

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

After my last report to members I believe it is appropriate to pen some further comments on the bookings for the Adelaide ring cycle. As a detailed report of correspondence between myself and Adelaide would probably be dubbed "The second Epistle of Paul to the Wagnerians" I will confine my self to a brief summary of, what I perceive, to be matters which have caused concern to a not insignificant number of our members - who have expressed sentiments to me varying from irritation to extreme anger on the procedure adopted by Qantas/American express. But I must point out at the outset that not all members expressed antagonism to the procedure.

The basic problems as I see them are as follows:

1. Costs. In my particular case I received a quote from American Express for 2 "A" reserve tickets for Cycle 2 with 8 nights twin share accommodation. I then decided to compare alternate pricing by looking at air fares to Adelaide and 8 nights twin share accommodation in a 5 star Hotel in Adelaide in December 1997. This showed a saving of \$650.80 on the Qantas accommodation package, and considerable saving on the "Cycle ticket + Airline Ticket" - package. And from what I was told the alternate source would not be likely to increase its charges for December 1998 by more than 10% AND would be making advance hotel bookings to cater for its anticipated customers visiting Adelaide at that time. I therefore concluded that the Qantas/American pricing package was totally unacceptable for me.

2. The uncertainty of knowing the actual seat numbers that will be allocated to a particular member. In view of the amount of the deposit required, the obligation to pay the full balance of the package by December 1997, and the non-refundability of payments - some members objected to having to commit themselves to purchasing a ticket without being told of the actual seats that would be allocated to them. Correspondence to me at that time had made it quite clear that we were not to make any allocation of seats to our members - even though Adelaide has supplied me with a list of the actual seat numbers allocated to us - and Qantas / American Express would make the allocation sometime in or after August 1997. And although I was able to relay to Adelaide any special requirements or preferences from members I was given no guarantee that those requirements or preferences would be met.

3. The amount of the deposit. A number of members cannot see the fairness in charging what they perceive to be such a large deposit at such an early stage. Some members are also shocked that the deposit does not vary based on whether the ticket is for an "A" reserve, a "B" reserve or a "C" reserve - I point out that the deposit for a "C" reserve ticket plus the airline ticket is \$1,000 but the full price of that ticket is \$1,001.

4. The time frame for our society. I could not start contacting members regarding the booking arrangement until I received a reply to an earlier letter from me requesting information to answer questions that had occurred to me and which I knew would be asked of me by some members.

These matter were put in writing to Mr Stephen Phillips and his reply, in writing, was that the

marketing program, the amount of the deposit and the times for payment had been fixed by Qantas / American Express and he could do nothing about these aspects. However there has now been a complete about face as regards the seat allocation to the members on our list in that we are now obliged to make the seat allocation from the seat numbers advised to us. I am now trying to get information on the seating configuration - eg surtitle views - where are the "A", "B", "C" rows - etc from Adelaide. American Express - when I rang them - told me they had no information on this matter.

The most euphemistic comment I can make about the procedure is that it is 'unfortunate'. The bottom line is that some people will not be able to attend a cycle simply because they cannot afford to pay the deposit and the balance at the time demanded by Qantas - whereas they may have been able to pay the price had they been given more time to pay AND other members are simply refusing to purchase a ticket simply because they are not prepared to put up with the policy that has been put in place by Qantas and American Express.

Please note that nothing in this update relates to the "Drive tickets" allocated to us. All I know at present is that we have been allocated 10 "B" Reserve seats for each of Cycles two and three and that these seats are in the Grand Circle - a part of the theatre that consists of only "B" and "C" reserve seats and that I will receive information from Adelaide at a later date advising how these seats are to be allocated and paid for. Except for the "Drive" tickets I doubt very much if we have achieved any benefit for our members by requesting an allocation of tickets. Members who went onto our list have certainly had to do more than those who have waited and made a direct booking with American Express. It is of course possible that the seats we have been allocated are better than what will be allocated by those booking direct. However I have some doubt about this. About the end of April I was given booking numbers for those who had booked through Sydney; these indicated that only about one half of the seats allocated to American Express had been sold. Indeed it was put to me at the time that this was the main reason for not allowing our society to allocate seats to members from our list as it might be possible for American Express to upgrade the seats available when the actual allocation was made.

On a completely different, and much more positive note, I am happy to report that the society was privileged to receive an invitation to a reception in honour of Dr Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, at the Sheraton-on-the-Park on 6th May. Olive Coonan, Ira Kowalski and I attended this most enjoyable function and were pleased at the opportunity to hear the Chancellor's address and to talk to some of Sydney's German community.

PAUL LEHMANN
President

ADDRESS

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