

THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC
NEWSLETTER

FRONT PAGE DETAILS TO BE CHANGED BY PRINTMAIL

Registered Office: 4/22 Read Street, Waverley, 2024

No. 79, June 2000

COMING EVENTS

<i>DATE</i>	<i>EVENT</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>
June 18	Paul Curran Director, Midsummer Night's Dream, OA to talk on Wagner in Russia and his own career in opera	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
July 8	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Seminar jointly with Art Gallery Society <i>see p.4</i>	Art Gallery of NSW 10.00 am - 4.00 pm
July 23	Annual General Meeting Followed by video	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
September 5 & 8	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> SSO concert performances	Concert Hall, Opera House, 5.00 pm
September 17	Panel on <i>Götterdämmerung</i> with videos	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
October 15	Wagner Society 20th Anniversary Function: Varied Program, <i>see p.4</i>	
November 19	Video <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> . Bayreuth	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
December 10	Wagner Society Christmas Party. Walking with Wagner. Barry Walters' presentation on visiting Wagner's residences; video of Wagner's favourite walk around Tribschen.	Goethe Institut 2.00 pm

COMMITTEE 1999-2000

President	Barbara McNulty	9487 1344
Vice President and Membership Secretary	Clare Hennessy	9747 5664
Treasurer	Olive Coonan	9344 3470
Secretary	Barry Walters	9387 6642
Members	Roger Cruickshank	9357 7631
	Lindsay Knight	9550 3290
	Shirley Robertson	9707 2225
	Terence Watson	9517 2786
Public Officer	Reg Maloney	

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

I'm writing this report in the warm glow that followed our lunch to celebrate the birth of the Master, Richard Wagner. Held this year at the Women's Club, it was a very happy and successful day. Our guest speaker was Tim Calnin, the Artistic Administrator of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, who gave us some fascinating insights into the background of the *Ring* concerts the orchestra has been presenting over the last few years and which will culminate in September when we hear *Götterdämmerung*. I think we would like to thank the Women's Club, and in particular Audrey Howarth, for all their help.

As many of you know, I have just returned from leading an Opera Australia tour to Germany and Eastern Europe during which we saw some of the best Wagner performances I have ever seen. In Dresden in the beautiful Semper Opera House we saw a *Parsifal* directed by Joachim Heilmann and sung by: Jukka Rasilainen as Amfortas, Kurt Moll as Gurnemanz, Poul Elming as Parsifal, Hildegard Behrens as Kundry and Ekkehard Wlaschiha as Klingsor. The production was visually pleasing and the music was outstanding - beautifully sung, and the orchestra under the guidance of Semyon Bychkov was excellent. This was without doubt the most satisfying *Parsifal* I have seen anywhere.

Then in Berlin we saw another *Parsifal*, this time at the Deutsche Oper. This was a very modern Götz Friedrich production, which used an abstract, lined set and lighting to create the different scenes. Sung by Wolfgang Brendal, Lazlo Polgar, Robert Dean Smith, Doris Soffel and Lenus Carlson. It was a very good performance though the conductor, Christian Theilemann, took the first and third acts rather too slowly, but the second act was somewhat faster and really dramatic.

At the Staatsoper we then saw a wonderful *Tristan und Isolde* produced by Harry Kupfer and conducted by Daniel Barenboim. The set was a huge fallen angel in a graveyard - no ship - that rotated from time to time. Sung by Siegfried Jerusalem and Deborah Polaski this was a tour de force. Siegfried Jerusalem had rested his voice for some months prior to singing this role and he sang more strongly and securely than I have ever heard him, particularly in the third act when Tristan is angry as he contemplates his situation. He has lost Isolde, forfeited the trust of King Marke and is dying. In his frustration he pours out his despair and rage to Kurwenal, Andreas Schmidt. Deborah Polaski, too, was in great voice, strong, rich and creamy, a perfect foil for this Tristan. Rosemary Lang sang Brangäne with a sweetness not often heard. In every way this was an arresting performance and one I shall treasure for many years to come.

Our Annual General Meeting will be on 23rd July; please note the change of date. Several long time members of the Committee will be resigning and this will be an opportunity for members to express appreciation to them for their contributions to the smooth running of our Society. Those retiring are: Olive Coonan, Treasurer, Clare Hennessy, Membership Secretary and Barry Walters, Secretary. As well, Barbara Brady, our Newsletter editor, has resigned. Thus we shall be looking for new members for the Committee. So if you are able and interested in helping, please fill in a Nomination Form. You will be made very welcome.

