

The Wagner Society



IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Newsletter No. 115, March - April 09

President's Report

Dear Members

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter for 2009.

Our December 2008 Newsletter came to you in February 2009, and in craving your indulgence for the delay I quoted the title of part three of Clive James' thoroughly unreliable memoir "May Week was in June." Now you're receiving the March Newsletter in early May, not as a result of naughtiness but because we wanted to make sure that we had all the details right before lurching into print.

Past Functions

Our first meeting of 2009 was held on Sunday 15 February, when Peter Bassett gave a fascinating talk with many examples on "Beethoven and Wagner", describing the stylistic and thematic legacy which Wagner inherited, and including the way in which Wagner sought to position himself as Beethoven's musical heir.

Peter had stopped over in Sydney on his way back to Queensland from a meeting in Melbourne, where (according to the press) he was "exploring the options" for a Ring Cycle in Melbourne in 2012, as reported in our last issue. Peter may remember his Sydney stopover for the surreal adventure he had on his way to dinner with some members of the Society after his talk. Dennis Mather and John Studdert (recently returned from a holiday in South Africa) collected Peter from his hotel in William Street, to drive him to a restaurant in Potts Point. Not long after they'd left the hotel, the car's front passenger door was wrenched open and Peter was grabbed on the arm by someone who tried to pull him out of the car. His seat belt, and perhaps a lack of real determination by his assailants, saved him. Peter must have been shaken and stirred by the experience, but he laughed it off over dinner. His would-be assailants were two drunken English back-packers, who wanted a lift up the hill to the Cross and had good-naturedly decided that their transport needs were greater than Peter's.

On Sunday 15 March Warwick Fyfe gave a talk on his "coming to Wagner". Assisted by his wife, Ruth Frances, who had prepared the accompanying audio-visual presentation, Warwick blasted through an illustrated and often-hilarious history of his family, his childhood in Canberra, his first musical adventures on the amateur stage, and so forth. It's impossible to do justice to such an engaging autobiographical tour-de-force, at the end of which we were all rendered a little speechless.

On Monday 23 March at 7pm, Professor Health Lees gave a talk entitled "Wagner, the Dutchman, and the Sea", which has been prepared as an introduction to the Adelaide production of *Der fliegende Holländer* in November. Illustrated from the piano and with recorded musical selections, Professor Lees first delighted the audience with compositions by the young Wagner, the overture to Guido Theodor Apel's historical drama *Columbus* (WWV37) which, perhaps like the voyage itself, seemed to have trouble getting started, and the *Rule Britannia* overture (WWV42, 1837) which had an even greater difficulty coming to an end. He then examined the music of the *Holländer* as it depicts the rolling of the seas and storms, comparing it to the treatment of the same material by other composers.

This meeting was our first evening function at the Goethe-Institut. Professor Lees was making a lightening visit from his

PRESIDENT'S REPORT continued p.3 ▶

NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

Thoughts On Katherina Wagner's <i>Die Meistersinger Von Nürnberg</i>	P5
Christoph Schlingensief - Fighting Lung Cancer	P9
La Scala 2010-13 Barenboim Ring	P9
Katharina Wagner's <i>Rienzi</i>	P7
What Was Eating Wagner?	P10
Great Composers, Lousy Reviews: When Music Critics Attack	P11

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

For Your **Diary**

	2009 see below for a number of performances in other states.	
October 7	London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vladimir Jurowski: Prelude and Liebestod <i>Tristan and Isolde</i>	Sydney Opera House
Saturday 7, Tuesday 10, Thursday 12 and Saturday 14 November,	The State Opera of South Australia, with Nicholas Braithwaite conducting the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, will stage a new production of <i>The Flying Dutchman</i> .	Adelaide

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

DATE	EVENTS - 2009	TIME & LOCATION
May 24	11.45AM - Act 3 of Katharina Wagner's <i>Meistersinger</i> "live" from Bayreuth 2008 2.00PM – Annual General Meeting, followed by a recital by Alexandra Hutton (soprano) and Adam Player (baritone) accompanied by Sharolyn Kimmorley, and a modest afternoon tea to celebrate Richard Wagner's birthday (22 May)	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
June	No Function	
July 19	12.30PM Second screening of the film "Katharina Wagners Feuertaufe" (Baptism of Fire) 2.00PM Recital with commentary by Stephen Whale, one of the Society's student members studying piano at the Sydney Conservatorium + pianist Tom Johnson and a singer	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
August	No Function	
September 20	Panel discussion led by members of the Society, who have been to the 2009 Bayreuth opera festival. We also hope to have a guest speaker	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
October 18	TBC	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
November 29	Antony Ernst – talk to be advised	Goethe-Institut - 2pm
November 29	Christmas Party - please bring a plate 2pm we will show the DVD "Simone Young - to Hamburg from Downunder"	Goethe-Institut - 2pm

Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)
Paddington Unit Church address 395 Oxford Street, Paddington (parking behind in Gordon Street)

The Goethe Institut has advised the Society that their building will close for major reconstruction later this year or next year, and that they will let us know as soon as they have concrete dates. The Society will advise Members as soon as possible of any changes to the location for our 2009 events.



President's Report continued

half-year home in Auckland to Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth, and was only available on that night to deliver his talk in Sydney during his few days in Australia.

Afterwards, we took Professor Lees to dinner at the same restaurant as Peter Bassett, but without any of the drama which attended Peter's journey. Professor Lees is writing a book about Beethoven. From the glimpses Heath provided us during the meal, the book will take much of the accepted folk-lore and romantic imagery which has built up around Beethoven, including aspects of his deafness, and bring it back to reality.

