



WAGNER
SOCIETY
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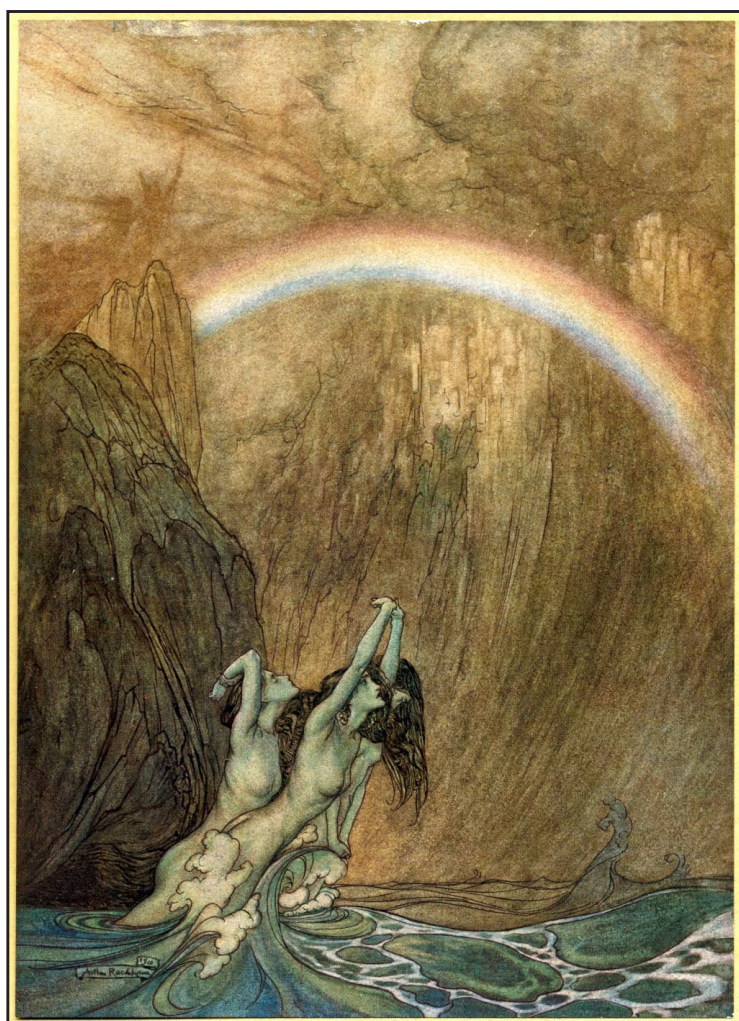
CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 26

153

JUNE 2019



The Rhinemaidens Arthur Rackham 1910

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

We have continued with interesting meetings for members of the Wagner Society.

Our Annual General Meeting was held on March 31. This was earlier in the year than our AGM had been usually held and disappointingly attendance was not high. I gave a report on the activities of the Society, which had a very successful year. I would like to acknowledge the years of dedicated work given to the Wagner Society by members of the committee.

First I want sincerely to thank our last President, Jane Mathews. She held the presidency for 5 years and gave us dynamic leadership, all based on her profound love of Wagner's music. She has been a committed leader and has been made a Life Member..

In the last discussions before the voting for the committee, three of our valuable members decided against standing for the committee.

Barbara de Rome who has been our efficient secretary for five years decided that she would resign. She celebrated by heading off to the Ring at New York's Metropolitan Opera.

Jenny Edwards also resigned. She has been invaluable in keeping links with our members and sending important news to them. She has worked with Lis Bergmann to ensure that Lis can keep strong links with our members.

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CONCERT AND CELEBRATION OF WAGNER'S BIRTHDAY

Sunday 19 May at the Goethe Institut



Celeste Siciliano and Ted Labow with their gifts of Brangayne wine



Jonathan Wilson and Celeste Siciliano

FOR YOUR DIARY

2019/20

7-12 July	Sofia Summer Wagner Festival. Tristan und Isolde, Parsifal	Sofia, Bulgaria
25 July - 28 Aug	Bayreuth Festival	Bayreuth
25 Aug	Gotterdammerung concert performance at Edinburgh Festival	Edinburgh
9 - 17 Aug	Die Meistersinger. Fulham Opera, London	London
23, 25, 26 Oct	Donald Runnicles conducts SSO in R Strauss and Faure	Sydney Opera House
2 November	Nina Stemme and John Lundgren in gala all Wagner concert with TSO	Hobart
5 Jan 2020	Die Walkure with Warwick Fyfe as Wotan, Singapore	Singapore
19 Mar - 5 Apr 2020	'Wagnerian Encounters' Festival incl Katarina Wagner's Lohengrin. Liceu Opera	Barcelona
April 2020	Sir Andrew Davis conducts 3 Ring Cycles for Lyric Opera of Chicago	Chicago
27 Apr - 11 May 2020	Tristan und Isolde. Royal Opera House, Covent Garden	London
April - Nov 2020	Philippe Jourdan conducts new productions of the 4 Ring operas for the Paris Opera	Paris
16 - 29 May 2020	Lohengrin. New OA/La Monnaie co-production conducted by Johannes Fritsch	Melbourne
Nov 2020	Opera Australia presents 3 cycles a new Ring at QPAC in Brisbane	Brisbane

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
7 July	1.00pm Seminar. Dr Antony Ernst on Parsifal	Goethe Institut
21 July	12.00pm DVD Act 3 of Barrie Kosky's Bayreuth Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg 2.00pm Stuart Skelton talks about Singing on the World Stage	Goethe Institut
MONDAY 19 August	6.00pm Simone Young talks about her recent musical experiences	Goethe Institut
29 September	Members report back from Bayreuth and other Wagner performances seen in 2019	Goethe Institut
27 October	Robert Mitchell talks to us	Goethe Institut
17 November	Christmas concert	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.

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)

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

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THE METROPOLITAN OPERA RING CYCLE, APRIL-MAY 2019 - REVIEW BY MINNE BRIGGS	P.12

PRESIDENT'S REPORT continued

Finally Leona Geeves also resigned after years on the committee. Leona has been invaluable in encouraging the development of singers with voices with the potential to develop in the Wagnerian repertoire. We hope she will continue with this important work.

We will all miss their passion and their experience, but we also hope that others will emerge to assist the committee.

Our next meeting was on May 19. This had a very good number of members in attendance. Two generous visitors from the USA to Sydney approached the Society offering to perform. Baritone Ted Labow and soprano Celeste Siciliano performed a challenging program of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss to a very enthusiastic audience. Members of the Society were also delighted to hear the excellent piano accompaniment provided by Jonathon Wilson whom we had assisted to attend the Lisa Gasteen School in Brisbane.

The performances were followed by an afternoon tea with bottles of champagne to celebrate the birthday of Richard Wagner. Members also provided a generous supply of rich chocolate cakes which were very popular, accompanied by much lively conversation.

We have an excellent list of speakers in the rest of the year. Antony Ernst will talk about Parsifal to the Society in early July. Tenor Stuart Skelton is also coming in July to talk about his successes overseas. In August our Patron, the great Australian conductor Simone Young, will talk about her impressive international career. In October we will be lucky to hear Robert Mitchell, formerly a leading tenor in the Australian Opera chorus, talk about his continuing career.