Reluctantly, the Committee has resolved to ask the members, at the AGM, to approve an increase in membership fees. This increase is not related to the GST but reflects the level of our donations towards the various Wagner performances that seem to be becoming a little more frequent, and our support for the Bayreuth Scholarship. Our last increase was in the very early nineties, so I do seek your support.

My apologies for the June meeting as I am leaving next week to take a group to Berlin - the Götz Friedrich *Tristan und Isolde* this time - and then on to Helsinki for the *Ring Cycle*. However I shall be back for the AGM.

BARBARA McNULTY

ADDRESS

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence
The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc
GPO Box 4574 SYDNEY NSW 2001
Telephone: 9487 1344 (Barbara McNulty, President)
Website: <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au/>

DONATIONS

We acknowledge with grateful thanks donations from the following generous supporters:
F. & P. Harvey, N. Kaldor, B. McNulty, W. Norris, A. Ziegler

The Society welcomes all donations and they can be addressed to the Treasurer, Wagner Society in NSW Inc at the GPO address above. Such donations help us to carry out our objectives of promoting the performance of Wagner's works; for example, contributions to the *Ring Cycle* in Adelaide and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* concerts. Donations are tax-deductible and receipts will be issued.

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members:
Monica Craston, Jorge Bechara, Thomas Field, Diana Heath, Lorraine Royos.

STOP PRESS: TICKETS TO THE BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 2000

Owing to unfortunate indisposition among members allocated tickets to Bayreuth this year, three tickets to the Festival have suddenly become available. They are for the third cycle and for seven operas, beginning August 18 and ending August 26. The operas are *Parsifal*, *Meistersinger*, *Lohengrin*, *Rhinegold*, *Walkure*, *Siegfried*, *Gotterdammerung*. A pair of tickets is available at very approximately \$3000, and a single ticket at very approximately \$1500. For further details, please contact the Secretary, Barry Walters, as a matter of urgency. Barry's phone number at home is 9387 6642 (best after 4.00pm or at weekends).

Please understand that such tickets are in considerable demand world-wide, and that we are contracted to return them to the Bayreuth box-office if no member of the Wagner Society in NSW wishes to use them. Please understand, too, that preference must be given to members who respond first, with clear and certain arrangements for early payment for the tickets.

TICKETS TO BAYREUTH 2001 THROUGH THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW INC

1. Members who apply for tickets to Bayreuth for 2001 must have had their membership approved at a Committee meeting on or before 1 September 1998, and must have been financial members continuously since that date.
2. Applications must be made on the form below, signed by the applicant, and received by the Secretary no later than 1 September 2000.
3. The Society will add a service charge of \$100 per successful applicant to cover the Society's expenses and overheads in ordering and distributing the tickets, and to maintain the Society's membership of the Friends of Bayreuth. Joint successful applicants will each be charged \$100.
4. Successful applicants are responsible for the cost of the tickets once they are allocated to them by the Society. All payments must be made through the Society.
5. The Society applies for tickets to all Festival performances for each applicant, and cannot meet requests for tickets to selected performances only.
6. If the number of tickets received from the Festival Box Office is less than the number applied for, a public ballot of applicants will be conducted by members of the Committee under the supervision of the President at a regular monthly meeting of the Society.

The Festival Box Office requires that the name, address and allocated seat number for each successful applicant be sent to them. Successful applicants may be asked by Festival staff to provide identification.

7. No allocated tickets may be disposed of other than back to the Society or to the Festival Box Office in Bayreuth.
8. It is understood that all signatories to applications agree to the above rules.

**APPLICATION FORM FOR TICKETS TO THE BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 2001
through the Wagner Society in NSW Inc.**

	Applicant 1	Applicant 2
Name		
Address		
Phone (day) (night)		
Membership Number		
Signatures		

June, 2000

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ewsletter: Wagner Society in NSW Inc

FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

June 18: Paul Curran will talk about Wagner in Russia and his own extensive career as music director. Paul's productions have included *Prince Igor* for the Kirov Opera, the Domingo/Gergiev Gala at Buckingham Palace, and operas for the Covent Garden and Chicago Festivals. As associate director: operas for the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Rome Opera, the Opernhaus Zurich and the Bregenz Festival. Work directing revivals includes: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the AO at the Sydney Opera House and the Edinburgh International Festival, and *My Fair Lady* for the Victoria State Opera. He has translated Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, *The Bear*, Ostrovsky's *Bankrupt*, *Too Clever by Half* and Moliere's *The Rehearsal at Versailles*, *Images de Moliere* as well as surtitles for the operas *The Golden Cockerel* (ROH, Covent Garden) and *The Demon* (Bregenzer Festspiele). Future engagements include *The Seven Deadly Sins* with Ute Lemper at the Peacock Theatre and a revival of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Sydney.

