



The Wagner Society

(Patron — Sir Charles Mackerras)

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NEWSLETTER NO. 8

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

What an exciting month August has been! Firstly, those wonderful performances of "Tristan & Isolde" which could not have failed to satisfy even the most critical Wagnerite. Sydney and Melbourne audiences turned out in capacity numbers to their respective concert halls to enjoy superb performances by orchestra and soloists alike. The acclaim was universal as evidenced by the unanimously enthusiastic reviews by the newspaper critics. Our Patron, Sir Charles Mackerras, again showed his mastery of Wagner's music, and command over his orchestras. Unfortunately, as you read this, he is already on the other side of the world carrying out his other many commitments. Sir Charles was very sorry not to be able to give a talk to the Wagner Society this year, as anticipated, and presents his apologies.

It was rather discouraging for your committee to see such a poor attendance at the Robert Gard recital. Robert's presentation was, as usual, impeccable and the programme content unusual to say the least. It had been the intention of your committee to stage further recitals and concerts, but without the full support of you, the members, this will not be possible. We would like to hear of any comments, favourable and unfavourable, regarding the recital, and about future policy on concert promotion. Our thanks and congratulations to Mr. Michael Edgeloe of the Liszt Society for the splendid preparation and printing of the programmes.

For our next function we have invited Professor Michael Ewans to talk to us on "Wagner and the Greeks". Dr. Ewans, a graduate of Oxford and Cambridge universities, is the author of numerous articles and programme notes on Greek tragedy and opera since Wagner. Most recently he has written a book - yet to appear in Australia - titled "Wagner & Aeschylus: The Ring and the Orestia", in which Dr. Ewans explores the effect of the classical greek

tragedy on Wagner, and its relationship, in points of poem and music, to the "Ring". At present Dr. Ewans is head of the Department of Drama at the University of Newcastle (N.S.W.).

The small Sydney contingent of Wagner Society members who went to the Melbourne performances of "Tristan & Isolde" were made very welcome by the committee of the Wagner Society in that city. Since its formation at the Rita Hunter luncheon a year ago the group has increased to a membership of around 70 keen Wagnerites, and several functions have been held. Talks were held with the President, David Gale, and Secretary, Aubrey Schrader, on the Sunday, on the many ways our two groups can pool their resources to the benefit of Wagner Society members in both cities. Certainly Dr. Gale is to be congratulated for the well organised and very satisfying dinner and supper during the intervals of the concerts. Hopefully we will be able to reciprocate when our Melbourne friends visit us next year for "Die Walküre".

Finally, please do not omit to check through the coming events list, and make a special effort to attend on the 27th September for what should be a very stimulating talk by a very learned Wagner scholar.

COMING EVENTS

Sunday, 19th September at 1.00 p.m.

"Götterdämmerung" performed on record at the Concordia Club, Stanmore.
Also at 1.00 p.m., but on Radio 2MBS-FM, Part 2 of "Rienzi", in the Wagner Society Programme.

Monday, 27th September at 6.30 p.m. in the Small Hall, Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Lecture, with musical illustrations, "on Wagner and the Greeks", by Professor Michael Ewans. Admission for members, students and pensioners \$3.00. General public \$4.00. See President's Report for details.

Sunday, 24th October at 1.00 p.m.

"Parsifal" performed from the latest digital von Karajan album, at the Concordia Club, Stanmore.

Sunday, 14th November at 2.00 p.m. at the Concordia Club, Stanmore, recordings of "Salome" and "Tosca", conductor von Karajan.

Sunday, 12th December at 2.00 p.m. at the Concordia Club, Stanmore, recording of "Falstaff", conductor von Karajan.

THE WAGNER INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTION, INC. of NEW YORK

I've been asked to write about membership of this organization. Even at this remote distance from USA, membership helps keep me in touch with world-wide Wagnerian activities - and not just the annual news from Bayreuth & Vancouver. For instance, notices of publications and reviews, commemorative benefit concerts of interest to Wagnerites, the staging of the entire "Ring" by the Boston Lyric Opera on four successive Sundays this month with a quite novel cast, the Parsifal film at Cannes this year and so on.

