

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORTby RICHARD KING

As usual I will begin my report this year with a summary of events. What started off as an experiment to see how it would be received, has now become an integral part of the functioning of the Society's calendar of events. I am referring to the monthly Sunday afternoon video and compact disc recordings given to us at the Goethe Institute. These informative and sociable gatherings are organised by the Functions Sub-Committee and in particular, Jessie and Keith Anderson, who also supply the audio equipment required. The Society did purchase a few years ago a superb pair of loud-speakers but to date we have not invested in the player and amplifiers. Perhaps this may be something to be looked at in the future as we build up our own recording collection. In the meantime we are deeply indebted to the Andersons for their generosity. They arrive a good two hours prior to the appointed time just to get all the heavy equipment in and wired up. Jessie Anderson could also be known as "Earth Mother Catering Services" - a title I am sure many would agree with!

Even though our financial year ends on the 30th April, I did cover the events including the 1988 Annual Dinner in my report to members last year, so I will start at June 1988. "Die Walküre" Compact Disc recording was presented on Sunday, 19th and this was followed by "Siegfried" on Sunday 17th of July. These recordings offer the opportunity for those who may be unfamiliar with the work, or who may live in a building where it is difficult to play recordings, a standard of sound quality unsurpassed - and no worries about the neighbours. Many of those present help with the setting up and cleaning afterwards, which is very much appreciated by the Committee.

Undoubtedly the highlight of 1988 was the Australian Opera production of "Die Meistersinger", and undoubtedly the focus of the Society was our Seminar in preparation for this unique event. We preceded the seminar with a video recording of the opera on Sunday, 21st August, a vital introduction for those who may never have had the opportunity to see the opera live. Our Speakers at the Seminar were a very impressive line up by any standards, and when one considers we are all volunteers, I think we can justly claim that a professional organiser would have been hard pressed to have done better!

Dr Leonard Hansen, our Founding President was chairman and our first speaker was Mr. Dennis Hennig of the Conservatorium of Music in Sydney. He gave a superb musical analysis of the opera with all the authority one expects of a professional musician, with the added bonus of touches of humour. For the non-musician it was presented in a clear and understanding way. Dr. Ken Moulden of the Department of Germanic Studies, Sydney University, followed Dennis with his informative analysis of the libretto. His understanding and insight added further dimensions to the work, not only for the novice but the veteran also! The third speaker who had prepared a paper was Mr. Brian Taylor, also of the Department of Germanic Studies, Sydney University, his speciality being a life-long interest in the historical mastersingers. Presented in a manner by one who not only knew what he was talking about, but with a passion for his subject, he took one back in time and evoked a new dimension to the work. Towards the end of this most wonderful day we welcomed Sir Charles Mackerras who was to conduct the performances. He spoke of the demands this monumental work has on a musician and gave his thoughts as to how he would be approaching his task. A Champagne Reception followed and we departed the Goethe Institute building with much food for thought and inestimable nourishment for the soul.

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For those who unfortunately were unable to be present and for those who were, a superb journal recording all the speakers and events of the day has been produced. Called "Wagner in Australia", Vol.1.No.1. it is now available for \$15 plus postage. We are indebted to the New South Wales Consulate-General of West Germany for the generous financial support in the production of this journal.

During the year an opportunity to acquire a most important historical collection of Wagner in Australia came to our notice. The Elizabethan Opera Trust Company's first production of a Wagner Opera at the Elizabethan Theatre in Newtown, was presented in 1958. The sets and costumes were designed by Mr. Frank Hinder, an Australian-born artist. The collection of sets and costume designs for "Lohengrin" were offered to the Society for the sum of six thousand dollars, which was considered by the Committee to be a very reasonable price for such unique material. We decided to purchase and launched an appeal in the Newsletter for assistance. The response was generous and most of the cost was met. We will be making an announcement as to when the collection will be on view in the near future. It requires matting and framing at present.