July 8: Details of the seminar on *Götterdämmerung* at the Art Gallery were previously mailed to members. Speakers are Mr Paul Curran (on staging music dramas from a director's perspective), Mr Tim Calnin, Dr Alison Gyger (on the text), and Dr Matthew Holt (parallel music and art movements). Last minute enquires should be directed to the Treasurer, Olive Coonan, on 9344 3470, or to the Art Gallery Society on 9225 1878 (for credit card bookings).

July 23: Following the AGM a video will be presented: Solti Conducts the Chicago Symphony Orchestra - Wagner Overtures and Preludes and Berlioz *Romeo et Juliette* orchestral music.

September 17: Excerpts from video documentaries on Wagner as a prelude to panel discussion of SSO performance of *Götterdämmerung*. Videos "Hitler's Religion" a film by Petrus Van der Let and "The Great Composers: Wagner". Anyone interested in being a member of the Panel please contact Barbara McNulty or Terence Watson.

October 15: Wagner Society 20th Anniversary Members' Forum. Guest and venue to be announced in next Newsletter. Members interested in contributing to a Members' Forum on, for example, why Wagner is important for them and their involvement with Wagner productions are invited to contact Barbara McNulty or Terence Watson.

November 19: Video *Tristan und Isolde* from Bayreuth Barenboim conducting, Ponelle staging and design, Kollo, Meier, Schwarz, Salminen and Becht.

RECENT SOCIETY EVENTS

19 March: A Concert of Music by Richard and Siegfried Wagner

Members of the Wagner Society spent a most enjoyable afternoon in the air-conditioned comfort of the Eugene Goossens Hall, ABC Studios, Ultimo in mid March. The programme of Wagnerian music - Richard and his son, Siegfried - was performed by the 85 strong Sydney Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra and singers from the Vocal Studies and Opera Unit of the Conservatorium, under the baton of Maestro Carlo Felice Cillario.

Beginning with the third Act of *Lohengrin*, the audience was delighted by the competency of the young soloists. They were soprano, Jane Parkin (who has completed her Diploma of Opera at the Conservatorium), and tenor, Benjamin Makisi (who is a B. Hons graduate from New Zealand, now studying at the Conservatorium). Performing the roles of Elsa and Lohengrin in this convert production, their voices were strong and clear, and I'm sure all were impressed with their understanding of the parts they portrayed. The chorus must also be commended - their singing and movements were well-rehearsed and executed.

Following was the Prelude to Act III from 1899 *Der Bärenhäuter*, ("The Lazybones"), the first opera by the 30 year old Siegfried Wagner, who wrote 17 operas, symphonic poems, a violin concerto, and many other works. What a pity so few of these worthwhile works are heard. The orchestra gave most creditable performance of this Prelude. This concluded the first half of the concert, which was being broadcast direct to air over ABC FM.

The second half opened with a performance of Richard Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll", which he wrote as a birthday gift for his wife, Cosima, after the birth of their son, Siegfried. She woke that Christmas morning in 1869 to its strains being played by 15 instrumentalists on the stairs leading to her bedroom - then he handed her the score. A greatly reduced orchestra played this enchanting work with sympathetic understanding and gentleness, befitting the occasion for which it was written.

The program concluded with more music from Siegfried Wagner's *Der Bärenhäuter* - the Overture and "The Devil's Waltz", a robust and energetic piece, played by an enthusiastic full orchestra - well done.

Our presenter was the delightfully attractive Marion Arnold whose honeyed tones, besides announcing the items, thrilled the audience with short anecdotes about Richard Wagner - all of which added to the enjoyment of the afternoon. **ELIZABETH LONG**

22 May: Richard Wagner Birthday Luncheon. Members present found the talk by Tim Calnin, Artistic Administrator of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, interesting and enlightening. We heard about the process of casting for the wonderful series of SSO's concert performances of the *Ring* under Chief Conductor Edo de Waart. For instance, the choice of Brünnhilde's eight Valkyrie sisters required a range of voices from high soprano to alto where their singing as an ensemble was more important than individual voices. The choice of tenor for the *Siegfried* Siegfried was difficult because there was an eminent Wagnerian tenor available and at his peak. However, preference was given to a younger and not so well-known tenor whose career in Wagner was only just blossoming. To help in this selection process, Tim Calnin is able to call on the resources of overseas colleagues, agents and musical administrators. When enthusiastic recommendations were made for the Finnish tenor Jyrki Niskanen, he only needed to hear some recorded extracts to be convinced. Many of us recall that outstanding portrayal of Siegfried. Fortunately, Tim was able to illustrate his talk with a Siegmund extract and a later Siegfried recording from Jyrki Niskanen. As the President reported, this was a most enjoyable function in an elegant setting. **BARBARA BRADY**

20TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held at the Goethe Institut, 90 Ocean Street, Woollahra, on Sunday 23 July 2000 at 1.00 pm

VOTING RULES

At the Annual General Meeting the office bearers (namely, President, up to two Vice Presidents, Treasurer and Secretary) must be elected, together with four additional Committee Members if sufficient nominations are received. If the number of nominations does not exceed nine members those members are automatically declared elected to the committee. Similarly the office bearers retain their specified positions if no one else is nominated to the same position. In the case of two or more nominations to positions of office bearer a ballot will be held on the day of the annual general meeting.

Financial members may vote by proxy given to a financial member if unable to attend the annual general meeting.

If more than four members are nominated for the Committee a ballot will also need to be held.

NOMINATIONS AND PROXY FORMS SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY FRIDAY 7th JULY 2000

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PROXY FORM

The Secretary, The Wagner Society in NSW Inc, GPO BOX 4574, SYDNEY, NSW 2001

I,

(Member's name)

of

(Member's address)

Membership number.....

Member's signature.....

cannot attend the 20th Annual General Meeting to be held on 23 July 2000 but nominate as my proxy to vote for me

.....

(Proxy's name)
who is a current financial member of the Society

(Address).....

.....(Date)

NOMINATION FORM

The Secretary, The Wagner Society in NSW Inc
GPO Box 4574, SYDNEY NSW 2001

We, the undersigned members, hereby propose and second respectively:

.....

for election as

.....

or a member of the committee of the Wagner Society in NSW Inc.

Date.....

Signed.....
(Proposer)

Signed.....
(Seconder)

Signed.....
(Nominated member)

=====

NOTICE OF MOTION

The Secretary, Wagner Society in NSW Inc
GPO Box 4574, Sydney, NSW 2001

I/we will be attending the Annual General Meeting on 23July 2000 and would like the following motion to be placed on the agenda for discussion under general business:

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.....

Name:

.....

Membership number.....

WAGNER AT THE ENO (extract from press release)

English National Opera will mount a new Ring Cycle, conducted by Paul Daniel, directed by Phyllida Lloyd and designed by Anthony Ward. The Company is preparing this important undertaking in the following stages: *The Rhinegold* in Concert, January 2001; *The Valkyrie* in Concert, September 2001; *The Ring Cycle* in Concert, Autumn 2002; *The Rhinegold* new production, Autumn 2003; *The Valkyrie* new production, Spring 2004; *Siegfried* new production, Autumn 2004; *Twilight of the Gods* new production, Spring 2005. *The Ring* complete Cycle, Autumn 2005 .

HISTORIC OPERAS ON CD-ROM

Opera-Opera (Sydney), May 2000, has alerted us to the release of a series of operas on CD-Rom, after the fashion of the *Ring Disc*. The series is entitled *Audio Encyclopedia*, compiled by Mike Richter. Three of these cover Wagner operas. They are AE#003: *Richard Wagner Complete Operas*; AE#203: *Opera from Bayreuth*, and AE#301: *From Which We Came* - which includes an abbreviated *Ring des Nibelungen* from 1924 in English with Florence Austral as Brünnhilde. Order and pricing information is on the Web at <http://mrichter.simplenet.com>

CONCERT PERFORMANCE OF GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

We have been advised by the SSO that tickets will definitely be released in June for distribution to those members who have reserved and paid for them.

For those who don't have the Symphony 2000 guide, the principals are: Edo de Waart - Conductor, Heinz Kruse - Siegfried, Elizabeth Connell - Brünnhilde, Peter Coleman-Wright - Gunther, Kurt Rydl - Hagen, Gwynne Geyer - Guttrune, Elizabeth Campbell - Waltraute and Ekkehard Wlaschihl - Alberich.

Members' Market

Members of the Wagner Society in NSW are invited to use this space to advertise for sale or purchase secondhand Wagnerian recordings and publications. There is no charge, but please limit advertisements to fifty words.

NOTICE OF MOTION FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:

(moved by the President at the April Committee Meeting, and carried)

“That annual membership fees be increased as follows, effective from 1 April 2001: Single Membership to be \$50, Shared Membership (defined as two adults

living at the same address) \$75, Pensioner Membership \$30, Student Membership \$20.”