We were informed last year by the Bayreuth Festival that the price categories had been rearranged for this year's festival. Fortunately none of our group of ticket buyers has had any problems with this, despite delays in getting tickets out. We

have a good group of members, eight on tickets from the Society, going to the Festival.

We are all excited at the news that Opera Australia will be offering Lohengrin in May 2020 and 3 Ring Cycles in Brisbane in November 2020. We will be contacting society members about OA's Wagner 2020 Syndicate initiative to sponsor young Australian singers.

So there is activity in Australia on Wagner performances and discussions. Networks between the states help us to learn about these and to brief our members about opportunities to hear operas and singers.

President Colleen Chesterman

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear members, I hope you enjoy this June edition. Thanks to The Gramophone Magazine for permission to publish Peter Latham's article. Thanks to Mailis Wakeham and Lis Bergmann for photos of the May 19 concert. Thank you to members who have helped me source other material. I invite all readers to send me articles for future issues, especially your thoughts on the various Wagner productions around the world which many of you are planning on attending

My apologies to Peter Bassett for my omission of acknowledgement of his authorship of the Deborah Riedel tribute and for repeating a paragraph of his Wagner and Singing article in the March issue.

Mike Day

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
Dr Dennis Mather
Hon Justice Jane Mathews AO

DONATIONS RECEIVED SINCE MARCH 2019

Barbara Brady

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

WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE MARCH 2019:

John & Penelope Hunter (1224), John de Luca (1225), Robert & Estelle Tsenin (1226), Patrick John Barrer (1227) and Wayne Robinson (1228)

THE RING CYCLE IN BRISBANE

<https://opera.org.au/ring>

Opera Australia is mounting a new production of the Ring Cycle in Brisbane in November 2020, in the Lyric Theatre, Queensland Performing Arts Centre

Director and Production Designer: Shi-Zheng Chen. (OA Turandot)

Conductor: Philippe Auguin

Wotan: Vitalij Kowaljov

Siegfried: Stefan Vinke

Brunhilde: Allison Oakes

Siegmond: Rosario La Spina

Sieglinde: Anna-Louise Cole



Performance Dates

Cycle 1

Das Rheingold 10 November 2020, 7pm
Die Walküre 12 November 2020, 5pm
Siegfried 14 November 2020, 5pm
Götterdämmerung 17 November 2020, 4pm

Cycle 2

Das Rheingold 19 November 2020, 7pm
Die Walküre 21 November 2020, 5pm
Siegfried 24 November 2020, 5pm
Götterdämmerung 26 November 2020, 4pm

Cycle 3

Das Rheingold 28 November 2020, 7pm
Die Walküre 1 December 2020, 5pm
Siegfried 3 December 2020, 5pm
Götterdämmerung 5 December 2020, 4pm

Booking periods

Priority booking periods are offered to members of the following groups. Bookings open in 2019 on:

13 June - Wagner 2020 Syndicate

18 June - Opera Australia Patrons

20 June - Opera Australia Subscribers, Queensland Performing Arts Centre Members

26 June - Opera Queensland, Queensland Symphony Orchestra Subscribers

2 July - On sale to the public

23 July - Instead of buying a standard cycle, from this date you may purchase the four operas of the Ring Cycle in the date order you prefer. For example, you could buy the four performances on Saturday. You must still buy all four operas in the Cycle.

The Ring Cycle is a special event and is not part of Opera Australia's regular season. Each Ring Cycle is sold as a 4-opera series and tickets are available for complete 4-opera cycles only. Concessions are not available.

Premium \$2200 | **A Reserve** \$1800 | **B Reserve** \$1000 | **C Reserve** \$380

THE WAGNER 2020 SYNDICATE Note from Opera Australia:

2020 will mark an exciting moment in our history as we present five Wagner operas in the one year, a new production of Lohengrin in Melbourne and the Ring Cycle in Brisbane. You can help us in this bold endeavour and embark on an amazing Wagnerian journey. By joining the Wagner 2020 Syndicate you will be at the heart of this special year, accompanying the productions from the rehearsal rooms to the stage. As a syndicate member you will make it possible for artists and artisans — singers, musicians, wardrobe and wig makers, technicians, répétiteurs and designers — to prepare and present Wagner's colossal masterpieces.

The Wagner Society in NSW has negotiated and agreed with OA Wagner 2020 Syndicate that, in return for a \$500 donation, financial members of the Wagner Society in NSW will receive priority booking from 18 June for 2 tickets plus tickets for rehearsals and other events in Sydney and Brisbane. Donors will receive a Code before bookings open. Donations should be to the Wagner Society and will be used to support young Australian Ring cast members. The full cast list will be available on 13 June.

Payment can be transferred to:

Westpac Banking Corporation, Paddington NSW Branch
 Account Name: The Wagner Society | BSB: 032040 | Account Number: 911323

Cheques should be made out to: The Wagner Society and posted to Michael Day, 1 Ocean St, Bondi, NSW 2026

Please notify your intention of donating or address enquiries to Mike Day: Michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com **subject Ring 2020**

REPORTS ON MUSICAL EVENTS AND MEETINGS

31 MARCH AGM

At the AGM our President paid tribute to the outstanding service given by retiring Committee Members Vice President Leona Geeves, Secretary Barbara deRome and Membership secretary Jenny Edwards and welcomed new Committee members Lis Bergman, Rhonda Dalton and Marie Leech.

Esteban Insausti is now a Vice President and Michael Day is interim Secretary.

Unfortunately Katrina Sheppard was taken ill and couldn't perform after the AGM as planned so we played a video about the making of the Boulez/Chareau Bayreuth Ring, which was enthusiastically received.

19 MAY CONCERT AND BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Our annual Wagner's birthday celebrations were preceded by a wonderful concert (see program right) by Soprano Celeste Siciliano and her husband Baritone Ted Labow, accompanied by pianist Jonathan Wilson. We have supported Jonathan in the past and he gave a virtuoso performance. Celeste shared sensitive insights into the words of each of the pieces which were all about 'endings'. Her performance was powerfully sung and beautifully acted. The audience of about 40 members and guests was very appreciative and sang along with Celeste when she led us in "Happy Birthday dear Richard" and cut the birthday cake.

Vier Letzte Lieder (selections) ~ Richard Strauss
II. September
III. Beim Schlafengehen

Tannhäuser ~ Richard Wagner
Act III: Wolfram's Aria
"O du mein holder Abendstern"

Elektra ~ Richard Strauss
Elektra's Monologue
"Allein! Weh, ganz allein"

Tristan und Isolde ~ Richard Wagner
Act III: Isolde's Liebestod
"Mild und Leise wie er lächelt"

Die Walküre ~ Richard Wagner
Act III: Scene & Wotan's Farewell
"In festen Schlaf...Leb' wohl"

Götterdämmerung ~ Richard Wagner
Act III: Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene
"Starke Scheite schichtet mir dort"

SERIAL MONOGAMY

Excerpts from April 2019 Opera News article 'Serial Monogamy' by Charles Shafaieh

THE RING DEMANDS DEVOTION. Sitting through four operas for more than fifteen hours, often in less than comfortable conditions, is only the beginning of Wagner's endurance test: cycles rarely take place in one's hometown, and they stretch over six days, if not longer. Dedicating so much time, energy and money to any artistic event might seem ludicrous, if not masochistic, to many, but in an era when binge-watching sixty episodes of *Game of Thrones* is acceptable behaviour, the zealous dedication of *Ring* fans seems almost normal.

Mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe, a celebrated *Ring* Fricka, says - "It's important to feel that there's something bigger than us, and *The Ring* creates a community." Wagner understood this social aspect of *The Ring* when he created the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. To a lesser extent, the same pull of community holds true at any house where the *Ring* is presented. **Jane Mathews, a retired judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, Australia, who saw her first *Ring* at Bayreuth, knows this better than most; she has spent roughly a year of her life at sixty-four cycles. "You go to one at the other end of**

the world, and there are a whole lot of buddies there with whom you have drinks and dinner afterwards," she says, enthusiastically.

THE RING HAS BEEN READ CONVINCINGLY as a quasi-religious ritual complete with temple pilgrimages, but Wagner's tetralogy takes on a peculiar character when emphasizing roaming rather than any final destination or ending. As with binge watchers who often talk with more joy about the act of binge watching than about the show itself, many *Ring*-goers seem less inspired by the *Ring* they are attending than by the thought of their next *Ring*—the interpretation still unheard. They want the *Ring* at which they will meet friends they made at a previous cycle, the cycle that will bring back that high from their first time, the impossibly ideal production—in a new city, at another time. Like the Wanderer himself, *Ring* fanatics roam, and in doing so, they ignore Erda's advice in *Das Rheingold* to the greedy Wotan, "Alles was ist, endet!" (All that is shall come to an end.)

https://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2019/4/Features/Serial_Monogamy.html

FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

7 JULY SEMINAR: ANTHONY ERNST ON PARSIFAL



“Parsifal is Wagner’s most enigmatic work, at once apparently simple and yet containing deep symbolic and musical complexity. We will be exploring how this last and in some ways most sophisticated work of Wagner’s relates to his personal concerns, the world around him, the changes in culture and society which had

happened around him, and, not least of all, the position of Parsifal as a piece of polemic about the state of humanity and its future. “

Anthony Ernst is currently the orchestra director of the Royal Danish Orchestra, the world’s oldest orchestra. He has worked as a dramaturg, opera director, translator, writer, lecturer and artistic planner, most recently as Artistic Planning Manager of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg. Previously he has worked with the Semperoper Dresden, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Teatro dell’Opera di Roma, Oper Frankfurt, Teatro Maestranza di Sevilla, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and Opera Australia, as well as being a tour leader for Renaissance Tours and regular contributor of programme notes, articles, surtitles, translations and lectures for Symphony Services and numerous other organisations. Anthony was born in Sydney and obtained his doctorate from the University of Newcastle.

21 JULY STEWART SKELTON TALKS ABOUT SINGING ON THE WORLD STAGE



Grammy nominee and 2014 International Opera Awards Male Singer of the Year, Stuart Skelton is one of the finest heldentenors on the stage today, critically acclaimed for his outstanding musicianship, tonal beauty and intensely dramatic portrayals. Stewart was born in Sydney. He won the McDonalds Aria Competition, which led him to study singing at

the University of Cincinnati and on the Merola Opera Program at San Francisco Opera. He now appears for the major opera

companies worldwide, including the Metropolitan Opera, New York, Seattle Opera, La Scala, Milan, Paris Opéra, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Bavarian State Opera and at the Baden-Baden Festspielhaus. He is especially renowned for his interpretation of dramatic and Heldentenor roles, including Florestan (*Fidelio*), Lohengrin, Siegmund, Tristan (*Tristan und Isolde*), Parsifal, Gherman (*The Queen of Spades*), Laca Klemen (*Jenufa*), Boris Grigorjevic (*Káťa Kabanová*) and Peter Grimes.

Stewart was supported in his early career by the Wagner Society in NSW. He is visiting Sydney for SSO concert performances of Peter Grimes, with Nicole Carr and conductor David Robertson on 25 and 27 July

19 AUGUST PATRON SIMONE YOUNG RECEPTION AND TALK



Please note that is at 6.00pm and is on a MONDAY. Refreshments will be served.

Simone Young is considered one of the most important conductors of our time. After completing her musical studies in her native

Sydney, Ms. Young received an award to work at the Cologne Opera where she was quickly appointed Kapellmeister, and then engaged by Daniel Barenboim at Berlin’s Staatsoper Unter den Linden. This launched her international career, which has taken her to nearly all the most important opera houses and symphony orchestras around the world.

Ms. Young is currently Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne and maintains a busy conducting schedule in the 2018/19 season, which sees her return once again to Berlin State Opera to conduct

Die Frau ohne Schatten, and to Vienna State Opera with *Lohengrin*. She will also lead performances of *From the House of the Dead*, *Jenufa*, and *Tannhäuser* at Bavarian State Opera, and of *Elektra* at Oper Zürich. Equally in demand on the concert podium, the 2018/19 season will bring Ms. Young to orchestras in Stockholm, Lausanne, Berlin, Leipzig, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit, and Australia.

Ms. Young’s previous titled positions include: Principal Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic (1998-2002); Artistic Director of the Australian Opera (2001-2003); Principal Guest Conductor of the Gulbenkian Orchestra in Lisbon; Artistic Director of the Hamburg State Opera and Chief Music Director of the Hamburg Philharmonic (2005-2015).

Simone Young is the esteemed Patron of the Wagner Society in NSW. She last spoke to us in August 2012

<http://www.simoneyoung.com/english/news-eng/>

THE MIGRAINES AND THE MUSIC: WAS WAGNER INSPIRED BY HEADACHE PAIN?

Three German researchers present evidence that Wagner interwove his headache pain into his operas

The enigmatic operas of Richard Wagner have been subject to countless interpretations over the decades—political, psychological, and spiritual. Now, a trio of researchers is suggesting there may be a much simpler explanation for much of what he wrote.

His music, they argue, is in part a reflection of his migraines.

“Wagner deeply interwove his migraine attacks and auras into his music and libretti,” a team led by Carl Gobel, a research fellow at the Kiel Headache and Pain Centre in Germany, writes in the *BMJ*.

“THE FIRST SCENE OF ACT ONE OF *SIEGFRIED* PROVIDES AN EXTRAORDINARILY CONCISE AND STRIKINGLY VIVID HEADACHE EPISODE.»

The researchers demonstrate this contention by looking specifically at *Siegfried*, the third opera in his massive *Ring Cycle*. They even describe what they call a “migraine leitmotif” that recurs in the opera.

“The first scene of Act One of *Siegfried* provides an extraordinarily concise and strikingly vivid headache episode,” they write. “The music begins with a pulsatile thumping, first in the background, then gradually becoming more intense.”

