

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

I present to you today the Annual Report of this our 20th anniversary year. It has been a sad and worrying one with growing concern about our financial position. You will recall that at last year's AGM we agreed to increase membership fees because of this concern. I again drew your attention to this in the November/December Newsletter. By February the position was so serious that the Committee was grateful to accept a loan from a Committee member in order to ensure all our financial commitments could be met pending the receipt of membership fees in April.

An investigation of several aspects of our finances was initiated and at the en of April we found proof that deliberate misappropriation of Society Funds had occurred.

As our financial and reporting year ends at the end of March it is not usual to report on matters after that time but in this instance I believe that this matter is sufficiently important for me to complete this report.

Once our suspicions were confirmed the Committee met urgently and initiated action directed at resolving the problems. The Police were informed and I wrote to all members. The response to my letter was very positive and the Committee would like to thank all of you who offered support and help.

Two offers in particular were important. Paul Lehmann, the previous President, offered to act as a mediator and arranged a meeting, that I attended, at which certain admissions were made, some of our books were recovered and an offer of restitution was made. A new member who is a solicitor offered his services 'pro bono' should we need legal assistance. As we don't have the financial resources to fight a civil action in the court this is a very generous offer. I am sure you will join me in thanking them.

Despite numerous promises, all of which have been broken, there has been no restitution and the matter was referred to the Police and our legal adviser towards the end of June.

It has become clear that the misappropriation occurred over a number of years and you will ask how such a thing was possible. I can only reply by saying that the Committee has always operated on the basis of trust, a trust that was betrayed. The Auditor and Committees were deceived over a long period of time.

As a result of this experience our financial systems have been strengthened and great care is being exercised to ensure that there is no repetition. It has been a severe shock to all of us and demonstrates that continual vigilance is necessary to ensure proper governance. We are all very aware of our responsibilities.

These problems aside the past year had many positive aspects. Our birthday lunch at the Women's Club in May 2000 was a great success, a delightful venue and a delicious meal. Our guest speaker Tim Calnin, the Artistic Administrator of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, entertained us with background glimpses into the *Ring* Concerts the orchestra has been presenting.

In June our guest was Paul Curran, an international opera director, in Sydney working on *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Paul gave an interesting talk about his experiences in overseas opera houses with particular emphasis on his time in Russia.

July saw our Seminar in conjunction with the Art Gallery of NSW on *Götterdämmerung* which was well attended with all participants enjoying the very pleasant venue and the warm welcome of the Friends of the Galley who provided a most enjoyable lunch. Our thanks go to Craig Brush, the Functions Manager of the gallery, for his support.

In September many of us attended those wonderful performances of *Götterdämmerung* given by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Edo De Waart and sung by Heinz Krause – Siegfried, Elizabeth Connell – Brünnhilde, Peter Coleman-Wright – Gunther, Elizabeth Campbell as Waltraute and Ekkehard Wlaschiha as Alberich.

These *Ring* Concerts have in many respects been the most significant artistic achievements in Sydney for many years and our congratulations and thanks have been conveyed to the orchestra and conductor.

Our September meeting was a lively panel discussion on *Götterdämmerung* with our special guest Bill Gillespie - Head of the Academy of performing Arts, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia - and our own members Peter Nicholson and Dr Terence Watson.

In October we celebrated our 20th Anniversary when Horst Hoffmann and Adele Johnston accompanied by Fiona McCabe presented a most enjoy able recital. We are indeed fortunate to have artists of this calibre who are willing to donate their time and share their talents so generously and we do thank them. At the same time we are very aware that they are professionals and I would hope that once our finances are stabilised we will be in a position to offer them an appropriate fee.

The year ended with a very pleasant Christmas party enlivened by Barry Walters walking us through many of the

residences Richard Wagner graced in many countries.

Sadly we record the deaths of Sarah Handley and Lady Finley during the year.

The committee has had a very busy year and I would like to thank them individually and collectively for their support. Roger Cruickshank, our Treasurer, has been a tower of strength, we owe much to Roger in sorting out the financial problems we have faced. He has been untiring in his investigations and his wonderful sense of humour has kept us all going. Dennis Mather as our Secretary is also tireless and his laptop computer has become an intrinsic member of the Committee. Terence Watson will retire as Vice-President this year but will continue his work as Editor of the Newsletter and assisting with the website. Shirley Robertson continues to provide the delicious afternoon teas we enjoy at each meeting and will do so in the future though she has now resigned from the Committee. Lindsay Knight helps wherever necessary and despite work constraints continues to here whenever we need him. Julian Block is a new Committee member co-opted during the year and we have come to rely on his legal expertise and advice. I would also like to thank Marc Greyling for his assistance, on a voluntary basis, in maintaining our website which can be very time consuming but which is a very valuable contact point for the Society on an international level.

Our Auditor Joseph Ferfaglia has served the Society since its foundation and his contribution has been enormous. He will retire after a very difficult year and we thank him very sincerely.

We were sad to say farewell to Dr Otto Roever, the German Consul-General, and his wife on their return to Germany but welcome their replacement Dr Wenzal. We continue to enjoy the facilities of the Goethe Institut and we thank Dr Goll and his staff for their support at all times. As well we are pleased to maintain our liaison with the Opera Foundation and continue to support the Bayreuth Scholar who this year was Michael Black.

I would like to give a special thank you to all those members who gave donations during the year. Donations to the Society are of course tax deductible and we rely on them to a large extent to be able to support and encourage performances of Wagnerian works within Australia.

This time last year I indicated to you that I would not be seeking another term as President because I believe that change is healthy for any organisation. However as the extent of our problems became clear several members asked me to reconsider and stay at least until matters were resolved. Accordingly I have again nominated and if it is your wish I will endeavour, with the assistance of the Committee, to ensure the future of the Wagner Society. Thank you.

As delivered to the 21st Annual General Meeting

Barbara McNulty July 2001