



WAGNER
SOCIETY
nsw

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 22

149

JUNE 2018



John Duncan Tristan and Isolde 1912



Miki Oikowa, Leona Geeves and Suzanne Chaudry on 25 March



Members at the AGM on 22 April at the Goethe Institut



Jim Holman, Chairman of the Washington Wagner Society and his wife Diana with our vice president Leona Geeves, President Colleen Chesterman, Jenny Edwards and Marie Leech at our reception at the Chesterman residence on 14 April



Eugene Raggio, bass-baritone; Laura Scandizzo, dramatic soprano; Chris Curcuruto, bass-baritone, at concert after AGM on 22 April

Accompanist Claire Howard Race, Laura Scandizzo and Chris Curcuruto

FOR YOUR DIARY

2018

Saturday 4 August	The State Opera of South Australia - present a concert performance of Act III of <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i> . Conductor - Nicholas Braithwaite . Kate Ladner as Eva, Bradley Daley as Walther, Shane Lawrence as Hans Sachs and acclaimed British Wagner specialist Andrew Shore as Beckmesser.	Adelaide Festival Theatre
Thursday 16 & Sunday 19 August	WASO will bring Stuart Skelton and Eva-Marie Westbroek to Perth for concert performances of <i>Tristan and Isolde</i> . Tickets and details at http://tickets.waso.com.au/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=10020	Perth Concert Hall
25 August	<i>Die Walküre Act 1</i> and <i>Siegfried Idyll</i> Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Sir Andrew Davis conductor; Eva-Maria Westbroek soprano (Sieglinde); Frank van Aken tenor (Siegfried); Daniel Sumegi bass (Hunding)	Hamer Hall, Melbourne
13-22 November	Opera Australia's <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i> . A co-production with Covent Garden, the cast will include Melbourne Ring veterans James Johnson as Sachs, Stefan Vinke as Walter, Warwick Fyfe as Beckmesser, with Natalie Aroyan debuting as Eva. Details: https://opera.org.au/whatson/events/die-meistersinger-von-nurnberg-melbourne	Melbourne Arts Centre

COMING EVENTS 2018 - SUNDAY STARTING TIMES MAY VARY

PLEASE CHECK THE SCHEDULE ONLINE FOR DETAILS

DATE	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	LOCATION
17 June	12.30pm: DVD: <i>The Wagner Family</i> 2010 film by acclaimed director Tony Palmer. 2.00pm: TALK and recital: Australian Mezzo-Soprano Celeste Haworth has music degrees from Vienna and Sydney and was a principal artist at the State Opera in Wiesbaden	Goethe Institut
5 August	1.00 – 5.00pm: SEMINAR: <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> - Dr Antony Ernst is a frequent guest lecturer on opera and is a music tour leader in Australia and overseas. NO DVD	Willoughby Uniting Church, 10 Clanwilliam St. Willoughby
30 September	12.30pm: DVD: <i>Wagner – a Genius in Exile</i> 2014 film by Andy Sommer 2.00pm: Brickbats and Bouquets - Bayreuth 2018 Presented by members who received tickets from the Wagner Society and attended the Bayreuth Festival	Goethe Institut
21 October	1.00 – 5.00pm: SEMINAR: <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i> - Dr David Larkin , lecturer at the Sydney Conservatorium, presents a seminar as background to the new Opera Australia Melbourne production on 13, 17, 19, 22 November. NO DVD	Goethe Institut
25 November	2.00pm: Concert by outstanding young artists supported by the Wagner Society, followed by Christmas Party	St. Columba Uniting Church. 53A Ocean St, cnr Forth St Woollahra

Advice about changes to the Program will be emailed to people who have given their email addresses to the Society's Webmaster; the latest updates will also be available on the Society's webpage: www.wagner.org.au.

Admission to each event will be \$25 a Member, and \$30 each non-Member, \$10 (Full-time students) Seminar/Concert \$40 (m), \$45 (n-m), \$20 (fts).

Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)

NEW MEMBERS SINCE
MARCH 2018

Sean Tinsley [1212]
Barbara Spencer [1213]

DONATIONS RECEIVED SINCE
MARCH 2018

Nicole Berger, Heinz Ebert, Pamela McGaw, Garry Tipping
Our thanks for the generous donations to help the Society's objectives.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

2018 has continued to be a very busy one for the Wagner Society in NSW. Our meetings have been fairly successful in terms of numbers attending and the presentations by our visitors. I would like to express personal thanks to our Vice-President Michael Day, who has taken a particularly strong interest in seeking out interesting DVDs for the first part of our monthly meetings. I am sure many of us were fascinated by the Madrid production of *Das Liebersverbot*, which was shown in February and March, while in May members watched *Wagner's Jews*. Do check the meeting programs as some stimulating ones are being shown later in the year, such as Tony Palmer's *The Wagner Family* in June and *Wagner – a Genius in Exile* in September. Michael has also taken over editing the newsletter for the first half of the year. We hope some members will be willing to take up this exciting opportunity, which committee members are willing to support. Do contact us if you have any interest in editing! And remember that we welcome members providing news or reviews of Wagner performances in other cities.

Secretary Barbara de Rome has searched through past records to prepare a list of artists who have received funding from the Society, the purpose for which funds were requested, the year received, and the amount they have received. This is giving us a good basis to see what we have spent in past years, any changes in policy and a means of clarifying the criteria which we use. It has been an impressive exercise by Barbara and we all appreciate the time she has spent.

At the AGM, all members of the current committee were re-elected unopposed, save for Tony Jones. He decided not to stand in order to spend more time overseas after his retirement. Over the last five years, Tony gave much advice to the committee from his experience in market research and from his committee appointments on other arts organisations. Long-time Society member Esteban Insausti was welcomed as the new committee member. The concert, featuring three singers who have received financial support from the Society, was excellent. One of them, Chris Curcuruto, has since been awarded a scholarship in opera studies by North Texas University. He has approached the Society for assistance in living expenses.

In March, the SSO approached me asking us to participate in an article about Sydney Music Societies. I was interviewed on

the phone by journalist Leta Keens and then photographed by SSO's Daniela Testa. The article is able to be found at <https://www.sydneysymphony.com/backstage-news/article/inside-sydneys-secret-music-societies> and includes a range of societies from the Schubert Society to The Ukelele Society!

I was contacted in April by Jim Holman, the Chairman of the Wagner Society of Washington DC. He was visiting Australia with his wife Diane, travelling in Tasmania and Melbourne. He has a strong commitment to building links between Wagner Societies and offered to lecture at one of our meetings. Unfortunately there was little advance warning; he was only in Sydney on a Saturday, when the Goethe Institut is unavailable. We decided to set up a meeting at our home in Paddington, inviting committee members and those going to Bayreuth this year. Jim addressed us casually, describing the structure and management arrangements of the Washington Society. He also introduced us to books he has published: as writer, *Wagner's Ring: A Listener's Companion and Concordance* and as editor *Wagner Moments* and *Quo Vadis, Wagner?* He has also lectured frequently on Wagner and brought along DVDs of his lectures on *Tristan*, *Tannhauser* and *Wagner and Religion*. We hope to show these prior to meetings next year. It was a pleasant afternoon, showing how we can build links between Wagner Societies and learn from each other.

I missed the May meeting as my husband Michael and I spent the month travelling in France and Sardinia. In our last week in Paris we saw *Parsifal* at the Bastille and a reconstructed version of *Orfeo and Eurydice*, with Philippe Jaroussky and Patricia Petibon at Theatre des Champs-Elysees. We felt close to the subject of the Society's meeting on 21 May when Michael Ewans spoke about Wagner and Gluck. I also had a useful discussion with Jacques Bouffier, who represents the interests of English-speaking Wagner Societies on the Verband of International Wagner Societies, which provides us with a number of tickets for Bayreuth.