Katharina Wagner's "Meistersinger" on DVD

Prior to our first three meetings this year, we have shown material relating to Katharina Wagner's current production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at Bayreuth.

On Sunday 15 February, prior to Peter Basset's talk, we showed a documentary by Dagmar Krauss entitled "*Katharina Wagners Feuertaufe* (Baptism of Fire), The Road to her Debut as Director in Bayreuth", which was kindly loaned by Barbara Brady. The film documents the genesis of Ms Wagner's new production of the Meistersinger in Bayreuth in 2007, and gives a unique insight into the inner workings of the Bayreuth festival. The showing of this film generated so much interest in its depiction of the workings behind the performances that it will be screened again, probably prior to the July meeting.

Reaction to the performance of the work itself has been very different. On Sunday 15 March, prior to Warwick Fyfe's talk, we showed Act 1 of the full production, and on Monday 23 March, prior to the talk by Professor Heath Lees, we showed Act 2. Act 3 will be shown before the Annual General Meeting (see details below). The DVD was made in 2008 during a performance at that year's Bayreuth Festival and broadcast live over the internet to subscribers. In keeping with Bayreuth's current practice, there are no sub-titles, which has caused some annoyance to our audience.

Annual General Meeting

On **Sunday 24 May** at 11:45am, we will show Act 3 of the *Meistersinger*, starting at the early time of 11:45am (as the DVD tracks total 128m 55s, including credits.) Then at **2pm** we will hold our Annual General Meeting, followed at around **2.40pm** by a recital by young singers, organised for us by Sharolyn Kimmorley, and then at around **3.10pm** an afternoon tea to celebrate Richard Wagner's Birthday (which this year falls on Friday 22 May).

At our 2008 Annual General Meeting, the committee was asked to recommend an increase in membership fees, which have remained unchanged for more than 10 years. There is never a good time to raise fees, and the current slump is certainly not a good time, but the committee has decided to recommend the following changes to the current fees to members at the 2009 AGM.

From 1 January 2010, we recommend that the annual fees be:

Single members \$60 (currently \$50),
 single pensioner member \$35 (currently \$30)
 Shared members \$90 (currently \$75),
 shared pensioner members \$55 (currently \$50)
 Student members \$25 (currently \$20)

Amendment to Constitution

Our Society has deductible gift recipient status, and is listed on the Register of Cultural Organisations maintained by the (federal) Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. The Department has recently contacted participants in the Register regarding legal and tax-related requirements for organisations to retain their eligibility for tax deductible donations, and this requires us to amend our constitution.

The Department has provided "model clauses" (printed below) for a public fund such as ours which meet these requirements, and we will recommend to the AGM that our current constitution (which is based on the "model rules" issued for associations incorporated in New South Wales) be amended to include these "model clauses"



Committee 2008 - 2009

President and Membership Secretary	Roger Cruickshank	9357 7631
Vice President	Julian Block	9337 6978
Treasurer	Michael Moore	9363 2281
Secretary	Alan Whelan	9318 1212
Members	Dennis Mather	9560 1860
	Gabrielle Bremner-Moore	9363 2281
	Julie Carroll	9498 6621
Newsletter Editor	Terence Watson	9517 2786
Public Officer	Alisdair Beck	9358 3922



President's Report continued

as published by the Department (tailored to our Society, where required).

Model clauses

Clauses relating to a public fund

- The Association will establish and maintain a public fund.
- Donations will be deposited into the public fund listed on the Register of Cultural Organisations. These monies will be kept separate from other funds of the Association and will only be used to further the principal purpose of the Association. Investment of monies in this fund will be made in accordance with guidelines for public funds as specified by the Australian Taxation Office.
- The fund will be administered by a management committee or a subcommittee of the management committee, the majority of whom, because of their tenure of some public office or their professional standing, have an underlying community responsibility, as distinct from obligations solely in regard to the cultural objectives of [name of organisation].
- No monies/assets in this fund will be distributed to members or office bearers of the Association, except as reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses incurred on behalf of the fund or proper remuneration for administrative services.
- The Department responsible for the administration of the Register of Cultural Organisations will be notified of any proposed amendments or alterations to provisions for the public fund, to assess the effect of any amendments on the public fund's continuing Deductible Gift Recipient status.
 - Receipts for gifts to the public fund must state:
 - the name of the public fund and that the receipt is for a gift made to the public fund;
 - the Australian Business Number of the company;
 - the fact that the receipt is for a gift; and
 - any other matter required to be included on the receipt pursuant to the requirements of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

Winding-up clause

- If upon the winding-up or dissolution of the public fund listed on the Register of Cultural Organisations, there remains after satisfaction of all its debts and liabilities, any property or funds, the property or funds shall not be paid to or distributed among its members, but shall be given or transferred to some other fund, authority or institution having objects similar to the objects of this public fund, and whose rules shall prohibit the distribution of its or their income among its or their members, such fund, authority or institution to be eligible for tax deductibility of donations under Subdivision 30-B, section 30-100, of the *Income Tax*

Assessment Act 1997 and listed on the Register of Cultural Organisations maintained under the Act.

Newsletter delivery

We've had a number of requests from members who would prefer to receive the Newsletter electronically, and Terence Watson (our Editor) and John Studdert (our Webmaster) are discussing technical issues with the publisher of our "paper" Newsletter, BEE Printmail. Once a delivery option has been agreed and tested, we'll start a pilot during which you can receive both, after which you will be able to choose to receive your Newsletter electronically or by post.

