



WAGNER
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CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome to the third Quarterly for 2016.

I write this letter from Bayreuth, and am preparing myself for the third Ring Cycle, which will be starting tomorrow. This year there are more members of the NSW Society than I can remember, certainly in recent years. This is largely due to the fact that our membership of the Verband (the international association of Wagner Societies) has led to us obtaining an additional allocation of festival tickets.

This is the fourth year of the Castorf Ring here in Bayreuth, and it has attracted a great deal of controversy. Most people find the production difficult to follow, and do not particularly like it. A few think that it is startlingly original, and thoroughly enjoy it. I have to say that the more I see it, the less difficult I find it. This is probably assisted by the fact that there are now English language lectures on the day of each opera, deconstructing the production and explaining some of its more obscure aspects. In any event, the singing and the orchestra remain of a universally high quality, which in my view are by far the most important aspects of any Ring Cycle.

Unfortunately I was out of Sydney for Antony Ernst's seminar, but on all accounts it and the recital, were, yet again, a huge success. They are described in detail later in this Quarterly through contributions gratefully received from William Beck, Lynette Longford, and Leona Geeves

I would like to mention a letter of thanks that we received from Christopher Richardson, bass baritone, (which is reproduced later in this Quarterly). Christopher was the recipient of a \$4,000 scholarship from the Society, which enabled him to attend the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School in December 2013. He writes of how this experience has transformed his professional life, and led to performance opportunities that would not otherwise have been possible. We were delighted to receive this letter, as it underpins the significance of our ongoing commitment to nurture and

develop the talents of young classical singers and performing artists through our funding programs.

I am happy to report that there are a number of pieces of good news to pass on to you. The first is a wonderful early Christmas present with the confirmation that Stefan Vinke, one of the world's greatest heldentenors, has agreed to be the star attraction for our end of year function on 30 October 2016. This date is a little earlier than usual partly because of Stefan's schedule of rehearsals for his much anticipated reprise of his role as Siegfried in the Melbourne Ring Cycle, and to accommodate those of our Members who will be attending one or more of the cycles. Further information about this exciting event will be sent to Members as soon as possible.

The second piece of good news is the AO (Officer of the Order of Australia) which was awarded to John Wegner as part of the Queen's Birthday honours "for distinguished service to the performing arts as a world-renowned bass-baritone, and



Antony Ernst

PRESIDENT'S REPORT *Continued page 4*

Patron: Ms Simone Young AM
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Mr John Wegner AO
Mr Roger Cruickshank
Dr Terence Watson



Antony Ernst (l) presenter for the *Bach to the Future* Seminar with John Meyer, President WA Wagner Society
(Photo by Mailis Wakeham)



Lee Abrahmsen as Elisabeth in "Dich teure Halle" from Melbourne Opera's 2016 production of *Tannhäuser*
(www.facebook.com/MelbourneOpera)

FOR YOUR DIARY

2016		
Saturday 5, Sunday 6 and Thursday 10 November	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i> with Stuart Skelton and Nina Stemme opening the 2016-17 season at the Metropolitan Opera; conducted by Sir Simon Rattle, directed by Mariusz Treliński - See more at: http://www.metopera.org/About/Press-Releases/The-Metropolitan-Opera-2016-17-Season/#sthash.gkr64YIB.dpuf : there was more information in the March Quarterly.	Various cinemas that broadcast Metropolitan Opera productions
Saturday, 19 November	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i> in the Apple Isle: Superstars Swedish soprano Nina Stemme, and Australian tenor Stuart Skelton perform excerpts from <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> with conductor Marko Letonja.	Federation Hall, Hobart @ 7:30 PM
Monday, 21 November to Friday, 16 December	The Melbourne/Armfield Ring Cycle with new singers and singers continuing from 2013: James Johnson* - Wotan; Lise Lindstrom-Brünnhilde; Stefan Vinke-Siegfried and Warwick Fyfe-Alberich; Conductor - Pietari Inkinen; Director-Neil Armfield. *Replacement for Greer Grimsley - see article below.	Melbourne Arts Centre State Theatre
Thursday, 1 December	SIMONE YOUNG CONDUCTS WAGNER Parsifal: Excerpts from Act II with Stuart Skelton tenor and Michelle de Young mezzo-soprano and BRUCKNER Symphony No.9	Melbourne Arts Centre - Hamer Hall @ 8pm
2017		
Wednesday 9, Saturday 12, and Monday 14 August	<i>Parsifal</i> - semi-staged production by Opera Australia, starring Jonas Kaufmann as Parsifal, Jacqueline Dark as Kundry, Kwangchul Youn as Gurnemanz, and Warwick Fyfe as Klingsor - see details below	Sydney Opera House - concert hall

COMING EVENTS 2016 - SUNDAY STARTING TIMES MAY VARY

PLEASE CHECK THE SCHEDULE ONLINE FOR DETAILS

DATE	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	TIME & LOCATION
October 16 @ 2pm	David Larkin: Liszt, Wagner and the audiences of the day DVD: 12:30 <i>Magic Fire</i> ; 1955 bio-pic with extensive use of Wagner's music, arranged by Erich Wolfgang Korngold.	Goethe Institut 12.30pm
October 30 @ 2pm	Early End of Year Celebrations with weltberühmten Heldentenor Stefan Vincke - details to be confirmed as soon as possible.	Goethe Institut

Advice about changes to the Program will be emailed to people who have given their email addresses to the Society's Webmaster; the latest updates will also be available on the Society's webpage: www.wagner.org.au.
Admission to each event will be \$20 a Member, and \$25 per non-Member, unless otherwise indicated.

Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)

NB: Information about DVDs to be shown before functions will be available before the first function in 2016.

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as an ambassador for the cultural reputation of Australia.” We congratulate John for this much-deserved honour. John, as many of you will know, has been battling with Parkinson’s disease over recent years. And “battling” is the appropriate word. He has steadfastly applied himself to exercises and other means of warding off and slowing down the progress of this disease, and has succeeded beyond all expectations.

In July this year, in our third piece of good news, regular presenter to the Wagner Society in NSW Sunday functions, Peter Bassett, was awarded a Ph.D. by Griffith University. His doctoral thesis related to the “Wagner decade” in Adelaide (consisting of the two Ring Cycles in 1998 and 2004, and the Parsifal in 2001), including the stories behind the scenes, and the reasons why the second Ring was never seen again. He has given a presentation to our society on this subject, and it was absolutely fascinating. We congratulate him for his achievements.

The fourth piece of great news is that in August 2017 Opera Australia will be putting on three concert performances of

Parsifal in the concert hall of the Sydney Opera House. To be precise, the dates are 9, 12 and 14 August, and there will be a stellar cast, including Jonas Kauffman as Parsifal, Jacqueline Dark as Kundry, Kwangchul Youn as Gurnemanz, and Warwick Fyfe as Klingsor. By the time you receive this Quarterly, tickets will be obtainable by telephoning the Opera Australia box office in Sydney.

Please keep in mind that the Society is likely to receive some sets of tickets to the 2017 Bayreuth Festival. Members will receive an email advice with information about any offers that we receive, with an invitation to advise of your interest in registering for the ballot for tickets, as is usual practice for Bayreuth tickets.

I would like to give my sincere thanks to those members who have assisted with the catering at our events. The standard has been extremely high, and it makes a significant difference to our members’ enjoyment of the whole experience. I would also like to thank Mailis Wakeham for all the wonderful photographs she takes for the Quarterly.

2016 MELBOURNE RING CYCLE - JAMES JOHNSON REPLACES GREER GRIMSLEY AS WOTAN

In late July 2016, subscribers to the Melbourne Ring Cycle received an email from Opera Australia informing them: “Greer Grimsley has suffered a serious health issue which, unfortunately, means that he will not be in sufficient physical condition to perform in the Melbourne *Ring Cycle*.” Grimsley’s replacement will be James Johnson.

Opera Australia’s biography is encouraging for patron of the 2106 Melbourne Ring Cycle: “Baritone James Johnson has been praised not only for his voice but also for his dramatic abilities, amply demonstrated in roles ranging from the major heldenbaritone roles of Wagner and Strauss to roles encompassing the Italian, French, Russian, Hungarian, Czech, and Polish repertoire. He is also at home as a concert singer, performing music ranging from the Baroque era to contemporary composers.”

Heldenbaritone James Johnson – photos from Opera Australia website.

Johnson has sung just about all the heavy roles, in an impressive number of languages, at most of the world’s



Heldenbaritone James Johnson

leading houses: Metropolitan Opera, the Chicago Lyric Opera, Teatro alla Scala, Opéra National de Paris, Teatro Liceu de Barcelona, Staatsoper Stuttgart, Deutsche Oper Berlin, New National Theater Tokyo, Megaron of Athens, Royal Opera of Copenhagen, and Theatre de la Monnaie.

