



WAGNER
SOCIETY
NSW

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

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SEPTEMBER 2017

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Since my last letter it has been a very demanding but exciting time for the Wagner Society in NSW. First, and most important, we have had an impressive program of performance of Wagner in Australia. The most significant of these were the three concert performances of *Parsifal* presented by Opera Australia in the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall in August. During the same period, Melbourne Opera presented four performances of *Lohengrin* at the Regent Theatre in Melbourne. There are reviews of this productions in this issue. And in early September the West Australian Symphony Orchestra under conductor Asher Fisch begins its 90th anniversary celebrations with performances focusing on Wagner. This year there were two concerts of excerpts from Wagner and contemporaries.

The Wagner focus continues into 2018. On 16 and 19 August, WASO will bring Stuart Skelton and Eva-Marie Westbroek to Perth for concert performances of *Tristan and Isolde*. *Tristan and Isolde* will also be performed by Melbourne Opera in St Kilda Palais from 2 to 11 February 2018. Opera Australia's just announced 2018 program includes *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Melbourne at the Arts Centre from 13-22 November. A co-production with Covent Garden, the cast will include Melbourne Ring veterans James Johnson as Sachs, Stefan Vinke as Walter, Warwick Fyfe as Beckmesser, with Natalie Aroyan debuting as Eva. Exciting times for all Wagner lovers.

New committee member Mailis Wakeham had a dramatic introduction to committee work. As members know we receive the bulk of our tickets to Bayreuth through the Richard Wagner Verband International Assembly. The 2016 meeting was scheduled to take place in Budapest in June. No committee members were able to attend, but by complete chance Mailis was to be in Budapest on the day of the meeting. So we nominated her as our representative

and asked her to raise with the Verband our concern with Bayreuth ticket allocations. The Wagner Society committee was concerned that we no longer received tickets enabling members to attend all operas presented during the Festival, as had once been the case. Our colleagues from the Wagner Society of Victoria expressed concerns as they wanted better seats. People coming from Australia are a long distance from Bayreuth and usually remain in the city during the performances of all operas.

The Verband discussed these issues under the heading "Tickets for Festivals". The meeting was advised that there had been an over-demand for tickets, an increase since 2016, and all tickets available had been provided to member societies. A committee takes on the task, which can be arduous and take a long time. There are rules in place:

- the Society seeking tickets must be registered as a company in order to join the Verband,

PRESIDENT'S REPORT Continued page 2

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

- and have paid their annual membership fee.

The Verband explained that as not all tickets provided by the Festspielhaus are the "best", a mix of the best and the less good tickets is shared amongst all Societies.

In July 2017, a letter was sent to all Wagner Societies by the Festspielhaus. This introduced a new program at the Festival, called Bayreuth Discourse. It has been designed as a series of events for academic and artistic analysis of Wagner's work and legacy. The first of these took place during the Festival this year. It was intended to provide a platform where controversies surrounding the composer and his legacy could be discussed. The 2017 theme was Wagner's Work and National Socialism; information was provided at

www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/diskuts. Another innovation for 2017 was the filming of the opening performance of Barrie Kosky's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, which was then shown in more than 120 cinemas throughout Europe. I have contacted relevant Australian film distributors to see if this will be available in Australian cinemas. The final part of the Festspielhaus report indicated that one of their aims is to ensure an improved ticket allocation for members of Richard Wagner Societies. They indicate that they do not want tickets 'to land in the hands of businessmen or on dubious internet platforms'. One suggestion is that Society members can specify membership of their local Society in their master data; forms for 2018 will be sent to members by September 2017.



At the Wagner Society in NSW's *Lohengrin* Seminar 13 August 2017 (l-r): June Donsworth, Margaret Whealy (Society Treasurer), Antony Ernst (Dramaturg & Speaker), and Colleen Chesterman (Society President) - see report inside- photo from Colleen Chesterman.

FOR YOUR DIARY

2018

	On 16 and 19 August, WASO will bring Stuart Skelton and Eva-Marie Westbroek to Perth for concert performances of <i>Tristan and Isolde</i> . <i>Tristan and Isolde</i> will also be performed by Melbourne Opera in St Kilda Palais from 2 to 11 February 2018. Opera Australia's just announced 2018 program includes <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i> in Melbourne at the Arts Centre from 13-22 November. A co-production with Covent Garden, the cast will include Melbourne Ring veterans James Johnson as Sachs, Stefan Vinke as Walter, Warwick Fyfe as Beckmesser, with Natalie Aroyan debuting as Eva	
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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
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
	Information about the 2018 Program of Events and DVDs to be shown before functions will be in the December 2017 issue.	

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 2017.

NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS
SINCE JUNE 2017

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

DONATIONS RECEIVED SINCE
JUNE 2017

Robert Mitchell, Marco Belgiorno-Zegna, Charles Manning, Peter Rowe, Jonathan Clarke, B Johnson, Richard Gastinea, Jonathan Clarke, Claire Brauer, R J King, A J Leinstner & J Roberts, Douglas Sturkey, Barbara Brady, and Minnie Biggs.

Our thanks for the generous donations to help the Society's objectives.

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

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ABOUT *PARSIFAL* A SEMINAR AND ALMOST THE REAL THING

by Colleen Chesterman

SEMINAR ON 30 JULY

Wagner Society members were well prepared for the opera, with a seminar given by Dr David Larkin at the Goethe Institut on the afternoon of 30 July. We had an audience of 92, of whom 73 were members. David spoke for 4 hours, with a 30-minute break for refreshments in the middle.

He focused on four key aspects of this complex piece. The first section considered what Wagner meant by calling it a *stage festival consecration play*. David suggested that this enabled Wagner to develop a poetic style for the opera. He emphasised the influence of Liszt, particularly his *Dante* symphony, on the music. He also discussed how Wagner had used the Dresden 'Amen' as an important element, drawing on Mendelssohn's *Reformation* symphony.

