

The Wagner Society



NEWSLETTER No.92, June 2003

IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

President's Report

Dear Members

Recent Functions

2003 marks both the 190th anniversary of Wagner's birth, and the 120th anniversary of his death. Our inaugural function in February was a talk by Professor Michael Ewans entitled "Wagner in Perspective - 120 Years after the Master's Death", which surveyed the range of his contributions, the passionate views for and against which he still arouses, and his continuing relevance. Professor Ewans is an honorary life member of the Society, and his talk - which itself aroused some passionate responses - will be published as an occasional paper to mark this year's importance for us. Professor Ewans has just completed a book entitled "The Greeks in Opera", and I'll let you know when this is available.

To prepare for this year's major Wagner event in Sydney, Opera Australia's production of "*Die Meistersinger von Niirnberg*", at our March function we showed a DVD of Götz Friedrich's production for the Deutsche Oper Berlin, conducted by Rafael Fruhbeck de Burgos. This was the first DVD we have shown using the Goethe Institut's new audio-visual equipment, and the increased clarity of the picture and sound when compared with the videos we have shown was astounding. In response to frequent requests, the DVD was shown with English subtitles, which I found to be a mixed blessing. Sitting at the back of the room I could hardly read them through all the heads in front bobbing and weaving, and in the end I gave up trying. Our thanks to Cecilia Segura, who provided the DVD.

The traditional Palm Sunday Parsifal meeting this year was a little untraditional, with a talk by Antony Ernst in place of a video production. While Antony demurred when I introduced him as "controversial", his talk inspired some heated debate during our normally placid afternoon tea. Antony discussed aspects of a number of possible interpretations, including Kundry's Jewish past as Herodias, the sin of mixed blood (Kundry's with Parsifal's pure Aryan), Titurel as God the Father (and his Nietzschean death), Amfortas as Christ, the Redeemer redeemed. One member has responded to some of the issues Antony discussed, and this may appear in a future issue of the Newsletter.

On 23 May we held our annual celebration of Richard Wagner's 190th birthday at the Women's Club. Guest speaker was Bill Gillespie, who told us how hearing Wagner's music as a student led him to a career in opera, rather than the other way round. While those who attended had an enjoyable time, numbers were down on previous years, and for the first time we didn't make the minimum number for the Women's Club. We will need to rethink the format of the function in future.

Future functions

We will not be having functions at the Goethe Institut in September or November. In September, members are invited to attend a master class to be given on Tuesday 9 September at the NSW Conservatorium of Music by the renowned Wagnerian bass, Sir Donald McIntyre. Sir Donald is a guest speaker at a Ring Cycle seminar in Adelaide on the weekend of September 6 and 7, which has been organised by the State Opera of South Australia as part of their preparation for the 2004 Adelaide Ring, and will be in Sydney after the seminar on his way back to New Zealand. The master class will be open to the public, and the cost will be \$10 for Wagner Society members. More details of the master class will be available in the Winter Newsletter which will be mailed out in August.

On Sunday 16 November, we will hold our function at the premises of Mr Denis Condon, 47 Station Street, Newtown. Mr Condon has an extensive collection of pianos and rolls - Ampico, Duo-Art, Welte (red, green and licensee) - and a Yamaha Disklavier. Some members will recall a similar function held in 1994, when Mr Condon gave an introduction

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PATRON:	Sir Charles Mackerras
HONOURARY LIFE MEMBERS:	Prof. Michael Ewans, Mr Richard King, Mr Horst Hoffmann, Mr Joseph Ferfaglia

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Registered Office: 3/46 Shirley Road, Wollstonecraft, NSW 2065

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Meetings **Dates** & Coming **Events**

DATE	EVENTS - 2003	LOCATION
Saturday June 7	Meistersinger Seminar at the Art Gallery of NSW, starting at 10am. Speakers include Antony Ernst, Dr Sally Kester and Arthur Lawrence. Tickets are \$50 for members (\$55 for non-members) including lunch, and they can be bought when you renew your annual membership, or by contacting Roger Cruickshank. (Name tags will be available for members.)	Domain Theatre Art Gallery of NSW 10:00am
Saturday July 5	Meistersinger presentation at the State Library of NSW starting at 10am. Speaker is Professor Heath Lees, president of the Wagner Society of New Zealand. Tickets are \$35, including lunch, and can be bought when you renew your annual membership, or by contacting Roger Cruickshank. (Name tags will be available for members.)	Metcalfe Auditorium State Library of NSW (entry from Macquarie Street) 10.00am-2:00pm
Sunday July 20	24th AGM, followed by video of a gala concert in Vienna recorded in 19XX, with (singers) conducted by Sir Georg Solti to celebrate his 80th birthday	Goethe Institut 1.00 PM
August	No function	
Tuesday September 9	Members are invited to attend a masterclass, to be conducted by Sir Donald McIntyre, world-renown Wagnerian bass. Tickets will be \$10 for Wagner Society members (on production of your current membership card.)	Conservatorium of Music (time and venue T.B.A.)
Sunday October 19	Adelaide Ring 2004 - prepare for this important event with talks about aspects of the Cycle. Beginning with Dr Terence Watson - Power in the Ring Part 2. Other speakers to be advised in the next Newsletter.	Goethe Institut 1.00 PM
November 16	Wagner Player Piano Recital - Dennis Condon - details of the music in the next Newsletter	47 Station Street, Newtown 1:00PM
Sunday December 7	End-of-year party, preceded by documentary on New York's private Amato Opera Company, a labour of love for Sally and Anthony Amato.	Goethe Institut 1.00 PM
Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)		

* We will try to find subtitled performances for videos, but not all recordings include them, so please feel free to bring a libretto to help with following performances.

