



WAGNER  
SOCIETY  
nsw

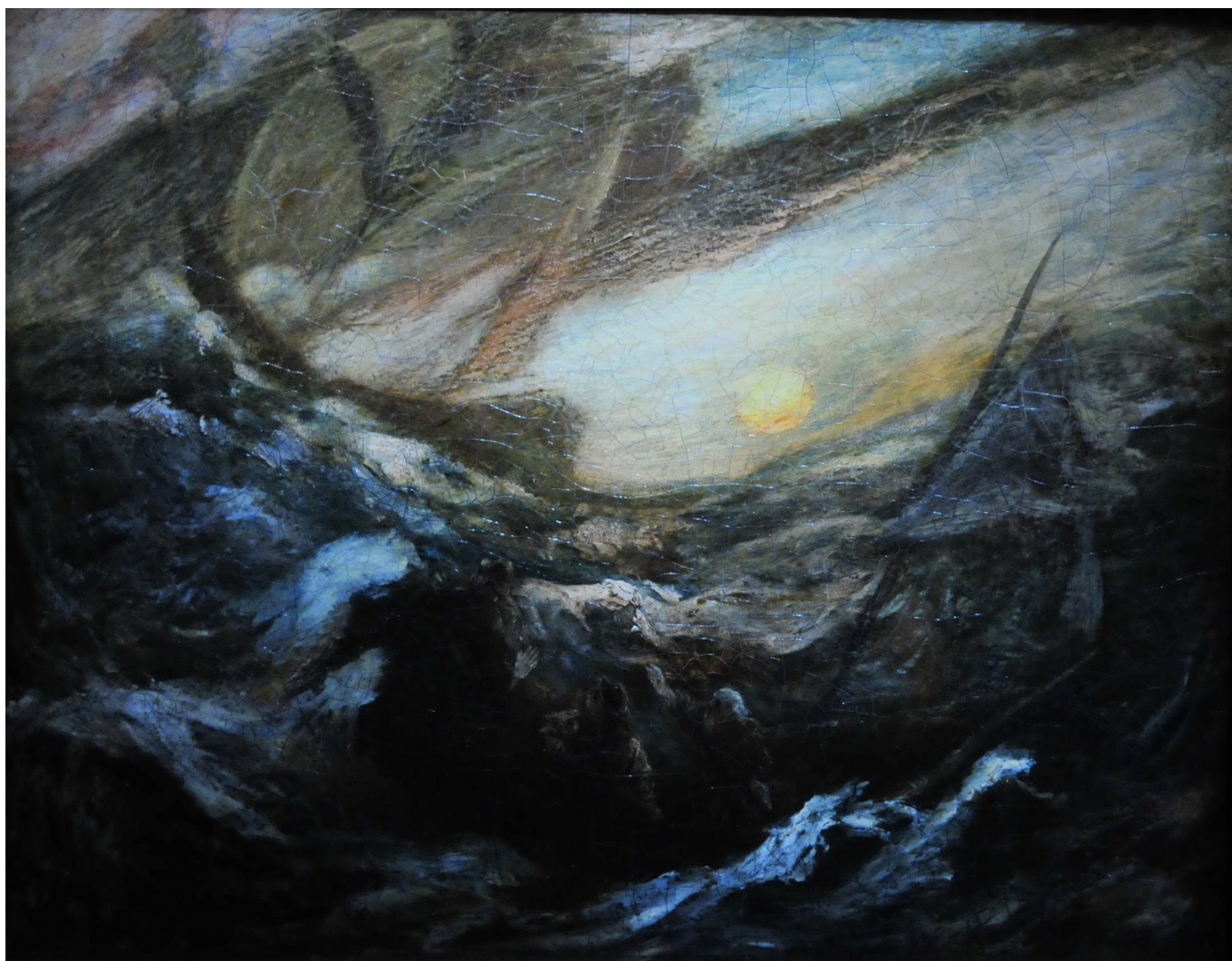
CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

# WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 24

# 151

DECEMBER 2018



Albert Pinkham Ryder The Flying Dutchman 1887, Smithsonian Museum

## 21 October SEMINAR

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg - Dr David Larkin, lecturer at the Sydney Conservatorium, presented a seminar as background to the new ROH/Opera Australia Melbourne production. Musical examples were sung by Warwick Fyfe - baritone - Beckmesser; Shane Lowrencer - Baritone - Hans Sachs; Donna Balson - soprano - Eva; Dean Bassett - tenor - Walter with Tom Johnson - accompanist





## FOR YOUR DIARY

2019

30 Jan & 1 Feb	The Bayreuth Festival in association with Katharina Wagner will present the Carsten Die Walkure in Abu Dhabi	The Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi
3, 5 & 7 Feb	Melbourne Opera presents Der fliegende Holländer conducted by Anthony Negus	Regent Theatre, Melbourne
20, 22 & 24 Feb	Victorian Opera presents Parsifal conducted by Richard Mills	Palais Theatre, St Kilda
9 Mar – 11 May	The Ring at the Met	New York
14, 16 & 17 March	Donald Runnicles conducts SSO with Highlights from The Ring	Sydney Opera House
7 – 17 June	The Ring in Kiel with Bradly Daley as Siegfried	Kiel
13 – 23 June	Wagner Days in Budapest. - 2 Ring Cycles. Information from <a href="http://www.finearttours.com">www.finearttours.com</a>	Budapest
2 November	Nina Stemme and John Lundgren in gala all Wagner concert with TSO	Hobart

## COMING EVENTS 2019 - 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
10 February	<b>12.30pm: DVD: Die Meistersinger Act 1. Bayreuth/Barrie Kosky</b> <b>2.00pm: Conductor Anthony Negus will talk about his passion for Wagner's music</b>	Goethe Institut
10 March	<b>12.30pm: DVD: Die Meistersinger Act 2. Bayreuth/Barrie Kosky</b> <b>2.00pm: Conductor Asher Fisch will talk about conducting Wagner</b>	Goethe Institut
2 April	<b>2.00pm: Annual General Meeting followed by musical entertainment TBA</b>	Goethe Institut
21 May	<b>2.00pm: Concert by young singers followed by celebration of Wagner's birthday</b>	Goethe Institut

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](http://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)**

## DONATIONS RECEIVED SINCE SEPT 2018

S M Kelly

**Our thanks for the generous donations to help the Society's objectives.**

## NEW MEMBERS SINCE JUNE 2018

Renate Siegel [1215]

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

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

We are approaching the end of another busy and successful year for the Wagner Society in NSW. I am writing this the day after returning from Melbourne, where a number of NSW Society members saw a splendid *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* produced by Opera Australia. It used the Royal Opera House Covent Garden production by Kasper Holten, revived by Dan Dooner. The two leading roles were sung by overseas singers, Michael Kupfer-Radecky as Hans Sachs and Stefan Vinke as Walther von Stolzing. But all other roles were cast from Opera Australia; there were excellent performances by Warwick Fyfe as Beckmesser, Daniel Sumegi as Veit Pogner, a first-rate Nicholas Jones as David, Natalie Aroyan as Eva and Dominica Matthews as Magdalena. The chorus was in fine voice. Pietari Inkinen conducted with his usual energy and the orchestra was splendid. The State Theatre in Melbourne has a large stage and excellent acoustics. The audience on opening night responded positively.

At the NSW Wagner Society Xmas party at 2.00 pm on November 25, we will be privileged to have as guest Stefan Vinke, responding to an invitation from immediate past President Jane Mathews to speak about his career and sing for us. I look forward to a large number of members joining us with Christmas dishes at St Columba's Uniting Church.

A large number of members prepared themselves for Die Meistersinger with a full afternoon seminar by Dr David Larkin from the NSW Conservatorium. David prepared a well organized discussion of the opera, with detailed projections. With the assistance of Warwick Fyfe, there was an excellent quartet of singers. This would certainly have provided a detailed briefing for those of us going to Melbourne.

We already have 6 applications from members for tickets to Bayreuth in 2019. The years when new Rings are being prepared for future seasons have less demand. They therefore provide great opportunities to get excellent seats provided by the Friends of Bayreuth and the Verband of

Wagner Organisations, We would encourage you to choose from the operas available: *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal*, *Hollander* and *Die Meistersinger*.

We have developed an excellent program of presentations for 2019. We have some major speakers, such as conductors Antony Negus and Asher Fisch early in the year and our patron Simone Young coming to talk about her flourishing career later in the year. Australian tenor Stuart Skelton is also hoping to fit us in, as is US director Francesca Zambello when she is directing West Side Story for Handa Opera on the Harbour.

We are still seeking assistance in obtaining fresh material for the Quarterly, which has become a very polished and admired production.

With best wishes for the festive season and a positive New Year.

