the works through his eyes is one of its many delights.

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

Warwick has agreed to give a talk on 15 March 2009 on his musical "coming to Wagner."

#### (2) April – Glenn Winslade

On Sunday April 20, Glenn Winslade gave a talk on his experiences from a singer's perspective at Bayreuth, where he sang the title role in *Tannhäuser* in 2002 and 2003.

Glenn's talk provided insights into the highs and lows of life for a new singer at Bayreuth, told with much warmth and humour. These ranged from his audition for Wolfgang Wagner and his engagement (Glenn's agent wouldn't believe that he'd been given the role); the extraordinary behaviour of his landlord at Bayreuth; the attitude of some of the "old hands" in the Festspiele theatre who expected him to fail and only at the end offered him advice, for example on areas of the theatre where the acoustic was less perfect; his friendship with John Wegner, who sang the role of Biteroff; the dangers created by Philippe Arlaud's alluring butcher's grass meadow set in Act 1; the way the sets changed the acoustic for the singers; the difficulty of keeping one's voice warm during the hour-long intervals so beloved of the beer and wurst brigade; and much more.

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## For Your **Diary**

2008		
	<b>see below for a number of performances in other states.</b>	
Sunday, July 20	Simone Young concert featuring Englebert Humperdinck's four-hand piano arrangement of Richard Wagner's Parsifal. With narration in German and English, twelve short movements are brought to life by passages of text from the opera.	Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House

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

DATE	EVENTS - 2008	TIME & LOCATION
July 20	Peter Bassett to talk on 'Lortzing's 1840 Singspiel, <i>Hans Sachs</i> , as inspiration for Wagner's <i>Die Meistersinger</i> '	2pm Goethe Institut
August	No Meeting	2pm Goethe Institut
September 14	Dr Robert Gibson	2pm Paddington Uniting Church
September 28	Chris Broderick, the new President of the New Zealand Wagner Society will talk on "Wagner and the Visual Arts"	2pm Goethe Institut
October 19	Goetz Richter (A/Prof. Strings- Chair, String Unit, Sydney Conservatorium) will talk on Nietzsche and Wagner	2pm Goethe Institut
November 16	Visit to the Opera Centre, Elizabeth Street, hosted by Sharna Flowers	Opera Centre, Elizabeth St TBC
November 30	Early Christmas Party	2pm Goethe Institut
<b>Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)</b> <b>Paddington Unit Church address 395 Oxford Street, Paddington (parking behind in Gordon Street)</b>		

## Committee **2008 - 2009**

<b>President and Membership Secretary</b>	Roger Cruickshank	9357 7631
<b>Vice President</b>	Julian Block	9337 6978
<b>Treasurer</b>	Michael Moore	9363 2281
<b>Secretary</b>	Alan Whelan	9318 1212
<b>Members</b>	Dennis Mather	9560 1860
	Gabrielle Bremner-Moore	9363 2281
	Julie Carroll	
<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	Terence Watson	9517 2786
<b>Public Officer</b>	Alisdair Beck	9358 3922



## President's Report continued

He also spoke about the modern tendency for performances of Wagner and Richard Strauss to be very loud, and supported the view that *Tannhäuser* is almost unsingable, with such hurdles as the string of ten top As in Act 2. This was a glimpse into a world often hidden from its devotees.

Glenn also spoke of the on-stage accident in which he had been involved, and how it had led to his untimely retirement. An idea of what we have lost is gained from a review of Opera Australia's 2002 production of *Lohengrin* in Melbourne, which appeared in *The Age* on 29 April that year. John Slavin, whose reviews are not renowned for their generosity of spirit, wrote "Winslade grows in confidence as the opera proceeds. By the crucial bedroom scene of act two when Elsa breaks the contract and betrays him, he is magnificent. He is that rare thing, a genuine heldentenor who can soar above the stunning volume that conductor Gabor Otvos draws from Orchestra Australia. Winslade tends to shout the opening phrase of each monologue in order to stamp his authority on it, but his singing of the crucial recitative "In Fernem Land", which reveals his identity, is lyrical and memorable."

### (3) May - AGM

On Sunday May 18, we held our 2008 AGM at the Paddington Uniting Church.

#### Audited accounts

The formal part of the meeting included the presentation of our audited accounts for the 2007 calendar year, which were adopted by the meeting. These have been lodged with the regulator, and a copy has been posted on our website for members to read. Because of the need to publish the accounts in full, it's not possible to include them in this Newsletter, and I'd urge you to have a look at them on the website. If you can't access the web, please phone me or another member of the committee and we'll print out a copy and post it to you.

The auditors have made two qualifications. First, they have noted that "it is not practicable for the Society to maintain an effective system of internal control over cash receipts until initial entry into the accounting records." This is a qualification which often appears in the audited accounts of societies such as ours, where cash isn't formally received into an electronic recording and receipting system, such as a till. The committee believes that the risk of theft is sufficiently mitigated by the use of a register where those attending record their names, and the balancing of this register against the cash receipts.

The second qualification is that, because they did not audit the accounts for the 2006 calendar year, the auditors are "unable to determine whether the balances as at 30 June 2006 have been fairly stated". This is a one-off qualification which will not be repeated when they audit our 2008 accounts.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the firm of Walter Turnbull, its Executive Director Mr Mark Driessen, and particularly Mr Christopher Ritchie, for their generosity and patience in successfully guiding us through this audit experience, and for their considerable work on our behalf. I'd also like to again acknowledge our thanks to Ms Julie Carroll, who approached Walter Turnbull on our behalf and secured their services *pro bono*.

#### Meeting entrance fees raised to \$15

The motion to increase the attendance fee at our meetings was amended (from \$12) and passed. From our next meeting on July 20, the entrance fee will be \$15 for members. Members at the AGM also directed the committee to consider increase annual membership fees, and a motion will be put to the 2009 AGM with a proposal.

#### Bayreuth ticket application handling unchanged

The motion to change the way we handle members' applications for Bayreuth Tickets was lost. The proposal was that priority be given to applicants in one year who had applied unsuccessfully in the previous year(s), in effect creating a "waiting list" which would ensure that provided you applied every year you were guaranteed a ticket, although because of the ballot you had no control over the year in which you would get tickets. This would have aligned our process with the public allocation system used in Bayreuth, and ensured that members who had never been would eventually get tickets.

I was somewhat unsettled by the overwhelming defeat of this proposal. I've been to Bayreuth three times – twice with tickets obtained through the Society – and the memories of those visits are still vividly with me. I'm concerned that we may create a two-tiered Society - those who have not been to Bayreuth, and those who have. While there are other avenues for obtaining tickets, such as joining the Friends of Bayreuth, or applying annually through the public ticket allocations (which I understand takes around 10 years), members of the Society who have never been to Bayreuth should not feel that the ticket allocation system disadvantages them. After our applications for Bayreuth 2009 close, I will submit a questionnaire to the committee and, with its approval, we will survey members on their attitudes to a range of options. If there is a consensus on changing the process, we'll put motions to the AGM in 2009, which if passed will affect the application process for Bayreuth 2010 onwards.

#### Welcome Julie Carroll to the Committee

Your 2007 committee was re-elected for 2008, with the addition of Ms Julie Carroll, and I'd like to welcome her onto the committee.