LETTER FROM THE ACTING EDITOR

Dear members,

Dear members, thanks for your feedback on the March issue. I hope you enjoy the June edition. I'd especially like to thank Justin Fleming for writing about his exciting new play, *Dresden*, which has its world premiere in Sydney this month. Thank you also to Peter Bassett and The Telegraph for allowing me to publish articles. Thanks to Michael Chesterman, Terry and Julie Clarke and Leona Geeves for their contributions and thanks to Mailis Wakeman for extra insights and photos of events. I appeal to all members to submit articles or reviews.

Mike Day

THE RAVEN'S REPORTING, COMPILED BY CAMRON DYER

There is a regularly updated list on the Society's Website www.wagner-nsw.org.au that takes the list to 2024.

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

REPORTS ON MUSICAL EVENTS AND MEETINGS

25 MARCH MEETING SUZANNE CHAUDRY

WAGNER ON A SHOESTRING

Suzanne’s talk was a treat – both informative and witty – giving us an introduction to the impressive work that Melbourne Opera has been doing and the use of modern theatre projection techniques that enabled large scale productions of Wagner’s operas to be mounted ‘on a shoestring’. Suzanne was very engaging, with a bright and clear voice full of the passion she has for theatre. She was helped during her presentation by her assistant director Miki Oikawa with some wonderful illustrations and video clips.

Suzanne started with some personal background, then gave a brief history of Melbourne Opera followed by detailed descriptions of the three Wagner production she has directed. She told us that her uncle had introduced her to theatre, her grandfather was a tenor who loved opera, and she was the youngest ever student in the NIDA Directors course. Since graduating she has earned her living solely from directing theatre, events, outdoor spectaculars and opera. She started with Italian repertoire for the Victorian State Opera, took some time off from opera directing in order to have 3 children, and came back to Melbourne Opera with a new enthusiasm for German language opera.

She explained how Melbourne Opera is a not-for-profit company committed to developing artists, attracting new audiences and charging affordable prices. It receives no government funding – relying on box office takings and the generosity of philanthropic opera lovers. It is a fully professional company but surprisingly it only has one full time member of staff. Chorus members are not paid and come from a wide background – Conservatorium students, professional singers and community enthusiasts. Judging from the samples we heard it has a wonderfully rich and full sound.

Their first German opera was *Rienzi* in 2013, followed by *Der Freischutz*, then *Tannhauser*, *Lohengrin* and *Tristan und Isolde* with *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Fleigende Hollander* coming up – a remarkably ambitious repertoire achieved on a very tight budget – less than \$5m per production.

Suzanne explained how the key to keeping the costs down was by having largely modern dress costumes and using new projection techniques. Sets have been a basic series of steps and platforms with large scale still and moving projections behind or all over the set, giving a remarkably wide variety of spatial impressions. *Der Freischutz* used dynamic images based on German expressionist movies, mainly in black and white with occasional bold colour. *Tannhauser* used photos and computer animations of beautiful abstract plant, cloud and water images which achieved a remarkably fluid and erotic impression without the need for all the (expensive) dancers called for by Wagner in the libretto. Shadowy pictures of rocks and naked bodies created a stunning three dimensional impression of the Venusberg cave.

Taking on *Tannhauser* was considered a big risk for the company but it was an outstanding artistic and commercial success and encouraged them to continue with Wagner productions, which have been staged in various Melbourne theatres, according to availability and cost, demonstrating the great flexibility and willingness to take risks that characterises the company. The continuing use of projections has helped save money as less time is needed to set up in the theatre, simpler, cheaper sets are possible and lighting setup is easier.

Suzanne’s next production, *Lohengrin*, had a very strong concept of the new world of Christianity replacing the old tribal ‘Viking’ world and had a stunning magical effect for the swan – created by animations projected on to vapour – achieving a mystical shadowy image that characters could walk through. This built on the idea that the swan was possibly a mass hallucination. Suzanne explained in detail how the scenes were story-boarded and the animations

- Patron: Ms Simone Young AM
- Honorary Life Members: Mr Richard King
 Prof Michael Ewans
 Mr Horst Hoffman
 Mr John Wegner AO
 Mr Roger Cruickshank
 Dr Terence Watson

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

- DRESDEN* - WORLD PREMIERE P.7
- THE WONDEROUS REALM OF NIGHT P.9
- PARSIFAL* AT THE BASTILLE P.13
- KARLSRUHE’S *RING* AND *WAHNFRIED* - THE OPERA P.14



MOC's Lohengrin 2017

timed to exactly synchronise with the music. This was illustrated with very evocative video clips. Suzanne expressed her opinion, shared by many others, that even before the invention of movies Wagner was effectively the first great film director and film music composer who has influenced all who came after. The chorus of 90 singers was very impressive.

Tristan und Isolde was the most recent production, presented at the Palais last February. Although dogged by illness it was a striking production. Members from Sydney who attended agreed with the critics that the performances were excellent, with the Isolde, Lee Abrahmsen, on the verge of an international career. Suzanne was full of praise for all the singers and musicians and especially the film makers. The settings again used projections, with the difference that they were not animations but film. There were some wonderful images of moving water and the last act had some extraordinary Mark Rothko like images followed by what looked like the surface of the sun writhing with solar flares - matching the rapture of the music.

This was a stunning finish to a very stimulating talk. Our president thanked Suzanne and suggested that we should set up a theatre party from Sydney to go down to Melbourne for the next production. Thanks also to Leona, our hardworking vice president who organised the event.

Mike Day and Mailis Wareham

14 APRIL SOCIAL GATHERING WITH CHAIRMAN OF THE WASHINGTON WAGNER SOCIETY

Our president Colleen Chesterman invited the committee and several members of the society to afternoon tea at her Paddington residence on 14 April to meet Mr Jim Holman and his wife Diana. Jim is the founder and chairman of the Washington Wagner Society and he entertained us for an hour with anecdotes about the history and aims of the society. He also showed us two very interesting books he has written about Wagner. Several of our members contributed to a lively discussion on the 'merits' of the current Bayreuth regime as well as asking very practical questions about the running of the Washington society. The society is 25 years old, has around 500 members, puts on 10 talks or concerts

every year and is very active and generous in its support of Wagnerian singers. We were very interested to hear of Jim and Diana's creative strategies for promoting the society and raising funds. Committee members provided delicious savouries and cakes to finish off a very pleasant and informative afternoon.

22 APRIL AGM AND CONCERT OF YOUNG SINGERS

Following the AGM an enthusiastic audience of 40 members and guests were treated to a beautiful recital by three up and coming young Australian singers whom we have supported over our many years of philanthropy. We welcome your donations to enable them to grow professionally and to provide performance opportunities for them.

