



WAGNER
SOCIETY
nsw

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am delighted to be able to write this letter as the recently-elected President of the Wagner Society in NSW. It is a great honour. I was elected to the management committee as Secretary in 2011 and then after two years became Vice-President. We have been very fortunate as it has been a harmonious committee and we have had some great successes with our excellent program of activities for Wagner's bicentenary in 2013, our support of artists in Opera Australia's Ring, our program of workshops and presentations and our support of young artists. We had a wonderful example of the latter with the young soloists who sang after the AGM; in particular, I appreciated the powerful singing of Laura Scandizzo in Senta's ballad, hitting the high note with ease.

We have two new members for the committee, Mailis Wakeham and Florian Hammerbacher. Both have been enthusiastic volunteers at meetings. Florian gives advice on the Goethe technology and, along with Leona Geeves, who established our Facebook presence, manages the site. Mailis takes photographs for the Quarterly and has distributed flyers. Catering and clearing up are shared tasks and we really appreciate the contributions of Society members, many of whom provide delicious treats for the afternoon teas. We would love to hear from any others who are prepared to help.

I would like to acknowledge the debt owed by all members of the Society to the two retirees from the committee. Our previous President, Justice Jane Mathews AO, was elected President, also in 2011. She has provided great leadership in a very active six years for the Society. Jane has been actively involved in planning our programs and has been instrumental in inviting Lyndon Terracini from Opera Australia and David Robertson from the SSO to speak to us. Her generosity to Australia's musical organisations

is widely recognized and we all benefit from this. She is also a generous entertainer during Ring Festivals and at Bayreuth. She has also represented Australian societies at the Verband, the international organization of Wagner Societies.

Our other retiree is Dennis Mather, who has been Treasurer during his numerous years on the committee. Dennis ensured that the Society was recognised by the Australian Tax Office as a charity for tax purposes, allowing members access to tax-free donations. Acting as de facto Membership Secretary, he was an important player in the turnaround in membership in 2011 from under 100 to over 300, providing us with a great base for the bicentenary celebrations.

When we were unable to obtain tickets to Bayreuth as we had previously, Dennis and Jane unified the Australian Wagner Societies' response to this decision, attended a meeting in Bayreuth with the head of the Friends of Bayreuth and obtained support from Verband members over this issue. They also sorted out the unsatisfactory situation of

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
	Dr Dennis Mather



Jane Mathews giving the Wagner Society in NSW's 2017 AGM her final report as President (Photo courtesy Florian Hammerbacher)



Performers for the Wagner Society in NSW AGM on 2 April 2017: (l-r) Tenor, Adam Player, Dramatic soprano, Laura Scandizzo, Baritone, Daniel Macey, and accompanist Jonathan Wilson, with wines from Brangayne Vineyards presented by Vice-President Leona Geeves (photo courtesy Mailis Wakeham)

FOR YOUR DIARY

2017

Tuesday 11 July	Pacific Opera and Wagner Society Masterclass for singers – see details below	The Opera Centre, Surry Hills
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday August 7, 9, 10. Sunday 20 August	<i>Lohengrin</i> - by Melbourne Opera - first production in Melbourne for 25 years. Bookings open through their website: http://www.melbourneopera.com	Regent Theatre & Robert Blackwood Hall, Monash University
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
Wednesday 6 and Saturday 9 September	Wagner & Beyond_ West Australian Symphony Orchestra with Asher Fisch: <i>Inspiring Wagner</i> (6 September) & <i>Wagner's World</i> (9 September). With pre-concert talks by Sally Kester. Details at WASO website: www.waso.com.au/tickets/2017_season/wagner_&_below	Perth Concert Hall

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
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
26 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.

membership of the Verband by ensuring that Australian Societies gained improvements relating to proxy voting.

It is typical of Dennis' commitment that his first task in leaving the Committee this year was to sort out our allocation of Bayreuth tickets, then invite all recipients to his home for drinks so that they could meet and celebrate before arrival in Germany.

Back in 2011, our new committee decided to build on the special expertise of retiring committee members by inviting them to attend committee meetings informally when they were able. In this way we enjoyed the valuable assistance of Roger Cruickshank and Terence Watson. Now Jane and Dennis have accepted the current committee's invitation to attend meetings.

For the rest of 2017 we have some exciting things in store. First there is Opera Australia's *Parsifal* in mid August. On 30 July, David Larkin from the Sydney Conservatorium will present a workshop, with contributions from singers so that we can hear the music he is analyzing. Reading the current on-line Bachtrack.com this morning, I was impressed by David's review of the recent Australian Chamber Orchestra concert and his musicological expertise. During the same period in mid-August there will be four performances of

Lohengrin by Melbourne Opera (see details in For Your Diary in this Quarterly). On 13 August, Antony Ernst will return to Sydney and present an analysis of that opera as the 'first music drama'.

Wagner is also appearing in other forms. On Wednesday 24 May 2017, we had a group who went to *You Will Not Play Wagner* at the Eternity Theatre (see review below). In England recently I spoke with playwright and Moliere translator Justin Fleming; he has written a play *Dresden* about Wagner's role in the uprising, which is being performed next year in London and possibly Sydney.

I can still remember the excitement my husband Michael and I felt discovering Wagner in London in the late 1960s. We had a wonderful introduction, with Jess Thomas in Peter Hall's *Tristan and Isolde* at Covent Garden, Norman Bailey and Geraint Evans in *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* at the ENO and later Reginald Goodall's conducting of *The Ring Cycle* in English with Rita Hunter and Alberto Remedios, at the ENO and on tour. Sadly, we did not get to Bayreuth during that period, but getting tickets from the Wagner Society in NSW was a way of fulfilling that dream. And we have continued travelling with Society friends to a range of Wagner performances.