Membership renewals

Thank you to those members who have renewed your membership for 2009, and a special thank you to those who have made donations. Individual letters acknowledging your renewal, and receipts for tax-deductible donations, will be mailed over the next few weeks, and all members will receive a letter before the Annual General Meeting. We don't issue formal receipts or membership cards, so this acknowledgement letter is your renewal record. Recently, Dennis Mather and John Studdert have been following up members by email and phone, and this has resulted in a very high level of member renewals.

Last year we introduced the option of renewing your membership by transferring money directly from your bank account to the Society, and this year more than 30 members have renewed this way. Posting a cheque remains the more popular renewal method, as we don't have the facilities to accept credit card payments.

One of the teething troubles with the direct transfer method is that your bank doesn't provide us with your name. Unless you type your name or membership number into a field in your bank's internet banking software, we have no idea who has sent us a payment.

Email addresses

Email is for many members the communication method of choice, and it's vital for us to have your current email address if you want to receive reminders about Society functions, or in the future to receive the Newsletter electronically. See the separate box for more information on email addresses and electronic newsletters.

Ring Cycle in Melbourne 2012

There has been no more hard news about the *Ring Cycle* in Melbourne in 2012, which has been made possible through the generosity of "Lonely Planet" publishing co-founder Maureen Wheeler.

During his visit to Sydney in February, Peter Bassett remained diplomatically tight-lipped on planning so far, despite the botched kidnap attempt. Without any facts on which to base a good story, rumours abound, and here are some of them. It is suggested that the production will be "in the round", in a venue not previously noted for its operatic or classical concerts, relying on video projections rather than fixed (and expensive) sets. What is encouraging is that the rumours are all about "when" the production takes place, rather than "if".



If Melbourne can stage a successful festival cycle, is it just a matter of time before an entrepreneur or benefactor of the arts in Sydney makes a similarly spectacular and generous gift, and creates what many think is impossible, the opportunity for a complete Sydney Ring?

Opera Australia

Corrie Perkin, the Australian newspaper's national arts writer, reported on 5 March 2009 that Opera Australia's search for a successor as music director to Richard Hickox, who died suddenly in November 2008, "starts in earnest tomorrow". In an article headlined "OA conducts search for director to succeed Richard Hickox", Perkin listed a number of rumoured contenders. These included Oleg Caetani, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's chief conductor; Asher Fisch, former music director of the Israeli Opera, who conducted the Adelaide Ring in 2004; Richard Armstrong, who at the time was conducting Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk in Sydney; Houston Grand Opera's Patrick Summers; Frenchman Emmanuel Joel-Hornak; Paul Daniel, former music director of English National Opera and now principal conductor of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra; and the Halle Orchestra's Mark Elder, who has had a long association with the Opera Australia. Australians mentioned for the role included Antony Walker, currently music director of Pittsburg Opera; and Alexander Briger, a regular in European concert halls, who is the nephew of Sir Charles Mackerras, our Society's patron.

Death of Margreta Elkins

And on sad note, a number of glowing tributes in local and European papers marked the passing of Margreta Elkins, who died in Brisbane on 1 April 2009, aged 78. After an extraordinary career spanning two decades in Europe, she returned to Australia in 1976 so that her daughter could be educated here. Her story, and those of two other Queenslanders Marilyn Richardson and Lisa Gasteen, is told in Joan Priest's book "Flight of Divas". Despite describing herself as a "Wagner freak" – she is said to have described Sieglinde as her favourite role - she turned down an offer to sing at Bayreuth, and offers from the New York Met and Glyndebourne.

Flying Dutchman in Adelaide in November 2009

Although the State Opera of South Australia's website says otherwise, normally unreliable sources tell me that performances of the Flying Dutchman in November (not to be confused with that Company's forthcoming production of Jake Heggie's new opera, Moby-Dick) will have a single interval, and not in one of the usual places.

We are used to having no interval in the Dutchman, or having 3 Acts with 2 intervals, which gives the non-alco-pop generation the chance to mini-binge and finger the merchandise, but one interval bunged somewhere different sounds more perverse than is entirely necessary.

I assume that pointless rumours like this are started by marketing departments which understand Oscar Wilde's dictum, that it is better to be talked about than not to be talked about, and I'm happy to oblige.

Walter Turnbull, Auditors

For the second year, the firm of WalterTurnbull is completing an audit of our accounts *pro bono*. I'd like to thank its Executive Director Mr Mark Driessen, and Mr Christopher Ritchie, for their support of the Society and for the extremely high level of professionalism they bring to this task.

An advertisement for WalterTurnbull's services appears in this Newsletter, and I commend them to you all. The *quid pro quo* for *pro bono* work is brand awareness, and the possibility that we may help introduce some business to them.

Roger Cruickshank 27 April 2009

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 processed up to Monday 27 April 2009 were received from: F. John Augustus and Kim Ryrie, Colleen and Michael Chesterman, Robert Lloyd, Brian Ducker, Sandra Beesley, Annie and Terry Marshall, Diana-Rose Orr, Barbara and Ian Brady, Kenneth Reed, Marlene and Paul Baumgartner, Ross Whitelaw, Despina Kallinikos, Brett Johnson, Naomi Kaldor, Anna-Lisa Klettenberg, Heather and Peter Roland, Paul Gresham, Jane Mathews, Neville Pollard, Monica and Aliro Olave, Cherry Jackaman, Carole Bailey, Ingrid Garofali, Paola Garofali, Roger Cruickshank, Leona Geeves, Janet and Hugh Wayland, Gabriella Bremner-Moore and Michael Moore, Rae and Russ Cottle, Pam and Ian McGaw, Terence Watson, Deanne Whittleston and Anthony Gregg, Neville Mercer, Anthony Jones, Hannah and Willi Spiller, Philip Bacon, Bill Brooks and Alasdair Beck, Alan Goldin, Moya Crane, Douglas Barry, Marie Bashir, Carole and Jim Leigh, Walter Norris, Jennifer Ferns, and Nance Grant.

