



The Wagner Society

(Patron — Sir Charles Mackerras)

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NEWSLETTER NO. 17

January 1985

STOP PRESS

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PLEASE READ NEWSLETTER IMMEDIATELY - IMPORTANT INFORMATION

FOR YOUR DIARY

February 11th - 6.30 p.m. Leonie Rysanek Reception.
Goethe Institute, Ocean St., Woollahra.
Free to Members (Members Only).

February 14th - 8.00 p.m. Horst Hoffman Recital.
Great Hall, Sydney University.
Free to Members (Non-Members \$6.00).

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March 2nd - Die Walküre - Theatre Party.
Sydney Opera House.

March 23rd - Die Walküre - Group Tour.
Melbourne State Theatre.

MORE INFORMATION INSIDE NEWSLETTER

BOOKING SLIPS ON PAGE 12

RECEPTION FOR LEONIE RYSANEK

Internationally renowned dramatic soprano Leonie Rysanek is making a return visit to Sydney in January for performances in "Die Walküre" as Sieglinde and in "Jenufa" as the Kostelnicka. In both roles she already has quite a reputation. Miss Rysanek made her Bayreuth debut as Sieglinde and her characterisation of the part has long been recognised in opera houses around the world, as very individual and a tour-de-force. In the Janacek Opera, it is the first occasion she will sing the demanding Kostelnicka in English.

When last in Sydney, Leonie Rysanek was made an honorary life member of our Society. This visit it is intended to arrange a small reception for her, so that members may once again meet this delightful woman. The evening will take the form of a wine and cheese party, during which there will be a short recital by Miss Lisa Gosteen. Lisa is a recent winner of the Metropolitan Auditions, and is one of Australia's most promising voices.

This function will be held at the Goethe Institute, at the corner of Ocean Street and Jersey Road, Woollahra, and will be free to members of the Society. Please note the details now in your diary.

Date: Monday, 11th February
Time: 6.30 p.m.
Place: Goethe Institute

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RECITAL BY HORST HOFFMAN - Great Hall, Sydney University,
Thursday 14th February, 8.00 p.m.

Accompanist: Werner Baer

We are fortunate to have two marvellous events in one week. A recital of Wagner and other composers will be given by Horst Hoffman, a leading Tenor with the Australian Opera with interludes on the Great Hall Organ by Werner Baer.

This will be free to members, but we would ask a donation of \$6.00 each from non-members. Refreshments will be served.

The professional fees, advertising, etc. will be paid by the Society.

Please show your support by attending and bring as many non-members as possible.

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DIE WALKÜRE

The Australian Opera is re-staging 'Die Walküre' in the New Year, firstly in Sydney from February 19th to March 2nd, then in Melbourne from March 16th. The cast is very much the same as in previous seasons, except for the Sieglindes, where two renowned international artists will interpret the parts. Sydney is privileged to see Leonie Rysanek in the role she has been identified with in her long career; whereas in Melbourne, Yvonne Minton, mostly known for her Kundry, Waltrante and Brangane, approaches this role for the first time.

A group will be travelling by coach to Melbourne on 22nd March and those interested either in coach travel or theatre tickets are asked to refer to booking forms at the end of the newsletter, or contact the Society for any further information.

Another concert in Melbourne on 6th March that is definitely worth mention is the Wagner/Strauss concert to be given by the two Sieglindes, Leonie Rysanek and Yvonne Winton.

The Wagner Society does not intend making any arrangements collectively for this performance, but for those fortunate enough to be in Melbourne at that time, we mention it.

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CORRECTION

LOVE OR POWER - THE FATAL CHOICE

The synopsis of the talk given by Sir Charles Mackerras, printed in our last Newsletter, incorrectly attributed authorship to Susan Mackerras -
- the rightful author is Dorothy Mackerras.

We apologise for our error.

Editor

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WAGNER NEWS FROM AMERICA

The New York Wagner Society is justifiably elated at having 'done' their first Bayreuth Festival as a group in 1984. This little peice of news makes us feel that we're definitely not trailing the field.