OPERA REVIEWS
THE *RING* AT THE MET.

New York in spring is a lovely sight with cherry blossom trees and dogwoods out and massed displays of tulips flowering in garden beds and tubs. The Big Apple has shaken off its reputation as a scary and dangerous place to be, and my daughter and I were able to walk around with equanimity.

We were in Manhattan to see Wagner's *Ring* Cycle at the Met. It was my second *Ring* Cycle as I had gone to Adelaide in 1998 and it was an introduction to Wagner for my daughter.

As we approached the Lincoln Centre on the first day I could see the beautiful chandelier in the foyer of the Metropolitan Opera with the Chagall tapestries on either side. I almost had to pinch myself to believe that I was at this holiest of opera houses. We collected our tickets which had been organised from Sydney and I was hugely relieved to find that we had been allocated excellent seats which afforded a perfect view and excellent sound. Reading the cast list from the programme which was given out free each night was enough to make any opera buff excited. The main roles were: James Morris - Wotan, Deborah Voight - Sieglinde, Placido Domingo - Siegmund, Jane Eaglen - Brünnhilde, Graham Clarke - Mime, Richard Paul Fink - Alberich, Sergei Koptchak - Fafner, Felicity Palmer - Waltraute and Fricka, Eric Halfvarson - Hagen and Fasolt, Sondra Radvanovsky - Guttrune and Freia, Alan Held - Gunter, Philip Langridge - Loge, Kristinn Sigmundsson - Hunding, Birgitta Svenden - Erda, Heidi Grant Murphy - The Forest Bird and Wolfgang Neumann (for our cycle) was Siegfried. In the other two cycles, Danish tenor Stig Andersen made his Met debut as Siegfried and I was sorry not to hear him.

This traditional production had been done last in 1997 and the story I heard was that this is to be the final season. The special effects are quite unbelievable and more like the sort of thing we are used to seeing in a Hollywood movie. With a budget four times that of San Francisco and Chicago (the Met's rivals in the USA) and a huge stage, the Met is able to deliver spectacle on a grand scale.

The first impression of the house as you enter is that it is large (seating 3,800) and lovely – as you might expect an opera house to be. The décor is a rich crimson colour and the orchestral pit seems enormous. Not all seats have good views and I was told that there were some seats very high up with small lights, which were sold to people who wanted to follow with a score. Each seat had its own titles that could be activated by pressing a red button if desired. As a result, it seemed that a lot more of the libretto was shown than we would normally expect to see in the Sydney Opera House where the surtitles are projected above the stage. On a more practical note, we appreciated the fact that there were water fountains with paper cone shaped drinking cups available, to dispense water free of charge.

When the Austrian Lobmeyr snowflake chandeliers were dimmed and raised, the house became quiet and quite dark and then a small podium light lit the desk for maestro James Levine, and the spell began with the deep E flat from the double basses that all Wagner aficionados know so well. The magic continued over the four nights. Levine was completely in control throughout - the orchestra was magnificent and the singers never had to battle against the sound from the pit.

Das Rheingold was visually beautiful and the Rhinemaidens (Woglinde - Joyce Guyer, Wellgunde - Kristine Jepson, Flosshilde - Jane Bunnell) appeared to be swimming in the water as they sang about the Rhinegold (“Heiajaheia”). James Morris was universally praised for his consistent excellence as Wotan, King of The Gods.

For me, the most memorable scene of the entire cycle occurred in the Act 1 love duet of *Die Walküre* where Deborah Voight as Sieglinde and Placido Domingo as Siegmund, achieved a perfect balance singing their roles while looking and acting convincingly. The large doors at the back of the set burst open to reveal the moonlit forest at the climax of the duet and the audience responded with huge applause and many curtain calls for these two great artists. It is interesting to note that on the following night Domingo conducted *La Boheme*. I should also mention that at the end of Act 11 the curtain came down about twenty bars before the end and maestro Levine was not happy! There was plenty of discussion at interval about the incident (patrons are not reticent about expressing their views) and the consensus was that somebody probably lost their job!

In Act 1 of *Siegfried* stretto-like rhythms lead up to the Forging Song (“Nothung! neidliches Schwert!”), which takes place complete with more splendid visual effects. The dragon scene in Act 11 is also quite realistic. There was concern that Wolfgang Neumann was showing some signs of strain singing the dramatic tenor title role and that he might not have the staying power. However, on the final night in *Gotterdammerung*, he demonstrated that he had the power and stamina to cope with the great closing scene with Brunnhilde where the hero and heroine are permitted to sing at the same time, more in the tradition of Italian opera.

