



WAGNER
SOCIETY
NSW

ISSUE NO 16

143

DECEMBER 2016

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

A reminder that your 2017 membership of the Wagner Society NSW is now due. Membership brings many benefits such as discounts at all our functions, access to tickets for Bayreuth, special offers to many musical performances and the informative Quarterly Newsletter. Please renew your membership as soon as possible. You can use Paypal, EFT or cheque - details available on the Society's website: www.wagner.org.au/about/membership

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome to the fourth and last Quarterly for 2016.

2016 has been a busy year for your Society. Our extremely active Events sub-committee has organised a number of fascinating talks, conversations, concerts and other events. Since the last Quarterly we have had two main events. The first took place on the evening of 20 September when the author/musician Roger Neill came and treated us a very special presentation about "Australian Singers of Wagner: The known and unknown." Roger played excerpts of a number of different sopranos singing Wagner, and had a dialogue with us, the audience, about each singer, first asking us to identify her and then discussing her career. It was an extraordinarily interesting evening, and the only disappointment was that, because it was in midweek and had been organised at relatively short notice, there were not as many members there as we would have hoped.

Our last event for the year was a concert combined with our annual Christmas party, held earlier than usual because many of our members will be going to Melbourne for Opera Australia's Ring Cycle. This year, because the Goethe Institut was booked for that afternoon, we went to St Columba's Uniting Church, also in Ocean Street, Woollahra. The church itself has been deconsecrated, and it is now a performance hall. We were all very impressed by it. There was plenty of seating space, and the acoustics were excellent. The concert itself was extraordinary. It consisted of the young soprano Jessica Harper, accompanied by the pianist Bradley Gilchrist. Jessica had very recently won the Wagner Society German language singing prize at the Sydney Eisteddford. She sang

a large number of works, and astonished everyone with the amazing quality of her voice, together with her vocal range and her stamina. Afterwards we all enjoyed a delicious afternoon tea, accompanied by a glass (or two) of wine.

On behalf of the Events Committee, I would like to thank a number of organisations which donated prizes for the fund-raising raffle at our end of year function: tickets to performances by Pinchgut Opera, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Australian Handel Ensemble, Sydney Theatre Company and Belvoir Theatre Company, as well as to Roger Neill for a copy of his CD of Australian Wagner Singers and to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music for a number of wonderful books.

We have been promised a number of tickets to the 2017 Bayreuth Festival - more than we have ever previously been allocated, except last year (when we were mistakenly allocated tickets intended for the South Australian Society as well as

PRESIDENT'S REPORT *Continued page 4*

Patron: Ms Simone Young AM
Honorary Life Members: Mr Richard King
Prof Michael Ewans
Mr Horst Hoffman
Mr John Wegner AO
Mr Roger Cruickshank
Dr Terence Watson

From the producers of "My Name Is Asher Lev" and "Coming To See Aunt Sophie"

Shalom & MOIRA BLUMENTHAL PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

YOU WILL NOT PLAY WAGNER

A play by Victor Gordon

Directed by Moira Blumenthal

WORLD PREMIERE

TREACHERY... OR TRIUMPH?

4 - 28 May 2017 Eternity Playhouse, Darlinghurst

Book at www.shalom.edu.au

See inside for more information about this production



(l-r) Leona Geeves (Society Vice-President), Bradley Gilchrist (accompanist), Jessica Harper (soprano), Jane Mathews (President) presenting performers with wines provided by Brangayne of Orange vineyards (see discount offer inside) at the conclusion of the Wagner Society in NSW end of 2016 year function (picture from Pauline Holgerson).

happy new year



VALHALLA

ICE CREAM

The Scoop of

SCOOPS

Tasmanian Made

All the best to Wagner Society in NSW Members for a safe and enjoyable holiday season and a great start to 2017 - enjoy your Valhalla scoops or whatever you enjoy most (in moderation of course).

FOR YOUR DIARY

2017

24,25,26 & 29 March	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i> . Conductor Daniele Gatti. Director Pierre Audi. Set designer Christof Hetzer. Orchestra of Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Cast Andreas Schager, Rachel Nicholls, John Relyea, Brett Polegato.	Palace cinemas: Verona & Norton Street
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
6 September	Asher Fisch & Western Australian Symphony Orchestra: Inspiring Wagner	Perth Concert Hall 7.30pm
9 September	Saturday Asher Fisch & Western Australian Symphony Orchestra: Wagner's World [see www.waso.com.au/tickets/2017_season/wagner for details of both concerts]	Perth Concert Hall 7.30pm

COMING EVENTS 2017 - 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
5 February	Dr Graham Bruce: Joachim Herz's 1964 film of <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> . NB: NO DVD beforehand.	Goethe Institut 1300pm
March 12	Rosamund Bartlett: Russian Wagnerians of the 20th and 21st centuries. 12.30 pm: Magic Fire – 1955 Film, with Wagner's music arranged by Erich Korngold. Part 1	Goethe Institut 1400pm
April 2	AGM: Concert by young singers. 12.30 pm: Magic Fire – 1955 Film, with Wagner's music arranged by Erich Korngold. Part 2	Goethe Institut 1400pm
May 21	Barbara Brady: Wagner's early opera - <i>Die Feen</i> , followed by Wagner's birthday party. NB: starting time 2:00 pm. NO DVD	Goethe Institut NB: starting time 1400pm
June	No Meeting	
30 July	Dr David Larkin, lecturer at Sydney Conservatorium, presents a seminar on <i>Parsifal</i> , before the OA concert performance, with singers contributing musical highlights. NB: starting time 1:00 pm NO DVD	Goethe Institut NB: starting time 1300pm
13 August	<i>Lohengrin</i> : the first real music drama: Dr Antony Ernst introduces the background to this popular mystical opera. NB: starting time 1:00 pm. NO DVD	Willoughby Unity Church, 10 Clanwilliam St., Willoughby NB: starting time 13:00pm
3 September	A leading musical identity will present a concert. 12.30 pm. DVD - TBC	Goethe Institut 1400pm
8 October	REPORT BACK: Bayreuth 2016 and 2017—Presented by members who received tickets from the Wagner Society. 12.30 pm. DVD - TBC	Goethe Institut 1400pm
19 November	Concert by artists supported by Wagner Society, followed by Christmas Party. NB: starting time 2:00 pm. No DVD	St. Columba's Centre, cnr Ocean and Forth Sts, Woollahra 1400pm

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 each 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.

our own tickets). We have received more applications from members than we have available tickets, so we will shortly be holding a ballot to determine who the lucky festival-goers will be. I anticipate that the results will be known before you receive this Quarterly.

Speaking of afternoon tea, I have been extremely impressed this year with the standard of food which you, our members, have contributed at our functions. It makes a real difference to the overall experience, and I would like to express our deep thanks to those of you who have assisted in this regard. There is always a risk that we will omit a name which should have been mentioned and for this we apologise in advance but based on the names on our Catering Roster we would like to thank: Glen Barnwell; Pattie Benjamin; Barbara Brady; Agnes Brejzek; Gabrielle Bremner Moore; Colleen and Michael Chesterman; Mike Day; Rhonda Dalton; Barbara de Rome; June Donsworth; Nick and Barbara Dorsch; Jenny Ferns; Tony Jones, Hugh Hallard; Renate Junker; Hannelore Laundl; Marie Leech; Lyn Longfoot; Helen Meddings; Yvonne Pearse; Sue Penny; Jan Roberts; Anne Robinson, Mitzi Saunders; John Studdert; Mailis Wakeham; Terence Watson; Margaret Whealy. Our thanks also to Mailis Wakeham for taking photographs at our events. These have been invaluable in promoting our Society via the Quarterly, our website and increasingly, on our Facebook page.