The Seattle Ring had its twilight this year and Gunter Kossodo writes in "Wagner Notes" (September 1984) that despite some new staging, and a Chereau touch here and there, the Festival needs a new production and 1986 is the year to look forward to for the Pacific North West Festival.

WAGNER NEWS FROM AMERICA (continued)

The musical direction will be in the hands of Armin Jordan, who, you will remember, conducted the orchestra in the memorable Syberberg "Parsifal."

The American premiere of the Wagner version of Gluck's "Iphigenia in Aulis" was given at the Waterloo (New Jersey) Festival in July 1984. Wagner attempted to make the work compact and unsentimental, eliminating much that he thought unstageworthy at this time when he was rejecting Grand Opera.

Gerard Schwartz presented the whole score, restoring the Gluck passages out from the Kurt Eichorn recording, and the Wagner passages - some up to 15 bars of pure Wagner written for entrances and exits.

Never having heard this Gluck spiked with Wagner my curiosity is roused more than somewhat.

Norman Bailey	- Agamemnon
Alessandra Marc	- Iphigenia

WAGNER NEWS FROM ROME

Parsifal was performed at the Teatro Dell'Opera in the Spring of 1984 (April 8th) and Jon Arlow reports that for some arcane reason the house lights remained UP!! It turned out to be a "striking" light crew and by Act II the crew and the magic had returned.

Peter Busse's direction was largely traditional with occasional and effective departures such as "the walls of the Grail Hall being made to vanish just as Klingsor's had, leaving the Knights kneeling in profile, hands raised in prayer and silhouetted in pure blue light in an empty space."

Karl Ridderbusch	- Gurnemanz
Gabriele Schnaur	- Kundry
Sven Olan Eliasson	- Parsifal
Lief Roar	- Amfortas
Dieter Schweikart	- Titurel
Zenon Kosnowsky	- Klingsor

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We have had Wagner at Woy Woy and now we are to have Wagner at Toowong. Intrigued?

Once I found out where Toowong was I was even more intrigued. It's in Queensland (near Brisbane) where a company by the name of Sugar and Spite Theatre Company directed by Mr. Paul G. Sugars is planning to present a "different experinece" of Wagner's Ring in February 1985. The chief

difference is that the four-evening saga has been telescoped into two hours, performed as a play with incidental music but without singing. The play was first given in March 1979 at the Westchester School as part of an opera-education programme and the Wagner Society of New York felt that Manhattan Wagnerites might gain something from it and it was performed there in February 1980. This idea is the brain child of Phillip Caggiano, a New York Opera stage designer and director who become involved in an opera education programme. We will give you more news of this fascinating event as soon as it comes to hand.

Dates for San Francisco Ring are now available and as it's only across the Pacific you might like to make note. The first cycle begins 2nd June; 2nd cycle - 7th June; 3rd cycle - 12th June. The cast list is irresistible with names like Peter Hoffman, Rene Kolls, Gwyneth Jones, Hanna Schwartz, Eva Marton, Helga Dernesch, Walter Berry. Edo de Waart once again conducts this stimulating Ring.

LEONARD HANSEN, PRESIDENT

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OVERSEAS CORRESPONDENCE

For some time now your committee has been corresponding with Wagner Societies and institutions in other countries. It is not always possible to reproduce all the details contained in the letters, but here are some items of interest received recently.

1. France

The President of the Paris Wagner Society, Dr. Catherine Devraigne, has written with details of the 1985 World Congress of Richard Wagner Societies. It will be held in Paris from 1st to 5th May, and she hopes that as many Australian members as possible will attend. A most interesting program has been devised, encompassing social and touristic attractions, as well as the expected musical functions.

Details of the Congress are available from our office for those lucky people who will find themselves in Paris for Springtime.

2. New York

Newsletters and publications have been received from the President of the New York Wagner Society, Nathalie Davis Wagner.

She informs us that Philip Caggiano's adaptation of the "Ring" into a 2-hour play for children is to be performed next year in Brisbane. The play - with no singing but with recorded music - has already been presented several times in the U.S.A. very successfully, being enjoyed by young and old alike.