In contrast to Tristan's and Isolde's abnegation of their desire to live and their yearning for death, he suggested that in *Parsifal* the crucial element is the need to sympathise with others, to suffer with them. As a pure fool Parsifal needs to understand suffering.

Before his second section, David introduced images from the 1982 film of *Parsifal* by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. David showed the film's treatment of the Prelude to Act 1. This complex film interprets *Parsifal* by reference to its psychological aspects. Parsifal is played by a boy initially, but by a girl after his kiss with Kundry. It also questions the Wagner family's involvement in controlling the festival, the house at Wahnfried, and militarism.

David moved on then to philosophical aspects, in particular the influence of Schopenhauer. As summarised by Brian Magee, this posits that humans are driven by insatiable desires and cravings which cannot be satisfied in normal life. Redemption is however possible through death, as in *Tristan and Isolde*, or through compassion, as explored in *Parsifal*. In the course of being seduced by Kundry, Amfortas receives his injury; when she kisses Parsifal, he understands Amfortas' sufferings and expresses compassion for him.

After tea, David explored the musical language: thoughtful, powerful, often slow. Its richness was then shown in a live performance of the duet between Klingsor and Kundry. Attendees had the opportunity to hear Warwick Fyfe, a member of the Society, singing an excerpt from Klingsor's role before he gave this performance in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House. It was a powerful spine-tingling experience in the small upstairs room of the Goethe Institut, leaving the audience stunned. He was well partnered by soprano Eleanor Greenwood. She was awarded the Wagner Prize in 2015 and received support from the Society for her living expenses in Berlin. The singers were accompanied by the redoubtable Bradley Gilchrist, who seems to be building an extensive repertoire of Wagner music.



Dr David Larkin greets Richard Wagner in the garden of Tribschen in Lucerne - photo by David Larkin

In the final section of his talk, David considered various interpretations of *Parsifal*, both on and off the stage. He referred to the Stefan Herheim production, which he had discussed earlier, and to Kaufmann's and Rene Pape's performances in the Metropolitan Opera's production in New York. The latter was seen in Australian cinemas some years ago (and watched by some Society members in the tiny cinema of MONA during the first Hobart Baroque Festival).

All who attended left much more familiar with the themes and music of this beautiful and complex opera. In preparing this summary, I have relied on notes kindly provided by John Sanders. But sadly I cannot reproduce the depth and subtlety of David's informative seminar.

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 OPERA AUSTRALIA CONCERT PERFORMANCES 10, 12 & 14 AUGUST

And so it came to pass ... for 3 nights in August the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall was filled with enthusiastic audiences watching and listening to Wagner's last and most cerebral opera, with its extraordinary music. Although the audiences were undoubtedly drawn by the presence of highly praised German tenor Jonas Kaufmann, the performance delivered much more. I and Michael Chesterman were fortunate to have seats in the centre of the third row, close to the singers, even if the surtitles were blocked. We found we were next to friends just returned from three months in Europe. We heard from others with seats further back and in the gallery that the sound was sometimes unsatisfactory. But this was not our experience.

Major praise must go to conductor Pinchas Steinberg. He controlled the Australian Opera Orchestra with delicate gestures and coaxed a wonderful depth of sound. The orchestra responded brilliantly, freed from the constraints of the Opera Theatre's cramped pit accommodation. Also liberated to produce thrilling singing were the forces of the Opera Australia Chorus, behind the orchestra in the choir stalls. It was a magnificent achievement by both groups.

The first and third acts were dominated by splendid singing by Kwangchul Youn as Gurnemanz, in his narration of the damage afflicting the Knights of the Holy Grail. His rich bass expressed sorrow and pity at what had befallen his community. We had seen him at Bayreuth in the famous Stefan Herheim production, but the complexity of the narratives and symbols in that production did not give Youn the same space to depict his wisdom and sadness as did this concert version.

The title role is a signature one for Jonas Kaufmann: his beautiful voice and expressive delivery establish a significant benchmark. He movingly conveyed Parsifal's simplicity and his difficulty in understanding how he has offended by killing the swan. His confusion in responding to the temptations of Kundry's kiss was also well shown. His assumption of the role of saviour of the community at Montsalvat was also movingly portrayed.

Michelle de Young as Kundry was somewhat disappointing, her high notes sometimes piercing; at times there was a harsh quality in her voice. In the first act, however, her voice was richly portentous and coloured and in the attempted seduction in Act 2, she added warmth and forceful power.

The local cast members matched the imports. Warwick Fyfe was a powerful Klingsor, his voice rich and violent when expressing the character's anger and hatred. As the wounded Amfortas, Michael Honeyman sang very well, as he did earlier in the year in *King Roger*. In smaller roles of esquires, knights and flower maidens, other Opera Australia soloists presented strong performances. In particular, Anna Dowsley shone with her warm mezzo in a range of roles.

So, even though not performed in the unique acoustics of the Festspielhaus for which it was designed, this was an outstanding production by Opera Australia.

Not all members would agree. Dennis Mather and John Studdert shared on Facebook their dissatisfaction over paying top dollar for underwhelming overseas singers. Bruce King described the Prelude to *Parsifal* as one of his favourite pieces of music. He expressed disappointment that a concert version is all we will ever see at the Opera House, since the Joan Sutherland Opera Theatre is simply not adequate for a full staging of the work. And indeed this is a pity, because dramatic interest is lost. Like Bruce, I regret the loss of stage effects. I cannot forget the Harry Kupfer production in Berlin in 2002, in which the Grail Knights moved in groups of three, embracing each other for help and support, which powerfully depicted the downfall of the order. The visually demanding and psychologically complex Herheim production, seen in Bayreuth in 2009, referenced German history of the second Reich through black eagles' wings, Freudian psychology, Weimar decadence and Nazi violence—confusing at times, but stimulating and exciting. By comparison, a concert version enables us to impose our own visions of the meaning. And like most other Society members whom we met, I was swept away by the music.