I cannot let the year end without acknowledging the death at the beginning of the year of Julian Block, for many years a Member, Committee Member and Vice-President. Julian was co-opted onto the Committee as an additional member in March 2001. In the context of the major financial problem that faced the Committee in 2000-01, the then President Barbara McNulty advised the 2001 Annual General Meeting: "A new member who is a solicitor offered his services 'pro bono' should we need legal assistance. As we don't have the

financial resources to fight a civil action in the court this is a very generous offer. I am sure you will join me in thanking them." At the Annual General Meeting of 21 July 2002, Julian was elected Vice-President. At the May 2012 AGM, as the new president, and when Julian stood down after eleven years of service to the Society, I acknowledged "our long-standing vice-president, Julian Block, who has put so much into the Society over such a long period. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude." He contributed a great deal to the Society over the years, including the hospitality of his and Rosemary's house for very many committee meetings. On behalf of the Society, I send our deep condolences to his widow, Rosemary, and his family. There is a formal obituary later in this Quarterly, and a personal reminiscence from the past President Roger Cruickshank.

Many of you will know Michael Abicht, who has helped us so much over the years at the Goethe Institute, particularly when technical issues have arisen. Michael has recently left the Goethe. I would like, on all our members' behalf, to thank Michael very much indeed for all his kindness and his assistance over the years.

The Editor of the Quarterly Terence Watson has asked me to pass on his apologies to Lynnette Longfoot and Bill Brooks for mis-naming them in the headings for the articles they wrote for the September issue, reporting on sessions of Antony Ernst's Seminar in August 2016. The Editor has arranged for the mistakes to be amended in the website versions.

2017 promises to be another exciting year for your Society. Our Events Committee has already mounted a fantastic programme for the year. You can read about it elsewhere in this Quarterly. In the meantime, I hope that you all have a very good Christmas and holiday break, and I look forward to seeing many of you at our next year's events.

COMMITTEE 2015 - 2016

President	Jane Mathews	9360 9822
Vice President	Leona Geeves	9957 4189
Vice President	Colleen Chesterman	9360 4962
Treasurer	Margaret Whealy	0414 787 199
Secretary	Mike Day	0413 807 533
Membership Secretary	Jenny Edwards	9810 6033
Members	Tony Jones	0412 572 624
	Nick Dorsch	0419 751 694
	Barbara de Rome	0411 018 830
	Dennis Mather	0414 156 700 or 9560 1860

OTHER FUNCTIONS

Public Officer	Alasdair Beck	9358 3922
Newsletter Editor	Terence Watson	8097 9797
Webmaster	John Studdert	wagner_nsw@optusnet.com.au
Technical Consultant	Florian Hammerbacher	

TRIUMPHANT REPRISE OF THE STEMME/SKELTON TRISTAN UND ISOLDE IN HOBART, TASMANIA by Colleen Chesterman

On the night of 19 November 2016, a packed audience in the Federation Concert Hall in Hobart heard Swedish soprano Nina Stemme and Australian tenor Stuart Skelton perform an abridged concert version of Wagner's magnificent *Tristan und Isolde* under the baton of Marko Letonja, conducting the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

The two singers had most recently performed the opera at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. The one-off performance was organised through the fortunate chance of a shared agent between conductor and soprano. [See below for an alternative account of the setting up of the event—Ed.] Letonja adapted the music by focusing on the emotional and musical highpoints in each act and the surtitles and summaries of events were made by Anthony Ernst. In his program note Robert Gibson drew our attention to excerpts from Cosima Wagner's diary where Wagner expresses a wish to make the opera shorter and certainly the performance carried the focus of the story. The only other singer was Slovenian mezzo Monika Bohinec, who sang as Brangäne in her interaction with Isolde in bringing the potion in Act 1 and in her off-stage warnings in Act 2.

The large audience, with many members of the Wagner Society in NSW, was very enthusiastic about the success of the sensitive adaptation, which brought together the emotional highlights of the opera, as well as the playing of the augmented TSO, the conducting of Letonja and the sublime voices and skilled acting of the two leads. The whole audience leapt to its feet to applaud at the end. Buoyed by the performance we went back to our hotel with other Sydneysiders to celebrate with a glass of champagne, and were thrilled when the musicians, conductor and singers came back for a party, so that we were able to applaud the performers face to face. Letonja will conduct Stemme in her performance as Brünnhilde in Stockholm next May, though sadly she told us that she couldn't get tickets for her family!

You can get or relive the excitement of the night in photos on the TSO's Facebook page: www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10154769003693336.1073741873.126146968335&type=1&l=3fcb48e27c

As part of the background for the wonderful coup staged by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Leo Schofield wrote a note for the Tasmanian Times: "Being a certified Wagner nut myself (I've seen the Ring nineteen times and introduced it on ABC television) I understand something of Wagner's appeal, which is why, over a dinner at Ethos restaurant in Hobart in March, 2014, I pricked up my ears when I heard the name of the Swedish opera star Nina Stemme, the world's most acclaimed Wagner soprano, whom I had recently heard singing Isolde in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the famous Vienna State Opera and I had been bowled over.

"My host at dinner that evening was Marko Letonja, the principal conductor and musical director of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and the other guest was the maestro's



[(l-r) Marko Letonja, conductor; Monika Bohinec, Brangäne; Nina Stemme (Isolde); Stuart Skelton (Tristan).

agent from Zurich, Rita Schütz who is also Ms Stemme's agent. I became unusually excited and proposed an exclusive Australian debut by Ms Stemme in Hobart. And as she was scheduled to sing Isolde with the Australian heldentenor Stuart Skelton at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, it seemed like a good idea that they combine with the TSO in a concert version of Wagner's great romantic opera."

To paraphrase Leo Schofield "And so, on November 19, it [came] to pass, not a concert version of the full opera, that proved too expensive, but an evening of great moments of a musical masterpiece."

Read Leo Schofield's full account of his role in this coup, go to: <http://tasmaniantimes.com/index.php/article/tristan-und-isolde-#sthash.EjImIrUH.dpuf> for 5 April 2016.

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

REPRISE OF SKELTON/STEMME <i>TRISTAN UND ISOLDE</i> IN HOBART – Colleen Chesterman	P.5
DAVID LARKIN - MUSIC OF THE FUTURE – Bill Brooks	P.6
OBITUARY - JULIAN BLOCK	P.8
OBITUARY-ALBERTO REMEDIOS	P.10
<i>TRISTAN UND ISOLDE</i> IN NEW YORK – Minnie Biggs	P.11
<i>DAS RHEINGOLD</i> IN CHICAGO – Terence Watson	P.12

DR DAVID LARKIN: “MUSIC OF THE FUTURE? LISZT, WAGNER AND THE AUDIENCES OF THE DAY” - 16 OCTOBER 2016 by Bill Brooks

Always a welcome contributor to our meetings, David Larkin again delivered us a stimulating and interesting lecture, with just the right mix of erudition, scholarship and anecdote, decorated with illustrative musical examples. The theme this time was the question that is particularly urgent today, when funding for the arts depends increasingly on “box office”, namely, how far is it the duty of composers and performers to entertain the audience of the time, giving them what they enjoy, and how far should they follow a higher duty, that of developing their art, pushing the boundaries, challenging our perceptions and, in short, writing for future generations?

David took us on a journey through the nineteenth century to explore with us how Wagner and Liszt considered this issue through changing times, and how their composing and performing lives were influenced by the demands of high art on the one hand, and audiences and critics on the other.

Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft (“The artwork of the future”, 1850) was one of the theoretical works written by Wagner during his exile in Switzerland. The concept was borrowed from the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), to whom Wagner dedicated the work. *Die Musik der Zukunft*, or *Zukunftsmusik*, (“the music of the future”) was a term twisted by hostile journalists to mean awful music that might one day just be acceptable. It was applied mockingly to Wagner, but the phrase was not new. The music journalist Karl Gaillard had used it disparagingly of Berlioz’ music in 1847. Later, Wagner wrote an essay *Zukunftsmusik*, (“The music of the future”, 1860), in which he aimed to reclaim the term as a favourable one, so in fact the term could be used negatively or positively. The essence of the definition was that it might be acceptable at some time, eventually.

Wagner and Liszt first crossed paths in Paris in 1840. Wagner was writing music reviews to keep himself from starving, while Liszt was a famous virtuoso performer. In March 1841, Liszt gave a recital to raise funds for a statue of Beethoven. When Liszt came on to the platform with a violinist to play the ‘Kreutzer’ Sonata someone called out, “Play us the Fantasia on *Robert le diable!*” Liszt replied eventually, “Je suis le serviteur du public”; they got the fantasy before the sonata. Wagner, who was there to review the concert, was scandalised. He accused Liszt of caving in to public taste. This was a time when Wagner still liked Meyerbeer. David played us an excerpt from Liszt’s *Réminiscences de Robert le diable* – a rather dull and pedestrian piece of music!

By 1850 Liszt had retired from giving solo concerts and had settled in Weimar, where he wanted to concentrate on being a “proper” composer. Wagner had left Dresden and gone to Zurich; he was engrossed in his theoretical works. *Lohengrin* had not been performed; Wagner asked Liszt to have it performed in Weimar, even though the resources of the Weimar theatre were insufficient. The interest is in the correspondence. Wagner writes: “What cannot be made true today will remain untrue in the future”. He wants his work performed here and now, whatever the limitations.

Wagner describes contemporary operagoers as having been corrupted by the formulaic operas of the day – an unnatural degradation where “natural” musical impulses of the folk have been corrupted to a form of scum. He doesn’t believe that the answer is education: since the existence of connoisseurs, art has gone to the devil. He just wants simple unspoiled people, with an open mind and a healthy soul.

Throughout the 1850s Wagner had no direct contact with his audiences. Liszt, in contrast, was right on the front line and in touch with audiences and what they enjoyed. In Vienna, his orchestral compositions had a mixed response. Hostile reviewers exerted much influence on their audiences. Alexander Ritter, a composer and conductor who had lived in Weimar for several years during Liszt’s tenure, told his “mentee” Richard Strauss in the 1880s that Liszt’s music was always very popular at the première but that later on people thought it was not so good. Even Schumann wrote disparagingly of Liszt’s music.

It was said of the Viennese audiences later in the century that they would be timid in their applause and not decide what they thought until after “he” (Hanslick) had made his opinion known, next day in the press!

Liszt maintained that negative criticism is like chalk on the base of a monument – it will be washed away, leaving the monument standing proudly in perpetuity. Throughout the 1850s Liszt fought fire with fire. He wrote pamphlets, introductions, pieces in newspapers. At important performances he would make sure that there was a sprinkling of friends and supporters.

Liszt also arranged meetings with antagonistic journalists. In Berlin, in December 1855, he went around to [his publisher] Schlesinger’s place, at which he had prepared a supper with the hostile journalists. They did not sit down until 11.30 p.m. and talked until 3 a.m. A toast was proposed to Liszt, who replied that he had left the city as a great artist in the 1840s: “as the servant of art, I return!”

As an example of Liszt’s compositions at this period, David played us an excerpt from the symphonic poem, *Tasso: lamento e trionfo*. The 16th century poet Torquato Tasso was a quintessential Romantic figure whose poetry was widely read until the 20th century. After a brilliant but turbulent career at the court of Ferrara, he was confined to an asylum for some years. After a further period of wandering, he came to Rome and was named Poet Laureate by the Pope, but died before he was crowned. Liszt’s *Tasso* is majestic and hymn-like, with lots of brass and percussion (especially triangle!).

In the 1860s, Liszt left Germany for Rome and Wagner returned to Germany. Their roles were now reversed. Liszt was burnt out after his fifteen years in Weimar. In earlier years, Liszt had spoken of his hopes for Weimar, where he and Wagner would preside over a musical golden age, as Goethe and Schiller had previously presided over a literary golden age. Now he writes to Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein that he no longer cares for audiences. But after a few years he finds

himself popping off to other parts of Europe to see friends, to perform, to schmooze.

Wagner is now face to face with the audience: *Tristan*, *Meistersinger*, the Paris *Tannhäuser*. The last-named was sponsored by Princess Pauline von Metternich, the wife of the Austrian ambassador, and she was not popular*. Paul Linder was drafted into this performance as a paid applauder in the claque – not Wagner’s idea, but part of the theatrical practice. Students willingly did this simply for a ticket. They were strategically placed throughout the auditorium and applauded or booed according to their instructions.

The 1860s started pretty badly for Wagner: *Tannhäuser* failed in Paris; *Tristan* was abandoned in Vienna after 70 rehearsals. One thing Wagner *could* do was give concerts to introduce his music to the public. At one such concert, in Paris in 1860, the audience liked it but it was hissed by others, who were then shouted down by those in favour. Such a distinguished critic as Berlioz did *not* like it.

The young Ludwig II then appeared in 1864 as a *deus ex machina*, solving Wagner’s financial woes at a stroke and preparing the way for the realisation of his artistic ambitions. This was the period of *Die Meistersinger*, a music-drama in which we can see the artist/audience/critic relationship played out. Walther, the inspired outsider, is initially not welcomed by the guild of mastersingers, but under the guidance of Hans Sachs he obtains the approval of the public, the mastersingers and also gets the girl. Beckmesser was initially to be called Veit Hanslick. The mastersingers can be envisaged as the musicians of the day. At this point David played us the last section of Walther’s ‘Prize Song’, in which Walther takes the strict rules of the mastersingers and modifies them to produce a magnificent musical depiction of the poet’s dream.

The last decades saw Liszt and Wagner reconciled in 1872 after their estrangement. Wagner was better known as a composer, but Liszt was more of a celebrity. Liszt’s biographer described Wagner’s re-cultivation of Liszt as “a calculated investment.” Liszt, however, remained generous. A concert

was planned in Budapest to raise funds for Bayreuth and the tickets were slow to sell. Liszt heard; he volunteered to play the ‘Emperor’ Concerto: tickets sold out.

However, Liszt was feeling sidelined: “At Bayreuth I am not a composer but a publicity agent.” In the Wagner family this attitude persisted – he was referred to disparagingly as “the Abbé”. Nike Wagner said his name was hardly ever mentioned, and Wagner was dismissive of some of his music.

Liszt’s later works were quite experimental; he didn’t even publish some of them. One such was even entitled “*Bagatelle without tonality*” and was not published until after his death. Liszt’s aim was “to hurl my javelin into the indefinite realm of the future.”

Wagner wrote a late essay: “The public in time and space” (*Das Publikum in Zeit und Raum*, published 1878). He now doubts that a great artist would be in tune with his own age. Being alienated from your time is a mark of your true greatness. By this time, however, he had “arrived” and achieved recognition in his lifetime. Wagner’s recognition reached its *apogée* just before World War I. Liszt too achieved recognition, and his piano music has survived, but his orchestral music is just not played, not even *Les Préludes*, which is the best; there are 12 symphonic poems and two symphonies.