His Wagner roles include: *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Parsifal*, *Lohengrin* (including performances at Bayreuth), *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. For those interested in a preview of his voice (or to follow up after hearing him live), Johnson has

recorded the following works: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Lyrische Symphonie*, *Die Jakobsleiter*, and *Penthesilea*. In particular, Johnson was Wotan and the Wanderer in *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* (with Johan Reuter as the *Rheingold* Wotan) in the Kasper Bech Holten directed Copenhagen Ring Cycle performed in 2003-6 and released on DVD in 2008. He has also been instrumental in making more popular the works of Alexander Zemlinsky, including his *Lyrische Sinfonie* and the opera *Eine Florentinische Tragödie*.

ANTONY ERNST SEMINAR

BACH TO THE FUTURE: WAGNER'S ROOTS AND THE GERMAN NATION - 6 & 7 AUGUST 2016

On 6 & 7 August 2016, 104 members and interested others registered for a seminar on the North German music tradition, which saw the development of both Bach and Wagner, in particular the cities of Leipzig and Dresden. Some attended both Saturday afternoon and all Sunday; others came to what sections they could. Overall, it was an outstandingly successful seminar, with a positive response from all participants. We were delighted to welcome Trevor Clarke from the Melbourne Wagner Society, and John Meyer, President of the WA Wagner Society. The enthusiasm of all was expressed by one member: A wonderfully informative weekend of music, history, philosophy, the birth of nations and where Wagner fits into all of the above. Organisation of the seminar, on behalf of the Wagner Society in NSW, was undertaken by Colleen Chesterman, Michael Day, Barbara de Rome, Jenny Edwards, Leona Geeves and Margaret Whealy. Florian Hammerbacher also provided much appreciated assistance.

REPORT ON THE SATURDAY SESSION

by William Beck

A large and attentive audience comfortably filled the auditorium at the Goethe-Institut for Dr Antony Ernst's weekend seminar. On the Saturday afternoon, 6 August, there were two sessions.

Wagner's Upbringing in the North German Tradition

In *Mein Leben*, Wagner stresses his identity as a musical radical – “rediscovering” Beethoven, following Weber (*Der Freischütz*) and so forth. This is all well and good, but Antony asked us to consider what other influences, perhaps equally important, had been omitted from the accepted narrative of Wagner's musical development. This may not just be a case of Wagner fashioning his history to suit his own ends: some things may have just been assumed and not thought worthy of mention.

Wagner, the first major Protestant composer, was born in Leipzig, the city where Bach had been Thomaskantor for twenty-seven years until his death in 1750. The post of Thomaskantor gave Bach responsibility not only for music at the (Protestant) Thomaskirche, but also at several other churches in Leipzig. He also taught music to the students at the Thomasschule and of course was director of the Thomanerchor, the choir of the Thomaskirche, with its 800-year history (it was founded in 1212). The Thomaskantor was thus basically in charge of music in Leipzig.

Dresden is the capital of Saxony. The Kreuzkirche in Dresden had a history comparable with that of the Thomaskirche; it also had a choir and an associated school, the Kreuzschule, where Wagner was a pupil for five years, and where several famous musicians from the former East Germany have been educated, including Peter Schreier and Theo Adam. Antony pointed out that the Kreuzschule and the Thomasschule, have an absolutely rigorous and thorough musical curriculum: their successful students become extremely accomplished.

The traditional view is that Bach's music was not performed after his death in 1750 and more or less subsided from view until Mendelssohn's Bach revival beginning with his performance of the *Matthäuspassion* in Berlin in 1829. This is not completely true. Although Bach's church music was

probably not performed publicly outside Leipzig, in Leipzig and Dresden it was at least studied and rehearsed. The choirs continued to sing the cantatas at the Thomaskirche, whose archives held the scores. It is therefore inconceivable that Wagner, growing up in Leipzig and Dresden and studying at the Thomasschule and the Kreuzschule, could not have known the music of Bach.

Bach's successors as Thomaskantor included Johann Gottfried Schicht (from 1810 to 1823) and Christian Theodor Weinlig (1823-1842). Antony played us some music by these composers – a rather sweet Schubertian chorale by Schicht and a “Laudate Dominum” by Weinlig, who taught Wagner. The choral music of the time was much denser and heftier than the orchestral music (typified by the classical symphony) – rather reminiscent of Tallis.

When we consider Wagner's approach to music drama, we can observe how he brings in influences from outside opera. Antony played us Bach's motet, “Singet dem Herrn” and compared it with the *Rheintöchter* singing in close harmony

Continued page 6

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in *Götterdämmerung*. A striking and well-known example is found in *Die Meistersinger* – the Prelude to Act One, itself a very complex piece of counterpoint, leads straight into a Lutheran chorale.

The Great Passion and The Ring

In the second session, Antony explored the links between the tradition of clear storytelling as exemplified in the Protestant settings of the Passion texts, and Wagner's development of music drama, which has more in common with the passion settings than with 19th century opera in the Italian and French tradition. Opera is essentially a Catholic art form: its natural home was in Italy, France, Austria and Bavaria, where the great Catholic monarchies and courts were located. There was a cultural milieu of conspicuous display. Northern Germany was different. Frederick the Great of Prussia is thought of as a great supporter of the arts, mainly because all his predecessors were not, and he stood out.

Protestantism can be thought of as a priesthood of believers – each believer has his or her individual relationship with God, who is not accessed through priests or saints. Catholicism holds out the priest as the intercessor in the relationship between believer and God. In the Catholic tradition, this involves much music and display for the glory of God. Catholic church music is liturgical – focused on the priest, the intercessor.

In contrast, many Protestant sects (Dutch Calvinists, English Puritans) did not have any music in the church. North German church music had to take on the showing, enactment and demonstration of the biblical stories, which was not available on stage. The Protestant Church had to be in the vernacular: Luther complained that the congregation did not speak Latin and could not understand what their intercessor/priest was saying. Passion Plays were performed, including in (Catholic) Southern Germany, but were not quite theatre, and not quite liturgy. Musical settings of the Passion date back 100 years before Bach. Schütz composed at a time when instruments were forbidden in church – it is for choir and soloists – texts and recitatives are in German. The recitatives sound like liturgy. When it is sung as set, this sounds much clearer and more intelligible than operatic music of the time. It is not about how beautiful the voice is, or how agile and clever the singer – the focus is on the text. The text of an opera is made up. The text of the Passion is prescribed – it is the Gospel – you cannot leave anything out. Consider the Miserere scene from *Il trovatore*. It is not gospel but pseudo-liturgical – in Italian ["Miserere d'un alma già vicina"] – they made it all up to create an impression.

This is not how Wagner worked, at least after *Lohengrin*. Antony pointed out how *Lohengrin* breaks new ground, unlike *Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*, where everything is very clearly constructed – there are "numbers". In *Lohengrin* he does not leave anything out – he treats it like a Passion, reporting the whole conversation. In Act I, everything is included – King Henry explains why he has come to Brabant, every trumpet fanfare is included – the final trumpet call – the waiting...Wagner portrays, at first, the doubt that anyone will come forward, then the glimmer on the horizon as the swan approaches, the word spreads through the crowd and Lohengrin arrives.

Consider Bach's setting of the narration in the *Matthäuspassion* at the time of Jesus' death: the Evangelist [Nr. 63a] describes the veil of the temple being rent in twain, the earthquake, the dead rising and so on. Then the Centurion and the bystanders are deeply moved and sing [Nr.63b] "Truly this was the Son of God." Compare this with, for example, Siegfried, Act III. "Das ist kein Mann! Brennende Zauber zückt mir das Herz.....[observe how the setting creates the feeling in us].... "Wen ruf ich zum Heil, daß er mir helfe? Mutter! Mutter! Gedenke mein!"... "Wie weck ich die Maid?.....Im Schläfe liegt eine Frau: - die hat ihn das Fürchten gelehrt!" There are often lines where there is no accompaniment – either a shimmering piece of music, or interpolated chords as in recitative.

To summarise and conclude, Antony cited two aspects of the Protestant tradition that led the way for Wagner. Firstly, we have the example of the priesthood of believers.

- In *Holländer*, there is an angel ("Dich frage ich, gepries'ner Engel Gottes, der meines Heil's Bedingung mir gewann...").
- In *Tannhäuser*, the Pope rejects him – the Pope is not a good intercessor with God.
- In *Lohengrin*, everyone has his own relationship with God.
- In *Parsifal*, it is Parsifal's relationship with God.

Verdi does not necessarily approve of the situation, but he accepts that there is a hierarchy in the stories he tells: the Grand Inquisitor in *Don Carlos*, the priests in *Aida*, Padre Guardiano in *Forza* can redeem people – he pardons and redeems Alvaro.

Secondly, we have the Catholic tradition of redemption through good works, versus the Protestant tradition of redemption through faith - there is no relationship between what you do and what happens to you.

- Senta doesn't have faith in the *Holländer* and he doesn't have faith in her. But she kills herself and they are both redeemed.
- *Tannhäuser* should end up damned – he has committed the sin of despair – but he is redeemed.
- *Lohengrin* ends tragically for lack of faith, not lack of good works.