Committee **2002-2003** As elected at the Annual General Meeting 21 July 2002

President and Membership Secretary	Roger Cruickshank	9357 7631
Vice President & Secretary	Barbara McNulty OBE	9487 1344
Vice President	Julian Block	9337 6978
Treasurer	Elle Rasink	9369 1779
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	Colin Jones	9665 0059
	Dennis Mather	9560 1860
	Monica Olave	9879 5209
Newsletter Editor	Terence Watson	9517 2786
Public Officer	Peter Nicholson	9436 1097



President's Report continued

to mechanical musical reproduction, and played piano rolls of works by Wagner and his contemporaries. This is a unique resource lovingly preserved, and I hope that you will make the most of this opportunity to listen to these unique recorded performances.

Edo de Waart's farewell Wagner performance

A theatre party from the Society attended the final Wagner performance by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under Edo de Waart. Entitled "Ride of the Valkyries", the concert included the Siegfried Idyll and a concert performance of the third Act of *Die Walküre*. I exhausted my superlatives for the Perth *Götterdämmerung* performances in February, and didn't expect to have to dust them off again this year, but I was very wrong. With Elizabeth Connell and Bruce Martin (standing in at short notice), and the SSO in unusually fine form, the performance was superb. I was a tourist to Sydney in the 80s when I first saw Martin's Wotan in the *Walküre* with Rita Hunter, which was the final stage of the ill-fated AO Ring, and those memories came flooding back. I am looking forward to hearing his Hans Sachs! For a concert performance, there were moments of real emotion, for example when Elizabeth Connell looked tenderly into Bruce Martin's eyes and briefly took his hand, before he musically kissed away her divinity. But the evening belonged to Edo de Waart, who has in his 10 year tenure with the SSO brought quality Wagner to a wide Australian audience. In this farewell performance, I was almost willing to forgive him his love affair with off-stage microphones and gimmickry, which I found so annoying in the past. Bruce Martin didn't need a microphone to sing "Steh, Brünnhild!" off-stage, and we didn't need the electronic sounds of thunder either. I was overcome with such affection for de Waart by the end of the performance that I almost willed him to annoy me one last time by filling the Concert Hall with the soft glow of Loge's fire licking the insides of those great sails – and he didn't! We must wait and see whether his successor keeps Wagner in the SSO's repertoire and at the same intensity.

The strange case of Herr Wagner's Steinway

2003 is the 150th anniversary year for Steinway pianos, and three historical Steinways made a brief visit to Sydney, being displayed in the foyer of the Angel Place Recital Hall on May 28 and 29. At first we were told that one of these historical Steinways was currently owned by the Wagner family and had been played by Richard Wagner in the late 1870s, but this couldn't be confirmed. The Steinway people suggested that this piano be delivered to the birthday dinner at the Women's Club, but the dinner was held on the day the pianos arrived in Sydney, and this dream arrangement did not eventuate.

Doctor Michael Bookalil

I regret to report that one of our foundation members, Doctor Michael Bookalil, has passed away. Doctor Bookalil joined the Society on 26 October 1980, and was member number 2.

Membership renewals

A reminder to those of you who have not renewed that now is the time to do so.

"Mark-up" on theatre bookings

When we organise theatre parties to concerts, we generally add a small handling fee and donation to the Society, which is included in the cost of tickets for members. In the past these amounts may not have been clearly disclosed, and some members have asked why there has been a discrepancy between the price we charge and the cost shown on the tickets they receive. For example, members pay \$165 for our theatre party tickets to *Meistersinger* on 5 July. We will pay Opera Australia \$156 for each ticket, and the balance, \$9, is a handling fee / donation for the Society. In future, we will disclose the actual ticket costs and associated fee / donation.

Roger Cruickshank 20 May 2003

Donations

The Society welcomes all donations and they can be addressed to the Treasurer, Wagner Society in NSW Inc, GPO Box 3282, Sydney NSW 2001. Such donations help us to carry out our objectives of promoting the performance of Wagner's works. Donations are tax-deductible and receipts will be issued. Donations have gratefully been received from the following members: Naomi Kaldor, Andrew and Wendy Hamlin, Despina and Iphigenia Kallinikos, Kenneth Reed, Ian and Barbara Brady, Sybil Baer, Pam and Ian McGaw, Willi and Hannah Spiller, Mitzi Saunders, Sandy and Phil Dudgeon, Anna-Lisa Klettenberg, Barbara McNulty, Isolde Tornya, Nance Grant, Walter Norris, Miriam Harris, Vanessa King, Sue Gillies, Ross Whitelaw, Helen Grant, Sandra Beesley, Bill Brooks and Alasdair Beck, Terence Watson, Nicholas and Barbara Dorsch, Richard Mason

and Camron Dyer, Margaret Budge, Alan Hauserman and Janet Nash, Annie Marshall, Ingrid Garofali, Ian Maxwell, Julian and Rosemary Block, Peter and Heather Roland, Aliro and Monica Olave, Judy Ferfoggia, Cherry Jackaman, Neville Pollard, Marie Hiscock, Jennifer Ferns, Bruce Love, Nizza Siano, Penelope Seidler, Diana-Rose Orr, Annie Marshall, Mary Haswell, Heinz Ebert, Jan Bowen.