#### Concert

The highlight of the AGM is always the recital by voice students from the Conservatorium of Music accompanied by Sharolyn Kimmorley, and this year's recital was just superb. The Paddington Uniting Church has a much bigger acoustic than the recital room at the Goethe-



## President's Report continued

Institut, and from the first (and wonderfully appropriate) notes of "Dich, teure Halle, grüss ich wieder" through comedy and tragedy to some beautifully phrased lieder we were treated to a range of music from a very talented quintet of performers - Catherine Bouchier, Regina Daniel, Louise Watts, Jonathan Alley and Adam Player. Some photos of the singers posing with members at the after-recital function have been posted on the Society's website.

### Future Functions

#### (1) July – Peter Bassett

On Sunday 20 July, Peter Bassett will give talk on Albert Lortzing's comic opera *Hans Sachs*, as inspiration for Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*.

Sunday 20 July is the last day of the papal visit and the Catholic Church's week-long "World Youth Day", and at least a quarter of a million pilgrims are expected down the road at the Randwick Race Course and at other venues. The event involves a number of road closures and has the potential to cause considerable delays to people making their way to the Goethe-Institut, so you should make sure you allow more time than usual to get there.

Sunday 20 July is also Peter Bassett's birthday, and after his talk he will be the guest of the Society at the Simone Young concert featuring Englebert Humperdinck's four-hand piano arrangement of *Parsifal*, which starts at 5pm in the Utzon Room at the Opera House. Here's hoping that the relatively short journey from Edgecliff to the Opera House can progress despite the pilgrims.

After the concert we will take Peter to dinner for his birthday in the vicinity of Circular Quay, and we would be delighted if any members who are also going to the Simone Young concert could join us. Please phone me if you're interested in attending Peter's birthday dinner.

#### (2) September 14 – Dr Robert Gibson

On Sunday 14 September at the Paddington Uniting Church, Dr Robert Gibson will give a talk on relationships between the music of the two Richards, Wagner and Strauss. Hans von Bülow apparently called them "Richard the First" and "Richard the Third", for the obvious reason that no-one was worthy of being placed in such proximity to the Meister as a "Richard the Second". This meeting is being held at the Paddington Uniting Church because the Goethe-Institut is staging a major exhibition in August-September and is not available for other uses on this date.

#### (3) September 28 – Christopher Broderick

On Sunday 28 September at the Goethe-Institut, Christopher Broderick, President of the Wagner Society of New Zealand, will give an illustrated talk on "Wagner and the Visual Arts". Chris took over the President's role when Professor Heath Lees stood down in May this year. In early July this year, Chris will visit Wagner Societies in Victoria, South and West Australia, and will visit Queensland after his talk in Sydney.

### Wagner programme series on 2MBS-FM 102.5

On Tuesday 1 July, 2MBS broadcast the first of a series of 12 programmes compiled by Barbara Brady entitled "Wagner and Friends". They will go to air on the first and third Tuesday of every month at 2.30 - 4.00 pm. Each programme will share selections from Richard Wagner's music (mainly opera, with some symphonic and choral extracts) with composers who were either contemporaries or had some sort of link with Wagner. The programmes will be presented by Gwynn Roberts.

For the most part the programmes are centred on one of Wagner's operas, but the final four, dedicated to The Ring of the Nibelungen, are based on four grand themes which feature in the Ring. The current schedule is [on page ??](#) In addition, Barbara Brady has written an article about the series for *Fine Music*, the 2MBS program guide. This article was first published in the July 2008 issue of "Fine Music", the magazine of 2MBS-FM, and is reproduced with kind permission of the editor and publishers.

Our Society is proud to sponsor these programs, and I'd like to congratulate 2MBS-FM for its decision to commission this series, and to congratulate Barbara Brady for her work in compiling it. We've indicated to the management of 2MBS our willingness to sponsor further programs, and raised the question of how this station proposes to commemorate in 2013 the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of births of Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner. We'll keep you informed on developments.

### Dr Christine Rothauser

Dr Christine Rothauser has sent us a report from the International Wagner Congress held in Geneva in May this year. The Congress (or to use its correct title, the "Richard Wagner Verband International e.V.") is the over-arching body representing some 136 national and regional Wagner Societies with around 37,000 members. Christine writes:

"This year the congress has at last turned a new page in its long history. The International Association was created in 1994 and while it has grown over the years, none of its International members had the right to vote on any of the issues. It meant that the board of management was elected without our consent and we were powerless to change the constitution.

"This year the German associations that held all the power, were faced with a protest and after the two speeches delivered by Dr Christine Rothauser and Dr Oster from Strasbourg, a motion was voted unanimously to amend the constitution, to give to the International Associations the right to vote and hopefully have only one accounting system for the two associations.

"Prof Eva Märston from Hannover has replaced Josef Lienhart as president. An International Commission has been elected, consisting of three members whose task is to amend the constitution. Their president is Frau Ingrid Budde representing Germany, Dr Christine Rothauser from Adelaide and Dr Fotis Papatthanassiou from Athens."

Dr Rothauser is a formidable champion of those issues in which she passionately believes, and





we congratulate her in opening up the Verband to a more international voice, and in being recognised by her peers in this way.

### 2008 Bayreuth Scholar

Alison Cole, the General Manager of Opera Foundation Australia, has advised that the winner of the 2008 Bayreuth Scholarship is Cameron MacKenzie. Apart from the fact that Cameron's application was rather well-endowed with good references, we don't know much about him at this stage, because Opera Foundation's website hasn't been updated with the new scholar's details. Instead, Google has revealed a number of Cameron MacKenzies in Melbourne, one of whom is a young man with a passingly-flattering photo, who trained in voice at the Victorian College of the Arts as a counter-tenor and may now be the Artistic Director for the Lyric Opera of Melbourne. I'll try to make contact with the real Cameron through Opera Foundation when I'm in Melbourne for the concert performances of *Der fliegende Holländer* at the end of August, and see whether he would be able to give a talk to our Society next year, if he's in Sydney at some stage.

### Live and delayed opera broadcast from Bayreuth

First it was the Chauvel Cinema in Paddington (and other cities outside Sydney), broadcasting delayed telecasts of live performances from the New York Metropolitan Opera, including one of the Met's ill-fated attempts to bring Deborah Voigt and Ben Heppner together. Then the Greater Union Cinema in Bondi Junction began showing delayed opera telecasts from La Scala, Milan, which will include on 30 and 31 August and 3 September a performance of Patrice Chereau's production of *Tristan und Isolde* with Ian Storey and Waltraud Meier, conducted by Daniel Barenboim. Now Hoyts is broadcasting four performances from the current San Francisco Opera season.

As the phenomenon has spread, opera-lovers have coaxed theatre managers in smaller cities and centres to show these broadcasts. One of our members, Heinz Ebert, was successful in persuading his local cinema in Gosford to show the delayed telecasts from the New York Met.

But in what we believe is a first, Bayreuth is offering a direct live high definition broadcast via the Internet of the opening performance at this year's Bayreuth festival of Katharina Wagner's production of *Die Meistersinger* on July 27 2008 at 4pm (German) time. The cost is 49 Euro, which will entitle you to watch it live and to watch it a second time before 2 August, all in the comfort of your own home. The link is <http://live.bayreuther-festspiele.de/live.htm> where everything you need to know is clearly explained (in English.)

