

# The Wagner Society



IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Newsletter No. 113, October 2008

## President's Report

Dear Members

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter for 2008.

There's been a change to our programme for the rest of the year. Unfortunately, our planned meeting at the Opera Centre in November, which was to have been hosted by Ms Sharna Flowers, has been cancelled. Sharna was to have returned to Opera Australia from maternity leave in July, but for personal reasons was unable to do so. We wish her and her family well.

Our next function is on **Sunday 19 October**, when Associate Professor Goetz Richter, Chair of the Strings Unit at the Conservatorium of Music, Sydney, will speak on Wagner and Nietzsche. When great friendships sour, the consequences are often bizarre, and we shall undoubtedly hear an extract or two from one of the more famous results of Nietzsche's split from Wagner's circle, Nietzsche's new favourite opera, *Carmen*.

Our final function for the year is our Christmas party on **Sunday 30 November**.

### Past Functions

#### (1) July – Peter Bassett

On Sunday 20 July, Peter Bassett gave a fascinating talk on that "other" Sachs opera, Albert Lortzing's comic opera *Hans Sachs*, and its influences on Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*. Peter's talk, richly illustrated with pictures from the period and extracts from both works, showed the connections between Lortzing's and Wagner's circles, and the coincidences between the two works. While it's unlikely that Wagner attended a performance of *Hans Sachs*, which was written and first performed in 1840, he was fond of the music of Lortzing's *Zar und Zimmermann*, and used to play and sing extracts for his own amusement.

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*Die Meistersinger* was first sketched in 1845, but not finished in 1867.

The presence of quarter of a million pilgrims gathered nearby, Tannhäuser-like, at the final gathering for "World Youth Day", and the attendant road closures, had none of the feared impacts, and after our function a group of us took Peter to a performance of Eglebert Humperdinck's recently-rediscovered four-hand piano arrangement of extracts from *Parsifal*, in the Utzon Room at the Opera House. Two of the four hands were provided by Simone Young, with Elke Neidhardt providing the narration in German. This was followed by a lively meal with 10 members of the Society at a nearby restaurant, to celebrate Peter's birthday.

#### (2) August – Lisa-Harper Brown and Warwick Fyfe, with Stephen Mould

On Sunday 31 August, Lisa Harper-Brown and Warwick Fyfe gave a wonderful recital, accompanied by Stephen Mould at the piano, of various solo arias, and duets for soprano and baritone. Highlights for me included a sublime rendition of Dvorak's "Song to the Moon" from *Rusalka*,

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## For Your **Diary**

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

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

DATE	EVENTS - 2008	TIME & LOCATION
October 19	Goetz Richter (A/Prof. Strings- Chair, String Unit, Sydney Conservatorium) will talk on Nietzsche and Wagner	2pm Goethe Institut
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**

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## 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: There have been no donations since 1 July 2008.

## New Members

The following people joined the Society:

The following people joined the Society: Louis Garrick [0971], John Sanders [0972], Stephen Whale [0973], and Alan Freeman [0974].



## President's Report continued

which Lisa had sung in 2002 at the recital she gave to the Society with Stuart Skelton, and a delightful early Wagner aria in French, which Warwick had prepared specially for the recital. (It was composed for money in one of Wagner's many dark moments in the French capital, before he found a more reliable source of income from borrowing.)

Duets for soprano and baritone are rare but often splendid, and Lisa and Warwick sang the Aida-Amonasro and Senta-Dutchman duets, one of which required Warwick to hurl Lisa rather violently to the floor at one point, a well-rehearsed move which they both survived.

Lisa was in Sydney to cover the role of Donna Anna in an Opera Australia production of *Don Giovanni*, in which Warwick sang the role of Leporello, and she organised the recital and programme for us. Unhappily, it was poorly attended, with at best 10 Society members among the 37 at the recital, for a variety of reasons. We had some difficulty securing a venue, and we were only able to confirm the use of St Stephens Uniting Church in Macquarie Street, which is frequently used for concerts and recitals because of its bright acoustic, a week or so before the recital. Lisa's husband Michael Paget, who was in Berlin at the time, designed a flyer which Lisa and friends handed out to the audience at performances of *Don Giovanni*, but despite this effort and the private efforts of members and other music societies, the recital didn't attract the audience that singing of this standard should be able to command. An American tourist, who had been given a flyer at the Opera House, expressed her amazement at the quality of the singing, and the absence of an audience.

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

On Sunday 14 September at the Paddington Uniting Church, Dr Robert Gibson gave the first part of a talk on the life and music of Richard Strauss. Robert described the early influence of Strauss's father, Franz Joseph Strauss, principal horn with the Munich Court Orchestra. While Franz's loathing for Wagner and his music was such that he was the only member of that orchestra who refused to stand in commemoration when Wagner died, he took the younger Strauss to Bayreuth in 1882 to hear *Parsifal*, conducted by Wagner, as a reward for academic achievement (where the two Richards came face to face, but did not speak.) The second part of Robert's talk will be given next year, and perversely it will include a discussion on the influence of Richard Strauss on Richard Wagner.

I've always been a sucker for a good tune, and as a result of an extract Robert played at the conclusion of his talk, I now have a copy of *Guntram*, Strauss's first opera, which I like enough not to offer as a prize in the Christmas raffle. (This sad tendency has its limits. You may rest assured, gentle reader, that no matter what lovely tunes from *Carmen* Herr Richter plays in his talk on Wagner and Nietzsche, I don't expect to rush out and buy another raffle prize.)

### (4) September 28 – Christopher Brodrick

On Sunday 28 September at the Goethe-Institut, Christopher Brodrick, President of the Wagner Society of New Zealand, took us on an extraordinary illustrated journey entitled "Wagner and the Visual Arts". The journey began for Chris a few years ago when he unexpectedly encountered Renoir's portrait of Wagner in the Musée D'Orsay in Paris. (Renoir wrote to a friend that, on seeing the portrait, Wagner said "Ah! Ah! It's true that I look like a Protestant minister"). Chris's presentation came from years of research he completed on his return to New Zealand, and as well as detailed discussions of the works of four artists – Henri Fantin Latour, Aubrey Beardsley, Arthur Rackham and Wassily Kandinsky - included a fascinating audio-visual interlude which Chris had prepared, matching Rackham's 60-odd colour illustrations for the *Ring* with musical extracts from the scenes they depict, a sort of continuous visual degustation with matching music.

That evening, we had a hilarious dinner with Chris and his partner, Sylvia Dixon, where some of the day's themes were pursued in more irreverent surroundings.

### Bayreuth 2009

We will be applying for tickets to the following performances at Bayreuth in August 2009: the *Ring* (third cycle) on Th20, F21, Su23 and Tu25, *Meistersinger* W26, *Parsifal* Th27 and *Tristan* F28.

On 27 July 2008, members were able to watch 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*. Some members who signed up for this service were unfamiliar with the picture format, which was a fixed size occupying a relatively small portion of the screen, and could not be enlarged to occupy the whole screen. (This appeared to be similar technology to the "flash" video format used by You-Tube.) There were also some adverse comments on the clarity of the picture, which compared very unfavourably with the high definition broadcasts now seen in movie theatres, for example from the New York Metropolitan Opera, La Scala and the San Francisco Opera.

At this stage we expect that another Bayreuth performance will be broadcast in 2009, and that the quality of the sound and picture will improve each year.