New Members

Lorna Martin (891), Dr Greg Watters (892), Dr William Felbel (893), Prof Frank Roy and Mrs Norma Patricia Hodson (894) and Dr Lourdes St George (895). Would new members please make themselves known to Committee Members at Society events to facilitate introductions? [Ed]



For Your Diary

<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	Conductor - Simone Young; Hans Sachs - Bruce Martin; Walther von Stolzing – Jürgen Müller; Sixtus Beckmesser – Michael Lewis; Miriam Gordon-Stewart; David – Steve Davislim; Fritz Lothner – Warwick Fyfe. See the March Newsletter for application form.	Capitol Theatre, Haymarket Sydney – July 2, 5, 8, 11, 16, 19 2003
<i>The Ring Cycle</i>	State Opera of South Australia announces the production team for Wagner's Ring Cycle - Adelaide 2004	Adelaide 17 Nov to 11 Dec

Guild Hall Music Ltd

Speaking of recordings of Wagner's music, members may want to follow up with the Guild Historical series of Wagner recordings. The Immortal Performances Recorded Music Society, according to the brochure, is a "non-profit, federally chartered, educational organisation that archives broadcast and rare recordings not generally available to the public....some of the greatest singers of the century have a recorded legacy preserved on broadcast recordings that are unknown or unavailable. This great cultural legacy, which IPRMS administers, should be made available to music lovers in the best sound and finest presentation achievable. Guild Hall has embarked on the project of making these important recordings available in their Historical Series."

The Ring Cycle is available in what the Guild Hall modestly calls "The Dream Ring". The brochure details their Wagner project as "to introduce the lover of Wagner's great art to performances they have either not heard or heard in poor-sounding editions (if they know of their existence at all) in albums that offer extensive notes about the singers and the performance, rare pictorials and biographies.

Their Ring Cycle features singers such as, for example, Friedrich Schnorr (as Wotan), Karin Branzell (as Fricka), Lauritz Melchior (as Siegmund and Siegfried), Kirsten Flagstad (as Brünnhilde) in performances conducted by Bodansky and Leinsdorf. As well as the Ring, Guild Hall offers *Tannhäuser* (Act III with Melchior, Müller and Janssen), *Tristan und Isolde* (Act III with Melchior, Ljungberg, Janssen, Giszalewicz and Andresen), *Götterdämmerung* (complete, with Melchior, Traubel, Janssen, Ernster, Resnick, Harshaw, Pechner) and *Parsifal* (Act II with Melchior, Flagstad, Gabor - Metropolitan Opera 1938).

There are many other historical performances of other operas, including *Elektra*, *Boris Godounov*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* and a series of recordings by Toscanini. Their website lists Arturo Toscanini in an all Wagner concert with selections from *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung* from 1941 and 1947.

If you are interested in finding out more about these recordings you can write to Guild Hall Ltd at

Wiesholz 42b, 8262 Ramsen, Switzerland
(Tel: (41) 52 743 16 00; Fax: (41) 52 743 15 53); email to guildmusic@bluewin.ch or visit their website: www.guildmusic.com. [Ed]

Death of John Shaw at the age of 81

The Sydney Morning Herald of 4 March 2003 reported that "John Shaw, one of Australia's most successful and dynamic opera singers, has died at the age of 81." The Herald listed the famous singers John Shaw sang with in his career, including "Maria Callas, Victoria de los Angeles, Birgit Nilsson, Regine Crespin, Leontyne Price, Joan Sutherland, Leonie Rysanek, Regina Resnik, Grace Bumbry, Jan Peerce, Jussi Bjorling, Jon Vickers, Carlo Bergonzi, Luigi Alva, Tito Gobbi, and Renato Capecchi". The Herald article also noted that: "When Georg Solti became musical director at Covent Garden in 1962, Shaw's Wagnerian potential was explored and he ultimately sang Telramund in *Lohengrin* (under Klemperer), and Gunther in *Götterdämmerung* and Amfortas in *Parsifal*." Our condolences to the family and our thanks to John Shaw for many memorable performances during his seasons in Australia.

Congratulations to Paul Curran

On a happier note, Paul Curran, along with Jeffery Tate, has been awarded the prestigious 22nd Franco Abbiati prize for outstanding opera production ["la messinscena rigorosa e fiabesca del regista scozzese Paul Curran"] for his work on last's season's *Königskinder* by Engelbert Humperdinck at the Teatro San Carlo di Napoli. The report (for those of you who read Italian) can be found at: <http://www.serrajotto.it/critici/news.htm>. Congratulations to Paul and we look forward to another interesting talk from him.