What does this mean about our concept of time? If it's all about good works, what happened in the past is important. It affects who you are now and your destiny. In the Protestant conception, you are in a timeless space. We know that Wagner was not a deeply religious person. He turned away from organised Christian religion and flirted with pantheism and Buddhism. But even if you are not a strict observer of a particular faith, you may not easily escape the cultural and other influences of your upbringing.

Antony finished the session with a story about an Irishman who met another man in the street and asked him, "Are you a Protestant or a Catholic?" The man replied, "I'm an atheist." "Yes, but are you a Protestant atheist or a Catholic atheist?"

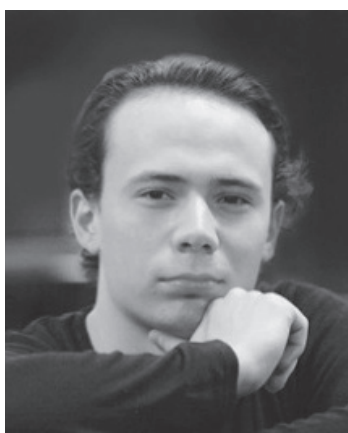
REPORT ON THE SEMINAR RECITAL - AYSE GOKNUR SHANAL ACCOMPANIED BY EVGENY UKHANOV by Leona Geeves

After the first day of Antony Ernst's wonderful seminar, soprano, demonstrated some of the glories of Wagner's music. Ayse sang from Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*: **Der Engel** (The Angel), composed November 1857; **Stehe still!** (Be still!), composed February 1858; **Im Treibhaus** – Studie zu *Tristan und Isolde* (In the Greenhouse), composed May 1858; and **Schmerzen** (Sorrows), composed December 1857

These were followed by Antonín Dvořák's **Songs My Mother Taught Me** (Czech: *Když mne stará matka zpívat učívala;*) the fourth of seven songs from his cycle *Gypsy Songs* for voice and piano written in 1880, set to poems by Adolf Heyduk. The pair closed with **Ochi Chernye**, (Dark Eyes) the famous song, by the Ukrainian poet and writer Yevhen Hrebinka, published in 1843; the music was composed by Adalgiso Ferraris.

Soprano, **Ayse Goknur Shanal**, whom the Wagner Society sponsored at the Lisa Gasteen Summer School, studied at the Royal College of Music and the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera, NY. Her awards include amongst others, Australian Singing Competition, and the McDonalds Operatic Aria. She played a significant role in developing and major vocal works for the commemoration of the ANZAC Centenary in Australia and the USA. You can keep up with Ayse's activities at: www.aysegoknurshanal.com.

Evgeny Ukhanov came from Ukraine to Australia aged 15, on scholarship and was the youngest finalist at SIPCA. He has performed as a soloist with the SSO and the ACO. He has appeared in concerts in Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Japan and Norway. He has featured on ABC Classic FM and his CDs include some recorded by ABC Classics.



Evgeny Ukhanov - accompanist for Ayse Goknur Shanal at the seminar recital (photo from Evgeny's website: www.evgenyukhanov.com)

Ayse and Evgeny had their CDs available for purchase after the concert and they are now available from a.g.shanal@gmail.com (uploaded on itunes shortly). Ayse and Evgeny are giving a recital at the Sydney Opera House, Utzon Room on 6 November 2016. Ayse will be featured in the National Anthem at the opening of the Test Cricket Match.



Leona Geeves (Vice-President), Ayse Goknur Shanal, soprano for the recital at the *Bach to the Future* seminar, and Antony Ernst, presenter of the seminar at the Sydney Goethe Institut 6-7 August 2016 (photo Mailis Wakeham)

REPORT ON THE SUNDAY SESSION

by Lynette Longford

Antony opened the Sunday seminar by setting the scene of German nationalism, or the lack of a cohesive nationalism during the 1800's, the history of the time, and the influences of change and traumatic conflicts on Wagner and his music.

Germany was a divided nation, with multiple smaller independent states interspersed throughout, which Antony highlighted by projecting a map to show us their various locations. Napoleon had dissolved the Holy Roman Empire and the French Revolution was in its throes next door, with subsequent implications for the German states and the prospect that a similar revolution might happen in their country. The divisions within the "Guilds" of these states posed the dilemma "What is it to be German"? The Brothers Grimm had looked at this question as they researched the origins of their folk stories, publishing their most authentic versions around 1805—1808. Other local folk stories were published at the same time, also in the quest for finding what was most authentically German.

Leipzig in 1813 was suffering from the effects of the conflict with the Russian army, which had followed a "scorched earth" policy, burning fields and crops, so that the Napoleonic army, which was used to foraging the land, had no food. Napoleon had based himself near Leipzig, at the intersection of three rivers. Anticipating the battle to come, many residents left Leipzig, where the ensuing battle left behind 100,000 casualties. The equivalent of nine football fields full of dead and dying people left a huge legacy with ongoing effects for the people who had not fled and were left to clean up after the chaos.

Significantly, the state of Saxony, which included Leipzig and Dresden, had been saved, and the constant struggle to work out which culturally diverse groups were part of "Germany" continued. The Prussians? The Austrians?

From the 1820's to the 1830's, at the same time as these issues were unfolding, industrialisation was developing together with its inherent changes. France was something of a model, with its unified states, however, the local state rulers in Germany proved to be more problematic, not wanting to relinquish their power over their own smaller states.

As a rising tide of nationalism was making its voice heard, Wagner was incorporating this movement in his operas, *Tannhäuser*, *Dutchman* etc ,and drew on examples of the great "Germany" of the past in *Lohengrin*, setting it in the context of the creation of a unified German nation.

By 1848, ideas of creating a unified German nation, along the lines of the more liberal government being formed in France, were thwarted for Wagner, having to flee the uprising of that time in Dresden and adjust to the necessity of the economic pressures of the time.

War in the 1860's saw Prussia overcoming Austria and Germany, becoming a Protestant nation, but not a "cultural" nation. Driven by Prussian influence, the culture was dour and rigidly militaristic. Wagner, living in Switzerland, was separated from these influences and was radically re-thinking his own position. *Meistersinger* is centred around the "middle" classes, rather than the nobility, the "guilds," with their artisan skills including the cobblers etc. A "Marxist" parable, the fading of the aristocracy and new radical ideas, could be expressed in an acceptable format. It was a time of evolution. Hans Sachs's final address is a rejection of power, with the core of German-ism being culture, not power, as in his aria "Holy German Art." Should Germany be overcome by a foreign entity, it was of utmost importance that "German" art should continue to be held sacred.

Hence, the Ring is embedded in Northern Germanic cultural mythology, rather than Roman or Greek mythology. Of note, is also the influence of King Ludwig of Bavaria's financial support of Wagner and his work.

The 1870's saw the Franco Prussian war, with Northern Germans defeating the French and driving back Napoleon's army. The Prussian army was very organised and well stocked as it occupied Paris. Allies in Northern Germany, including Bavaria (and Wagner), became united in a new German empire with a more unified nationalism and cultural themes incorporated into music (later adopted by the extreme

German nationalism of the 1900's). Wagner, not wanting to identify with this development, escaped to Bayreuth and Bavaria to create his own cultural community. Influenced by the protestant musical tradition and the music of Bach which he had grown up with, he focussed on writing into the Ring a mix of the culture, the politics, the ethics and the influences from his readings of Schopenhauer and Buddhism.

WAGNER'S BUDDHISM

Antony went on to speak on Wagner's interest in and academic study of Buddhism—also of particular interest to Antony in his own life journey and deeper understanding of the Ring. Although Antony claimed that Wagner would never have met a Buddhist, references to Buddhism underpin much of the Ring's journey and have given Antony clarity on a number of Ring dilemmas he has struggled to understand and come to terms with. Antony referred to Buddhism as a "tool" to better understand Wagner's characters, especially the character of Siegfried.

His talk included concepts such as:

- The Ring as a reaction to the popularism and authoritarianism of Germany at the time (as described in the morning talk) - he related this to the Buddhist philosophy of renunciation and detachment.
- Social thinking—reflecting transformation and evolution.
- Themes of renunciation and detachment throughout the Ring.

Antony raised the issue of "What does it mean to be a God?" As distinct from the human condition, a God exists outside of time, is eternal and immortal and can predict the future, the consequences of what has happened in the past. Hence the "Curse" of the Ring bound together the past and the future, and desire and fear became part of the human condition.

- Buddhist teaching includes "you construct yourself," i.e. by our unease at looking at what may happen in the future, our unease stands in the way of enlightenment—the opening of the eyes. Renunciation of the things we are caught up with, being able to look outside ourselves and experience compassion for other people—leads to enlightenment.
- The Ring is an extreme example of being tied to self, egotistical, desiring what is not possessed.

DONATIONS RECEIVED SINCE JULY 2016

No donations received to date.

NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS SINCE DECEMBER 2015

No New Members.

EMAIL ADDRESSES FOR EASY CONTACT AND ADVICE ON FUNCTIONS AND DEALS!