Details of the Australian production will be published as they come to hand. (see above)

OVERSEAS CORRESPONDENCE (Continued)3. Austria

Quite a deal of very interesting material has been received from the Wagner Society in Graz. As all the publications are in German their use to our members is restricted, but copies will be placed in the Goethe Society Library, where they will be of more benefit and accessible to Wagner Society members.

4. San Francisco

The Director of Public Relations of the San Francisco Opera has sent us a great deal of information and details concerning their 1985 Ring cycles.

Summary: In what they are calling "The 1985 Ring Festival", the complete Ring cycle will be presented three times between June 2nd and 21st with the addition next year of Weber's *Der Freischütz* in concert performance. Also planned are three concerts of Wagner Chamber Music and the presentation of the epic film "Wagner," starring Richard Burton, in its entirety, nine hours. With a cast to rival Bayreuth, San Francisco offers a real alternative.

Gwynneth Jones will return as Brunnhilde in *Die Walküre* - with Eva Marton taking over in *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*; Hannah Schwartz as Fricka and Erda. Peter Hofmann repeats Siegmund and the lovely Linda Esther Gray is his Sieglinde. Walter Berry will appear in the role of Alberich; Rene Kollo as Siegfried and Helga Dernesch doubling as Fricka and Waltrante gives some idea of the quality of San Francisco Opera's 'Ring'. The conductor will be Edo de Waart and the director Nicholas Lehnhoff.

Casting for *Der Freischütz* is yet to be announced and for further information it is suggested writing to 'The Ring', San Francisco Opera, War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA94102.

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WORDS AND MUSIC : WAGNER AND HIS SUCCESSORS

Synopsis of the paper
delivered by A/Prof. Michel Ewans
to the Wagner Society at the Goethe Institute, Sydney,
on 24th September 1984.

The sequence of "Stage Festival Dramas" which Wagner composed between 1851 and 1855 (*Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* Acts I and II) could be described in contemporary terms as 'experimental music theatre.' In contrast to all previous operas, these dramas have a straight dialogue text with no overlaps; orchestral material which alternates between the singers, following the developing emotions of each character; and climaxes reserved for moments where the orchestra can express the full meaning by playing alone.

WORDS AND MUSIC : WAGNER AND HIS SUCCESSORS (Continued)

The radical new elements in The Ring were: the abolition of the distinction between recitative and aria; the absolute continuity of the music within each act; the use of Stabreim, an alliterative verse which superseded the traditional longer, rhymed lines used in Wagner's previous opera texts; and the use of the orchestra to bind the inner feelings of the characters together with their outward surroundings, exploring the psyche and its relationship with nature simultaneously.

These features of The Ring open up the possibility of an even freer blank verse, which Wagner developed in Parsifal - demanding a constant rubato from the orchestra - and opened the way for the development of the possibility of prose opera.

Very few operas, even after Wagner, abandoned the traditional link between verse and music. The few that do were composed in response to the new forms of drama which developed in the spoken theatre between 1880 and 1900; and the three main developments in opera at the turn of the century, which made operatic settings of this kind of text possible, would not themselves have been possible without the example of Wagner's innovations in The Ring and Parsifal; symbolic opera in Debussy's Pelleas and Melisande; realism in Janacek's Jenufa; expressionism in Strauss' Salome and Elektra, and in a more developed form in Berg's Wozzeck and Lulu.

Symbolism, a French poetic movement which was largely inspired by Wagner's own example, reached its climax in drama in Maeterlinck's Pelleas and Melisande. This was a revolutionary drama in its belief that true tragedy lies not in action but in silence and repose, and in its insistence that words alone are no longer adequate to convey the meaning of a drama. This play offered the chance of a whole new role for music, illuminating those aspects of human experiences which are beyond words - the states of the souls of Maeterlinck's characters and their relationship with the symbols which accompany their progress through the landscape of the play.