### Flying Dutchman in Melbourne

I attended a superb concert performance of *Der fliegende Holländer* in Melbourne on Saturday 31 August. I thought that the Senta of Gabriele Maria Ronge, who replaced an indisposed Lisa Gasteen at short notice, was superb, and that the cast including John Wegner (Dutchman), Stuart Skelton (Erik), a heavily-pregnant Sian Pendry (Mary), and Bjarni Kristinsson (Daland) were generally outstanding. While I found Oleg Caetani's tempi a little slow, the Melbourne Symphony under his direction produced a wonderfully lyrical sound.



## President's Report continued

Ronge had previously performed the role of Senta in a production in 2004 at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, with Caetani conducting and Bjarni Kristinsson as Daland, so she wasn't unfamiliar with the ensemble.

John Wegner seemed uncomfortably restricted in a concert performance. This most physical of singing actors rocked backwards and forwards and shifted his weight as he stood, as if he might leap across the stage at any moment.

While I accept that I'm often inclined to let my enthusiasm carry me away – even Lady Bracknell was susceptible to draughts - I was surprised by the frequent comments of friends and Society members I spoke to in Melbourne, and later here in Sydney, who didn't share my enthusiasm for the quality of the singers. I accept that in any live performance there will be ugly sounds and occasional muffled notes, which is the price we pay for listening to human beings. Even the greatest singers succumb to this. But overall, although Ronge may have been affected by a cold, the performance was well beyond the ordinary, and overall quite superb.

Superb, but not perfect. I wasn't impressed by the single interval we endured, and recalled another performance many years ago in Melbourne, where an interval was inserted so that players wouldn't breach their contracts by playing more than two hours without a break. I also wasn't impressed with the male choirs, the Melbourne Chorale and men of the Victorian Opera Chorus, who for me didn't produce the depth and intensity of sound I expected from their numbers.

But the thing which impressed me least was the venue. This was my first experience of the Hamer Hall, a tragic venue more crippled by poor design than our own dear Concert Hall in the Opera House, if that's possible. Perspex Frisbees, which creates a false ceiling to allow musicians to hear the sounds they produce, hung shamefully above the orchestra, mirroring our own Perspex donuts in the Concert Hall. I was told that the air-conditioning blows air down the throats of singers, who frequently get sick during a season in the hall, or afterwards; that there is a plan to close the hall for 15 months or more to rectify the problems; and so on.

I attended two performances of the Dutchman in Melbourne. For the first, on Thursday 29 August, I secured an A-reserve seat over the internet, one of the worst seats I have had at any musical event. The rows curve in the Hamer, and the front four rows had been taken out and the stage extended to cope with the size of orchestra. This made F row alarmingly close to the front. I was four seats from the end of that row, which curved so far forward that I was virtually in line with the singers. When John Wegner rocked forwards, I lost sight of the conductor and any other singers sharing the stage at the time. The sound was an unbalanced travesty. With a touch of the Ronald Reagans, I wanted to shout out

"Tear down this Hall, Mr Caetani!" But a good seat and a glorious performance on Saturday night was the best revenge.

### Flying Dutchman in Adelaide in 2009?

In 2009, State Opera South Australia is rumoured to be staging performances of *Der fliegende Holländer* with members of this cast – John Wegner as the Dutchman and Stuart Skelton as Erik – and with Margaret Medlyn as Senta. The State Opera's 2009 programme has not yet been confirmed, but we're quietly confident that we will see Wagner again in that superbly festival city.

Although not all the opera companies have released their 2009 programmes, this looks likely to be the only Wagner production in 2009 in Australia.

### 2008 Bayreuth Scholar

While in Melbourne, I had lunch with the young opera director and winner of the 2008 Bayreuth Scholarship, Cameron Menzies. Over Peking Duck, Cameron and I discussed his wish to produce works which will never end up as raffle prizes, such as Gounod's *Faust*. During his scholarship visit to Germany, Cameron has secured contracts to work on the Deutsche Oper Berlin's production of *Tannhäuser*, alongside director Kirsten Harms, and with the Köln Oper and Hamburg Oper. He's agreed to give the Society a talk next year about his experiences in Germany, although he admitted to being rather intimidated by the quality and capaciousness of Warwick Fyfe's written report as 2007 Bayreuth Scholar, and is unlikely to try to match it.

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

The series of programmes compiled by Barbara Brady entitled "Wagner and Friends" continues on the first and third Tuesday of every month at 2.30 - 4.00 pm. These programmes share selections from Richard Wagner's music (mainly opera, with some symphonic and choral extracts) with composers who were either contemporaries or had some link with Wagner, and are presented by Gwynn Roberts. The schedule for the remaining programmes is:

(Programme 8) 21 October - Parsifal

(Programme 9) 04 November - Nature in the Ring

(Programme 10) 18 November - Power and Magic in the Ring

(Programme 11) 02 December - Love in the Ring

(Programme 12) 16 December - Birth, Death and Redemption in the Ring.

Our Society is proud to sponsor these programmes, and I'd like once again to congratulate 2MBSFM for its decision to commission this series, and to congratulate Barbara Brady for her work in compiling it.

**Roger Cruickshank**  
9 October 2008





# Beyond Celebration: A Rebirth of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth 2008

- Katie French

It is so easy to feel distinctly outside Time arriving in Bayreuth, two air flights and three train trips after leaving Australia. The centre of town is such a beautiful time-warp of cobble stones, of window boxes and gardens of jasmine and lavender petunias, where 'real time' begins at 4pm when that day's opera begins. Walking up the path through the flower gardens to the *Festspielhaus*, with the dappled sunlight glinting through leaves just taking on their golden autumn shades, one could almost believe one was crossing that mythical 'rainbow bridge' on the way to Valhalla! There is such a sense of excitement, an excitement captured by the celebratory fanfare of the brass from the balcony of the hall.

This is to be Stefan Herheim's new production of *Parsifal* (an opera which we've seen previously only on video). In this recreation of the mythical tale of the Kingdom of the Grail, and its dispirited knights, threatened by the magical powers of the envious magician, Klingsor, and his irresistible seductress, Kundry, and in desperate need of redemption by an 'innocent fool', are we going to be challenged, delighted, or confounded - as many were by Katharina Wagner's production of *Die Meistersinger* the previous evening?

These comments provide no musicologist's analysis or professional critique of the opera. They are a recollection of the images and music so excitingly presented that they still swirl through the mind.

Audience members become aware immediately that we are not just here to celebrate but to be challenged, when the curtain opens on the first notes of the Prelude. From the very beginning, and throughout the Prelude, in what becomes a hallmark of Herheim's production, a series of unexpected images is presented to an increasingly enthralled audience.

The establishing scene, unanticipated and initially puzzling, is not the forest and castle of Montsalvat, home of the Guardians of the Grail, not a gathering of robed knights and squires. The curtains have opened to reveal, in the foreground, a beautifully furnished room, the central focus of which is an enormous bed. Household staff, (a butler whom we recognize as the singer who will become Gurnemanz, and a maid who will become Kundry!), numerous officials and a doctor, all wearing large, grey wings, flutter anxiously around a sick room.

On her deathbed lies a flaming-haired Herzeleide, (unnervingly resembling both the ferocious, red-haired female warrior, *Germania*, in von Kaulbach's huge painting above the mantel of the room, and

a determinedly seductive Kundry). She opens her arms ardently, only to be rejected by her young son, Parsifal, self-absorbed with a wooden horse and a bow and arrow.

