

The Wagner Society

Registered Office: 141 Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo 2011
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Newsletter

No. 24. SEPTEMBER, 1986.

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PATRON: SIR CHARLES MacKERRAS
HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS:
WERNER BAER
RITA HUNTER
LEONIE RYSANEK
MICHAEL EWANS

COMING EVENTS

Sunday	September 28th	Wagner on Compact Disc Goeth Institute 1 - 5 pm. Guest Miss Rita Hunter *
Saturday	October 18th	"Wagner and His Friends" at home of Denis Condon. 47 Station St. NEWTOWN. 7.30 - 8.00 *
Sunday	October 26th	Wagner on Compact Disc. Goethe Institute 1 - 5 pm.
Saturday	September 27th	Australian Ensemble Clancy Auditorium University of N.S.W. 8.00 pm *
Sunday	December 14th	Christmas Party 2.30 - 6

* See details in Newsletter.

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DONATIONS

RECEIVED DURING LAST QUARTER.

Mr Werner Baer, Mrs Joyce Grant, Mr Murray Smith, Mrs Eva Forbes, Miss Clare Stevenson, Mr Christopher Coote, Miss Joan Klein, Mrs Ley Webster, Mr Neil Matthews, Lady Galleghan.

Our gratitude is extended to the above members who we hope will accept this publication of their names as our acknowledgement for their support.

Donations to the Wagner Society are tax deductible if they are paid to the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and accompanied by the form opposite.

Donations to the Wagner Society are Tax-Deductible if they are paid to the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and accompanied by the form below.

To: The General Manager,
The Elizabethan Theatre Trust, P.O Box 137, Kings Cross, 2011

Dear Sir,
Please find enclosed a cheque for \$ _____ representing my donation to The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. This donation is given unconditionally. However, it would be appreciated if, when considering your appropriations to the performing companies, preference in the allocation of this donation could be given to The Wagner Society.

Signature
Name
Address

THE BAYREUTH SCHOLARSHIP.

The good news that the Bayreuth Scholarship for 1986 was awarded in April to the producer Mr John Wregg was only conveyed to the Wagner Society on June 5th (!), and so, sadly, missed our June Newsletter.

Our congratulations go to Mr Wregg on the eve of his departure (12th Sep.) for Munich via London accompanied by his wife and two small children. It gives the Wagner Society great pleasure to be able to assist Mr Wregg in furthering his special field of study by granting him the return air fare. The timing of the newsletter has not favoured us but for those unable to be at the Goethe Institute on 31st August, Mr Wregg was our guest and he told us of his study plans which include:

A tour of companies in Great Britain, Scottish Opera, Opera North, Welsh Opera, Glyndebourne, Wexford, English National Opera, and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. In Germany time will be spent observing full productions in Cologne and Berlin and visits to companies in Hamburg and Frankfurt. And of course Bayreuth!

This Scholarship is usually granted for two months. However in the case of Mr Wregg the period has been extended to three months altogether.

Mr Wregg has come to the world opera from a background of law. He is a Bachelor of Laws (Melb. Uni.) and not the first of his conferences to cross the boards. His interests and experience in all aspects of theatre range widely.

In opera he has been Resident Producer for Australian Opera 1981 et. Seq. reviving Aida, Adriana Lecouvreur, Magic Flute, Lucia Di Lammasoor, Falstaff, Macbeth inter alia, and has directed H.M.S. Pinafore for the Melbourne Music Theatre. 'I Loved Miss Watson', and 'Stubble' for The Seymour Group, The Bamboo Flute and Poe for Australian Opera.

In Theatre, as Director and Designer Mr Wregg has to his credit such titles as Lysistrata, Twelfth Night, Coriolanus, Dracula, The Real Inspector Hound, Glass Menagerie, & Kiss Me Kate.

As writer for Stage and Screen the list includes Doomsday, The Freedom Fighters, Man in a Telephone, Ned Kelly, episodes of 'Prisoner' and a time as Tutor in Script writing at Prahran College of Advanced Education.