Wagner International Inst. literature not only informs, but it also strengthens one's zeal to join the coterie at Bayreuth when possible. This Institution is not an elitist grouping of those lucky enough to have strolled up Siegfried Wagner Allee every year. It seems to me like a banding together

of likeminded music lovers, firstly to share Wagnerian experience and enjoyment. Also to extend interest in Wagner's works, in face of the mediocrity spreading across the musical world of today. And what more can one ask of a world co-ordinating musical body than this! ARTHUR CARTER

THE MUSICAL LEGACY OF WAGNER - Peter Dennison, Professor of Music in the University of Melbourne. Broadcast 7th February 1982. Synopsis

Richard Wagner set his seal on the artistic climate of an entire epoch. In his own day and since his death, Wagner and his works have excited fierce and passionate adulation from his admirers, and equally devoted and intense hostility from his critics. But for anyone with a real concern for the arts, Wagner was a phenomenon that could not be ignored. Poets, playwrights, painters and novelists were intoxicated by Wagner's art, and sought to emulate its principles and to appropriate something of its practice in their desire to explore the points and counterpoints of the human condition. In this broadcast, however, Professor Dennison concentrated on the specific impact that Wagner had on other composers. The central concern of the programme were the cases of five major composers all born between 1857 and 1866, and each coming from a different European country. These five were Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Claude Debussy, Ferruccio Busoni and Edward Elgar, and works by each in which some species of debt to Wagner was particularly apparent were played together with, in most cases, the music by Wagner that had been, in that case, most influential. In addition, some account was made of the reactions to Wagner by Bruckner, Dvorak and Tchaikovsky, and of the particular case of Wagnerianism in France. In discussion of the latter, music by composers as diverse as Franck and Delibes was played.

PARSIFAL AT KARLSRUHE - Jim Leigh

The Badische Staatstheater, Karlsruhe, mounted a new production of Parsifal this year (the centenary year) and I saw the performance of Sunday 2nd May. The new opera house has an excellent big stage and pit and the foyer contains a permanent exhibition including many Wagner memorabilia. The first Tristan and Isolde (Ludwig and Malvina Schnorr) were from the Karlsruhe company and Wagner, Von Bulow and Richard Strauss often conducted there.

This was my first visit to a German "provincial" opera house and I was very interested to see if they were as good as claimed by the conductor Ferdinand Leitner, who when hearing of the cost of the Sydney Opera House, snorted and said they could have built 80 opera houses just as good for the same money in Germany. I'm inclined to agree with him now.

The production, by Gunter Roth, varied quite drastically from tradition. The wall of Monsalvat was close to the front of the stage and in view throughout the first parts of Acts I and III. There was no transformation scenes. In the Hall of the Grail, the knights just wandered in any old how, more like Mastersingers, fiddled about changing their cloaks, but sang well. Act II was radically different, being set on a rotating stage with four different rooms, each part of a luxury Victorian brothel-red plush furniture, flowers, mirrors and prostitutes for flower maidens. Kundry has a big double bed. Parsifal was in evening dress.

In the performance itself, Hans Tschammer's steady and powerful Gurnemanz controlled the whole work (he sings Amfortas in the Syberberg film of Parsifal).

Hana Tanku as Kundry was also good while Nico Boer's ringing tenor was perfect for Parsifal and he also looked the part. Hans Kiemer portrayed the suffering Amfortas—for whom there was plenty of blood—and Mark Munkittrick sang the dying Titirel. Dieter Weller (a guest from the Hamburg State Opera) was a malevolent Klingsor. The Badische Staatskapelle, Badische Staatsoper Choir (reinforced by the Stuttgart Philharmonia Vocal Ensemble) were admirably led by Christof Prick.

I thought the orchestra was exceptionally good, better than the Mannheim one, probably better than that of the English National Opera say, and certainly better than the Strasbourg Philharmonic who have made numerous opera recordings with the Opéra du Rhin (the Karlsruhe company co-operate with the Opéra du Rhin).