Last year's premier performances of this production were not greeted with universal enthusiasm, so this is a brave move, and hopefully signals the start of live telecasts from Bayreuth and from other festivals and opera houses.

### The Neidhardt Ring

Hopes that Elke Neidhardt's incredible *Ring* production from Adelaide in 2004 would be revived in 2011 have suffered a serious set-back, with news that the new federal government will not join a partnership with the South Australian state government to provide the \$15 million required.

The ABC carried a news item on 11 April 2008, saying that "A former arts minister says the South Australian Government has not pushed hard enough to win funding to again stage Wagner's Ring Cycle in SA. .... As a member of the former Liberal state government, Diana Laidlaw was behind the push to bring the opera to Adelaide in 1998 and 2004. "We have excelled with the Ring Cycle and made a name for ourselves," she said. "I think the State Government has been slack in not pressing the former federal government and the current Government to be partners with the state in a further performance of the Ring Cycle." The head of the State Opera Company, Stephen Phillips, says it would be unprecedented for private donors to fund the performance. "The Los Angeles Opera is doing a new production of the Ring in a couple of years' time and a private donor did put in US\$6 million towards that project, but it's a very different culture in the United States," he said."

When the South Australian state government announced in the middle of last year that it would put up half of the required funding if the federal government matched it, many saw this as a half-hearted gesture by the South Australian state government, which could then blame the its federal companions when the project failed, and this view seems to have been proven correct.

A different spin on this news came from Black Sheep Advertising. On it's website, under the heading "We've swapped a dragon for a panda" the writer noted that the two Chinese pandas promised for Adelaide Zoo had not fallen victim to the Rudd razor gang's budget cuts. Federal funding will be given to the Zoo, so that it can build a special panda enclosure (\$5 million) and then rent the animals for 10 years from the Chinese government at a cost of \$10 million.

The day before this \$15 million largesse was announced, the writer tells us, the Federal Government's Minister for the Arts, Peter Garrett, had announced that funding for the planned Adelaide Ring revival in 2011 had been cut.

The writer concludes "Now Wagner's dragon will be seen no more in Adelaide. In its place will sit two fuzzy, lazy quadrupeds with little or no magic about them. Apparently there are about 250 Pandas in zoos around the world. There are only a small handful of cities that staged 'The Ring'. Mr Rudd, I don't think it was our wishes you were pandering to. And, once again, South Australia loses another international attraction. I guess we'll just have to bear it."

Along with the dreadful puns. What more is there to say. Now all that remains is the quiet fire-sale of the props and costumes, and the magic of 2004 will be gone forever.

Roger Cruickshank 6 July 2008



## New Members

The following people joined the Society:

Joseph Kelleher [0965], Kay Abrahams [0966], Richard Bloor [0967], Ingrid and David Price [0968], Damien Pignolet [0969], and Robin and Ron White [0970].

## 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 up to Monday 30 June were gratefully received from the following members and supporters: Donations processed were received from: Carole Bailey, Julian Block, Nance Grant, Sir Nicholas and Lady Shehadie, Moya Crane, Ann Weeden, Walter Norris, Terence Watson, Barbara and Nicholas Dorsch, Leona Geeves, Hannah and Willi Spiller, Brian Ducker, William Felbel, Joan and Maxwell Connery, Gillian and Kenneth (Tim) McDonald, MaryAnne and Nick Gillott, Margaret and Clare Hennessy, David and Sabina Full, Mary and Graeme Fogelberg, Patricia and Roy Hodson, Judy and Joseph Ferfaglia, Stephen Freiberg and Donald Campbell, Barbara McNulty, and Terence Watson.

## Wagner on 2MBS-FM 102.5

2MBS-FM 102.5 will broadcast a series of 12 programs compiled by Society Member Barbara Brady entitled "*Wagner and Friends*". The first program, *Early Wagner*, was broadcast on 1 July from 2.30-4.00 pm. Each program will share selections from Richard Wagner's music (mainly opera with some symphonic and choral) with composers who were either contemporaries or had some sort of link with Wagner. The programs will be presented by Gwynn Roberts. The programs are scheduled for broadcast on the first and third Tuesday of each month from 2.30-4.00 pm:

- (Program 1) July 1: *Early Wagner*
- (Program 2) 15 July - *Rienzi* and *Das Liebesverbot*
- (Program 3) 05 August - *Der fliegende Holländer*
- (Program 4) 19 August - *Tannhäuser*
- (Program 5) 02 September - *Lohengrin*
- (Program 6) 16 September - *Tristan und Isolde*
- (Program 7) 07 October - *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*
- (Program 8) 21 October - *Parsifal*
- (Program 9) 04 November - *Nature in the Ring*
- (Program 10) 18 November - *Power and Magic in the Ring*
- (Program 11) 02 December - *Love in the Ring*
- (Program 12) 16 December - *Birth, Death and Redemption in the Ring*.

## Bayreuth Festival to be Handed Over to Two Wagner Daughters

The narrative twists and turns of the Bayreuth succession never ceases to surprise – an apt image for the festival founded by one of the greatest dramatic imaginations of Western culture.

The latest development balances on the hitherto impossible-seeming alliance of the two half-sisters – the well-established Eva Wagner-Pasquier and the recently Bayreuth-blooded Katharina Wagner after Wolfgang Wagner finally announced his formal retirement: "I hereby declare that I will abdicate the position of director for the Festival by Aug. 31", he wrote to the festival's board of directors. In a comment reported in the International Herald Tribune, "Bayreuth's mayor, Michael Hohl, who also sits on the board, said that the position of festival director would be posted for the next four months. He noted, however, that descendants of Richard Wagner would be given priority for the position."

According to the website of Deutsche-Welle World, [Wolfgang] Wagner's spokesman Peter Emmerich, confirmed that the director-for-life had this week submitted a letter expressing his intention to retire to the board of the Bayreuth Festival. Emmerich also said that Wagner could now imagine a co-directorship involving both daughters. Previously, he had categorically rejected appointing Eva Wagner-Pasquier, 63, his daughter with his first wife." Also according to Deutsche-Welle, "Emmerich said the two have become closer since Katharina's mother Gudrun Wagner passed away last fall."

The UK *Telegraph* has filled in a few more details, including the information that "after Bayreuth's financial backers were reported to have threatened to cut funding because of uncertainty over the festival's leadership, Mr Wagner has agreed to step down as director. He has demanded a rapprochement between his two daughters that would lead to them taking the helm at Bayreuth together, sidelining Nike Wagner, his niece."

According to The Guardian, this announcement "provoked Nike, who has radical ideas about the festival, to counter that she and Eva would



be the better team. An online poll in the newspaper Die Welt suggests the German public agrees with her." So there is only to be a duumvirate, not a triumvirate at Wagner? Well, perhaps not, since Katharina has made it clear that, according to an article in *The Guardian*: "Ms Wagner said she had told her father of her plans to team up with Mr Thielemann." One assumes that Eva is agreeable?

*The Guardian* notes that Thielemann, who conducted The Ring this year at Bayreuth, said he would like to lure conductors to the festival who had previously shied away from it or not been invited, such as Simon Rattle, Zubin Mehta and Kent Nagano, but that the music on offer would remain strictly Wagner."