New Members

The following people joined the Society:

Fred and Irma Beringer [0975] (regrettably omitted from the previous Newsletter), Kylie Winkworth [0976], Amanda Thane and Glenn Winslade [0977], Isolde Sültemeyer [0978], Flora and John Weickhardt [0979], and Robyn Richards [0980].



Thoughts On Katherina Wagner's *Die Meistersinger Von Nürnberg*

I – Robert Lloyd's "Baptism Of Fire" -

Remembering Neville Cardus's Heritage

After viewing the fascinating Documentary, "Katherina Wagner's Baptism of Fire", was asked to contribute my thoughts to our excellent Wagner Society Newsletter. Tempted at first, I declined, feeling it would be unfair to make any value judgment until I had seen her entire Production. Had I done so, my opinion would have been quite un-printable. But time, a little distance and deep reflection, has allowed me to overcome any feeling of guilt or fairness. Ms Wagner's Fire certainly lit my Fuse! Going by "All's Fair in Love, War and Wagner" principles, I have quashed any qualms of conscience I might have had.

So, who am I to be placed into a position of such responsibility? I'm Wagner Society Number 0795—a Designer with experience in most forms of Theatre, Television and Opera direction. I have also survived working with Advertising Agencies. Born in the year of Cosima and Siegfried's death, I am old—or as I prefer, elderly. I'm also angry and need Schubert Lieder to calm me down. Yes, I confess to being a Music Lover. Music is the glue that holds me together. I also relish being elderly and outraging the young.

In the days when mothers wore gloves and hats to "go to the shops", I came under the guidance and mentoring of (later, Sir) Neville Cardus. Attending many concerts together, he gently steered me through the musical minefield that awaited my future. At the end of an evening concert, and after he had lodged his critique at the Sydney Morning Herald desk, we would repair to Repins Coffee shop for a chat. Our discussions would last until we were thrown out. With an almost paternal protectiveness, Cardus would answer my withering barrage of questions with patience and wicked wit. Disappointed that I didn't share his passion for cricket he, meeting his Waterloo, accepted defeat. And we had Wagner to talk about. His other secret passion and most private joy was *Meistersinger*. And, not surprisingly, having attended many productions of this work, particularly in the Festspielhaus, it is mine.

Knowing what an enormous privilege I had enjoyed in knowing him, it wasn't until many years later, when attending a concert conducted by Furtwängler at which Kirsten Flagstad sang the *Liebtestod*, that I realised what an inheritance I'd been given. Her performance had a shattering effect upon me; she also sang the first performance of Strauss's *Four Last Songs*. It was a memorable night and the beginning of a never-ending journey. Cardus's broadcasts with the ABC introduced us to Wagner, Mahler, Bruckner and Strauss; he gave my generation our musical vocabulary; his tutelage allowed me to appreciate Elisabeth Schwarzkopf as a meltingly lovely Sophie [in *Der Rosenkavalier*] at Covent Garden and later, Kathleen Ferrier, accompanied by Benjamin Britten and aided and abetted by Peter Pears, where they performed many of the ruder English Folk Songs. By the way, she burst out laughing, mid song when she saw Winston Churchill sitting in the front row asleep and being thumped in the ribs by a resolute Lady Clementine. Cardus would have loved it.

He had a wicked wit and exaggerated to perfection. In his critiques, never sacrificing the truth, he could decimate a particular performance that fell short of his demanding expectations. Always constructive, particularly with younger performers, he could root out careless or poor musicianship with the tenacity of a sniffer dog. On one occasion, the SMH allocated a full column in anticipation of his Crit. This concert, at the Conservatorium, was a Schubert Lieder recital given by a soprano who I'll tactfully call Miss Smith. At the end, of the performance, I couldn't understand why Cardus didn't write his Crit. Just reading it the next day I understood why. The column was blank except for—"Miss Smith turned Schubert's Trout into a Flounder." Of course, at the age of 14, I thought it was lovely.

Without doubt, the best and most revealing lesson learned at Cardus's knee was after attending a Chopin recital given by the celebrated pianist Ignaz Friedman. In mid flight, the now elderly musician had made some appalling mistakes. He stopped, looked dismayed, smiled and started again. In trying to impress Cardus with my profound knowledge- aged 13-I targeted Friedman's lapse. My Mentor firmly berated me saying, "Robert, a pianist of his international renown never make mistakes, only interesting errors". I learned that it is the human factor that sometimes makes our attendance in the Concert Hall or Opera Theatre such a privilege—so memorable. A pinch of salt added to an interesting meal.

These days, with our superb sound systems, we have become used to perfection. Records and CDs carefully engineered and dare I say, digitally corrected performances, have changed our expectations when we attend the Concert Hall and Opera House. We forget how physical making music can be. We condemn a Soprano who may have developed an unfortunate Vibrato or fails to deliver her famous top A when it could be due to a throbbing bunion. Birgit Nilsson, giving a masterclass was asked by a future Brünnhilde what was the secret of success—what sage advice could she offer: "Wear comfortable shoes." Says it all really.