He runs out into a garden, and the audience becomes aware of a magnificent home set in beautiful grounds among trees. The house is identifiably *Wahnfried*, Wagner's own place of 'Freedom from folly and delusion'. (How ironic the naming of that home will become over the course of the opera.) Reflective surfaces and mirrors expand this environment so that there is a destabilising notion of illusion and reflection mixed with reality.

The focus then slips back to the bed (a multi-function site throughout the production, alternating as Herzeleide's deathbed, the scene of Kundry's seduction of Amfortas and the attempted seduction of Parsifal, and a sign of the collapse of the never-ending cycle of death and rebirth with its own destruction in Act III). We also slip back in time to the very bloody birth of Herzeleide's child, Parsifal, hovered over by both religious and state dignitaries, who triumphantly hold him aloft as a clear hope, almost a trophy.

A celebration of the fashionable bourgeoisie begins to take place among the trees in the garden of *Wahnfried*, all elegant participants, including children, wearing enormous soft grey wings.

Questions immediately begin to demand answers. Are these beautiful people angels; good angels or dark birds of evil, exemplified by the eagles on the flag of the German Empire? How do we interpret them? How do they picture themselves: as part of some mythical race of winged heroes? Are there parallels between the Knights of the Grail of this opera, and these people and their beliefs? Is this smart set the embodiment of some sort of movement, some spirit of nationalism which centres on *Wahnfried* as their Grail Temple? Are they, too, like the Grail Knights, hoping for a redeemer, someone who will restore Germany's sense of self, its national pride - a modern Parsifal?

Is this to be an allegorical interpretation in which the two communities are examined in the light of each other - played off against each other? Will they perhaps share a Redeemer: or could there also be a Dark Redeemer?

Perhaps to assist in the unravelling of these questions, another focus exists on the stage, a pond and fountain in *Wahnfried's* garden, and, in the extreme forefront, the ivy-covered tomb of Wagner, decorated with flowers of remembrance. Various participants come to converse with the tomb and build strange little mud brick walls (in the manner of Rene Magritte's painting *The Cultural Conversation* which has appeared on a screen [you can see an image at [www.abcgallery.com/M/magritte/magritte58.html](http://www.abcgallery.com/M/magritte/magritte58.html) - Editor].) Why do they come? Is this to be a 'conversation' about culture and nationalism, or is this just a brick wall where the conversation is closed? During the opera it is both.



Herheim then contrasts these Prelude images of this positive, self-satisfied, confident, ambitious society with the focus of the opera-proper, the decayed and dispirited world of the Grail Knights, who had been entrusted with the guardianship of the holy relics of the Grail and the Spear as symbols of the strength of their faith. Overconfident of his ability to defeat Klingsor, Amfortas, the community's new leader, proved unable to resist the sexual charms of Kundry. Now, bloodied by the Spear and crippled, Amfortas embodies the suffering and guilt brought to the community by the loss of its sacred relic and his own sacred purity. The circumference of his head has been transformed into a crown of thorns, with savage black protuberances emerging from his skull.

Into this suffering, defeated world the bumptious, artless Parsifal arrives, still bearing the bow and arrow of his childhood, and wearing his bourgeois sailor suit. On a swift learning curve, he is rapidly confronted with the consequences of brute force by a now transformed Gurnemanz.

As the stage transforms splendidly into the Temple of Montsalvat, an uncomprehending Parsifal watches the Grail Knights yearning for the solace of the Eucharist, demanding their 'love feast'. Then startlingly, in a perversion of its intention, they are subsequently refreshed by its 'fiery blood of life', and transformed both by archival film footage projected onto the internal walls of a newly-appeared *Wahnfried*, and on the stage itself, into aggressive, battle-ready German warriors, imbued with nationalistic fervour. Black-booted, grey-uniformed, armed, carrying their eagle-emblazoned ensign, they storm from the stage.

Even during this depiction of the period of the Empire of Wilhelm II, one is reminded of Hitler and his cult of Pure Blood. The two communities echo each other: Europe's collapse into World War I mirroring the collapse of the community of the Grail.

Somewhat in the role of Parsifal, the innocent fool, the audience too, at the end of that first act, hardly knows what it has seen. It has been so stunning. The first Act received rapturous applause and conversation was at fever-pitch even before the audience left the theatre.

Clearly, Herheim brings to the audience a multi-layered interpretation of *Parsifal*, with ambiguous visual imagery, a slippage of time between past and present, a slippage of characters – one into another - and interwoven stories: of the infant, Parsifal, growing from child to Redeemer of the community of the Grail; of the history of Germany from the late nineteenth century Empire until the reconstruction of the 1950s; and of the history of the Bayreuth Festival itself, and its susceptibility for some responsibility as a central focus of nationalism, politics and culture.

Is the production challenging? Definitely. Is it 'appropriate'? Wagner's brief was to challenge, to incorporate theatrical innovations. His concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that 'total work of art', is exploited to the full by Herheim not only in his use of paintings of Wagner's day for example,

for background, popular mood and costume; but actual paintings in the set reveal the prevailing fervour of a range of historical times; and both archival and new film convey the passionate nationalism of the soldiers of the German Empire, the Nazi era, and the despondency of post-WWII destruction.

And all is held in place by the music. The music of *Parsifal* could never take a back seat, and conductor Daniele Gatti, weaves a mesmerising spell, complementing and almost demanding the alluring imagery. The exemplary voices are never overwhelmed by the stunning imagery, and the characters appear totally comfortable in their challenging portrayals.

This is not to say that all the interpretations work perfectly. In Act II, the vengeful Klingsor's magic garden is transformed into a semi-circular military hospital ward which might well have been based on the imagery of the German artist, Otto Dix, the anti-war 'degenerate' artist most loathed by Hitler. Disfigured and deluded modern-day Grail Knights, victims of the seductive propaganda of heroic national fervour, lie battered and deformed, all needs, sexual and emotional, tended to by a ward full of compliant nurses and feathered cabaret dancers in the roles of 'flower maidens'.

It is a Frankenstein image that Dix might well have admired. However, the overlord is a raunchy Klingsor, who emerges from an enormous mirror over the mantel in *Wahnfried* as Frank-N-Furter of the 'Rocky Horror Show'. Black-winged, platinum blond-wigged, long limbs clad in black mesh stockings, patent stilettos, satin dinner jacket worn over satin shorts and the most alluring of red lips – Klingsor presents a stunning image. It is wonderful theatre. However, it is a disappointingly misguided interpretation of this vital, vindictive, vengeful manipulator. This is **not** what Klingsor is about.

Klingsor is no seductive Gay icon, revelling in the Mardi Gras or the Cabaret. (His seductions are performed on his behalf by the long-suffering Kundry, as punishment.) Desperate to become a holy Knight of the Grail, he had castrated himself in a desperate attempt to control his wayward sexuality. This bloody, desperate act of self-loathing saw him expelled from the Grail community upon which he then determined to wreak revenge by creating a garden of seduction in which the Knights would fall victim to their carnal passions. To portray Klingsor as the raving transvestite transsexual from Transylvania is to use a tired and inappropriate cliché.

By contrast, Kundry as seductress is brilliantly interpreted. Appearing initially on the balcony of *Wahnfried*, encircled within the heraldic medallion of the Grail Community where the white swan formerly appeared, she is transformed into the sex goddess Marlene Dietrich in her role as the Blue Angel. When she fails to seduce Parsifal in this persona, seemingly by sleight of hand she metamorphoses into the red-haired Herzeleide, then Germania, then Kundry herself in increasingly desperate attempts to seduce, to persuade, to gain pity.