Eugene Raggio, young bass baritone, who has been singing and touring recently in Germany with *Das Phantom der Oper* (not the Lloyd Webber one), had to rush away from our concert to conduct *The Messiah* in Surry Hills. Eugene was kind enough to sing, at very short notice, Wagner's *Die Frist ist um*, which he sang for our Flying Dutchman seminar some years ago. <https://www.eugene-f-raggio-bassbaritone.com/>

Laura Scandizzo, dramatic soprano, and a Pacific Opera Adjunct Artist whom we have heard at our Christmas concerts, and whose attendance we sponsored at a summer school in Varna, Bulgaria. Laura delighted us with *Abscheulicher* (*Fidelio* - Beethoven), *Dich teure Halle* (*Tannhäuser*-Wagner) and *Es gibt ein Reich*, (*Ariadne auf Naxos* - Strauss)

Chris Curcuruto, bass baritone, who also sang at one of our Wagner seminars some years ago. Chris has been involved with Pacific Opera since 2015, from Young Artist to currently a Young Artist Representative on its Advisory Council. Chris gave us wonderful performances of *Si la rigueur* (*La Juive* - Halévy), *Come dal ciel precipita* (*Macbeth* - Verdi) and *Wie schön ist doch die Musik* (*Die Schweigsame Frau* - Strauss) <http://www.christophercurcuruto.com/>

They were accompanied beautifully by **Claire Howard Race**, a young, much-awarded artist, making her first appearance with the **Wagner Society**. She is resident pianist with the Sydney-based Sirius Chamber Ensemble and is currently Assistant Chorus Master and Principal Rehearsal Pianist for the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs.

Leona Geeves

20 MAY MEETING WAGNER AND GLUCK

Professor Michael Ewans delivered his lecture about Wagner's adaptation of Gluck's *Iphigenie en Aulide* and played some fascinating recordings of performances which none of the 40 members present had heard before. For further details please refer to Wagner Quarterly number 148 March 2018

STOP PRESS

EXCITING NEW PLAY PREMIERES IN SYDNEY THIS JUNE



***From the beginning of time, worlds rise and worlds crash...
And life is born and life is burned.***

1838: Richard Wagner writes *Rienzi*. Seventy years later, a 17-year-old Adolf Hitler witnesses the composer's first opera in performance - and is struck dumb. For Wagner, it was one of the greatest creative acts known to us. For Hitler, it sets in motion the greatest wave of human destruction we have ever seen. For both, the city of Dresden is their stage.

Justin Fleming's explosive new play is a story of creativity and destruction and the dark side of human inspiration. Of the fork in the road and how far you might travel along it before you are stopped. It is the story of Hitler and Wagner, and the woman who connected them through time.

Writer Justin Fleming | **Director** Suzanne Millar

With Yalin Ozucelik, Jeremy Waters, Ben Wood, Renee Lim, Thomas Campbell, Dorje Swallow

Set Design Patrick Howe; **Lighting Design** Benjamin Brockman; **Sound Design** Max Lambert;

Stage Manager Charlie Vaux; **Assistant Director** Rebecca Blake; **Production Assistant** Hannah Goodwin;

Production Manager Andrew McMartin; **Producer** John Harrison

DRESDEN Australian playwright **Justin Fleming** writes about his new play, being performed for the first time at the Kings Cross Theatre, Sydney 15 – 30 June 2018

I began working with director Suzanne Millar exactly ten years ago and in that time, we have done several plays together. She has an all-embracing energy and devotion to new work, matched by an infectious passion for the creative fire of the rehearsal room. I first mentioned *Dresden* to her some time ago, and as soon as she and producer husband, John Harrison, acquired their own theatre space in King's Cross, she got in touch with me with renewed enthusiasm for the play.

The play, I admit, makes some hefty demands: there are no small parts, no "supporting actors". Every character in it is *big*. Finding the exact cast we needed to meet this challenge meant waiting till we could find them and work out their availability. When the pieces fell into place, the season was locked in.

I guess I am one of those "concept" writers, a terrible term, I know. But in developing *Dresden* for the stage, I

was interested in creation and destruction having the same inspirational source, in this case, the story of Cola di Rienzi (1313–1354), who succeeds in seizing control and raising the power of the Roman people. But popular opinion soon turns against him. In the end, the people burn the Capitol in which Rienzi and a few diehard supporters are bunkered. This stirred Richard Wagner to write *Rienzi*, his first success on the stage of the theatre and the young Adolf Hitler to begin his demonic mission on the stage of the world. So it is on this dual arena that *Dresden* takes place, culminating in the terrible destruction of that beautiful city.

Members of the Wagner Society will know that Wagner completed *Rienzi* in 1840 and that with the enthusiastic endorsement of influential Jewish composer, Giacomo Meyerbeer, it had its opening night in Dresden on October 20, 1842. In the play, Adolf Hitler is 17 years old when he sees a performance of *Rienzi* with his friend, August Kubizek, a young musician. The teenage Adolf is so obsessed by *Rienzi* that he insists he and "Gustl" write an opera together. When

Adolf's attempts at opera fail dismally, he embarks on his next terrifying adventure – to “save the German people” through political action. But in order to gain legitimacy, Adolf visits Wagner's widow, Cosima, daughter of Franz Liszt, and begs her to give him the sanction he craves – the master copy of *Rienzi* which he will keep in the Berlin headquarters of the National Socialist Party, using Wagner's music for public rallies and marches.

The play has had three workshops, two in London and one in Sydney – three, because there is not only the text which must integrate a vast sweep of historical time, but also the score of *Rienzi* itself. There is often music as *underscore* in my plays – I have never accepted that movies own music – and in my early work with Doug Anderson and Richard Wherrett, I discovered how important is this power of music. When I worked with Richard on *Harold in Italy*, we had a live viola. Kate Gaul, directing *Coup d'Etat* in Melbourne, had a live musician on stage punctuating the action. When Suzanne directed *His Mother's Voice*, a live piano was part of the design, as it has been in all productions of *Burnt Piano*. What makes it all the more critical in *Dresden* is that so much of the drama is *about* music.

Suzanne and I are working with Max Lambert, whose flair and understanding of this contract between drama and music has been integral to several of my plays – including *Harold in Italy*, *The Literati* and now *Dresden*. Without being silly about it, the music is a *character* in the play.

Last year, my wife and I attended a night at Covent Garden hosted by ardent Wagnerian, Stephen Fry. The famous moment was recounted there of the young Ludwig, King of Bavaria, who so loved Wagner's music that he sent an emissary to rescue Wagner in his flight from creditors, paid all his debts, and turned his life into the stuff of fairytales. Wagner's life had nowhere to go but up; Hitler's had nowhere to go but down. Did either know this when they launched their career on the plight of *Rienzi* in Rome?

Justin Fleming

<http://www.bakehousetheatrecompany.com.au/dresden/>

THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NEW SOUTH WALES INCORPORATED

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT
FOR THE 12 MONTHS ENDING
31 DECEMBER 2017

INCOME

	2017	2016
Membership	15,494.00	16,644.00
Lectures and Functions	14,496.00	8,137.00
Donations	7,940.00	6,262.00
Interest	608.00	619.00
Bayreuth Ticket Sales	23,615.00	28,652.00
Other Fundraising Income	7,155.00	8,240.00
Total Income	69,308.00	68,554.00

EXPENDITURE

Newsletter	4,804.00	8,547.00
Function Catering Expense	347.00	1,526.00
Function Room Hire	4,104.00	3,570.00
Payments to Presenters	2,644.00	3,600.00
Sponsorships	10,986.00	12,500.00
Bayreuth Ticket Expense	17,558.00	36,944.00
Other Operating Expenses	3,958.00	2,776.00
Total Expenditure	44,401.00	69,463.00

NET SURPLUS/-DEFICIT	24,907.00	- 909.00
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COMMITTEE 2018 - 2019

President	Colleen Chesterman	9360 4962
Vice President	Leona Geeves	
Vice President	Mike Day	0413 807 533
Treasurer	Margaret Whealy	0414 787 199
Secretary	Barbara de Rome	0411 018 830
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Members	Mailis Wakeham	9331 7353
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	Tony Jones	0412 572 624
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THE WONDROUS REALM OF NIGHT

Peter Bassett on *Tristan und Isolde*

'I have been rebuked' said Wagner, 'for not introducing into the second act of *Tristan und Isolde* a brilliant court-ball, during which the hapless pair of lovers might hide themselves at the proper time in some shrubbery or other, where their discovery would create quite a startling scandal, with all the usual consequences. Instead there passes little more than music in this act....'

