



The Wagner Society

(Patron — Sir Charles Mackerras)

Registered Office: 141 Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo.
Telephone enquiries: 358 1919 (Bus. Hours)

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Telephone Enquiries: 358-1919 (Business Hours only)

Patron: Sir Charles Mackerras

President: Leonard Hansen

Vice President: Sue Kelly

Secretary: Clare Hennessy

Treasurer: Richard King

Committee:

Cedric Falconer

Ian Hopkins - Co. Editor

Margaret Suthers - Co.

Jean-Louis Stuurop

Janet Wayland

Honorary Life Member: Werner Baer M.B.E.

RECEPTION

Sydney's most exciting musical event this year was undoubtedly the two concert performances of "Götterdämmerung" on the 30th September and 1st October.

Sir Charles Mackerras directed the Sydney Symphony Orchestra with great feeling and precision, and the soloists and choir sang superbly, bring a vitality and realism to the roles one would not have expected in the concert hall.

It was gratifying to read so many favourable comments in the press, and I'm sure all Wagner Society members felt proud to have supported this production. Well-wishing telegrams were sent, on your behalf, to the singers and musicians, but I would like to extend here special congratulations to our member, Miss Nance Grant, for her beautiful singing, not only as Gutrune, but also as Sieglinde in the Melbourne "Valkyrie". Most of us cannot imagine how much training is needed for these roles; Miss Grant even took special tuition under Professor Breme in Bayreuth.

During the first interval on the Saturday evening, members were able to mingle and chat in the Reception Hall, whilst enjoying light refreshments. Our only regret was that the caterer's interpretation of "light" referred mainly to quantity rather than type of savoury, so the service ended up being a little light-on. We apologise to those who went away hungry and dissatisfied; a complaint was made to the caterer for letting us down like that.

Appetites were certainly well satisfied at the Sir Charles Mackerras lecture on the 12th October in the Crown Street Hospital auditorium. Sir Charles covered his subject of "Wagner in Concert" very thoroughly, and with his usual wit. The evening was well attended, and, judging by the questions asked later, thoroughly enjoyed. Our thanks go to member Peter Bone for masterminding the event so faultlessly, and to the hospital board and staff for the location and the ample supper. A real delight

A review of the talk will appear in our next Newsletter.

We look forward to a repeat performance from Sir Charles when he returns to Sydney next year from his overseas commitments.

There is a small group of very satisfied Wagnerites who are enjoying immensely the Sunday afternoon playing of complete operas at the Concordia Club. It is an ideal way to hear your favourite music, free of interruption and disturbance. The sound is excellent, thanks to Mr Stuurop's unflagging efforts and many hours in setting up the equipment. The Club facilities ensure all personal comforts, including having refreshments available at "intermission" and meals before and after if required, all at reasonable cost.

Remember, "Lohengrin" is playing on December 13th at 2.00 pm, so treat yourself to an exciting experience by being with us.

As mentioned at the Mackerras evening, Wagner Society members have been invited to an evening with the South Pacific Liszt Society, on Friday, 4th December. Mr Werner Baer, M.B.E. will be talking about the Liszt-Wagner relationship. If you are interested in the activities of the Liszt Society, ring their Secretary, Leah Cunningham, at home on 960-1258.

That extraordinary soprano, Jesse Norman, has had another successful tour of Australia and I hope as many members as possible were able to enjoy her wonderful performances. It seems that Miss Norman could be turning to Wagner opera soon, certainly on records, if not on stage. Your Committee felt it would be a nice gesture to welcome Jesse Norman to Sydney with a bouquet of flowers from the Society.

The continuous growth in Membership is very gratifying to see, especially the many new Foundation members, who have given so generously to help the Society off to a good start. To all our recent members, the Committee bids a warm welcome, and hopes you will find what you are looking for in the Wagner Society. If not, please let us know; or if you would like to contribute to the newsletter or help in any way, please get in touch with us.

The Annual General Meeting of the Wagner Society has been set down for Friday, 21st of May - the Friday nearest to Wagners birthday, the 22nd. Keep this date free as the entertainment after the meeting promises to be something special.