FAREWELL LETTER FROM IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT JANE MATHEWS AO

As you know, at the AGM this year I did not stand again for president, and Colleen Chesterman, our long-time vice-president, was unanimously elected to the position.

I have been privileged to be president of this society for seven years now, and I thought that it was time to stand down and make way for new blood. But I will be continuing to play an active role in the organisation.

The last seven years have seen some significant changes in the Society—all of them for the better, I think. I cannot take the credit for this...it is due to the amazing team we have had on the committee, and particularly the Events Sub-Committee. The combination of their ingenious ideas and their contacts in the music world

has meant that our members have been treated to a number of fascinating expositions on matters relating to Wagner and his work, and also been privileged to hear some of our most outstanding young singers.

My profound thanks go to all of them, and particularly to Terence Watson, the editor of this Quarterly Magazine. A number of international Wagner lovers have told me that our Quarterly is the most comprehensive magazine that is put out by a Wagner Society anywhere in the world. And that certainly matches my experience of the magazines I have seen from other societies. Terence puts an amazing amount of time and energy into producing this magazine, and much of his contribution goes unrecognised.

NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS SINCE MARCH 2017

Mr B Bravery [1194]; Ms Barbara Ross [1195];
Mr Christopher McCabe [1196]; Ms M Serra [1197].

DONATIONS RECEIVED SINCE MARCH 2017

R N Purvis; Diana Rose Orr; Sue Kelly, and Dr Richard Mason.
Our thanks for the generous donations to help the Society's objectives.

NEW OPERA WAHNFRIED COMPOSED BY AVNER DORMAN

Review by Terence Watson

To give you some idea of the explosive kaleidoscope of musical and theatrical styles on which Avner Dorman calls to capture his vision of this family and its influence on western culture and history you should have a look at the short trailer on the Karlsruhe Staatstheater website: www.staatstheater.karlsruhe.de/programm/info/2379/. It suggests the crossing of Freudian repressed desire with the circus, “Days of our Lives” with vaudeville, Prussian militarism with British eccentricity, lunatic fantasy with real-life consequences, with many mostly visual references to Wagner (the Dragon, Bakunin, winged helmets etc) and musical allusions to his *bête noire* the Jews (through Kletzmer music). Dorman’s opera does not end well: whether or not the Wagner family saga has or will seem to be open to debate.

The creative team includes: the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe with Justin Brown, Conductor; Keith Warner, Director; Tilo Steffens, Set Designer; Julia Müer, Costume Designer; and among the huge cast of performers: Matthias Wohlbrecht, Houston Chamberlain; Christina Niessen, Cosima Wagner; Barbara Dobrzanska, Anna Chamberlain; Eric Jurenas and Andrew Watts, Siegfried Wagner; Ina Schlingensiepen, Winifred; Agnieszka Tomaszewska, Eva Chamberlain; Armin Kolarczyk, Wagnerdämon; Eleazar Rodriguez, Der Meisterjünger; Renatus Mészár, Hermann Levi; Konstantin Gorny, Bakunin et al.

As you can see, the story is not about the great composer, but his family—and many of the strange people Wagner’s reputation, and views—attracted to Wahnfried in Bayreuth, along with many fantastical figures intended to represent aspects of Wagner and his alleged inner, creative world. John Johnston notes: “Directed by the visionary Keith Warner with libretto by acclaimed German playwrights Lutz Hübner and Sarah Nemitz, *Wahnfried* was commissioned by Karlsruhe Staatstheater to complement their new production of Wagner’s Ring cycle.” The composer, Israeli-born composer and conductor, Avner Dorman holds a Doctorate in Music Composition from the Juilliard School where he studied with John Corigliano. He majored in music, musicology, and physics at Tel Aviv University and studied with former Soviet composer Josef Bardanashvili.

As Johnston says: The production is composed of “an 18-scene historical narrative skilfully blending fact with the ‘post-truth’ distortions and delusions of his inheritors and acolytes.” It is based on the pernicious influence of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who is initially a foreign outsider in the Bayreuth circle. Chamberlain, “scion of a wealthy British family, now mostly forgotten, but once famous for writing a pseudo-scientific justification of Aryan racial supremacy *The Foundation of the 19th Century*, which greatly influenced both the Kaiser and Hitler. [...] It is Chamberlain’s rise to notoriety as a racial theorist and rabid nationalist and subsequent mental collapse that mirrors the rise and fall of Imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic.”

Opera News Desk of 29 November 2016 tells us more about Chamberlain: “In the annals of the Wagner family, the



Photo by Falk von Traubenberg: Christina Niessen as Cosima Wagner

name Houston Stewart Chamberlain is but a footnote. Yet, argues Avner Dorman’s new opera *Wahnfried*, he was in some ways the link between Richard Wagner and Adolf Hitler. Chamberlain was a failing English scientist who became obsessed with Wagner’s music, after the composer’s death marrying Wagner’s daughter Eva and moving to Bayreuth. There he stayed close to his adopted family and, eventually, to Adolf Hitler, whom he hugely admired. Hitler for his part saw Chamberlain as a mentor and was highly influenced by his magnum opus, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* - which codified Aryan supremacy and systemic anti-Semitism. Hitler so admired the older man that he often quoted him, and made the journey to Bayreuth for his funeral.” Opera News Desk also comments: “It’s a satirical study of a man who thought himself the living embodiment of a Wagnerian hero, only to realise (as he is tormented by the mocking “Wagner demon”) that he could never aspire to true greatness. And yet, as so often, mediocrity was no bar to the poison he was able to spread...”