There is no doubt that the leading creative impulse for *Tristan* was musical. But the music – brilliant, bold and revolutionary as it is – exists to express a non-musical idea so unexpected that no composer but Wagner would have contemplated it.

As the drama begins, we are plunged immediately into the inner lives of the characters as events approach a crisis. Tristan's ship plies the Celtic Sea between Ireland and Cornwall and the Princess Isolde is in despair. The empty seascape mirrors the emptiness in her heart, and the heaving ship – hostage to wind and waves – reminds her that she too is a hostage: to a king she doesn't love and to his nephew for whom she suffers the pangs of desire. Stung into action by a sailor's song and the sighting of land, she lashes out at those who had brought her to this pass. She invokes the tempest, commanding it to rouse the sleeping ocean to wreck the ship, devour its fragments and consign its hapless passengers to the winds.

This outburst – just a few minutes into the first act - is the earliest indication we have that Isolde is contemplating a joint death with Tristan for, if the ship goes down, they'll both go with it. The music is ferocious, punctuated by evocations of the raging sea and the frantic efforts of the sailors. But it's all in Isolde's mind for, in reality, they are sailing calmly onwards to the waiting Marke. In Gottfried von Strassburg's 13th Century Romance, *Tristan*, it was the potion that *caused* Tristan and Isolde to fall in love, whereas in Wagner's version they were already in love (though neither admitted it), and it is the expectation of impending death that sweeps away their inhibitions.

For much of the opera, a struggle is taking place between the outer and inner worlds and, for most of the time victory seems to be going to the former - the world of duty and



August Spiess Neuschwanstein 1881

propriety, loyalty and appearance. But eventually, it is the inner world accessible only through the gates of death that triumphs. Brangäne's misplaced devotion deprives the lovers of the death they had sought and, by the end of the first act, the outer and inner worlds are once again clamouring for attention. The curtain falls on the apparent triumph of the outer world of society, politics and power. But, amidst the excitement, shouting and fanfares, the two lovers - with eyes only for each other - hardly notice that the world exists at all.

"As I have never in life felt the real bliss of love, I must erect a monument to the most beautiful of all my dreams, in which, from beginning to end, that love shall be thoroughly satiated. I have in my head 'Tristan and Isolde,' the simplest, but most full-blooded musical conception. With the black flag which floats at the end of it I shall cover myself to die."

Richard Wagner in a Letter to Liszt

In Act Two, it seems that the lovers have, at last, caught a glimpse of the realm of perfect union and timeless reality - until the world of honour and jealousy reasserts itself. The act begins stridently with the motive of day, followed by expressions of the lovers' impatience, and then Isolde's longing. The feverish orchestral activity falls away and we hear the evocative sounds of distant hunting horns, which, in turn, melt into the sounds of a summer's night. Never before had music conveyed such a wonderful transition from day to night, from the harsh glare of the outer world of reason to the soft embrace of the private world of emotion.

If the second act is an apostrophe to the night, the third act returns to the world as we know it – the world of illusion, of separate existences, of yearning and suffering. At Kareol, Tristan suffers unimaginable torment in the full glare of the day. Isolde too remains in the realm of day, as Tristan knows only too well. 'I heard the crash of death's door

closing behind me' says Tristan, 'but now it stands ajar. I must break forth from night to take her back with me.... Ah, Isolde, when will you quench the flame...when will the light die out?' It seems, on first hearing, that he is reliving his interminable wait for the torch to be extinguished in Isolde's garden – the signal for their physical reunion. But in fact it is another flame to which he now refers – the flame of unsatisfiable yearning.

Wagner's answer to King Marke's anguished question at the end of his great monologue: 'Who will make the inscrutable, deep, mysterious reason known to the world?' would, undoubtedly, have been 'Arthur Schopenhauer'.

Following in the footsteps of Immanuel Kant and, more distantly, Plato, Schopenhauer had written of the illusory nature of the world as we perceive it, with its inevitable frustration and pain - equated in *Tristan und Isolde* with the all-deceiving 'day'. Here, the world of daylight belongs not the realm of actuality but to the realm of illusion. This is because, as human beings, we can only have an incomplete *perception* of reality, brought to us via our senses and mental faculties. Beyond that perception of reality is the reality itself ('the thing-in-itself'), which we do not and cannot know directly. 'Night' in *Tristan und Isolde* is not the realm of ignorance but that of timeless reality.

The most intimate knowledge of the will to live, said Schopenhauer, is to be found in the ecstasy of sexual love – which is one of the most powerful images in the opera. However, the will to live is essentially selfish. So, how can sexual love be an impulse towards a timeless reality in which there is no 'self'? Wagner maintained that sexual love was not just an impulse to maintain life – an expression of the will to live - but a longing for the transcendence of individual boundaries and union with the universe. 'Then I myself am the world' sing the lovers at the height of their passion. Wagner believed he had made an important advance on Schopenhauer's theory on this point, and he even wrote a letter to the philosopher on the subject, but never sent it.

So, in *Tristan und Isolde* we have the story of a sexual love so intense that even the physical bodies of the lovers are a barrier to its fulfilment. Its driving force is a yearning for union beyond the constraints of time, the fluctuations of physical passion and even separate existences. In the realm of night there is no separate existence – no need for 'Tristan and Isolde' - only the ultimate unity of being.

So, these were the issues that caused Wagner to redefine what was possible on the operatic stage, and to find an appropriate vehicle for its expression. Some of the most beautiful and poetic imagery in *Tristan und Isolde* is drawn from an eastern source: the *Upanishads* of the Hindus. Schopenhauer was extravagant in his praise of these mystical treatises written in Sanskrit between 800 and 400 BC, sometimes called the Himalayas of the Soul. When Tristan and Isolde sing: 'then I myself am the world', they are drawing on one of Schopenhauer's favourite passages in the *Upanishads*: 'I am all these creatures, and besides me there

is no other being', illustrating how someone contemplating nature necessarily draws nature into himself, transcending individuality and joining with the sublime.

When the lovers seek to merge their personalities ('Tristan you, I Isolde, no longer 'Tristan!' and so on) they are echoing yet another verse of the *Upanishads*. When they sing: 'heart to heart, mouth to mouth, bound together in one breath', the *Upanishads* are there again. The Sanskrit word *âtman* – 'breath' or 'soul' - is often used in conjunction with truth, infinity and the supreme deity – something beyond comprehension. *Âtman* is related etymologically to the German word for breath, *Atem*, and we find the most vivid expression of this connection in Isolde's final vision, in which the once-living Tristan is transmuted into the 'immensity of the world's breath'. Indeed a passage in the *Upanishads* that reads: 'The *Âtman* is beyond sound and form, without touch and taste and perfume' clearly inspired other lines of the *Liebestod*.

There are so many beautiful images in *Tristan und Isolde*, including the invocation of the night and Brangäne's lullaby-like warning in Act Two, and Tristan's vision in Act Three, when he awakens from his trauma to imagine Isolde coming to him across a sea of flowers. On an ocean of sound that bears him up, Tristan rejoices: 'Ah, Isolde, Isolde, how beautiful you are'. In the loneliness of suffering, this is the reality that becomes his consolation, to be matched at the end by Isolde's own vision of the transfigured Tristan. Her eyes are fixed on him and, as the music tells us, on that wondrous realm of night into which, together, they are about to pass.

Peter Bassett's book *Richard Wagner's Tristan und Isolde* and other writings are available through his website: www.peterbassett.com.au.