Les Grooms - The Threepenny Ring - Perth Festival Golden Anniversary

The fabulous *Götterdämmerung* performances were not the only Wagner on offer during this year's 50th Festival in Perth. I was lucky enough to catch the final performance of a French busking group called Les Grooms [Bellboys] who promised - and delivered - the entire Ring Cycle in 78 minutes, including one of the most impressive apocalypses I've ever seen! This performance took place two nights before *Götterdämmerung* in Mandurah's Boardwalk theatre - about an hour's drive south of Perth. It came close to trumping the Golden Anniversary *Götterdämmerung* performance. Strictly speaking, the performance was in the back stage area under a tent that accommodated about 300 people sitting on the floor or chairs.

We were ushered into this unexpected venue by the eight Bellboys themselves, dressed in uniforms donated to them in an hour of need by a Parisian hotel that was changing its corporate style [there will be a photograph of the group on the Society's website.] They are very fetching red double-breasted jackets with gold buttons, black pants and the traditional bellboy round cap. The jackets and caps were soon abandoned as the group threw itself into the challenge of retelling the entire Ring story in 78 minutes. Lest you think that this was a frivolous "send up" of the Ring, the work was commissioned by a representative of The Barbican Theatre, who had seen one of the group's previous pieces, *The Tragic Flute*, and wanted them to create a similar piece to promote a forthcoming production of the Ring at The Barbican (autumn 2004).

Les Grooms has been together since 1983, "springing" as the program says, "from the enclave of Théâtre de l'Unité ["Since 1972, purveyors of provocative theatre"!!] in St Quentin-en-Yvelines. Their repertoire of "music, which is designed for concert halls, but which is performed in the streets", is eclectic. The Threepenny Ring "began its life at the festival of Chalon dans la rue and has now been seen in France, the UK, Belgium, Holland, South Korea, South Africa, the Reunion Islands, Algeria and Canada", before arriving in Mandurah.

All the Bellboys (assisted by a small number of others) play and sing - very well. Most of the music was performed on brass instruments, including a Wagner tuba, supplemented by a small

drum kit, musical saw, harmonica, didgeridoo and saxophone. Their approach to the music of the Ring was eclectic, but also highly imaginative, provocative and effective.

From the Prelude to *Das Rheingold*, with all the instruments listed above playing, through Siegmund and Sieglinde's love duet as a Latin American-cum-Tijuana brass number, the Ride of the Valkyries as a mixture of Arabian belly dance, quick march and pastiche of Bernstein's song "America" from *Westside Story*, Brünnhilde's "Annunciation of Death" to Siegmund as a plangent sax blues number, to the Brünnhilde "Please forgive me" tango to Wotan's "I forgive you" cha-cha-cha, and the Prelude to Siegfried on a solo, blues harmonica, the magic fire on the musical saw, Yiddish folk tunes and contemporary Jewish klezmer, the music was not just an amusing, virtuosic demonstration of the arranger's chutzpah.

The arrangements picked up an element of the story or character and gave it a twist that threw new light on the meaning. The Brünnhilde "Please forgive me" tango is a good case, since the tango was very slow and soulful, reinforcing Brünnhilde's emotions at this point. To underscore their seriousness about the musical value, the group hired two young, professional singers to sing Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegfried and Brünnhilde straight (which they did very well, given what was happening around them!), even if the music accompanying them had been arranged into some more exotic form. After the performance, one of the performers explained to me that the music had been the main concern of the group. They wanted to make their political and social points through the music, hence the reference, through the work's title, to Kurt Weill and Bertold Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*.

The arranger, Antoine Rosset, to balance Wagner's anti-Semitism, introduced Yiddish folk and klezmer elements, suggesting that, one way or another, reality would reassert itself despite Wagner's racist fantasies. In the words of M Rosset: "Let's tear it away from Bayreuth and from its family. This two-centuries old music is public property. It belongs to everybody. Let's have fun with it...the whole Ring in less than one and a half hours...Let's make a concentrated version of this Wagnerian material, spiced with oriental scales and klezmer rhythms, and blow a raspberry at the avowed anti-Semitism of our dear Richard". Similarly, the group took its dramatic approach from Brecht's theory of "alienation" - insisting on a "critical distance" between the audience and performers/ performance so that the audience would have to think about the dramatic illusion that it was experiencing to avoid being seduced by it.

The performance in a tent in the backstage of a theatre was a brilliant coup de théâtre - it completely disrupted my expectations of going to the theatre that



night! Once the audience was inside, the Grooms performed in, around, behind, above and below the audience, sometimes pulling out unsuspecting member to play a part or to shine the spots and hold props. The running joke of the night also kept breaking the illusion - and the audience up: regularly, one of the performers would break out of character to say we are now an hour or two hours or four hours and ten minutes, etc into the story!