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

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“Says Dorman of the opera’s subject, “This is a great story, clearly, one that offers fantastic opportunities for satire and a certain amount of playing off Wagner’s own sound-world, since this narrative is in many ways a grotesque offshoot from what he achieved. But it’s not just a fascinating tale, it’s a parable. A parable about what terrible things can happen when a mediocre spirit and intellect are welded to overwhelming ego and ambition. And few can doubt that this is a warning from history to our own times. Opera with all of its power and scale is the perfect art form to express that.”

“Dorman’s eclectic musical style,” writes Johnston, “rarely quoting Wagner, sardonically comments on the story employing dissonant Prussian marches, waltzes, catchy popular tunes, jazz and klezmer to subvert and underline the overblown Romanticism of the Wilhelmine Empire and supposedly degenerate post-war era. At times the score sounds like apocalyptic Second Viennese School, and at others, especially in the choral scenes, it recalls the ostinato rhythms of John Adams. The family bickerings show his great skill in vocal characterisation and ensemble writing.” The large orchestra included a battery of percussion. “Sets are fluidly moved from facsimiles of original sets to the villa salon and family box, becoming the cell in which the deranged Chamberlain is finally confined. Warner fluidly managed the complex forces and staging with satiric detailed edge.”

Johnston concludes his review by putting it in its intended context: “Seeing this opera half way through a Ring Cycle in Wiesbaden, was like tasting an astringent sorbet between the courses of a heavily sauced Wagnerian banquet. A timely antidote to immersion in the Wagner ethos and warning of the ever present threats of populism, hatred and intolerance.”

In an interesting and thoughtful commentary, Dorman says of himself and his work: “While I am a native of Israel, I have long been connected with the culture and people of Germany. My grandparents came to Israel from Germany, and the household in which I grew up was permeated with German culture, from music to literature. As I developed as a musician, I was particularly influenced by the music of the great German composers, an influence that continues to this day. I struggled to come to terms with the understanding, therefore, that this society — that for which I held such a great affinity and connection — was the same society that gave birth to Nazism, and attempted to rid the world of all Jews. This tension nagged at me from an early age: how could the culture that brought about and championed the work of Bach and Beethoven, Goethe and Nietzsche, be the same one that brought to life the ideology that resulted in the Holocaust?”

“As the main character of the opera, Houston Chamberlain is, in many ways, a contradiction himself. He begins as a failed scientist and a foreigner and is scorned by the public. The libretto allows us a window into his psychology; weak and even pathetic at times, Houston earns our pity, despite his harsh and unfeeling manner. The unfeeling becomes the inhumane as he develops his theories — and the crowds follow his lead. The opera grotesquely celebrates his life, depicting the huge following he created at the time while clearly focusing on his vile and racist thoughts and rhetoric. Nevertheless, Houston’s commitment to these ideas does not go unquestioned, as the demons of Levi and of Wagner himself haunt and torment him.

“The music of the opera creates a fantastical, at times, absurd depiction of Houston and of the Wagner household. Unlike the works of Wagner, in which the long-form, uninterrupted *Gesamtkunstwerk* allows and encourages the audience to be swept away into another reality, I wrote each scene in *Wahnfried* with a clear ending. The audience has a brief moment to break from the grotesque action of the stage and consider how it might relate to the world more broadly. In my experience, the only way for me to deal with the gravity of the Holocaust has been through the use of humor — and the libretto of *Wahnfried* contains that same dark humor.

“Having worked with this story and with these characters for several years, it is quite clear to me that the story of *Wahnfried* is not simply the story of the birth of Nazism. The spread of hatred, intolerance, and fear that we see in *Wahnfried* and the ideas that Houston Chamberlain wrote over a hundred years ago are still the same elements of the dark and hateful plague we see all around the world today. I see this opera as a cautionary tale that illustrates the power and contagion of hate, no matter the century or the circumstances. I hope that we can learn from the events of *Wahnfried* and from other darker parts of history and work to build a more peaceful world for the future.”

You can read his full commentary at www.musicalesclassical.com/composer/work/54606 as well as his blog on the rehearsals for the opera’s premiere at www.rhinegold.co.uk/classical_music/avner-dorman-first-opera-rehearsal.

WITH APOLOGIES TO GARY LARSEN’S FAR SIDE CARTOONS [EDITOR]



The Wesendoncks feign death until the Wagners, sensing the sudden awkwardness, are compelled to leave and return to their other special friends, the von Bülowes!

WAGNER AND THE FAIRIES BY BARBARA BRADY

by Colleen Chesterman

On 21 May 2017, long-term Society Member Barbara Brady introduced Society members to Wagner's first opera *Die Feen*, or *The Fairies*. Barbara and her husband Ian joined the Wagner Society in 1987. She was a member of the Society's management committee for five years and newsletter editor before Terence Watson. She and Ian have had one visit to Bayreuth with the Society. She has been a long-term volunteer at 2MBS-FM, now called Fine Music. In 2008 she prepared a series called *Wagner and Friends*, supported by the Wagner Society. The series was repeated in 2013 for Wagner's bicentenary, again supported by the Society, together with the presentation of Wagner's 10 major operas, programmed by Colleen Chesterman in *At the Opera* on Wednesday nights.

In 2013, Barbara and Ian went to Leipzig to see Wagner's first three operas performed. She became enthusiastic about *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi*, believing they have been unjustly neglected; for example they are never performed at Bayreuth. In 2016, she returned to Leipzig to see the operas when they were repeated. Barbara presented us with photographs and some film of the opera, as well as excerpts from recordings.