### Postscript

After sending me her report Colleen was suddenly hospitalised. Colleen is now home and feeling much better but was unable to attend the Christmas Party. I'm sure all members will join me in wishing her a speedy recovery. Mike Day, Editor

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## QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

REPORTS ON MUSICAL EVENTS AND MEETINGS	P.5
FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS	P.8
REPORT BY CHRIS CURCURUTO	P.12
BUDDHIST AND HINDU CONCEPTS IN WAGNER - Peter Basset	P.13
R.I.P. RICHARD GILL, CONDUCTOR	P.17

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## REPORTS ON MUSICAL EVENTS AND MEETINGS

### 30 SEPTEMBER BRICKBATS AND BOUQUETS

Over the course of a pleasant couple of hours an enthusiastic audience was entertained by members who had received tickets from the Wagner Society and attended the 2018 Bayreuth Festival.

Garry Richards gave us detailed insights into the Hollander set in an electric fan factory. Peter Cresswell was very enthusiastic about Parsifal, set in contemporary Mosel, which was unanimously agreed to have been a very moving experience. Peter also recommended the Kosky Meistersinger, set in Wahnfried and the Nuremberg Trials courtroom, but wasn't impressed by Tristan und Isolde, unlike both Florian and Esteban who found Act 2 especially insightful and moving. Jenny Fearn saw Meistersinger in 2017 and again this year and described the quite substantial changes that had been made to the staging – one of the unique characteristics of Bayreuth where productions are always seen as works in progress. Jenny also told us about her experience of the Ring in Erl – very beautiful and enjoyable.

Georgina Carnegie described her first Bayreuth experience this year and her enthusiasm reminded many of us about our first visit experiencing the charm of the town and the wealth of possible other activities, plus of course, the superb acoustics of the theatre and the extraordinary power of the chorus. She loved the humour of Die Meistersinger and the beauty of the orchestral playing in Parsifal. We were surprised to hear from Georgina that Placido Domingo was booed for his woeful conducting of Die Walkure. Nick Dorsch



finished off by talking about seeing a Ring in Leipzig instead of Bayreuth this year – this seemed a worthwhile alternative. We then all continued with lively discussion over afternoon tea, including Bratwurst and sauerkraut to continue the Bayreuth mood as well as the usual delicious cakes provided by generous members.

### 21 OCTOBER DAVID LARKIN SEMINAR: WAGNER'S DIE MEISTERSINGERS VON NÜRNBERG - TERENCE WATSON



It was a pleasure for all the attendees of this Seminar to welcome David Larkin back to the Wagner Society for another series of illuminating and enjoyable insights into yet another of Wagner's operas in preparation for the production in Melbourne by Opera Australia at the end of November. David constructed his four hour

Seminar in four parts: An overview of the work; a musical interlude; a discussion of the music—choruses, tunes and musical language; the “dark side” of Wagner and this work; a second musical interlude; and an interpretation, including the reception history and some significant productions. The following summary does not do full justice to the range and

subtlety of David's presentation. Any errors in this report are due to the author's poor memory and rapidly scribbled notes.

#### Overview of the work's genesis

David reminded us that Wagner conceived the work in 1845, when he was on a water cure in Marienbad and began reading Georg Gottfried Gervinus's (1805-1871) History of German Literature [the 5 volume *Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen* published between 1835 and 1842], which contains an account of the Mastersingers and Hans Sachs. In the same year, he wrote a prose draft of a *Komische Oper* as a *Satyr Spiel* in the context of his work on *Tannhäuser*. In 1861, he produced another prose draft and then a poetic libretto. During this time, he also finished *Tristan und Isolde*.

In 1862, he composed some musical elements, including the prelude to act 1, which was performed in Leipzig on 1 November 1862. Most of the work was written between February 1866 and October 1867. Sachs's final monologue was conducted by Bruckner in Linz in 1868. The premiere of

the work was conducted by Hans von Bülow on 21 June 1868. David noted that, for the first time in a Wagner production, the houses of Nuremberg were proper sets, not painted flats.

Having set up the basic history, David introduced the first musical episode, which turned out to be a *coup de théâtre* for the audience.

### Musical Interlude 1

David had arranged for a performance of the wonderfully comic section of act 2 of the work in which Sachs marks Beckmesser's song as he attempts to serenade the woman in the window, who he thinks is Eva but is her servant Magdalene. The performance turned out to be a teaser for the production in Melbourne for which this Seminar was preparation. The singers were: Shane Lawrence, bass-baritone (understudy for Michael Kupfer-Radecky), as Hans Sachs; Warwick Fyfe, baritone, as Beckmesser; Donna Balson, soprano, as Eva; and Dean Bassett, tenor, as Walther von Stolzing. Donna and Dean ably contributed their whispered comments from their hiding spot behind the piano. The interaction between Shane and Warwick was electrifying, as well as very funny, with Warwick bringing his characteristic intensity and comic flair to his performance. I hope that we get to hear Shane perform the whole role very soon, since he has a voice a great richness and a physical and stage presence very consonant with not only Sachs but also a future Wotan. Accompanist Tom Johnson assisted the singers greatly with clean, clear playing that brought out the comedy inherent in Wagner's score in which he is often playing games with tunes and techniques.



### Discussion of the music

The musical interlude led David neatly into his discussion of Wagner's compositional achievements in this complex work. A major focus in this section was Wagner's deployment of styles and techniques from the time of Hans Sachs and the mastersingers in Nuremberg in a work that was also innovative. In 1861, David informed us, Wagner was studying Jacob Grimm's 1811 *On old German Mastersong (Über den altdeutschen Meistersang)* [Wagner had a copy in his Dresden library]. He was also reading Johan Christoph Wagenseil's 1697 *Nuremberg Chronicle*, which contained the mastersinger guild's rules for mastersongs. [If you would like to learn about mastersongs and singing, and your old German is good enough, you can read Grimm's work at [www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/grimm\\_meistersang\\_1811?p=7](http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/grimm_meistersang_1811?p=7).]

A central feature of Wagner's borrowing from the mastersong tradition was its Bar form: A-A-B, in which a Bar is the whole song, A represents a *Stollen* (or stanza) and B an *Abgesang*

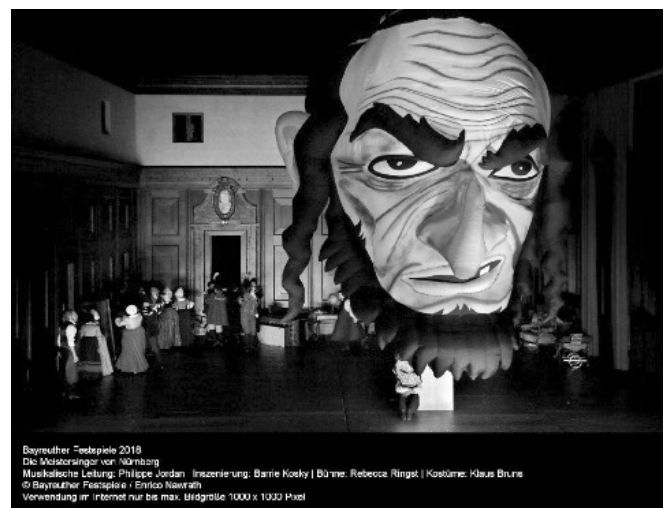
(literally "aftersong" or refrain). David then explained how one of the challenges for a Mastersinger was to create a new *Ton* or tune (loosely), but a new one could only be created once the Mastersinger had mastered all the *Töne* in their tradition. Also, a new *Ton* could not infringe any of the multitudinous rules, nor share more than four syllables with an existing *Ton*. Of all the mastersongs recorded, only 13 different *Töne* were attributed to the historical Sachs.

Davis also pointed out *Meistersinger* is more tuneful than we might expect after *Tristan und Isolde*, but this was consistent with one of Wagner's aesthetic principles: each artwork must differ from all others. In addition, Wagner now introduced duets—two singers singing at the same time, but with different texts—in contradistinction to his stated principles in his essays and earlier operas, in which singers alternated, because he wanted clarity of text above all. David suggested that, in Wagner's new Schopenhauerian perspective, textual clarity was replaced by the primacy of music. Even ensemble writing reappears in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in the form of the act 3 quintet. David then took us through the text and music of the quintet, while pointing out how Wagner varies the texts and music to characterise the singers.

To help establish the historical setting through the use of old styles in music (more or less pre-Haydn), he uses chorale style writing at the beginning of act 1 but does not use any existing chorale. He uses toward the end of act 3 a text from Sachs—"ein wonnigliche Nachtigall," well-known as an anti-Catholic poem. [The crowd acclaims Sachs: *Wacht auf, es naht gen den Tag; ich hör' singen im grünen Hag ein wonnigliche Nachtigall.* (Awake, the dawn is drawing near; I hear, singing in the green grove, a blissful nightingale).] Wagner also drew on traditional guild tunes for the entrances of the guilds.