The tricks Les Grooms used to tell the story were as varied, imaginative and effective as the musical arrangements. There were so many ingenious solutions to presenting the scenes that I couldn't begin to list them all. Suffice it to mention using handpuppets for the Nibelungen complete with tiny anvils, introducing an Indonesian Wayankulit or shadow play for the ride of the Valkyries and the journey of Siegfried and the Woodbird, having all the members of the band sink into erotic embraces during Siegfried and Brünnhilde's love duet, Brünnhilde vacuuming with the didgeridoo before she sends the layabout out-of-work Siegfried out on his journey, or dressing Hagen in a full-length leather coat (Matrix-style) which he opens during his call to the vassals to reveal them all as mannikins stitched into the inside of his coat. The giants were indescribably clever and funny, under a big hessian sack, with a French horn as the head and two mutes as eyes!!

The troupe employed an impressive range of acting styles, gestures and a strong ensemble approach with performers switching roles without a pause. This ensured that the basic storylines were conveyed accurately and with as much detail as could be packed into 78 minutes. The group selected major scenes from each opera as the frame on which to hang the multicoloured clothes of their musical and dramatic reworking of Wagner's epic.

The program also proposed that: "Wagner is preceded by his reputation: loved by the converted, but detested by those who don't know him. Where would we position ourselves? How could we popularise Wagner? And what about the politics? And the Nazi connotations: could we ignore that? After much discussion and differing interpretations, we have decided, in the context of a show which is destined for a wide public:

1. That ears unaccustomed to Wagner need some help to appreciate the music.
2. That it would be unthinkable to ignore all that which is associated with Wagner's work. Which is why we will try to come at the work from a suitable angle, one which will be at the same time serious and playful."

If proof were needed that The Grooms' work is a significant contribution to the understanding and

appreciation of Wagner's music and his role in western culture, I simply refer you to the inspired, awe-inspiring ending. As the band belted out Siegfried's funeral music, the audience was guided out of the tent to form a circle around it. As we listened to the march meld into a perfectly straight version of Brünnhilde's immolation, we all gasped as the tent collapsed then merged into billows of smoke lit by red spots as Valhalla burned. Then some troupe members under the collapsed tent created the waves of the Rhine. The audience stood spellbound as the final bars of "Brünnhilde's glorification" wafted into the flies of the Boardwalk backstage. The enthusiasm of the ovation, of necessity standing, was unbounded and well deserved.

Les Grooms told me that they are hoping for an invitation to Sydney or to Adelaide for the 2004 Ring Cycle. I, for one, will be supporting their return in any way I can and will go almost anywhere to see this performance again. [Ed. March 2003]

***Götterdämmerung* - the Libretto - an adaptation by John Kinsella for the Perth Festival Golden Anniversary 2003**

Like our President, Roger Cruickshank, I liked immensely the Perth Festival's 50th anniversary production of Wagner's monumental *Götterdämmerung* (see Roger Cruickshank's review in the last newsletter (No. 91, March 2003) or on the Wagner Society website at www.wagner-nsw.org.au).

My interest, however, was also taken by the translated/adapted libretto screened as surtitles during the performance. Fortunately, Kinsella's libretto had been published so I was able to take a copy to read more closely. In the book was also an article by Kinsella: On Adapting Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* into English, in which he outlined the theoretical underpinnings of his adaptation. [Text published by Perth International Arts Festival & University of Western Australia 2003.] I found this to be an illuminating account of his approach to the translation/adaptation as well as to some of the more puzzling and "unpoetic" elements in his work. Kinsella also wrote an article for the



Guardian Unlimited that may still be available at the website: www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,891229,00.html.

In this essay, Kinsella asserted that: "This will be my significant work in poetry, if ever I am to write one!" (p12) and gave us his "initial statement of intent". Here are some key points: "This is not a translation into English, of which there are many, but a version, an interpretation. It is intended to capture the passion and dynamism of the original, as well as the spiritual and material crisis it invokes. The language [of the adaptation] is contemporary, and the mythology fluid" (pp9-10).

"My interpretation tackles the prejudices of Wagner, of Australian intolerance (to refugees etc), multiculturalism, and above all else, the power of the land versus the "power" of progress, the power of love versus the lust for power" (p10).

"Above all, a dedication to the work as poetry has informed the adaptation and translation process. Even where an expression is repeated, or a stock epithet deployed, its context and place in the physical drama, and the drama on the level of language, will win out" (p194).

In his essay, Kinsella selected the text of Brünnhilde's rage against the gods in Act 2, Scene 4 of *Götterdämmerung* to illustrate his approach to adapting the original libretto to contemporary conditions:

Wagner's original

*Heil'ge Götter, himmlische Lenker!
Rauntet ihr dies in eurem Rat?
Lehrt ihr mich Leiden, wie keiner sie litt?
Schuft ihr mir Schmach, wie nie sie geschmerz? Ratet
nun Rache, wie nie sie gerast!
Zündet mir Zorn, wie noch nie gezähmt!
Heißet Brünnhild', ihr Herz zu zerbrechen,
Den zu zertrümmern, der sie betrog! (p19-20)*

Kinsella's adaptation

*Sacred, holy Gods,
Rulers and hosts of Heaven.
Did you write this into your programme?
Did you plan my suffering?
A suffering to rival and defeat all other suffering?
Is my humiliation to set a new standard for
humiliation?
Am I to be paraded as some kind of cosmic joke?
If not, then help me seek vengeance.
Let me get revenge with a rage
That no vengeance ever bore.
Let new registers of heat and pain be unleashed.
Unleash fission and fusion, chemical and biological
weapons.
Drive Brünnhilde to rip apart her heart, destroy the
man who betrayed her! (p21 & p129-30)*

The most obvious difference between the original and the adaptation is the length, which begs the question of whether the extra text in the adaptation adds anything not clear in the original or other translations.