Die Feen is Wagner's first completed opera, in three acts, composed in Würzburg in 1833, when he was 20 and working at the opera as chorus-master. He could not find any satisfactory German libretti, so he translated Carlo Gozzi's *La donna serpente* from the Italian. Wagner revised the opera in 1934, adding some crucial scenes, but there was still no production. It was first performed in Munich in 1888, 5 years after Wagner's death.

In Wagner's adaptation, the opera tells of the love of Ada, who has fairy blood, for a mortal Arindal, son of a king. Barbara described echoes from later Wagner: for example

renunciation. Ada forbids Arindal to ask her name for eight years. He cannot keep this oath and is abandoned. The plot also involves redemption, particularly Ada's readiness to renounce her immortality and the eventual redemption of the two lovers as immortals ruling fairyland. The scenes shown by Barbara demonstrated how imaginative many productions are. Barbara showed scenes from the Leipzig production which demonstrated how imaginative the production was. She also played a conversation between the producer and the designer about how they arrived at this unique production which could only be done in Leipzig because of the stage machinery it offers.

Barbara showed how the opera builds on the German Romantic tradition, with scenes from the operas of Marschner and von Weber, which also move between fantasy and magic into reality.

In discussion, members pointed to scenes which looked forward to later Wagner. Ada's major aria for example prefigured the demands made by Wagner on his dramatic soprano female leads. Barbara was keen to know if members agreed with her view that these early operas should be staged at Bayreuth; there was general agreement that they offered an interesting example of Wagner's development and should not be excluded. Florian Hammerbacher disagreed on the grounds that *Die Feen* was not a 'through production' and thus differed from Wagner's distinctive style in his major operas.

It was a small audience of 25. We had messages later from members who had been unable to get trains from the Western Suburbs where there were cancellations. But we had an enthusiastic champagne toast for Wagner's birthday, a fine example of Barbara's famous birthday fruit cake (see photo below) and other delicious cakes provided by Roswitha Wolff, Mailis Wakeham and others.

WAGNER & BEYOND - THE WEST AUSTRALIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA UNDER ASHER FISCH, PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR

INSPIRING WAGNER

Wed 6 September, 7.30pm, Perth Concert Hall

Marschner *The Vampire*: Overture

Schumann Scenes from Goethe's *Faust*: Overture

Liszt *Mazeppa* (Symphonic Poem No.6)

Wagner *Das Rheingold*: Entrance of the Gods

Wagner *Siegfried*: Forest Murmurs

Wagner *Götterdämmerung*: Siegfried's Rhine Journey

Wagner *Götterdämmerung*: Siegfried's Funeral

Wagner *Die Walküre*: Ride of the Valkyries

WAGNER'S WORLD

with Shane Lowrencev bass-baritone

Sat 9 September, 7.30pm, Perth Concert Hall

Wagner *Tristan und Isolde*: Prelude and Liebestod

Wagner *Die Walküre*: Wotan's Farewell

Wagner *Parsifal*: Good Friday Spell

Wagner *Die Meistersinger*: Wahn! Wahn!

Bruckner Symphony No.7 (second movement)

Chabrier *Gwendoline*: Overture

Strauss, R. *Don Juan*



POST AGM WAGNER SOCIETY YOUNG ARTISTS CONCERT

by Leona Geeves

After the 2 April 2017 AGM, as usual, we showcased some of the young and emerging artists we have supported in various ways.

Baritone, Daniel Macey, who won our 2016 Sydney Eisteddfod Wagner Singing prize, sang two arias from the opera giants both born in 1813, Wagner's "O Du mein holder Abendstern," from *Tannhäuser*, and Verdi's "Per me giunto," from *Don Carlos*. He added Onegin's aria from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*.

Dramatic soprano, Laura Scandizzo, whom we are helping with major sponsorship to attend a summer school in Bulgaria, delighted us with the "Gallows Aria" ("Ecco l'orrido campo") from Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and Senta's Ballad from Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*.

Tenor, Adam Player, who the Society helped with funding to learn new repertoire, when, a few years ago, he made the change from baritone to tenor, favoured us with three seldom-heard Lieder: Franz Schubert's "Lied eines Schiffers," "an die Dioskuren," and "Pagenlied" from Mendelssohn's "Scheidend."

Pianist, Jonathan Wilson, after studying in Canada and playing world-wide, returned to Sydney. He won the Mietta Song Competition last year with Laura J King. He is the recipient of the Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship, awarded by the Melba Trust in 2017. He was partly supported by the Wagner Society for his attendance at the Lisa Gasteen Summer School in 2016. See additional photograph above.



Singers for the Wagner Society in NSW AGM on 2 April 2017: Tenor, Adam Player, Dramatic soprano, Laura Scandizzo, and Baritone, Daniel Macey, with wines from Brangayne Vineyards (photo courtesy Mailis Wakeham)

RECONSTRUCTION OF HERMANN LEVIS GRABMAL

John Johnston, in his review of *Wahnfried* referred to above, notes: "Levi, one time Music Director, conducted the first Bayreuth performance of *Parsifal* and his successor Felix Mottl assisted Hans Richter at the first Bayreuth *Ring* in 1876. His annotated scores are still used by the current Music Director, Justin Brown, who has been closely involved in the inception of this new opera *Wahnfried* composed by Israeli Avner Dorman, as counterpoint to their new *Ring* production."