I was struck by the blasé reaction of the audience who probably can hear a major Wagner opera every week. There are about 80 opera houses in Germany, each with something on nearly every night of the week. While I was in Strasbourg in April, May, June (on the Germany-France border, the Rhine), there were Ring productions at Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Stuttgart and Dusseldorf, all within 2-3 hours drive. I also saw Die Frau ohne Schatten at Karlsruhe and all the impossible magical effects in that most Wagnerism (and Mozartian) of Strauss' operas were achieved.

FROM THE BIRTH OF THE WORLD TO RAGNAROOK

"Mark my new poem well", wrote Wagner to Liszt on 11th February 1853 "For it holds the world's beginning and its destruction". He was of course, talking about the "Ring" which is based upon Nordic and Teutonic mythological events and ideas.

It has often been said that an appreciation of Wagner's art is almost complete in the music itself and that words and text take a distant second. However, a broad knowledge of the text and therefore the mythological ideas of the primitive Northern people should make us relate more convincingly to the events and emotions projected by Wagner onto his characters.

Although relatively small and selected passages were taken by Wagner to suit his aim, he did take for granted that the public were familiar with the mythology recounted in the "Eddas", Volsunga Saga and the Nibelungenlied. The purpose of this article is to elucidate upon the creation myth and intergrate some of Wagner's poem with the myth.

In the very beginning of time so the Norsemen believed, there was no earth as we know it today; there was only Ginnungagap, the yawning void. Within this void moved strange mists which in the South was called Muspellheim, the land of fire and in the North, Niflheim, the land of mist. Deep down within Ginnungagap lay the well of life, Hvergelmir, from which spread the glacial waters of twelve rivers. From Muspellheim rivers also poured which contained traces of poison which slowly set to become solidified. As the North-South rivers met, ice and debris piled up over the well of life which upon melting, formed a giant in human form, Ymir - the first of all living beings. Ymir was the father of all the terrible frost giants and of all the giant kin. As ice continued to melt it gave forth a cow, Audumla, who provided milk for Ymir to grow. The cow herself licked the blocks of ice and was nourished by the salt it contained from the rivers Muspellheim. As Audumla licked away the ice, gradually a whole man emerged who was the first of the Aesir and his name was Buri. Buri had a son Borr, who married one of the giant's daughters, Bestla. With her he fathered the Three Gods Odin (Wotan, Vili and Ve).

The sons of the Giant's race immediately began an unrelenting struggle against them ceasing only with their annihilation. All giants including Ymir were killed with the sole survivor being Bergelmir who with his wife fathered the new race of giants. During this time other gods joined with the sons of Borr. In association with Odin these new gods worked to build their celestial dwelling place. In this vast obode, called Asgard, "The obode of the Aesir", each of them had his own mansion.

Between their place of residence and that of mankind the gods built a vast bridge to which they gave the name Bifrost, the rainbow. The gods then deliberated to the manner in which the earth may best be peopled. In the rotting corpse of the giant Ymir who Odin and his brothers had killed, grubs were beginning to form. From these grubs the gods made dwarfs to whom they gave human form. The dwarfs led a subterranean existence. There were no women among them and hence they had no offspring. As and when the dwarfs disappeared two princes whom the gods had given them replaced them by other dwarfs, moulded from their natal earth. Thus the race of dwarfs endlessly continued.

As for the origin of man, they sprang directly from the vegetable world. Three gods, Odin, Hoenir and Lodur were one day travelling together on the still deserted earth. At one stage they came across two trees with inert and lifeless trunks. The Gods resolved to make mortals of them. Odin gave them breath, Hoenir a soul and reasoning facilities. Lodur gave them warmth and the fresh colours of life. The man was called Ask (Ash) and his wife was Embla (Vine). From them proceeded the entire race of man who populated the "middle obode", or "Midgard" which lay midway between Niflheim and Muspellisheim.