While the music is rising in intensity, the character of Mime is “pounding with his hammer,” they write. “At the climax, Mime cries out: ‘Compulsive plague! Pain without end!’”

That music returns in Act One, Scene Three, at which point Mime complains “Loathsome light! Is the air aflame?” The researchers call that “a musical depiction of the visual disturbances of a typical migraine aura.”

If that interpretation sounds like a stretch, consider a letter Wagner wrote to Franz Liszt in January 1857. He tells his fellow composer that “for 10 days, after I had finished the sketch for the first act of *Siegfried*, I was literally not able to write a single bar without being driven away from my work by most tremulous headaches.”



Gill's Familiar Cartoon of Richard Wagner

Apparently incorporating the pain into his score provided creative inspiration, but not physical relief.

So, if Wagner's music gives you a headache, consider this: His pain was most likely much worse than yours

TOM JACOBS <https://psmag.com/social-justice/wagner-master-composer-migraine-music-71431>

I love Wagner, but the music I prefer is that of a cat hung up by its tail outside a window and trying to stick to the panes of glass with its claws.

Charles Baudelaire

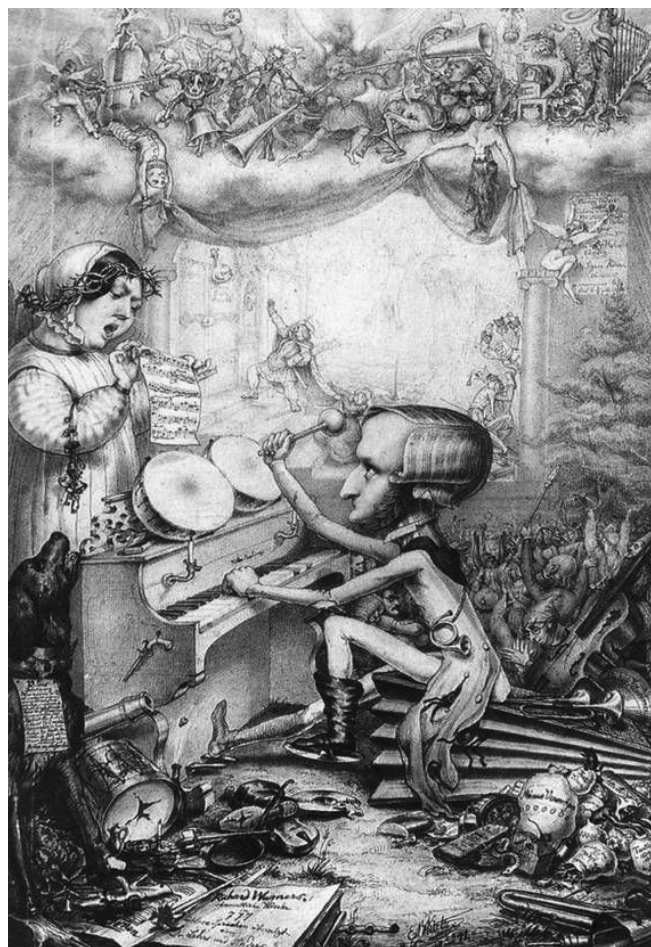
WAGNER: AESTHETICS AND ORCHESTRATION

by Peter Latham

Wagner himself never wished to be regarded as a composer pure and simple. He protested with some justice that his achievement covered many fields, and that any estimate of it must be based on a general survey and not merely on the music that constituted but one element in the complex whole. Even the modern opera-goer (and the opera-singer, too) is far too apt to forget all other considerations in his anxiety to appreciate to the full the music that the composer puts before him; and if this tendency is common today, it was almost universal when Wagner lived and wrote. For though the obvious truth that an opera is a combination of music and drama has never been entirely forgotten since it was first stated by the group of Florentines among whom this form of art originated, yet the ideal blend of the two has not proved easy to discover. Music has always had a way of asserting her pre-eminence at the expense of the plays with which she has been associated, in spite of all the efforts of theorists and reformers to keep her within legitimate bounds. Even the redoubtable Gluck himself could not always resist her imperious demand for freedom to develop unrestrained along her own lines, and during the seventy-five years or so that elapsed between *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *The Rhinegold* she succeeded in reducing the sister art to a condition of almost complete subjection.

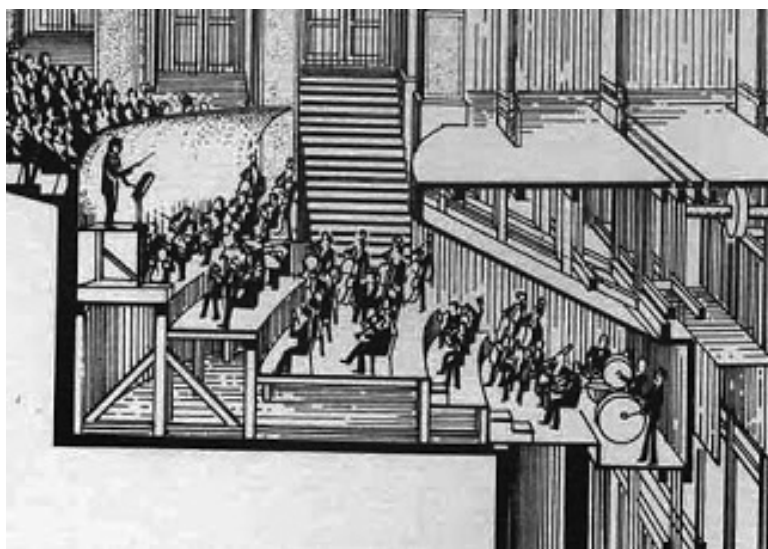
Mozart and Beethoven, it is true, never failed to give due consideration to the significance of the scene they were setting, but the bent of their minds towards purely instrumental compositions made them ill-fitted to continue the work of Gluck, even if the sheer splendour of their genius had not been such as to overwhelm by its very magnificence the dramas to which it lent its lustre. Their deep sense of artistic fitness did, indeed, lead to the creation of an operatic tradition that was to develop through Weber till at last it bore rich fruit in the work of Wagner himself. But before this consummation could be reached a period had to be traversed during which the original ideals of dramatic music seemed to be obliterated in a flood of lyric eloquence and vocal virtuosity. This is not the place for an estimate of the operas of Spontini, Meyerbeer, Auber, Donizetti, Bellini, and a host of others, all famous in their day and not by any means forgotten even now; but it will be generally conceded that in their work it was the music and the singers that mattered. The very inanity of so many of their libretti is sufficient evidence of the small store they set on dramatic considerations.

Such being the operas to which audiences were accustomed when Wagner appeared upon the scene, it is not surprising that he should have decided that his theories required some explanation if they were to prove acceptable to the operatic public. His hearers, he felt, must be made to see that his mature work, however novel it might appear, contained nothing that was not perfectly logical and easily intelligible once the standpoint from which he regarded the artistic problem was properly appreciated, and consequently we find him in his writings insisting again and again on the essential unity of the true "Music-Drama", in which literature, acting, and stagecraft should all play their part with the music in achieving the desired dramatic result.