The Staatstheater Karlsruhe is supporting the memory of the great conductor by rebuilding Levi's burial site: "The STAATSTHEATER supports the Richard-Wagner-Verband Karlsruhe e. V. in the re-establishment of Levi's Mausoleum in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which was destroyed by the National Socialists. We are looking forward to donations to the account IBAN DE55 6605 0101 0009 1264 91, BIC KARSDE66XXX. Please enter

"donation tomb Levi" as a password and a contact address for the donation certificate." www.staatstheater-karlsruhe.de/programm/info/2379/

The above report is based on the following reviews and web resources:

[https://bachtrack.com/review-dorman-wahnfried-warner-karlsruhe-april-2017?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Bachtrack Newsletter May 2017&utm_content=Bachtrack Newsletter May 2017+CID_a8cf1381e740050bf0ebd2888ae4d5ac&utm_source=Campaign Monitor&utm_term=Read the review](https://bachtrack.com/review-dorman-wahnfried-warner-karlsruhe-april-2017?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Bachtrack%20Newsletter%20May%202017&utm_content=Bachtrack%20Newsletter%20May%202017+CID_a8cf1381e740050bf0ebd2888ae4d5ac&utm_source=CampaignMonitor&utm_term=Read%20the%20review)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avner_Dorman

www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/54606

www.broadwayworld.com/bwwopera/article/Avner-Dormans-New-Opera-WAHNFRIED-to-Premiere-in-Karlsruhe-20161129

YOU WILL NOT PLAY WAGNER BY VICTOR GORDON

Review by Terence Watson

Director, Moira Blumenthal; Michael Misrachi and Michael Shur, Producers; Set & Costume Design, Hugh O'Connor; Video Design, Mic Gruchy; Lighting Design, Emma Lockhart-Wilson; Sound Design, Katelyn Shaw.

Cast: Annie Byron - Esther (conducting competition founder and sponsor); Tim McGarry - Morris (competition administrator and close friend of Esther); Benedict Wall - Ya'akov (Israeli conductor and competition finalist); Kate Skinner - Miri (competition assistant/assistant to Esther); Graham Bruce - Richard Wagner Consultant; at the Eternity Theatre with the world premiere produced by Shalom and Moira Blumenthal Productions.

The Director's program notes say: "The play opens in November 1938, during the *Night of the Broken Glass*, *Kristallnacht* [depicted with historical video footage projected on the back wall of the theatre], moves to London during the late 20th Century and then to Israel at the cusp of the new millennium." While the video footage during the opening provides graphic and immediate scene and emotional setting, and similarly when repeated at other points in the play, the latter movement is, though, not clear from this production: I assumed all the contemporary action was happening in Israel now.

That aside, the play is based on the proposition that Esther has, from some years after World War II, committed some of her apparently large wealth to an international conducting competition in Israel. This year, for the first time ever, a young Jewish Israeli conductor has made it to the finals. Esther and Morris meet late at night after the announcement of the finalists to celebrate Ya'akov's success, but their pleasure is short-lived. They receive news that one of the finalists has chosen to play a selection of Wagner's music: they both exhibit their prejudices and preconceptions by assuming that it must be the German finalist who has dared to provoke the judges and the citizens of Israel. It is, though, Ya'akov who has chosen to conduct Wagner, not, as he later explains, because he specifically wants to challenge the unwritten ban, but because, during his training in Berlin, he was overwhelmed by hearing the opening of *Das Rheingold*. Wagner's music is now central to his life as an artist and a person. The rest of the play is largely concerned with Esther and Morris trying to persuade Ya'akov to choose another composer's works—his Mahler, they both attest, was transcendental. He refuses, and points out that the competition rules do not contain a prohibition on Wagner's music being played during the competition.

At this point it becomes clear that the competition can be taken as a metaphor for the attitudes to Wagner and his music in Israel generally where the ban on Wagner's music is also tacit; it is just understood that no one would reasonably choose to do such a thing. Ya'akov points to the instances of Zubin Mehta and Daniel Barenboim playing a piece of Wagner's music, with some protests from some sections

of the audience, but support from other sections. These precedents cut no ice with Esther or Morris. These two older characters are balanced not just by Ya'akov, but also by Miri, the young assistant who appears now and again in the play, to represent, perhaps, an apolitical, ordinary Jewish person who understands the pain of the survivor generations, but does not feel them to be particularly relevant to her life—until Esther recounts another episode from her younger days in Nazi Germany and Miri comes to understand some of Esther's deep continuing pain.

Morris is forced to admit, with bad grace, that it was his mistake not to include an explicit ban in the rules, but he protests it should be understood by any Israeli musician that it is not acceptable to play Wagner's music, at least while there are Holocaust survivors, or their children, still alive to be further traumatised by the performance of music that arouses hideous memories of their past, or their parents' past. Ya'akov defends his choice by pointing out, for example, that he is a child of survivors as well, but he has been able to overcome his "indoctrination" through personal experiences and growth. Esther and Morris bridle and accuse him of shocking insensitiveness for a Jewish person. Ya'akov seemed to me to be intended as a representative of a new, independent, confident generation of artists not wanting to be constrained by history, with the older Esther and Morris constrained by their histories and responsibilities.

At this point in the play (about halfway through the 90 minute play and well after midnight in play time), it seems that there can be no common ground, so they all agree to meet again later that day to talk further. The next day, Ya'akov offers further arguments supporting his position: the music is pure (Esther counters that he cannot legitimately divorce the text from the music—ironically, Wagner's own position); and so many people in Israel drive German Mercedes Benz cars, so they are hypocritical and their objections to Wagner and his music are inconsistent (Esther counters that there is a world of difference, given the help post-war Germany has been giving to Israel); Ya'akov contends that, while there is anti-Jewish content in Wagner's polemical texts, we can also choose to detach it from Wagner's artworks—they exist in the public domain where we can make our own choices about how to respond to them, the artist and his views. Esther contends, as Wagner did, that his text and music constitute a seamless whole, but she also insists that his artworks are contaminated by his personal prejudices. This latter point is the subject of much continuing controversy outside the play about the appropriate way in which to "deal" with the "Wagner problem."