The physically slight Mihoko Fujimura as Kundry seemed almost to change her form according to her various methods of seduction. Her sometimes brittle voice soared and plunged, cajoled and cursed. She was at her decadent best. One wonders how Parsifal could have denied her compassion – except for the awful epiphany he undergoes, the pain of Amfortas' torture of desire. Parsifal's resolution to reject her is reinforced by what appeared to be images of a uniformed Amfortas in the dock, perhaps at a war trial, blazoned on a back screen. Was he being tried as unworthy guardian of the Grail or as unworthy upholder of a perverted German spirit?

It was the final confrontation between Klingsor and Parsifal which polarised many. As the Spear thrown by Klingsor was wielded by Parsifal in the shape of the cross, there was an instantaneous collapse of Klingsor's domain, and an immediate, synchronous explosion all over the stage of Third Reich banners of red complete with swastikas. The stage was overrun by goose-stepping, jack-booted, leather-clad storm troopers, as a golden boy from the Hitler Youth emerged from the centre of the stage pond. Some enthusiastic booing erupted. Was it caused by embarrassment, or the shock of recognition?

'Too gimmicky', some were heard to say. (Perhaps they had not read the programme notes in which it was outlined how Hitler had submitted set designs for the new 1934 production of *Parsifal*, or that Radio Munich had been using the Grail motif as its call sign since May, 1933!)

Act III seemed not only slow in tempo: it seemed the most problematically realised. The first notes of the Prelude revealed not the expected spring landscape in the domain of the Grail, but a bombed *Wahnfried*, post World War II. Magritte's *Cultural Conversation* was again displayed, this time photographically on the back screen, immediately followed by a depiction of Wagner's death mask. Clearly we were to confront Wagner's War responsibility, should there be one. Were his works subject to use or abuse, or not; did the *Festspielhaus* provide a focus of reverence for the members of the Cult of Blood?

With the most deliberate slowness, Parsifal appears to Gurnemanz and Kundry as the Knight in full regalia, showing all the marks of the trials to which Kundry's curse has condemned him. He places his armour in the centre of *Wahnfried's* pool which literally swallows it. The glowing Grail spear is plucked from the centre of the destroyed fountain, and fresh water flows as new life.

The Mary Magdalene washing-of-the-feet scene and Kundry's blessing by Parsifal at least signify that her perpetual swirling in turmoil round the earth in birth after rebirth, seeking redemption for her lack of compassion is finally over. However, it all seems so anti-climactic.

Then a second proscenium arch is rolled onto the stage, within the main stage, its footlights thrown back onto the audience. A dread thought begins to form: please don't let this become an 'All the world's a stage and, as the audience, you've become the players'- kind

of production! This awful thought is confirmed when a huge circular mirror with grid lines hinges into place. The audience is to be confronted by its own guilt!

The Transformation music moves the scene not to the domain of the Grail, but to the serried seating of the Bundestag, the German parliament, where the Grail Knights are transformed into elected, be-suited representatives. The coffin of Titurel, draped in the flag of the Empire, is placed before a dock in which appears Amfortas, lustily accused by aggressive contemporary 'Knights' of being unworthy guardian of the Grail. There is to be no peaceful reconciliation here. The appearance of the white-robed Parsifal compassionately healing the pleading Amfortas with glowing red spear brings peace to a stormy scene.

The white dove of the United Nations takes the place of the dove of the Holy Spirit above the stage. A transformed Gurnemanz representing the Common Man, and poor Kundry as the Common Woman (transformed yet again in spite of being freed from her eternal cycle of death and rebirth), appear with shared boy-child. This brings what has been until now a most wonderful performance of *Parsifal* to a disappointingly saccharine finale. An overjoyed audience enthusiastically applauds itself in a huge mirror. What an extraordinary conclusion to a fabulous evening!

Conductor - Daniele Gatti; Production - Stefan Herheim; Stage design - Heike Scheele; Costumes - Gesine Völlm; Dramaturgy - Alexander Meier-Dörzenbach; Chorus director - Eberhard Friedrich; Amfortas - Detlef Roth; Titurel - Diógenes Randes; Gurnemanz - Kwangchul Youn; Parsifal - Christopher Ventris; Klingsor - Thomas Jesatko; Kundry - Mihoko Fujimura.

## Society **Function** **E-mail** Reminder Service

Members are reminded that the Society operates an e-mail reminder service for each Society function. Could members who are subscribed to the service advise the Webmaster of any changes in email address via [info@wagner-nsw.org.au](mailto:info@wagner-nsw.org.au) ? To subscribe to the service simply send a request to the same email address.

**John Studdert,**  
**Webmaster**



# The Glimmerglass Opera Festival's *Das Liebersverbot*

## – Terence Watson

Wagner Society member, Robert Thurling (who was on his way to Bayreuth) and I took a bus from Manhattan to Cooperstown, the nearest town to the Glimmerglass Opera Festival ([www.glimmerglass.org](http://www.glimmerglass.org)). The bus trip was a kind of milkrun, setting down and picking up people through New Jersey and then back into New York state. The countryside was unprepossessing until after Kingston in New Jersey when we started to climb into the Catskill Mountains - very typical wooded landscape for New England, but no hint of Fall colour yet. One highlight was passing through Woodstock, which still clearly cherishes its hippy heritage with plenty of colourful art&craft on display. Robert and I were getting a little worried as we needed to be in our motel to change for *Das Liebesverbot* by about 7pm at the latest and we were still at Oneonta about 20 miles away at 6pm. We arrived at Cooperstown, the home of baseball (and not much else) at 6:30pm to discover that they had no taxis - we had to call one from Oneonta that arrived at about 6:50pm and, for \$60, took us to the 6 miles to the motel where we changed and walked the 3/4 mile to the Alice Busch Opera Theater (and back again afterwards - in full moonlight). Next time we drive!

In the end, the tribulations were worth it - the Glimmerglass production of Wagner's second opera was impressive. Well sung by people I know nothing about and directed by Nicholas Muni with sets by John Conklin (Associate Artistic Director of the festival) and conducted by Corrado Rovaris (a nicely Italianate name for the occasion!). Muni managed a nice balance between treating Wagner respectfully and updating the dreadfully silly story - even the Shakespeare play needs a judicious treatment to avoid the basic nonsense of a king who goes undercover to spy on his regent and his people. The production seemed to be set in about 1950 because the hero, Luzio, was dressed like an early Elvis Presley-style bodgie with brylcreamed combs and tight denim jeans & leather jacket - all he needed was a motorbike. Most of the other male cast members were in white/beige linen trousers & cotton shirts; the women in simple shifts or skirts and blouses as might have been the fashion in 1950s Palermo. The regent, Friedrich's, henchmen were reminiscent of mafia types with suits and sunglasses and the women in these scenes were dressed in a kind of uniform and being the Regent's female guards. The set was a simple semi-circle of a few columns and a first storey walkway all the way around the semi-circle that was reminiscent of The Globe Theatre. In fact Conklin had dreamed up a "Shakespearish" festival with all the productions in this year's festival relating to his plays in one way or another - Handel's *Julius Caesar in Egypt*, Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate*, Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (*The Capulets and Montagues*) and, of course, *Das Liebesverbot* based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. So the set, common to all productions, became a linking device.