The Australian Opera production of "Die Meistersinger" was booked out for the entire season and those of us who need our regular fix of a Wagner Opera were resorting to any means whatsoever to experience it again and again! A world class performance!

We rounded off the year with a C.D. afternoon of "Götterdämmerung" in November and in December held our annual Christmas Party. Our guest was Bayreuth Scholarship winner, John Wegner, who regaled us with his European odyssey. His performance as the Nightwatchman in "Die Meistersinger" was very special indeed.

The Society presented the Australian Opera with a cheque for five thousand dollars and was matched by another five thousand dollars by our Founding President. This enabled the Society to be given sponsorship status with the other sponsors involved, they being the West German Government and the Consortium of German Business Houses operating in Australia. We were given very prominent exposure in the programme as Sponsors of Donald McIntyre's appearances. When the telecast of the opera was presented on ABC-TV in January this year, we were given credit.

As I mentioned before, John Wegner had won our Bayreuth Scholarship in 1987. In 1988 it was awarded to Bernadette Cullen. She will be singing her first Wagnerian role with the A.O. in 1990.

During the latter part of 1988 we lost one of our most ardent supporters, with the death of Mr. Michel Arnould after a long and distressing illness. Michel was a Founder of the Society and served on the Committee for seven years. He designed our wonderful logo, which is the envy of Wagner Societies the world over. He is very sadly missed by all who knew him.

We began 1989 with a February showing of "Rienzi" on video on the new large screen at the Goethe Institute. This was followed in March and April with "Tristan" and "Parsifal" on C.D. which takes us up to last Friday night May 19th, at Sydney's Menzies Hotel for our Annual Dinner in honour of Richard Wagner's birthday. John Pringle was to have been our guest of honour but working commitments required his presence in Melbourne. At short notice Moffatt Oxenbould kindly consented to be our replacement and we had the added bonus of hearing one Wagner and two Verdi arias from Mr. Conal Coad, a New Zealand born bass singer, who had recently returned from singing the role of the King in "Lohengrin" in Belgium. He will sing the role of Pogner in Wellington, New Zealand next year when they stage "Die Meistersinger" with Donald McIntyre, a fellow New Zealander in the lead role. Conal has a superb voice and I think we will hear much more of him in the future.

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Moffatt took us on a grand tour through time and space with his history of Wagner performed and NOT performed by opera companies in Australia over nearly thirty years. A very informative and enjoyable talk indeed. Our final bonus for the evening was an impromptu reading by Margaret Whitlam, of some of Wagner's letters to his seamstress, a small volume unearthed by Patricia Baillie of Da Capo Bookshop. All in all, a most enjoyable evening.

As I said on the night, the Society is only the sum of the individuals who make it up. It is not some abstract bureaucracy that marches on regardless, and that is why we will always need people with experience and tenacity to keep the impulse alive. As I am not standing for re-election this year, I would like to thank all the people over the nine years I have been on the Committee for their support and encouragement. I think you all will agree the quality of our endeavours are all very professional and each year the standards are made higher.

In particular, I would like to thank on behalf of the members, our Secretary, Clare Hennessy, for her beautifully prepared minutes, letters and the thousand and one items required of the position. Olive Coonan for her work organising many of the social events and in particular the Annual Dinner. Murray Smith for his work as Treasurer and Co-ordinator of ticket sales for theatre groups etc. A very time-consuming task. To Annie Marshall for the membership records together with Margaret Budge, and Keith and Jessie Anderson for the marvellous work with the monthly Sunday afternoons and the latter two for the high quality of the newsletter. Their major task this year was the Society Journal, which is without doubt a unique publishing event.

Dr. Leonard Hansen, our Founding President for the work on the Functions Sub-committee, the organising of events and his wonderful financial support. And finally, Joseph Perfoglia for his assistance re the preparation of the intricate financial statements required since the Society became Incorporated, and to Reg Maloney for his meticulous work as Auditor.

To those members and friends of the Society, our Life Members and the Goethe Institute who have all assisted in one form or another, I should like to say - A VERY SINCERE THANK YOU!