David then drew attention to the way in which Walther varies the traditional forms and manner of singing, suggesting that, in the first song in act 1, "Am stillen..." he might be speaking it, rather than singing. In his first Trial Song, according to David, Sachs senses that there is a conformity with the rules in the structure, but also innovation.

Wagner also uses counterpoint, which moves horizontally, to underscore the historical interest of the opera because it was typical of the period, rather than harmony, which moves



Act 2 Bayreuth 2017 dir Barrie Kosky



vertically. However, David at the piano also illustrated the way in which Wagner used cycles of fifths in the chromatic style of Bach and Mozart, but also the use of augmented chords that were not used before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. [I have to confess no musical training, so my account here might be inaccurate.]

We broke during this intellectual and musical nourishment for a wonderful afternoon tea provided by some of the wonderful chefs among our members.

### The “dark side” of Wagner and this work

In this section, David ventured into the complex and controversial area of Wagner’s anti-Semitism and its relationship to his artworks by setting up a dialectic between a number of commentators on art and Wagner. He quoted Schopenhauer: in the composer, more than any other artist, the man is entirely separate and distinct from the artist. Theodor Adorno: we cannot separate the ideological element and hold to a pure art as a kind of purified substrate. Dieter Borchmeyer: there is no Jewish character in Wagner’s works; his hatred of Jews is excluded from the inner sanctum of his creations. Marc Weiner: anti-Semitism is integral to understanding the mature music-dramas. David rehearsed the standard arguments or allegations about Beckmesser and his Jewish cantorial style of singing, which is, somehow, according to another view, also a parody of old-fashioned bel canto singing; the use of the Jew in the briar-bush folktale; the way in which Beckmesser appears in act 3 (shuffling like a caricature of a Jew). David also referred to Wagner’s notorious essay *Jewishness in Music* in which the author offered a philosophical, historical and genetic explanation of why Jews are incapable of both original music-making, and integration into German society and culture. Commentators often refer to Beckmesser’s mangling of the text of Walther’s poem as written down by Sachs as an illustration of Wagner’s point in the essay that Jews are not capable of properly understanding their adopted language. David also referred to the parallels often drawn between Beckmesser and Mime in The Ring Cycle.

David concluded this section by saying that he was grateful there is a gap between the character and such external references as the use of Jewish stereotypes.

### An interpretation and some reception history

David then moved onto the slightly less controversial topic of Wagner’s nationalism, noting that the opera premiered shortly before German unification in 1870. To illustrate how Wagner’s work has been used by directors and a Fuhrer to make political, cultural and racial points, David used some video extracts from a number of productions. He began with Barry Kosky’s acclaimed Bayreuth production of *Meistersinger* to illustrate the way in which the Hans Sachs character is an portrayal by Wagner of himself, as an older man, and that, in his role as Sachs, Wagner expresses his heartfelt commitment to and defence of German art. Against this production, David showed a short clip of Karl Böhm with the Berlin Philharmonic conducting the conclusion to a staged performance of the opera for a Nazi Party function, in which the production looks like a Nazi rally.

David suggested that there was a pattern in Wagner’s work which the Nazis found fitted their own views, but also observed that, just because the Nazis appropriated Wagner’s works does not mean that their beliefs were his. Adorno, though, claimed that the form of nationalism in which Wagner participated exploded into National Socialism, which could then draw on Wagner’s writings and artworks for its rationalisation.

In contrast, David referred to the research of David Dennis, published in British journal *The Wagnerian*, showing that there is no evidence that Nazi cultural politicians or their *volkisch* forebears and associates referred to Beckmesser as Jewish, or to his fate as foreshadowing National Socialist policies against the Jews. On the other hand, Wagner’s representation of the *Volk* was fundamental to the Nazi reception of *Meistersinger* and Hans Sachs’s relationship to the *Volk*.

As a kind of *Abgesang*, David showed a clip of Lauritz Melchior in the 1946 film *Two Sisters from Boston*, in which the singer is being recorded on a very early acetate disk through a very large trumpet. He sings the final version of Walther’s *Preislied*. The finished recording is then played back to him, to his great surprise and pleasure. This is a very funny scene, making fun of the early days of recording, with a guest appearance by the HMV dog! [You can watch the extract at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cqnATSWX6L](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cqnATSWX6L).]

David concluded by considering Wieland Wagner’s solution to the politicisation of the work. In 1956, Wieland Wagner stripped the work of all the naturalistic elements of previous stagings, presenting the work in a timeless, placeless world, with no Nuremberg, no nationalistic costumes, but with innovative lighting. However, this production was very unpopular and so, in 1957, Wieland added some kitschy design elements to suggest the beloved city. Among other productions, David also referred to Katharina Wagner’s 2007 production for Bayreuth, which, among other things turned Walther into a painter, and Stefan Herheim’s 2017 production, which set the work in a workshop composed of huge sets, making the performers seem like miniatures. And now for Melbourne!

The audience was immensely grateful for David’s detailed analyses and deep insights into the work and the world out of which it emerged, as well as the world into which it was thrust.

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## 25 NOVEMBER CHRISTMAS PARTY

The annual Christmas Party had a very special guest of honour this year – Stefan Vinke, fresh from his wonderful *Meistersinger* performances in Melbourne. Unfortunately Stefan had a virus and was unable to sing but he talked about his career and its highlights for well over an hour, in response to questions from our Past President Jane Mathews and many enthusiastic audience members. This was followed by Christmas drinks and nibbles and a raffle draw, with many desirable prizes donated by generous members and friends.

Many thanks are due to VP Leona Geeves for her massive effort in pulling the event together.

# FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

## DVDs

**Barrie Kosky's** stimulating 2017 Bayreuth production of Die Meistersinger will be shown at 12.30 before regular meetings over the course of 2019, starting on 10 February – Act 1, then 10 March – Act 2



## 10 FEBRUARY

**Anthony Negus**, who is in Australia to conduct Melbourne Opera's Der fliegende Holländer will talk about his passion for Wagner's music



Anthony Negus studied clarinet and piano at the Royal College of Music London and gained a music degree at Oxford University. He was for several years a musical assistant in Wuppertal, and in Bayreuth working with Erich Leinsdorf, Heinrich Hollreiser (Tannhäuser), Horst Stein (Ring), and Eugen Jochum (Parsifal).

Following a period with Hamburg State Opera, he joined the Welsh National Opera (WNO) music staff. As a conductor there, he built up a wide repertoire of operas including Beethoven, Gluck, Mozart and Richard Strauss.

Working with the legendary Wagnerian conductor and coach Sir Reginald Goodall in the 1970's and 80's was a formative and highly influential period which led to his conducting Parsifal and Tristan und Isolde; and then assisting Sir Richard Armstrong, Rheingold, Siegfried and Gotterdammerung..

Over many years as Music Director of Longborough Festival Opera, he has established himself as one of the most perceptive and original conductors of the Wagner repertoire, culminating in the highly acclaimed Ring Cycle in 2013, followed by Tristan und Isolde, Tannhäuser, and Die Zauberflöte. The 2017 revival of Tristan und Isolde prompted unprecedented critical and audience acclaim.

## REVIEWS OF ANTHONY NEGUS CONDUCTING DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER

With the full support of the orchestra playing at their very best, Anthony Negus was aware – as only someone with Wagner's music in his blood is – of the intricacies of the score: it was stormy and muscular when necessary yet had nuance and lyricism elsewhere. Negus revealed all the true romantic sweep and dramatic drive necessary to make his Der fliegende Holländer battle the high seas and not become becalmed.

**Jim Pritchard**

<http://seenandheard-international.com/2018/06/anthony-negus-conducting-allows-longboroughs-der-fliegende-hollander-to-conquer-high-seas/>

From the spine-tingling opening chords of the overture, Negus stirred up the swell and spume of the tempest-tossed wandering of the cursed Dutchman. The antiphonal brass resounded in the resonant acoustic and the the woodwind chattered like the gale in the rigging. The score demonstrates the composer's symphonic technique, while looking back to the Singspiels of Weber and Marschner and anticipating the mature style of the later music dramas. Negus fairly broad conducting effected the transitions skilfully, always in command of the longer span and dramatic ebb and flow.

**By John Johnston, 14 June 2018 Bachtrak**

Negus sets up the story's tensions in a passionate, spacious account of the Overture, the balance between strings and the rest spot on, and, while the Longborough orchestra has sounded fuller and freer, it and the conductor are very singer-friendly. In the programme book Negus goes into some detail about the various editions and additions to Wagner's score, and there are many moments when you can hear the music anticipating Lohengrin as much as Parsifal.