COMMITTEE 2017 - 2018

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Vice President	Leona Geeves	9957 4189
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and Technical Consultant	Florian Hammerbacher	wagner_nsw@optusnet.com.au
OTHER FUNCTIONS		
Public Officer	Alasdair Beck	9358 3922
Newsletter Editor	Terence Watson	80979797
Webmaster	Ashish Nanda	wagner_nsw@optusnet.com.au

SWANS IN MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY

by Michael Chesterman

The Melbourne swan that I am writing about – not a live bird nor a stage model but an entirely effective hologram – formed part of a most enjoyable production of Lohengrin staged recently by Melbourne Opera. In the company of the Society's President, Colleen Chesterman, I saw this production at the Regent Theatre on 11 August. The Sydney swan was not visible at all, either on a stage or for that matter on a football field, but was an unseen presence in an equally enjoyable seminar on this opera given two days later to a substantial audience of Society members and guests by Dr Antony Ernst.

MELBOURNE OPERA'S PRODUCTION OF LOHENGRIN 7, 10, 12 & 19 AUGUST

- MICHAEL CHESTERMAN

Given that Melbourne Opera receives no government funding, the standards achieved in this production were remarkably high. The approach taken by director Susan Chaundy was essentially traditional and straightforward, though an unusual twist was to highlight the opposition within Brabant between an established pagan Norse-based religion (to which Ortrud adheres) and Christianity (of which Lohengrin is akin to a prophet). As she explained in a program note, Chaundy sought to do this by incorporating a large overhanging branch of the tree known as Ygdrassil in old Norse myths into the set for Acts One and Three and setting Act Two in a Christian cathedral. Since in *Lohengrin* the only overt references to Norse mythology are brief mentions of the gods Wotan and Freya during Act Two, this would appear to be drawing a long bow. But the sets and accompanying video projections were both striking in appearance and visually pleasing.

The principals were uniformly first-rate. As Lohengrin, Romanian tenor Marius Vlad maintained a clear, if at times slightly muted, tone and provided a characterisation that consistently emphasised the dignity and integrity of the Grail knight. As Elsa, the Australian soprano Helena Dix radiated warmth in personality and vocal tone and in Act Three was most moving in her self-recriminations and lamentations for having asked the forbidden questions. A second Australian principal, Sarah Sweeting, sang Ortrud with great intensity and menace, but moved somewhat awkwardly. Much the same could be said of the performance of Icelandic baritone Hrolfur Saemundsson as Telramund. Australian bass Eddie Muliaumaseali'i was a wonderfully dignified and sonorous King Heinrich.

The Melbourne Opera Chorus, whose members are (I gather) unpaid, sang impressively and moved very well, except that occasionally the children amongst them had to be reminded by their elders as to where exactly on the stage they should be standing. The orchestra, conducted by David Kram, played very well. The trumpeters' heraldic calls were particularly impressive because they emanated from boxes high up on either side of the front stalls. As it happened, our seats were well forward in the front stalls, so the stereo effect was definitely not lost upon us. All in all, Colleen and I greatly enjoyed reacquainting ourselves with *Lohengrin*, wonderful opera that it is, after an excessively long period of time during which, as far as we know, it has not been staged in Australia.

SYDNEY'S SEMINAR ON LOHENGRIN BY ANTONY ERNST - MICHAEL CHESTERMAN

Once again, Antony Ernst captivated Society members and guests with an extended presentation of original and insightful material. He was, as ever, articulate and consistently entertaining (despite apparently having no need to rely on notes) and he made very effective use of projected images. He also played short excerpts from the opera, though, since his focus was chiefly on the text rather than the music, he did not highlight and comment on key passages such as 'In fernem Land' and 'Mein lieber Schwan'.

In this relatively short summary, I can do no more than outline a few of the points that he made.

He referred back to his seminar last year focusing on the many links between Bach's Passions (which he described as substitutes for operas in Protestant church music) and the operas of Wagner. He pointed out that to an extent not found in Wagner's earlier compositions, the music of *Lohengrin*, like that of Bach, is mostly comprised of a number of lines of orchestral sound underpinning the vocal lines. This rich contrapuntal texture is indeed apparent from the outset, in the remarkable Prelude to Act 1. As soon as its shimmering sounds from the string section commence, the listener feels that Wagner's music has acquired a new dimension.

Antony also argued that Lohengrin's insistence that Elsa should have complete faith in him and, being reassured by this faith, should not seek to know his name or his origins had parallels in Protestant doctrine. It resembled the Protestant principle that believers, relying on their faith in God and their direct relationship to Him, must be prepared to live with continuing doubt and uncertainty as to whether or not they will be saved. Antony drew attention to the many occasions in operatic texts and other forms of literature where doubters who try to acquire knowledge on matters forbidden to them are severely punished for their disobedience.

Another aspect of *Lohengrin* that constituted a point of departure for Wagner was, according to Antony, its depiction of all the key events of the story on stage in 'real time'. There is, he said, no significant reduction of the time that any particular event would be expected to occupy. Equally, the action is never interrupted merely to permit the

singing of an aria. This is well exemplified in Act I by the Herald's three ceremonial calls for a knight to fight as Elsa's champion. Lohengrin's swan is required to wait for quite a while in the wings (sorry – couldn't resist!) while all the traditional rituals for summoning a champion are performed at an appropriately stately pace.