The Festival's press release quotes Michael MacLeod, General & Artistic Director, saying that "*Das Liebesverbot*

actually inspired the concept for our 2008 season". "This piece was not well-received upon its premiere in 1836 for several reasons, but not because the piece is not worthy of performance. It was poorly rehearsed, and backstage drama overwhelmed the production. I am thrilled Glimmerglass is producing this work, which has wonderful music that has Italianate characteristics along with a premonition of Wagner's later, Germanic style."

Ryan MacPherson's Luzio focussed the production both because of his stylish acting in the central male role, but also because of his nicely exaggerated Italian machismo and his strong singing - his voice is probably not going to last at the operatic level for too long as it has a bit of raggedness at the top already, but it is warm and rich in the middle and lower registers. The villain, Friedrich - Mark Schnaible - is a more established singer and managed to achieve a range of emotions for a relatively cardboard character. Claudio, Richard Cox, was a pleasant tenor who, sadly, had to make a few awkward gear changes to a high head voice to get some of his top notes. Claudia Waite as Isabella was the strongest of the cast with a powerful soprano that, at times reminded me of Lisa Gasteen's voice, including her odd way of sounding ees in German - Waite may also have a Wagnerian career ahead of her. Of the minor characters, Brighella - Kevin Glavin, gave a nicely satirical commentary on "German characteristics" in both singing and some spoken lines.

The ensemble was very impressive with lots of interaction at the focus of the action and behind it. The singers were supported very ably in achieving a high level of cohesion by the subtle and sympathetic playing of the orchestra. The orchestra coped with Wagner's demands (already quite high for such a young composer) very well with no noticeable fluffs from the horns or intonation problems in the strings and, given that it is, apparently, made up from performers from the local area, says much about the high standards!

One of my New York friends, John Collis, and I had slightly different reactions to the Bellini opera, *The Capulets and the Montagues*. I found it a little underwhelming with little plot logic and not very credible character development. And its inclusion in a season of "Shakespeare plays" is misleading since it has absolutely nothing to do with his *Romeo and Juliet*. The book and the libretto based on it are by forgotten Italians. However, their versions did concentrate a lot more on the bloody battles between the Ghibellines and Guelphs in Verona - something I vaguely remember from my university history days. This emphasis made it rather more like a political thriller, with less of Shakespeare's emphasis on the romantic love of his protagonists. The singing, though, was, as with the Wagner, very impressive from a cast of relatively young singers. Juliet in particular was given some very long, impassioned singing (about very little and, in the way of bel canto opera, very repetitious). John, however, was impressed with the clear and elegant orchestral writing compared with Wagner's, which he thought muddy. Certainly, Wagner's orchestration is already heavier than Bellini's. I, of course, sprang to Wagner's defence by saying that Bellini had written his opera in 1830 after five now forgotten operas, including *Zaira*, from which he took ten tunes to rework for *Montagues*. It also





came just before his famous works *La sonnambula* (1831), *Norma* (1831), *Beatrice di Tenda* (1833) and *I puritani* (1835). Bellini was also 30 when he wrote it, while Wagner had only written *Die Feen* in 1833 at the age of 20, after giving up on *Die Hochzeit (The Wedding)* in 1832. *Das Liebesverbot* was written in 1836 when Wagner was 23. All in all, I contend, a more than creditable achievement for someone who claimed at that age that he did not want to be an opera composer, just a great dramatist!!

The performance that we were discussing was a repeat of the Wagner work that I found even more interesting since I was now more familiar with the music and the production. I found myself following all sorts of impressions and ideas in response to the music and situations that lead to the later operas – in so many ways, Wagner stayed fascinated by a small number of dramatic motifs and situations through out his career. Particularly intriguing was the very clear appearance of the Elizabeth's prayer motif from *Tannhäuser*.

Under the nice by-line, "Early Wagner: Splendor Soon to Come", Steve Smith in his article for the New York Times on 11 August 2008, wrote: "Wagner's mature operas have created an image of him as the high priest of a cult based on a severe sort of German aesthetic mysticism. But "Das Liebesverbot" ("The Ban on Love"), from 1836, provides rare insight into a period when he was a young man searching for both style and substance."

And continues: "It mixes elements of the Italian bel canto and French opera styles, with touches of Mozart, Beethoven and Weber. Yet despite those copious borrowings and an antic tone never again encountered in his work, "Liebesverbot" unquestionably contains traces of the mature Wagner in embryonic form: in breathless string shimmers anticipating those of "Tannhäuser" and "Lohengrin"; in the simple melodic figure in the overture that serves as a leitmotif; and in the vocal heft of the principal female role. Portentiousness lingers even in ribald scenes, auguring the grandiosity to come."

He summarises the singing and playing as follows – with a bit of a put down with the last word in his review: "The singing...was serious business. Despite a vocally uneven first act, the soprano Claudia Waite was a bold, assertive Isabella, with blazing top notes and a presence to make you believe that a virginal nun could outfox a career politician. Her voice appreciably bloomed in the second act. Mark Schnaible, a bass-baritone, brought a robust sound and a genuine sense of inner turmoil to Friedrich. Richard Cox, a tenor, was eloquent and lyrical as Claudio. The charismatic tenor Ryan MacPherson played Luzio, Claudio's randy friend and Isabella's would-be suitor, like a pomade-slicked James Dean. Lauren Skuce, a soprano, played Dorella with spunk and brazen sex appeal. In the buffo role of Brighella, a power-hungry police chief, the bass Kevin Glavin was both wildly funny and surprisingly humane. Joseph Gaines, a tenor, was impressive as Pontio Pilato, by turns a flesh peddler and a jailer. Corrado Rovaris, the conductor, drew a stylish, mostly secure performance from the chorus and orchestra. If, in the end, the value of reviving "Liebesverbot" more often remained dubious, there was no question that it was worth sampling once.

From a local perspective, Geraldine Freedman in The Daily Gazette of Schenectady in New

York state writes: "Wagner's music for this opera is unlike any music people usually associate with him. The overture was pure Rossini, the lyricism was out of Bellini's bel canto tradition and his use of the strings was all von Weber. Only a few hints of what would become his ecstatic use of the strings peeped out. At barely 22, who could blame him for writing in the styles current at the time? A genius has to begin somewhere. Yet the arias were quite wonderful."

Wayne Myers, Dispatch Drama Critic of *The Oneida Daily Dispatch* (the town from which our cab was despatched) was more persuaded by the merits of the work: "The production makes a strong case for mounting this opera more often. But not for its fidelity to Shakespeare. Muni's 1950's Palermo, Sicily-set "Das Liebesverbot" tracks the "Measure for Measure" plot to a point. Wagner eliminates the character of the duke, and his Isabella, while also a nun, is certainly no virgin. When Luzio shows up at the convent, he finds himself sexually attracted to this "bride of Christ," convinced that if anyone can make Friedrich, a cold German, relent, it's her. She puts on lipstick, sunglasses and grabs a handbag and is off to see Friedrich."

Alex Ross in *The New Yorker* was also more sympathetic to Wagner's tyro work, especially after cuts had been made, calling the work "a flawed but diverting work that shows the master of music drama in an embryonic stage.... Shakespearean elements recur throughout his mature operas—in the potion-laced, Romeo-and-Juliet-ish love of Tristan and Isolde; in the self-lacerating monologues of Wotan in "Die Walküre," redolent of "King Lear"; in the midsummer rituals of "Die Meistersinger." Yet only in this apprentice piece, from 1836, did Wagner take on Shakespeare directly—perhaps because, at the age of twenty-two, he was too young to know better."