David played (beautifully, on the piano) a short piece by Liszt, written in 1883. This was *Am Grabe Richard Wagners* (*At the grave of Richard Wagner*). Slow, not dense, complex or showy, it contains fragments of *Leitmotive* from *Parsifal*, which David described as being more or less disconnected and just stuck.

Finally, we heard some music, which for many of us is probably still “of the future” – excerpts from Ligeti’s *Le grand macabre*, sung by the soprano Barbara Hannigan and conducted by Simon Rattle. Ligeti died in 2006—a decade ago—but in listening to his music some of us probably feel as unfamiliar and at sea as the early audiences for *Tristan und Isolde*.

*WSB note: Wikipedia says that she taught ladies to smoke cigars “without fear of their reputations.”

Baudelaire, *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris*.
https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Richard_Wagner_et_Tannh%C3%A4user_%C3%A0_Paris

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 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

NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS SINCE JUNE 2016

Marita Supplee [1184]; Margaret Kelly [1185]; Roswitha Wulff [1186]; Robert French [1187]; Warner Whiteford [1188]; Peter Rowe [1189]; Joanne McGrath [1190]; Elisabeth Hall [1191]

DONATIONS RECEIVED SINCE JULY 2016

No donations received to date.

OBITUARY: JULIAN BLOCK-LAWYER, RIGHTS ACTIVIST, WAGNER LOVER - 1934-2016

Most Members of the Wagner Society in NSW would know Julian from his involvement in the Society's Management Committee to which he was drafted to advise it on the best way to handle the embezzlement of money from the Society's accounts in 2000-01. The then President Barbara McNulty advised the 2001 Annual General Meeting: "A new member who is a solicitor offered his services 'pro bono' should we need legal assistance. As we don't have the financial resources to fight a civil action in the court this is a very generous offer. I am sure you will join me in thanking them." At the AGM of 21 July 2002, Julian was elected Vice-President. At the May 2012 AGM, as the new president, and when Julian stood down after eleven years of service to the Society, Jane Mathews acknowledged "our long-standing vice-president, Julian Block, who has put so much into the Society over such a long period. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude." He contributed a great deal to the Society over the years, including the hospitality of his and Rosemary's house for very many committee meetings. On behalf of the Society, Jane Mathews conveyed the Society's deep condolences to his widow, Rosemary, and his family.



In her obituary for the Sydney Morning Herald for her father, Jessica Block wrote that Julian "was primarily a finance and tax lawyer, but he always talked most proudly about the work he did in the 1960s in Soweto and of a memorable year he spent representing the gay community in South Africa, where he fought and won a battle against the enforcement of draconian laws.

"In addition to the AAT [Administrative Appeals Tribunal], Block was a judicial member of the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal.

He was described by the late Justice Graeme Hill, who frequently reviewed his decisions on appeal, as "one of the best tax lawyers I know". Away from work, Block was a member of the executive of the Sydney International Piano Competition, the Wagner Society in NSW, and a patron of Opera Australia for many years.

For the full version of Jessica Block's obituary, please go to: www.smh.com.au/comment/obituaries/obituary-lawyer-julian-block-20160215-gmu4yf.html

REMEMBERING JULIAN BLOCK

by Roger Cruickshank, Past President, Wagner Society In NSW

In the land of clichés, every cloud is supposed to have a silver lining. My experience is, sadly, that they often don't. I first met Julian Block during a particularly overcast period in the story of The Wagner Society in NSW Inc, and his friendship over a number of years was one of the few silver linings that this period produced.

A very popular and trusted long-standing member of the Society was found to have stolen a substantial sum of money over more than a decade. In the aftermath of this discovery, then president Barbara McNulty O.B.E. asked Julian to join the committee to provide members with confidence that financial matters were under control.

Julian and I would meet for lunch every few months at Machiavelli's restaurant in Clarence Street, where after discussing the grim matters that preoccupied us at that time, the atmosphere would lighten and we would talk about music and much happier things. Julian had strong opinions. I think that he loathed Lieder more than I did, and was happy to say so. Over our standard lunch, a shared antipasto plate and a shared signature dish of fusilli crab, we shared opinions that I was often nervous about articulating. It gave lunch a special frisson.

During this time Julian fell under the spell of one of the Beastly Gorgon Sisters, disguised as a Dietician, to whom he

referred (in tribute to Seinfeld) as the "Food Nazi." I found it hard to imagine Julian being afraid of anyone, but this woman was able to trim him down alarmingly simply by the fear of her disapproval. Happiness was weighing less than you did at your last meeting, and it worked.

Julian confined his participation in committee meetings to providing guidance on matters of financial governance and oversight, and often made his home available for committee meetings. This meant that there was a post-match supper, which included iced fruit cake as a treat for me. (I hope I don't appear shallow with this specific recollection.) Julian's strong opinions often caused people to call him "curmudgeonly", and other old-fashioned words. Wagner Society committees are made up of people with only one narrow interest in common, who might otherwise never meet, and certainly aren't always friends. Perhaps that's the lot of committees generally. One night, after Julian and another committee member had clashed sharply and often, when the meeting ended he announced that he was going to bed, which he did. Alas the other committee member refused to leave the table until Julian returned to escort them to the front door, as etiquette demanded. I of course was left with my iced fruit cake, trying to calm the troubled waters between mouthfuls, and in the end peace prevailed and we all went home.

One endearing quality was Julian's deep love for his wife, Rosemary. Where others could not move him one jot, her gentle words could get him happily to Lieder recitals and other forms of cultural torture. It was charming to watch his tender deference to Rose, so completely foreign to his curmudgeonly persona. I can't say that he was a softie, but in her hands he came close.

He also had a wicked sense of humour. He would have me in stitches describing an appellant or defendant who came before him as Deputy President of the (NSW) Administrative Appeals Tribunal. He would occasionally send me copies of his judgments, not for their legal erudition, but for the careful descriptions of those who appeared before him or the facts of the matter, none of whom would have guessed the wicked humour hidden in his description of them.

Julian told me about a trip he made to Bayreuth in the 1980s, I think, under the aegis of the Wicked Witch of the South. Many Australians have made that trip, but he was the only person who talked to me about it openly. A travel agent operating in Victoria offered tickets to Bayreuth at 10 or more times their face value. These were obtained from an overseas Wagner Society on what judgemental persons might call "The Black Market." With the Wicked Witch shepherding

her Australian Goslings about the Festspielhaus, carrying I imagine a brown paper bag full of US dollars in large denominations, about 15 minutes before their first opera our Southern Witch would disappear, only to reappear with seconds to spare and handfuls of tickets. The result was general happiness and rejoicing, except I suspect for the Festival Organisers.

After the police investigation into the theft of the Society's funds, where it was decided by the Deputy Public Prosecutor that a prosecution was not in the public interest, the former member died, and Julian resigned from the Committee. I moved to Leura, and didn't see him again for a number of years, although he regularly sent me email links to stories that were funny, or informative.

In February 2016, I was reading a Tuesday Sydney Morning Herald, with its Good Food supplement and simple early-week crossword, and there was a fabulous photo of Julian and Rose. He looked so happy and full of life that it took me a few seconds to realise that the accompanying article was an obituary by his beloved daughter Jessica. Julian had died. It's taken me a long time to put these memories together on a page, and to say goodbye to his wonderful Silver Lining.

**WAGNER SOCIETY MEMBERS SPECIAL OFFERS AND 10% DISCOUNTS -
ASK BEFORE YOU PURCHASE AT:**

The Wagner Society Management Committee has negotiated a 10% discount for Wagner Society members: just mention that you are a member!