Debussy is often seen as an anti-Wagner composer' but in many ways he was much nearer, in his 1903 setting of Pelleas and Melisande, to reaching the ideal laid down by Wagner in his prose writings of a close relationship between each section of the text and action and the music than Wagner himself was, even in Das Rheingold. Debussy aimed to bring the tempo of the music and the tempo of the emotions into synchronisation, and achieved this by the creation of a cellular musical style which was flexible enough to respond with an infinite number of changes of pace to the subtleties of Maeterlinck's text. As heard in Boulez's remarkable recording, Pelleas and Melisande is very far from a hazy impressionism; it is an opera in the Wagnerian tradition - clear, sensitive, powerful and at times even violent in its effect.

Janacek was a very different man from Debussy - the son of a village school master, the grandson of a peasant, and a lover of rural life. But it took a long search before Janacek developed a musical idiom, based on the style of Moravian folk music, which could express his direct response to man and nature. This was achieved in his first great opera Jenufa (1903), which sets a realistic prose drama. Music is here subordinated

WORDS AND MUSIC : WAGNER AND HIS SUCCESSORS (Continued)

to action in the sense that the orchestral commentary, although very powerful, is always there not for its own sake but to illuminate the drama; and this is done by fragmenting highly emotional orchestral melodies round an expressive vocal line which reveals character-in-action, and by use of repetition. Janacek created a style which possesses Wagner's vigour and energy, but with a wholly new orchestral sound; and he achieves an objective stance towards his characters, in operas which combine great seriousness with truth to popular experience.

After these two outstanding foreign responses to Wagner's ideal, the developments in Germany are more familiar, since they build on Wagner's own style of orchestration as well as on his theory of drama. Strauss in Salome and Elektra pushes one aspect of the Wagnerian ideal to its limit, with a continuous one-act structure lasting two hours, symphonic construction and a web of leitmotive more complex than in Gotterdammerung, an orchestra even larger than Wagner's and no protective pit-cover as at Bayreuth. The music achieves overwhelming emotional power. But it also creates problems of word audibility, and in Elektra problems of endurance. Strauss therefore abandoned this style of opera in and after Der Rosenkavalier; the development of Wagner's ethos further into expressionism was left to a very different man, Alban Berg.

Berg's decision to set to music Buchner's fragmentary drama Woyzeck meant that he could not build his opera up over two hours to an overwhelming climax as Strauss had done; Buchner's ordinary-life settings, the brevity, dialect and richness of his dialogue all demanded a new kind of expressionism which would encourage the audience to take up different perspectives on the successive parts of the action. Berg achieved this chiefly by the diversity of instrumental and vocal styles in Wozzeck (1921), by the range of the idiom from fierce dissonance to full consonance, and by the synthesis of instrumental forms from a variety of periods. So Wagner's symphonic structure reappears now, though quickened into a nervous, expressionistic style.

In Berg's music we might seem to be a long way from Wagner's innovations of the 1850's. But all these operas are in Wagner's special tradition: a synthesis of words, action and music with two over-riding aims:

1. lucid, expressive word-setting of audible texts which are not themselves formalised by being in verse.
2. the ideal of a symphonic orchestra which interrelates closely with the stage action, ties characters to their surroundings and illuminates their thoughts and feelings.

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Professor Michael Ewan's latest book is available to members, directly, at the reduced rate of \$28 per copy.

IMPRESSIONS OF BAYREUTH - 1984

by Dr. Sue Kelly

A modest Australian contingent attended the Festival this year. We had the usual long flight to Frankfurt, where we were able to recuperate for a night before going on to Bayreuth. It remains a small country town which comes to life for the Festival, with pleasant cafes and shops, and well run hotels strategically placed on major traffic intersections!

Our first night was "Parsifal" - the Gotz Friedrich production. I liked the egg box design at the time, but was less certain as to its meaning when I thought about it later. I did feel it tended to inhibit the movements of the chorus. Klingsor's "Magic Garden" was very effective. He operated from a giant watch-tower in front of a radar plot dressed like Darth Vader, or it was just possibly reminiscent of a watch-tower in a concentration camp - either way, very effective.