"At the time, Wagner was aligned with the Young Germany movement in literature, which agitated for freedom of expression both in politics and in private life. He chose "Measure for Measure" mainly because it provided him with a juicy target in Angelo, the puritanical lawgiver whose hidden desires eventually precipitate his downfall. The scene is shifted from Vienna to Palermo, and Angelo is renamed Friedrich, so that he becomes a kind of oppressive Teutonic invader...Wagner didn't remain such a libertine or a liberal, but this seemingly formulaic bel-canto score hints at several of his perennial obsessions. The overture begins with bubbly music in the style of Rossini, but the darkly meandering theme representing Friedrich's "ban of love" foreshadows the fateful leitmotifs of the "Ring." When the action moves to a cloister, the murmuring interplay of female voices and strings anticipates the Rhinemaidens in "Das Rheingold." The Dresden Amen appears, as in "Tannhäuser" and "Parsifal." Isabella, the novice who draws Friedrich to his doom, becomes a more significant character in Wagner's libretto, absorbing plot functions that Shakespeare assigned to the cunning Duke, who is dropped altogether; in the end, she embodies worldly wisdom and the redeeming force of love, a Brünnhilde in training. By making some well-chosen cuts, Glimmerglass evaded the windier passages of Wagner's score—the original version apparently sent the first-night audience into a stupor—and rendered the opera eminently stageworthy."

Again, for a less convinced reaction, Heidi Waleson in the *Wall Street Journal* considered that "Wagner's seldom-



performed 1836 opera "Das Liebesverbot" (Forbidden Love) is a travesty of "Measure for Measure," heavy on the sex and punishment, light on the moral questions of the play. It's also a bizarre German vision of Italian licentiousness and of Italian opera in general. Wagner kept the tub-thumping orchestral rhythms but missed the bel canto vocalism that the Italian opera composers favored, and he ended up with a pretty turgid piece of work." In contrast, perhaps predictably after that comment, she liked "I Capuleti e i Montecchi" (1830)...by Bellini, a real bel canto composer".

To give you an idea of the production, you can view some images on the Glimmerglass website at: <http://www.glimmerglass.org/press/gallery3noflash.html>. You can also read a selection of reviews on the Glimmerglass Festival website at [www.glimmerglass.org/press/reviews08.html](http://www.glimmerglass.org/press/reviews08.html). Otherwise, the full articles of the reviews sampled in this report can be found at:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/arts/music/12wagn.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=Early%20Wagner:%20Splendor%20Soon%20to%20Come%20&st=cse&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/arts/music/12wagn.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Early%20Wagner:%20Splendor%20Soon%20to%20Come%20&st=cse&oref=slogin)

[http://www.zwire.com/site/index.cfm?newsid=19865463&BRD=1709&PAG=461&dept\\_id=68844&rfti=8](http://www.zwire.com/site/index.cfm?newsid=19865463&BRD=1709&PAG=461&dept_id=68844&rfti=8)

[http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/musical/2008/08/25/080825crmu\\_music\\_ross](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/musical/2008/08/25/080825crmu_music_ross)

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121858848982135259.html>

From my perspective, Muni's direction ranged from intimate tête-à-tête's to wildly raunchy crowd scenes with couplings more reminiscent of late night MTV or soft-core porn than mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century opera – but fairly justifiable given Wagner's message about how the Italians are lucky to be able to engage in free love compared with their inhibited German neighbours. That stereotype has as much accuracy, of course, as Shakespeare's similar typing of Italians as corrupt and decadent. Muni made much of the Brighella character, a kind of Shakespearean fool, to underscore Wagner's satire of repressive social and political structures.

Isabella, the heroine, had retired to the convent, not as a virgin novice to hide from life, but rather for a spell of quiet contemplation. When Luzio comes to ask her help in rescuing her brother, Claudio, from imminent death for having impregnated his girlfriend, Isabella moves rapidly but credibly from annoyance at being disturbed to being aroused by Luzio's good looks and chutzpah, to deciding that she needed to leave the convent to take control of affairs in Palermo that have turned decidedly dangerous. Muni was able to bring out in this long scene the hints of Wagner's later subtlety in characterisation and relationships.

Muni's direction was generally fast to match the fairly breathless pace with which scene followed scene, but without any sense of rushing simply to get through what is a fairly complicated story. I think it was fairly clear that Muni and his cast sympathised strongly with Wagner's Young Germany message of free-love and anti-authoritarianism

and entered into embodying it on stage with lust and life. While the direction and the performance was energetic and convincing and the music was mostly entertaining and sometimes arresting with hints of the later Wagner, you should not listen to or, if you are able to catch a performance, to watch a performance of this early work with any expectation of achieving ecstasy or insight or transport or joy or tears, or whatever kind of response Wagner's works usually elicits from you. Otherwise you will be disappointed. However, taken as an interesting, musically pleasant theatrical experience, *Das Liebesverbot* is well worth a visit should there be a production you can see.

The Alice Busch Opera Theater in which the Glimmerglass Festival happens, opened in June 1987 on the shores of Lake Otsego, the Glimmerglass of James Fennimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales" on land donated by one of the wealthy Goodyear family (I guess of the rubber tyre makers). It seats about 987 very comfortably in a parterre level, a slightly raised second level and then in a small balcony level. No seat is more than 70 feet from the stage, so it is quite intimate. The acoustics are also impressive - with all voices being quite audible, even from the back of the quite large stage, and all sections of the orchestra easy to pick out. The Glimmerglass Opera Company apparently staged its first performances in the Cooperstown High School's auditorium from 1975 until 1987. The Company has commissioned a number of new works, given American premieres, some lesser known works of famous composers, and included staples of the repertoire as well. Each production each year is new - no revivals. You can see some photographs of the theatre at [www.glimmerglass.org/about/alicebuschopera.html](http://www.glimmerglass.org/about/alicebuschopera.html). The 2009 season is: **Verdi's *La traviata*, Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, Menotti's *The Consul* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*.**

A closer inspection of the baseball memorabilia of Cooperstown did little to endear it to us as a "must see" tourist attraction for the average Wagnerian! Although, it has to be said that all the buildings were in the period of Fennimore Cooper and relatively low key in their self-promotion. If you're curious, you can see more of Cooperstown at [www.thisiscooperstown.com](http://www.thisiscooperstown.com) or <http://cooperstownchamber.org>.

We also visited to the Fennimore Cooper Art Gallery ([www.fennimoreartmuseum.org](http://www.fennimoreartmuseum.org)) in a beautiful old house from the Cooper family – beautiful views throughout the house to Lake Otsego and the woods around it. A fascinating exhibition was on display – from the **Gilded Lions and Jeweled Horses: The Synagogue to the Carousel** that explored the work of the Jewish artists and artisans who migrated to the US from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> Century who turned their hands from designing and carving portals and decorations for their synagogues to designing and carving the amazingly elaborate and beautiful animals for carousel rides – using the same lion, eagle, dragon and other decorations in both settings. You can see a full description of the exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum's website (<http://gildedlions.org/welcome.html>). All in all a positive and rewarding experience – especially if you drive there!



# **Lohengrin** at the **Deutsche Oper, Berlin,** **Tuesday, 20 May 2008**

– Daryl Colqhoun

To attend was a more or less impulse decision – I was at a conference at Berlin and it turned out that this evening was free, and so I had a look to see what was on. *Lohengrin* started at 6:00pm and so when business finished at around 5:15pm I pounded off in the direction of the Deutsche Oper and go there with 7 minutes to spare. The first thing I spotted was a man holding up a ticket for sale and so, to save time, I bought it without much regard for where it was in the house. At €27euros it turned out to be quite a long way up, in the upper circle (zweiter Rang). I was pleased to discover that the sound was quite good up there, and I had a good view of the surtitles, but couldn't see much of anything upstage, which included the treatment of the swan.