The Teutonic people believed in the division of the Universe into three super imposed and layered worlds. It is possible they conceived the Universe merely as a kind of vast plain, in the centre of which stretched the earth, and beyond the ocean and the original abyss lay vague countries inhabited by giants. The world also consisted of the Ash Tree "Yggdasil". One of its roots reached down into the depths of the subterranean kingdom and its mighty bows rose the heights of the sky. Near the root which plunged into Nifhel, the underworld, gushed forth the fountain Hvergelmir, the bubbling source of the primitive rivers. Beside the second root, which penetrated the land of the giants, covered with frost and ice, flowed the fountain of "Mimir", in which all wisdom dwelt and from which Odin himself desired to drink even though the price demanded for a few drops was the loss of an eye. Finally, under the third root, which according to one tradition rooted in the very heavens, was the fountain of the wisest of the Norns, "Urd". Everyday the Norns drew water from the well with which they sprinkled the Ash Tree so that it should not wither or rot away. In the highest branches of the tree was perched a golden cock, which surveyed the horizon and warned the gods whenever their ancient enemies, the giants, prepared to attack them.

This vision of the world was not eternal. In the end it would perish, and in its ruin the gods themselves would be involved for the Teutons did not believe in the immortality of the gods. A day would come when the giants and demons of evil (Andvari - Alberich) who lived in remote or subterranean regions in the universe would attempt to overthrow the order maintained and established by the gods. Nor would the uprising be in vain; it would be the "twilight of the gods" and collapse of the Universe.

To this grandiose catastrophe - which is recounted in the old "Eddas", the name "Götterdämmerung" or "Ragnarok" has been given.

At the dawn of time, Gods in their palaces in Asgard had led a peaceful and industrious life. They had taken pleasure in building temples, erecting altars, working in gold and forging tools with hammer and anvil or in playing draughts together. Had they been only able to dominate their passions this golden age of peace would never had come to an end. The Gods brought down the blows of destiny on their own heads. That day in Valhalla when they tortured Gullveig, the envoy from the Vanir (a similar clan of gods analagous to the Aesir) in order to extract her gold, they committed a crime from which the first wars resulted. Later they broke their word to a giant who had reconstructed their celestial dwelling (Valhalla). As the price of his labours they had promised him the goddess Freyja, the sun and the moon, but when the time came to pay they permitted Loki to deceive the giant by a dishonest trick. From that moment all the oaths, all treaties completed in the world, began to lose their force and validity. A new era opened, characterized by perjury, violence and warfare. Men, Giants and Gods were swayed by hatred and anger, the Valkyries ranged the world continually, flying from one battle to another. Evil dreams began to trouble the sleep of Aesir, Odin uneasily watched the sinister portents accumulate. He understood that the supreme struggle was being prepared. Calmly and resolutely he made ready to face it. The stage was set for the final encounter. The battlefield was the plain "Vigrid" which stretched before Valhalla and was the square which measured 1 thousand leagues each side. Here the gods and giants, together with warriors who's numbers were countless, pitilessly butchered one another.

Odin wore a golden helmet plumed with vast eagles wings. In his hand he grasped his spear Gungnir. Like a hurricane he flew in the forefront of his warriors who swarmed endlessly from the gates of Valhalla. Around him, like a winged host, flew the Valkyries on their dazzling horses. Odin caught sight of the wolf Fenrir and, sword raised, fell upon him. The monster's gaping jaws were so vast that they swallowed up the father of the gods. Thus Odin perished, first casualty of this Titanic battle. The battle continued relentlessly hours and days until finally all great gods were dead.

Now that the God Thor (Donner), protector of mankind had perished, men were abandoned. They were driven from their hearth and the human race was swept from the face of the earth. The earth itself was beginning to loose its shape. Stars were becoming adrift from the sky and falling into the gaping void.

The Giant "Surt" set the entire earth on fire; the Universe was no longer more than an immense furnace. Flames spurted from fissures in the rocks: everywhere there was the hissing of steam. All living things, all plant life, were blotted out. Only the naked soil remained, but like the sky itself the earth was no more than cracks and crevasses. And now all the rivers and seas rose and overflowed. From every side waves lashed against waves. They swelled and boiled and slowly covered all things. The earth sank beneath the sea and the vast fields of battle where the lords of the Universe had faced each other was no longer visible.