The article in *The Guardian* ends with a strange insight from Katharina Wagner into her perspective on history and the Festspiele's role in it. On one hand she makes what seems to be a fair comparison (levels of talent and success yet to be determined): "She was quoted as telling the paper that the daughters' reconciliation triggered memories of the elder Wagner's own cooperation with his brother, Wieland, in the 1950s, when they started the festival again in the wake of World War II. Wieland died of cancer in 1966, leaving Wolfgang to lead on his own." (Maybe Eva needs to have regular health checks to ensure she lasts a reasonable time, before forfeiting the field to Katharina.)

The Guardian then notes that: "Bayreuth's post-war directors have all faced the hard task of trying to distance the festival from its connections with the Nazi era, when it was a favourite haunt of the Third Reich elite. "Despite this Ms Wagner has welcomed comparisons between her and Mr Thielemann's partnership and that of Winifred Wagner, the English-born wife of Siegfried Wagner who was a passionate Hitler supporter and friend, and conductor Heinz Tietjen, who jointly took over the festival leadership in 1930"

It seems that the sisters have to come up with a plan to meet a 29 April deadline set by the Foundation. No further information seems to have made its way on to the Web on whether a plan has been submitted or a decision made by Foundation. Maybe at the opening or conclusion of this year's Festspiele – stay tuned for further chapters! (You may wish to read more on the saga at the following websites.)

[Editor]

<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,3262049,00.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2008/04/14/wbayreuth114.xml>

<http://www.cbc.ca/arts/music/story/2008/04/14/wagner-bayreuth-heirs.html>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/sep/24/germany.classicalmusic>

<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/04/29/europe/bayreuth.php>

## LOVE/DEATH: The Tristan Project by Bill Viola – Katie French

For those for whom *Tristan and Isolde* represents Wagner's masterpiece, the recent showing of segments of American video artist Bill Viola's *Tristan Project* were an aesthetic treat not to be missed.

Originally created in 2005 in collaboration with Peter Sellars (of Adelaide Festival notoriety), *The Tristan Project* as a whole, was conceived as a four hour backdrop to Sellars' production of *Tristan and Isolde*. Only three short extracts have been shown here, each of about ten minutes in length – *The Fall Into Paradise* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and *Fire Woman* and *Tristan's Ascension (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall)* against a huge screen on the altar wall of the wonderfully atmospheric, medieval-inspired St Saviour's Church in Redfern.

Each of these works powerfully combines light and darkness, silence and sound, endless stillness and sometimes shocking movement, in a suspense-filled, erotically charged, bold embodiment of the moods of several dramatic segments of Wagner's opera.

The perversely entitled *The Fall Into Paradise* commences with a tiny speck of light emerging with agonizing slowness from a pitch-black environment. Ever so slowly, so that the audience becomes vitally aware of the portentous significance of the concepts of Time – of timelessness, of change and changelessness over time, of being outside time – the speck expands and evolves into a male and female form, filmed from above. They revolve slowly, encircling each other until, with shocking, passionate force and an explosion of water, they are conjoined and propelled downward – or, disorientingly, it could be upward! – into a sea-blue paradise, a sapphire other-world of bubbles, of merging, interwoven, enthralled limbs and hair, and waves of fabric, all silhouetted against the light. The enraptured pair, oblivious within their roaring bubble chamber, are out of this world. They are suspended, drowning in timelessness, in the shared rapture of Wagner's 'fatal pair'.

*Fire Woman* engulfs viewers seated in the unnervingly darkened pews of St Saviour's in a ceiling-high wall of thundering, soaring flames. In stark silhouette, an immobile figure, robed and cowled, confronts a relentless, blazing inferno for what seems like an eternity of waiting. Then with the same shocking suddenness of the lovers' plunge into Paradise, she raises her arms to form a silhouetted human crucifix. It is an appalling, hair-raising moment as it seems certain she will plunge into the hypnotic flames, but she defies expectations by catapulting backward into an unseen mass of water, propelling waves of petrol blue into the ferocious orange flames. The viewer endures the relentless intensity of the flames, the same 'ravaging, fiery torment which



consumes' Tristan, that same shocking, roaring fire of 'day's wild passion'. Tristan's own words from the opera become all the more poignant as he deliriously cries: 'Ah Isolde, when ah when will you quench the flame/ that it may announce me to my happiness.'

The third extract, *Tristan's Ascension (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall)* opens subtly, with a sense of quiet and peace - Tristan's yearned for 'peace of death'. Tristan's body lies on a grey granite slab in a winding sheet of white silk. The only sounds are the interminable dripping of water from the heights above the corpse. But the relief is temporary.

Inevitably over extended time, the drips develop into a trickle, into a torrent, into a raging deluge, swelling and roaring to an almost unbearable intensity. With the surging, submerging swell, the body appears to levitate, not on a horizontal plane, but from the chest with the neck laid bare, as though Tristan were releasing himself

as an offering, achieving his own liberation from the world, his yearned for annihilation.

Here he is the Tristan of Isolde's *Liebeshod*, 'soaring on high, stars sparkling around him,' his heart proudly swelling, in a time outside Time, in the oblivion of supreme bliss.

These extracts from *LOVE/DEATH: The Tristan Project* are three powerful and evocative contemporary works of art. They combine the seductive power of those elemental forces of fire, of water and earthliness with the elemental power and destructive forces of passionate love. Viewers are engulfed by these powers, suspended outside time for the length of the piece – then liberated back into real-world time, exhausted.

For those who feel inspired to see more of Viola's work, his web site is: [www.billviola.com](http://www.billviola.com)

## Wagner and Friends

- Barbara Brady

No, that is not an oxymoron! Richard Wagner had numerous friends who recognized his genius and admired and supported him - and many of them were steadfast throughout his lifetime, regardless of his habit of seducing their wallets and wives. Those friends who fell by the wayside were the ones who declined on grounds that Wagner could never understand, to pledge yet further funds. Not all of Wagner's penury in his early career was his own fault. Performance copyright law was rudimentary in Germany before 1870 so opera composers were paid only for the first performance of a run whereas the singers were paid for each performance. The lack of copyright protection also meant that music could be pirated, bringing profit to the publisher but none to the composer. This made it difficult for emerging composers to make a living unless they had other means of support. In Wagner's case those means were massive loans, sometimes set against rights to future operas.

Whether the demands he made on his friends served to keep him out of debtors' prison or to sustain a luxurious lifestyle, they were foremost the means to furthering his work, his art. Wagner's attitude was that lenders were quite consciously devoting their money to the artist and his cause. Nothing must stand in his way; he is accused of arrogance, self-centredness, megalomania; but the point is made that had it not been for his driving egotism he may never have found the strength and resilience to realize his artistic ambitions. The creative pursuit of *The Ring of the Nibelung* over twenty six years must have required super-human perseverance and self-belief.

Just as Wagner needed financial patronage, he needed to be approved of and believed in as an artist, and to be loved as a person. His charisma was evidently extraordinary; he was more fond of women than men for the sympathetic

devotion they readily gave, and a handful of affairs and liaisons is documented. In the case of Mathilde Wesendonck there is no doubt of Wagner's infatuation while he was writing *Tristan und Isolde* and calling her his "muse". And yet the unbearable, unresolved yearning portrayed in music of unmatched beauty may never have been possible had Wagner's love for Mathilde been satisfied on the simplest level. Certainly Wagner tried patiently to explain to his wife, Minna, that his relations with Mathilde were purely ideal. This brings us to the quaint vignette of Wagner reading the newly-completed poem (as he called his librettos) of *Tristan* to an intimate group comprising his wife Minna, the object of his love Mathilde Wesendonck, his future wife Cosima, and their respective husbands. A veritable *ménage à six*.