We expect our Divas to be thin and beautiful, to act with the intensity of a Sarah Bernhardt, dance with the grace of Pavlova and sing like angels. Our demands are cruel. Directors expect the singers to perform on hazardous surfaces that would terrify the most intrepid mountain goat, clinging to moving scenery often defying Gravity. And they are expected to sing. We have seen Salomes trying to seductively divest themselves of Seven Veils being wheeled about the stage on a Tea trolley, looking as though they are about to have emergency heart surgery. Singers are usually a generous and compliant Breed enduring these demands with superhuman strength—all in the name of Art. All they want to do is sing and please their audience. Too many Directors and Designers take this good will for granted and abuse their privileged responsibility.

With Neville Cardus, it was his admiration and deep respect for musicians that illuminated his life. His Critiques and Articles were passionate statements—testaments to his abiding faith in the essential goodness



of humanity. Ernest Newman once flippantly said to him, "The trouble with you, Cardus, is that you actually LIKE music." Praise indeed from a man who knew more about Richard Wagner than Wagner himself!

A bit about the Conservatorium. I have to admit to missing the old Conservatorium; uncomfortable, draughty and a maze of Studios—the cacophony of noise, appalling. It was like visiting an embarrassing aged relative in a seedy nursing home - receiving no thanks for the flowers, just rude comments about one's appearance or being late—and not bringing chocolates. Her way of expressing deep affection and gratitude that one cared. There was something comforting in the lack of pretension and so it was with Cardus. To this day, I miss them both.

So what is it about *Meistersinger* that touches us so deeply and makes a great performance such a life affirming experience? Is it its pride and respect for past tradition, embracing change and acceptance of the new? Of course, it is all these things, but above all it breathes the simplicity of truth; its immediate impact, its innate honesty. With the Mastersinger's roll-call in Act I—one member is missing: "He's sick," the reply—one is gripped and immediately captive. Even with new and different interpretations, these qualities shine through the score. Could any of us present ever forget the opening scenes of Act 3 conducted by Christian Thielemann and directed by Wolfgang Wagner?

So with the ghost of Cardus still breathing down my neck, I was dismayed at what the documentary on Katherina Wagner's production revealed. Not only has she inherited an illustrious name, together with the weight of expectation in bringing Bayreuth productions into the 21st century. This is a huge responsibility. In her dramaturgically mauled offering, she has obviously also had a fixed concept—always dangerous. Without wishing to damn with faint praise, her directorial skill are obvious; clear and decisive, delivered with drive and good humour. But it was what she was directing that troubled me. The glimpses we had of her father attending her rehearsals puzzled me. He was smiling—that in itself is a cause for concern—but I put this down to his being tranquilized.

Of particular interest to me, as a designer were the extraordinary and sophisticated facilities the Festspielhaus stage offers. The superb technicians employed there are quite amazing—in all departments. With their "no problems, only solutions" energy and approach, this something that Ms Wagner has also inherited, with seemingly, no restriction or limitation placed before her. This is not to even second guess a budget that must rival Germany's National Debt. What an opportunity to excel.

In her headlong rush to be contemporary, meaningful and worse "relevant," Ms Wagner has marshalled the worst aspects of our present "Entertainment Industry": Disneyland, video games and too easily accessed Internet pornography. With Taste no restriction either, we are subjected to the now obligatory Nude Scene—a naked chap, full frontal doing something questionable with a blow up sex doll. If this is not enough, he is joined in this escapade with a friend—who I hope is not Walter. If it were, I suggest Eva would have wisely run a mile. Dressed with all the allure of a determined Corsetry Consultant, I suspect she elopes with the desperate Sixtus Beckmesser, the obvious hero of this production.

The superb standards, particularly in staging and lighting techniques, generated in the

Festspielhaus eventually filter down to the wider operatic world. Is this collision of Big Brother meets Puppetry of the Penis a sign of things to come? I don't really think so. But the sooner Ms Wagner leaves the kindergarten, puts coloured paints and finger-painting behind her, the better. Time and experience are the greatest teachers. With youth on her side, an enviable advantage, she has the opportunity to make a major contribution. A too fixed concept and using shock tactics aren't the answer. Adherence to the Libretto and trusting the integrity of the Score, particularly the orchestration, usually gives a sensitive Director all the guidelines needed to present a performance of merit.

I do have a favourite moment in Ms Wagner's production—the resolute Army of Bayreuth Housewives, armed with buckets and mops, descending on the stage and cleaning the mess! Until I see the entire production—and hoping it has a happy ending—I remain, yours sincerely, Outraged of Elizabeth Bay.

II - Maintaining the Rave: Translating Opera from the Stage to the Screen -

Katie French

There has been a remarkable response to the recent innovation of screening in local cinemas films of live performances of opera at major international opera houses such as the Met and La Scala. Queues for tickets outside the Chauvel in Paddington, and 'repeat performance' screenings at the Cremorne Orpheum have resulted in a get-there-early-to-get-a-good-seat mentality, which has rarely been associated with opera performances, especially live performances.

However, the Wagner Society's 'mini-screening' of Act 1 of Katharina Wagner's controversial production of *Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg* provided a timely reminder not only of the impact a director's interpretation can have on an opera, but also how a film director can literally dictate how a production is 'seen'. Opera, live in a theatre, can have quite a different impact to filmed opera in a cinema. This particular production was seen by members of the Wagner Society who visited Bayreuth in 2008, and when one considers the overwhelmingly negative responses there have been to the production, Ms Wagner would seem to need to have everything going in her favour. Sadly, the film of her production is not.