In the process of finding my seat I found myself in conversation with the elderly ladies next to me, who explained that the low population of the house was attributable to the fact that the performance started too early. There may have been something in this. They also mentioned that there are too many awful productions around – I can't remember the German words used, but this production seemed pretty straight and, although Lohengrin himself did look like an astronaut at his first appearance, there were mediaeval-looking knights and nobles and so forth, fighting with swords. And so it's a pity I didn't get to see that swan, or whatever substituted for it. Extensive research (that is, a good look on the web) has failed to reveal what I couldn't see.

The first interval gave me an opportunity to buy a program and to discover that the production was by Götz Friedrich and so, evidently, not new, Friedrich having died a few years before. I also discovered that Lohengrin himself was our own Stuart Skelton (I am very bad at recognising people on stage). Other personnel were: conductor Michael Schönwandt, Heinrich der Vögler – Richard Hagen, Elsa – Petra-Maria Schnitzer, Telramund – Sergei Leiferkus, Ortrud – Susanne Resmark, King's Herald – Markus Brück, stage and costume design – Peter Sykora.

And in this interval I also went outside and made a reconnaissance of the area, looking for an ATM. I felt sure that the gambling joint down the road would be fitted with one, but it wasn't. What I did see around the place were several members of the cast, in costume, having drinks with members of the audience. Perhaps the backstage facilities are lacking. There did seem to be building works going on in the opera house.

During act 2, the inevitable happened: someone's phone rang. Many pairs of angry eyes were directed in its direction and its owner scooted out. There

are situations where one would want to be interrupted at the theatre, but that's what vibrate mode is for. Our concentration returned to the stage on which Ortrud was just starting to importune Elsa, who at that point was required to sing: "Wer ruft?" ("Who is calling?"), which the audience found amusing!

The second interval gave me another, and this time successful, opportunity to find an ATM, and then it was back for act 3 and Lohengrin's monologue, which was not a bit tedious; my neighbours described Skelton as "ein guter Lohengrin". All of the cast sang well except for Mr Brück, who seemed to be a little unwell. We hear stories of the financial difficulties of the three Berlin houses, but I know little of the details. Whatever they may be, perhaps management felt they could get away with a slightly below-par singer in a smaller rôle.

It was an enjoyable evening to contemplate as I meandered through Richard-Wagner-Straße, Kantstraße, Schillerstraße, Leibnizstraße, Goethestraße and the rest and wondered why we don't have a Robin Warren, a Barry Marshall or a Patrick White Street. (We do have an Alan Bond place though.) So if anyone has seen this production and knows what the treatment of the Swan was, perhaps they could let the newsletter know. I'd be most interested.

## **Bayreuth Succession – End of Volume 3 of the Saga:**

### **Bayreuth Festival Board Names Katharina Wagner and Eva Wagner- Pasquier as Co-Directors**

The Bayreuth Festival board on Monday, 1 September 2008, named half-sisters Katharina Wagner and Eva Wagner-Pasquier (the composer's great-great granddaughters) to replace their father, Wolfgang Wagner, at the helm of the German festival dedicated to the music of composer Richard Wagner at the end of August after 57 years as director of the festival. However, Wolfgang's niece, Nike Wagner, also submitted her own joint application with renowned Belgian director Gerard Mortier. Mortier, helped bring about a successful resurgence of the Salzburg Festival in Austria, and is to become general manager and artistic director of the New York City Opera in the fall of 2009. The foundation that runs the festival includes representatives of the federal, regional and local governments as well as sponsors and family members. It voted 22-0 in favor of Katharina and Eva's bid, Toni Schmid, the Bavarian government official who heads the foundation, said. The descendants of Wieland Wagner, Wolfgang's late brother and the father of Nike, abstained.



The German culture minister, Bernd Neumann, welcomed the choice, and more importantly, he said the federal government would continue “to be committed to its responsibility to support the Bayreuth Festival.” The federal government provides 10 percent of the festival’s annual €16 million (about \$US23 million) budget, with another 20 percent coming from state and local governments. The new team’s plans should be adopted, the minister said, “so that the most famous opera festival in the world continues to do justice to its exemplary role as the trailblazer and hub for the artistic examination of Richard Wagner’s works, his tradition and his international reputation.”

According to reports, Nike Wagner, a musicologist by training, who runs the Weimar Festival, said her and Mr. Mortier’s approach would have respected tradition, but also looked forward, in Wagner’s spirit as a “composer of the future. She said the board members had gone into the meeting with their minds made up. She called the procedure “strange” and expressed sadness, but also said she hoped her cousins would “pick up on my and Gerard Mortier’s proposals”. Mortier’s intentions, in other reports, apparently remained unclear. In explaining his application, Mortier has said he was concerned about Bayreuth’s future, but he has also said he wanted to send what he called a “signal” to City Opera board members who were lukewarm in support of his recent appointment. Mortier...has promised to shake up the house with a string of challenging 20th-century works.

Katharina Wagner has been associated with steps toward a trend for opera houses to use technology to disseminate opera. Her *Meistersinger* was available for live streaming on the Web. Pressed on her future plans, according to news reports, she mentioned the commissioning of new children’s operas in association with the Festival, and a plan for all Wagner’s mature operas to be seen at the bicentenary year Festival of 2013. She also promised, with a wry smile, that she herself would definitely not be staging a new production every year – “it’s far too demanding just running the Festival.” Eva, as expected, would assume responsibility for the purely artistic side, especially the casting – “but I don’t think you’ll notice changes in that area very soon. Maybe in two or three years’ time.” Katharina Wagner declined to comment on whether there may be a role for her cousin, Nike, at the festival in future. Eva would not rule out cooperating with her cousin. Eva Wagner-Pasquier is artistic adviser to the Aix-en-Provence opera festival, known as Pelerinages, in southern France. The two have pledged to improve the artistic quality of the festival.

Unlike their father, Katharina and Eva will not be awarded a lifelong contract said Schmid. Though details have yet to be negotiated, he pointed out that such contracts at opera houses usually run for between five and seven years.

Mike Ashman in *The Gramophone* of 2 September 2008 noted that the “succession of the Eva/ Katharina team was greeted initially with almost universal favour in German artistic and political circles. Their mix of old and new qualifications are indeed strong. Katharina has worked in Bayreuth rehearsals since she was a child: her own stagecraft and tastes should keep alive the proud, radical traditions of “workshop Bayreuth” established by her uncle Wieland. She obviously had much say in the offering of new Bayreuth shows to innovative directors like Christoph Schliengensief and Stefan Herheim, will continue to work as a freelance director outside Bayreuth (she left the press conference to begin rehearsals for a new *Rienzi* in Bremen), and should direct again at Bayreuth sooner than the 2015 *Tristan* that she is said to be lined up for (surely, at least, she must undertake the 2013 *Ring*?). Eva’s lengthy casting experience in Europe and America can be expected to bring the Bayreuth singer roster – currently at a low ebb and becoming very German-biased and influenced by who gets the roles in Berlin – back to the leading international standard it once had.