We look forward to Mr Wregg's return and an opportunity to hear of his plans with opera in Australia and Wagner opera in particular.

DAVID PARKER - MARIE VAN HOVE

&

THE CANBERRA SCHOOL OF MUSIC "BOHĚME".

On 29th June, members enjoyed a very entertaining recital at the home of tenor, David Parker, and his wife Marie van Hove in Forestville. While the highlight of the programme was, for Wagnerites, the Lohengrin Narration and the Prize Song from the Meistersingers, nevertheless the Liszt sonnets were a revelation to those not familiar with them - altogether an afternoon of fine music in splendid surroundings and in good company.

During the interval Marie told us about the student performance of La BohĚme during August in Canberra of which David was producer and Marie the conductor. I'm pleased to report that, although we did not have enough members able to go to hire a bus, the Society was represented at the two Saturday performances by members who were on holiday there or who made private arrangements to stay with friends. Our thanks go to those members who have reported that the enthusiasm and involvement were very evident even though the main tenor had the flu and had to be replaced.

Our best wishes to the Canberra Music School in its endeavours.

Jessye Anderson.

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COMING EVENTSWagner on Compact Disc.

The first of our Spring Sunday afternoons at the Goethe institute will have passed by the time you read this so just to remind you that the last Sunday of September 'Tannhauser' will be presented, beginning promptly at 1.00 pm.

Miss Rita Hunter will be present to sign copies of her newly released autobiography "Wait Until The Sun Shines Nellie", and to renew acquaintances. We all know Rita can tell a good story and the title is irresistible.

The Australia Ensemble.

As part of the Ensemble's Subscription Series and in observance of the 100th anniversary of Liszt's death, a programme of particular interest can be heard on Saturday 27th September. (8.00 pm). Adults \$13, Concession \$9. Liszt's late elegy for Wagner, "At Wagner's Grave" written for string quartet will be played, and serves as introduction to Wagner's summery pastoral, the Siegfried Idyll in the original chamber scoring. Easy and free parking. Enter Gate 9, High St., Randwick.

Wagner and his Friends:

As the title suggests, Denis Condon is going to treat us to an evening of music by Wagner and music from the pens of just some of the many composers who were influenced by the Master. If you've never experienced a performance by the great pianists of their day of the electric reproducing pianos at Ampico Towers don't miss out this time. Phone 358 1919 (bus. hours) and reserve a place. Numbers are limited.

Christmas Party. Again at the Goethe Institute and we hope to have a film screening, which was one of the first events ever staged by our Society, called "One hundred years of Bayreuth" this forty minute film is well worth viewing. The Christmas Party is a time to mix with members and friends and enjoy the culinary delights of our master chef, Jessye Anderson.

Continued.

South Australian Wagner Society.

In our June Newsletter we reported the founding of the Wagner Society in South Australia and further correspondence from its President, Prof. Andrew McGredie, proudly announces a membership of 50! Well done!

The (S.A.) Society proposes an annual newsletter for all Wagner Societies to which all will contribute. This can only benefit us all but particularly desirable is the chance to forge links between the disparate groups in Australia. We have indicated our interest in this joint venture and look forward to further discussion.

Wagner Memorabilia.

There must be many objects, programmes, books and souvenirs in the possession of Wagnerites and the idea of an exhibition of any items of relevance has been mooted. If you have anything you think would be of interest in such an exhibition telephone Janet Wayland at 332 3926 (evenings) or send a description to some to 278 Oxford St. Paddington. 2021.

If the response is encouraging the exhibition could be arranged in conjunction with the Christmas Party.

Absolute care and responsibility will be taken of every exhibit.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

Andreas Ogrowsky
Marino S.A. 8.6.86

The 7th June '86 will be the day remembered by any Wagnerian as the day Wagner's music got a strong foothold in Adelaide. Firstly the tremendous performance of 'Der fliegende Holländer' in the Opera House. Secondly the initiative to form the "Richard Wagner Society of South Australia", convened by Prof. A. McCredie. Both events will hopefully promote the appreciation of Wagner's music in many ways. The performance was sung in English and although the D. Pountney translation doesn't improve the meaning of Wagner's words, it seemed justified. The audience was captivated by the music and the story. During the silence when Senta sees the Dutchman enter through the door not a single noise was heard from the audience. That speaks for the production and the audience.