English born dramatic soprano Jane Eaglen is regarded as the most promising Wagnerian soprano since Birgit Nilsson and this has certainly been her season at the Met. (During the autumn, she sang Isolde.) Her voice is enormous and as Brunnhilde in the immolation scene in *Gotterdammerung*, she soars above the orchestra, seemingly without effort. It appears that in this season she has established herself as a great Wagnerian soprano who sings the trills and *gruppetti* beautifully and for whom a top C holds no fear at all. Not only does she hit it but she also sustains it. At the end of *Gotterdammerung*, when Brunnhilde throws herself on the funeral pyre that she has ordered to be prepared for Siegfried, the stage once again appears to be on fire and the Gibichung Hall collapses, as though hit by an earthquake. As the Hall and Valhalla is consumed by the flames, the Rhine floods and we see the Rhinemaidens swimming beneath the water, having regained their Ring. Shadowy figures appear briefly, as if surveying the death and destruction of a great city from yesteryear.

June, 2000

There was complete silence until the last note and then the audience went wild with applause and shouts of “Bravo!”

We saw touts waving dollar bills in the hope of securing tickets to *Die Walküre* and one poor hopeful holding a placard aloft requesting a ticket for *Götterdämmerung*. There did not appear to be any takers! But surely they are proof that the *Ring* still has something to say to modern audiences. There can be no doubt that Wagner’s music will endure for as long as there are artists to perform it and an audience to hear it.

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his book *London Music in 1888 - 89*, George Bernard Shaw mentions that to go to Bayreuth for a single performance “costs a Londoner five days’ absence and 12 pounds out of pocket.” For an Australian to go to the Met takes a week’s absence and never mind how much out of pocket because it was an absolutely unforgettable experience!

JAN BATES

SOME WAGNER NIGHTS

The performances described below were attended as part of a roundtheworld trip in March and April 2000. The notes are elaborations of diary entries made at the time. They thus have the benefit of immediacy, if they lack the polish of a detailed review.

Der fliegende Holl_nder Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Friday 24th March 7.30pm
Bernd Weigl [Holl_nder], Solveig Kringelborn [Senta], Kim Begley [Eric], Anne Wilkens [Mary], Kurt Moll [Daland], Timothy Robinson [Steersman]. Conducted by Simone Young. Directed by Ian Judge, Sets John Gunter, Costumes Deirdre Clancy.

We had seen this production in 1992, when it was new, starring Julia Varady and James Morris. Unfortunately the ROH imposed 2 intervals for these performances; in 1992 it was uninterrupted. This was a shame, as the production was designed to be performed without intervals, the transformations between Acts forming an integral part of the concept. The main feature of the set is a large square revolve, which also lifts and tilts, sufficient to make one almost seasick. Apparently the introduction of intervals was due to an accident at rehearsals, although a less charitable explanation is the revenue generated from interval bar and food sales. For those familiar with cramped interval facilities at the ROH, the new house is a delight, with the Vilar Floral Hall magnificent. The auditorium is hardly changed, apart from airconditioning and the raking of the stalls.

Overall we found the performance enjoyable, but not great, with all the singers (and the conductor) flawed. Weigl had a good anguished interpretation, but he was rather underpowered and was also suffering from a cold. Kringelborn had a powerful piercing voice but had some problems with her lower register and in the colour. We felt that Senta was not suitable for her voice [the programme described one of her roles as Fiordiligi!]. She portrayed Senta [as did Varady in 1992] as deranged. Begley [an old ROH hand] was a bit woolly, Wilkens was a bit weak, Moll was good but wobbly, Robinson good but a rather thin tone. Young was dramatic but made the orchestration seem rather heavy, and also was excessively loud.

Tannh_user Vienna Staatsoper, Thursday 30th March 7pm
Angela Denoke [Elisabeth], Waltraud Meier [Venus], Kurt Rydl [Landgraf], Wolfgang Schmidt [Tannh_user], Wolfgang Brendel [Wolfram]. Conducted by Peter Schneider, Directed by Otto Schenk, Designer G_nther SchneiderSiemssen.

This beautiful production we had seen before, at the Met in New York [it is available on video]. Like Schenk/SchneiderSiemssens' other Wagner productions, it is based on 3 revolutionary ideas first, that Wagner had some experience in stage direction, and that therefore his instructions are to be respected if possible, secondly, that the production and direction should be consonant with the music rather than in direct opposition to it, and thirdly, that singers will give more convincing and dramatic interpretations if irrelevant stage business is eliminated. The same team also designed the Vienna *Holl_nder* [see below] and the Met Ring [see other review].