[http://www.classicalsource.com/db\\_control/db\\_concert\\_review.php?id=15514](http://www.classicalsource.com/db_control/db_concert_review.php?id=15514)

*The Wagner expert Barry Millington once suggested how the composer came to choose Der fliegende Holländer as his subject for an opera: 'Living in squalid lodgings in Paris, Wagner and his wife [Minna] are forced to pawn wedding presents and other silver items to buy food. Uprooted from hearth and home, persecuted by creditors, unfulfilled in love. Wagner identifies himself with the mythical wanderer, the Flying Dutchman.' Another musicologist Christopher Wintle propounded there was a connection between the Dutchman and the mythical Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, because of 'the privations of a deracinated artist – pre-eminently Wagner.' Wagner longed for an obedient woman who would serve him and his art, with the self-sacrificing love and blind devotion of Senta to the Dutchman. This wasn't to be Minna, but he eventually found his soulmate in his second wife Cosima.*

**Jim Pritchard**



## 10 MARCH

**Asher Fisch** will talk about conducting Wagner's music dramas

Asher Fisch and WASO celebrated the orchestra's 90th anniversary in August this year by presenting a concert version of *Tristan und Isolde* with Stuart Skelton. Asher will be conducting the SSO on 7 & 9 March in Bruch, Mendelssohn and Strauss.

Born in Israel, Asher Fisch began his conducting career as Daniel Barenboim's assistant and kappellmeister at the Berlin Staatsoper. He made his United States debut at the Los Angeles Opera in 1995, and has since conducted at the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, and San Francisco Opera. A regular guest at leading European opera houses, Mr. Fisch has conducted all the major German and Austrian opera houses including Berlin, Munich, Dresden, Leipzig, Vienna, Milan's Teatro alla Scala, Paris Opera and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

A seasoned conductor in both the operatic and symphonic worlds, Asher Fisch is especially celebrated for his interpretative command of core German and Italian repertoire of the Romantic and post-Romantic era, in particular Wagner, Brahms, Strauss, and Verdi. Mr. Fisch also conducts a wide variety of other repertoire from Gluck to contemporary works and serves as an advocate of living composers such as Avner Dorman and others. In 2014, Mr.



Fisch became the Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (WASO). His former posts include Principal Guest Conductor of the Seattle Opera (2007-2013), where he concluded his tenure conducting the Opera's quadrennial Wagner Ring Cycle in summer 2013, Music Director of the New Israeli Opera (1998-2008), and the Wiener Volksoper (1995-2000).

## COMING EVENTS IN MELBOURNE

### 3, 5, 7 FEBRUARY

**Melbourne Opera** will present *Der fliegende Holländer* on 3rd, 5th and 7th February 2018 at the Regent Theatre

<b>Director</b>	Suzanne Chaundy	<b>Senta</b>	Lee Abrahmsen
<b>Conductor</b>	Anthony Negus	<b>Daland</b>	Steven Gallop
<b>Dutchman</b>	Darran Jeffrey	<b>Mary</b>	Roxane Hislop

Darren Jeffery is as much in demand on the operatic stage as he is on the concert platform. His versatility enables him to sing roles from Handel to Wagner and the more contemporary works of Britten, Stravinsky, Weill and Birtwistle. Darren has sung over fifteen roles with the Royal Opera, Covent Garden and has become well known for his performances at English National Opera.



Darran Jeffrey – Dutchman

He has performed at the Salzburg, Glyndebourne and Aix-en-Provence Festivals, at the Chicago Lyric Opera as Kothner in *Die Meistersinger* and has received two Grammy awards for his contribution to recordings of *Falstaff* and *Billy Budd* with the London Symphony Orchestra, under Sir Colin Davis and Daniel Harding respectively.

Darren studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester with Patrick McGuigan. He received the RNCM's highest accolade, the Curtis Gold Medal and performed the title role in its award winning production of Verdi's *Falstaff*.



20, 22, 24 FEBRUARY

From Victorian Opera: Parsifal - Wagner's Holy Grail



Immerse yourself in the legend of the Holy Grail and the knights who protect it and witness the most beautiful quest for redemption in the literature of opera.

From the prelude of Parsifal onwards, you will be mesmerised by music of sacred dimensions; a testament to the mystical power of harmony. Wagner traversed unknown territories of musical writing with his mythical odyssey, shaping an incomparable world that enthralled composers as diverse as Sibelius, Mahler and Debussy, and later inspired major film score composers.

**PERFORMANCE DETAILS**

Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Wednesday 20 February, 4:30pm

Friday 22 February, 4:30pm

Sunday 24 February, 3:00pm

**Composer and Librettist** Richard Wagner

**Conductor** Richard Mills

Orchestra Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO)

**Director** Roger Hodgman

**Set Designer** Richard Roberts

**Costume Designer** Christina Smith

**Lighting Designer** Matt Scott

**Choreographer** Elizabeth Hill

**Cast**

**Parsifal** Burkhard Fritz

**Kundry** Katarina Dalayman

**Gurnemanz** Peter Rose

**Amfortas** James Roser

**Klingsor** Derek Welton

**Titirel** Teddy Tahu Rhodes

For this exceptional event, we welcome the Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO) under the baton of the intrepid Richard Mills, with some of the world's greatest Wagnerian singers.

Director Roger Hodgman guides this new, modern production with poetry and simplicity, following the prophesied odyssey of Parsifal from blasphemer to saviour.

**Ensemble featuring:**

Carlos E. Bárcenas

Olivia Cranwell

Shakira Dugan

Stephen Marsh

Kathryn Radcliffe

Georgia Wilkinson

Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE)

Victorian Opera Chorus and Students from

the University of Melbourne.

**NOTE FROM THE EDITOR**

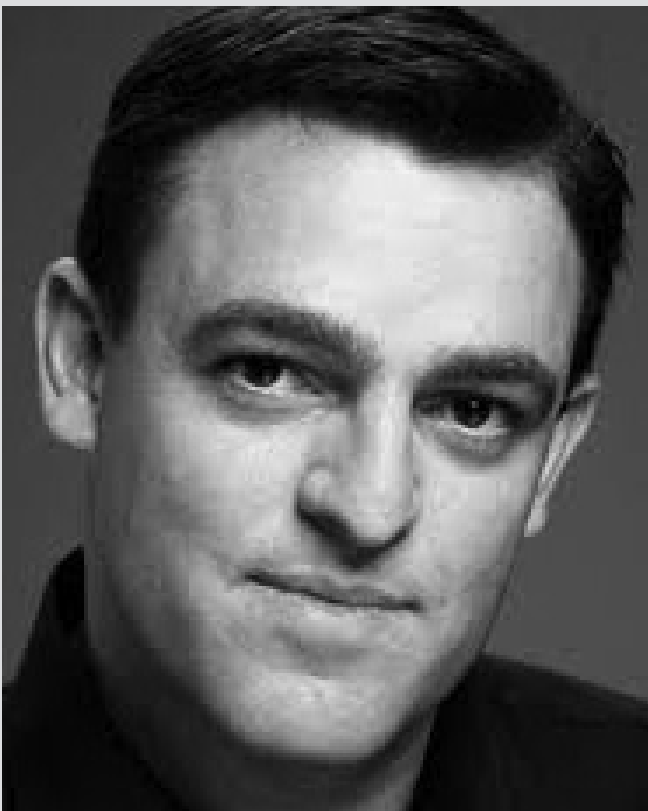
Dear members, I hope you enjoy this December edition. I invite to you to send me articles for future issues, especially your thoughts on the various Wagner productions around the world that many of you are planning on attending. Thank you to members who have helped me source material. Special thanks to Peter Bassett for his fascinating article on Wagner and Buddhist and Hindu influences.

**Mike Day**



## Derek Welton - Klingsor

The Australian-born bass-baritone Derek Welton started singing with the Australian Boys Choir before moving onto Melbourne Chorale. In 2004, he won the Encouragement Award at the Herald-Sun Arias and the following year was Runner-up. He is now under contract to Deutsche Oper Berlin and is already considered one of the most promising Wagnerian singers of the younger generation. Following engagements with Opera North as Donner in *Das Rheingold* under Richard Farnes and the Salzburg Easter Festival as Gralsritter in *Parsifal* under Christian Thielemann, he made his role début as Klingsor in *Parsifal* at the Beijing Music Festival and, in 2016, appeared at the Semperoper Dresden as the Herald in *Lohengrin*, again under Christian Thielemann. These successes led to critically acclaimed performances in his role début as Wotan in *Das Rheingold* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin under Donald Runnicles and in his début at the Bayreuth Festival as Klingsor under Hartmut Haenchen.



## James Roser - Amfortas

James initially began a career as an environmental scientist, before beginning his musical studies. He was a recipient of a number of major singing awards in Australia, including the Mietta Song Recital Award, Vienna State Opera Award and Britten-Pears Young Artist Award, was a young artist with Pacific Opera and has sung with the Vienna State Opera, Staatstheater Cottbus, Tiroler Festspiele Erl and Opera Australia.