*"Oh, now we were
dedicated to Night!
Spiteful Day
with ready envy
could part us with its tricks
but no longer mislead us with guile.
Its vain glory,
its flaunting display
are mocked by those to whom Night
has granted sight."*

- Tristan

WAGNER SOCIETY IN NEW SOUTH WALES 2018 APPEAL

The Wagner Society in NSW exists to encourage awareness, understanding, appreciation and performance of Wagner's music-drama. One way we achieve this is by giving financial support for young and emerging artists' continued development in the form of study grants, scholarships, travel for intensive coaching and provision of prize money for competitions relevant to Wagner's music.

Every year, the Committee considers many requests, some for a little as \$500, for assistance with projects that reflect our goals. Generally we have between ten and twenty thousand dollars to distribute each year but the requests for support often exceed the available funds and worthy applicants must be declined. However, if every member donated one or two hundred dollars we could significantly increase the number of artists supported.

Please help make a success of our Young and Emerging Artists Supporters' Appeal

We are writing to all members seeking support that will help increase the number of young and emerging artists the Society is able to assist. Your donations could make a significant difference to the development of Australian artists with interest and expertise relevant to Wagner.

Donors of between \$100 and \$150 will join our Young and Emerging Artist Supporters, donors of \$150 to \$250 will join our Gold Supporters and those donating

\$250 or more will be specially recognised as our Lead Supporters. All donations are tax deductible and will be directed specifically to increasing our level of support for Young and Emerging artists. June is a great time to donate as your donation is tax deductible in the year ending 30 June 2018. Donating is easy, simply go to the Society website; <http://www.wagner.org.au> click on the Donate with PayPal and then follow the instructions.

You may donate via PayPal or directly to the Wagner Society bank account **BSB: 032040**

Account Number: 911323

Thanks to the generosity of donors in 2017 (listed on the website) the Society has been able to support the following young artists and prizes:

Maia Andrews
Samantha Crawford (who gave a recital for members)
Chris Curcuruto (who sang splendidly at the 2018 AGM)
Eleanor Greenwood (always popular when singing for members)
Damien Noyce
Joshua Salter
Laura Scandizzo (who has sung for members to great acclaim)
Katrina Sheppard
Valda Wilson (a memorable Theodora for Pinchgut)
Sydney Song Prize

FUTURE EVENT

5 August SEMINAR - *Tristan und Isolde* - Dr Antony Ernst

Willoughby Uniting Church, 10 Clanwilliam St, Willoughby, 1.00 – 5.00pm

Dr Antony Ernst, one of our most popular presenters, continues his series of stimulating seminars, this time in preparation for WASO's concert production of *Tristan und Isolde* on 16 & 19 August in Perth.

Antony is an inspiring lecturer, speaking without notes and entertaining audiences with lively wit and insightful anecdotes, as well as showing the benefits of his long study of and experience in classical music.

He has been CEO of Sydney Youth Orchestras and a dramaturg, director, writer, lecturer, translator and administrator, for companies such as Opera Australia, Sydney Symphony, Bell Shakespeare, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Staatsoper Dresden, Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Opera Frankfurt and Teatro Maestranza Seville. From 2011 until 2017 Antony was Manager of Artistic Planning with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg. He is now in Copenhagen as Orchestra Director for the Royal Danish Opera.



MY TRIP TO GERMANY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT RICHARD WAGNER AND THE RING by Mailis Wakeham

My rationale for choosing to go with Odyssey Traveller (OT) was that they had organised a tour for Richard Wagner's Ring Cycle, which was being staged in Leipzig, Germany, Wagner's birthplace, and also that I'd be going to three other cities that connected with Wagner – Dresden, Bayreuth and Munich. To my delight, they provided preparatory material, with a Reading List which provided a short synopsis of each opera.

The tour itself commenced in Dresden, where we stayed for two nights in the elegant Maritim Hotel, situated on the banks of the Elbe. It was there that the 8 people booked onto this tour met together, also with the Tour Guide, who let us know that he had organised a local guide to show us around each of the cities we were booked to go to – and in particular to take us to places relating to Wagner. From the Maritim Hotel we were able to walk to the Semperoper in around 5 minutes, and a few more minutes to the more distant, and very beautiful "Frauenkirche Cathedral" (Church of Our Lady").

Our Tour Guide had organised a bus and bus driver to take us to Leipzig the next day. En route we stopped at Graupa, to visit the Jadschloss which included a multimedia exhibition titled: "Wagner in Saxony". We then travelled on to Leipzig, where we were to stay for five evenings at Victor's Residenz-Hotel. On our arrival there, we were provided a list of the performances, direction and cast for each of the Ring Operas, plus a separate synopsis of *Das Rheingold* which was to commence that same day at 5pm (as would each of the Ring performance). Our Tour Guide said that we could walk from our hotel to the Leipzig Opera house in only 15 minutes, and we all agreed that this would be a good way to get some exercise after a long bus trip.

The opera house was well organised for food and drinks at interval, and was packed with people. As our group walked back to our Hotel, we chatted about our views of *Das Rheingold*; most of us had enjoyed the singing, but found some of the staging rather awkward, particularly that of the "river waters".

The next day, we were taken on a guided city tour of Leipzig that followed in the steps of Wagner, and returned to our Hotel in time to have some dinner, receive a synopsis of *Die Walkure* and then we walked to the Opera House to see the performance. On our walk back to our Hotel we all agreed that the staging had been very dramatic and almost to the point of being fearful.

The following day we went on a bus ride to Eisleben, and were shown where Wagner had lived with relatives after the death of his stepfather. On return to our Hotel, we prepared ourselves for the third evening - *Siegfried*. On our return walk back from the Opera house everyone praised it.

The final evening was *Götterdämmerung*, which made me feel tense from start to finish. When walking home, the group could not stop talking about it - each seemingly trying to clarify the staging of this Ring Cycle.



Ancient instrument at the Framus Museum



Me and my friend Richard

On a Sunday, we were invited by our tour guide to go and see ancient music instruments in a museum near the Opera house – these instruments were exquisite items, so unlike modern-day instruments. Sadly there was no means of hearing them. Later in the afternoon we visited the Old St John's Cemetery where Wagner's parents and his sister Rosalie were buried. The Cemetery itself was richly green with grass and trees.

Our Tour Group were next driven to Bayreuth, and on the way there stopped to visit Framus Museum in Markneukirchen, where over 200 instruments produced between 1946 and 1979 were on display – quite different from the ancient instruments we'd seen earlier. We arrived at Bayreuth early afternoon, and were quite amazed at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof at which we stayed at for two nights. A metallic statue of a seated Richard Wagner was located right next to an area where people could buy drinks, sit on stools or armchairs. I couldn't resist sitting on Wagner's lap and holding his hand.

Once again, a local Guide took us for a walking tour of Bayreuth, where many statues of Wagner were seen, and sites related to Wagner were pointed out. In the afternoon we visited the Festspielhaus, which of itself included a guided tour, who explained with a lovely clear voice that all the features of the theatre had been designed according to Wagner's demands, including an orchestra pit to be built under the front of the stage, hidden from view but ensuring that everyone in the auditorium could hear perfectly. I asked whether current operas were also being staged there, and whether these were being recorded – the answer was 'yes'.

After our 2 days and nights in Bayreuth, we departed for Regensburg for just one night before heading to Munich, where we stayed for only one day and night. We drove around Munich with a local guide who spoke to us of Wagner, but we had no time to walk through the city streets. After breakfast the following morning, it was time for everyone on the tour group to say farewell and to go to their own home, or wherever else they planned or wished to go. I flew back home.

