



The Wagner Society

(Patron — Sir Charles Mackerras)

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NEWSLETTER NO. 9

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

As 1982 draws to a close, your Committee has been working hard on an interesting and diverse programme for 1983. Whilst some of the dates and topics later in the year may still have to be confirmed, the basic plan is there, giving you some idea of what lies ahead. We do urge any member with ideas for functions to communicate them to us, for only by having popular and successful activities can the Society flourish.

The major change being made is the holding of several General Meetings through the year, at which members are invited to join in the running of the Society. Whilst it is recognised that most people prefer to miss out on the business of meetings, we do feel that it is necessary to have participation, in order that the Committee, in its decision making, does not lose touch with the needs of the members. The meetings will be held at the Print Room, 141 Dowling St., Woolloomooloo, at 7.30 pm, and an entertainment will be organised to follow the meeting, if time permits. The dates have been set out elsewhere in the Newsletter.

It is very pleasing indeed to announce that we are to be host to such a great international operatic star as Leonie Rysanek. In the short and busy time that Miss Rysanek is in Australia, she will attend our formal dinner on Saturday, 5th February, at the Wentworth Hotel, Sydney. We can be justly proud of the Society's reputation and standing when such a notable personality accepts our invitation to be guest of honour at a function, and we can all look forward to an exciting evening meeting Miss Rysanek, and listening to her experiences of a long theatrical career.

members of the Opera Guild and other music lovers have been invited to attend the dinner also, so make your application early, as numbers will have to be limited. The evening should be a fitting finale to the Sydney Festival Season.

Whilst mentioning the Festival, I must remind you of the wonderful concert the A.B.C. has organised at the Sydney Town Hall on January 28th. You will find in the Newsletter full details, and an application form for tickets which you should return without delay.

Keep the date of 20th May free to attend our Annual "Wagner's Birthday" Dinner. Our special guest this year will be Rita Hunter, who you'll find is a delightful person to meet socially, as well as being our very own stunning Brünnhilde later in the year. There will also be a raffle drawn that evening - following last year's successful one - this time the prizes will be two tickets to Die Walküre, a recording of Lohengrin, and the book of Richard & Cosima Wagner which is reviewed in this Newsletter. Sale of tickets will commence in the New Year.

During July and August quite a few of our members travelled to the Wagner Festivals of Seattle and Bayreuth. Not only were they able to enjoy the fine music and theatre, but also, being a Wagner Society member, they could relate better to their counterparts in other countries. May I say thank you to these roving ambassadors, for passing on to us their interesting stories, and for making the Australian Wagner Society wider known around the world.

Whilst I was in Paris in October I met Dr. Catherine Devraigne, President of the formidable Cercle Nationale Richard Wagner, the oldest and largest Wagner Society outside Germany. Their list of activities and guest artists is most impressive, and they would welcome visits by our members to their meetings. Also, their collection of art works and Wagner memorabilia is breathtaking and, naturally, quite priceless.

In New York I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Ingo Von Boenigk, President of the Wagner International Institution. Generous with his hospitality and very interested in our activities, he talked enthusiastically about the ways our groups can co-operate to mutual benefit. He introduced me to Carl Childs, Chairman of the North Californian Chapter in - a little closer to home - San Francisco. Members who would like to visit these groups on their travels should contact me for the appropriate addresses and details.

Finally, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and look forward to seeing you at the concert on the 28th January and at our gala dinner on the 5th of February.

MEETINGS & EVENTS III 1983

Saturday, 5th February - Black-tie dinner in honour of Miss Leonie Rysanek, 7.30 for 8.00 pm at the Wentworth Hotel, Sydney. Pre-dinner drinks and wines are included in the cost of \$28.00 per person.

Use the pink application form for place reservations.

Tuesday, 15th March - General meeting of the Wagner Society, 7.30 pm at the Print Room, 141 Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo. A video film will be shown after the meeting if time permits.

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Tuesday, 15th March (continued)

All members are welcome, but please phone a week or so before, so that adequate seating can be arranged.

Tuesday, 12th April - Talk given by Sir Charles Mackerras. Date and details to be confirmed.

Friday, 20th May - Annual General Meeting and Annual Dinner. Special guest will be Miss Rita Hunter.

Tuesday, 19th July - General Meeting.

Tuesday, 13th September - Talk by the production team of the Australian Opera's "Die Walkure".

Saturday, 8th October) Performances of Die Walkure for which the Wagner

Friday, 28th October -) Society has special group booking arrangements.
(last night))

Sunday, 20th November - 1st Annual Picnic at Ball's Head Park, near Greenwich.

OTHER FUNCTIONS AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

Sunday, 19th December 1982 - An all Wagner concert, presented by the A.B.C., featuring bass-baritone Bruce Martin and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. The programme includes Wotan's Farewell from Die Walkure, the Siegfried Idyll, Tannhäuser Overture, and selections from Die Meistersingers of Nurnberg.