The first two lines of Kinsella's adaptation are expanded simply, it would appear to fit the different line length he has chosen. The second brings off a clever pun that reflects the original description of the gods whispering conspiratorially to create a plan to teach Brünnhilde a suffering that no one had ever experienced before. Kinsella codes a metaphor based on computing language suggesting the gods are somewhat nasty programmers writing a vicious executable file, a computer virus or Trojan horse, to ruin Brünnhilde's life.

Kinsella uses this computing metaphor on other occasions such as his translation of the stage directions describing the wall of fire surrounding Brünnhilde's rock: "Fireglow, firewall..." (p95) that effectively suggests the role of the flames in protecting Brünnhilde from contamination or invasion by alien, hostile codes, embodied in lesser mortals, as a firewall program does for computers.

Later, when Brünnhilde laments the fact that she gave Siegfried all her wisdom, Kinsella has Brünnhilde cry: "I downloaded all my learning and awareness/into him, created an artificial intelligence" (p137). This suggests a parallel process to that embarked on by Wotan in *Die Walküre* when he set about creating Siegmund as a tool to retrieve the ring from Fafner as the Würm. Brünnhilde has transferred all her knowledge as a goddess to her lover to help him be successful in the world. The reference to "artificial intelligence" has overtones from many people's view that Siegfried is not the most intelligent man.

Then, Kinsella introduces contemporary usage - "Am I to be paraded as some kind of cosmic joke?" - intended to reinforce Brünnhilde's feelings of betrayal. However, to me it elaborates unnecessarily on the underlying idea in Wagner's text. Kinsella's would argue that he wanted to make the text relevant to contemporary readers; however, to me the words reduce the intensity of Brünnhilde's passion to banality. It made me wonder what the point is in selecting phrases that appear to undercut Wagner's own powerful words.

Let's return to Brünnhilde's cry to the gods, particularly the section about letting "new registers of heat and pain be unleashed". Kinsella follows this with: "Unleash fission/ and fusion, chemical and biological/ weapons". I like the call "unleash fission and fusion" - these words are wonderfully malevolent and disturbing in the way they conjure up for any post-Hiroshima reader images of destruction and suffering. If only Kinsella had stopped there, but unfortunately he goes on to add bogey words to, I guess, reinforce his point - "chemical and biological/



weapons". However, to me this is simply overkill and adds nothing to imagistic impact of the previous phrase. I would have responded better to less abstract words such as "acids and spores" that suggest the same weapons, but are more immediately evocative.

Similarly in the Prologue, Kinsella has the Third Norn describe Wotan's end through the burning of Valhalla and the gods: "Shattered spear's razored splintering/ will be angled by Wotan/ into the heat's glow,/ plunged deep into the reactor core,/ China Syndrome, Three Mile Island,/ Sellafield, Chernobyl..."(p.48). When I read this in the surtitles and later in the book, I was impressed by the image of Wotan's spear shattering and plunging into the fire of a reactor core as a parallel for the rule of law vaporising in the white heat of a power only precariously under control. But, I stumbled over yet another list of bogey words. What does "China Syndrome" or "Chernobyl" add to the image? In my view nothing. The ideological intrusions simply literalise the metaphor and destroy the poetic power of the preceding words. It's not as if Kinsella's reference to "reactor core" wouldn't conjure up those dreadful incidents that he spells out for us.

A further example, to illustrate the level of overkill with this ideological twitch. Waltraute is trying to persuade Brünnhilde to give up the ring because the "world's collapse,/the land's ending/ hangs on it (p92)": "To end the torment of Valhalla/ cast this circle of damnation/ into the river? Neutralize the toxins - pesticide/ residues, nitrogenous fertilizers,/ oil slicks and heavy metals./ Detoxify and purify!" (p92).

Again, for me, Kinsella destroys the quite strong effect of his earlier active images with a list of heavy, abstract proper nouns "pesticides" and even "nitrogenous fertilizers" that seem more in place in an environmental assessment report than in an adaptation of Wagner's poem, however much Wagner may have been concerned about the degradation caused to his environment by the earlier phase of the Industrial Revolution.

Elsewhere, Kinsella lists " DNA", "Pioneer 10", "growing saline", "Carbon-dating", "electro-shock therapy, injections", "radiation, echoes of fallout", "high tech, smart weapons", "PCBs, carbon monoxide, radiation", and "silt and heavy metals and chemical residue". In each case, the ideological intention is clear, but the effect arbitrary and forced and not integrated into the poetry. Kinsella, though, might defend the inclusion of catalogues of bogey words by saying that he intends to drive an ideological point home. Indeed in his essay, he asserts that: "Passion in language is dictated by odd juxtaposition, dramatic shifts. It's real speech and formality. It's evocation, invocation, ritual and loss of control together" (p22-23).