Malcolm Donnelly was a powerful Dutchman who could have "carried the performance" alone, Beverley Bergen not only looked a convincing and moving Senta but combined an acting ability and voice to make a portrait of a girl who is a bit "off the rail" a rather breath taking achievement of characterisation.

Arend Baumann with his dark bass voice gave a many faceted Daland - a caring father even if concerned mostly with material matters.

Thomas Edmond's fine performance showed that a lyric approach to Erik's plight was a believable alternative to the usual dramatic tenor.

Geoffrey Harris and Daphne Harris made up the cast and maintained a high standard of this performance. The Adelaide symphony Orchestra did very well with reduced numbers and limited pit-space and although John Matheson didn't produce "magic" with the orchestra, the general impression was very positive.

The production by Bernd Benthaak was on a high level. The "singing competition" between the Dutch and Norwegian sailors in the last act was produced and directed in such a gripping style the audience was left in awe.

In short a great day for Wagner and his cause. The audience very responsive - droves of members of Wagner Society Victoria; Sydney Society represented by only one member.

Letter to the Editor Cont. -

Ruth Kearin
Kiama 26.5.86

Thank you very much for sending the Newsletter and application form for the Wagner Society so promptly.

I stumbled upon Wagner whilst reading F. Nietzsche's life story and started a wonderful journey which I feel is just beginning. I have bought records and tapes and read books about him, but when I speak to people about his music most seem almost embarrassed to discuss him. None of my family or friends are interested in him either. I asked for a "walkman" for Mother's Day and now do all my housework while listening mostly to Wagner. I thought the Wagner Society might be able to help me with my education, but I feel I have a lot to learn before joining and since I live down here, work full-time and have a family, I don't believe I would be able to attend many functions.

However, my children will be fairly independent in a few years, and hopefully I will know a lot more about Wagner then, so I would like to postpone joining for a while.

It is a great comfort to me to know there are many others who love Wagner's music. I have just finished a book on the history of Germany to help me understand his philosophy and to see how I will interpret the Ring Cycle.

I have taped every episode on video and intend listening and studying for myself. Thankyou again for your time.

PRESIDENTS NOTE.

I hear this so often "I know little about the man and his music and would feel embarrassed to mix with people who know so much more than I." The Society is not a clique of "know alls" who would look down their noses at newcomers who have only their enthusiasm and love of music. The Society's Foundation is enthusiasm and love of the Master - This is all you need!!

Werner Baer
Castlecrag 3.6.86

Thankyou for your charming note of 26.5.86. Both Sybil and I were delighted to be with you and your members on the night of the Annual Dinner, which, I think, went splendidly.

It was a pity though that Ronald Dowd decided to sing only one, however major excerpt from one of the great Wagner works. However, the long chat of moments from his long and fine career was most interesting and I am sure the members of the Wagner Society appreciated what he had to say. I have already started one of the lovely books you kindly gave me on this occasion.

Many thanks for your generosity.

Sybil sends her regards to you, my best wishes to you and the members of the Society.

John H. Casey.
New York.

During a recent study tour to the U.S. I accompanied an American colleague to the Annual General Meeting of The Wagner Society of New York, on 10th June, 1986.

Continued.

It was held in the Meeting Hall of the Swedish Church just off 5th Avenue in Manhattan, and attended by approximately 60 members but I believe the total membership was about 300. The President, Ms. Natalie Davis Wagner, claimed no relationship! He and the outgoing committee were all re-elected unopposed. Before the meeting I had been introduced to Ms. Wagner, and in her address to the members she referred to my presence as a representative of a kindred organization on the other side of the world. There was a great show of interest in the Sydney society and our involvement with matters Wagnerian. A number of the New York members explained they had been in Australia in recent years and attended the opera, but none reported seeing our truncated "Ring". The New York society had profited handsomely during the year from a co-sponsorship with the Metropolitan Opera Guild of a showing of the Richard Burton "Wagner" film, and was in a very good financial situation.