Please send in your order for tickets as soon as possible, using the pink application form.

Sunday, 30th January at 2.00 pm on 2MBS-FM, the Wagner Society pays tribute to the great singer, Leonie Rysanek, in a special programme of interviews and records.

Sunday, 13th February - more Wagner on 2MBS-FM at 1.00 pm marking 100 years to the day since the death of the composer.

Sunday, 20th February at 2.00 pm at the Concordia Club for "The Flying Dutchman", in super Hi-Fi.

OPERA ON RECORD

JEAN LOUIS STUURUP

Unfortunately due to heavy personal commitments I have had to cancel Falstaff which was scheduled for December 12. This was announced at our last session, when it was also suggested that a Christmas party be arranged for all our "regulars" and any other members who would care to come along. I looked into this, but am very sorry to say that this great idea was thought of too late, and there just isn't enough time to organise things.

Next year I will be starting off again on February 20 at 2.00 pm with the WESSENDONK LIEDER and THE FLYING DUTCHMAN. The next newsletter will show the dates of all the following operas. I will also announce the dates on February 20 at our first concert. Each month will feature a different Wagner opera with a different cast from that of last year.

BOOK REVIEW - RICHARD AND COSIMA WAGNER (Biography of a Marriage) by
Geoffrey Skelton

This book by the translator of Cosima's diaries is possibly one of the most illuminating biographies on Wagner's most creative years which I have read. It spans the period of Tristan-Mastersingers to the Ring and finally Parsifal. I find the book to be written with warmth, humanity and a true scholarly instinct.

When one hears the curious misconceptions surrounding Cosima's influence on Wagner and his music, one's immediate reaction is annoyance - especially when upon questioning it is found little or nothing has been read on the subject. The great tenderness and love felt by both of them comes through as the author had access to many letters and documents previously overlooked or not available. The book also covers the relationship with Ludwig II with many letters and cables quoted. The research involved was a huge task.

Throughout his life Wagner was drawn to the philosophy of Schopenhauer and I think the author has had the wit to understand their great parallel thinking rather than just a slavish adoption of someone else's philosophy. This admiration of Schopenhauer was also shared by Frederick Nietzsche. Wagner met Nietzsche when the latter was 15 years old (1868) and the friendship, which was a mutual admiration of each other's achievements, lasted about 10 years. When Nietzsche attacked the very foundation of Wagner's Art in the book "Human, All too Human", he knew the friendship would end - it was a parting of the ways for both thinkers. Cosima wrote in her diary, "Richard feels he would be doing the author a favour for which he would one day thank him if he did not read it". Their insights reveal along with others, the enormous influence Wagner had upon his contemporaries.

Finally I would recommend the book on the basis of inspiration alone. Where lesser men would have given up because of monumental obstacles in their path Wagner as we know achieved the almost impossible. Cosima was an integral part in his efforts and in a way surrendered her own personality to help him. Their relationship transcends our understanding of the normal husband/wife ideal of the period and I have no doubt their destinies were bound together from before they ever met.

The last essay that Wagner wrote before he died was part of an article about masculine and feminine "On the Womanly in the Human". If he had finished it I think it would have been a revelation - for who can doubt that a mind which created "The Ring" obviously had insights well ahead of his time.

The book is available to Wagner Society members at \$31.95, a saving of \$8.00 off the recommended retail, but leaving a small margin of profit for the Society.

RICHARD KING

WAGNER AND THE GREEKS given by Dr. Michael Ewans on the 27th September at
the N.S.W. Conservatorium of Music.

Wagner first became interested in ancient Greek culture as a schoolboy, but the crucial period in which he was influenced by Greek literature begins in 1847 at the time he was finishing Lohengrin. He then read the new translation of Aeschylus's Oresteia and "My ideas about the significance of the drama and the theatre were without a doubt moulded by these impressions". The reading

of Aeschylus at the same time as he was beginning to study the early Norse sources for the Siegfried myths provided Wagner with a solution to several artistic problems.

He withdrew from composition altogether for five years and formulated a new ideal for his own art based on the model of Aeschylean tragedy in a series of prose writings. The example of the Oresteia gave him the courage to compose the vast Ring Cycle, like an Aeschylean trilogy, as a sequence of "stage festival dramas".

This lecture proceeded to illustrate in detail some specific areas in which the Oresteia influenced the Ring. The Cassandra scene in Agamemnon was compared with the scene in which Sieglinde in a trance foretells the death of Siegmund; the style of the confrontation between Brünnhilde and Siegmund was shown to be formed under the influence of the dialogue technique of Greek tragedy, and the scene between Hagen and Alberich was compared with its Aeschylean original, the appearance of the ghost of Klytemnestra in Eumenides.