This was an excellent performance of a beautiful production. The score used is the Paris version, although the Dresden version is used in the song contest. Meier had a beautiful rich voice, like dark chocolate. Denoke was a sharp contrast, a rather oldfashioned sound but a beautiful legato line, particularly effective in the Act 3 prayer. Schmidt was good, with his usual weaknesses of being too loud [he only recognises f and ff] and a rather coarse sound. As some readers may be aware, this singer has had severe vocal problems in the past. We have had mixed experiences; in 1997 he was terrible, consistently singing sharp in *Götterdämmerung* at the Met, but in 1999 he was fantastic in Siegfried at San Francisco, with clear ringing heldentenor tones. Here his Act 1 song was a bit crude [although the tessitura of this, going up a semitone each time, is a strain for any tenor], but the dramatic side was good. He was particularly effective in Act 3, providing a tense Pilgrimage Narration. The conducting was quite good, with the score well paced.

Die Walküre Vienna Staatsoper, Sunday 2nd April 5pm

Waltraud Meier [Sieglinde], Gabriele Schnaut [Br_nnhilde], Marjana Lipov_ek [Fricka], Poul Elming [Siegmond], Matti Salminen [Hunding], John Tomlinson [Wotan]. Conducted by Donald Runnicles, Directed by Adolf Dresen, Designer Herbert Kapplmüller.

The performance was good but not great, with very mixed performances, some great, others woeful. The production is semitradeational, although rather devoid of ideas. One clever effect is that Act I is set in a large wigwam, which then collapses for the 'Winterstürme'. However, this coupdetheatre is repeated in Acts II and III, devaluing its impact. For the magic fire scene, paper shreds are blown in the air with a red light behind. As the paper supply ran out before the end, the impact was bathetic rather than pathetic.

Elming was better than we expected [we heard him in the same role in 1994 at Covent Garden, when he ran out of voice before the end of Act I] with a pleasing dark voice and handsome looks. The voice is still not particularly exciting, and his wooden acting doesn't help. Tomlinson is a singer we have experienced several times over the last 6 years, and we find him execrable. Normally we would avoid any performances he is giving. To be fair, he gained enormous applause from the rest of the audience. From our perspective, he barked his way through most of the role, with many notes only receiving a vague approximation, and he proved incapable of singing more than one note cleanly in succession. In addition, his interpretation of Wotan involved running around the stage and some gross overacting. Basta! Salminen was excellent, with a black sound. Lipovsek was

superb, making Act II Scene 2 very exciting. Schnaut had ringing tones, with a few imperfections, a firm rather than an exciting portrayal Meier was fantastic, every note beautiful and excellent characterisation she literally ran rings round Elming. Runnicles and the orchestra were excellent.

Der fliegende Holländer Vienna Staatsoper, Monday 3rd April 5pm
 Elisabeth Meyer-Tosco [Senta], Matti Salminen [Daland], Glenn Winslade [Erik], Oskar Hillebrandt [Holl_nder]. Conducted by Fabio Luisi, Directed by Wolfgang Zerner, Designer Gntner Schneider-Siemssen.

We were scheduled to hear Elizabeth Connell and Wolfgang Brendel, but first she announced illness and he then pulled out [in sympathy?]. Meyer-Tosco was rather underpowered, particularly in the Ballad, but subsequently improved. Like Kingelborn in London, the voice did not sound suitable for Senta. Oskar Hillebrandt was extremely underpowered as the Dutchman. It was interesting to hear Winslade, an Australian we have not previously encountered, who gave a very good performance as Erik, with a nice line and colour and a strong voice. The production, by Schneider-Siemssen, was excellent, and followed Wagner's directions precisely. For example, twice the ghost ship had different weather to the real one, in Act I enjoying calm weather and sea in contrast to the storm, the effect being reversed in Act III. The conducting was good, a major improvement on London, with many effective details, particularly the piccolo. There was one interval, after Act I.

RICHARD MASON

THE RAVENS REPORTING, COMPILED BY CAMRON DYER

This list does not cumulate and should be read in conjunction with Newsletters No.77 and 78. There is also a comprehensive list in chronological order on the Society's Website.