Wagner had a passion for reading the poems of each of his operas aloud to his friends before going ahead with the music, and was so good at it that one story relates how someone actually felt a bit deflated at the performance of the opera *Parsifal* after first having been so affected by Wagner's magnificent reading of the text. It would be another thing to be one of the group listening to a reading of the entire *Ring* in one sitting. Soon after finishing the poem of the *Ring* at the end of 1852, Wagner decided to visit his friends the Willes and read it to the company there. He began one evening with *Das Rheingold*, continued with *Die Walküre* until after midnight, carried on with Siegfried the next morning and finished off with *Götterdämmerung* at night. The Wagner expert, Ernest Newman, adds that the "ladies ventured no comment; Wagner attributing their silence to their having been deeply moved."

This brief foray into Wagner the man and his personal friends is in fact a diversion. The real purpose of this piece is to introduce a new fortnightly series of programmes, going to air on 2MBS-FM from (...time and date...) under the title of *Wagner and Friends*. The word "friends" is simply a convenient catch-all for Wagner's contemporaries, or for composers who





were earlier and later and spun a thread to and from him. Each programme therefore will include works by composers ranging in time from Beethoven to Richard Strauss, and genres from *Singspiel* to grand opera, with some symphonic, choral and instrumental music along the way...

As for Wagner, what can the listener expect from this series? Perhaps it would be reassuring to know what *not* to expect: There is no sign of the Norns, all the long narrations have been sacrificed, and this will not be an illustrated lecture series on the development of Wagner's musical style. Instead it is an opportunity to explore a diversity of Wagner's music: the best-known pieces for a start, but also some surprises such as a sweet cavatina here, or a jolly, blokey song, there and a deliberately light touch when it comes to a problematic music drama such as *Parsifal*; here, for instance, we skip the long prelude and jump straight into a seductive waltz with the Flower Maidens. But of course there is much more: symphonic passages surging up under lyrical melodies, soaring voices, shimmering strings, and some longer scenes where the listener is enticed into the powerful emotion of the music and the drama.

The format is chronological up to the eighth programme, saving the great masterpiece, *The Ring of the Nibelung* for the final four. Rather than taking one music-drama at a time, we have approached the broad themes that are central to the *Ring* - *Nature, Power and Magic, Love* and, finally, *Birth, Death and Redemption*. No prize for guessing that the last moments of the series will be the glorious finale to *Götterdämmerung*.

If you are wondering how to make sense of the *Ring*, with its dwarves, gods, demi-gods, dragons and mortals, there are two answers. First the music links the diverse characters, events and places; it was Wagner's genius which devised the network of musical moments (*Lietmotive*) to bring cohesion to the whole. Secondly, please do go and see a *Ring* cycle. I wouldn't hold my breath for a production in Australia (though the stunning 2004 State Opera of South Australia *Ring* could just possibly be revived in 2012) but there are several European, American and even Asian cities which pride themselves on their *Rings*. You will find dates and venues for future Wagner operas around the world up to 2013 on the Wagner Society's website which can be accessed direct at <http://wagner-nsw.org.au> or by following the links from the 2MBS website.

Finally a warning! Beware of Wagner's "ear-worms", fragments of music that burrow their way into the brain uninvited and repeat themselves incessantly for days on end. For my part, having been embedded with Wagner's music for a considerable time while compiling these programmes, I am hopelessly infected. I can only appeal to Herr Wagner for release. In the words of Brünnhilde: "Ruhe! Ruhe! Du Gott".

[Don't forget, international and interstate Members and readers, that you can also listen to the broadcasts on 2MBS-FM on the Internet at <http://www.2mbs.com.au>.

Editor]



## A Feast of Wagner Around Australia in 2008

– Featuring Australian Wagnerian Soprano Lisa Gasteen

**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*

**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

# President's Report for the Society's 27th Year

From 1 January to 31 December 2007, delivered to the Annual General Meeting on 18 May 2008

Dear Members

I am pleased to present the President's Report for the 27th year of the Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated.

## Functions

The Society's 2007 functions held in the Goethe-Institut included:

- In February, Terence Watson led a discussion group of members who had attended to Toronto and Costa Mesa Ring Cycles in 2006, which was followed by a talk by Terence on "the 'Problem' of Siegfried";
- In March, Robert Gay spoke about Wagner's debt to the model of French Grand Opera;
- In April, Nigel Butterley gave his second talk on music and the Faust legend, entitled "Faust and the Feminine";
- In May, we held our AGM;
- In July, I gave a talk on "Wolfram";
- In September, Professor Heath Lees from the New Zealand Society spoke on "Wagner and Mallarme";
- In October, members who had attended the Bayreuth Festival spoke about their experiences, and about Katharina Wagner's new production of "Die Meistersinger";
- In November, Antony Ernst gave a talk on "Tristan and Isolde" in this Church; and
- In December, we held our end-of-year party.

Prior to some of the meetings, we showed excerpts of DVDs including the film on Wagner's life by Tony Palmer.

## Finances

Following the resolution passed at the 2007 AGM, the 2007 accounts will be audited. I'd like to thank Julie Carroll, who arranged with the firm of Walter Turnbull for this to be completed "pro bono".

## Thanks

We continue our good relations with the German Consulate, the Consul General, and with the Goethe-Institut, and we thank the Institut's Director, Klaus Krischok, and its officers and staff for their continued help and support. We are also continue to provide financial assistance each year to the Bayreuth Scholar, who is selected by Opera Foundation Australia and in 2007 was Warwick Fyfe, a member of the Society, and are very please to be able to support students from the University of Sydney Conservatorium of Music by way of German Language scholarships at the Goethe-Institut.

There are many people in the Society I wish to thank, and foremost among them special thanks go to the members

of your Committee who worked so hard on your behalf throughout 2007 - our Vice President, Julian Block, our Honorary Secretary, Alan Whelan, our Honorary Treasurer, Michael Moore, and our committee members Gaby Bremner-Moore, Terence Watson and Dennis Mather.

I'd particularly like to give Terence Watson, our Newsletter editor, special thanks. I regularly receive favourable comments about the high standard of our Newsletter from members, and from Societies within Australia and overseas, and I'd like to commend Terence for his hard work on our behalf.

Our thanks are due to Renata and Herman Junkers who give so generously of their time to provide the afternoon teas at our functions; to John Studdert our web-master, whose work on the web-site is also the subject of praise from other Societies; to our faithful Ravens, Camron Dyer and Richard Mason; and to Alasdair Beck, our Public Officer. I'd also like to thank those members who come early to our functions and lend a hand with the food or the name tags.

## Finally

And finally I would like to thank you, our members, whose commitment to the Society and support for our functions, including this AGM, ensures that we can continue to provide scholarships and assistance for young artists, including the Bayreuth Scholar, and to further the aims of our Society. Your continuing interest and encouragement is the reason we are here today. Thank you all.