FISH FINE MUSIC

Fish Fine Music was born in 1982 as two small stores known as The Record Collector. After almost a decade as Sydney's largest classical music retailer, the company expanded to include popular music stores and in 1991 we re-branded ourselves as Fish Fine Music.

Fish Fine Music exists purely because our team has a passion for music. Our policy is to carry the largest classical range of CDs and DVDs in Australia and we remain committed in the long term to the unsurpassed audio quality of the CD format.

We welcome you to both our online store and our two Sydney City locations, and endeavour to bring you the fine music you want with the finest of service.

STORE LOCATIONS:

Level 2, Queen Victoria Building - 9264 6458

The Italian Forum, 23 Norton St,
Leichardt NSW 2040 - 8014 7762

www.fishfinemusic.com.au

**DA CAPO MUSIC SECONDHAND
AND ANTIQUARIAN MUSIC
BOOKSTORE**

Upstairs at 51 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, NSW, 2037
Above SAPPHO BOOKS

Website: <http://www.dacapo.com.au>

Please phone Da Capo if you have any queries:
+61 2 9660 1825

Or email Da Capo at: music@dacapo.com.au
or **Meredith Baillie** - on shop@sapphobooks.com.au

The cafe attached to **Sappho** serves great coffee and wine and snacks.

**BRANGAYNE OF ORANGE
VINEYARD**

Brangayne of Orange has kindly agreed to offer Members a 10% discount if they purchase any of their wines. Please call and order by phone (02 6365 3229) and mention your membership of the Wagner Society.

OBITUARY: ALBERTO TELISFORO REMEDIOS, CBE

27.2.1935 - 11.6.2016

In the June 2016 issue of the Quarterly, in the irregular section *Swan Lines*, your Editor published a photograph of Alberto Remedios simply because it was a good picture of a great Wagnerian singer who signed the photograph as guest of honour at the Wagner Society in NSW's birthday party for Wagner in May 1987. Your Editor regrets that the news of Remedios' death had not reached him in time to include an obituary for him in the June issue. The following comments have been taken from the sources acknowledged at the end of the obituary. It is worth noting that Remedios retired to and lived in Sydney, Australia, from 1999 until his death and is now buried in Castle Hill cemetery.

Remedios had an extensive international career, including the Sadlers Wells Opera (later English National Opera), the Royal Opera House (briefly), Frankfurt Opera, the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires, San Francisco, Seattle (the first Ring Cycle on the west coast of the US), the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the Australian Opera and with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Many Members would remember his very early appearances in Australia in 1965 when he toured with the Sutherland-Williamson company and Luciano Pavarotti, singing Faust and Lensky. This happened, according to legend, because "...he was in an Italian restaurant in London where the owner did not believe that he was a singer and jokingly offered him a free meal if he could prove his credentials. Remedios stood up and sang for his supper but, unknown to him, Joan Sutherland was also dining there. She subsequently invited Remedios to join her and Luciano Pavarotti on a tour of her native Australia in 1965 that included Lucia di Lammermoor and Eugene Onegin."

"Remedios performed regularly in Australia – he sang in concert performances of *Götterdämmerung* at the Sydney Opera House in the late 1970s with Rita Hunter, conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras and sang Lohengrin for Victoria State Opera in the 1980s. [...]" Your Editor understands that the English National Opera dedicated to him their June 15 performance of *Tristan and Isolde*. He also sang in Australia in concert performances of *Tristan und Isolde* with Rita Hunter, and also sang the roles of Radamès (*Aida*), Otello and Siegmund here.

"His performances as Walther von Stolzing in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* conducted by Reginald Goodall and recorded live by Chandos for Sadler's Wells in 1968 established his fame even more widely. He went on to sing both Siegmund and Siegfried in the company's first complete production of the *Ring* cycle, also conducted by Goodall and recorded live."



Alberto Remedios Guest of Honour at the Wagner Society in NSW annual dinner for Wagner's birthday: May 1987

While Remedios, according to reports, had trouble reading music and remembering lines, his performances were memorable. This "trouble" allegedly led to a very short stint at Covent Garden: "It was the Royal Opera's loss, but was doubtless a factor too in Bayreuth's otherwise unaccountable failure to hire him (despite a reputedly successful audition for Wolfgang Wagner). Bayreuth's putative reasoning, that Remedios was "too bel canto" for Wagner, is almost certainly legendary, but neatly encapsulates the divide between his appealingly lyrical, open-throated tone and the more traditional heroic (and latterly antiheroic) modes prevalent at Bayreuth and elsewhere.

"The tenor Richard Berkeley-Steele recalls expressing his own trepidation at approaching the heldentenor repertory, whereupon Remedios grabbed him by both hands, leaned across the table and shouted in his face: "We are *lyric* heldenteners, always remember, *lyric* heldenteners." It seems to your Editor that, on the strength of Stuart Skelton's performances of the role of Tristan, in New York and Hobart at least, this singer can also be categorised, thankfully, as a *lyric* heldentenor.

The Guardian's obituary might best sum up Remedios's status as a Wagnerian singer: He "...traced an almost mythological career path, appropriate for the singer who so memorably incarnated the role of Siegfried in Wagner's *Ring*. As a key member of the team that under the tutelage of Reginald Goodall created the *Ring* for Sadler's Wells (later English National) Opera – the other outstanding players were Rita Hunter and Norman Bailey – he forged an identity for the character, based on geniality and an essentially lyrical approach to the heroic role, that remains unrivalled today." "Remedios, drawing on natural reserves of glorious tone, created a likable character of youthful impetuosity, capable too (for example in the Forest Murmurs scene) of suggesting vulnerability."

But *The Telegraph* has the last word: "His was a deliciously syrupy voice. In his prime he could not fail to make the hairs stand up on the back of the listener's neck with his sheer vocal power, a power that was tempered by both glorious phrasing and careful attention to line. One critic who heard him in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Sadler's Wells in 1968 reported in complimentary terms how his "voice had grown so large that the sheer volume of sound in that resonant auditorium was almost painful in its intensity"

www.limelightmagazine.com.au/albertoremedioshasdied
www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jun/26/albertoremediosobituary
www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2016/06/14/albertoremediostenorobituary/

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE AT THE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN OPERA: by Minnie Biggs

I saw the last two performances at the Met conducted by Asher Fisch, and the High Definition film at the Dendy cinema, really just to hear Simon Rattle in the pit. It was wonderful to be back in the Met, after more than 25 years, seeing the people, the glamour, the house, those chandeliers rising up before the start, breathtaking. And on the back of the seat in front of me were subtitles/surtitles, in both English and German. I chose to look at the German, when I looked, just to have the words together with what was being sung. It was said that they were funded by a famous crook, now in jail! A rich crook. And speaking of rich, a glass of champagne costs \$20 and is served in pretty plastic glasses, which I fear are not recycled.

Too much has been said about the dark production by Trelínski, filled with non sequiturs, and with little relation to the story or the music, and never about the fact that all the critics and commentators described the opening projection as a huge nautical compass, when it is in fact a radar screen, not a compass, which, like much else, bears no relation to the opera.

The Met orchestra is beyond compare, all agree, and with Simon Rattle at the lead, better than best. Something about a super maestro at the head of a super orchestra producing superb music. He had studied the score that Mahler had used, and said that balance and transparency, allowing the instruments to play out to beyond the end, was an important aspect he absorbed.

It is impossible to compare the sound of the live performance with the film but there is no question that Asher Fisch came on very clear and bright, and often too strong, overplaying Skelton. His second, and their last, performance he pulled way back and Skelton had a better time of it. Rattle at the movie was a rounder sound, while clear and true.