Towards the end of his seminar, Antony suggested that the crucial point of conflict in *Lohengrin* is between the demands of honour, on the one hand, and opposing human needs and desires, on the other. It is important, he said, that Elsa's promise not to ask Lohengrin what his name was or where he came from is made not just to Lohengrin but to the community of Brabant at large. In yielding to her own essentially human and utterly understandable yearning for information on these aspects of the man with whom she

has just walked out of the church to the strains of a justly celebrated wedding march, she both breaks her promise to him and exposes herself to public shame and condemnation for violating the principles of honour. Antony suggested that a similar conflict between honour and human desires is perceivable in later Wagner operas, notably *Tristan und Isolde*. But while in *Tristan* a form of redemption – this being a constant motif in Wagner's works – of the lovers' breach of the principles governing their honour occurs through their deaths, in *Lohengrin* no such redemption – only despair in the hearts of both Lohengrin and Elsa – is portrayed.

In preparing this brief and manifestly incomplete summary of Dr Ernst's presentation, I have been greatly assisted by separate notes kindly made available to me by June Donsworth and Marie Leech.

UPDATE FROM SAMANTHA CRAWFORD - SINGER SUPPORTED BY WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW AWARD

Dear Ms. Colleen Chesterman and Members of the NSW Wagner Society Committee,

I am writing to express my heartfelt thanks for your generous support of my career development. The role preparation and lessons with Dame Anne Evans will be a valuable step in preparing me for singing this



Dame Anne Evans with Samantha Crawford

wonderful repertoire, especially lighter lyric roles. I am most grateful for the mentorship from Dame Anne and Dame Gwyneth Jones, and I am sure they will be delighted to hear of your support of an emerging artist.

Attached are a few photos for you to see the good use your support is giving me. Firstly, working with Dame Anne, then rehearsing Sieglinde / Siegmund duet with Stuart Skelton, and pianists Jayson Gillham and Richard Peirson.

I do hope to be able to come and personally express my thanks to the society members and perform for you in the near future.

Looking forward to hearing your thoughts.

With my heartfelt gratitude,
Samantha Crawford, Soprano



(l-r) Pianists Jayson Gillham and Richard Peirson with Stuart Skelton, and Samantha Crawford

THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN TO SING AT THE BAYREUTH FESTIVAL

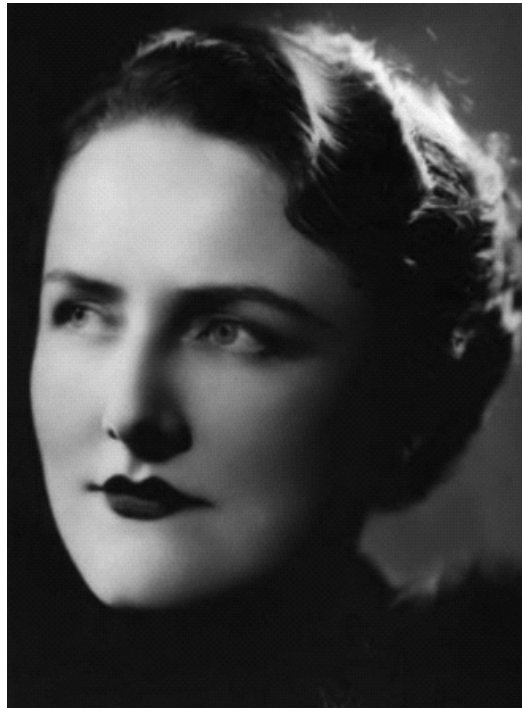
by Peter Bassett

The soprano Norma Gadsden was the first Australian to sing at the Bayreuth Festival, performing there in 1937 just two years before the outbreak of the Second World War. Born Dorothy Smith in Sydney in 1898, she moved with her family to Melbourne as a teenager. Known to her friends and colleagues as Dolly, she attended the Albert Street Conservatorium hoping, initially, to establish a career as a pianist. There she discovered that she also had a fine voice and was given singing lessons, including by Melba during one of her visits home.

In July 1917, when she was only seventeen, Dolly married Norman Gadsden, scion of a well-off packaging and jute importing family. He embarked for the war just a few days after their marriage. The young couple had two beautiful children but their marriage did not work out and, at twenty-two, Dolly decided to leave her husband and two children, to see if her voice held the key to her future.

In 1929 Dolly travelled to Paris where she found lodgings in the same house as Marjorie Lawrence who was the girlfriend of the landlady's son and was therefore given the best room in the house! Dolly worked for a year in Breslau studying German and the Wagnerian repertoire. With her warm voice, placed between a mezzo and a soprano, she attracted the notice of the conductor Franz von Hoesslin, and she was engaged to sing Sieglinde for her Monte Carlo debut on 22 January 1937. On 29 January she sang her first *Walküre* Brünnhilde, conducted by Hoesslin. She had also sung Fricka in *Das Rheingold*. She sang Marina in *Boris Godunov* opposite Chaliapin, in his last performance.

Dolly met her future husband, the baritone and later singing teacher Dominique Modesti when he had to go to a singing engagement some distance outside Paris. She had a car, and Madame Gilly, her teacher, asked her to drive him. On



the way, the car had a flat tyre which Dolly asked Dominique to change. He looked helpless and confessed that he had not the faintest idea how to do this, so Dolly did it herself. This was the beginning of a relationship that lasted sixty years. Around that time he sang *Klingsor* and *Telramund* in French – the latter opposite Dolly as *Ortrud*.

Eventually Norman Gadsden divorced Dolly in 1938 (on the grounds that she had deserted him by not returning from Europe) and she married Dominique Modesti in France. Her mother, Mrs Smith, never forgave her for severing the Gadsden connection, and was unsympathetic towards Modesti.