News of other events will be found in the next newsletter, in the New Year.

Until then, from myself and the committee, every best wish for a Merry Xmas and Happy New Year.

Leonard Hansen.

AN INTRODUCTION TO GOTTERDAMMERUNG

GIVEN by Mr WERNER BAER,

By Janet Wayland

On the 6th July, Society Members were invited to hear Mr. Werner Baer discourse in his inimitable way on the closing scenes of the Ring. With the Sydney concert performance of "Götterdämmerung" not too far away, it was an opportunity to do some 'homework'. Packed into a lecture hall at W.E.A., we were plunged into darkness and for a moment we were reminded of the magic of the Festspielhaus as the first stirrings of that E^b chord emerged from the Stygian depths.

Step by step Mr. Baer coaxed us with questions, testing our musical observations, "treating us as musicians", he said. At the outset we were shown the contrast between the exultant ending of Siegfried and the darkness of "Götterdämmerung" through the harmonic relationship of the opening chords in E^b min and C^b maj., sombre, dark, triste. Wagner had a remarkable sense of colour. All musicians do, and because it is a very personal reaction, we may not always see things the same way.

The importance of the notes E^b, C^b and D^b in the Ring can be appreciated when we realise that the long journey from Rheingold to "Götterdämmerung" goes from E^b to D^b, via C^b, and that every

subject is derived from the E^b arpeggio.

In illustrating the many leitmotifs, Mr Baer touched upon the destiny motif which is of such construction that it is able to be used infinitely; to move fate forward with tremendous severity by means of harmonic changes; or in a repetitive way as in the Fire scene at the end of Die Walkure, when it is locked innocent-seemingly in reverse becomes the downfall of the Gods, which in turn influences the Norn's rope of destiny motif.

And that is where we begin with this new motif symbolic of the weaving of the Norns, the three recorders of Fate, who unwind and fasten one end to a branch of the World Ash tree, which represents Eternity. The melody, continuous and seamless, follows as they weave to and fro, from Ash tree, to pine, to rock. The rope frays and breaks against the rock. The Norns interpret this as a curse, a foreboding, and suddenly the colour changes to E^b minor. The Norns yield to their destiny.

The mystery of the number 3 was discussed, albeit briefly, the religious and psychological implications being left to the experts. We noted the occurrence of the three ladies in Mozart's Magic Flute and that Bach wrote his more demanding Inventions in three parts. Mr. Baer suggests that the basic form of a chord, the triad, makes it possible to express, harmonically, most things in three.

We have a change of scene, two new themes which stand in stark contrast as the feminine and the masculine, as we hear Brynhilde exhort Siegfried to go in search of new heroic deeds. After the Norns disappear we hear the slow unwinding of a melody in the cellos broken by the Siegfried who is no longer a youth. Brynhilde herself has also undergone a transformation into a loving woman as her motif changes correspondingly. As they part, Brynhilde and Siegfried exchange tokens, he giving her the Ring, and she giving him her horse, Grane, thus part of each of them leaves, and part of each remains. This becomes the subject of their long duet, at the end of which he leads the horse off and the orchestral episode known in the concert hall as Siegfried's Rhine Journey begins. By the use of several motifs, Siegfried's actual journey is quite clearly depicted.

The distant horn announces his arrival in the valley. Loge's Fire motif suggests that he and Grane have passed through the wall of fire, and soon the song of the Rhinemaidens tells us he has reached, and is travelling along the Rhine.

A gradual change in atmosphere is wrought again by the use of the motifs of the Rings, Renunciation and Alberich wielding power over the Niebelung, and by the simple, yet powerful device of the falling semi-tone we are reminded of the conflict still unresolved.

On this threshold we had to part, leaving many questions unanswered, but as Mr. Baer says, the Ring is a controversial work and he has no wish that his audience should agree with him.

OUR BAYREUTH TRIP - 1981

by Richard King

Leaving Sydney on 19th August marked the beginning of a round world trip for my business partner, Murray Smith and myself, which had taken nearly six months of planning. This was my third visit to Bayreuth and Murray's second. Getting to Bayreuth is a major hurdle. I began to write for seats in 1961 and it was 1977 before I was successful!! Persistence!!