**Roger Cruickshank, President**

## Barrie Kosky Named Director of One of Germany's Leading Opera Houses - Komische Oper.

News reports tell us that Kosky has been appointed as artistic director of the city's Komische Oper from 2012. Kosky has produced a number of operas and popular musicals in the house already, including Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and the Cole Porter musical *Kiss Me Kate*. Kosky is reported as saying: "To be able to create a vision for an opera house in the 21st century is an extreme and wonderful challenge, and one that after 20 years of working in the theatre, I am ready for. I want to build on the great artistic tradition of the house, as well as developing and expanding what the definitions of music theatre are." Apparently, the Komische Oper was named Opera House of the Year by German critics last year. The Komische Oper employs 420 people and has an annual budget of E34 million (\$55.3 million). Berlin audiences may know what to expect of Kosky, but Kosky said the Komische Oper job would allow him infinite possibilities. "Expect the unexpected," he said.



# Review of the Metropolitan Opera *Tristan und Isolde* on 28 March 2008

– Richard Mason

The drama started before curtain-up, as a manager came out on stage to be greeted by groans from the audience. Were Ben Heppner and Deborah Voigt doomed never to unite in song? This cursed run of six performances had already suffered from Ben Heppner cancelling the first four, and Deborah Voigt struggling with three different Tristans, falling ill during Act II of the fourth performance and then cancelling the fifth. However, the manager announced that it was “only good news” as Margaret Jane Wray was ill and to be replaced by Michelle deYoung.

Deborah Voigt was very dramatic and colourful in Act I, in the first part of Act II her voice was rather tight, improved for the softer tones of “O sink herneider”, and produced a superb rich soaring colour for the Act III close. Ben Heppner was astonishing, producing a true heldentenor sound, absolutely firm with ringing high notes on full voice throughout. The love duet was sung in full, without the usual large cut made for Tristan’s benefit. Amazingly, he still had enough voice for an anguished Act III, where the vocal stamina added to the dramatic tension. Certainly the greatest Tristan I have seen, including Vickers, probably the best since Melchior. Both Voigt and Heppner had finely detailed interpretations.

Michelle DeYoung produced a rich colour for a sympathetic Brangäne, Eike Wilm Schulte played a bluff and warm Kurwenal, whilst Matti Salminen brought anguish and deep distress to the role of King Marke. James Levine underplayed the more dramatic moments in the score to instead concentrate on producing a careful and sweeping build-up of sound that became increasingly intense. The opera has probably never been so long nor appeared so short. The production was partly traditional, partly abstract, partly Japanese, partly Eurotrash and partly naff. The Met audience gave a 20 minute standing ovation at the end (at 12.15!) of this magnificent performance, which was still ringing in the ears over a week later.

## Bayreuth Scholarship Report 2007 – Warwick Fyfe

### Brief Summary of Study Tour Activities

**Coachings:** Christopher Squires, Donald Wages

**Lessons:** Deborah Polaski

**Meetings / Encounters:** Martin Cooke, Siro Battaglin, Simon Hewitt, Deborah Humble, Josef Hussek, Paul Kildea, Bettina Kok, Jhrgen May, Toni Post, Alex Soddy, Simone Young

**Opera Performances:** *Tales of Hoffman*, *Rienzi*, *Tristan und Isolde*

**Opera Rehearsals:** *Rosenkavalier*, *Turco in Italia*, *Elektra*

**Backstage visits:** Hamburg Staatsoper, Bavarian State Opera, Cologne Opera

[And then there were a host of art gallery and museum visits as well!]

Warwick’s first working day in Hamburg was very busy, but ended with a fortuitous meeting at dinner: “Resolved to make good on my promise to myself to indulge in some echt German food (which I adore) while here, I made my way determinedly, come dinner time, to a restaurant near the hotel, which had been recommended to me. Superb Schweinhaxe served by waitresses in traditional dress. Could there be a finer or more luscious image of pure bliss? I doubt it. Having demolished my very own pig, I was paying the bill when I realized that Simone Young was sitting at the table behind mine.” To find out what happened next, you can read Warwick’s account on the Wagner Society’s website – [www.wagner-nsw.org.au](http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au).

Members may remember a talk by Antony Ernst in preparation for the Adelaide Ring Cycle in which he spent some time discussing the concept of “Fach”. Warwick encountered this very early in his first auditions at the Hamburg Opera House: I may not be a Heldentenor, but the question remains: What is my Fach? This is an especially pertinent question in Germany because of the dominance of the Fach system.” If you would like to find out more, go to our website.

Warwick was fortunate to watch a “stage orchestral rehearsal of *Der Rosenkavalier* conducted by Simone Young. The moment I entered the auditorium (my carefully secured pass was totally superfluous \*(anyone could have wandered in), I immediately sensed that vibration in the air which bespeaks the specific tension endemic to opera rehearsals where the stakes are high and Brobdignagian personalities abound, lumbering around and crashing into each other.” Warwick continues describing this experience in his characteristically understated, slightly ironic way, with a refreshing candour about his reactions to this and the many other highlights of his working tour. Among his operatic experiences, Warwick introduces



us to his clearly extensive knowledge and love of art through his many visits to galleries and museums that he squeezed in with almost indefatigable delight.

Warwick was also able to meet for some coaching sessions with the Wagnerian soprano Deborah Polaski, who, Members may remember was interviewed by the Australia soprano, Lisa Harper-Brown, at a Society meeting. Warwick's encounter (you have to read the full, self-deprecating account on line to enjoy Warwick's humour) coincided with a "call to say that the folk in Cologne were interested in hearing me with regard to the role of Telramund". Warwick sums up: "This was one of the most exciting experiences of my professional life."

In the course of recounting his experiences in Leipzig watching a production of *Rienzi*, Warwick makes a number of comments about the nature of Wagner's music and his development as an artist (and his own from a brass player to Wagner singer) that are fresh and illuminating and make for further interesting reading. For example: "Later in his career, Wagner (who of course revolutionized harmony) was on record as being very proud of his transitions. Well, at the time of writing *Rienzi*, he was certainly not yet the master of the art of musical transition. He seemed to find fluency in this area (to my ear) abruptly with *Dutchman*, after years of hamfistedness. It was like a lattice of clumsiness was holding his genius down, which could only break through in spurts during the time in which he was laboriously learning his craft, until, with *Dutchman*, this impeding superstructure gave way and the sublime mature music erupted forth with its ideal proportions and expertly judged, inevitable-seeming transitions. I've a good deal of Wagner's juvenilia on CD, and the main thing to be said of it is how astonishingly bad most of it is compared to the immature works of other great composers. *Rienzi* is not a terrible work, and so can to that extent be regarded as transitional, but it is very uneven."

Similarly, Warwick's account of *Garmisch-Partenkirchen: Kneeling at the porcelain altar* of The Richard Strauss Institute is both informative and amusing and one cannot help sympathising with the stomach disorder that threatened to destroy the day completely, but fortunately he was able to engage in an interesting discussion of Strauss's music with the director, Jürgen May who also gave Warwick a personal tour. Warwick's account of his visit to the Bavarian town of Füssen and, of course Ludwig II's castles Hohenschwangau and Neuschwanstein, is fascinating – I for one never knew that Füssen was a old and famous musical instrument making town.