Franz von Hoesslin, who had conducted at Bayreuth in Siegfried Wagner's day, persuaded Dolly to go to Germany to audition, and she sang *Waltraute* in *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung* at the 1937 Bayreuth festival under the baton of Wilhelm Furtwängler with Heinz Tietjen directing. Frieder Leider sang *Brünnhilde*, and Max Lorenz sang *Siegfried*. Hoesslin, whose second wife was the Jewish contralto Erna Liebenenthal, was forced to leave Germany in 1935 when he refused to conduct the Nazi anthem at a state ceremony, although he returned to Bayreuth in 1938 through the intervention of Winifred Wagner. Those were the days when Winifred ruled the roost, duly protected as a staunch admirer and close friend of Hitler.

In Bayreuth, the Modestis met their lifelong friend Friedelind Wagner, the grand-daughter of Richard and sister of Wieland and Wolfgang.

In Paris, Friedelind lived for a time in Dolly's flat. Friedelind was, to her eternal credit, scathing of the Nazi regime, a thorn in the side of her mother and an embarrassment to her brothers. She eventually went into exile in Switzerland, England and America, where she made anti-Nazi broadcasts. In her biography she tells how Tietjen had microphones



Lieutenant Norman Gadsden in 1917

installed in the backstage areas of the Festspielhaus and in his office to record any unguarded remarks that might prove useful to him. Even Josef Goebbels described Tietjen as 'a sneaky intriguer'. Nevertheless, Hitler approved of him because Winifred did and, despite Furtwängler's protestations, endorsed Tietjen's appointment as principal conductor for the 1938, 1939, 1940 and 1941 seasons. The Wotan between 1931 and 1941, Rudolf Bockelmann,

had become an avid Nazi and was given important responsibilities in the party relating to the oversight of opera. The atmosphere must have been tense to say the least, and Norma Gadsden did not return to Bayreuth in 1938. Neither did Furtwängler. She went on to sing elsewhere, including as all three Brünnhildes in Brussels.

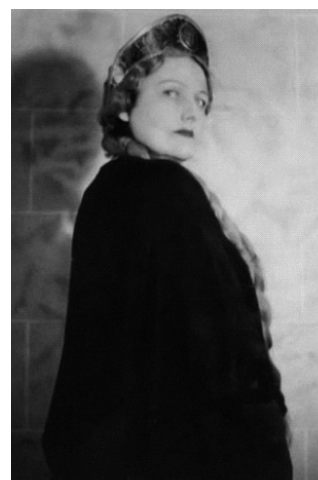
In the 1930s Hitler had wanted to keep the British Empire out of any future conflict and he took the view (according to Friedelind) that 'the two nations spring from the same race; the Germanic races belong together'. He tried hard to get the sympathetic Edward VIII to attend the 1937 Bayreuth festival, and even proposed sending the beautiful 1936 *Lohengrin* to Covent Garden for the coronation that never happened. For his part, Edward said that he would welcome the visit but hoped he wouldn't have to attend any performances because opera bored him stiff! On the other hand, Hitler despised the French. The engagement of Dolly at Bayreuth in 1937 fitted this pro-Anglo Saxon policy, but Dominique Modesti, with his Corsican ancestry, Algerian birth and French upbringing, and reluctance to sing in German, was another matter, and he was never invited to Wahnfried.



Friedelind Wagner



Norma Gadsden as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*



As Ortrud



The Valkyries of 1937 (Schwertleite absent). Norma Gadsden is second from the right



Photo from 1937. Winifred, Paul Eberhardt (technical director), Wilhelm Furtwängler, Emil Preetorius (designer), and Heinz Tietjen (stage director)



Dominique Modesti (seated centre front) and his Australian students including Robert Allman, Lance Ingram (Albert Lance), Lauris Elms and Elizabeth Fretwell



Photograph of Dominique Modesti and Dolly taken many years later by Lauris Elms and published in her autobiography *The Singing Elms*

In September 1941 the following item appeared in the Melbourne press:

‘Interviewed at the home of her mother, Mrs. T. Smith, of Toorak, Melbourne, last week, the celebrated operatic soprano Norma Gadsden recalled with pride that she refused two invitations to dine with Hitler. “When he sent me flowers I burnt them,” said Madame Gadsden, “I met the Führer twice when I was singing at the Wagner Festival at Bayreuth. On both occasions I was at Wahnfried, the home of Wagner. Hitler sat with one of the Wagner grandchildren on his knee and talked and talked. It was the same old thing — everybody must support him — nobody must ask questions. Nobody else spoke. It just wasn’t done. Hitler looks like a small sergeant-major. He raps out the orders. Nobody answers back. I met Goering, too, a fat fellow in white uniform with blue ribbons. They call him Lohengrin. And Goebbels, who is so full of diabolical schemes, and looks it.”’

The war effectively ended Norma Gadsden’s career. Dominique Modesti had to register in his place of birth – Algeria, and when France fell, they went to America, then to Australia, and after the war back to France where Dominique became a famous pedagogue.

Norma Gadsden’s two children by her first husband were both killed in accidents during the war, something which, Dominique said, had nearly driven her mad. Her son was killed during Air Force training in New South Wales in 1940, and her daughter in the snowfields at Mount Bogong in 1943 when her group became trapped in a blizzard and perished in the snow. Dominique Modesti also lost a son from his former marriage during the war.

I have searched high and low for a recording of Norma Gadsden’s voice but without success. Perhaps one does exist, in which case it would be an important memento of the first Australian to perform at the Bayreuth Festival and one who was also a very fine Australian singer of the pre-war years.

I am most grateful to Lauris Elms, herself a celebrated Australian singer, for personal reminiscences of her long-time friends and colleagues Norma Gadsden and Dominique Modesti.