Regular emails are sent to those members of the Society whose email addresses we have on file. If you have not been receiving these emails, please ensure we have your current email address by filling in the form on the Society's contact web page: www.wagner.org.au/contact-us.

- The Curse—an example of the “Law”—if something happens, there is a later consequence, such as Wotan’s legal contract he had to abide by. Wotan tries to find a solution by adding interventions, but he just makes the situation worse. There are, though, opposite guiding force in acting out of “love”—as in Siegmund and Sieglinde’s relationship.
- There is a Buddhist tenet is that “Everything Changes,” for example, when Brünnhilde wakes up on the rock and still “out of time”, goes on to experience humanity, of remembering what happened in the past, but not yet fully aware of “Everything Changes.”
- Buddhism espouses the “Don’t Know” mind, e.g. worry about the future? Why? For example, Siegfried is not worried about the future; he “Didn’t know” what might happen. He lived in the present, with little awareness of the past (apart from knowing he didn’t know from where he’d come) and had no fear of the future.
- Rather than saying “I can’t do it,” Buddhism espouses the concept of “I haven’t done it yet.” Siegfried was yet to experience love.
- Another example : when Wotan asked Erda “How to stop a turning wheel,” a Buddhist response would be “You can’t stop it, but you can step away from it.” Wotan understood that he could not stop what had been put in motion, however, he now has to step away from the situation, to remove himself from what is to happen.
- Siegfried’s experience on the rock: for the first time, he feels “fear” as a result of his new experience with desire: confidence in the love he was experiencing took away his fear.
- Both Siegfried and Brünnhilde’s actions reflect Buddhist teaching: “If you refuse to accept the legitimacy of authority, then it has no power over you.” Hence their “love” was more important to them than the “law.”
- Antony’s theory is that now that Siegfried and Brünnhilde both have knowledge about what has happened and awareness that the ring can only be returned and the “curse” lifted following the destruction of Valhalla, enlightenment has been reached. In the Immolation scene, Brünnhilde declares she now knows everything.
- Wagner’s journey from a place of bitterness in a changing world and a sense of outrage to evolve to a place of love and compassion is both a mental and philosophical journey and an incredible achievement for him and is a reflection of Buddhist beliefs of bitterness progressing to a state of charity and renunciation of self, including a relationship between the individual and the divine; that is, enlightenment.
- In Buddhism, intentions count a lot. The reason people do things is very important. The same could be said of Wagner’s writing!

CHRISTOPHER RICHARDSON, BASS BARITONE - LETTER OF THANKS FOR WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW SUPPORT

The following letter was sent to Leona Geeves, Vice-President of the Wagner Society in NSW, from Christopher:

Further to our recent conversation following the opening night performance of Pinchgut’s ‘Armida’ production, I would like to reinforce in writing the significance of the Wagner Society in NSW’s scholarship funding in the advancement of my career as a classical singer.

As you are aware, I was the very fortunate recipient of a \$4000 scholarship grant from the Wagner Society of NSW in December 2013 which enabled me to attend the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School (LGNOS) at Griffith University in Brisbane. Attending this school gave me the opportunity to work intensely over a three-week period in vocal technique, languages and stagecraft with a number of seasoned industry professionals from Europe and the U.S.A.

Although at the time I certainly found the experience valuable and enjoyable (in so much as it was measurably transformational in my vocal practice and application of languages as a classical singer), it is only now with the passing of time that I can fully appreciate the actual significance of the Wagner Society of NSW’s fiscal enabling of my LGNOS 2013 attendance.

As a direct result of the industry audition I undertook whilst attending the opera school, I was signed for exclusive representation as a performing artist in Australasia by esteemed Classical Music agent Graham Pushee, the director of Arts Management Pty Ltd. Since then, I have progressed from being a relatively ‘unknown’ artist in Australasia to being an esteemed emerging professional in increasing demand as a concert bass-baritone and opera soloist. As a result of this, I have appeared as guest soloist with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO), the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Pinchgut Opera, Sydney Philharmonia Choir (SPC), and am engaged to perform this year with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, and again with the MSO and SPC.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Wagner Society of NSW for its ongoing commitment to nurturing the development of young classical singers and performing artists in our wonderful nation, through the granting of scholarship funding.

With sincerest thanks and best wishes,
Christopher Richardson Bass Baritone

WAGNER IN ENGLAND by June Donsworth

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg - Glyndebourne, 29 May 2016

This was a special first-ever treat for me. A beautiful sunny, warmish May day. Train from Victoria, coach from Lewes to the Glyndebourne Theatre and parklands. Flowers blooming, patrons dressed up, linen covered tables scattered through the lawns and, lakeside, champagne and delicacies to eat, beautiful set, wonderful music and acting and some great singing.

It is a reprise of an acclaimed 2011 production by Sir David McVicar. The sets and costumes were outstandingly beautiful. Gerard Finley, Canadian baritone, was in superb voice as Sachs. American Amanda Majeski's voice, as Eva, was a beautiful clear shiny soprano. David Portillo was a lively, engaging David. (NOTE, David Portillo also sang superbly in the recent Opera Australia production of *Così Fan Tutte*—also a McVicar production). Jochen Kupfer sang Beckmesser and for me he was a delight. Tall and slim with long black hair he tossed to great effect, he camped up the role in Restoration comedy style, with fine voice and acting. In the finale, Sachs went over to Beckmesser to make peace. Beckmesser refuses the hand of friendship and sulks off...very much in character. The only disappointment was Michael Schade's Walther—a tight tenor which made one relieved that he actually made it to the end of the Prize song. In summary, a great and memorable day out in every way.

Tristan und Isolde, English National Opera, London Coliseum - First Night, 9 June 2016.

Conductor Edward Gardner: Director Daniel Kramer: Set Designer Anish Kapoor: *Tristan* Stuart Skelton: *Isolde* Heidi Melton: *Marke* Matthew Rose: *Kurwenal* Craig Colclough: *Brangäne* Karen Cargill: *Melot* Stephen Rooke.

A great deal of expectation for this new production. The incoming Artistic director, Daniel Kramer, was described as “the irrepressibly optimistic 39 year old American.” However, the combination of Kramer’s “optimism” (read inability to maintain some overall consistency in era, time and place) and Anish Kapoor’s lack of consideration for both audience and singers in the sets resulted in a very mixed and confusing production.

In Act I, the set consisted of three golden wooden pyramids, on their sides, creating three triangular spaces—the left for Isolde and Brangäne, the right for Tristan and Kurwenal, and the middle for King Marke and his retinue. The golden effect was beautiful, but unfortunately when the singers were not at the absolute front of the set, they could not be seen by the audience on the other side. Isolde, with the blackest of long hair wigs, began the Act dressed in a full length cape and white diaphanous shift underneath. Brangäne had a wiry-looking silvery wig, black belted dress and black stockings, very red lips, and two rouge spots. She resembled Marge Simpson. As the Act progressed, Brangäne dressed Isolde with one garment piece after another—bodice, wide cane frames, silvery skirt over that, finally, an embroidered grey skirt. Isolde



June Donsworth at Glyndebourne for *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

eventually looked like a very old version of Diego Velázquez's *Infanta* in *Las Meninas*. In the right hand triangle appeared Tristan. He too was dressed elaborately by Kurwenal. Over basic black pants and top was put a grey pleated skirt, then epaulettes resembling grey propellers sticking out from his shoulders. A Samurai-like outfit apparently. Completely out of synch in time and place with Kurwenal, who was dressed like an 18th century court attendant, also with puffed up wig. Early into Act 1, Isolde cut her arm with a knife that had been concealed in her sleeve—blood flowed. (I had never seen Isolde as an impulsive wrist-slasher... or someone with a Borderline Personality Disorder..... this was ridiculous).

The singing?? Stuart Skelton was in magnificent voice, with clear tone and diction, a beautiful mellow voice. After they had drunk the love potion, and he sang “Isolde,” shivers ran down my spine. Heidi Melton was in patchy voice in Act 1—sometimes sweet soprano, sometimes quite delightful, other times screechy and harsh; lumpen presence and wooden acting. Karen Cargill's mezzo, similarly, I thought was patchy—at times just lovely on the ear, other times harsh. Matthew Rose (King Marke) was satisfactory, with some deep, resounding authority in his voice.

Act II. Anish Kapoor, for my money, made a serious mistake here. The set consisted of a three dimensional sphere suspended in the middle of the stage; its cave-like inside was filled with crusty fake cement with hidden vertical paths. Tristan and Isolde had to sing their wonderful love song whilst clambering up and down paths through the crusty cement, several times missing their steps and causing a vile distraction from their sublime music. At the end of this, they both did a bit of wrist slashing with an odd shaped carving knife, with

more blood spilt, resulting in a team of white coated Medics rushing onto the stage. Tristan and Isolde were then wrestled into hospital beds, and King Marke sings his what-should-be-heart-wrenching cry of sorrow and betrayal to two hospital invalids who lay passively under their strapped down hospital covers. The pathos of Marke's solo was thus completely lost. Eventually Tristan managed to roll out of the bed and rushed at Merlot, who stabbed him. Merlot had a Hitleresque look, with a lock of brown hair hanging over his forehead, and a red cross across his eyes and down his nose.