Esther also laments the way in which modern (classical/serious) music has become just another industrial and commercial product—echoing unconsciously (I think) one of Wagner's major complaints in the essays he wrote in Zurich (*Art and Revolution*, *The Artwork of the Future*, and *Opera and Drama*). In those essays, he lambasts the corruption of the pure arts by profit and entertainment in terms very similar to Esther's.

As the play moves to its conclusion, Esther makes a very personal plea to Ya'akov to reconsider by telling her own experience as a young child in Nazi Germany, in various concentration camps, losing her parents, and surviving—just—to arrive in America and to a better life. Ya'akov is, of course, moved by her story, but he still says he is determined to conduct Wagner's music because of his commitment to his art. His position echoes that of Wagner who also refused to compromise his artistic and aesthetic visions to make his life easier.

There is also a subplot involving the theft by Nazi thugs of the very young Esther's treasured Stradivarius (?) given to her by her father. During the play she receives mysterious, but clearly disturbing, phone calls from Sam, that are finally revealed just before the play's end to be him reporting the successful retrieval from an auction of the violin and its imminent return to her.

As a kind of *coup de grâce*, she reminds Ya'akov that the finals will be held on *Kristallnacht* and leaves him alone on stage. He turns weeping to the audience and the stage goes dark, leaving the audience with no explicit resolution: in other words, it is up to the audience to decide how they would behave in these circumstances. The audience reacted very positively to the play and performances, but there was a chastened, somber mood amongst us as we left the auditorium.

The performers were convincing in their portrayals of complex characters trying to negotiate very fraught situations with humanity. Tim McGarry, as the administrator Morris, is faced with the potential implosion of the competition, and so tends to be acerbic and bullying in his dealings with Ya'akov, but he is also compassionate and protective of Esther. Annie Byron as Esther maintains an almost regal persona, reflecting her wealth and status, but often shows how there is deeply conflicted human being under the persona with mercurial changes from humour to pathos to anguish. Benedict Wall gives his Ya'akov a certain detached, ironic persona not uncommon with younger people still trying to make their mark in life, but, once challenged to reflect on his decision, he reveals a capacity for empathy that bodes well for his future as a thought-provoking conductor. Kate Skinner as Miri has no great significance in the play, but her presence is used at times to break a tense situation, or contrast with Ya'akov's intensity, or just serve as a factotum for necessary stage business. However, she carried these various functions effortlessly and sensitively.

It is not made explicit during the play that many of the "Jewish" musicians, composers and other artists (Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Heinrich Heine, for instance) felt compelled to convert to Christianity to have a career in any of the German court services. In a sense, this is a betrayal of their obligations to their birth faith, but from another perspective they can be defended as making practical decisions to make a living. This of course does not excuse those "Christian" courts of their bigotry in imposing such prescriptions and proscriptions on Jewish people. However, the play does not seem to advert to this complicating factor

in Jewish-German history, but it does raise an echo in Ya'akov's struggle to carve a career as an artist through the difficulties of modern life with so much competition from other aspiring conductors. Of course, many such subjects could not be covered in detail in a one act play.

As I thought about the play later, it occurred to me that there was an even greater irony in the general proposition about mounting a conducting competition in Israel that was not explicitly explored. The orchestra, which is the "instrument" that the aspiring conductors are "playing" in their pursuit of a career, is largely the creation of German musicians during the hundred years from, say Haydn to Mahler; the size, range, flexibility, instrumental innovations, etc that happened largely in German states, though not without contributions from Jewish musicians and composers. So the competition is focused on a more or less entirely German cultural creation of at least as great a, and I would argue greater, significance than any model of motor vehicle or other material product produced in Germany and exported to Israel.

If one were cynical about this situation, one could suggest that the modern orchestra in Israel is a kind of fifth column both infiltrating Israeli culture with great, and "acceptable," German masters and determining the manner in which it is performed and the means by which it is performed. We do not, of course, generally conceptualise "the orchestra" as a product, cultural or technological, let alone the history of its creation and distribution around the globe as a mechanism for disseminating a repertoire that is very heavily freighted with universally acknowledged geniuses of music-making, a large proportion of whom are German. In this context, the discussion of whether or not various composers - Chopin, Stravinsky, Orff - were anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic seems to be a sub-category of a larger question about the creation and perpetuation of racial and other stereotypes within our prized cultural institutions.

We could perhaps also justifiably speculate that some members of the orchestral instrument on which the aspiring conductors are "playing" in this competition are Germans, performing side by side with Jewish musicians and musicians from around the world. Indeed, probably all modern orchestras are multicultural institutions, with even the once most tradition bound ones now admitting women and "foreigners" into their ranks - and arguably producing even better playing than their earlier, "purer" manifestations. It is thus a little disappointing that none of the characters in the play addresses this fact and that the playwright seems not to have even attempted to point to this greater dramatic irony.

These reservations aside, the play is definitely worth seeing and I wish it well in finding many more performances around the world.