BAYREUTH ON ABC RADIO IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2017

ABC Classic FM brings you all the highlights (including the entire *Der Ring des Nibelungen*) from this year's festival during Sunday Operas all throughout October and early-November:

01/10/2017 at 7.00PM - *Das Rheingold*

08/10/2017 at 7.00PM - *Die Walküre*

15/10/2017 at 7.00PM - *Siegfried*

22/10/2017 at 7.00PM - *Götterdämmerung*

29/10/2017 at 7.00PM - *Tristan und Isolde*

05/11/2017 at 7.00PM - *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

To find out more about this annual institution head here. Members should be aware that online applications for the 2018 Bayreuther Festspiele, close on 31 October, and postal applications close on 16 October, so, if you are thinking of attending, take what steps you need to submit your application before these dates.

BAYREUTH'S FIRST MALE BRÜNNHILDE

Eagle-eyed Society Member Colin Baskerville drew your Editor's attention to the following report. Admittedly, the story is a little breathless and a bit of a beat up, but one should perhaps not be surprised to see one day in some production somewhere, cross-singing of roles in Wagner operas, just as there is now, regularly, at the Shakespeare Globe in London plays performed by all male or all female casts, not to mention all the pants roles in other operas.

In *Limelight* of 30 August 2017 Jo Litson reported that "during the final performance of the current season of *Götterdämmerung* in Frank Castorf's controversial Ring cycle, Foster hurt her foot at the end of Act I. As reported by Slipped Disc, assistant director Andreas Rosar donned a sparkling golden gown and went on stage in her place for the next two acts, while she sang from the wings in a wheelchair."

"Foster posted a message on her Facebook page saying: 'Twisted too fast left to come out for a bow and calf went 'pop' so a ripped muscle – nowhere near as bad as the right leg last year though! Lots of ice and Arnica and it'll be fine.'"

Litson also noted the previous occasion in May 2016, "during a dress rehearsal for Francesca Zambello's Ring cycle at Washington National Opera, Foster sustained a leg injury and missed making her American debut in *Die Walküre*. Instead she had to wait until two days later when she appeared in *Siegfried*."



Catherine Foster and Andreas Rosar. Photograph from Catherine Foster's Facebook page

Litson reported Foster's good natured and appreciative Facebook response to the incident and her treatment in Bayreuth: 'And so my 49th Bayreuth performance coincided with my 49th *Götterdämmerung*! Certainly not one I will forget and a huge thank you to Andreas for stepping into my shoes (literally!) and playing so well – to my colleagues and friends on stage who simply sang and played superbly taking it all in their professional stride and of course to Wolfgang for chauffeuring me around backstage in the wheel chair and all the backstage crew, makeup, costume department everyone who made it possible for the show to continue. Simply amazing! And simply... thank you Bayreuther Festspiele - Bayreuth Festival.'"

Members of the Wagner Society in NSW, many of whom have heard and seen Ms Foster in Bayreuth and elsewhere, send their best wishes for a speedy recovery and return to the stage.

Source of article: www.limelightmagazine.com.au/bayreuths-male-br%C3%BCnnhilde?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Enewsletter%20September%2020202017&utm_content=Enewsletter%20September%2020202017%20CID_069623cd3775795baa38fe6c24e33a24&utm_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm_term=Bayreuths%20first%20male%20Brnnhilde

WAGNER MURMURS – WITH THANKS TO THE WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

The Newsletter of the Wagner Society of New Zealand contains the following information that will be of interest to Members:

- Bayreuth Ring director, Tankred Dorst, died in June aged 91.
- Yuval Sharon will be the first American to direct at Bayreuth when he stages a new production of *Lohengrin* at the 2018 festival. Roberto Alagna will make his Bayreuth debut singing the title role.
- Plácido Domingo will conduct *Die Walküre* at the 2018 Bayreuth Festival.
- Philippe Jordan will conduct a new production of the Ring for Opéra National de Paris in its 2020/21 season.
- Anna Kelo will direct a new production of the Ring for Finnish National Opera. It will be staged between 2019 and 2021 and will be conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Members might like to see the full Newsletter from New Zealand, with reminiscences of the late Jeffrey Tate by Margaret Medlyn and Peter Bassett at http://wagnersociety.org.nz/newsletters/wsnz_sep17_newsletter.pdf. In the Newsletter, in his article "Lord Of The Ring Meets Lord Of The Rings," "Heath Lees Examines the Long and Deafening Silence around Wagner and Tolkien."

Members will also find much useful information about forthcoming productions of Wagner's works in the Ravens Reporting elsewhere in this Quarterly.

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.

November 2017

Atlanta *Holländer* – November 4, 7, 10, 12.
 Barcelona *Tristan und Isolde* – November 28.
 Berlin Deutsche Oper
Lohengrin – November 9, 12, 17.
Tannhäuser – November 11, 19.
Holländer – November 18.
 Chicago *Die Walküre* – Nov 1, 5, 10, 14, 18, 26, 30.
 Cologne *Tannhäuser* – November 1.
 Dresden *Götterdämmerung* – November 1, 5.
 Duisburg *Das Rheingold* – November 4, 9, 24.
 Hanover *Holländer* – November 5, 14, 23.
 Karlsruhe *Götterdämmerung* – November 5.
 Oldenburg *Die Walküre* – November 19.

December 2017

Barcelona *Tristan und Isolde* – Dec 2, 4, 7, 10, 12, 15.
 Berlin Deutsche Oper
Tannhäuser – December 2.
 Duisburg *Das Rheingold* – December 3, 16, 21.
 Hagen *Holländer* – December 16.
 Karlsruhe *Siegfried* – December 3.
Götterdämmerung – December 10.