That year I experienced my first complete "Ring" cycle and being the Chereau production made it just that more difficult to grasp the awesome majesty of it all. Nevertheless knowing the music through recordings, I was on cloud nine, despite the interpretation's shortcomings.

This year as you probably know, there was no "Ring" cycle and would not be until 1983. Two new productions of Meistersinger and Tristan plus the former productions of Dutchman - Lohengrin and Parsifal made up this years offering. The Meistersinger was less "majestic" in its portrayal than I have seen, with a great amount of humour especially in the final scenes.

It was the first time I have seen a "Tristan" this production had the effect on me, one experiences as a dream though through a mist. An extremely moving opera.

We were booked into the Bayerischer Hof Hotel which is frightfully grand and included a large indoor pool which was a very relaxing to spend mid mornings prior to the 4 o'clock start. Early on, used to the facilities, I was assisted by a rather large gentle with a beard. Only later it dawned on us it was Bernd Weikl. ("Sachs" in Meistersinger & "Heerrufer" in Lohengrin.) That was waved to us from his dressing room at the festival house. He near Bayreuth and uses the pool in the Hotel for relaxation and exercise.

Having followed the career of Elizabeth Connell we were delighted to hear her sing Ortrud in Logengrin. I sent her a note wishing her success in the future and mentioned the formation of a Wagner Society in Australia and our dream of a "Ring" cycle being performed here. Later in London we heard her sing in her first English recital at Wigmore Hall. She received good reviews next day in the press, she did in Bayreuth. In a letter from her, Miss Connell expressed wish to return to Australia - but alas no one has asked her. No to say she has plenty of work in the Northern Hemisphere.

As usual Bayreuth was full of people from all over the world and many friends. An American told us amusing stories of the Wagner gleaned over thirty years of visiting Bayreuth, including conversations with Winifred Wagner. Also a German who has heard Tristan & Isolde hundred and twenty times since he was eight years old. I don't think Wagner saw his music as an end in itself but more as a pathway to people who experienced the complete "Ring" cycle over a four or five day period would probably never again look at the world in quite the same way as they had before. As Sir Charles Mackerras said, Wagner regarded his music as "special" and expected every member of the choir and orchestra to likewise regard it so, (I think that "feeling" was conveyed to us who heard Gotterdammerung in Sydney on 3rd October 1954). Those who have been to Bayreuth know how beautiful it is and the lifestyle of the people. The best food is often found in the more modest of the way taverns frequented by the locals but the exotic dishes to be had at inflated prices in the more elegant restaurants. During nearly 10 days in Bayreuth, we went to Italy and then to London.

twelve days. As I mentioned earlier, the Connell recital which included the Wesendonck Lieder was a highlight. Another fabulous night in London was Mahler's Ninth, the Chicago Symphony conducted by Georg Solti at Festival Hall, followed by an incredible fireworks display over the Thames. In New York we were fortunate to get seats at the Met. for Das Rheingold and Siegfried conducted by Eric Leinsdorf. Manfred Jung made his New York debut as did Eva Randova (two Bayreuth regulars).

The Productions were traditional and extremely beautiful. Back in Sydney on 1st October, I think we were even more excited at the prospect of the concert "Götterdämmerung" than we had been anywhere this trip and we certainly were not let down.

What is it about this man's music that drives one half way round the world for a few hours 'grace'. Those of us who are Wagnerites through and through probably know, but would find it difficult to explain.

Passing through Sydney at the time of the Wagner Concerts was the Editor of the newsletter of the Wagner Society in England, Miss P. Scantlebury.

Members visiting Europe are welcome to contact her at 3 Brunswick Road, Ealing, London, W5 1AQ, as they may find something of interest happening at one of the affiliated Wagner Societies.

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DATES TO REMEMBER:

December 13th - 2.00 p.m. "Lohengrin" Concordia Club

December 4th - South Pacific Liszt Society