You can read Victor Gordon's account of his motivation in writing the play at: www.limelightmagazine.com.au/features/question-performing-wagner-israel. You can read further reviews and articles at: www.jewishnews.net.au/reigniting-wagner-debate/64279; and www.jewishnews.net.au/can-one-play-wagner-clear-conscience/63977; www.jewishnews.net.au/62817-2/62817.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW FACEBOOK PAGE by Florian Hammerbacher

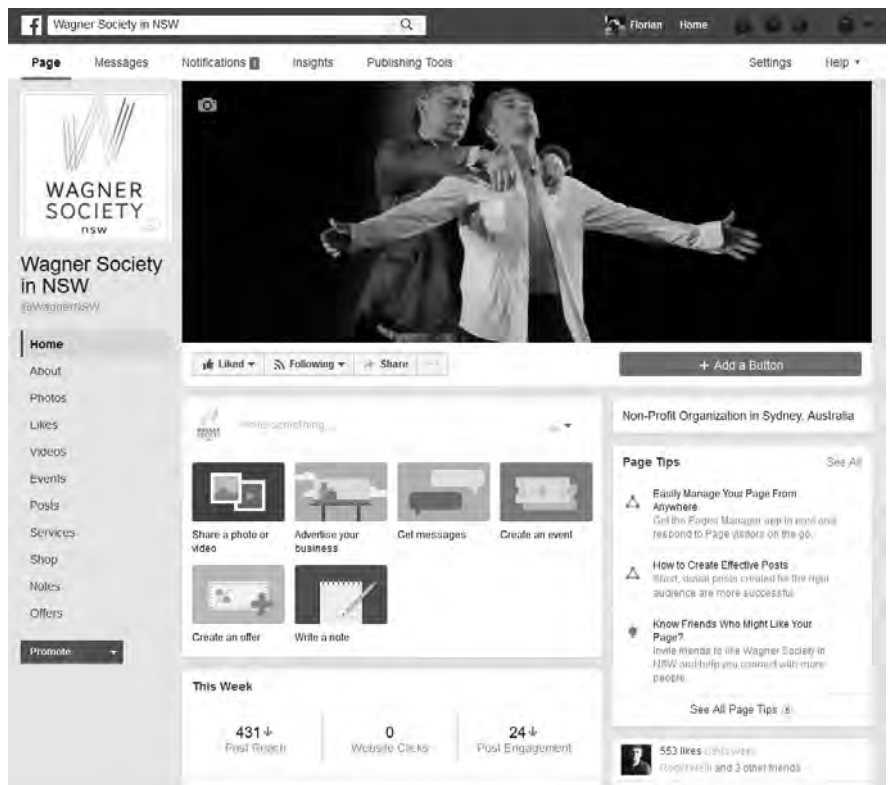
Dear members of the Wagner Society in NSW, with this brief article, Leona Geeves, Vice President, and I would like to draw to your attention that the Society has, for some time, had a Facebook page and to provide some insights of what we want to accomplish with the use of social media. We plan to offer you a follow-up article with further insights and articles in the next quarterly.

Did you know that your Society has already been on Facebook for quite some time? If you have not done so already, please like your Society's page on www.facebook.com/WagnerNSW!

You can follow a lot of our activities there, as this is a medium which requires significantly less maintenance compared to our homepage on the internet at: <http://www.wagner.org.au>. This enables us to post more often and sometimes also from "behind the scenes". We plan to do even more in the future to engage more frequently with people who have an affinity for classical music in general and with Wagner in particular.

Over the past months, we were able to actually become more engaged with these communities. Point in case: the announcements and event reminders for our phenomenal and groundbreaking talk on Soviet and Russian Wagnerians in the 20th and 21st centuries by Dr Rosamund Bartlett was seen by over 2500 people in NSW and created a lot of interest as well as a significant amount of interaction with people who have not followed our Facebook page prior. We also had an increase in the number of visitors to the function on 12 March 2017, as you can see in the report in this Quarterly.

We aim to become even better in engaging and sharing relevant content with you. For our next article, we will show you how to invite your friends on Facebook to become followers of our Facebook page. We also want to share more



Front page of Wagner Society in NSW Facebook site

about the criteria we have to meet in order to share material on Facebook. For now, we ask you to start thinking about all the exciting photos, videos and links you already have and which you would like to share with a broader audience.

In conclusion to this first article about our activities on Facebook:

- If you have not done so already, please like us on www.facebook.com/WagnerNSW!
- Start spreading the word and invite your friends on Facebook to like our Page as well.

Start thinking about material you want to share with the members and friends of the Wagner Society in the future, especially with many of us bound for Europe later this year to attend performances and festivals there.

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-nsw.org.au that takes the list to 2024.

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



SWAN LINES

An occasional column on aspects of the Society's History and Highlights

The Society's logo was designed by Michel Arnould during the Foundation meeting on 26 October 1985.

DVDs AND BLU-RAYS AT SOCIETY FUNCTIONS

SEPTEMBER

THE WAGNER SOCIETY

Page Four

AN ALTERNATIVE BAYREUTH?

The Wagner Society's aim is to promote Wagner's music. In the words of our Treasurer, Richard King, it is a pity to see people come and go in life without having heard of Richard Wagner.

In view of that we have decided to give you an "alternative Bayreuth" by running a series of Sunday afternoon concerts, commencing at 2pm, on the afternoons of October 18, November 15 and December 13 in the Concordia Club, 231 Stanmore Rd, Stanmore.

We propose to push the series off to a flying start with "The Flying Dutchman" on October 18, followed, on November 15, with "Tannhauser" and to close the year (and this stage of Wagner's development), on December 13, with "Lohengrin". The recordings to be used will be Solti/Solti/Kempe.

In February 1982 we will start the next stage of Wagner's output with Tristan, Die Meistersingers, The Ring and Parsifal. I hope to use the new digital recording of The Ring which should be coming out next year.

Also, I will be introducing some music of Wagner's spiritual brother, Anton Bruckner as well as historical recordings of great Wagnerian singers.