My comment here is that the "irrepressibly optimistic" director Daniel Kramer would have had to be delusionally optimistic if he thought this hospital scenario was interesting or original, or could add anything whatsoever to an already very dramatic and musically superb climax. The orchestra and Heidi Melton at times during the love duet drowned out Skelton, which I found VERY annoying.

Act III. A bit of the crusty moon-shaped object was seen; the rest of the stage was bare. Lighting cast strange and interesting shadows against the back wall. Tristan was now wearing a long straggly grey wig, and was reclining on a heap of blankets, under his doona. He looked like Billie Connolly. Tristan's singing was wonderful, beautiful, fabulous.

The jarring element here was Kurwenal—dressed and acting like a court jester; bald, white faced, red cheek spots, running and hopping around like a clown, climbing a ladder and looking out, even seemed to be telling jokes to cheer Tristan up. In the finale, the lover's cement cave was lit up, and Isolde appeared in it. Her singing of the *Liebestod* was uninspiring. However, the final scene worked beautifully, as Tristan climbed into the bottom of the cave and Isolde held him in her embrace (re-united at last—in fantasy).

The English reviewers were uniformly highly complimentary of Stuart Skelton:

"Stuart Skelton's superbly mellifluous heroic tenor is ample reason to see the show" (*The Independent*)

"I doubt there is another tenor around today who could sing the role of Tristan in English with anything like the authority, sustained beauty of tone and intensity that Stuart Skelton brings to it here" (*The Guardian*).

"Skelton must surely be regarded as one of the finest Wagnerian tenors before us today. His tonal clarity, crisp diction, firmness and attention to the detail of Wagner's vocal writing are rarely to be found in a single singer" (Bachtrack)

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WAGNER OPERAS IN THE USA AND GERMANY

by Colleen and Michael Chesterman

We booked with a group of Wagner Society friends to go to Francesca Zambello's *Ring of the Nibelungen* in Washington in May 2016. We had seen the operas in 2011 in the first showing in San Francisco and had found it very satisfying. The cycle was meant to show in Washington in 2014, but the budget for this was not available. In Washington, we selected the third cycle, when the role of Brünnhilde was sung by Nina Stemme, whom we had seen in San Francisco. She is still the best exponent of the role. We booked through the Kennedy Centre Box Office, which offers parties of 12 reduced tickets. Three of our seats were A reserve, all others B, but they were excellent in view and sound.

Zambello had designed it as an 'American' Ring. *Rhinegold* begins during the gold rushes, Alberich is presented as a forty-niner. In *Valkyrie*, we are in the 1920's, and the Valkyries are presented as young Amelia Earharts. By *Siegfried*, we enter the world of the dispossessed, with Mime and Siegfried in a battered caravan in a forest. *Götterdämmerung* is set in the world of the wealthy financiers, shallow and corrupt.

Another significant theme is the relationship between man and nature, which he carelessly destroys through greed. Throughout, projections illustrate the implications of this wasteful destruction as forests become industrial furnaces and splashing waterways are covered by detritus.

Overall, it remains an excellent Ring, particularly *Götterdämmerung*. The power of the main players was evident from the beginning. The Rhinemaidens sang beautifully, teasing Alberich, played by Gordon Hawkins, a powerful bass. The role of Wotan was played by Alan Held, tall and dominating, with Elizabeth Bishop as his wife Fricka. The gods entered Valhalla as if they were embarking on a magnificent cross-Atlantic liner. In *Valkyrie*, the first act was beautifully performed by Christopher Ventris as Siegmund, Meagan Miller as Sieglinde, and Raymond Aceto as Hunding—all strong performers. However, Nina Stemme's appearance in the second act dominated all, as she teased her father and demanded that he assist Siegmund. But, the resistance put up by Fricka was strongly presented and the murder of Siegmund in a wasteland under a highway proved inevitable. The Valkyries were powerful as they alighted like aviatrixes, but left Brünnhilde to Wotan's punishment. In *Siegfried* the setting was bleak, a wasteland with a battered caravan. David Cangelosi as Mime is a comic clown, with an evil streak, but he dominates as he jumps on the roof of the caravan at the end of Act 1. Daniel Brenna is a relatively new Siegfried, but his voice has much promise and his youthful looks and energy are very welcome. His meeting with Brünnhilde was well realised. Finally, to *Götterdämmerung*, one of the most satisfying operas we had ever seen. The Gibichung siblings were all impressive; Siegfried maintained his boyish

aggression and Brünnhilde sang with wonderful power as the ring was destroyed. It was a magnificent end.

After a week touring the north eastern states galleries we flew to Munich for the Bavarian State Opera's production of *Die Meistersinger*. We had never been to this beautiful opera house and indeed were lucky to get tickets through friends. We were keen to see Jonas Kaufmann as Walter, which was indeed deeply satisfying as his voice and interpretation were very strong. But, the direction of David Bösch was deeply disappointing. The opera was set in the 1950's, Walter wore a leather jacket, David rode a moped, Pogner drove a car, Sachs's workshop was in a food-truck and the apprentices used baseball bats to beat up Beckmesser in Act 2. The singing, including Kaufmann, the impressive Wolfgang Koch as Hans Sachs, Benjamin Bruns as David was of a very high standard. Kirill Petrenko conducted brilliantly driving the orchestra to absolute power.

The next day we flew to Berlin for the Deutsche Oper *Tristan und Isolde*. We had not read reviews of this 2011 production, instead attracted by its cast, Nina Stemme as Isolde, Stephen Gould as Tristan, Matti Salminen as King Marke. All sang well. But, the production, by English director Graham Vick, apparently booed on premiere by the audience, was nothing less than appalling.

The set was a room with a central window and rooms on the sides. It is crowded with suburban furniture—leather lounges and there is a closed coffin. People sit in the furniture; one turns out to be King Marke. People wander about in the first act. A naked young woman wanders across the stage. Some sailors seem to hassle Isolde. Perhaps it is a drug rehab centre, this guess is borne out when Tristan and Isolde shoot up the potion. By the second act, more people are walking around, inside and out. On stage left, a well-hung, naked, young man is digging a hole in soil. Will the coffin go into this? By the third act, the cast had gone grey, so many years have passed. Some of the walls are of stone. Tristan is wearing a velour dressing gown, and walks out of the middle window. Isolde, in a beige twinset and brown check skirt, arrives too late. Nina Stemme's *Liebsteod* was magnificently sung, but I had my eyes closed. Donald Runnicles conducted well.

THE RAVEN'S REPORTING, COMPILED BY CAMRON DYER

There is a regularly updated list on the Society's Website:

www.wagner.org.au/events-performances/performances/ravens-reporting

TANNHÄUSER IN MELBOURNE - WHO KNEW!