Simon Estes was a wonderful "Amfortas" and Hans Sotin as Gurnemanz was magnificent. Peter Hofmann sung well as Parsifal. The flower maidens were a mess, as usual, and not particularly well sung. For me, the best performance was given by Waltraud Meier - She was the most seductive looking and sounding Kundry in my experience.

The next performance was "Flying Dutchman" which is probably the most incredible evening I have ever spent in a theatre! The music, the scenery, the production, the design - everything - was on a special plane and an immediate award should have been given for the lighting alone. It was the Harry Kupfer production which demonstrates more psychological insight each time one sees it - altogether a great night.

The Mastersingers transported one back to Hollywood of the 50's - bright costumes, uninteresting groups of chorus, glaringly unrelieved lighting. Can it be Wolfgang Wagner was responsible for both production and design? Siegfried Jerusalem naturally was an excellent Walter; Graham Clark sounded well as David but for me the best voice was the night watchman, Matthias Holle - perhaps my heart was not in it. And so to "THE RING" -

Much controversy has been engendered by this Peter Hall/William Dudley production which you have probably read about in the press. I feel, on reflection, that a lot of time was spent on the technical effects (which apparently worked better this year than last) and this left perhaps less time to concentrate on singing. Whilst I liked many of the special effects, there did not seem to me to be a coherent plan to the whole "Ring" nor did it seem to me the producer had stamped any real authority on the production. Anyone who has experienced a Chereau production will remember the magnificent acting that he extracted from the singers, even if the production details were not to one's liking (I loved it). In this regard, most of the acting was a disappointment. I am not sure if this is lack of producer's authority or just that they were a fairly stolid group of German singers.

The other problem was the absence of Solti, who withdrew before the Festival began' his place being taken by a youngish German conductor, Peter Schneider. This was a disappointment to many and I felt that the musical aspects of this "RING" were frequently deficient.

IMPRESSIONS OF BAYREUTH - 1984 (Continued)

"Rheingold" - Opened with a Saggital Section through a fish tank that I found very effective and would have been even more impressed if the joins had not shown. Unfortunately, a lot of time had been spent on the technical side which left the Rhinemaidens in somewhat poor voice. Hanna Schwarz was a splendid Fricka and Loge was good. Siegmund Ninesgern I found dull as Wotan. The evening ended with a stunning Rainbow Bridge up which the Gods walked; it almost made up for the rest of the night!

"De Walkure" opened with a set reminiscent of the recent Sydney Opera House production, although, of course, on a larger scale. Matthias Holle was a menacing Hunding and Siegfried Jerusalem and Jeanine Altmeyer looked and sounded splendid as the lovers. Hildegard Behrens then lifted the evening as Brunnhilde. She is young and slim, acted well and sounded very good (whether she really should be singing the role at this stage is another matter). Was I alone in admiring the incendiary donought that carried the Valkyries down from the Roof? It subsequently became Brunnhilde's fire-surrounded rock when Wotan lit the gas. I was bowled over by the theatrical aspect of it; many people disliked it greatly.

Many of you will remember the problems with Siegfried last year, so it was a relief to know we had Manfred Jung for the whole of the "Cycle". I have heard him many times in Bayreuth and other places and while he may seem a little dull, he always gives a wholehearted performance and at least he can sing the role. Hermann Becht continued as a powerful Alberich and Erda resided in a huge womb-like wicker cage that was most effective. The final scene, with excellent singing, worked it's usual magic and sent us home excited.

In "Götterdämmerung" the singing was more patchy, with Gurtrune poor and Fasbänder as Waltraute terrible. Honour was restored by the three Norns! The forest scene looked lovely and the funeral procession was well handled, as was the final scene. Behrens sang magnificently!

The rest of the time passed in the usual Bayreuth pursuits of walking, shopping, drinking coffee, local sight-seeing and admiring German efficiency which coped well with such things as dinner for twenty at midnight or an ice cream at 2 a.m. - not good training for England.