Most of us have Wagner's recordings, but some do not have the equipment or the room to complement them. Then again, some of us live in home units and are unable to "let go" with our hi-fi set ups because of neighbours and sometimes other members of the family! The purpose of this series of concerts is to set you free from all those restrictions so that you can sit back, relax and enjoy the glorious music in near ideal conditions.

The Concordia Club, which is opposite Newington College and two minutes from Stanmore Station, has very kindly made available to the Wagner Society, at no cost, their Gesellschaft Room for this purpose.

For the technically-minded among you, the room is ideal, being about 50' x 28' x 10' with wood panelling all along the walls and

The showing of videos, DVDs and now Blu-ray recordings of Wagner's operas, or music-dramas if you prefer that term, has become an important part of Wagner Society in NSW Sunday functions. Many of us take it for granted that most functions will be preceded by a showing of at least an act (given the length of most Wagner works) of a recent or historical video recording of a work, or, as recently, an innovative filmic translation of one of Wagner's works (Joachim Herz's *Flying Dutchman* introduced by Graham Bruce). In the early days, the showings came from VHS tapes, but, thanks to the technological prowess of many Members of the Society, we have been able to move more or less seamlessly from one new format to another. Apart from the chance to see a production at times when productions of Wagner's works in Australia were

few and far between, the showing of the recordings were also attractive for members, since they were projected on the large screen of the Sydney Goethe Institut and through the large speakers, which enabled the volume to be increased to a level that many of our neighbours at home would not tolerate!

As part of the occasional remembering of the Society's history under the Swan Lines logo, we reproduce here from the Society Newsletter No. 4 September 1981 the invitation from Jean Louis Stuurup, on behalf of the committee, to attend an "Alternative Bayreuth" at the Concordia Club in Stanmore, Sydney, starting on 18 October 1981 with *Der fliegende Holländer*. From this small beginning a major tradition of our Society has grown [Editor].

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THE WAGNER SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER

wool carpet on the floor. The following equipment will be used: Thorens TD8 Mk II turntable; SME Series 3 tone arm; Shure V15 Mk IV cartridge; Quad 44 pre-amplifier; Quad 405 power amplifier; Equaliser; Series 4000 Philips loud speakers; KEF B139 super woofer and 100W amplifier for same; Telefunken back loud speakers.

All in all, 13 loudspeakers, of different frequencies, to bring GOOD music, not loud music.

Some of the equipment to be used has been loaned to the Society by Arrow Electronics, 342 Kent Street, Sydney, and we offer our grateful thanks.

We hope to create a sort of quadrophonic sound (to try to imitate Bayreuth).

We would also like to point out that the Concordia Club facilities are at our disposal, including an excellent dining room, where Australian and Continental meals are served. After the performance why not enjoy a good meal and discuss or argue about Wagner to your heart's content!

If you wish to follow the story of the opera, could you please bring your own synopsis.

On behalf of your Committee,
JEAN LOUIS STUURUP

P.S. A small donation would be appreciated to cover cost of insuring equipment.

ART EXHIBITION

Our member Nicholai von Tonlamann is exhibiting his paintings and sculptures based on the "Ring of the Nibelungen". Featured also will be a major sculpture piece by Barry Karp depicting Fafner guarding the Ring. Members are welcome to attend the opening of the exhibition which will be held at O.T.C. House, 32 Martin Place, Sydney, on Monday, November 2nd at 6.00 p.m.

WAGNER SOCIETY NSW STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS TO 31 DECEMBER 2016

INCOME

Membership	20,146.74
Lectures and Functions	8,137.50
Donations	6,261.62
Bayreuth ticket sales	28,652.10
Interest	618.91
Other Fundraising Income	8,239.85
Melbourne Ring Donations	7,000.00
Total Income	79,056.72

EXPENDITURE

Newsletter	-8,547.57
Function Catering Expense	-1,525.52
Function Room Hire	-3,570.00
Payments to Presenters	-3,600.00
Bayreuth Ticket Expense	-36,046.41
Melbourne Ring Donations	-7,000.00
Sponsorships/Scholarships	-12,500.00
Other Operating Expenses	-3,673.61
Total Expenditure	-76,463.11

PROFIT FOR THE YEAR TO DATE	2,593.61
Retained Profits at Beginning of Year	62,453.37
Retained Profits at 31/12/16	65,046.98

BANK BALANCES

Account	1/01/2016	31/12/2016
32040911323	\$25,051.17	9,269.34
32040252276	37,402.20	55,777.64
Total	\$62,453.37	\$65,046.98

MASTERCLASS

In conjunction with Pacific Opera, the Wagner Society is sponsoring a Masterclass with Stephanie Weiss mezzo-soprano and Christina Wright pianist on Tuesday 11 July 2017 7pm-10pm (light supper included). The Venue: The Opera Centre, 480 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills. Tickets: \$20 from the website: www.pacificopera.com.au. "Pacific Opera is the Young Artists' opera company. We produce fresh, vibrant opera with a twist, providing a platform for the stars of tomorrow." You can check out future performances by Pacific Opera at their website: <http://pacificopera.com.au/whats-on>.

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!

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BRANGAYNE OF ORANGE VINEYARD

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ADDRESS

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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)



New President of the Wagner Society in NSW President Colleen Chesterman introducing Barbara Brady's presentation on Wagner *Die Feen* as produced at the 2013 Leipzig Bicentennial celebrations (Photo courtesy Florian Hammerbacher)



Wagner Society in NSW Theatre Group at performance of *You Will Not Play Wagner* – see President's Letter and a review inside

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Vice President	Mike Day	0413 807 533
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