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| Adelaide | <i>Parsifal</i> September 22, 26, 29, 2001. |
| Bayreuth | <i>Parsifal</i> July 25, August 3, 7, 18, 2000.
<i>The Ring</i> July 26, 27, 29, 31; August 10, 11, 13, 15; 21, 22, 24, 26, 2000.
<i>Lohengrin</i> August 2, 5, 8, 17, 20, 28, 2000.
<i>Die Meistersinger</i> August 1, 4, 9, 16, 19, 27, 2000. |
| Buenos Aires | <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> September 26, 28, October 1, 3, 6, 2000. |
| Chicago | <i>Holl_nder</i> February 10, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, March 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 2001. |
| Dallas | <i>Siegfried</i> January 11, 14, 17, 20, 2001. |
| Dresden | <i>Holl_nder</i> September 14, 17, 30, 2000.
<i>Lohengrin</i> March 11, 18, April 19, 22, 2001.
<i>Parsifal</i> April 13, 16, 2001.
<i>Die Meistersinger</i> April 28, May 1, June 13, 17, 2001.
<i>Rienzi</i> May 27, June 1, 4, 2001 [concert].
<i>Tannh_user</i> June 20, 24, 27, 2001. |
| Duisberg | <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> June 17, 22, 2000. |
| Edinburgh | <i>Das Rheingold</i> August 21, 23, 26, 28, 2000. |
| Karlsruhe | <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> October 1, 2000 [no other dates]
<i>Die Walk_re</i> November 5, 2000 [no other dates]
<i>Lohengrin</i> July 7, 2001. |
| Karlstad | <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> September 21, 24, 28, October 1, 4, 7, 10, 14, 25, 28,
November 5, 11, 18, 24, 28, December 5, 9, 13, 16, 2000. |

- London The Royal Opera
Tristan und Isolde October 14, 17, 21, 24, 30 November 3, 9, 2000.
ENO
Das Rheingold January 26, 2001 [concert, new cycle begins]
Die Walk_re September 2001 [concert, no date]
- Longborough *Siegfried* June 23, 25, July 1, 2000.
- Munich *Die Meistersinger* September 17, 2000, July 31, 2001.
Tannh_user November 22, 26, 30, December 3, 2000, July 21, 24, 2001.
Parsifal April 8, 11, 16, 20, 2001.
Lohengrin May 5, 9, 13, 2001.
Tristan und Isolde June 7, 10, 14, 2001.
- M_nster *Das Rheingold* May 10, 2001 [no other dates]
Die Walk_re February 18, 2001 [no other dates]
Siegfried April 22, 2001 [no other dates]
G_tterd_mmerung April 14, 2001 [no other dates]
- New York The Met
Holl_nder November 24, 28, December 1, 4, 8, 13, 16, 20, 2000.
Parsifal March 29, April 2, 7, 10, 13, 2001.
- Nuremberg *Die Meistersinger* November 26, December 3, 9, 16, 30, 2000.
- Paris Bastille
Parsifal February 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 2001.
- Stuttgart *The Ring* Sept 21, 22, 23, 24; 29, 30, Oct 1, 3; Nov 24, 26, Dec 2,3, 2000
- Vienna *Rienzi* October 11, 14, 2000, March 13, 17, 2001.
Tristan und Isolde October 8, 12, 16, 2000, May 1, 5, 2001.
Holl_nder November 27, 30, December 4, 2000.
Lohengrin November 24, 28, December 3, 2000, March 6, 10, 2001.
Das Rheingold February 27, 2001.
The Ring March 14, 18, 25, April 1, 2001.
Parsifal April 12, 15, 18, 2001.
Die Walk_re May 10, 13, 2001.
Tannh_user June 15, 19, 22, 2001.
- Washington DC
Parsifal November 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 2000.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED: The Society acknowledges with thanks receipt of the following publications from Wagner societies and related organisations: *Kulturchronik* (Goethe Institut) No.6, 1999 & No. 1, 2000; *Leitmotive* (Wagner Soc. of Northern California) Vol. 13, No. 2, Summer 1999; *News and Notes* (Northern California) Vol. 4 No. 4-Vol. 5 No. 1, Dec. 1999-March 2000; *Newsletter* (Richard Wagner Society of South Australia) Nos.134-135, Mar-May. 2000; *Newsletter* (Wagner Society of New Zealand) Vol.3 No. 1, Apr. 2000; *Notes* (Opera Foundation Australia) No. 4, Mar. 2000; *Richard Wagner Nachrichten* (Richard Wagner Gesellschaft, Austria), Jahr.12, Folge 1-2, Feb-Juni 2000; Richard Wagner Society (Victoria), various notices; *Wagner Notes* (Wagner Society of New York) Vol. 23 Nos.1-2, Feb-Apr 2000; and *Wagner News* (Toronto Wagner Society) Vol 11, No. 4.