Tours to Bayreuth were discussed, and were being organized through a travel agency giving a guarantee of tickets in Bayreuth and in Salzburg. The New York society relished the prospect of the Metropolitan Opera in Lincoln Centre opening its season in August this year with a new production of "Walkyrie" featuring Peter Hoffman, Jeannine Altmeyer and Hildegard Behrens. A complete "Ring" cycle is to be progressively mounted over the next three years. Another exciting event for early '87 was to be a presentation in concert of the final scenes from all four operas of the Ring.

The friendliness of the evening confirmed my belief that devotion to Wagner transcends nationality.

Contact with the New York Wagner Society could be made via Box 949, Ansonia Station, New York N.Y. 10023.

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We receive many letters from members and to all those whose letters have to date not been published, we apologise. Space would not permit. We want you to keep writing but keep the letters brief so that more voices can be heard. Ed.

BAYREUTH 1987.

If you intend to go to Bayreuth in 1987, now is the time to set the wheels in motion.

The usual procedure is to apply directly to the Festspielhaus for an application form. Dr Hansen, in his most recent letter, informs us that Wagner Societies do have some priority when applying for group bookings and suggests that when your application form arrives, usually about Oct/Nov, you send it directly to the Society's address here and we could then send the group application with accompanying letter. We would be free to choose our own travel agent if a group tour were warranted. Further details and confirmation can be had by telephoning the Society's number towards the end of October, by which time Dr Hansen will have returned.

JOTTINGS FROM OVERSEAS.BAYREUTH.

The ultra-conservative group of Wagnerians, "The Action Circle for the Works of Richard Wagner" have been busy protesting in Bayreuth again, this time against the removal from the repertoire of the current "English" Ring. They feel that as they had to suffer the (to them) heretical and distasteful Chereau Ring for five years, the (to them) more acceptable realistic version by Peter Hall should be allowed an equally long run. However their population, with more than one thousand signatures, is not likely to have any effect on the Festival administration who have planned the following:

1987 LOHENGRIN: New production by cineast Werner Herzog (Bayreuth debut), conductor Peter Schneider, with a singer new to Bayreuth in the title role.

PARSIFAL: The Gotz Friedrich production returns to the stage.

DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NURNBERG: young Danish conductor Michael Schoenwandt makes his debut.

TANNHAUSER: current production.

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE: current production.

1988 New Ring Cycle, production by Harry Kupfer (most recent Bayreuth production - The Flying Dutchman), musical direction by Daniel Barenboim (currently conducting Tristan und Isolde).

Ticket prices go up almost 10%, the dearest ones being DEM 220.

MUNICH

The new Ring Cycle planned for 19th to 29th March, 1987, will be conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch, with Nikolaus Lehnhoff producer, and Erich Wonder designer. The latter two were responsible for the San Francisco Ring. Controversy is still rampant over the costs, which they hope to contain to 2 million Marks.

PARIS. Practice makes perfect.

Daniel Barenboim, conductor designate of the new Ring Cycle in Bayreuth in 1988, is presenting a concert performance of Siegfried during the 86-87 season of the Orchestre de Paris, of which he is director. Act I will be given on 1st and 3rd October, and Act III on 8th and 10th January, and artists include Siegfried Jerusalem, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Hildegard Behrens and John Tomlinson.

AVIGNON Zylis-Gara sings Wagner.