They are just words deployed to establish Kinsella's ideological credentials while, in my view, they clang like cracked lead bells in the sounding of the poem. I find it implausible that Waltraute, even were she the

most committed environmentalist, would be likely to cry "Detoxify and purify" to anyone, let alone Brünnhilde, as a crowning argument to convince anyone to surrender the ring.

Kinsella employs many other literary techniques in his adaptation, which I haven't space to discuss here. However, I would like to touch on Kinsella's "localising" of Wagner's text to make the setting and culture of *Götterdämmerung* appear Australian, that I think is generally successful.

To begin the process of localising the setting of *Götterdämmerung* to Western Australia, or Australia generally, Kinsella employs the names of many local plants (karri, red-gum, ghost gum, kangaroo paws, scarlet runners, "...the mallee and blackbutt, jarrah and parrot bush, ferns and sun orchids, the rich stands of banksia" (p84), where Brünnhilde bids Waltraute rest her horse in her mountain home, "red-inflamed marri-blossom" (p95)), a few birds (crows - rather than Wotan's ravens - a wedge-tailed eagle, a golden whistler, "night herons and black swans" p83), references to swamps, [wheat] harvesters, the goldfields, and "Rolling bushfires" (p86). Evocatively, Siegfried describes Guttrune's eyes as generating "a heat that warps railway lines and destroys air-conditioning" (p74). Anyone who has experienced an outback summer can relate immediately to such an image.

However, Kinsella deploys another set of metaphors to "Australianise" Wagner's text - Aboriginal Dreamtime and cultural references. The three Norns lament the passing of their time in a deliberate allusion to Aboriginal culture: "Our timeless learning ended!/ Women's business lost to the world,/ silenced, our wisdom unheard" (p51). There is some merit in deploying this allusion since, in Wagner's version, the Norns, along with their mother, Erda, to some extent, represent the persistence of a matriarchy in early Nordic and Germanic culture.

Later, Kinsella translates part of Siegfried's and Gunther's "bloodbrotherhood" oath as: "...drops drunk solemnly today/ will gush in rivers, congeal like/ the sap of red-gum over the conscience,/ atonement and retribution for the tribal law broken..." (p79). This image has validity as well in extending the Norns-Aboriginal women link by comparing the ancient laws behind the "bloodbrother" oath to even more ancient Aboriginal laws.

Given that ancient Nordic or Germanic myths are less likely to evoke strong reactions in 21st Century Australian audience, Kinsella's Dreamtime images give us correlatives from a, possibly, more familiar local culture, to help us re-possess a fitting sense of otherness or mystery.

In the scene in which Brünnhilde, Hagen and Gunther conspire for Siegfried's death, she says: "I downloaded all my learning and



awareness/ into him, created an artificial intelligence./ His taking possession of a woman's business/ has given him power over the woman..."(p137). This both extends the computing imagery already associated with Brünnhilde, as well as linking with the image of the Norn's "women's business" and very effectively links Brünnhilde with the Norns (since they are all Erda's daughters). This imagery evokes the "white magic" thinking that is behind much conceptualisation of the roles of men and women in traditional societies. If you appropriate someone's magic, for example by learning the secret words or stealing sacred implements, then you obtain control over that person.

Even Siegfried is given words that echo the Aboriginal heritage of Australia when he rejects the Rhinedaughters' request to return the ring and their predictions about what will happen if he doesn't: "Wild, frantic, destructive curses/ woven and embedded into the matrix/ of the eternal rope of primeval law -/ inchoate and written in rock-walls,/ in ochre under the sand, in the vascular/ system of the land, even so -/ Notung will cut every thread..." (p158). These images are, again, appropriate given the mythic world from which both Aboriginal law and Siegfried's imperatives derive. They help to create a sense of strangeness and distance that is entirely appropriate to Siegfried's world, as it appears to us in the early 21st Century.

In his essay, Kinsella puts his money on the table about his choice of words, images and concepts: "In Wagner's original, there are many puns and word-plays that are universally missed, or more likely avoided, by translators, because they don't fit into the tight alliterative and narrative framework constructed by Wagner. These puns and word-plays are mostly intentional, but some come about from his failings as a poet [my emphasis]. In other words, they sounded as corny then as now. What is not in abundance is metaphorical twisting of the language that is totally ambiguous in meaning. There are wonderful moments of this ilk, but the language is often more direct than this. This is what impairs it as poetry. More ambiguity and more uncertainty increase the poetic mystery" (pp35-36).

Kinsella also says that, "As a post-modernist, it is expected that I be aware of the limitations of text; that I do this automatically. Wagner, however, certainly wasn't expected to do this; nor would he have expected from himself" (pp31-32). I take this to be an indication that Kinsella believes he is more aware than Wagner of the ambiguity of language and the limits to what can be expressed in a way that other people can understand. While Wagner could not have deployed post-modernist terminology to account for his understanding of how humans communicate, I doubt that Wagner was any less aware of the "limitations of text" than Kinsella. One only need read some of Wagner's meditations

on how his works were developing to realise that his understanding of the constraints on writers in conveying their mental constructs was very sophisticated.