Obviously, when opera-goers watch a performance in a theatre, to a large extent they are in charge of what they see. They can view the stage as a whole, can focus on particular details with which they either empathise or query, can look back at something they can't quite see or understand, and they can watch secondary characters' responses while others are the centre of focus. Most significantly, the lighting on the stage is set for the live performance.

By contrast, when a live performance is filmed, the film's Director takes charge of the 'seeing'. (S)he takes over so much of the interpretation by defining the angles of the shots, whether close-up or a long shot is used to include the whole stage or just a singer's face and its expressions. Even the juxtapositions of shots can virtually define or delete a character or design feature. Additionally, because of the 'irresistible continuity' of film, for the audience members it's a case of 'no going back' if you've missed something. The Director's caravan moves inexorably onwards. However, to the film Director's disadvantage, the stage lighting



during a live performance may not be adequate for film. And in the case of Act 1 of *Die Meistersinger*, the 'live performance' lighting seems to have been used, and is so dim, particularly towards the rear of the stage (especially with its dark timbered furnishings and dark curtains) that it is nigh on impossible to see who was doing what to whom, or with what!

To what extent does all this matter? To all intents and purposes, *Die Meistersinger* is Wagner's parable about the Arts: a love story filled with charming humour and human foibles, which is nevertheless a protest against narrow-minded critics and prejudiced audiences. Ms Wagner's Act 1 is filled with delightful touches of humour and enough satire to give it a delicious edge, but the film's audience is unable to **see** these touches, and as such the film of the Act fails.

At the beginning of Act 1 she subsumes the end of the service in St Catherine's church in Nuremberg into the inordinately more pompous and self-focussed preparations for the meeting of the town's Mastersingers. Humorously, satirically, she superimposes a pseudo-religious ritualism onto these preparations, highlighting both the pretentious and slavish adherence to tradition of this tight-knit little group of self-satisfied burghers in its tightly traditional corner of the world. It is very sly and very amusing.

Into this dark-timbered inner-sanctum, two groups of identically uniformed 'religious acolytes' begin to process. Ceremonially, with ritual formality, unsmilingly, these platinum-blond, bobbed, cloned Bavarian youths carry oddly brown 'sacramental candles' forward to what appears to be an altar, where they are formally arrayed, before the attendants genuflect and depart.

A large, colourful but indecipherable altarpiece is positioned above the display. Also, in the spirit of religious imagery, several artists hover in the rafters painting what appear to be frescoes. Surely this is the grand chapel of some abstruse order. Then two long, wooden rectangles are equally ceremoniously carried in, one from each side of the stage, and laid to rest on the floor, with equal ceremony. The wooden 'candles' are raised from the 'altar', carried down each side of the rectangles ... and then screwed equidistantly into the base.

It is a jaw-droppingly hilarious moment. The audience has just been beguiled into believing we have watched a portentous ceremony. What we have seen, performed with such slavish devotion, has been the apprentices constructing the tables, chairs and marker's box for a meeting of the Mastersingers!

Now, when we look closely at that frescoed ceiling, we can see that there is no 'Heavenly Host' being portrayed, but significantly, portraits of portly, self-reverential burghers of Nuremberg and their Fraus. The dimly lit 'altarpiece' when focused on can be seen to be a still life of a rather large picnic feast with a very large German *wurst* as its focus of devotion. The entire scene so far has been a wonderfully funny, tightly constructed metaphor that needs to be **seen** by the camera if the audience is to get the joke and **laugh**. Laughter is allowed, even in Bayreuth! And this is a comedy.

It is really a shame, as many in the Australian contingent enjoyed this first Act. We had been filled with foreboding, influenced by reviews which ranted about 'vulgarity', and 'infantilism resulting in disgust.' Even the 2007 Annual

Report of the Bayreuth Friends had highlighted 'the deep chasm between the educated public and intellectuals' concerning the production! Perhaps most telling was the sign at each entry door to the performances of *Meistersinger* only, which read: 'Due to the unusual staging [sic] of the production there will be no curtain calls after Acts 1 and 2.' (Evidently the audience in 2007 had made the cast the focus of their contempt, and there was to be no opportunity for 'expressions of interest' in 2008!)

It is only in Acts 2 and 3 of Ms Wagner's production where things truly fall apart chaotically so that there is a cacophony of unintelligible and inconsistent images, and where the lemmings head for the cliff, accompanied by most of the audience. Ms Wagner does continue the 'religious' metaphor through the rest of the Act during the arrival of, and the pretentious performances of, the Masters, but as they are centre stage and on the fore stage there are few difficulties seeing who they are and what they are doing. There are some lovely little moments as they all (except Hans Sachs, the Cobbler who is significantly 'barefoot'), take secret little white cloths from their vestments and, simultaneously polish their shoes. Equally delightful is their stacking before themselves on the table, sky-high towers of what appear to be catechisms of some sort (which turn out to be copies of all the German Classics, much like our orange and white Penguin Classics.) However, as pointed out, all this can clearly be seen: the humour is not lost, nor does it simply commence on their arrival. It has been incorporated subtly (and not so subtly) from the beginning. And good for her. It works superbly... as long as it can be 'seen' by the camera and relayed to the audience.

So this is a little parable about going to the opera in a cinema: what you 'see' is not always what you should get!

Email Addresses

Email is for many members the communication method of choice, and it's vital for us to have your current email address if you want to receive reminders about Society functions, or in the future to receive the Newsletter electronically. The Society's email address is info@wagner-nsw.org.au (info at wagner hyphen nsw dot org dot au).