On 25th June, in an all Wagner concert, the Polish soprano Teresa Zylis-Gara again proved that she can turn her crystalline voice most successfully to Wagner. Without any attempt at a show of power or volume she thrilled her audience with her superb control and intelligent interpretation, especially of the Wesendonk Lieder. Her other items were Elizabeth's Greeting from Tannhauser and Isolde's Liebestod. The orchestra under Michelangelo Veltri completed the programme with the overture to Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg, the prelude to Tristan and Isolde and to the 3rd act of Lohengrin. In response to a most enthusiastic ovation Miss Zylis-Gara sang a spine-tingling "Vissi d' arte" from Tosca, her voice - and persona - relaxed and glowing after the difficult and less familiar Wagner.

MONTPELLIER Rare Films.

As part of an extremely varied and well researched Summer Festival Programme there was a showing of two very rare and historical films on Wagner. The more important films was made in 1913 by cinematographer Carl Froelich to commemorate the 100th

Continued.

anniversary of the composers birth. Lack of funds precluded a professional actor in the title role, so that was taken by an Italian, Giuseppe Becce, himself a frustrated composer and admirer of Wagner. In fact, Becce's music was played by a small orchestral ensemble during the showing of these silent films. The second short film from 1921 was titled "Tannheimer, or the Cabaret of Pyritz", and was made as a type of shadow-play. The silhouettes of the Wagnerian heroes and heroines paraded and posed on the screen while "Ludwig von Wich" recounted their grandiose adventures in a rather risqué parody.

ORANGE 1987 In the Roman Theatre, on 11th July, "Der Fliegende Hollander" with a cast virtually identical with the Bayreuth production but conducted by Christof Perick, one of the current Wagner specialists in the European houses.

1988 July 9th, 16th, 23rd and 30th. A staged performance of Der Ring des Nibelungen, conductor Marek Janowski, producer J. Karpo. The new Philharmonic Orchestra and Choirs of Radio France.

(Remember! You read it first in the W.S. Newsletter!)

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INTERNATIONAL RICHARD WAGNER CONGRESS

VIENNA , 21 to 28 MAY, 1986

DIARY OF A DELEGATE.

Wednesday, 21st.

Confusion.

Eight hundred and fifty Wagner Society members from all over the world descended on Vienna University to register. That's about three times the usual number at an annual congress. Under the watchful eye of Heinrich Tettinek, the local president and organiser, and with the expertise of the staff of the Austria Reiseservice, the long queues of hot and flustered visitors managed to collect their vouchers, opera tickets, souvenir record and pages of detailed instructions, all in good time for the opening ceremony. But woe! Only about two thirds of the participants could fit into the splendid Great Hall for the event. The ones left out need not have worried - the four speeches were all too long and repetitive, with not a word in English or French to make the many foreigners feel welcome. Fortunately there was some very pleasant playing by a wind ensemble of the Vienna Conservatorium to liven up the atmosphere.

After these formalities everyone was taken out to the Grinzing district, in a cortège of about 15 large coaches, for a "Wiener Heurigen" evening, ie. traditional Viennese food accompanied by new wine of the region. The courtyard of the country inn was a delightful setting in the balmy weather, and some wonderful playing of light Viennese airs by a group of members of the Philharmonic Orchestra was the perfect catalyst for making friends with one's neighbours, and seeking out the odd familiar face from previous Wagnerian encounters.

Thursday, 22nd

Scandal.

Despite the disastrous effects of the young wine, most people were around for the morning tour of the city, and only one or two old ladies got lost in the Belvedere, and had to be abandoned. It was with some relief then, that we were all dropped off at the Hotel Inter-Continental for lunch, and another chance to make new friends and catch up with acquaintances from the night before. We were all looking forward to that evening's performance of Goetterdaemmerung, starting at 5pm, and were not sure how we could fit in Prof. Eoesze's lecture beforehand. From the Liszt Academy in Budapest, he was to talk on the influence of Franz Liszt on the musical creativity of Richard Wagner - which apparently he did very well.

Continued.