These views, so contrary to current conventions, were regarded by the older school of composers and critics at first with indifference, and later, as Wagner's genius became more and more widely recognised, with growing anger and alarm. Not only was a resuscitation of the inconvenient ideals of Gluck likely to interfere with the style of opera to which they had grown accustomed, but it soon became clear that Wagner intended to push his ease further than Gluck had ever dreamed of. He possessed, moreover, a power of clear reasoning, a quick eye for his opponent's weaknesses, and a trenchant pen that rendered him a formidable adversary, and, above all, he was liable at any moment to produce a masterpiece of his own more compelling than a thousand arguments. Finally, he wove into his operas a mass of philosophic doctrine and questionable sociology that was enough in itself to raise in arms against him all but the most progressive elements in contemporary thought.

This was the origin of the great Wagnerian controversy, the echoes of which have not even now quite died away. Besides the difficult problems of opera it included, as has been shown, many things whose only connexion with the principal issue was that they had been dragged into the arena by Wagner himself, and it was further complicated by the discussion that arose concerning the relative merits of "absolute music" and "programme music", the supporters



The sunken pit at Bayreuth

of poetic music (as “programme music” has sometimes been called) enrolling themselves under the standard of Wagner and Liszt, while the purists found a somewhat reluctant and self-effacing champion in Brahms. There was, as will be seen, plenty to write about if all these large questions were to be thoroughly threshed out, and if any one of the controversialists found himself temporarily at a loss for weapons, Wagner’s private life furnished a fresh and almost inexhaustible arsenal. No wonder the fight was bitter! No wonder the Wagnerian literature is voluminous!

Over these weighty matters the dispute among the critics still rages. But meanwhile the much-enduring public has quietly made up its mind. Wagner’s reforms may indeed mark a turning-point in operatic history, his libretti may be less silly (though more tedious) than those of most opera-writers, but the public cares little for all this. One thing, however, it has seen and felt for itself, the supreme greatness of Wagner’s music, and having established this to its own satisfaction it leaves the critics to their own concerns and goes on filling Covent Garden and the Queen’s Hall whenever it has a chance of hearing this music performed. When it can it plays over the scores of the operas for itself at home, and when it can’t it buys gramophone records. This last point clinches the argument: every element of Wagner’s work is lost on the record except the music – even the words are seldom clear – and yet the companies have found it worthwhile to issue more of the work of Wagner than of any other serious composer whatever. The public may be wrong, though I am not at all prepared to admit that it is, but it has delivered a definite verdict which it would be mere folly for us to ignore.

One of the curious results of the present situation is that while it is in Wagner’s music that most of us are interested, yet it is far from easy to gather information about this vital aspect of his work from the mass of the Wagner literature. The best writers have been so engrossed in controversy that their dealings with the music itself have been too often confined to a few desultory references, brought in where they may serve to further the general argument. What we need is a book in English that will be mainly concerned with Wagner

the composer, showing us wherein his greatness lies and what is the relationship between his work and that of other nineteenth century writers. It should not be impossible to produce a readable little volume on these lines, which would appeal to the ordinary music lover by steering safely between the Scylla of aesthetic theorising and the Charybdis of excessive technicality.

Meanwhile, in the absence of more adequate information, perhaps these stray remarks may be of interest. They lay no claim to originality and there must be many readers of THE GRAMOPHONE to whom everything I have to say has long been familiar. But it is not to them that I address myself so much as to those others who, having felt the spell of this mighty music, would be glad to learn the sources of its inspiration and what use its creator made of them. No one need fear that such an enquiry will

destroy the magic of *Tristan* or *The Mastersingers*. Every critic knows that there is an inmost shrine of genius to which he can never penetrate; it is outside this that his business lies, and he is content to stop short upon the threshold, leaving the ultimate secrets still “wrapt in mystery”.

The outstanding feature of all Wagner’s later works, and in a lesser degree of his earlier ones, is the importance of the orchestra. From being merely a suitable background against which the brilliance of the “star” singer may shine more brightly the sound of the instruments has become a bottomless ocean of music in which singer and audience alike must swim or, on occasions, sink. The large force of players that he employs is, of course, partly responsible for this result, but other composers might have used the means without achieving the effect, whereas Wagner can obtain all his characteristic richness even with the diminutive band of the *Siegfried Idyll*. The real secret of his orchestration is his unique appreciation of the possibilities for colour inherent in the instruments at his disposal, and it was this that guided him both in his selection of new recruits for the orchestral family and in his treatment of its established members. The well-known division of that family into strings, woodwind, and brass, with percussion as required, he inherited from the great classical symphonists such changes as he made were in the direction of splitting up these groups still further. Everyone remembers the famous passage at the beginning of the prelude to *Lohengrin*, where the ethereal quality of the music is due to its being played on violins only, these being divided up into four, five, or even eight parts instead of the customary two. This elaborate writing for the strings is no isolated instance (the music accompanying the wood-bird’s song, *Hei! Siegfried erschlug nun der schlimmen Zwerg!* from the forest scene in *Siegfried* supplies another example) but is typical of Wagner’s methods.

When, however, he came to the wood-wind, where each part in the score is played by a single instrument instead of a group, he found it impossible to proceed in the same way without adding to the number of players; for the two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, and two bassoons, with which Beethoven was usually content were clearly insufficient to

produce the subtle shades of colour that he loved. So we see him adding a third flute (or a piccolo) to the flute group, a third oboe (or a tenor oboe, cor anglais) to the oboes, a third clarinet (or bass clarinet), and a third bassoon (or double bassoon). This enabled him to obtain three-part harmony in any of the four principal wood-wind timbres and is in a large measure responsible for the rich sonority of his passages for full orchestra, besides accounting for the mellow smoothness that characterises his writing for wood-wind alone.

But it is in the brass that we notice the most conspicuous advance. Not only does Wagner pursue the same plan here as in the wood-wind, using four (or more) horns regularly, three trumpets, and reinforcing the three trombones with a bass tuba, but he is able, owing to improvements in the mechanism of some of these instruments, to treat them with far greater freedom than had been possible hitherto. Mozart, Beethoven, and even Weber, when writing for horns or trumpets, had been compelled to confine themselves to a mere handful of notes since the “natural horns” and “natural trumpets” that their players used were only capable of producing the series of sounds that we call, for obvious reasons, the “bugle notes,” and a very few others. This cruel limitation prevented their allotting any but the simplest themes to these instruments (and it must be remembered that Mozart and Beethoven seldom used the more versatile trombones), it forced them if they wished to carry their music into some remote key to “leave their horns and trumpets behind them,” and generally it relegated the brass to a subordinate position in the background that was quite unworthy of its dignity, besides occasioning some clumsy writing that a later generation unaware of the difficulty has sometimes been too ready to condemn. During the nineteenth century, however, instrument makers set themselves to remove this reproach to their profession, and they succeeded in evolving the valve horn and valve trumpet on which it was possible to produce almost any note that was within the instrument’s compass. Wagner was, perhaps, the first to realise the full potentialities of this invention, and his free and effective use of it sounded the death-knell of the older instruments. For the Wagnerian brass no key is impossible, no note inaccessible, and the group takes its rightful place as an equal beside the wood-wind and the strings.