“The new team will doubtless look carefully at increased accessibility to Bayreuth performances, the choice of cast and conductors, and at what is, and is not, fixed in stone in the next seven years’ planning. They may even have a good think about the newer ideas proposed by their cousin Nike – because nothing, not even Bayreuth, can remain exactly the same. But overall an exciting time seems in prospect.”

A number of reports recounted the presence in front of the town hall of a lone protester who sat in the pedestrian precinct, guarding a placard calling for an end to the festival with a quote from Wagner: “Children, do something new.”

Catherine Hickley in the online journal, Bloomberg, reported that “In a quirky twist, another last-minute application for the job arrived in the mail today, according to Bayreuth Mayor Michael Hohl. It was from a certain Richard Bauer who claimed to be an illegitimate son of Wieland Wagner, Hohl said. German press agency DPA earlier reported that Bauer had promised to make tickets for Bayreuth free and raise funds through a television program about the Wagner family if appointed to the job. ‘The trouble is he didn’t say anything about his qualifications,’ Hohl said.” [Editor]





# 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.

## 2009

### February 2009

Strasbourg **Siegfried** – February 2009  
[no actual dates].

### March 2009

Barcelona **Die Meistersinger** – March 2009  
[no actual dates].

New York The Met  
**The Ring** - [no actual dates].

Stuttgart **Lohengrin** – March 2009  
[no actual dates].

### April 2009

Barcelona **Die Meistersinger** – April 2009  
[no actual dates].

Munich **Holländer** – April 9, 12, 2009.  
New York The Met

Riga **The Ring** - [no actual dates].  
**Götterdämmerung** - April 24, 2009  
[no other dates].

Salzburg Easter Festival  
**Siegfried** - April 4, 13, 2009.

### May 2009

Bergen **Götterdämmerung** - May 21, 2009.  
Munich May 14, 17, 21, 2009.

Vienna Staatsoper  
**Das Rheingold** - May 2, 2009.  
**The Ring** - May 5, 6, 8, 10, 2009  
[2 other cycles but no dates].

### June 2009

Vienna Staatsoper  
**The Ring** - 3 cycles [no June dates].

### July 2009

Aix-en-Provence  
**Götterdämmerung** - July 3, 6, 9, 12,  
2009.

### August 2009

Seattle **The Ring** - 3 cycles [no actual dates].

### September 2009

Lübeck **Siegfried** – September 2009  
[no actual dates].

### Season 2009/10

Barcelona **Tristan und Isolde** – No actual dates.

### October 2009

Hamburg **Siegfried** – October 18, 2009  
[no other dates].

## November 2009

Vienna **The Ring** - 2 cycles [no actual dates].

## 2010

### February 2010

Berlin Deutsche Oper  
**Die Meistersinger** – February 5, 13,  
21, 2010.

### March 2010

Salzburg Easter Festival  
**Götterdämmerung** - March 27,  
2010.  
Vienna **The Ring** - 1 cycle [no actual dates].

### April 2010

Berlin Staatsoper Fesstage  
**Siegfried** [no actual dates].  
**Götterdämmerung** [no actual dates].  
Salzburg Easter Festival  
**Götterdämmerung** - April 5, 2010.

### Season 2010/11

Amsterdam **The Ring** - New production begins.  
Berlin Staatsoper  
**The Ring** [no actual dates].  
Hamburg **The Ring** – 2 cycles [no actual dates].  
Milan **The Ring** [no actual dates].  
New York The Met  
**The Ring** - New production begins.

### September 2010

Lübeck **Götterdämmerung** – September  
2010 [no actual dates].

### October 2010

Hamburg **Götterdämmerung** – October 17,  
2010 [no other dates].

## 2011-2013

### June 2011

Lübeck **The Ring** – June 2011  
[no actual dates].

### Season 2011/12

New York The Met  
**The Ring** - 3 cycles [no actual dates].

## 2013

Amsterdam **The Ring** - [no actual dates].

### August 2013

Seattle **The Ring** - 3 cycles [no actual dates].



## Wagner Quotes – By Him and About Him

*Whatever my passions demand of me, I become for the time being -- musician, poet, director, author, lecturer or anything else.*

-- Wagner, letter to Liszt

*His is the art of translating, by subtle gradations, all that is excessive, immense, ambitious in spiritual and natural mankind. On listening to this ardent and despotic music one feels at times as though one discovered again, painted in the depths of a gathering darkness torn asunder by dreams, the dizzy imaginations induced by opium.*

-- Charles Baudelaire (1821-67), Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris (1861)

*If one has not heard Wagner at Bayreuth, one has heard nothing! Take lots of handkerchiefs because you will cry a great deal! Also take a sedative because you will be exalted to the point of delirium!*

-- Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), letter, 1884

*Wagner's art recognises only superlatives, and a superlative has no future. It is an end, and not a beginning.*

-- Edward Hanslick (1825-1904), in: Pleasants, ed., Hanslick's Music Criticism (1950)

*Is Wagner a human being at all? Is he not rather a disease? He contaminates everything he touches -- he has made music sick. I postulate this viewpoint: Wagner's art is diseased.*

-- Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Der Fall Wagner (1866)

*Of all the affected, sapless, soulless, beginningness, endless, topless, bottomless, topsiturviest, scrannel-pippiest, tongs and boniest doggerel of sounds I ever endured the deadliest of, that eternity of nothing was the deadliest -- as far as the sound went.*

-- William Ruskin, letter, 1882, referring to a performance of Die Meistersinger,

*Not until the turn of the century did the outlines of the new world discovered in Tristan begin to take shape. Music reacted to it as a human body to an injected serum, which it at first strives to exclude as a poison, and only afterwards learns to accept as necessary and even wholesome.*

-- Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), The Craft of Musical Compositions (1837)

Send the Editor your favourite quotation by or about Wagner for future compilations - Editor

## Wagner Wins SIPCA 2008

Well, to tell the truth, it was Konstantin Shamray who won the 2008 Sydney International Piano Competition of Australia (SIPCA). According to his official biography, Konstantin was born in Novosibirsk and began studies in the Kemerovo Music School. From 1996 he continued his studies in Moscow at the Gnessin Special Music School and in 2003 at the Russian Gnessin Academy of Music with Tatiana Zelikman. He has been the recipient of several Foundation awards. He has performed in many concert halls in Moscow and other cities in Russia and also in Italy, Germany, Holland, Austria, Czech Republic and USA. His solo recitals have many different programs and he has performed with international orchestras including the Prague and Moscow Philharmonic Orchestras. He has recorded CDs in Holland and the Czech Republic.

According to Ashleigh Wilson in *The Australian* of August 04, 2008 "For once, the judges and the punters agreed." "Konstantin Shamray, the 23-year-old from Moscow, was the standout performer at the Sydney International Piano Competition of Australia. His talent was undeniable, he tackled tough pieces with ease, and he didn't jump around theatrically at the piano like some of the others."

So how did Wagner win? A number of the performers chose to play Isolde's Liebestod (or technically "Verklärung" from *Tristan and Isolde* by Wagner in Liszt's fiendishly difficult transcription during the competition. Konstantin played in his first stage recital and must have wowed the judges as well as the audiences, judging from his repeat performance of it as part of his winner's recital at the end of this pianistic marathon. Among other things, Konstantin also tackled the Sonata Op 106 'Hammerklavier' in B Flat Major by Beethoven, but I was not lucky enough to hear it. Konstantin will have finished his prize-winner's tour by the time this newsletter reaches you. I hope you had a chance to hear him perform the "Verklärung". [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 **Friday, 24 October 2008**;
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

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

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(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)**