If you'd like to receive reminders about forthcoming Society events and occasional matters of interest to members, just send us an email from your current email address, with "Email reminder service" in the "subject" line. If you'd like to take part in the pilot for electronic delivery of the Newsletter, make sure that we have your current address by enrolling (or re-enrolling) in the Email Reminder Service.

Some people have particularly avaricious anti-spam programmes which devour emails from nice people like us, and each different email programme (such as Outlook) has its own way of avoiding this. Some programmes let you nominate the Society as a "favourite" or "trusted address", to ensure that our emails do not suffer that fate, and if you take the time to make us "trusted" you'll ensure that you receive our emails for as long as you want to.



Christoph Schlingensief - **Fighting** Lung Cancer

Peter Michalzi reported in *the Frankfurter Rundschau* on 23 March 2009 that Christoph Schlingensief was diagnosed with lung cancer at the beginning of last year and in response has "made his illness the subject of a number of stage productions. At the Ruhrtriennial in Duisburg he created a grand-scale fluxus burial mass for the "future deceased". Then in Berlin's Maxim Gorki Theater in November, he staged a small sketch, "The Situation Now", in which he reported that the diagnosis for his remaining lobe looked "shit". And now, after a successful second bout of therapy, he is continuing the hospital drama in Vienna's Burgtheater."

Michalzi notes "'Mea Culpa' is Schlingensief's huge, heart-rending production at the Vienna Burgtheater; he calls it a 'readymade opera' - certainly an apt description for this stage juggernaut with its cargo of quotations, images, musical genres, thoughts and emotions. But above all else, it's a new kind of psychodrama. A performance that whirls round Schlingensief, his soul, and his cancer like a maelstrom - a maelstrom created by a black hole that no one knows, not even the Master towards whom Schlingensief is pulling us. It is dark and distant here, but also true and vast; it is Death."

Wagnerians would remember that Schlingensief produced *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 2003 "which he truly thought could save both himself and the world. In this failure, he finds the root of his illness. As soon as someone shouts "the wound, the wound" and Amfortas positions himself on top of Kundry with clear intent - and this happens early on - all our suspicions are confirmed: Schlingensief

is now laughing about himself as freely as he does about the holy Wagner."

You can read the whole report at Sign and Sight's website: <http://www.signandsight.com:80/features/1852.html>.

In the *Tagesspiegel* of 27 August 2008 there is a note on "Wagnerian greats" bidding farewell to Wolfgang Wagner, who has now retired after half a century as head of the Bayreuth Festival. "Director Christoph Schlingensief remembers the "graveyard of artworks" in his "Parsifal" production: "The key work here was the first Readymade, Duchamp's urinal, to which my own work is greatly indebted. This urinal soon became a bone of contention during rehearsal, without ever being so much as mentioned. During the day we would rehearse in the graveyard of artworks, at night, when everyone was asleep, Wolfgang would sneak onto the stage and personally remove the offending object, which he believed had nothing to do with Wagner or 'Parzifal'. This would happen on a nightly basis and after every dress rehearsal. And Wolfgang won in the end through sheer doggedness, and so the graveyard was spared Duchamp's urinal. And everyone was happy. But the concept of the Readymade can never be removed from the opera. You can also read about the great Wagnerians, not only Schlingensief, but also conductors, Christian Thielemann and Daniel Barenboim, Directors, Jürgen Flimm and Nike Wagner, film-maker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and relict Elisabeth Furtwängler bidding farewell to Herr Wagner at the *Tagesspiegel* website: <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/Bayreuth;art772,2601486>.

La Scala 2010-13 Barenboim Ring

- A Report from the Ravens

The Cycle is to be directed by Guy Cassiers and conducted by Daniel Barenboim have now been officially confirmed by the La Scala management. La Scala Intendant Lissner promises the Ring will be "contemporary and very political".

Although this Ring is a co-production with the Berlin State Opera, there seem to be no dates yet available for it. Confirmed cast as of now: René Pape (Wotan), Nina Stemme (Brünnhilde), Waltraud Meier (Sieglinde), the rising New Zealand tenor Simon O'Neill (Siegfried), Ian Storey (Siegfried). Waltraud Meier will not sing Brünnhilde, as apparently previously announced by her agent. The dates: *Das Rheingold* opens on 13 May 2010, *Die Walküre* will open the 2010-11 Scala season, *Siegfried* will open the 2012-13 Scala season, and *Götterdämmerung* in spring 2013.

The complete cycle is scheduled to be performed in June 2013. A full report in Italian is available from the website:

http://archivio.lastampa.it/LaStampaArchivio/main/History/tmpl_viewObj.jsp?objid=9152876



“What Was Eating Wagner?”

How Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy’s early death left “underdog” Richard Wagner to wreak a bitter revenge.”

Under this provocative heading and with this challenging opening, Martin Geck has written a fascinating and stimulating essay to mark the Mendelssohn Bicentenary Year: “As unlikely as it may sound, compared with Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, whose 200th birthday is being celebrated this year on February 3rd, Richard Wagner regarded himself as the underdog. This might help explain why, after Mendelssohn’s early death in 1847, he wreaked bitter revenge, lashing out furiously at the little Jewish prince whenever he could.”

After comparing the radically different childhoods of both composers – Wagner in relative poverty; Mendelssohn the son of a wealthy Jewish businessman – Geck notes “a number of fundamental similarities between Mendelssohn and Wagner”: “Both were disgusted by the superficiality of the music and opera business there. Mendelssohn considered Giacomo Meyerbeer’s “Robert le Diable” to be a piece of pure effect, ‘cold and heartless’; and the music in particular lacked “warmth and truth”. As far as vaudeville and theatre were concerned, he believed that ‘politics and lewdness were the two key concerns around which everything else revolved’. Wagner was no less harsh in his criticism; he might have showed an initial curiosity in the various strands of Parisian musical theatre, but the longer he longer he stayed, the more his contempt for French and Italian opera deepened”.