Operatic roles he has performed include *Rigoletto*, *Don Giovanni*, *Beckmesser*, *Gunther*, *Wotan* (*Das Rheingold*), *Il Conte*, *Antonio* (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), *Guglielmo* (*Così fan tutte*), *Papageno*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Escamillo*, *Peter* (*Hänsel und Gretel*), *Johann* (*Werther*), *Harald* (*Die Feen*) and he made his musical theatre debut in 2012 singing the role of 'Curly' in *Oklahoma!* at the Rainhill Music Festival.

He has performed in recital in Australia, France, Germany, Austria, Canada and the United Kingdom, performing for Artsong NSW, Chamber Music Australia, Oxford Lieder Festival, Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, Franz Schubert Institut, Rainhill Music Festival, Gesellschaft für Musiktheater Wien.



## REPORT FROM CHRIS CURCURUTO, A YOUNG BASS-BARITONE SUPPORTED BY THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW

In August this year I relocated to Texas, USA to undertake a Graduate Artist Certificate in Opera at the University of North Texas (UNT). I am one of only three advanced singers selected to participate in this brand-new program, which provides an insulated environment to further develop and refine those skills necessary to undertake a performing career under the expert guidance of an accomplished faculty as well as facilitating professional networks. I am very pleased to have been accepted into the voice studio of internationally-renowned pedagogue and voice teacher Dr Stephen F Austin, with whom I will continue my vocal development. Dr Austin recently described our work in his studio as being like an artist painting an undercoat; we are taking the time to do the work that the audience won't necessarily hear but that forms the solid foundation to be able to make the consistent, professional, international standard of singing that they will. I believe this to be an apt analogy for all of my work here at UNT. By taking the time to undertake this intensive development now, I am investing in a healthier, longer lasting career performing at a higher level than I might otherwise be able to achieve.



In addition to my weekly lessons with Dr. Austin, I am also currently auditing his vocal pedagogy class (meaning that I am not formally enrolled but am able to attend and participate in the class, free of charge). Dr. Austin's work in this field is very well recognised and from his lessons I am gaining an in-depth scientific and practical understanding of the vocal mechanism. As part of our program, I also receive two coachings a week with two incredible vocal/language coaches, Robert Frankenberry (Pittsburgh Festival Opera), and Stephen Carey (Forth Worth Opera), and have a weekly session with Chair of Opera at UNT and Artistic Director of Pittsburgh Festival Opera, Prof. Jonathan Eaton. In our sessions with Prof. Eaton, we have the opportunity to plumb the depths of his extensive knowledge of operatic style and performance, and of the operatic industry both in the USA and throughout Europe. These sessions are what we make of them and vary week-to-week between practical sessions working through, for example, bel canto repertoire, to industry discussions.

Of interest to the Wagner Society, Pittsburgh Festival Opera are currently working their way through the Jonathan Dove reduction of Wagner's Ring Cycle, called the Ring Saga, directed by Prof. Eaton. Auditions will be held at UNT later this year for supporting roles in the Festival, including for Die Walküre, which I have been encouraged to participate in. Mr Frankenberry (having extensive experience in German language and repertoire) and I will commence coaching on roles from Walküre in the coming weeks. Robert has suggested that we primarily look at Hunding (Walküre), as a role that I could realistically sing at the next Festival, whilst also commencing a role study of Wotan with a view to more long-

term possibilities. Part of the Festival is the Mastersingers Project for Young Dramatic Voices coordinated by Wagner expert and international star soprano, Jane Eaglen, who has an illustrious career performing leading Wagner and dramatic soprano roles in all the major opera houses of the world. I have been encouraged to apply for this program also.

This academic year, UNT Opera will perform a number of fully-staged and concert productions. First up, a return to Janacek's "The Cunning Little Vixen" (last performed with Pacific Opera as Harasta in 2015) this time as the Parson. The opera will be performed in English although I will receive Czech coaching for the roles of Parson, Badger, and Harasta. We open

this week! Next, the role debut that I am probably most excited about, I will sing the title role in Puccini's "Gianni Schicci". Schicci will be performed in Italian in a double-bill with a rarely performed French opera by Roussel, "Le Testament de la Tante Caroline", in Feb/March 2019. And finally, I will sing the role of Don Alfonso in a concert performance of Mozart's "Così fan tutte" (also in Italian) in April 2019. I have also been cast in a concert featuring staged scenes from Le Nozze di Figaro which will be performed in January.

I am the recipient of the David L Shrader Opera Scholarship which covers my full tuition for the course of the two-year program and have also received a sponsorship from the Wagner Society in NSW to partially meet the cost of living expenses whilst living abroad. This funding has been crucial to my capacity to undertake this venture and has been applied to costly expenses including a security deposit for my accommodation (over \$2000 AUD) and the cost of health insurance (for this semester alone costing approximately \$1600 AUD). Within my first week of arriving here in Denton, I was approached by another member of faculty, Verdi baritone Dr Jeffrey Snider, and invited to join his church choir as a paid section leader/soloist. I was later recruited to participate in the church's handbell choir as well (see here for an example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDsYd1qIU8o>), where I fittingly am responsible for the 4 lowest bass bells. I am very much enjoying my affiliation both with this church community who have offered me a lot of support, but also with Dr. Snider who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the operatic repertoire and who is undertaking ongoing study into the history of voice types. More recently, I have been able to secure employment on-campus as a legal assistant with the Student Legal Services Office. As a student employee, they are very flexible with my work hours, allowing me to change from week-to-week depending on my rehearsal and performance schedules. Since arriving, I have also been offered a number of paid performances with UNT for donors and high-level university personnel which has been of great assistance.

## THE USE OF BUDDHIST AND HINDU CONCEPTS IN WAGNER'S STAGE WORKS by Peter Basset

From The Wagnerian; Wednesday, 1 January 2014

<http://www.the-wagnerian.com/2014/01/the-use-of-buddhist-and-hindu-concepts.html>

**“Wagner was strongly attracted to the idea of metempsychosis - the endless cycle of births and deaths - and so was Schopenhauer. In a letter to Liszt, Wagner wrote: ‘The Buddha’s teaching relating to the transmigration of souls almost certainly expresses the truth.’”**

Why should oriental practices and ideas have anything to do with Richard Wagner’s stage works, which are so strongly identified with European, and especially Germanic traditions?

In the Saxony of Wagner’s youth, eastern ideas, tastes and manners were visible everywhere in the Chinoiserie of architecture and design, the manufacture of Europe’s first hard-paste porcelain at Meissen, and the fashion for operas and plays with oriental themes. Wagner had grown up with these things but he wasn’t at all interested in the quaint and patronising orientalism that has attracted other composers over the centuries, from Mozart to Richard Rodgers. Instead, he

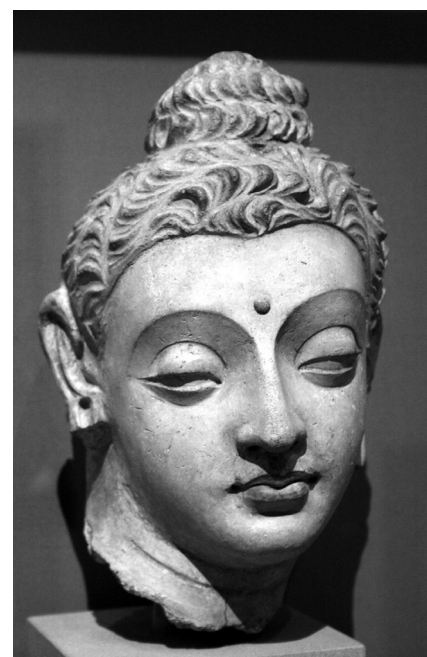
was drawn to a school of thought which linked German intellectual achievements with those of ancient India.

His interest in the east had been stimulated by his brother-in-law, Hermann Brockhaus who had married Wagner’s sister Otilie in 1836. Hermann was an orientalist, and in 1848 he was appointed to the chair of ancient languages and literature at Leipzig University, specialising in Persian and Sanskrit. German, French and English philologists had discovered that Sanskrit – the liturgical and scholarly language of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism – had much in common with European languages. All belong to the Indo-European linguistic family. Some scholars went further, arguing that there were also cultural connections via a common Indo-European ancestry.

In 1872 the Danish historian and critic Georg Brandes offered his own explanation for this sudden fascination with Indian culture. ‘It was not a surprise’ he wrote, ‘that there came a moment in German history when they – the Germans – started to absorb and to utilize the intellectual achievements and the culture of ancient India. It is because Germany – great, dark and rich in dreams and thoughts – is in reality a modern India. Nowhere else in world history has metaphysics bereft of any empirical research achieved such a high level of development as in ancient India and modern Germany.’