Warwick was then lucky enough to score a ticket to *Tristan und Isolde* and "despite feeling ill, I was too excited at the prospect of seeing the opera described by Birgit Nilsson as the greatest of all, performed where it was premiered back in the days of Ludwig II, for my physical pain to spoil my evening. The lights dimmed and I waited with my heart a-flutter for that first minor sixth interval." Warwick's assessment of the performance, and comparisons with *Rienzi*, for example, are frank and insightful and worth reading in full.

Warwick sums his experience in part by observing: "I think the single most important legacy of this trip is my professional relationship with Deborah Polaski. What we did felt like just the beginning, and there was a real will to see things continue into the indefinite future. I believe that with her support, guidance and wisdom, I can achieve things otherwise beyond me." Again, I would encourage all Members to read the full report. If you do not have access to the Internet, you may be able to prevail on the President to give you a copy to enjoy in the traditional way.

Editor.

## "Young Set to Become Keeper of the Ring in Hamburg"

In his 3 April 2008 article with this title – originally in *The Sunday Times* and reproduced in *The Australian* - Hugh Canning commented on his viewing of the first stage of Hamburg State Opera's Ring Cycle under Simone Young that has begun "with unprecedented backing from the marketing department of the city government, which clearly sees the Hamburg Ring, to be given cyclically in 2011, 2012 and 2013, as an important magnet for visitors from Germany and abroad." Such a sad comparison with Australia where we have the enlightened approach of the South Australian State and the Federal Governments that neither could possibly risk wasting Australian taxpayer funds on re-mounting one of the great Ring Cycles of recent times.

In another sad parallel with Adelaide versus Sydney/Melbourne, Canning notes that "In the years since the collapse of the communist German Democratic Republic, Hamburg has seen its position as the most important German cultural centre after Berlin and Munich superseded by Dresden and Leipzig. The new Ring is a cultural highlight of a huge program of urban regeneration. Its jewel will be a glittering concert hall, residential and hotel complex, the Elbphilharmonie, which will rise, like a crystal crown, on top of the shell of a warehouse at the heart of Hamburg's new HafenCity (Harbour City)." Ah, Australia Felix – not! Could one imagine anyone in Australia, any more, imagining an Australian city being revitalised through a major commitment to the arts? No! Instead, in NSW we have calls for road races and huge scale convention and entertainment facilities. And a major architect's proposal to give us a proper Opera House under the Botanical Gardens is bagged rather than provoking a critical discussion about the merits of the proposal and a serious debate on the alternatives.

For those of us who might be able to travel to Hamburg, Canning notes that the "Hamburg Ring will be seen complete after the opening of the Elbphilharmonie, but the artistic portents are promising. It is always difficult to judge a Ring from Das Rheingold - the





most action-packed and director-friendly component of the cycle - but Claus Guth's witty, ironic staging, which opens with nymphet Rhinemaidens in soiled pink nighties cavorting on a huge bed, and transports us to a mountain eyrie where Wotan and his middle-class family plot world domination, bodes well for the production." I for one, would love to see Guth's interpretation of the Ring after enjoying his Bayreuth Dutchman.

Giving us a further insight into the success of the Hamburg *Rheingold* and the future of the rest of the Ring, Canning writes that "Young, an experienced Wagnerian, favours a swift, eventful unfolding of Wagner's more than two-hour span and lucid orchestral textures. Her Hamburg ensemble supplies superb Rhinemaidens, imposing giants and a lustrous young Erda (Deborah Humble), and she needs only two guests: the authoritative Falk Struckmann as Wotan and the hugely promising Wolfgang Koch, one of the rising generation of young Wagnerians, as a formidable, raging Alberich. The later Ring operas bring Lisa Gasteen as Brünnhilde and Christian Franz as Siegfried: central casting, perhaps, but with the multiplicity of Rings in the offing, casting options are few." Your Editor has put this cycle in his diary and only needs to save desperately (and be lucky enough to score tickets)! See you there!

## Wagner Revisited via the *Stendhal Syndrome*

Past issues of this Newsletter have carried articles about the impact that Wagner has had on other artists, mainly poets and dramatists. This time we look at Terrence McNally's play *The Stendhal Syndrome*. Members may be familiar with McNally's very successful 1995 play *Masterclass*, based on Maria Callas' masterclasses at the Julliard School of Music in New York City. That play also had a very successful season at the Sydney Theatre Company with Robyn Nevin giving a powerful performance as the Diva.

Around 1995 McNally also wrote a one-act play *Prelude and Liebestod* and then around 2003 wrote a companion piece *Full Frontal Nudity* as meditations of the overwhelming impact art can have on people. This is the so-called Stendhal Syndrome. Wikipedia provides this useful description: "Stendhal syndrome, Stendhal's syndrome or Florence syndrome, is a psychosomatic illness that causes rapid heartbeat, dizziness, confusion and even hallucinations when an individual is exposed to art, usually when the art is particularly 'beautiful' or a large amount of art is in a single place. The term can also be used to describe a similar reaction to a surfeit of choice in other circumstances, e.g. when confronted with immense beauty in the natural world. It is named after the famous 19th century French author Stendhal (pseudonym of Henri-Marie Beyle), who described his experience with the phenomenon during his 1817 visit to Florence, Italy in his book *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to Reggio.*"



*Full Frontal Nudity* is McNally's explicit exploration of this Syndrome, but rendered ironically and satirically through the thoughts and words of three American tourists being introduced to Michelangelo's David by a tour guide named Bimbi and so sensitive that after years of daily exposure David still takes her breath away. She leads a widowed, retired English teacher of uncertain sexuality, Mr. Charlotte (!); Leo Sampson, a foul-mouthed macho punk; and Lana Maxwell, a dumb blonde who doesn't even know there was such a biblical figure. The tourists present a range of emotions and reactions from the punk's penis insecurities through Mr Charlotte's embarrassment with nakedness to the genuine Stendhal experience of the guide.

*Prelude and Liebestod*, on the other hand, uses two rounds of Wagner's music as the backdrop to a the characters thoughts: "The piece is set in a concert hall during a performance of Richard Wagner's *Prelude and Liebestod* from *Tristan and Isolde* and consists of five interlocking monologues -- by the famous gay Conductor (Larry Eisenberg), his frustrated Wife (Jayne Clement), the tetchy Concertmaster (Klair Bybee), the nervous Soprano (Roberta Orlandi), and a Young Man (Matt Ryan) who's hell-bent on seducing the maestro. Eisenberg, as the breathtakingly egocentric Conductor, brilliantly carries the weight of the piece in a long series of soliloquies, which he must deliver while conducting Wagner. It's a daunting exercise in split focus, requiring him to maintain his constant connection to the music, while delivering a complex, coruscating series of reminiscences, self-examinations, and a musical orgasm that ends in a colossal emotional meltdown.

McNally explained his approach in an interview for the 2004 performance: "how art can affect us emotionally, psychological, erotically" – hence the Stendhal Syndrome. McNally also notes that the music was not intended to dominate, but to set the tone and to engage the sensual/sensuous response of the audience to this powerful music for his own ends – a kind of piggy-backing on Wagner's work. Later in this interview, McNally tells us: ". It was always my intention that the second time he does [the piece, within the play] the music pretty much fades out and he stops conducting and we go into his inner life. The audience, you ask them to accept the conceit that we're going into this very intense interior monologue now. But he's still communicating with his wife and the young man and the concertmaster and the soprano through looks."