Geck speculates about the two composers who were in very close proximity around their 30s: “[Mendelssohn] had been the conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, since June 1841 he had also been director of music at the court in Dresden, without regular duties. What would have happened if he had decided to accept a full post in Dresden at that time? Would there have been room at the Dresden court for Richard Wagner as well, who soon afterwards performed “Rienzi” and the “Flying Dutchman” there?” Geck also points out that Wagner was clearly aware of and possibly attended Mendelssohn concerts during this period.

Geck also notes that both composers “were in fundamental agreement regarding questions of music education”, were “pioneers in advocating serious concert programs in the sense of today’s ‘symphony concerts’; “they advocated intensive rehearsal periods and fought against the sloppy treatment of musical scores,” fought for “well-educated and decently paid musicians,” and “worked on behalf of professional reforms”. Mendelssohn “founded the Leipzig Conservatory in 1843” and Wagner proposed “a thorough reform of the royal orchestra to the king of Saxony, and “later convinc[ed] the Bavarian King Ludwig II to found a Royal School of Music”.

Geck also tackles Wagner’s notorious pamphlet *On Jewishness in Music* published in 1850 (and republished in 1869 with an “explanatory introduction”, that does little to dampen the fires of outrage):

Wagner’s anti-Semitism absolutely needs to be viewed in the context of the revolution of 1848-49, and I would hypothesise that he only became a confirmed anti-Semite as a result of it. Afterwards, he searched for the socioeconomic causes of the revolution’s failure and came upon capitalism: The “good” powers of the people could not and cannot accomplish anything as long as Capital rules the day; in this sense, one can understand his aforementioned desire that Paris, as a centre of “music capitalism,” should be razed to the ground.” And yet this irrational formulation suggests that Wagner, while thoroughly representing Communist ideas in 1849-50 in works such as “Art and Revolution” and “Artwork of the Future,” did not ground himself a la Marx in analysis and reflection but rather personalised matters from the outset: The real villains were the capitalist Jews. They were corroding society to such a degree that it could only perish and, in the state it was in, as far as Wagner was concerned, it deserved to perish.

Geck also shows how much Mendelssohn and Wagner were alike in trying very hard to avoid becoming a “victim of a music business”. But he also points out where Wagner drew the line between himself and the Mendelssohn “school”: “In anticipation of the upcoming Beethoven year [1870], Wagner complained about the kind of conductor who puts considerable effort into producing the most streamlined performances possible but, in so doing, takes insufficient account of what the composer - for example, Beethoven - wanted to say. In the midst of criticism and all kinds of excitations, there’s a critical jab at ‘our contemporary music financiers, who either came out of Mendelssohn’s school or who, as beneficiaries of its support, were recommended to the world’.”

Geck’s analysis is subtle and well worth reading at the SignandSight website www.signandsight.com/features/1856.html. Geck’s concluding sentiments are well worth remembering as we rapidly approach not only Wagner’s but Verdi’s bicentenary year in 2013: “Anniversary celebration years for composers are welcomed as an opportunity to dispense with actual or alleged clichés...”.

[Editor]



Great Composers, Lousy Reviews: When Music Critics Attack

Jan Swafford wrote a review on 3 February 2009 of *Lexicon of Musical Invective* by conductor, theorist, and scholar Nicholas Slonimsky. The book was published in 1953, but according to Swafford "the book is still in print." Swafford provides this snapshot of Slonimsky: "The author himself had caught his share of slings and arrows as a young conductor who was determined to promote what the time called "ultra-modern" music. Now Slonimsky is remembered for premiering important pieces by Edgard Varese and Charles Ives, among others. After too many strange chords scuttled his conducting career, Slonimsky spent decades as a freelance writer, scholar, and theorist.... But Slonimsky's most enduring achievement is the *Lexicon*, his encyclopedia of umbrage."

Within the review, Swafford laments that "only a short abstract of one example" can be given, but, for the delight and chagrin of Wagnerians, the choice is "the rabid fury of one J.L. Klein in his 1871 *History of the Drama*. His parade of epithets—racist, classist, sexist, species-ist, satanic, and medical—is symptomatic of

the time's wordsmiths when they really, really didn't like your stuff: 'This din of brasses, tin pans and kettles, this Chinese or Caribbean clatter with wood sticks and ear-cutting scalping knives ... [t]his reveling in the destruction of all tonal essence, raging satanic fury in the orchestra, this demoniacal lewd caterwauling, scandal-mongering, gun-toting music ... the darling of feeble-minded royalty, ...of the court flunkies covered with reptilian slime, and of the blasé hysterical female court parasites ... inflated, in an insanely destructive self-aggrandizement, by Mephistopheles' mephitic and most venomous hellish miasma, into Beelzebub's Court Composer and General Director of Hell's Music—Wagner!'" You can read the full review at Slate Magazine's website: www.slate.com/id/2210339. If you enjoyed this article, Swafford has written many more for Slate Magazine, including *The Beethoven Mystery: Why haven't we figured out his Ninth Symphony yet?* – a list is at www.slate.com/default.aspx?search_input=swafford&search_loc=on&q=swafford&id=3944.

[Editor]

The Wagner Society's Pro Bono Auditors



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

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