The American scholar, Suzanne Marchand, has written that the Germans were ‘the most important orientalist scholars between about 1830 and 1930, despite having virtually no colonies in the east’. The effect of this, she maintains, was that German orientalism, especially the study of Zoroastrian Persia, India and Mesopotamia, helped to destroy western self-satisfaction, and to provoke a momentous change in the culture of the west: the relinquishing of Judeo/Christian and classical antique models as universal norms.

If this argument can be sustained, then it must be said that Richard Wagner made a noteworthy contribution to the process. During the last three decades of his life, he demonstrated a serious interest in the two great religions of India and, in a letter to Liszt of 1855 wrote admiringly of ‘the oldest and most sacred religion known to man, Brahman teaching and its final transfiguration in Buddhism, where it achieved its most perfect form’. He held the view that Christianity, although first appearing in the Greco-Roman world, had its distinguishing roots in India. One can find shared moral principles in the teachings of Jesus and the historical Buddha Shakyamuni who lived



in the fifth century BC. In the same letter to Liszt, Wagner cited contemporary research suggesting that Buddhist ideas had flowed westwards after the spread of Alexander’s empire to the Indus in 327 BC and had influenced Christian doctrine. Whether or not Buddhism did, in fact, have any influence on Christianity, all that matters for our purposes is that Wagner believed that it did, and this belief shaped his works, especially Parsifal.

His awakening, so to speak, to the literature of the east, can be traced to the early 1850s. In 1852 he wrote from Zürich to his former assistant August Röckel languishing in Waldheim prison, about the poetry of the fourteenth century Persian mystic, Hafiz, whose works were then being edited by Hermann Brockhaus. ‘We with our pompous European intellectual culture’ wrote Wagner, ‘must stand abashed in the presence of this product of the orient, with its self-assured and sublime tranquillity of mind.’ In 1814, Goethe had been drawn to the poetry of Hafiz and used it in his collection of twelve lyrical poems West-Eastern Divan, symbolizing exchanges and mixtures between the orient and the occident.

Wagner's reading of Hafiz informed his ideas on a number of Ring-related issues. He wrote again to Röckel while working on his Rheingold poem, saying: 'Study Hafiz properly. ... something similar will also become clear in my Nibelungen.' Perhaps he had in mind these words of the poet: 'Man of self, raised up with endless pride, we forgive thee – for love's to thee denied'.

The Persian poet also had something to say about fate and destiny that is relevant to Wagner's treatment of Erda. Wotan believes that success, life and power are all that matters, but Erda tells him that all things that are will end; he is not the ultimate controller of his fate. Hafiz describes the futility of resisting an appointed destiny and offers only one solution: 'cast the world aside, yes abandon it'.

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's knowledge of the eastern texts dated from the end of 1813, but by that time his own insights had already been described in his early writings. He was astonished and delighted to discover that his views had much in common with key doctrines of Hinduism and Buddhism, and happily proclaimed this in his later writings, notably *The World as Will and Representation*. This led some people to think that the ancient texts were the source of Schopenhauer's ideas,

which wasn't the case. Working in the central tradition of western philosophy he had arrived independently at similar conclusions.

There is an interesting parallel here with the relationship between Wagner's ideas and Schopenhauer's writings. The impact of these writings on the composer was great; not because they were the source of his ideas but because they clarified notions that had already occurred to him and yet he found difficult to accept. He first read *The World as Will and Representation* in 1854 and found in

it a coherent explanation for his treatment of Wotan. His intention had been to show nothing less than the breaking of the god's proud spirit, not by an external and greater force but by what Schopenhauer would call the annihilation of the will – the negation of compulsive wanting, striving, and yearning that leads inevitably to disappointment and pain. The Buddha would have called it the renunciation of craving and desire which lies at the root of suffering and is represented musically in the opening bars of *Tristan und Isolde*. Wagner got to know the Hindu Upanishads and the Buddhist writings and would draw on their imagery in the *Ring*, *Tristan*, an unfinished Buddhist opera *Die Sieger*, and *Parsifal*.

Parts of the Tripitaka, the texts that make up the Buddhist canon, arrived in Europe in the early years of the nineteenth century, somewhat later than the Upanishads which Schopenhauer admired so extravagantly. The first European scholar to provide a comprehensive and informed account of Buddhism was the Frenchman Eugène Burnouf, who in 1844 published his *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*. It was this book that Wagner devoured during a period of convalescence in Zürich in 1855 before sketching out an opera called *Die Sieger* ('The Victors') drawn from Burnouf's material. 'What a shameful place our entire learning takes' he told Mathilde Wesendonck, 'confronted with these purest revelations of most noble humanity in the old orient'.

The title *Die Sieger* was inspired by the word Jina, which in Sanskrit means 'Victor'. It is used in a specific Buddhist sense, for one who is victorious in



**Hafiz - Persian mystic poet**

*Look at the smile on the Earth's lips this morning, she laid again with me last night!*  
- Hafiz

the quest for enlightenment. The sketch dealt with an event in the legendary life of the Buddha - the enlightened or awakened one - whose honorifics included Jina, the Victor. Wagner had been attracted to the story not least because of its theme of reincarnation, which he saw as an ideal vehicle for his compositional technique of emotional reminiscence. He told Cosima: 'only music can convey the mysteries of reincarnation'.

His intention to complete *Die Sieger* remained with him for decades but, in the end, its themes were subsumed in *Parsifal*'s and it remained unfinished. One reason for this was that Wagner had no direct knowledge of India and found it hard to imagine the specific culture, atmosphere, plants and so on to which he could relate. Most of the Sanskrit scholars of Wagner's day, including Hermann Brockhaus, had no direct knowledge of India either, even though they knew the ancient texts intimately. Their conception of India was abstracted and idealized.

## IN LIGHT OF THE UPANISHADS



ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER  
*The World as Will and Representation*

Volume 1 - Random Selections



Wagner's notions of Buddhism were expressed in the context of European narratives and settings. However he believed that ancient India had provided the cultural roots of German thought. This might strike us today as curious, but a hundred and sixty years ago it was no more curious than Charles Darwin's theory of the universal common descent of species through evolution. Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, the year of *Tristan und Isolde*.

**“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’**

the Buddha himself. It is misleadingly labelled these days as ‘the motive of the world’s inheritance’, but it was described by Wagner’s assistant Heinrich Porges as the ‘redemption theme’. The phrase in question is first heard in the Wanderer’s final scene with Erda. He desperately wants answers to one question in particular: how to stop a turning wheel. In Buddhist teachings, the turning wheel of karma is the inexorable working out of the consequences of one’s actions, the destiny of suffering that is shaped by one’s deeds. Erda is baffled and unable to help him. He pauses to collect his thoughts and then he says that he is no longer concerned about the end of the gods and, in fact, consciously wills it. What he once resolved in despair, he will now do gladly. At that point, we hear in the orchestra the majestic theme once intended for the Buddha. During the first rehearsals, Wagner said that this passage ‘must sound like the proclamation of a new religion’. Indeed it does.

In *Parsifal* we find a veritable cornucopia of Buddhist images. The events surrounding the shooting of the swan in Act One follow almost exactly those found in a collection of Buddhist legends dating from the first century AD. In both cases, the incident is used to provide a lesson in compassion. In the legends we also find the story of Mara, the tempter figure who, with the help of his seductive daughters, had tried to prevent the Buddha from achieving enlightenment. The imagery in Act Two of *Parsifal* including that of Klingsor and the Flower Maidens owes much to the Mara legend. Kundry is a tormented creature, longing for sleep and death but condemned to endless rebirths. In the first Act, Gurnemanz wonders aloud whether she carries a burden of sin resulting from actions in a previous life, which is a curious remark for a Christian knight to make. In time we learn that in a former life she had laughed at the Saviour on the cross, which is the very antithesis of compassion. His own compassionate gaze fell on her; she says, and now she seeks him again ‘from world to world’ – which is to say, from life to life.

Wagner was strongly attracted to the idea of metempsychosis - the endless cycle of births and deaths - and so was Schopenhauer. In a letter to Liszt, Wagner wrote: ‘The Buddha’s teaching relating to the transmigration of souls almost certainly expresses the truth.’ In *Parsifal*, even the innocent fool declares in the final Act: ‘Ah! what transgression, what burden of guilt must my foolish head have borne from eternity.’ In the first Act, *Parsifal* reveals that he has had many names but has forgotten them all; and in the third Act he speaks of all that lives and will live again.

At the heart of *Parsifal* is the notion that salvation is to be found not in the satisfaction of selfish desires but in the ability to share the sufferings of others. In our shared sense of compassion we can recognize the fundamental unity of all beings – of all creation.