All was finished.

This issue we present a list of the compositions by Wagner. In the next few newsletters we will have articles and reviews of the recordings (both available and deleted) that have been made of Wagner's music.

Operas and Music Dramas

		First Performance
Die Hochzeit (unfinished)	1832	
Die Feen	1833-34	Munich, 29th June, 1888
Das Liebesverbot, oder Die Novize von Palermo	1835-36	Madeburg, 29th March, 1836
Rienzi, der letzte der Tribunen	1838-40	Dresden, Court Opera 20th October, 1842
Der fliegende Hollander	1841	Dresden, Court Opera 2nd January, 1843
Tannhäuser und der Sängerkreis auf Wastburg	1843-44	Dresden, Court Opera 19th October, 1845
Lohengrin	1846-48	Weimar, Court Opera 28th August, 1850
Der Ring des Nibelungen	1853-74	Bayreuth, Wagner Festival Theatre 13,14,16,17th August, 1876
Prologue - Das Rheingold	1853-54	Munich, Court Opera 22nd September, 1869
I. - Die Walküre	1854-56	Munich, Court Opera 26th June, 1870
II. - Siegfried	1856-69	Bayreuth, Wagner Festival Theatre
III. - Götterdämmerung	1869-74	Bayreuth, Wagner Festival Theatre
Tristan und Isolde	1857-59	Munich, Court Opera 10th June, 1865
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg	1862-67	Munich, Court Opera 21st June, 1868
Parsifal	1877-82	Bayreuth, Wagner Festival Theatre 26th July, 1882

Orchestral Works

Overture in C major	1830
Overture in B-flat major	1830 (lost)
Concert Overture in D minor	1831
Concert Overture in C major	1831
Symphony in C major	1832
Overture to Raupach's 'König Enzo'	1832
Overture 'Christoph Columbus'	1835
Overture 'Rule Britannia'	1836
Overture 'Polonia'	1836
'Die letzte Heidenverschwörung in Preussen, oder Der deutsche Ritterorden in Königsberg', incidental music to a play by J. Springer	1837

'Eine Faust Ouverture' on Goethe's 'Faust'	1840
'Huldigungsmarsch'	1864
'Siegfried Idyll'	1870
'Kaisermarsch'	1871
American Centennial March	1876

Chamber Music

String Quartet in D major	1829 (lost)
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Choral Music

'Neujahrs-Kantate' for chorus and orchestra	1834
'Nicolai' National hymn for solo voice, chorus and orchestra	1837
Chorus for the vaudeville 'La Descente a la Courtille'	1840
'Das Liebesmahl der Apostel' for men's chorus and orchestra	1843
'Weihegruss' for the unveiling of the memorial to King Frederick Augustus I of Saxony, for unaccompanied men's chorus	1843
'Gruss seiner Treuen an Friedrich August den Geliebten' for unaccompanied men's chorus	1844
'An Webers Grabe' for unaccompanied men's chorus	1844

Songs

Seven compositions to Goethe's 'Faust'	1832
1. Lied der Soldaten	
2. Bauern unter der Linde	
3. Brandess Lied	
4. Lied des Mephistopheles, I	
5. Lied des Mephistopheles, II	
6. Mein Ruh' ist hin	
7. Melodram	
'Vampyr' - aria (allegro to aria in Marschner's 'Der Vampyr')	1833
Romance for bass (addition to K. Blum's 'Singspiel of Marie, Max and Michel)	1837
Song for bass (addition to J. Weigl's 'Der Schweizerfamilie')	1837
Aria, with male chorus, for bass (addition to Bellini's 'Norma')	1837 (probably)
'Der Tannenbaum' (Scheuerlein)	1838
Four French Romances for voice and piano	1839
1. Dors mon enfant (?)	
2. Mignonne (Ronsard)	
3. Attente (Victor Hugo)	
4. Les Deux Grenadiers (Heine)	
'Les Adieux de Marie Stuart' (Béranger)	1840
'Tout n'est qu'images fugitives' (Jean Reboul)	1840

(Continued next month)