Nina Stemme, in her nearly 100th performance and Stuart in his first [at the Met Opera – Editor], were wonderfully and quite incredibly matched, as old timers Rene Pape as King Marke and Ekaterina Gubanova as Brangäne and newcomer to the role of Kurwenal Evgeny Nikitin were richly and well played. I was surprised and delighted to note the small differences in the individual performances over the three productions, in the movements, the acting, the expressions and even the voices of the singers. The orchestra was more of a complete perfection in detail, in every performance.

I was also surprised to confess how much I appreciated the film version. The interviews, while superficial, are revealing and sympathetic and informative—what fun to meet the Puerto Rican English Horn player! The close-ups and angles of the filming are often more interesting than—in this case—the very dark uninteresting staging. We are fortunate to live in a world where such performances of the highest calibre are offered. As our Stuart Skelton said, twice, in his interview, “I am a very lucky boy!” We, too.

Then I recalled the production at Bayreuth last summer [2015], the production itself completely forgotten, visually as unmemorable as that of the Met. However, I do remember feeling emotionally drained, people all around with tears running down their faces, and wondered at the lack of emotion, or much less, of the Met performances. In what part of an opera performance does emotion lie, from whence does it come? The music is sublime and contains all, but is it the singers, the conductor, the director who draws out the tears? A couple of years ago, there was a concert performance in Auckland and I must say, the opera really does well without the crazy, distracting complexity added by so many directors, which is a further recommendation for the Stemme/Skelton performance in Hobart later this month.

YOU WILL NOT PLAY WAGNER - A PLAY BY VICTOR GORDON, DIRECTED BY MOIRA BLUMENTHAL

Ever since the Holocaust, performing works by composer Richard Wagner has been taboo in Israel due to the connection between his music and the Nazis. But when a young Israeli conductor tries to perform Wagner in an international music competition, he causes a national storm. Should the politics of Wagner's music interfere with the quality of his art? And would a Jewish Israeli conducting Wagner be treachery or triumph?

This play is set in contemporary Tel Aviv, where Ya'akov, a young Israeli conductor, causes a storm by selecting to perform Wagner in the finals of an international music competition. He comes into conflict with Esther, Holocaust survivor and competition patron who has her own tragic connection with Wagner's music, and Morris,

the competition organiser. Their arguments push the competition to the brink and set Israeli society on edge. Should Ya'akov play Wagner? Should the politics of his music interfere with the quality of his art? To what extent do we honour the memory of the Holocaust, its survivors and their descendants, without it suffocating the next generation? And would a Jewish

Israeli conducting Wagner be treachery or triumph?

Presented by Shalom and Moira Blumenthal Productions, the world premiere of *YOU WILL NOT PLAY WAGNER* will play from 4 – 28 May 2017 at the Eternity Playhouse, Sydney. See advert on inside front page. BOOK NOW at www.shalom.edu.au.

DAS RHEINGOLD: CHICAGO LYRIC OPERA - THE BEGINNING OF A WITTY RING CYCLE by Terence Watson

The night of *Das Rheingold*, 5 October 2016 (not the premiere) was my debut in Chicago's Lyric Theatre. It is a real opera house in the grand old European style. Lots of gilt and red carpet. This production of *Das Rheingold* heralds an interesting full Ring Cycle in 2020. Most of the entire cast was very strong, with all of them outperforming the underpowered Eric Owens whose voice failed to ring in the traditional Wagnerian heldentenor manner, giving him a kind of tentativeness and lack of authority, especially in comparison with John Tomlinson and Donald McIntyre et al.

The production is dominated by three pairs of three level tapered wooden towers on each side of the stage—partly in the wings. I took it that these are replicas of either the heads of stairs down into mines or the heads of the many mechanical opening bridges that span the Chicago River, although other reviews suggest that the set is supposed to represent an abandoned theatre. At the back of the stage is another huge frame spanning the whole of the back with what looks like a frame for a huge hall. It suggests the steel frames for which Chicago set the standard many decades ago when the idea was developed here of steel framed buildings that allowed open spaces unencumbered by internal columns.

Into this space walk three women who seem to be the Norns, since they appear to be knitting long scarves—or ropes of fate with red wool. They are dressed all in black like old mourning widows, with slightly mad hair. Two of them are carrying what looks like a bigger version of Lady Bracknell's "handbag," but could be a carpetbag of American lore. One of them turns off a standard light which is, for no apparent reason, front stage centre. At that moment, the stage goes dark and the music starts—very well, with those tricky opening low horn notes well delivered. As the music builds, the Norns take four red cords from the towers and appear to hook them to the bag, but, instead, out of the bag emerges a huge blue coloured parachute silk banner, which they haul up into the top of the stage by the red ropes. This gave a very effective and unobtrusive top of the Rhine rippling above the action (the Norns keep it moving during the whole scene). Then six rude mechanicals (apparently called "The Crew" by Director David Pountney) run in from the sides to dance with long banners of the same material that they wave around and interweave - nice, but not really very necessary to underscore the impression of a river already created. However, all the rude mechanicals come to play very important parts in the production as they have to move most of the parts of the set in very complicated, choreographed patterns. They seem to be dressed as early 19th century Irish migrant workers, those who helped to make Chicago a great city.

To begin with, they have to manipulate the cantilevered machines—the kind on which movie cameras are often mounted for tracking action from many vantages when making movies. At the ends where the cameras would be, there were small, round platforms on which the Rhinedaughters (Woglinde—Diana Newman; Wellgunde—Annie Rosen; Flosshilde—Lindsay Ammann) cavort and swim and tease Alberich, who arrives without ceremony through a small trapdoor in the floor, with a radioactive symbol on its underside. These dollies seem to be a clever nod to Wagner's premiere of the work, which had the Rhinedaughters riding

around on clumsy wooden towers behind scrims - the famous "swimming machines." Here, though, there is no hiding behind scrims or pretence that they really are in the Rhine. Rather, this gives an indication of the general approach of not hiding the stage business or the rude mechanicals who come and go all through the performance. At various times, the "dollies" hold the singers over the pit. After a few minutes, I came to appreciate the purely balletic effects of the singers being swung high and low, back of forth, all the time while the Rhinedaughters tease Alberich.

The Rhinedaughters are dressed in what seems to be 18th century women's underwear, but with a long train, to suggest, perhaps, a fishy tail. The singers were also lithe and sexy making it quite believable that Alberich would desire them so strongly. Samuel Youn's Alberich is probably the best I've seen and heard, especially in his hissing, spitting, angry nastiness, with a wonderful ringing baritone voice, and a convincing portrayal of frustrated desire—perhaps only equalled by Warwick Fyfe in the Melbourne Ring Cycle. The way in which the director David Pountney presumably directed Alberich to display his evilness also revealed how evil can seem to be amusing, in that it is hard to understand how someone can be so stupid as to think that their desires and actions are within the realm of the rational or reasonable and that they have any real chance of achieving their warped and dangerous objectives.

This point also suggests how Pountney brought out much humour in the opera. It is after all allegedly Wagner's version of a satyr play, though presented by ancient Greek tragedians after their serious works began. It also made me like this production very much and wish to see the whole Cycle—assuming he can keep up this high standard of interpretation.

The gold is presented as a kind of stylised lotus flower that descends from the flies, opening from a box into a flower with the gold at the centre. It floats above the billowing blue banner of the river. Alberich steals it by tossing one of the Rhinedaughters off her camera dolly and using it to rise up high enough to grab the gold and then disappear backstage, leaving the Rhinedaughters writhing in despair on the stage. The Norns unhook the river so it sinks to the stage, covering the Rhinedaughters who disappear into a trapdoor, with the river following them.