McNally also elucidated what he saw as the link between the sexually explicit content of his characters' thoughts and Wagner's music-drama: "It's graphic and I think honest and ultimately moving: a man so lost in an impossible moment for anyone to live in which is that incredible moment of supreme ecstasy which is Liebestod, which happens to Wagnerian characters in love. They become so overwhelmed that they die, literally. It's very strange and I think that music famously is prolonged foreplay before orgasm. That chord that's started in the very beginning of the Prelude does not resolve itself until the last note of the soprano and cadenza in the orchestra. I think it's pretty clear to me what Wagner was writing about and it

was shocking in its day. It just seemed the ideal piece of music to write about."

Another review from 1989 gives us a more specific idea of the play and of McNally's indebtedness to Wagner's seminal work: "As [the music] begins, quietly and full of eloquent pauses, the Conductor begins a monologue, speaking his thoughts aloud. At first they are merely conventional expressions of self-satisfaction: "I never met anyone as interesting as me," he says. He basks in the attention of the hall, of the Wife, of the young Man.

As the music grows in complexity and feeling, so too does the conductor's soliloquy. It becomes an aria, following the moods of the music, peaking and receding, filling with anger, loneliness, sexual hunger, loathing. "What is transfiguration but an orgasm coupled with a heart attack," he cries. The other characters also speak their minds, but they are only single instruments; their voices and thoughts join through the conductor in this symphony of human feeling. [Actor Larry] Bryggman's solo [as the Conductor] is a virtuosos piece, by turns elevated and vulgar, sublime and profane, summoning and purging pity and fear, combining the little death of sex and the bigger

one that follows life." Another reviewer noted: "Still, as the Conductor leads his orchestra and a young soloist through pieces from "Tristan und Isolde," simultaneously conducting an internal monologue to the swirls of Wagner, Mr. Thomas [the Conductor in this performance] makes it clear that this nasty, strutting egomaniac is rising to heavenly heights. His intensity rivals the production's recorded music. Great art, it seems, does not require purity of soul from those who create it or, for that matter, from those who experience it."

McNally's work also seems to open up a Pandora's Box of ethical and artistic problems of appropriating works of art for one's own ends. At the worst, we hear and see great works of art debased in advertising designed to sell us some dubious product. At the best, such appropriation can make us see the work or art in a new light and, ideally, learn to appreciate it more.

Sadly there does not seem to have been any local performances, but perhaps one of our more adventurous theatre companies could be encouraged to schedule *The Stendhal Syndrome* for 2013, Wagner's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday??

## It Ain't Over Until the Iguana Sings

On 20 June 2008, under this heading, Chris Henning wrote a very entertaining article on the shenanigans at the Iguana Restaurant on the Central Coast of NSW that occupied far too much press space and media time in the past few weeks. In a lovely pastiche, which shows considerable familiarity with the convoluted political machinations of Wagner's Ring Cycle, Henning drew telling and funny parallels between the politics of Valhalla and of the NSW Labor Party on the Central Coast. The following will give you a taste.

**Die Slabberdammerung (Twilight of the Slabs)** The Slablords, Siegdella and his lady, Belinhilde, are partying at a castle with Central Coast friends, known as the Woymaidens, when the Iguana appears, singing the rollicking drinking song *Move, Move. We Need Your Table*. Belinhilde, who knows sorcery, tries her most powerful spell in the well-known aria ---- *Off, ----head*. But her spell goes awry, and she succeeds only in conjuring up the greedy twins Faffen and Fupfa, who covet the Woygold. They join Belinhilde in the tremendous *Me ---- Off? ---- Off Yourself, Bitch*. As the three battle for supremacy, Siegdella tries to intervene, brandishing his sacred sword Rightwing, and singing the famous aria *My Wife Is A Saint. I Have The Numbers To Prove It*, but Faffen accuses him of hallucinating in the powerful duet *Youse Must Be Off Your Face (I'm Cutting Youse Off)*....Belinhilde... sets fire to the restaurant and marches out with the Woymaidens singing the curse song *Lizard, Your Redevelopment Plans Are Toast*....At its climax, the sword Rightwing shatters, and at that moment the Iguana recognises Siegdella as a true hero, and is filled with remorse.

Henning's article included a synopsis of the action of two more acts. Rather against Wagner's principles, but perhaps as a sop to the mediapack, Henning couldn't resist inserting a ballet: "Dance of the F twins (ballet). Faffen and Fupfa leap about in front of TV cameras, mocking Belinhilde and Siegdella obscenely, and brandishing their stat decs".

Unfortunately, the article seems to have disappeared from the Herald's website. Perhaps Mr Henning could be tempted to expand on the continuing relevance of the political aspects of the Ring Cycle with a talk to the Society?

(Apologies to interstate and international readers to whom the above will seem bizarre. I can assure you that the plot of **Die Slabberdammerung** is no more convoluted or unbelievable than the behaviour of the right wing of the NSW Labor Party when it is having a great night out.) [Editor]



**Application Form for Tickets to the Bayreuth Festival 2009**  
Through the **Wagner Society** in NSW Inc.

<b>Holding Deposit</b>	<b>\$2,500 incl \$100 handling fee*</b>	<b>\$2,500 incl \$100 handling fee*</b>
	<b>Applicant 1</b>	<b>Applicant 2</b>
<b>Name</b>		
<b>Address</b>		
<b>Phone</b>		<b>(Day)</b> <b>(Night)</b>
<b>Membership No</b>		
<b>Signature/s</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Tick the box</b> if you wish to be allocated the <b>less expensive</b> tickets of those allocated to the Society.	
*Based on the average cost of last year's allocation of sets of tickets plus 10% to cover ticket price increases. The Society levies a \$100 charge to cover administrative and related costs.		

At the AGM on 21 May 2006, Members agreed to change the process for balloting the sets of tickets the Society receive from the Bayreuth Festival Office. Preference will now be given to Members of two or more years standing who have not, within the past five years, received tickets to Bayreuth through the Society. Otherwise, the process for applications for sets of tickets for the Festival in 2007 has not changed, and is:

1. any member of the Society may apply for 1 set of tickets in her or his own name and must forward a cheque for \$2,500 with their application form.
2. two members with a shared membership may apply for one set of tickets in each of their names (ie two sets of tickets for the two members) and must forward a cheque for \$5,000 with their application form;
3. application forms and cheques must reach the Society (at its GPO Box address) by **Sunday, 30 September 2007**;
4. in December, the Society expects to receive advice of the number of sets of tickets that have been allocated. If the Society receives all the tickets that were applied for, then a ballot will be held to allocate the seats among the successful applicants as follows:
  - a. Applicants who are members of two or more years standing who have not within the past five years received tickets through the Society will be balloted first;
  - b. other applicants of two or more years standing will be balloted second; and
  - c. the remaining applicants will be balloted last.
5. Cheques from successful applicants will be banked, and each successful applicant notified of their seat numbers (and given a refund or asked for further money as required.).
6. if the Society receives fewer tickets than were applied for, then a ballot will be held to determine which applicants will be successful, and their seat allocation. The same process will be followed as in "4", except that cheques will be returned to unsuccessful applicants.



## **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)**