It has been said that for Wagner, who lived in exile for much of his creative life and was seriously disenchanted with politics, Buddhism was a way of answering his three most fundamental questions: what does it mean to be German? What does it mean to be Christian? What is art? In his view, Buddhism wasn’t remote from German thought but intrinsic to it.

This connection can be demonstrated by one piece of music composed for *Die Sieger* that ended up in the Ring. According to Cosima Wagner’s diary entry for 20 July 1878, it had been written for



Mara and his daughters tempting the Buddha

Unity of being is also a central idea in *Tristan und Isolde*, where mystical union offers the only way in which the lovers’ unquenchable longing can be realized. Some of the most beautiful and poetic imagery in *Tristan* is drawn from the Upanishads, which Schopenhauer praised for their recognition that our senses are only able to grasp a representation of the world, and that this representation stands like a veil between the subject and the hidden world of timeless reality - *Tristan’s* wondrous realm of night.

In May 1868, in the diary he called ‘The Brown Book’, Wagner jotted down some correlations between Hindu/Buddhist concepts, dramatic imagery and modes of musical expression. His identification of truth and reality with night, and selfishness and illusion with day is at the heart of *Tristan und Isolde*. Interestingly too, Wagner equated Nirvana with ‘untroubled, pure harmony’, the most perfect example of which comes in the final bars of *Isolde’s* *Liebtestod* when she is joined at last with her *Tristan* in mystical union. No wonder Richard Strauss described it as the most beautifully orchestrated cadence in all music. It could be no other. Far from Nirvana, the troubled and illusory world of appearances and unsatisfiable longing – the world of ‘day’ – is harmonically at the other extreme, and there is no more violent example than the shattering orchestral dissonance and Brangäne’s scream when Melot, Marke and their hunting party burst upon the lovers.

“**In a prose draft for the new ending, Wagner made absolutely clear that his inspiration was a Buddhist one. He imagines Brünnhilde expressing the hope that, like her, Siegfried will not be reborn, but she foretells that Hagen will suffer many rebirths.**

in one breath’, Wagner is alluding to the Sanskrit word *âtman* – ‘breath’ or ‘self’ – often used to express truth, infinity and something beyond comprehension. *Âtman* is related etymologically to the German word for breath: *Atem* – and the Greek word *atmos*. We find the most vivid expression of this in Isolde’s final vision, in which the once-living Tristan enters into the ‘immensity of the world’s breath’. Indeed, a passage in the Upanishads reading: ‘The *âtman* is beyond sound and form, without touch and taste and perfume’, appears to have inspired Isolde’s rhapsodic final words.

The clearest and, perhaps most important Buddhist connection with the Ring came with a change in 1856 to the text for the closing scene of *Götterdämmerung*, written contemporaneously with the sketch for *Die Sieger* and within months of the first sketch for *Parsifal*. Earlier versions of the ending contemplated the survival of the gods and the triumph of love over wealth and power. By 1856 however, the goal was no longer redemption through love but redemption through renunciation. In a prose draft for the new ending, Wagner made absolutely clear that his inspiration was a Buddhist one. He imagines Brünnhilde expressing the hope that, like her, Siegfried will not be reborn, but she foretells that Hagen will suffer many rebirths. In the metrical version, intended for singing, Brünnhilde refers to herself as the ‘enlightened one’ and anticipates her own release from the cycle of suffering and rebirth. Ultimately this text wasn’t used because, as Cosima pointed out, its cumbersome language was sounding contrived. Nevertheless, Wagner printed it as a footnote in his 1872 definitive edition of the poem, with the explanation that ‘its meaning was already conveyed with the

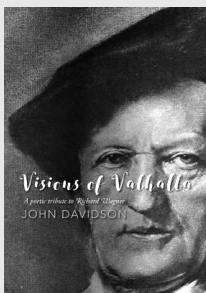
When Tristan and Isolde sing: ‘Then I myself am the world’, they are drawing on one of Schopenhauer’s favourite passages in the Upanishads: ‘I am all these creatures, and besides me there is no other being’, illustrating how someone contemplating nature necessarily draws nature into himself, transcending individuality and joining with the sublime. This image also finds an echo in the Good Friday scene in *Parsifal*, when Gurnemanz draws even the humblest things in nature – the grasses and flowers of the meadow – into a greater reality. In both instances the music achieves an overwhelmingly beautiful ‘untroubled, pure harmony’, to use Wagner’s phrase. When, in *Tristan und Isolde* the lovers sing: ‘heart to heart, mouth to mouth, bound together

greatest precision in the musical expression of the drama’.

So, unlike the earlier endings, it wasn’t the meaning that changed but the means of conveying it. It was, and still is in my view, a Buddhist-inspired ending. The nature of Brünnhilde’s insight which had transformed her from an insanely angry woman at the end of Act Two to the redeeming figure at the conclusion of Act Three is explained in a remark by Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck in 1858, about his difficulties in depicting the Buddha in *Die Sieger*: ‘I have now solved the problem’ he wrote, ‘by having him reach one last remaining stage in his development whereby he is seen to acquire a new insight, which – like every insight – is conveyed not by abstract associations of ideas but by intuitive emotional experience; in other words, by a process of shock and agitation suffered by his inner self; as a result, this insight reveals him in his final progress towards a state of supreme enlightenment’.

Those words can equally be applied to Brünnhilde, whose insight was born of her overwhelming, grieving love for Siegfried, and also to Parsifal who tells Amfortas: ‘Blessed be your suffering that gave compassion and wisdom to the timid fool’. So Brünnhilde and Parsifal are both, in their own ways, redeemer and redeemed, and exemplify Wagner’s idiosyncratic application of the Indian religions to his greatest works for the stage.

## BOOK REVIEW



In 2016 John Davidson published a book of 57 poems in an illustrated collection entitled *Visions of Valhalla: A poetic tribute to Richard Wagner*.

The book is available from Steele Roberts Publishers, New Zealand at the price of NZ\$25. Contact [info@steelepublishers.co.nz](mailto:info@steelepublishers.co.nz) for further information.

“Richard Wagner referred to himself repeatedly as a poet rather than as a composer and would surely have been delighted to find himself the subject of a volume of poetry. John Davidson’s poems evince a deep love and knowledge of Wagner and his works: avoiding both hagiography and sentimentality, he makes the reader think about the subject in new ways — the mark of a true poet. This volume will doubtless appeal to committed Wagnerians but deserves to find an audience beyond them too.” ~ *Barry Millington*

“These poems make a marvellous read: singly, a few at a time, or in one read-through. Of all the writers on things Wagnerian, poets have tended the most towards flowery, reverent adulation. But not John Davidson. His poems — impressions and soliloquies as much as poems — are honest, witty, and very contemporary. Yet all through the collection, a leitmotif of homage can be heard. In the end, Wagner (and the poet) stand revealed through a uniquely satisfying music of words.” ~ *Heath Lees*

## R.I.P. RICHARD GILL, CONDUCTOR

BORN: SYDNEY, 4 NOVEMBER, 1941 | DIED: SYDNEY, 28 OCTOBER, 2018

Wagner Society members were very saddened by the news of the death of Richard Gill. Below are excerpts from the obituary by Simon Thomsen in *The Business Insider*

On his last day on earth, conductor and music educator Richard Gill was at home in Sydney's inner west when dozens of the thousands of people he'd influenced turned up outside the house to pay tribute to their mentor and remind him how loved he is.

Gill died of cancer on Sunday morning, aged 76. A sold-out concert in Sydney planned for next Monday to mark Gill's 77th birthday was to be beamed to his home, but as it became clear the conductor would not witness the celebration, Sydney Symphony Orchestra associate principal trumpet Paul Goodchild decided to take a spontaneous concert to his mentor, telling Fairfax Media he expected 15-20 people to turn up.

Instead, more than 70 people arrived in Stanmore, including a police band, to play for Gill, who was inside with his family and close friend Kim Williams by his side.

"This was the perfect way of saying thank you, goodbye and a great tribute to somebody who has made so much of a difference, to not only the lives of musicians, but to everybody who really listens to music," Goodchild told Fairfax.

He played his favourite piece, The Dam Busters March, from the 1955 British war movie as a tribute to Gill.

Williams says that when applause broke out after they'd played the piece, Gill opened his eyes and smiled.

Richard James Gill was a Sydney boy. Born and raised in Eastwood, where he went to Marist college, he started his working life as a music teacher, a passion that never left him in more than five decades as a conductor and educator.

His career as a conductor really took off when he founded the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra in 1969. With his shock of white curly hair, Gill was a striking, yet impish figure with a quick smile. His distinguished career ranges from teaching at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music to dean of the Western Australian Conservatorium of Music and director of chorus at the Opera Australia. He founded Victorian Opera in 2005 and became its inaugural artistic director. He was conductor with the Sydney Youth Orchestra in the mid '70s to early '80s, artistic director and chief conductor of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra, and most recently was musical director of the Sydney Chamber Choir.