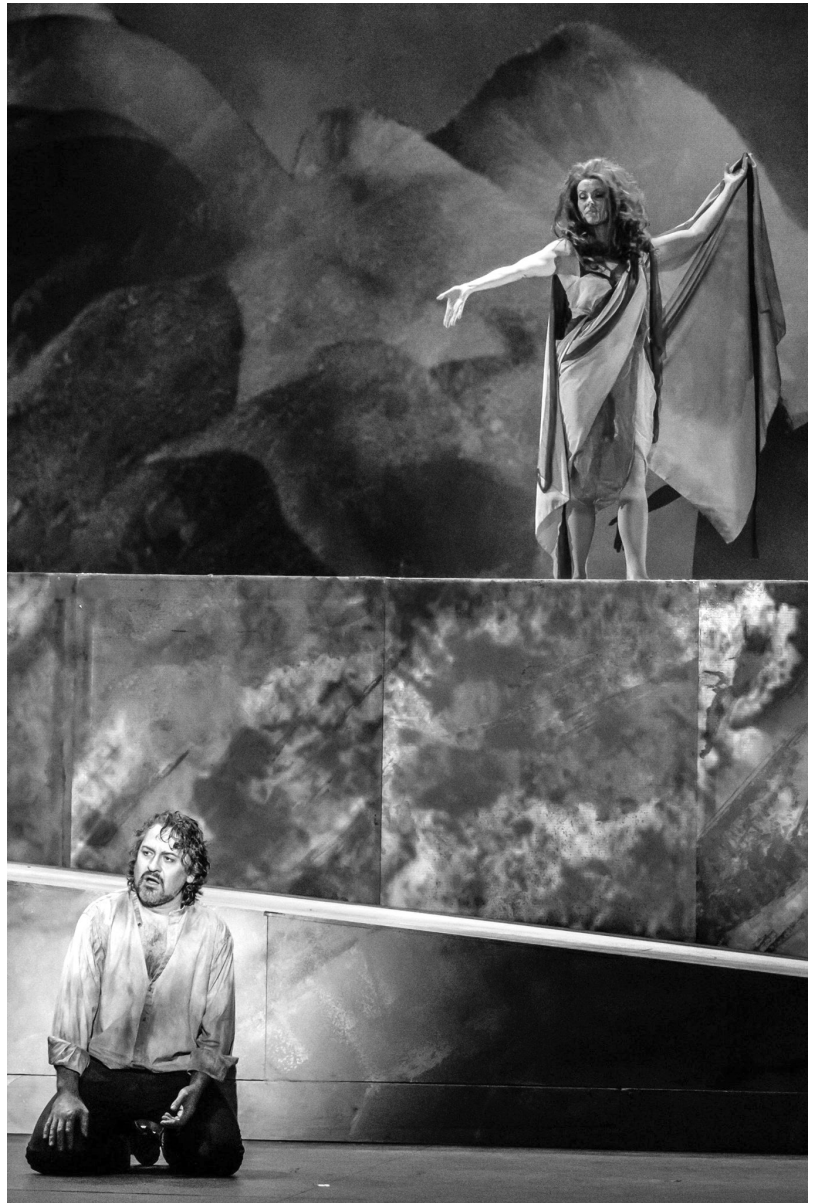
by Terence Watson

Clearly many Melbournians knew about the production since, for the opening performance, it seemed to your Editor that the stalls of the Regent Theatre were almost completely filled (only the stalls were open, I think)—that is, most of about 1800 seats. However, your Editor recognised only four other Sydney-siders at the event, indicating, surely, that the publicity and promotion did not reach very far from Melbourne. This would be disappointing, I believe, to many Wagnerians around the country who do not have many opportunities to attend live performances of Wagner's works in this country. The situation is also a little more disappointing in that Opera Australia took out a full-page colour advert for the Melbourne Ring Cycle in the program. Could it not have been possible for OA to circulate an email to its Ring Cycle subscribers? Then there is, of course, the scope for networking information about Wagner productions through the many Wagner Societies in Australia.

Your Editor received an email from an eagle-eyed regular contributor to these pages in mid-August, in time for me to book a ticket to this performance by the Melbourne Opera at the Regent Theatre in Collins Street. I was very glad I had the opportunity to attend the first of the four performances (14, 17, 20 and 28: the fourth performance was at the Robert Blackwood theatre at Monash University). According to Melbourne Opera's publicity, this was the first time that opera had been staged at the Regent Theatre—the company's usual venue is the Athenaeum Theatre just across Collins Street.

It might be that Melbourne Opera determined that it could fill the necessary number of seats with locals to make their four performances viable. However, in a note in the program from the Patron-in-Chief, Lady Potter AC CMRI points out that: "All this [Melbourne Opera] activity is presented without any government subsidy whatsoever, a quite unique achievement in Australian professional theatre scene."

At this point, your Editor has to confess complete ignorance about the existence of the company. According to its website: "Melbourne Opera Company Ltd was founded in 2002 as a not-for-profit public arts company dedicated to producing opera and associated art forms at realistic prices. Melbourne Opera is committed to the development of young artists, regional touring, and openness and transparency. The Board is elected annually by the financial membership, which is open to all. Repertoire and casting decisions are taken by an arms-length artistic subcommittee." Melbourne Opera is



Marius Vlad as *Tannhäuser* and Sarah Sweeting as Venus in Melbourne Opera's 2016 production (www.facebook.com/MelbourneOpera)

also "a business name of South East Regional Touring Opera Ltd." The company's "University Performing Arts Partner" is Monash University, which appears to bring along with it involvement in the company's operations by members of the university's Music Department. The website also advises: "The current Melbourne Opera Orchestra has been developed into Melbourne Opera's third orchestra since its formation in 2003. The Orchestra leads an active concert life as well as playing in the opera pit." The orchestra is also available for private and corporate commercial functions. The company's next production is *Anna Bolena*, 2 -12 November 2016.

So, how was the performance? In a word—Bravo! With no knowledge of the company's previous productions, your Editor had no preconceptions about what I would encounter,



The (English?) Pilgrims in Melbourne Opera's 2016 production of *Tannhäuser* (www.facebook.com/MelbourneOpera)

although there was apprehension that taking on *Tannhäuser* was no cake-walk, especially with the very demanding title role to be filled with a credible tenor. There was certainly no need to worry about this once the powerfully voiced Marius Vlad began to sing to Venus, who was sung provocatively, but not quite so powerfully, by the beautiful and lithe Sarah Sweeting.

However, we must pause to lavish praise on the video projections created by Zoe Scoglio that made this production, for your Editor, one of the most erotic and supernatural visions of the realm of the Venusberg he has seen. Such a change from watching naked bodies, however attractive they might be in themselves, writhing around the stage pretending to be in sexual ecstasy! Scoglio opted for partly abstract images, which seemed to me like a cascade of foaming Rorschach inkblots suggesting vulvas and the occasionally ejaculatory fountains, and partly naked bodies to create a constantly changing pattern of interweaving limbs and bodies before finally morphing into a “cave of female flesh.” Occasionally, during Venus’s and Tannhäuser’s duet, one of the projected figures would turn and seem to look at the singers. All in all, the fantasy of the video imagery matched beautifully the sensuality that Wagner intended to arouse with his post-Tristanesque music. (A taste of these images is given by the photographs from the production reproduced on the inside back and back pages of this Quarterly. As far as your Editor can determine, most of the photographs on the company’s Facebook page have been taken by Robin J Halls. I am grateful for the chance to show some of these to Wagnerians who were not able to see the production.)

Scoglio kept up the visual magic when the Venusberg transformed into the meadow scene. Here in the background, the “cave of female flesh” changes into distant

mountain peaks, suggesting a kind of pantheism in the relationship between the erotic power of love and sex and the natural world. While the virtuosic video creations of Act I, scenes i and ii, became static for Act II. The opening of the curtain for Elisabeth’s “*Dich teure Halle,*” the scene revealed drew a delighted gasp and a burst of applause from the audience—the image on the back page gives you a sense of the power of the imagery. Lee Abrahmsen’s Elisabeth’s opening aria pinned our ears back, as she showed no effort in dominating those treacherous high notes with which the aria ends. In a role that can often sink into schmalz or saccharine, Abrahmsen projected initial vivacity that collapsed slowly into disillusionment and despair. To that opening image we must also add the delight at the way in which the lights came up on the stage to reveal the gorgeous back projection, giving us one of the most beautiful Wartburg halls I’ve ever seen. Thanks to the lighting designer Lucy Birkinshaw for a memorable moment of theatre. The entrance of the guests was also handled with great aplomb. The director Suzanne Chaundy had them climb a set of stairs from behind a slightly raised dais that completely crossed the stage in all scenes, giving a two level set. The guests’ heads then their bodies appeared until they were all standing on top of the dais, dressed in elegant evening attire. The competitors in the contest were lavishly accoutred in formal evening wear with colourful sashes. The overall impact was simple but very stylish; little fuss, but so well directed. The later, external scenes of the pilgrims returning, Elisabeth’s watch and prayer, Wolfram von Eschinbach’s “O du, mein holder Abendstern,” Elisabeth’s cortege, and Tannhäuser’s “Rome Narration” and Venus’s return, are all placed on the dais, in front of it, or on the ramp leading between the two. For each of the scenes, Scoglio and Birkinshaw created subtly changing lighting and video projections onto sections of the stage and across the dais, as well as the two crescent-shaped flats on either side.

Of the other roles, Eddie Muliaumaseali'i's Hermann, Landgrave of Thuringia, stood out, with his powerful, rich bass, which reminded me strongly of René Pape singing Wagnerian roles at Bayreuth and the Metropolitan Opera. I hope that his career is as successful as is Herr Pape's. Manfred Pohlenz's Wolfram was solid, but lacked the romantic flair one expects from someone who delivers *that* aria as one of the highlights of the opera. Marius Vlad's singing of the title role was a delight from beginning to end—apparently never tiring, and bringing fluidity and angular anguish as the situation needed. He was awarded “The Best Romanian Male Singer in 2010,” and has clearly gone on to bigger and better things, as examples of recent performances: Tannhäuser at the Romanian National Opera and at Theater Freiburg, Lohengrin at the Novaya Opera in Moscow, Theater Freiburg and the Romanian National Opera, Froh in *Das Rheingold* with Daniel Barenboim at Teatro alla Scala, Staatsoper Berlin and at the BBC Proms in London. You can read more about him at: www.spelartists.com/#!/mariusvlad/e2wje.

While the orchestra, under the direction of David Kram, sounded a little thin at times for a Wagner orchestra, they played with conviction, nuance, and mostly with precision, apart from some shaky entrances. There were, as far as I could hear, no brass fluffs that so often mar the playing of orchestras not entirely familiar with Wagnerian demands. One advantage of the apparently smaller orchestral sound is that it did not drown out the singers. Kram appeared to take the music at a pace, partly perhaps for the singers' benefit, partly to stop the work dragging as it can in some of its more

tendentious moments, and partly perhaps to get everyone home in good time. Whatever the reason, his brisk pace certainly kept my interest and excitement from flagging.