REVIEWS

PARSIFAL AT THE BASTILLE - A Review by Michael Chesterman

On 23 May, Colleen and I went without much foreknowledge to a new production of *Parsifal* by the National Opera of Paris at the Bastille Opera House. We are very glad that we managed to include it during our relatively short time in Paris.

The programme claimed that in this new production the director, Richard Jones, compares two illusory worlds: the 'dogmatic' world of the community of Montsalvat and the world of Klingsor's 'sexual hypnosis'. In my view, he did this very well, notably through giving considerable prominence to the attitudes and behaviour of members of the Montsalvat community. I do not know whether this constitutes a new and original approach to *Parsifal*, as I have not seen it staged very often. But the consequence was that the production was a good deal more successful theatrically than I expected.

In the scenery for Acts 1 and 3, Montsalvat somewhat resembled a downmarket boarding school for boys, of which Gurnemanz was the headmaster. There was a classroom of sorts, dominated by a large portrait of a man (never identified) looking vaguely like Billy Graham. Outside was a monumental statue of another unidentified man. On occasions, the huge stage revolved so as to reveal a structure rather like a stand for spectators in a downmarket football stadium. At different times, a number of novitiate monks adopted prayerful poses (around the statue) or sat dutifully alongside more senior monks in serried rows (in the football stadium). But more significantly, they also pushed and shoved each other around when not required to pray or attend rituals; they harassed and abused Kundry during Act 1; and a large group of them violently thrust Amfortas towards the Grail during Act 3, ultimately knocking him to the ground. They often behaved like preppy college boys, despite a number of admonitions by Gurnemanz. The sterile nature of the community's adherence to outworn rituals was wonderfully underscored by this depiction of most of its members.

At the beginning of Act 2, we saw Klingsor as a crazed scientist, conducting genetic experiments. The outcome of these was that the flower girls, appearing in serried rows in the football stand, included a number of plastic replicas of females prominently displaying raised legs with enlarged buttocks or genitalia. They also included a few members of the chorus, displaying enlarged breasts. Surrounding each of them were several large artificial petals. The lighting was in acid colours – yellow, lime green, even crimson at one point. When the flower girls, real and artificial, tried to seduce Parsifal by provocatively contorting their bodies and limbs, they could (with a stretch of the imagination) be conceived as lilies in full bloom being stirred up by a strong wind. After he rejected their advances they quickly turned into dead lilies.

Following this ingenious depiction of Klingsor's world of perverse sexuality, the attempted seduction of Parsifal by Kundry was both dramatic and moving. This was chiefly due to wonderful acting and singing by Anja Kampe. First as comforting mother figure, then as dangerous seductress, she came across as sympathetic, even likeable, and above all human. One felt for her as well as for Andreas Schager's



Parsifal. He was distinctly more vulnerable and impassioned than the Parsifal of Jonas Kaufmann whom many of us saw in the Concert Hall last year.

At the end of Act 3, after Parsifal's appearance in front of the monks had halted their violent thrusting of Amfortas towards the Grail, Parsifal was not shown as simply taking over the reins as a new head of their community. If the portrait and statue that I mentioned earlier were to be interpreted (as Colleen and I surmised) as representations of prior occupants of this position, there would in the future be no such memorial to Parsifal. He in fact led all the monks out of the football stadium towards some new unspecified venue offstage. At this point he and Kundry has their arms around each other's shoulders; however, the nature of their future relationship was also not specified.

The singing in this production was absolutely superb. A relatively young Gurnemanz, Gunther Groissbock, brought great power and dignity to the role. It was no surprise to us to read in the programme that later this year he will be singing Gurnemanz at Bayreuth and Fasolt and Hunding at the Met. Andreas Schager's tenor voice was both rich and strong. Peter Mattei conveyed Amfortas's pain rather too convincingly for the audience's comfort, without sacrificing voice quality to any degree. Anja Kampe managed to maintain lightness and purity of tone through all the manifestations of Kundry's elusive character.

The playing and singing of the orchestra and choirs of the National Opera of Paris was also first-rate. The same can be said of Philippe Jordan's conducting, except that for my money his tempi were too slow, and the pauses too lengthy, in the first part of Act 3. After the drama and tension of the attempted seduction of Parsifal (an absolute highlight of the evening) and the defeat of Klingsor, this quiet section of the opera came over as more of an anticlimax than need have been the case.

To sum up, this was a musically excellent production of *Parsifal*, which despite its modern setting (in Acts 1 and 3) and the considerable enhancement given to the actions of the monks of Montsalvat remained entirely faithful to Wagner's text. It did not use this text merely as the starting-point for excursions by a director (such as Stephan Herheim, whose production I saw at Bayreuth in 2009) into extraneous topics such as he favoured (e.g. the history of Germany since the late 19th century or the behaviour of Wagner and his family during or subsequent to his residence at Wahnfried). It offered instead a most illuminating account of the opera called *Parsifal*.

THE RING IN KARLSRUHE - MAY 2018

A Review by Terry and Julie Clarke

When the curtain opens during the prelude to *Götterdämmerung* and you see three men on stage sitting on cinema director's chairs you can be assured that you are about to witness another example of German regietheatre. This we duly did in Karlsruhe in May 2018.

Karlsruhe is a pleasant city in south western Germany. Completely flattened by the RAF and USAF towards the end of the war, it has few of the attractions of nearby Heidelberg and Baden-Baden and is thus, unsurprisingly, free of tourists. It does, however, have a fine, post-war opera house and a longstanding reputation for music making, opera and Wagner in particular.

The new Ring Cycle in Karlsruhe was unusual in that each opera had a different director. It was no surprise that there was little coherence between the individual operas, since we understand they only had one brief meeting in Iceland. *Das Rheingold* was the most recognisable of the productions and each one thereafter became increasingly bizarre.

It must be mentioned at this point that the orchestral playing under Justin Brown, their regular director of music, was superb and the singing, overall, was very good. But back to the productions.

The final act of *Siegfried* can give a flavour of the first three nights. The poor hero had to do his whole awakening scene by himself in a derelict museum since there was no sleeping Brünnhilde in evidence ('das ist keine Person'). Finally, Heidi Melton as Brünnhilde did emerge, standing, through the centre of the stage, but the unkind director had costumed her as every jokey cartoonist's depiction of a Wagnerian soprano, right down to the long blond pigtails. It was an uncomfortable final scene.

Fortunately for us we had been privileged to meet Katherine Tier, the Australian mezzo, who had many roles in this Ring, (Fricka, Waltraute, Erda, Norn, Rhinemaiden) and she was able to give us some inkling of what it was all about.

It was *Götterdämmerung* in which the most egregious directorial excesses took place. The three men mentioned at the start were in fact the Norns, they were not only girls in male attire but also made up to resemble the directors of the three previous operas. Furthermore, they featured in many of the subsequent scenes moving in and out from the wings until finally morphing into the Rhinemaidens. Katherine Tier, as the First Norn, stripped off her male clothes to reveal a shift so that she could transform into Waltraute in her scene with Brünnhilde – a girl playing a boy playing a girl.

All the characters were in some form of modern dress. Siegfried, the hero to save the world, was a scruffy



Heidi Melton (Brunhilde) and Katherine Tier (Norn, Waltraute, Rhinemaiden)

individual with lank, unwashed hair wearing a dirty undervest and a tendency to drop his trousers at every opportunity. Fortunately, he sang with a sonorous ringing tone which he sustained until the end.