The only worry we had when we arrived at the Opera House that evening was that, Rene Kollo having cancelled, the role of Siegfried was being taken by veteran tenor Hans Beirer, as a sort of 75th birthday celebration. Well, we had heard elderly tenors before, but when it was announced he was also suffering from damaged back and leg muscles as a result of a fall while rehearsing "Elektra", our concern intensified. And this 26 year old production of Herbert von Karajan, with designs and costumes by Emil Pretorius, how was it going to stand up? To start with, the lights from the orchestra pit, reflecting off the bright ivory and gold decor of the auditorium, rendered the Norns virtually invisible behind the scrim in an inky black stage. Their voices were often drowned out by the overly loud and unsubtle playing of the orchestra under George Albrecht. Then, to the glorious Dawn music, and an even louder gasp from the audience, Hans Beirer limped on to the stage, using his spear as a crutch, and began in a wildly erratic voice the mist hideously sung Siegfried one could imagine. A tenor version of Florence Foster Jenkins! Gwynneth Jones tried to make amends with a superb portrayal of Bruennhilde, her voice in contrast to his, being shining and always under control. Of the other singers, Christa Ludwig was magnificent as Waltraute, Walter Berry a noble Alberich, Franz Grundheber and Peter Meven adequate as Gunter and Hagen, and Lisbeth Balsev was an insipid Gutrune. The Vienna Philharmonic Choir lacked impact, and were swamped by the bombastic playing of the orchestra. Indeed, during Siegfried's Funeral March, one was almost obliged to protect one's eardrums with one's hands, which may also have helped to cover the inaccurate playing by the brass. The production as a whole was cohesive, and the design more than occasionally quite effective. The immolation scene, with the tottering Siegfried out of the way, was a moment of rare musical grandeur and dramatic majesty, executed as only a truly great diva can

Friday, 23rd.

Splendour.

Up too late for the special 8.30am demonstration at the Spanish Riding School, and only just in time for the gala ceremony in the Golden Hall of the Music Academy at 10.00am. Here the Congress Oration was to be given by Dr. Oswald Bauer, academic and researcher at Bayreuth. Firstly, however, a delightful orchestral concert of works by Liszt and Wagner. Then the inevitable speeches by Federal President Goldman, the ubiquitous and longwinded Tettinek (a judge by profession!) and Wolfgang Wagner, so that the planned running time for the ceremony of two hours was already up by the time Bauer was called to the rostrum. A slight groan arose from the audience as he started reading from a thick wad of printed notes, and even though the title "Richard Wagner and Vienna" was topical, the minutiae of detail made the talk agonising, especially for the punctual Germans. In a tense and embarrassing moment Bauer, who had already been asked to shorten his talk, was virtually ordered off the stage, leaving the hall to a slow hand-clap from the impatient audience. A chamber ensemble of the Vienna Philharmonic, anxiously waiting in the wings, was then rushed on to close the program with a most delectable rendition of the Siegfried Idyll.

For the next hour, in an elegant room in the Imperial Hotel (home for Wagner during his later visits to Vienna) the presidents of all the participating societies met under the chairmanship of Dr. Goldman, to discuss past and future activities, finances, scholarships etc. These details are available in an annual report, for all members to peruse.

During the afternoon, back in the Great Hall of the university, two heady papers were read on the future of opera. Prof. Marcel Prawy of Vienna spoke of the freedom of the director, and Prof. Goetz Friedrich (Berlin) spoke on opera production in the future. The social programme then got under way at 7.30pm with a brilliant reception by the Mayor of Vienna in the stunning Great Hall of the massive gothic Rathaus. As if this was not enough, there was a cocktail party to follow, for committee members, hosted by Prof. Ernst Fuchs, a noted artist, in his glorious fantasy-villa on the outskirts of Vienna. In a setting not unlike in a Fellini film the Wagnerian hierarchy, from Herr Wolfgang, Gudrun and Verena down, mixed freely in animated conversation till late in the night.

Saturday, 24th.

High Baroque.