He conducted the world premiere of Alan John's *The Eighth Wonder* (1995) and Moya Henderson's *Lindy* (2002) for Opera Australia, and championed works by Australian composers.

His last great project was as artistic director and co-founder of the Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra, which



announced that the Richard Gill Memorial Fund will be set up at his request to help cement its future and develop young Australian musicians. Paying tribute to Gill on the orchestra's website, co-founders Rachael Beesley and Nicole van Bruggen said "he will be remembered for his contagious energy and flamboyant rhetoric".

"Adamant and forthright one moment, then exuberant and funny, then a wistful conjurer or reflective poet," they said, adding that the conductor spent his life "systematically addressing the widespread

shortcomings and neglect of music" in the Australian education system. "He was convinced of the positive effects of music on young people," they said.

"This was not to churn out more Mozarts, but to switch children on to creative thinking and lateral problem solving, to inspire young minds to be interested in and engaged with their surroundings and be able to clearly articulate their observations."

"Like the fading of a beautiful sustained note, or that magical silence following a fabulous performance, a loss as significant as Richard Gill cannot be adequately explained or understood," Beesley and van Bruggen say in their tribute to their artistic director. "This loss – like music – evokes, suggests and implies. But what we can do is keep making a multitude of sounds. And in every one of them, we know and celebrate that Richard is still there with us."

<https://www.businessinsider.com.au/fans-of-conductor-richard-gill-paid-a-wonderful-tribute-to-the-musician-before-he-died-2018-10>

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### Richard Gill

*For most of his life, Richard was the musical pioneer whose exemplary leadership provided a significant direction for Music throughout the Nation and his loss is a tragic blow to all who revered his work. His superhuman energy and delightful sense of humour helped propel forward projects which inspired all who worked with him, especially young Australians. If it might be challenging to recall all the more hilarious moments which formed part of Richard's early and brilliant years at the Sydney Conservatorium, then his passing will definitely not be forgotten by future generations of musicians. God bless Richard Gill for all he did for Music in this country. Condolences to Maureen, his partner and to Richard's and Maureen's extended musical and personal family. With love to a wonderful colleague and human being.*

**Roger Woodward 3 November 2018**

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## TOVEY ON BAYREUTH

Donald Tovey was an English piano and composer prodigy and writer, born in 1875- 1940

In 1897 he had the surprising opportunity to go to Bayreuth, his first independent trip abroad. Aged 22.

Soon after arriving he wrote a postcard saying,

“The Rheingold came off yesterday. It is certainly very beautiful and the music represents in the most convincingly manner what the libretto would have been if Wagner had been capable of writing decent grown-up poetry. The performance is very impressive, too. Siegfried Wagner conducted but the orchestra knew the thing by heart so he couldn't do much harm. There are only two persons who can sing: Marie Brema (whose voice wobbles terribly, but she sings in tune and like a great artist and she is a splendid actress.) Fricka is her part and someone whose name I forget, who sang Froh yesterday and who will sing Siegfried tomorrow. The others simply declaim anywhere within a minor third of the notes written. That is a mistake.

It is important to get the libretto, not as it is, by heart. for it's quite impossible to catch the words from any other singers except those two. But when you know the libretto the whole thing is easy to follow, and one can listen to the music with the greatest pleasure, except when the worst singers interrupt.

Wagner is the only Wagnerian whose music has repose and breadth. It has those qualities in a degree to which only the greatest composers ever attain. I am surprised to find how much it impresses me, and how little it disturbs. Indeed it only sheds light on older music.

...the Ring is much too tremendous to describe while one is in the midst of it. Siegfried, for instance, is a splendid structure in you don't look at it too closely. Analyse the words and the logic and you get more absurdity and Irish Bulls than you would expect from a twelve year old child; but watch the scenes, the contrasts, and the tone and the feeling of the whole and you feel as you do with a Mozart opera that you have great types of human character before you..

...Parsifal is wonderful and wonderfully perfumed as regards orchestra. But (with the exception of Kundry and the small parts where the poor creatures are so contemptible as to learn to sing and act because they have no other claims upon the public) I have never heard worse singing in my life. P—— who sang Klingsor had only two notes; one was D flat and the other wasn't. Parsifal was Van D—— very fat and in the first act exactly like Tweedledum.

Graal Hall the most magnificent scenery ever put on any stage. Bluemengarten too tawdry for Drury Lane and absolutely grotesque. Wagner is such a colossal and reposeful musician that I have definitely come to even something like an admiration for the man himself.”

Later in the year when he received the score of Tristan it “shook him from stem to stern, he was found still putting his boots on two hours later.”

This was the foundation of an understanding of Wagner which came to be greater and more profound than that of any other musician of his day, and of a knowledge of operatic problems which bore fruit later in many penetrating essays and in his own opera.

**from Donald Francis Tovey**  
**A biography based on letters by Mary Grierson publ 1952**

*Thanks to Minnie Biggs for finding this article*

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# Wagner Society in NSW Annual Christmas Party at the Uniting Church, Woollahra on 25 November with special guest Stefan Vinke



## Thanks to the following for their generous donations of raffle prizes:

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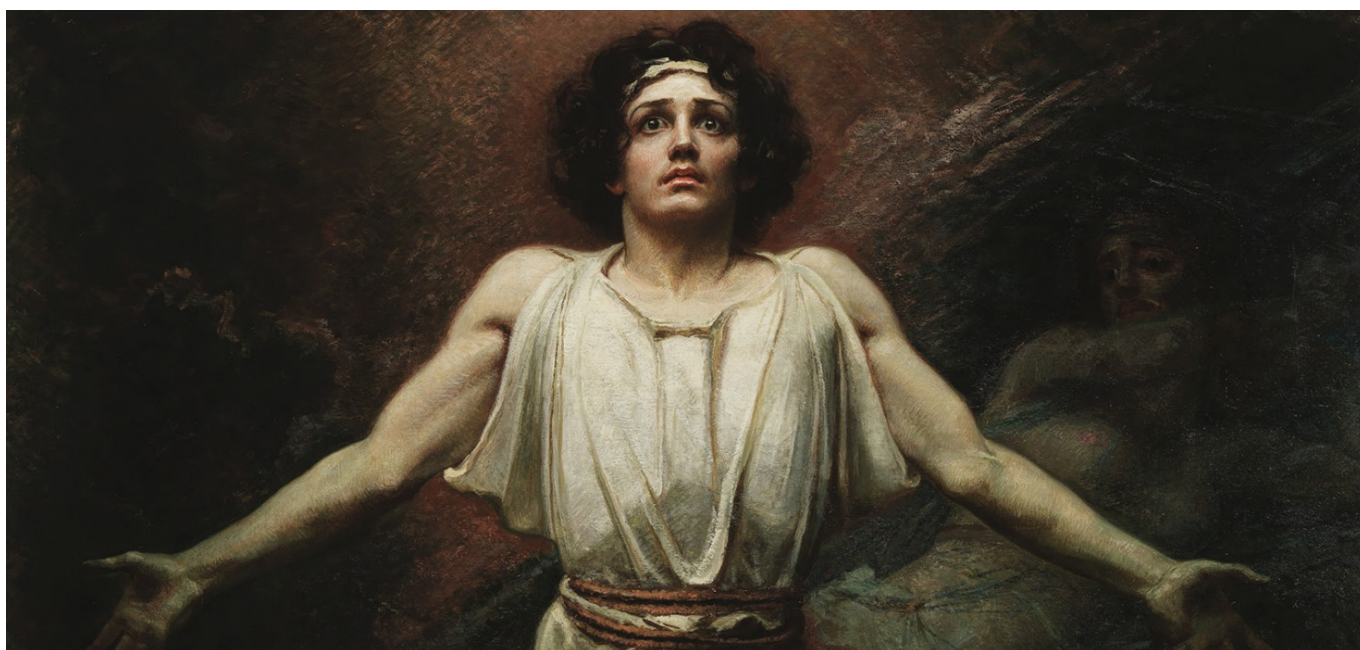
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(All website addresses used in this Newsletter are reproduced in the PDF version of the newsletter on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article - Members Area)

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**Evil Vanishes - Parsifal 1910 (detail)** Rogelio de Eguisquiza y Barrena 1845 - 1915 Museo del Prado, Madrid

Eguisquiza was an established artist when he met Wagner in 1879, whom he already admired and followed. He was the only Spanish artist to establish a first-hand relationship with the composer, albeit of a sporadic, respectful nature. This acquaintanceship completely transformed Eguisquiza's artistic concerns and from then on he focused on the iconography of the composer's works. Over the years and in an almost obsessive manner Eguisquiza produced drawings, prints and paintings of the characters from Parsifal, Wagner's last opera, which the composer conceived as an allegory of human salvation.

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## ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

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

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