At the same time, a new backdrop arrives with a painting of a distant golden version of the wooden—or it could be metal—set on the stage. Wotan, Fricka and Freia arrive in another very funny touch—on three tier carts carrying their goods and chattels, presumably on their way to moving into Valhalla. Fricka's cart is dominated by a huge ram skull. Wotan's is dominated by what appears to be a small tree—the World Ash Tree??—growing out of a huge potplant holder that has split open, but closer inspection reveals it to be the broken top of a Corinthian?? Column—perhaps a reference to the decline of Wagner's beloved Greek culture? These two carts give the rude mechanicals more machinery to manipulate in carefully arranged patterns. The gods are dressed in the over-elaborate, slightly comical (especially Wotan's feathered hat) costumes of late 18th century aristocracy—perhaps to recall the court of Louis XVI before the French Revolution. Eric Owens as Wotan seemed very uncomfortable in his costume, as if he'd prefer to

be in casual clothes. For her part, Tanja Ariane Baumgartner as Fricka wore her gown as if born to it. And she sang a treat. It's not often we get a voice that can handle Fricka's range satisfactorily, and a singer who looks desirable, rather than frumpy or matronly. Oh and Freia (sung very nicely by Laure Wilde) also arrives at this time, on top of another cart, but she is inside a topless cage out of which grows a small, severely pruned apple tree. She is dressed as if she were really a fairy in an early 19th century ballet.

The Opera company's website explains his *mise en scène*: "Pountney's production views the gods in Rheingold early in the opera as a kind of nomadic theater company "from the old days—Molière or Shakespeare. They're constantly journeying, but they reach a point where they're going to build themselves this castle. The end of Rheingold [the entrance of the gods into their new home, Walhalla] is the transition from a nomadic existence into imperial splendor."

In addition, the website quotes Pountney on the role of "The Crew:" "They'll be onstage implementing certain traditional theatrical techniques during the performance. Technically speaking, "Rheingold is the most virtuosic of the four operas and careens wildly between different spaces," notes Pountney. "There are tricks onstage, whether it's dragons or people floating in the water." We have three important trap doors—mechanically operated traps that we'll use throughout the cycle." The set brings to mind elements of "an old-fashioned wooden theater," which would have had "proscenium and bridges that can fly in and form a way in which people can move from one place to another."

Then the giants arrive. One of the towers on each side of the stage is reversed to reveal a huge head on the top, with a singer in each of second level of the tower, down the side of which two huge forearms hang. A very sketchy, but effective suggestion of huge size and power being manipulated by a rather puny mind or ego. The soft-hearted Fasolt was sung by my favourite Wagnerian hunk Wilhelm Schwinghammer, with Fafner sung by another hunky looking bass Tobias Kehrer, but both were made up to look Lord of the Rings non-human creatures. They both sang very well from their towers, which some rude mechanicals had to move around, while others moved the gods' moving carts.

Froh and Donner now arrive on the top of their carts. Froh's is dominated by a huge hand holding a fan (he is the god of the winds!) and he wields a small one himself. Froh was sung by Jesse Donner and Donner (not a typo!) by Zachary Nelson. Pountney also seems to be suggesting that Froh might be gay, since hooked over the struts of the big fan on his cart are rainbow ropes, and he occasionally waves his fan in a rather campy manner. Loge also behaves a little campily at times during his appearances.

When Loge, sung by Stefan Margita, arrives, the acting and singing standards really jump: he dominates the stage every moment he is on it. He's dressed rather like a Barnum & Bailey ringmaster and arrives on a three-wheeler bike that looks as if it must feature in some children's fantasy book (I couldn't track down anything like it online). He has a lovely ringing tenor, more in the English style than the Italian. He treats the whole action as a bit of a joke and occasionally tap dances in his *joie de vivre*. For his second last aria, lamenting how stupid the gods are and his luck in not being in their company, he pops up next to conductor Andrew Davis in the pit.

During Wotan's and Loge's "negotiations" with the giants, Freia begins to display very affectionate behaviour with Fasolt's forearm, which has become detached from his tower "body" and is now manipulated by a rude mechanical. Fasolt's hand is crooked in such a way that, when he takes her hostage, she fits nicely between his thumb and forefinger. Instead of lumbering off stage, the mechanicals simply turn their towers around so we can no longer see the heads.

Wotan and Loge descend to Nibelheim through the same trapdoor Alberich had used. As we descend, a tower on each side is suddenly filled by Nibelungs, dressed as foundry workers, with menacing welding masks, who beat out the Nibelheim motif as their towers move onto the stage and then out again.

Alberich is now dressed in a gold version of Loge's ringmaster tails and jodhpurs, perhaps to point out not just the parallel between Licht and Schwarz Alberich/Wotan, but also the real cleverness of Loge and the poor imitation of it by Alberich. The Tarnhelm is a hollow model of Youn/Alberich's head, which is slipped over his real head. The dragon and toad are funny big blow up toys inflated by mechanicals hooking airpumps to them. This touch reinforced the idea that Alberich is deluded and stupid, rather than truly evil. In a nice ironic gesture, Alberich has a paperweight in the form of a Rhinedaughter on her dolly on his office desk, perhaps reflecting his present instrumental relation to women.

During this scene, much use is made of three elevators that rise up from the floor. Sometimes, Wotan and Loge use one to "arrive" in Nibelheim, Alberich uses one to "disappear" so he can beat Mime, sometimes the Nibelungen use them to bring up gold (in the form of small Metropolis stylised women), and Alberich disappears into one each time he magically transforms. One also reappears later with Erda in it.

During the ascent from Nibelheim, Pountney has Fasolt's tower and disconcertingly disembodied forearm and hand re-enter, with Freia now caressing and kissing Fasolt's thumb and forefinger as she somewhat erotically enters and leaves the crook of his digits. This moment helps us understand how serious Fasolt is about his attraction to Freia and she to him, but it also suggests that love has no preconceptions and no limitations on its potential recipients or volunteers.

When the trio arrives at the gods' mountaintop, Alberich is wheeled in tied to his office chair and gapes at the ostensible view from this great height that he has never seen before. The Nibelung's deliver the gold via two of the elevators. As the Nibelungs realise Alberich's situation, they become restless, with one of them attacking Alberich, who, with considerable trouble, throws him off. Wotan, though, reveals a very brutal side when he cuts off Alberich's arm off to possess the ring. I think in the Neidhardt Ring Cycle in Adelaide in 2004, Wotan only cut off Alberich's finger.

Alberich delivers a truly chilling curse, thanks to Youn's powerful voice and impressive vocal acting. The Norns re-enter to clean up the blood he has dripped all over the stage. One of them picks up the wastepaper bin that now holds Alberich's arm—she nearly faints before the other two help her off stage. The almost constant presence of the Norns, if that is who they are, fits nicely with Erda's revelation to Wotan that she uses the Norns to whisper the daily news into his ear as he sleeps—they are clearly very busily involved in everybody's lives!

The giants return to trade Freia for the Nibelungs' gold. To enable the gold to be piled up to hide Freia from Fasolt's view, the mechanicals pull in an elevator conveyor belt and she returns to her cage. The reason for its toplessness now becomes evident—the gold is dumped into the cage until she is hidden, except for that little gap the Tarnhelm fills.

When Fafner demands the ring as well, and Wotan refuses, there is another funny moment with the Norns. They appear in the back corner of the set hammering on the floor/earth to summon Erda, who arrives underneath them in one of the elevators Alberich has used to bring the gold ransom to Wotan. This time, though, there seems to be the root of a wisdom tooth hanging from the ceiling of the elevator. Instead, I guess it was meant to represent the roots of the World Ash Tree. Erda was sung very strongly by a singer with the lovely Wagnerian-sounding name of Okka von der Damerau. Her costume made her look a little like Helen Carter Bonham in "Alice in the Looking Glass."