Act Two started with a particularly revolting Alberich in his underclothes who appeared to have been castrated quite recently. Later in the scene Hagen also castrated himself with a knife although once he had got his trousers up again he managed to summon the vassals without apparent discomfort. A live black pony was brought on to the stage so that it could be ritually sacrificed and emerge later as a corpse so that Hagen, Gunther and Brünnhilde could smear themselves with blood.

In Act Three, shortly after the (male, director) Rhinemaidens had refused to accept the ring, Siegfried attended a barbecue and was stuck in the back with a kebab skewer from which Hagen had been eating the meat. He was left to lie on an empty stage for the whole of the funeral march being cuddled by Gunther, for whom, from their first meeting, he had shown a particular fondness. Hagen stabbed Gunther when he attempted to snatch the Ring but then, for good measure, stabbed Guttrune as well. However, in her dying frenzy she managed to grab the knife and kill Hagen. The stage was strewn with bodies like the end of Hamlet. During the final moments of the waters of the Rhine overflowing and the music of redemption we were treated to the sight of the final death dealing scene being played in slow motion and in reverse with all the players in turn arising from death and leaving the stage backwards. What we heard was undoubtedly *Götterdämmerung* but what we saw was decidedly not. Directors such as Tobias Kratzer appear to derive pleasure in proportion to the amount of outrage they can engender in their audience. I have no doubt he is mightily pleased with himself.

WAHNFRIED - THE OPERA, MAY 2018

A review by Terry and Julie Clarke

It has frequently been observed that the machinations of Wagner and his descendants would themselves supply plentiful material for an opera. An example of such a piece was premiered in 2017 and revived during the Ring in Karlsruhe this year. Entitled *Wahnfried* it is a modern opera written by Lutz Hübner and Sarah Nemitz, composed by the Israeli Avner Dorman with the assistance of the musical director at Karlsruhe, Justin Brown and directed by Keith Warner. As with all modern opera the music and singing were largely atonal but there were occasional flashes of Wagner motifs, jazz, waltzes and klezmer.

The story was based, not on Wagner himself, but on the dysfunctional family circle in the years after his death. The central figure was Houston Stewart Chamberlain, whose views and writings on Aryan supremacy and anti-Semitism were keenly espoused by the family at Wahnfried and were to have wider circulation and influence throughout Germany. In the opera he was seen initially as a timid Englishman, who, enchanted by Wagner's music, entered the household at Wahnfried, discarded his first wife and married Richard's daughter, Eva.

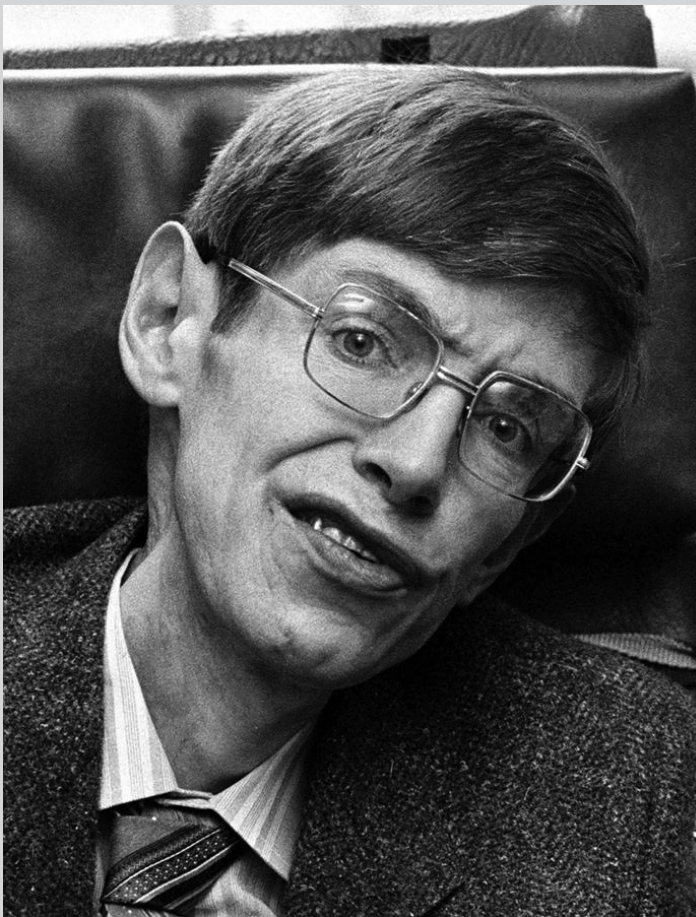
Some knowledge of the history of the family as well as the English surtitles helped to make sense of many of the allusions in the multiple colourful scenes. Herman Levi, the first



The cast of *Wahnfried*

conductor of Parsifal struggled as a Jew between his respect for Wagner's music and the racial prejudice of the family. Cosima was the malignant black widow, Siegfried was sung by a countertenor. Wagner ghost was represented as a circus clown. There was even a genuine fire-breathing dragon better by far than any we normally see in Siegfried. In the end we saw Chamberlain's descent into madness and, of course, the arrival of Hitler and his acceptance into the Wahnfried fold.

This was a huge work with a large cast and chorus drawn from the ensemble at Karlsruhe, a significant effort for a one-night performance in the middle of a Ring Cycle. We found it extremely sensitive and confronting and it made for a comprehensible and enjoyable evening of opera interposed within an increasingly bizarre Ring.



'It was in 1963 that I first developed an interest in Wagner, or "Wag-ner" as my speech synthesiser pronounces him. Wagner more than any other person before or since had the ability to compose music that has an emotional effect. It reaches a level no one else does'

IN MEMORIAM

Stephen Hawking

8.1.1942 – 13.3.2018

OBITUARY

Excerpts from the Telegraph's rather witty obituary of an extraordinary Australian who wrote about Wagner and contributed greatly to the literary and musical life of Great Britain.

CHARLES OSBORNE, 1927 - 2017

Charles Osborne, who has died aged 89, was an actor, poet, theatre critic, editor, opera buff and biographer; at other times he was a nude model, chorus boy, bookshop assistant, cinema usher and underwear sales rep.