January 2018

Amsterdam *Tristan und Isolde* – January 18, 22, 25, 30.
 Coblenz *Holländer* – January 20, 22, 28, 30.
 Dresden *The Ring* – January 13, 14, 18, 20; 29, 30, February 1, 4.
 Düsseldorf *Die Walküre* – January 28.
 Hamburg *Die Walküre* – January 7, 14, 20.
 Karlsruhe *Götterdämmerung* – January 7.
 Leipzig *The Ring* – January 6, 7, 13, 14.
 Mönchengladbach *Lohengrin* – January 14, 20, 26.
 Munich *The Ring* – January 13, 19, February 3, 11; January 11, 22, 31, February 8
 Toulouse *Die Walküre* – January 30.

February 2018

Amsterdam *Tristan und Isolde* – February 4, 7, 10, 14.
 Chemnitz *Das Rheingold* – February 3, 22.
 Coblenz *Holländer* – February 4, 8, 10, 14, 17, 23.
 Dresden *The Ring* – January 29, 30, February 1, 4.
Holländer – February 11, 15, 18, 23, 29.
 Düsseldorf *Die Walküre* – February 17.
 Hamburg *Holländer* – February 13, 16, 21, 24.
 Karlsruhe *Das Rheingold* – February 3.
 Mönchengladbach *Lohengrin* – February 2, 24.
 Munich *The Ring* – January 13, 19, February 3, 11; January 11, 22, 31, February 8.
 New York *Parsifal* – February 5, 10, 13, 17, 20, 23, 27.
 Prague National Theatre
Lohengrin – February 9, 18.
 Toulouse *Die Walküre* – February 2, 6, 9, 11.
 Zurich *Parsifal* – February 25.

March 2018

Baden-Baden *Parsifal* – March 24, 30.
 Chemnitz *Das Rheingold* – March 3, 31.
Tannhäuser – March 4.
Die Walküre – March 24.
Parsifal – March 30.
 Coblenz *Holländer* – March 15, 19, 25.
 Düsseldorf *Die Walküre* – March 4, 11, 25, 31.
 Erfurt *Holländer* – March 17, 25.
 Hamburg *Holländer* – March 2.
 Karlsruhe *The Ring* – March 28, 29, 31, April 4.
Die Walküre – March 29.
 Leipzig *Tannhäuser* – March 17, 24.
Parsifal – March 30.
 Mönchengladbach *Lohengrin* – March 18, 25.
 Prague National Theatre
Lohengrin – March 11.
 Vienna Staatsoper

Zurich *Parsifal* – March 29.
Parsifal – March 3, 7, 11.
Holländer – March 18, 21, 24, 28, 31.

April 2018

Baden-Baden *Parsifal* – April 2.
 Berlin Deutsche Oper
Tannhäuser – April 2, 8.
 Breda Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – April 22.
 Brussels *Lohengrin* – April 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 29.
 Chemnitz *Tannhäuser* – April 1.
Die Walküre – April 2, 22.
Das Rheingold – April 15.
Parsifal – April 29.
 Coblenz *Holländer* – April 15.
 Düsseldorf *Siegfried* – April 7, 22, 29.
 Enschede Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – April 20.
 Erfurt *Holländer* – April 8.
 The Hague Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – April 24, 26.
 Karlsruhe *The Ring* – March 28, 29, 31, April 4.
 Leipzig *Tannhäuser* – April 2.
The Ring – April 11, 12, 14, 15.
 Paris *Parsifal* – April 27, 30.
 Vienna Staatsoper
Parsifal – April 1, 5.
The Ring – April 4, 8, 11, 15.
Die Walküre – April 22.

May 2018

Amsterdam Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – May 25, 27.
 Baden-Baden *Holländer* – May 18.
 Brussels *Lohengrin* – May 2, 4, 6.
 Chemnitz *Die Walküre* – May 1, 27.
 Duisburg *Die Walküre* – May 31.
 Düsseldorf *Siegfried* – May 6, 10.
 Groningen Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – May 18.
 Hamburg *Das Rheingold* – May 18, 21, 26, 29.
 Karlsruhe *The Ring* – May 5, 6, 10, 12.
Die Walküre – May 31.
 Leipzig *The Ring* – May 10, 11, 12, 13.
Tannhäuser – May 27.
 Maastricht Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – May 15.
 Paris *Parsifal* – May 5, 10, 13, 16, 20, 23.
 Prague National Theatre
Lohengrin – May 27.
 Rotterdam Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – May 8.
 Utrecht Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – May 3.
 Zwolle Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – May 31.

June 2018

Apeldoorn Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – June 2.
 Arnhem Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – June 9.
 Duisburg *Die Walküre* – June 10, 17, 24.
 Leeuwarden Nederlandse Reisopera
Holländer – June 7.
 London Royal Opera
Lohengrin – June 7, 10, 13, 17, 23, 28.
 Munich *Parsifal* – June 28.
Holländer – June 29.
 Prague National Theatre
Lohengrin – June 10.
 San Francisco *The Ring* – June 12, 13, 15, 17; 19, 20, 22, 24; 26, 27, 29, July 1.
 Sofia *Tristan und Isolde* – June 1.
Parsifal – June 27.
 Vienna Staatsoper
Lohengrin – June 15, 18, 22.

July 2018

Bayreuth

Lohengrin – July 25.
Parsifal – July 26.
Tristan und Isolde – July 27.
Die Meistersinger – July 28.
Lohengrin – July 29.
Holländer – July 30.
Die Walküre – July 31.

Dresden

Holländer – July 2.

London

Royal Opera
Lohengrin – July 1.

Munich

Parsifal – July 1, 5, 8, 31.
Holländer – July 2.
The Ring – July 20, 22, 24, 27.
The Ring – June 26, 27, 29, July 1.
The Ring – July 5, 6, 8, 10.