THE PACIFIC NORTH-WEST FESTIVAL, SEATTLE, 1982.

JANET WAYLAND

I confess I knew very little about Seattle before I went there in August, other than that it is the port which serves as a base for U.S. nuclear ships whose presence is making the locals very nervous, and that anyone I spoke to who'd been to this handsome city assured me I'd love it. Not one said why, and there simply isn't a one word reason for enjoying Seattle. There is so much to delight the visitor. Bernard Levin likened it to the White Queen of Australia, Adelaide, with its "wide streets and unhurried demeanor". Maybe, like Adelaide, its distance from the national capital gives the Seattelites the time to be friendly and their quiet pride in their city and its achievements. A shimmering setting with glimpses of water at every turn; to the East, Lake Washington, to the West, Puget Sound, and on a clear day, the Cascade Mountains and Mount Rainier, and once you learn the mnemonic for the street names you can throw away the map.

Jackson, Madison, Seneca, Union and Pike.

The mnemonic? Jesus Made Seattle Under Pressure.

The named streets slope down to the water-front where imaginative restoration and recycling of old wharf buildings has revived this former "skid row". And Seattle is where that expression came from. The giant logs were skidded down the bank to the water, and in hard times the unemployed headed for Skid Row in the hope of a job. A Melbourne tram shuttles along the water-front; a novelty for Americans and a pleasant surprise for one Australian visitor. The view of the city from here is sadly brutalised by a concrete elevated roadway far worse than our monster at Circular Quay.

At Pike Place Market, original and some new buildings, there was smoked salmon a metre long at ludicrous prices, fruit and vegetables coloured to perfection and the choice was endless. The memory of those blue point oysters at McCormick's will remain to lure me back another day.

Pioneer Square and the surrounding street gave me many rewarding hours of browsing. Again, sensitive reclamation of the old has brought back to this birthplace of Seattle a new, attractive life, not an imitation of it. There

are tempting antique shops, a print shop, Shorey's irresistible second-hand book shop and little restaurants continually serving fresh and interesting food.

But I wasn't there as a tourist. I was in search of another Valhalla, for Seattle proudly boasts of being the only place in the world where the Ring is produced twice in a fortnight, in German and then English. It was Glyn Ross, the Director of Seattle Opera, whose implacable determination it has been to bring people to the opera, and who set about selling opera with all the huckstering style an American can muster. Having succeeded in filling the house, emphasis now is on educating this willing audience by presenting a third of their season's operas in English and the rest in their original language.

Having seen the Chéreau and the Goetz Friedrich productions, I wanted to see and hear the celebrated Andrew Porter translation at first hand; a beautifully crafted work in itself.

The Opera House, built in warm brick, stands in a park, along with restaurants, (a recycled pavilion), fountains, craft shops, all of which came into being with the World Fair in 1962. One large fountain looking more like a bristling space craft settled in its crater, gives forth music at a subtle volume and to my surprise it was strains of Wagner and Rossini filtering through to workers in their lunch break, children romping on the grass and visitors sunning themselves. Just one of many unexpected delights. I couldn't help wondering what sort of music would come from an Australian fountain in an Australian park!

Sadly, Seattle Opera has to share their beautiful theatre and has to pack up sets, costumes and instruments at the end of each performance and leave the space for others, though for the two weeks of the festival it is theirs, I imagine. Inside the red and deep coral pink decor gives a warmth to the large auditorium, from any point of which the sight lines and acoustics would be unimpaired. The pit is enviably large but the prompter has to perch on the top of a ladder! We all have our problems.

On the comfortable walk from my hotel to the Opera House a few of the faithful were to be seen making their pilgrimage, while many would be arriving from the city centre by monorail, another bonus from 1962.

After a cheerful welcome from Glyn Ross, and a plea for no applause ("we are still educating an audience"), all is set to begin.

With the first murmurings of the E^b chord projected light patterns move in waves across the black curtain before it rises to reveal the rocky, watery scene behind a scrim on which those same light patterns played throughout. As expected, the sets and costumes were based on the traditional Rachman design and the production "as Wagner would have wanted it". The very mention of Chéreau sends a shudder through the company. The new production for 1983 promises new and exciting treatment, I understand from the lighting people, and an assurance that, most definitely, they will not "do a Chéreau". The fibre-glass rocks which were shuffled about for change of scene are well and truly due for retirement, as are the tired old costumes.

The augmented Seattle Symphony Orchestra performed more than adequately. The strings, cellos in particular, were superb, and the brass never once let us down. Henry Holt led the band with great energy. I am still mystified as to why they produced the anvil sounds of the Niebelungen from high up on stage right. Could someone have pressed the wrong button? It was hardly a subterranean effect.