Later, in London, I saw "The Flying Dutchman" at ENO - it was the longest and dullest evening I have spent in the theatre - such a contrast! I also saw "Tanhauser" at Covent Garden. Some people may have read of complaints about prices at Covent Garden. I can say it is no exaggeration - ticket prices were astronomical, particularly for good seats and the amount of folding money passing hands in the Bar was staggering. The production by Elijah Moshinsky seemed reminiscent in places of Wieland Wagner's sparse sets in the 50's. I enjoyed the lighting although many of the critics did not. I found the well dressed, not to say over dressed procession in the second act hard to take by someone schooled in the Australian Opera's austerity regime, nor did I think it particularly effective. Gwenneth Jones gave her usual generous performance as Elizabeth and the STAR for me, of the evening, was Thomas Allen, elegant of form and voice as Wolfram. Klaus König from East Germany sang the title role. He sang well but did seem a little dull.

IMPRESSIONS OF BAYREUTH - 1984 (Continued)

Eva Randova was a very effective Venus; Colin Davis conducted briskly.

I also saw Donald McIntyre as Scarpia in Tosca - it was the old Zefirelli production that I saw many years ago and it still wears very well.

Other musical high-lights included a wonderful Philharmonia Concert of Brahms's German Requiem conducted by Guilini that transported everyone and a Covent Garden recital by Jessye Norman. She sang French and German songs and the capacity charity gala audience was standing on chairs and cheering; the sort of singing you never expect to hear again - you just remember it!

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ITEMS OF INTEREST

1. Our member, Patricia Baillie advises members her bookshop (The Cornstalk) at 112 Glebe Point Road, Glebe has recently set up a printed music department. The bookshop specialises in books on music - musicians and related subjects. Tel (02) 660 4889.
2. For those rare Wagner records we suggest you visit "The Record Collector" at Bondi Junction Plaza, Shop 97, (Grosvenor Street entrance) you will find new issues of many notable live and studio recordings of the past, we well as the latest compact disc issues of the "Ring" and "Parsifal", "Lohengrin" and "Tristan and Isolde". Tel. (02) 389 2878.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From: Trevor O'Brien

Membership No. 261.

"Bayreuth '84"

Dear Sir,

As a newcomer to Wagner and his music, the experience of being able to attend the 1984 Bayreuth Festival was one of memorable impact. Having seen the A.O.'s productions of Wagner's operas earlier this year and enjoying them, I knew not what was in store for my senses, nor did I know of the degree of disappointment to be experienced when on two occasions I failed to obtain tickets for performances, having arrived in Bayreuth holding only seats for two operas and wanting five more.

While some may argue that it is impossible to attempt a comparison between Bayreuth and Australian productions, the thing I found myself doing was just that. We, in Australia do not receive the same audiovisual impact, that transcendence and overwhelming ability of Wagner's music to transfigure

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (Continued)

are indeed at their greatest in the surroundings that play psychological tricks; in relation to the man himself and the related historical importance of Bayreuth help to create an anticipation of quality, of something special; something that does indeed evolve throughout a performance. The overall effect of time and place does not however, blind even the younger Wagnerian from appreciating both the standard already attained here in Australia or the potential still developing within producers, directors, singers, musicians and audiences alike to extol Wagner's concepts and ideals.

Accepting the Australian conditons of isolation, youthfulness and modern provinciality, along with the still parochial attitudes of many towards not only Wagner's art but all the arts, it is a step towards viewing and receiving a greater elation and understanding from that which is presented for us; without a feeling of condescension.

BOOKING SLIP : DETAILS for DIE WALKÜRE SYDNEY AND MELBOURNE

SYDNEY:

NAME: _____ MEMBER NO. _____
ADDRESS: _____
PHONE NO: _____

Number of tickets: MEMBER \$33 per ticket (A Reserve)
NON MEMBER
CONCESSION

Please include cheque and stamped self addressed envelope

MELBOURNE:

NAME: _____ MEMBER NO. _____
ADDRESS: _____
PHONE NO: _____

Number of tickets: MEMBER Prices of tickets and/or
NON MEMBER accommodation details will
CONCESSION be available soon.

Please reserve _____ seats on coach.

RETURN THIS FORM IF INTERESTED IN THIS TOUR