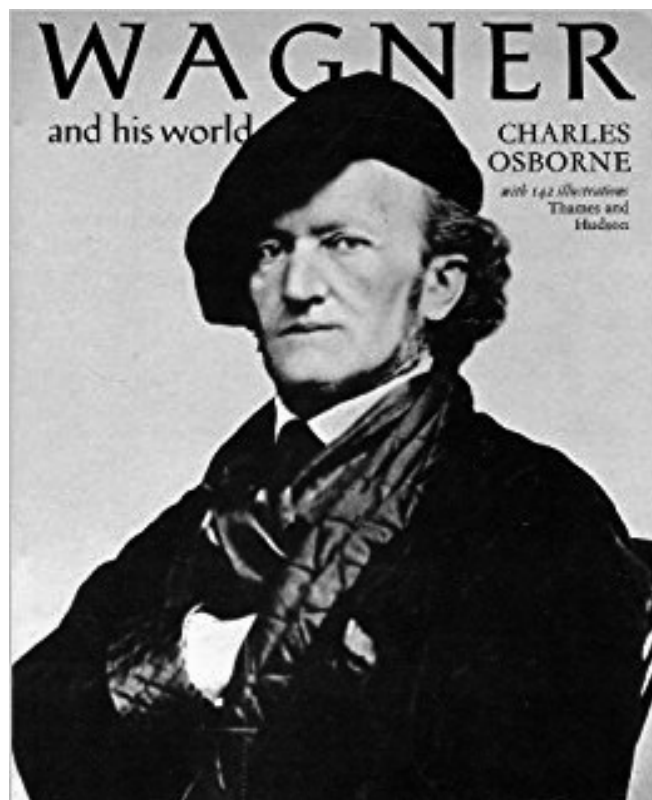
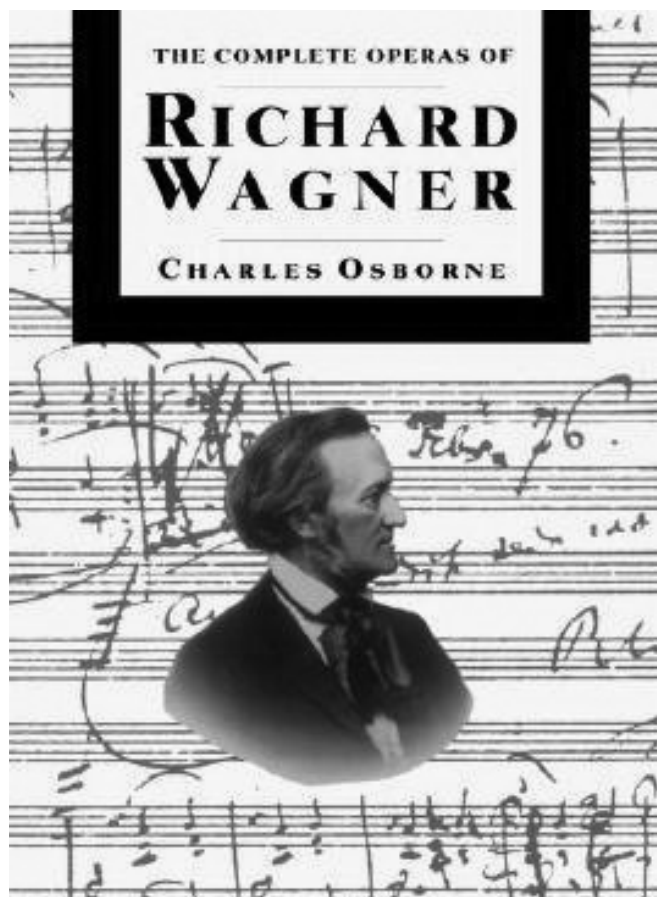
Born in Brisbane on November 24 1927, he was an only child. His father, a solicitor from Devon, had suffered from asthma and was advised to seek cleaner air in Australia. Before doing so he had met and married Osborne's mother, a woman of Austrian-Jewish heritage. Young Charles took piano lessons. He recalled how "there were all these gramophone records of singers around the house". He was educated locally and saw his first opera (Rigoletto) in Brisbane in 1946. Deciding that his voice was not suitable for singing, he found work in the theatre, principally in Melbourne. In 1952 he toured rural Australia in Russell J Oakes's *Enduring as the Camphor Tree*, visiting 41 towns in eight weeks. "After the performances we resorted to séances, Scotch and sex," he recalled.

Landing in Britain in 1953, Osborne developed a large circle of literary and theatrical friends. He claimed to have had a minor role in the 1954 film *The Dam Busters*. He played a Devil in the York Mystery Plays of 1957 when Judi Dench



played the Virgin Mary. Between engagements he had an assortment of jobs, none of which lasted long,

His luck changed in 1961 when, according to one account: "His eye lit on a window card: **BOY REQD - GIVE ASS ONLY**. Osborne burst in to find himself in the fur-lined HQ of the *London Magazine*, being eyed in turn by the last of the Bloomsbury groupies." His role, "giving assistance", gradually evolved from Ed Ass to Ass Ed, though he said he regarded reviewing books as "a sordid and unrewarding activity". He also wrote poetry, a biography of Dame Nellie Melba and *The Bram Stoker Bedside Companion*.



In 1966 he joined the Arts Council and five years later was appointed literature director. It was a turbulent time, not helped by his enthusiasm for a fight, especially with the poets that had been entrusted to his care. He recalled how it fell to nominate a successor to John Betjeman as poet laureate in 1984. "I thought it disastrous to have 20 people agonising over it," he said of his unilateral selection process. Philip Larkin, his first choice, was appalled at the idea of being laureate and "told me in no uncertain terms he would not accept ... Ted Hughes was the second choice."

He was close to several poets, notably WH Auden, whose biography he published in 1980. Philip Larkin once wrote to him: "Dear Mr Ozborn. I am fond of poetry and should like to join the Poultry Book Society. I hope that you publish Patent Storing, she is my favorite, next to Ted Hughes of course. Yours respectfully P. A. Larkin (Mrs)."

He wrote about his Arts Council years in *Giving it Away: Memories of an Uncivil Servant*, in which he admitted that the council had been giving grants to "mediocrities". The book includes a lengthy chapter entitled "Name Dropping" that describes his acquaintance with everyone from Sir Harold Acton to Yevgeny Yevtushenko, the Russian poet with whom he once drank vodka on Boris Pasternak's grave. His retirement from the council in 1986 was celebrated with a recital by the tenor Nicolai Gedda.

He was a champion of Verdi's operas, many of which he saw at the Teatro Verdi in Busseto, the composer's home town.

After watching all 26 he wrote *The Complete Operas of Verdi* (1969), one of several opera guides. He could be outspoken about modern stagings: when ENO set Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* in a public lavatory in 2002, he described how "the curtain rose ... with 14 men sitting on toilet seats with their pants around their ankles". The scene was ludicrous and boring, he said, adding that it was "shocking only because the filthy creatures didn't wipe their bottoms when they got up".

Osborne's next career, as a waspishly entertaining theatre critic for *The Daily Telegraph*, ended with an ill-advised review of Alan Bennett's stage adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows*. His successor, Charles Spencer, sometimes known as Charles the Second, once explained: "I got my job because Max Hastings [the editor] loved Ratty, and Moley, Badger and Mr Toad, and Charles Osborne thought they were insufferably twee ... What luck!"

Thereafter Osborne pursued his love of opera, writing several more books (including two on Wagner) and reviewing for *The Jewish Chronicle* and *The Oldie*.

He met Ken Thomson at a party in Melbourne in 1962. They became inseparable and in 2006 entered into a civil partnership. Thomson survives him.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2017/10/13/charles-osborne-actor-poet-critic-biographer-obituary/>

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In 1877 Wagner received a letter from an Australian correspondent, telling him of a Melbourne performance of Lohengrin. This was his reply. Period photograph of Melbourne from the State Library of New South Wales.

Most honored sir!

Your news has pleased me very much, and I cannot refrain from thanking you for it.

May you see to it that my works are performed among you in English; only then can they be understood intimately by an English-speaking public. We are hoping that this will happen in London.

We (my family and I) were uncommonly interested in the enclosed views of Melbourne; as you

were so kind as to offer to let us have more, I assure you that you would thereby delight me greatly.

Please extend my compliments to Herr Lyster [the promoter] and even in your distant part of the world may you maintain a friendly feeling toward

your much obliged

Richard Wagner

Bayreuth, 22 October 1877

Alex Ross translation; the original text is in Jennifer Marshall, "Richard Wagner's Letter to Australia," *Miscellanea Musicologica* 14 (July 1985).

<http://www.therestisnoise.com/2011/04/wagner-gazes-upon-australia.html>



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John William Waterhouse *Sharing the Potion* 1916



Salvador Dalí *Tristan und Isolde* 1944

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(All website addresses used in this Newsletter are reproduced in the PDF version of the newsletter on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article - Members Area)



Rogelio de Egusquiza Barrena La Muerte 1910

DELIGHT ALONE!

In the surging swell
Where joys abound,
In perfumed wavelets'
Trembling sound,
In the world's soft breathing
Whisp'ring round –
To drown thus - sink down thus
- all thought gone - delight alone!

Richard Wagner, Last lines of Tristan und Isolde

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