One of the peculiarities of the production was that the Pilgrims sing in English, while everyone else sang in German. While, this is probably less of a trial than the late 18th and early 19th century multi-lingual performances of Wagner operas in Australia, I glided over the anomaly by choosing to imagine that they were Chaucerian pilgrims on their way from Canterbury. The second peculiarity was the complete deletion of the moment when one of the pilgrim's enters carrying Tannhäuser's blossoming staff. I, for one, was quite happy for this very odd choice of Wagner's—are we to take it as ironic or sarcastic or entirely straight—to be left out. Ending the work with both Elisabeth and Tannhäuser dead seems more modern and internally coherent. However, Wagner told us that he still owed the world a *Tannhäuser*, so this directorial decision might have given us a hint of what that work might have been like, had Wagner revised it—yet again.

All in all, this production is one of which Melbourne Opera can be proud. It is to be hoped that they will again tackle another Wagner opera in the not too distant future (and let us all know about it).

You can read other reviews of the production on the company's website: www.melbourneopera.com/reviews-quotes and see more photos on Melbourne Opera's Facebook page: (www.facebook.com/MelbourneOpera).

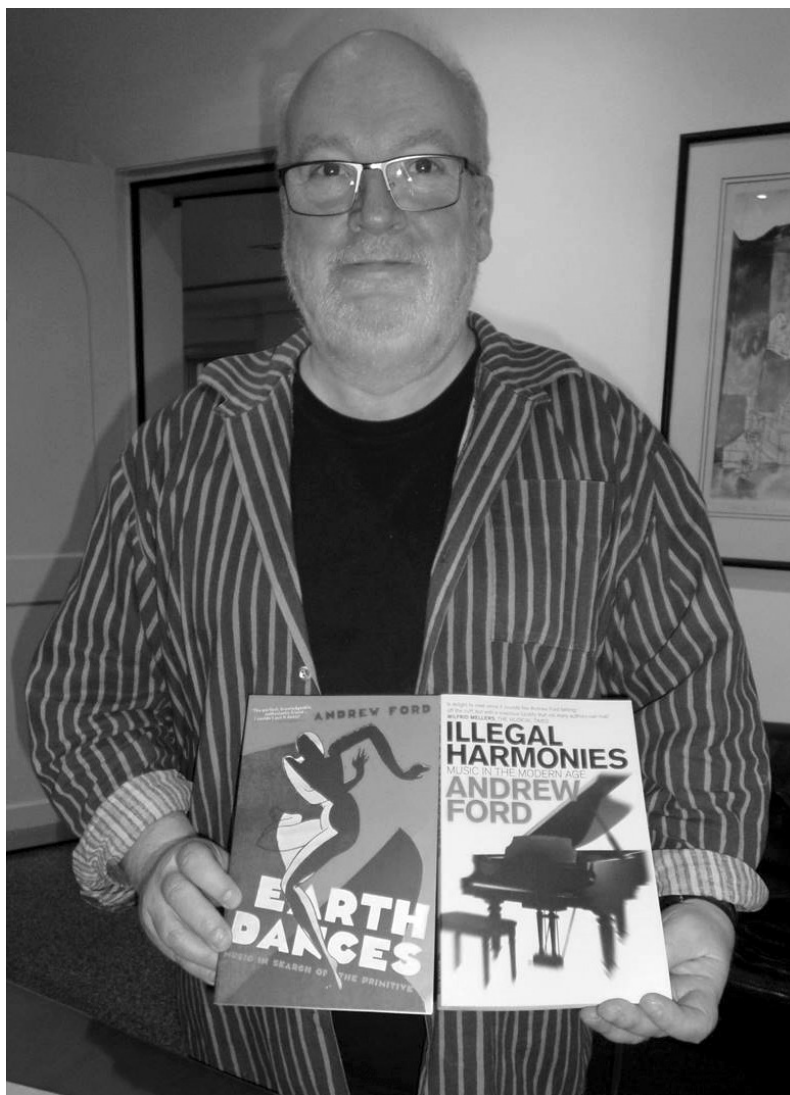


The Shepherd (Harry Hendel or Isaac Pearson-l; your editor could not confirm who sang on 14 August) with Marius Vlad in Melbourne Opera's 2016 production of *Tannhäuser*. (www.facebook.com/MelbourneOpera)

“AFTER WAGNER” - ANDREW FORD, WAGNER SOCIETY PRESENTATION - 19 JUNE 2016 by Terence Watson

After an unavoidable and dramatic last minute postponement of his talk in 2015, Andrew Ford gave his much anticipated talk on music “After Wagner” on 19 June 2016. As a musician himself, with an impressive discography and a number of well-received books about music, including the emergence of modern music, he is well placed to discuss Wagner’s influence on his contemporaries and later composers. Many in his audience were also very familiar with his long-running and very wide-ranging ABC Radio National program *The Music Show* (Saturdays and Sundays at 1100am and repeated those days at 10pm).

Challengingly, Andrew began by asking audience members to name a couple of features people immediately think about on entering a theatre: the responses included “the lights dim” and “curtains open”—both of which Wagner was responsible for introducing to theatres for the first time in the Bayreuther Festspielhaus. However, these technical innovations were accompanied by his influences on the music making of other composers. Among the other innovations were the epic structure of the music-dramas, the replacement of “stop-start” recitatives and arias with “continuous melody,” the weaving together of music and drama, and the use of *Leitmotifs* (taken up by Hollywood through Eric Korngold among others). Perhaps most influential, though, was Wagner’s use of harmony with, according to Andrew, the opening of *Tristan und Isolde*, the tonality of which is so hard to pin down, opening up the whole world of atonality to be exploited by the Second Viennese School.



Andrew Ford with his two books *Earth Dances* and *Illegal Harmonies* (revised edition)

However, Andrew also pointed out, perhaps from the perspective of a composer, that Wagner’s use of the orchestra opened us new sound worlds for later composers to explore. Andrew convincingly contended that Wagner’s works were astonishingly well-orchestrated, with a very high level of innovation in instrumental use (and in once case invention). He reminded us that much more than we often think (and certainly non-Wagnerians think), Wagner uses a chamber music level of instrumental support for his singers, who are mostly engaged in domestic conversations.

Having set the stage, Andrew then considered only a few of the many composers whom Wagner influenced, either positively or negatively, accepting his innovations, or rejecting them. Firstly, he noted that he would not talk about Bruckner, since the Wagnerian influence was “too obvious,” nor even Stockhausen, with his attempt to “out-Wagner Wagner” with his *Licht (Light)*, subtitled “The Seven Days of the Week,” a cycle of seven operas composed between 1977 and 2003. He was also not considering Elgar, whose *Dream of*

Gerontius would have been “impossible” without *Parsifal*; nor Mahler, even though the opening and overall structure of his first symphony reflect much of the music of *Das Rheingold*.

Andrew focussed, rather, on Schoenberg, Berg, Debussy, Boulez and Boulez (not in chronological order!). For instance, Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night)* and *Erwartung (Awakening)*, whose sound worlds are very similar to the *Forest Murmurs* of *Siegfried*. In the case of Berg, Andrew cited the example of Berg’s use of a canon form in the Painter scene of *Lulu*, in imitation of Wagner’s use of complex counterpoint in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Parsifal* to link the music with the stage action. Andrew also noted how the march from Berg’s *Three Orchestral Pieces* is a harsh version of Siegfried’s funeral march.

Debussy, though, gives us a more complex situation of attraction and distancing, given that Wagner’s musical presence in Paris was unavoidable. While Debussy did not much care for Wagner’s “heavy-handed” use of *Leitmotifs*

in The Ring Cycle, he loved *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal*, but for different reasons. The former because Wagner’s use of *Leitmotifs* was more subtle; the latter because of the orchestration and the orchestral sound it produced, which is quite different from Wagner’s previous works in being very lightly orchestrated, with little orchestral doubling, and so creating a very transparent sound. As examples, Andrew pointed to the 1913 *Jeux*, with its light, mercurial music (which is also, Andrew wittily noted, about a *ménage à trois*—“very Wagnerian”). As in *Tristan und Isolde*, for example, Debussy’s compositional method “does not look back,” that is, he does not repeat any musical phrases, but rather modifies them each time. Andrew compared the music to a single skein of orchestral music thrown out with no repetitions. As Andrew noted, *Jeux* was itself an important influence on later composers, especially those using the twelve tone system.

Andrew moved on to Boulez, who has been generally better known as a conductor (including of The Ring Cycle and *Parsifal* at Bayreuth). Intriguingly, Wagner’s *Faust* overture was one of Boulez’s favourite pieces of music, which he thought wonderfully constructed. He also recorded the less known 1843 *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* (*Love Feast of the Apostles*). Andrew suggested that, although Boulez was not

Wagnerian in his early music, in his later music, after the experiences of conducting Wagner works, the influence becomes more evident as his composing changes. After playing excerpts from Boulez’s *Notations*, Andrew observed that, for an orchestral player, it is like “sitting inside a kaleidoscope,” also giving the player a “3D sense in orchestral sound.”