The final scene of the gods attempting to enter Valhalla is very funny—even vaudevillian. All of the gods, except Freia, who is vigorously resisting being co-opted back into the gods collective, are now dressed in white and gold capes, as if for a high religious occasion or coronation—and to top it off huge silly white feathered hats again—the imperial look Poultney mentioned above. Freia is finally coerced into dressing up and joining the collective. Then some mechanicals pull out of the floor a series of ropes coloured like the rainbow and hook them to a bar under the entrance to Valhalla. For three times, as the gods attempt to process formally into Valhalla in a kind of dance-march, they are interrupted by the Rhinedaughters calling for the return of their gold. Wotan, in particular, is comically frustrated by their calls and in exasperation (of a

thwarted thespian) almost throws his hat at them when they suddenly emerge from the same trapdoor into which they had disappeared in scene 1. Finally, the gods are able to "climb" the rope bridge (actually just walking between the ropes) until they are lifted up on one of the elevators at which point the curtain descends, leaving them suspended in mid-air.

The end was greeted with rapturous applause on both the occasions I saw the production. I strongly feel that the production is a worthy start to what could be a very interesting interpretation of the whole Cycle and am planning for a return to see a full Cycle in 2020. The Ring cycle is, apparently, a coproduction by Lyric Opera of Chicago and Teatro Real, Madrid, so, if you prefer Madrid to Chicago, then you might like to keep an eye on the Teatro Real's calendar.

The orchestra under Andrew Davis played very well, though not as flawlessly as the Met orchestra under Simon Rattle for the Stemme/Skelton *Tristan und Isolde* I had experienced twice in the preceding fortnight. The acoustics of the hall are very good, clean but warm. The whole production was intelligent, making the jokey aspects of the work stand out, without detracting from the overall seriousness of Wagner's indictment of the gods, except Freia, of course.

See more at: www.lyricopera.org/concertstickets/lyricnotes/july2016/ring-up-the-curtain#sthash.im8M1sAu.dpuf,

www.lyricopera.org/concertstickets/lyricnotes/september2016/rheingold-second-city,

www.lyricopera.org/concertstickets/blog/2016/10/tech/. For a brief video survey of the opera, visit: www.lyricopera.org/concertstickets/blog/2016/10/tech/~/link.aspx?_id=1B4A0619FBFB4BC392C65123CDAC59CF&_z=z

DEVELOPING WARWICK FYFE'S CAREER - CROWD FUNDING PROJECT

Warwick Fyfe is not only a great Australian Wagnerian singer, but also a Member of the Wagner Society in NSW. We have pleasure in asking Members to consider supporting Warwick's further development. The following information is part of the crowd funding material explaining Warwick's appeal—Editor:

"Opera singers nowadays need to be more versatile and travel farther to maintain a successful career. This project represents the next step in developing Warwick Fyfe's career as an international freelance Heldenbariton, specialising in the Wagnerian / Germanic repertoire. This voice type does not really mature until a singer is around the mid 40s, so now is the very best time for him to make this happen.

"Warwick has been invited to Berlin in early 2017, to work with one of the greatest Wagnerian singers in Europe, the Kammersängerin Deborah Polaski, and to be heard by some German agents that she has arranged for him to see. He would also like to work on specific Wagnerian repertoire, with Anthony Negus, director of the Longborough Festival. Auditions with three UK companies have been scheduled so far. He will need to be in the UK and Germany for a minimum of two months in order to achieve his goal of singing for these people, and build on successful work in recent years.

"Funds are needed to help with airfares, accommodation, internal travel in the UK and Germany, as well as coaching

fees and accompanist fees. Warwick has been saving hard to make this happen. However, without a regular income, this is not so easy for a freelance artist and sole breadwinner. In late 2014, with the kind help of generous supporters, Warwick travelled to the UK and successfully auditioned for the Welsh National Opera, then covering for them the very vocally demanding role of Golaud, in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Subsequently, he performed a full season as The Four Villains, in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*, with the English Touring Opera.

"We know that Warwick is capable of impressing people who haven't heard him sing before. What few people know is that from 2013, he actually achieved all of this while struggling with serious illness, yet still had wonderful reviews. Unfortunately this also meant that he was not able to capitalise fully on his success at that time. Today, thanks to his wonderful doctors, he is back to his former strength and is at the peak of his vocal powers, hoping to capitalise on the goodwill generated last year. This year, he's sung in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Wellington and Hanoi.

"Any donation, however small, will help Warwick to pursue his ambition of one day singing these great roles, and bringing joy to the many people who love to hear him sing. All donations over \$2 will be tax deductible. Donations can be made through this website: <https://australianculturalfund.org.au/projects/warwicks-wagnerreise/>."

HAYLLAR MUSIC TOURS

EXCLUSIVE SMALL GROUP TOURS FOR MUSIC LOVERS

TREAT YOURSELF THIS CHRISTMAS TO A HAYLLAR MUSIC TOUR IN 2017

“Simply a superlative experience... This tour must rank as one of the best.”
Irene and John, Opera & Theatre in London & the English Countryside, June 2016

MUSIC AT THE ADELAIDE FESTIVAL
6–10 MARCH 2017 | FULLY BOOKED

OPERA & THEATRE IN LONDON & THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE
10–23 JUNE 2017 | PLACES LIMITED

OPERA & ART IN MILAN, VENICE, VERONA & TORRE DEL LAGO
3–16 JULY 2017 | PLACES LIMITED

OPERA & MUSIC FESTIVALS IN SALZBURG, MUNICH, BREGENZ & VERONA
23 JULY–5 AUGUST 2017


AUSTRALIAN FESTIVAL OF CHAMBER MUSIC & THE QUEENSLAND OUTBACK
2–10 AUGUST 2017


MUSIC & ART IN BUDAPEST, PRAGUE, LEIPZIG & BERLIN
20 SEPTEMBER–3 OCTOBER 2017


THE WORLD'S
FINEST CLASSICAL
MUSIC WITH
HAYLLAR MUSIC
TOURS

Premium seats | Exclusive private events | Small groups (max. 20 people) | No hidden costs

PLACES ON OUR 2017 TOURS ARE FILLING QUICKLY. BOOK NOW TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT.
ORDER YOUR BROCHURE TODAY:

 02 8091 2545

 contact@hayllarmusic.com

 www.hayllarmusic.com

ADDRESS

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence:

The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc
GPO Box 4574 SYDNEY NSW 2001

Telephone: 9360 9822 (Jane Matthews, President)

Website: www.wagner.org.au | Website enquiries: wagner_nsw@optusnet.com.au

(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)



Jessica Harper, soprano, in full flight at the Wagner Society in NSW end of 2016 year function (photo by Pauline Holgerson).



Bradley Gilchrist (accompanist) and Jessica Harper (soprano)—artists performing at the Wagner Society in NSW end of 2016 year function - receiving wines provided by Brangayne of Orange vineyards (see discount offer inside) (photo by Mailis Wakeham).



Wagner Society in NSW end of 2016 year function - St Columba's Uniting Church, also in Ocean Street, Woollahra (photo by Mailis Wakeham).

The Wagner Quarterly is laid out, produced and distributed by the friendly and expert team at BEE Printmail
49 Herbert Street, Artarmon NSW 2064, Ph: 9437 6917, Email: beeprint@printd.com.au

ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

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