Certain other obvious peculiarities of Wagner’s orchestration are of less importance. In *Rienzi* we find him writing a part for the serpent, an old wooden instrument that will remind some of us of Thomas Hardy’s *Under the Greenwood Tree*. “It is now happily obsolete,” as Mr Corder observes. In the score of *The Ring*, again, various strange and forbidding brass instruments are to be met with, a bass trumpet, a double bass trombone and the like; I am told that HMV have used the full complement of these for their splendid *Ring* series of records, but I cannot claim much acquaintance with them in the opera-house or the concert-hall, where their parts are taken as a rule by the ordinary trombones and tuba. For the tuba, by the way, Wagner shows a marked partiality, and in *The Ring* he employs four of these instruments, often using them antiphonally with his trombones. The effect is a fine one, but I have not come across any convincing illustrations of it on the gramophone.

Very different from these brazen-throated monsters is the harp, for which Wagner writes regularly though by no means always well. Perhaps the most famous example of its use is in the “rainbow bridge” music from *The Rhinegold*, where the diverse and simultaneous arpeggi of six harps, and divided strings are employed with the happiest, result. This, however, is exceptional, and on the whole harpists have a right to reproach Wagner for his lack of consideration for them. There is, for instance, in the *Liebestod*, a full and elaborate part for the instrument, which is most of it inaudible, the weak sound of the harp being submerged beneath the orchestral flood – it must be heart-breaking work for the player! But even so he will probably prefer it to that apparently simple and effective passage in the Fire-music from *The Valkyrie* where the descending chromatic arpeggi are so appallingly awkward that no one to this day has ever been able to render them quite satisfactorily.

But the harp is a solitary exception; for all the other instruments Wagner shows an imaginative sympathy that has seldom if ever been equalled. Needless to say he makes unheard of demands on all his orchestral players – there are things for the strings in *Tristan* that tax to the uttermost even the largest and most accomplished body of violinists – but most great composers have found themselves transcending the technical limitations of their executant brethren at one point or another, and unless the feats required of them have been utterly unreasonable the executants have made it their business to find a way of translating the written notes into tone. Richard Wagner was certainly not the man to be more considerate than others in this; respect, and his scores would have been beyond the reach of the orchestras that sufficed for Beethoven, and even Weber, as much by the difficulty and complexity of the individual parts and the subtlety of the relations between them as by the prodigious number of players that was required to perform them. The only proper place to discuss fully this aspect of the subject would be on a book on orchestration, but no technical knowledge is needed to appreciate the general truth of what I have just said or the splendid way in which orchestras and their conductors have strained every nerve that their presentation of Wagner’s music may come as close as possible to his original conception of it. All honour to them!

And all honour to the recording companies, who have had their own problem to solve – a problem of which Wagner can never have dreamed. I am very ignorant of the history of the gramophone and its rude parent, the early phonograph, and it would be interesting to know whether the master could possibly have heard any instrument of this kind before he died, in February 1883. But be that as it may, he can never have anticipated the enormous vogue his music would one day acquire by such unexpected means, and he certainly made no allowances for the difficulties of reproduction. Considering the enormously complex nature of the work that had to be done by the recording companies, the results already achieved are nothing less than astounding; and – most satisfactory of all – they show no signs of resting upon their laurels!

<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/editorial/wagner-aesthetics-and-orchestration-by-peter-latham>

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA RING CYCLE - APRIL- MAY 2019

Review by Minnie Biggs

Regrettably, the Met Ring is all or too much about The Machine. Robert Lepage's 45 tonne, 17 or is it 23 million dollar, twenty four panel ego trip. (There are eighteen names listed as staff for the Machine project!) (Just think what that money could do for the ailing finances of the Met Opera!) However, it must be said that there are people who like it. Quite a lot of people. And defend it. Not me.

It seemed to have little or nothing to do with Wagner or the operas or the messages therein. Great big lumbering structures, frequently wheezing and groaning as they move, perilous for the singers, the Rhine Maidens hang from easily spotted ropes, it was all about itself. Lepage. The lighting effects often looked like giant billboards in primary coloured neon lights. Ugly. Most notoriously was the Rainbow Bridge. No stretch of the imagination could visualise a bridge - something about brightly lit parallel lines? How did the poor singers climb that vertical structure? With difficulty.

The Valkyries rode their horses in a straight line across the top of the structure, stiff and unconvincing, sliding down to the ground, as on diving boards, where they placed cloths on the ground - to indicate horses or feeding or the dead warriors? Brunhilde's mountain at one stage became an iceberg, and one that featured falling glaciers, in white and grey. Not the moment to consider climate change if indeed that was what they had in mind, Otherwise - a giant iceberg?

For the last two operas, he seemed to run out of steam, less Machine movement and slightly less aggressive neon lighting. The Gibichung hall had an effective table, rising and falling from below. Similar to Erda's elevator, where in the second cycle, there was a long pause before someone shouted out something, and she began to sing. The fire at the end was splashy and bright and unconvincing for me and featured yet another vertiginous vertical climb.



The very best news is about the singers. Every one of them was excellent. Unusual in a Ring, there are often one or two who are less satisfying, for their acting or voice. These were the very finest I have heard. And seen. Michael Volle was a superb believable human Wotan in perfect voice, Christine Georke, a magnificent Brunhilde, Andreas Schager a strong musical Siegfried, (in the third cycle Stefan Vinke.) Our Stuart Skelton never better as Siegmund, beautiful Eva Maria Westbroeck as Sieglinde, Jamie Barton a convincing Fricka, deep strong Eric Owens as Hagen. Alberich was Tomasz Konieczny, Loge who had a lighter voice or do I always notice this? was Norbert Ernst. Guttrune was Edith Haller and Gunther Evgeny Nikitin. All superb.

Philippe Jordan conducted. The famous Met Opera orchestra, brought to its excellence through James Levine who had the advantage of hiring and working with his musicians over the years, honing them to that excellence with his famous ear. Since his departure many players have moved on and there has been no continuous leader. So perhaps it is not surprising that Jordan's gang was not up to earlier standards. I seldom heard the seamless beauty of old. The horns, those important horns, were too often too alive, bright, brash and far too often

given to actual mistakes. Ouch. He took a fast tempo, having written in the program about young conductors taking the slow too slow, the fast too fast, and how he has learned to not succumb to that, except he does, moves altogether too quickly throughout. Seldom observing Wagner's ritardandos. I never felt the remembered sublimity of the Met orchestra sound. However, on a bright note- my friend who was following with a score said he had never heard the Siegfried hammer scene so correctly performed, every note as RW wrote it, in the correct time. Let's hear it for Andreas Schager! * (see below) Stefan Vinke did not do it as well in the last performance.

What was special about this Ring for me was seeing, or rather listening to it, twice. Seldom has there been such an opportunity. For the last cycle I ordered score seats (\$12) with the express intention of just listening, as those seats have no view of the stage. But somehow they did not come through, so, on tenterhooks, in the last minutes, I bought standing rooms places (\$49).