As a kind of bridge from the living Wagner to the mid-20th century, Andrew then turned to Strauss. Andrew reminded us that Strauss’s horn writing was influenced by Wagner’s, as well as by his own father’s career as an orchestral horn player who played, against his preference, in some Wagner premieres. While *Elektra* is, Andrew suggested, Strauss’s most Wagnerian work, *Capriccio* and *Ariadne auf Naxos* have much of the domestic qualities of scenes in The Ring Cycle.

Andrew summed up by observing that, while Wagner wrote for very large orchestral forces, he used such passages sparingly and for specific purposes to colour the dramatic action. He was also able to transform his palette rapidly, so that there are only a few big set pieces interspersed among many more smaller, quieter sections. Andrew then responded to a number of questions before continuing the discussion with Members over afternoon tea.

JONAS KAUFMANN RETURNS TO SYDNEY AS PARSIFAL - 9, 12 & 14 AUGUST 2017 by Terence Watson

Conductor-Pinchas Steinberg; Parsifal-Jonas Kaufmann; Kundry-Jacqueline Dark; Amfortas-Michael Honeyman; Klingsor-Warwick Fyfe; Gurnemanz-Kwangchul Youn; Titirel-David Parkin; Flower Maidens-Stacey Alleaume, Anna Dowsley, Eva Kong, Julie Lea Goodwin, Dominica Matthews,; Alto Solo-Anna Yun, Esquires-Eva Kong, Anna Dowsley, Graeme Macfarlane, Simon Kim; Knights-Dean Bassett, Adrian Tamburini.

Conductor Pinchas Steinberg is the chief conductor of the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra. His conducting debut was in 1974 with the Radio Symphony Orchestra in Berlin, followed by invitations to conduct the Philharmonia Orchestra London, Royal Philharmonic and London Symphony Orchestra. He has recorded Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer* for Naxos and has conducted *Parsifal* in Helsinki

The biography on Jonas Kaufmann’s website reports: “Besides his vocal and musical qualities, it is his total identification with his roles that has been received with such enthusiasm by press and public. This was the case at his role début as Siegmund in *Die Walküre* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in the spring of 2011. The eagerly awaited new production, masterfully conducted by James Levine, and transmitted world-wide on radio and in HD to cinemas, allowed audiences to hear the special quality of Kaufmann’s Wagner interpretations in detail: The blend of “German” expressive power and Italian vocal finesse.” His discography includes a number of CD’s and DVD’s of *Lohengrin*, *Walküre*, *Parsifal*, *Königskinder*, *Ariadne auf*

Naxos, *Don Carlo*, *Tosca*, *Adriana Lecouvreur*, *Faust*, *Werther*, *Carmen*, *Verismo*, *Wagner* and *Verdi*. (www.jonaskaufmann.com/en/199/press.html.)

In an article for the Sydney Morning Herald of August 2014, Richard Jinman reported his interview with



Jonas Kaufmann

Kaufmann prior to his two concerts in Sydney in the same month. Jinman notes of his early life: “His family fled East Germany in the 1960s and he grew up in a Munich apartment block full of fellow exiles. His musical tastes were shaped by his father’s record collection – a rack of vinyl devoted to Bruckner, Mahler, Shostakovich and Rachmaninov – and a grandfather who played Wagner on the piano, singing both the male and female parts. Kaufmann sang in school choirs, but did not get serious about music until his late teens, when he was talked into doing a major in music and joined the chorus at Munich’s Gartnerplatztheater opera house. Deciding that a career in music was ‘pretty chancy’ he opted to study mathematics at university. Luckily for opera lovers he had a change of heart after two semesters, hung up his slide rule and enrolled at Munich’s Academy of Music and Theatre.”



Warwick Fyfe

Jinman also reported an interesting observation from Kaufmann about the quality of the productions in which he is contracted to appear: “Kaufmann says he has been in ‘less than 10’ productions he considers to be truly great. ‘That’s quite frustrating,’ he says in way that suggests it is very frustrating indeed. ‘I did a production years ago with an English director [he refuses to name names] that got booed every night and after every single act. That is really hard ... The director is only there for the opening night and then he’s off and the cast has to deal with it [the audience reaction].’”

Kaufmann is emphatic about the power of opera to move people, even those who have not tried it before. In “Jonas Kaufmann: an interview” by Jennifer Williams, 29 July 2014, Kaufmann is reported as saying: “In the worst case, you won’t come back. In the best case, it may change your life. Opera is a power house, a unique sort of magic and excitement. There is nothing like the thrill of an exciting live performance, with all those risks, and surprises, and that special chemistry between stage and audience; the combination of performed music, theatre and stage design ... that’s something you don’t get in any other genre.”

You can read the full Kaufmann biographies and interviews at the following webpages:

<https://medium.com/@OperaAustralia/jonas-kaufmann-an-interview-7e26e18f627b#.ig09z751e>

www.smh.com.au/entertainment/opera/tenor-jonas-kaufmann-seeking-passion-not-perfection-20140728-zxqgj.html

www.theoperablog.com/jonas-kaufmann-an-interview/

NSW Wagner Society Members will be pleased that our fellow Member Warwick Fyfe is returning to Wagner in the challenging role of Klingsor—another one of the nasty characters Warwick takes (professional) pleasure in bringing to life. Many Members will be returning to Melbourne in November-December 2106 partly to enjoy Warwick’s reprise of the role of Alberich he created so chillingly in Melbourne in 2013 and for which he won the Helpmann Award for Best Male in an Operatic Feature Role. Among the many roles he has sung for Opera Australia are the Dutchman in *Der fliegende Holländer*; Wolfram in *Tannhäuser*; Kothner in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*; the Herald in *Lohengrin*; and Donner in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Warwick also performed Fasolt in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* for the 2004 State Opera of South Australia.

Of one of his many other roles, Coppelius/Miracle/Dappertutto, in English Touring Opera’s production of *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Rupert Christiansen writes in the Telegraph 12/10 /15 (quoted on Warwick’s website): “Warwick Fyfe as Hoffmann’s multi-faceted enemies: an Australian bass-baritone making his British debut, Fyfe wields a powerful voice..... darkly impressive....He is a terrific actor, and it’s no surprise to learn from the programme that he is a past winner of the Robert Helpmann Award.”

“Since 2014 he has been expanding his international freelance career, and has worked with English Touring Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, and has performed in concert in Australia, the U.K, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam. In 2015 he was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study Wagnerian Vocal technique in Germany, the US and the U.K.” (More on Warwick’s website: www.warwickfyfe.com/239165821.)

The Gurnemanz of Kwanchul Youn will be of particular interest to Australian Wagnerians since he has not sung Wagner with Opera Australia, although he has sung much Wagner overseas, including *Parsifal* and *Tannhäuser* at the Vienna State Opera, *Lohengrin*, *Das Rheingold*, and *Tannhäuser* at the Berlin State Opera, *Das Rheingold* at the Teatro alla Scala, *Parsifal*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tristan und Isolde* at the Bavarian State Opera Munich, *Lohengrin* at the Semperoper Dresden and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden London, *Tristan und Isolde* at the Gran Teatre del Liceu Barcelona, *Parsifal* at the Lyric Opera Chicago, and *Tannhäuser* and *Parsifal* at the Teatro Regio Torino . He also appeared at the Bayreuth Festival where he sang in *Tristan*, *Parsifal*, *Die Walküre*, and *Der fliegende Holländer*: can be heard as the Night Watchman on Teldec’s recordings of the Bayreuth Festival’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, under the baton of Daniel Barenboim.

Members will also remember Jacqueline Dark as Fricka in Opera Australia’s 2013 Ring Cycle in Melbourne, for which she received her second consecutive Helpmann Award. The wild Kundry will bring altogether different challenges, although we remember that, in 2012, she sang Herodias in Opera Australia’s production of *Salome*. Jacqueline has also sung Mary for Opera Australia’s production of *Der fliegender Holländer*.



Jacqueline Dark as Fricka with Terje Stensvold as Wotan in Opera Australia’s 2013 Ring Cycle in Melbourne

MELBOURNE OPERA'S 2016 PRODUCTION OF *TANNHÄUSER*



Marius Vlad as Tannhäuser in Act 2 of Melbourne Opera's 2016 production (Elisabeth extreme left) (www.facebook.com/MelbourneOpera)



Manfred Pohlenz as Wolfram von Eschinbach singing to Lee Abrahmsen as the evening star Elisabeth in Melbourne Opera's 2016 production of *Tannhäuser* (www.facebook.com/MelbourneOpera)

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(All website addresses used in this Newsletter are reproduced in the PDF version of the newsletter on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article - Members Area)



Zoe Scoglio's video projections for the Venusberg scene of Melbourne Opera's 2016 production of *Tannhäuser* (www.facebook.com/MelbourneOpera)



Zoe Scoglio's transition from Venusberg to beginning Act 1 scene 3 of *Tannhäuser* by Melbourne Opera (photo by Zoe Scoglio)

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