San Francisco
 Sofia

August 2018

Bayreuth

Parsifal – August 1, 8, 14, 19, 25.
Lohengrin – August 2, 6, 10.
Holländer – August 3, 7, 12, 22, 26.
Die Meistersinger – August 5, 11, 17, 21, 27.
Tristan und Isolde – August 13, 16, 20, 24, 28.
Die Walküre – August 18, 29.

2018/19 Season

New York

The Ring – [no actual dates].

September 2018

Linz

Tristan und Isolde – September 15, 23, 30.

London

Royal Opera
The Ring – September 24, 26, 29, October 1.

Minden

Götterdämmerung – [no actual dates].

October 2018

Düsseldorf

Götterdämmerung – Oct 27 [no other dates].

London

Royal Opera
The Ring – September 24, 26, 29, October 1; 2, 4, 7, 9; 16, 18, 21, 24; 26, 28, 31, Nov 2.

November 2018

Chicago

Siegfried – [no actual dates].

Gothenburg

Das Rheingold – [no actual dates].

London

Royal Opera
The Ring – October 26, 28, 31, November 2.

Melbourne

Die Meistersinger – Nov 13, 17, 19, 22.

January 2019

Duisburg

Siegfried – January 26 [no other dates].

May 2019

Duisburg

Götterdämmerung – May 5 [no other dates].
The Ring – May 23, 26, 30, June 2.

June 2019

Duisburg

The Ring – May 23, 26, 30, June 2.

Düsseldorf

The Ring – June 13, 16, 20, 23.

September 2019

Minden

The Ring – [no actual dates].

November 2019

Gothenburg

Die Walküre – [no actual dates].

2020

Berlin

Deutsche Oper
The Ring – [no actual dates].

March 2020

Chicago

Götterdämmerung – [no actual dates].

April 2020

Chicago

The Ring – 3 cycles [no actual dates].

November 2020

Gothenburg

Siegfried – [no actual dates].

2020/21 Season

Esbjerg

Siegfried – [no actual dates].

November 2021

Gothenburg

The Ring – [no actual dates].

2022/23 Season

Esbjerg

Götterdämmerung – [no actual dates].

2024

Esbjerg

The Ring – [no actual dates].

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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CELEBRATES ITS 90TH YEAR WITH *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*

Most of you will be aware that in 2018 the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra celebrates its 90th year. Led by Chairman Janet Holmes à Court and Principal Conductor Asher Fisch, whose contract has just been extended by a further four years until 2023, WASO is celebrating the anniversary with a focus on Wagner. As the climax, Fisch, a committed Wagnerian, who has conducted popular *Rings* in Adelaide and Seattle, has decided to present *Tristan und Isolde* with a stellar line up of international artists, including Stuart Skelton, for two concert performances, Thursday 16 and Sunday 19 August 2018. Other cast members are Eva-Maria Westbroek (*Isolde*), Ekaterina Gubanova (*Brangäne*), Boaz Daniel (*Kurwenal*), Kwangchul Youn (*King Marke*) and Angus Wood (*Melot*).



This is a rare opportunity for Australian audiences and we hope our members will support it. During the recent WASO Wagner & Beyond mini-festival, audiences gained an insight into Asher's deep understanding and personal love of the music of Wagner and were introduced to the orchestra's expertise in the music, with a particularly strong brass section of German Wagner tubas, trumpets and brass. The performances received critical acclaim both nationally and internationally. President Colleen Chesterman, committee member Nick Dorsch as well as members on a Renaissance Tour were all impressed by the orchestra's playing and the conductor's commitment.

The promise of great *Tristan und Isolde* performances is a compelling reason to cross our continent. Ticket sales have opened and are strong. But in discussion, WASO committee and staff indicated that they are seeking support to fund this project. *Tristan und Isolde* is an expensive and relatively rare undertaking for any orchestra. A campaign has been created for individual philanthropists with privileges open to donors \$1000 and above.

We discussed with WASO staff how to encourage more involvement from members of our Wagner society. They have arranged that 20 seats will be held for NSW

Wagner Society members, 10 Gold at \$225 and 10 Premium at \$195. We would like to encourage members to support the enterprise by buying tickets and in addition giving tax-free donations to our Society of \$250 for gold ticket buyers, \$150 for premium. The Wagner Society in NSW will then add to these donations and make an additional significant donation, which will be least equal to the donations received. We hope in this way to assist Stuart Skelton's visit.

Payments for tickets and donations should be sent to the Wagner Society by credit card or bank transfer (details below). All individual donors

will be acknowledged in the program and on the WASO website as Wagner Friends. NSW Wagner Society would be acknowledged as supporter of Stuart Skelton. For members of the Wagner Society NSW attending *Tristan und Isolde*, WASO will try to ensure access to rehearsal/s and meetings with Asher, Stuart and cast during our visit.

It is a great opportunity to support Stuart, proudly from Sydney, as he contributes to this concert as a world renowned operatic heldentenor. He has a friendship and strong artistic rapport with Maestro Asher Fisch and they are delighted to be working together with WASO next year. We look forward to a positive response from Wagner Society members to these proposals.

EFT

Use your bank's internet banking facilities to send your ticket payment & donation electronically to:

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Account Number: 911323

(Please remember to include your name & WASO in the payment details)

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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)

PARSIFAL SEMINAR - 30 JULY 017



Dr David Larkin at the piano during his seminar presentation on Wagner's *Parsifal* on 30 August 2017 at the Sydney Goethe Society (see report inside – photo by Pauline Holgerson).

Eleanor Greenwood (who sang Kundry), Warwick Fyfe (who sang Klingsor), Bradley Gilchrist (accompanist at the piano) with Leona Geeves (Society Vice-President) after performing an extract from Act 2 of *Parsifal* during the 30 July Seminar presented by Dr David Larkin (see report inside– photo by Pauline Holgerson).



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