For Rheingold, I was at the top of the top of the family circle and found a spot on the floor with a light below the wall against which people lean and look. With my specs and my libretto, I listened and heard as I never had before. Quite comfortable with my legs crossed underneath me, the sound was superb, orchestra and voices slightly more mellow, rounded. For the subsequent operas I 'scored' a score desk seat. My friend who had his seat honestly found there were usually a couple of empty ones. So I moved in. Thankfully ushers do not check tickets once you are in the hall, unless you need help. Again, just listening and following the libretto at least part of the time, I heard the operas anew. One little example, in Siegfried I penciled a note about hearing a waltz tune or rhythm in Mime's singing, Brand new to me.

At the performance of Siegfried the woman behind me had a different score than that of my friend; his was a big book with the parts of all the instruments. I asked her about it - it was for piano and voice, with the libretto in tiny letters in German and English- and she offered it to me for the third act. "I've been here the whole time; I can have a nap!" Thank you, what a blessing! Also a challenge, a long time since I have used a score, intense concentration. What a thrill it was, just being with those pages of even just the piano score. And an extra gift: she had penciled in the leitmotifs!

Such an enriching and widely opening experience it was, to dive deeper and absorb more of the many layers of Wagner's music and stories. People love to talk about how many Rings they have attended but for me it is about how much more I learn and understand and appreciate that genius which is Richard Wagner.

* In a recent biography of Mathilde Wesendonck, it is mentioned that in one of the houses Wagner lived in while in Zurich, he was surrounded by piano playing, a practicing flute, and a blacksmith shop. He had to endure all that noise all the time while trying to compose. The persistent hammering of the blacksmith may well have inspired his own hammering, bringing hammering to a new musical high.

Minnie Biggs May 27, 2019



THE DEATH OF RICHARD WAGNER

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Mourning on earth, as when dark hours descend,
Wide-winged with plagues, from heaven; when hope and mirth
Wane, and no lips rebuke or reprehend
Mourning on earth.

The soul wherein her songs of death and birth,
Darkness and light, were wont to sound and blend,
Now silent, leaves the whole world less in worth.

Winds that make moan and triumph, skies that bend,
Thunders, and sound of tides in gulf and firth,
Spake through his spirit of speech, whose death should send
Mourning on earth.

From the depths of the sea, from the wellsprings of earth, from the wastes of the midmost night,
From the fountains of darkness and tempest and thunder, from heights where the soul would be,
The spell of the mage of music evoked their sense, as an unknown light
From the depths of the sea.

As a vision of heaven from the hollows of ocean, that none but a god might see,
Rose out of the silence of things unknown of a presence, a form, a might,
And we heard as a prophet that hears God's message against him and may not flee.

Eye might not endure it, but ear and heart with a rapture of dark delight,
With a terror and wonder whose core was joy, and a passion of thought set free,
Felt inly the rising of doom divine as a sundawn risen to sight
From the depths of the sea.

The world's great heart, whence all things strange and rare
Take form and sound, that each inseparate part
May bear its burden in all tuned thoughts that share
The world's great heart -

The fountain forces, whence like steeds that start
Leap forth the powers of earth and fire and air,
Seas that revolve and rivers that depart -

Spake, and were turned to song: yea, all they were,
With all their works, found in his mastering art
Speech as of powers whose uttered word laid bare
The world's great heart.



LETTER FROM JESSICA HARPER

On Sat, 6 Apr. 2019, 12:13 am, Jessica Harper - jessicaharpersoprano@gmail.com wrote:

Dear Colleen and all the members of the Wagner Society NSW,

Just an update to let you know what I have been up to! Thanks to your financial support I have been able to do a month long Intensive German course, which I found enormously rewarding and challenging. To my surprise, I was placed in the B2.1 level, which is much higher than I thought, and also means I have saved several thousand euros in course fees. I will do the next course in June or July, as I have been in Poland this week competing in the 4th International Adam Didur Competition (I am very chuffed to say I made it to the semi-finals!), but as I have missed the first week of the April German classes I don't think it's worth spending the money to do the course this month.

Thomas Cadenbach is a wonderful coach, and I have had five paid sessions with him so far. He is only charging me €50 cash per session, so your funding is stretching much further than I originally anticipated. When we have finished the ten sessions I will ask him to write an email or a letter confirming that we met, and for how much etc, so you can keep it for your records.

I am putting on a concert with the Killara Music Society in November this year. Though I haven't yet booked my flights, would it suit the society for me to perform for you as well sometime around then? I would love to put on a concert exploring Wagner lieder (not just Wesendonck, which I'm sure you've heard many times!) and one or two pieces my

von Weber as well (following a decidedly Dresden inspired theme!). Perhaps some pieces by Clara Schumann as well? My partner Joseph and I found the house where she was born the other week - it's very close to the Blaues Wunder Brücke (Loschwitz Brücke), in a very upmarket part of town!

Let me know if this works for you. I would love to thank you for your support with a concert or similar.

Have a lovely weekend and thank you again.

Jessica

RECENT GRANTS TO YOUNG SINGERS

BRADLEY KUNDA - REPETITEUR and
REBECCA MACCALLION - SOPRANO

Have been given grants to attend the 2019 Berlin Opera Academy. July-August 2019

EUGENE F RAGGIO - BASS BARITONE

Has been given a grant to attend the Berlin Dramatic Voice Program – performing the role of Wotan in *Das Rheingold*.

LETTER RECEIVED BY OUR PRESIDENT FROM LICEU OPERA, BARCELONA

Dear Dr Chesterman,

The LICEU Opera Barcelona has announced its new season 19-20 and one of the most expected moment will definitely be the 'World Premiere' of a new production of LOHENGRIN, directed by Katharina Wagner.

Coinciding with this extraordinary event, several cultural establishments in Barcelona have been involved with organising "Wagnerian Encounters", which comprises a bill of concerts, conferences, tours, various activities, and attendance to the opera *Lohengrin*.

Therefore, in order to offer maximum flexibility, we have planned and designed two different dates. Each of them with a basic programme - a kind of common base which can be modified for your needs if necessary - and on the other hand a "flexible programme" with activities, conferences, visits, restaurants, that you can add, or not, according to your wishes.