In his "Afterword", Kinsella is also specific about some of his word choices: "I'd like to add, as a postscript, a few comments on the translation process that really only resonance after the journey has been completed. Shifts between different 'meanings' and motifs are not inconsistencies or random choices of words, but intentional selections and deployments according to context, mood and the pace of the narrative at a particular time" (p193). My only response is that it doesn't come across particularly poetically - on any level. There may be passion in Kinsella's ideological convictions, but this doesn't translate into memorable metaphors or striking images.

To me, it seems that Kinsella, in these theoretical claims, is trying to have his cake and eat it too. He criticises Wagner for not being "metaphorical or ambiguous" enough for his libretto to be considered great poetry. Then Kinsella packs his own adaptation with even more literal, unambiguous, unmetaphorical constructions, such as his lists of bogey words, and call this poetry. Kinsella then claims that taking this tack in his adaptation is "intentional".

In other words, Kinsella is creating a warm, comfortable hermeneutic structure based on circular arguments designed to make a pre-emptive strike against any criticism of his poetic text. In simple terms, his proposition goes: "If I write X, then I say that I intended X to be poetry, then X is poetry". However, irrespective of the defensively circularity of this position, it is not incumbent on his readers to stay with him in his postmodernist circularity. We can choose to step outside the charmed circle and evaluate his poetry by other criteria. This is in keeping with more rigorous postmodernist postulates that there is no privileged position from which poetry comes into existence or makes its meaning manifest to its readers, even a self-created charmed circle.

I have found much of Kinsella's adaptation inventive and stimulating, but it does not prevent me from finding that much of it is also tired cliché, bad rhetoric and prosaic propagandizing, none of which helps Wagner's reputation or Wagner's own messages to reach a contemporary audience. Whatever the value of Wagner's libretto as poetry, and there is much discussion about this, Kinsella's text evidences similar kinds of achievements and failings, although not to Wagner's heights. Kinsella undercuts many of his intentions by too clumsily substituting his own "corny" puns and wordplays, too deliberately "twisting" Wagner's word and too blatantly exposing his ideological convictions where Wagner was content to allude indirectly to his. [If anyone would like to borrow my heavily annotated copy, please call me. [Ed - May 2003]



The Raven's Reporting

You can check the previous Newsletter No 91 (March 2003). There is also a regularly updated comprehensive list on the Society's Website <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au>.

E-mail reminder service

If you have an E-mail service, you may be interested in the E-mail reminder service that the Society provides for members. If you would like to receive an automatically E-mailed reminder just prior to each Society event please provide your E-mail address to info@wagner-nsw.org.au. (The Society respects your privacy and any details provided will be protected and used only for this reminder service. Details will not be provided to third parties. You can of course unsubscribe at any time - information on how to do this is included in the E-mail message.)

Newsletters and Publications

- Newsletter No 16 February 2003 and mailout April 2003- Wagner Society in Queensland
- Newsletters 159 March, 160 April and 161 May 2003 - Richard Wagner Society of South Australia Inc
- Newsletter Vol 4 No 10 March 2003 and Vol 5 No 1 May 2003 - The Wagner Society of New Zealand
- Wagner Notes Vol XXVI No 1 February and No 2 April 2003 - Wagner Society of New York
- Wagner News Vol 14 No 3 March 2003 - Toronto Wagner Society
- Material from the Richard-Wagner-Verband Wurzburg-Unterfranken
- Wagneriaani No 21 Kevät 2003 - Finnish Wagner Society
- News and Notes, Vol VIII No 1 March 2003 and Leitmotive Vol 16 No 4 Winter 2002-03 - - The Wagner Society of Northern California
- Richard Wagner Nachrichten Jahrgang 15/2 April - Juni 2003 - Österreichische Richard-Wagner-Gesellschaft
- Kulturchronik No 6 2002 and No 1 2003- Goethe Institut Inter Nationes

New Australian Wagner Website

In response to requests from other Wagner Societies in Australia, the website master for the NSW Wagner Society, John Studdert, has set up a new Australian Wagner WebSite at <http://www.wagner.org.au>. This new "portal" site has links to other Australian Wagner Societies and it will be developed over time in response to further requests from Australian Wagner Societies and members' suggestions.

24th Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting will be held at the Goethe Institut, 90 Ocean Street, Woollahra, on Sunday, 20 July 2003 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. Separate forms need to be submitted for each nomination.

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, 20 June 2003



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 _____

I cannot attend the 24th Annual General Meeting to be held on 20 July 2003 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 President Vice President Treasurer Secretary or a member of the committee of the Wagner Society in NSW Inc (tick one position). Date _____

Signed _____
(Proposer)

Signed _____
(Secunder)

Signed _____
(Nominated member)

NOTICE OF MOTION

(Must reach the Secretary no later than 20 June 2003 so that they can be circulated to members prior to the meeting)

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

I/we will be attending the 24th Annual General Meeting to be held on 20 July 2003 and would like the following motion to be placed on the agenda for discussion under general business:

Name: _____

Membership number _____



Address

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence

The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc

GPO Box 4574 SYDNEY NSW 2001

Telephone: 9357 7631 (Roger Cruickshank, President)

Email to: webmaster@wagner-nsw.org.au

Website: <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au>

(all website addresses used in this newsletter are on the Wagner Society's website)

Address for Sunday Functions

Goethe Institut

90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)