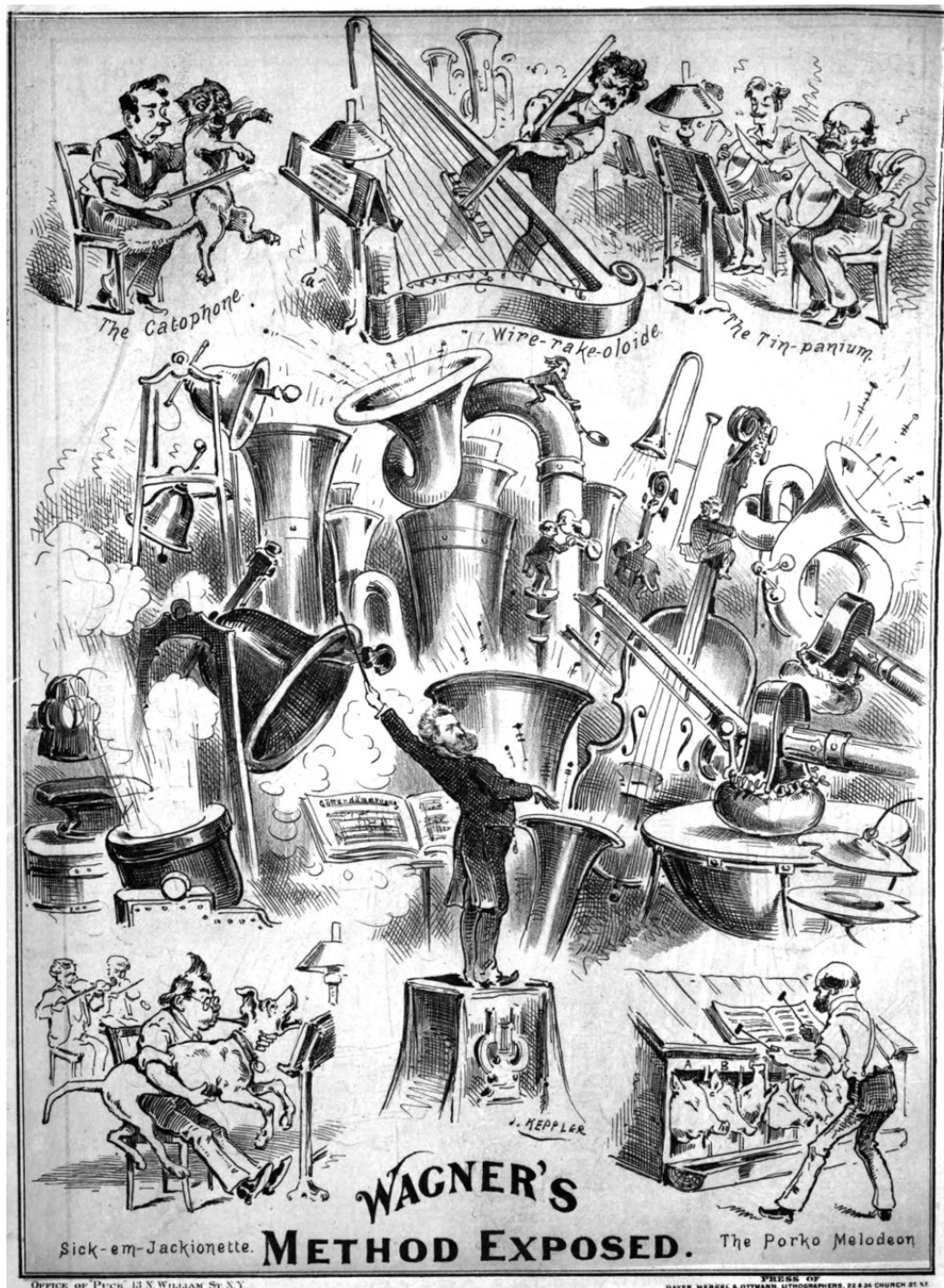
I remain at your disposal and wish you a very nice day!

Best regards,

Axel Ruis
Liceu Opera
18 March 2019

<https://www.liceubarcelona.cat/en/temporada-2019-2020/opera/lohengrin>

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF WAGNER



Wagner's Methods Exposed 1877 Kepler

Heartless sterility, obliteration of all melody, all tonal charm, all music. This revelling in the destruction of all tonal essence, raging satanic fury in the orchestra, this demoniacal, lewd caterwauling, scandal-mongering, gun-toting music, with an orchestral accompaniment slapping you in the face. Hence, the secret fascination that makes it the darling of feeble-minded royalty, of the court monkeys covered with reptilian slime, and of the blasé hysterical female court parasites who need this galvanic stimulation by massive instrumental treatment to throw their pleasure-weary frog-legs into violent convulsion. The diabolical din of this pig-headed man, stuffed with brass and sawdust, inflated, in an insanely destructive self-aggrandizement, by Mephistopheles' mephitic and most venomous hellish miasma, into Beelzebub's Court Composer and General Director of Hell's Music - Wagner!

J.L. Klein, *Geschichte des Dramas* (1871), p. 237

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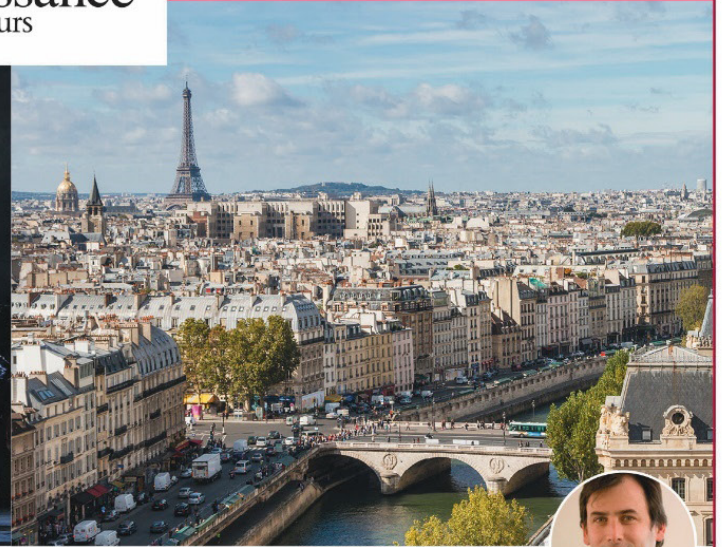
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Guaranteed Category One Main Floor Prime Seating with Scott Curry
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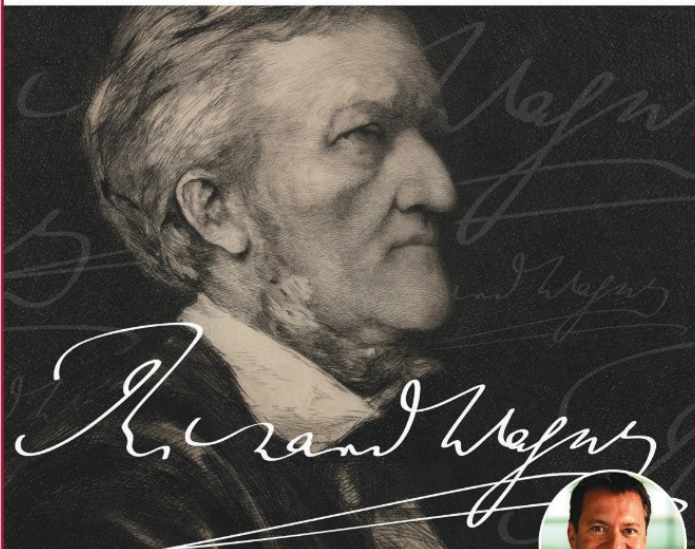
Travel to Chicago in 2020 for the gripping new production of the Ring by the city's Lyric Opera under the baton of Sir Andrew Davis and directed by David Pountney.



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Siegfried's Death Arthur Rackham 1911

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