9.00 am. Once again our convoy of coaches takes off, this time for a very pleasant day's outing to the Wachau, a picturesque valley through which the Danube flows on

Continued

its way to Vienna. Inspection and lunch at the famous baroque Benedictine monastery at Melk. An afternoon stop at Duernstein Castle, one-time prison for Richard the Lionheart, and high in a hill in the late afternoon sunlight, an organ recital in the every ornate 18th century church of Goettweig monastery, whose organ has recently been restored. The restaurant there with its impressive view over the green sculptured landscape, was the venue for the evening meal, offered by the Governor of Lower Austria, and accompanied by the usual speeches.

Sunday, 25th.

Exhilaration.

In view of the day's heavy programme, decided to miss the morning matinee given by members of the renowned Burgtheater, animating texts by and about Wagner. Instead visited a mid-day performance of the Spanish Riding School. Went without lunch to prepare for the "Wiener Jause" at the Hotel Sacher - an elegant and rich afternoon tea, and just the right entree for the 6.00pm performance of Tannhaeuser at the Opera House, just across the street. No disappointments this evening, instead one of those magical times when the singers, orchestra and production were just perfect. (A review will appear in a later Newsletter) To finish the evening, and in fact the main part of the Congress, a cocktail party was held at the Hotel Imperial. Under the glittering chandeliers and the classic gold and mirrored decor, the exhilarated party, their Sacher Torter well and truly digested by this time, scrambled for satisfaction at the buffet tables. Alas, the food and champagne were insufficient, but Dr. Goldman gave spiritual nourishment with a witty closing speech, and introduced several of the stars of the Vienna Opera.

Post-Congress visit to Budapest.

Monday, 26th.

Hungary

7.00am. Eight coaches of bleary-eyed Wagnerites headed East across the plains to Budapest. Only a slight delay for checking of visas and money changing at the border, then on to a delightful lakeside locale for an al fresco lunch - to the amusing accompaniment of traditional music. The anticipated nap in the coach before and after lunch having been thwarted by an over-zealous guide and an indefatigable Dr. Tettinek, we arrived at the Grand Hotel Hungaria exhausted but cognisant of Hungarian history and the development of its musical culture. Fortunately some time remained for a short nap before the visit to the opera, which that evening was "Huniady Laszlo" by the great national composer Ferenc Erkel. It was truly a grand opera in the early Verdi style, the plot based on a 15th century feud in a noble family, and greatly appreciated by the capacity audience, a large proportion of which seemed to be made up of young teenagers. The singing and orchestral playing were first rate, and it really mattered not that the sets and costumes were drab and basic, the tone of the evening having been set by the delapidated state of the between-wars theatre itself. We were then taken to a restaurant in the old citadel for our supper and to admire the view, and to be serenaded by more traditional music!

Tuesday, 27th.

The Mastersingers of Budapest.

Dragged out of bed for the city tour, which ended with luncheon at one of the city's better restaurants. Ate outdoors in a lovely garden setting. More music! Time for shopping of bargain-priced books and records. Visit to the noted Franz Liszt Academy for an after noon concert given by senior students of the conservatorium. Shaking off the dust of a hot, busy day, dressed in finery for a performance of Die Meistersinger von Nuernberg at the prestigious State Opera Theatre. Restored to its full 19th century glory it was as dazzling as it was unexpected in this rather worse-for-the wear city. But it was the performance which really bowled us over, a production of such wit and sparkle, of such fine music and voices, of enthusiasm and energy, rarely does one see such interpretation and understanding by artists. The fact that the opera was almost all sung in Hungarian did not seem to matter, so lucidly was the sense conveyed by expression. "Almost all" because the tenor Sandor Solyom-Nagy had to be replaced by Josef Hopferwieser, of Vienna, who sang the role of Walther in German.

Continued.

Elated with our evening we returned to the hotel for a very late dinner but not late enough unfortunately for the ethnic musicians who insisted, for a fee, in pouring their loud violin-accordion-zither music down the ears of every diner.

Wednesday, 28th.

Release.

Early breakfast by numbers ensured an orderly departure of the coaches from the hotel. A mid-morning stop was made to visit Visegrad and the enormous cathedral of Esztergom, with its Liszt memories. Lunch was taken in Győr, in a quaint building which formed part of the old town walls. But horror, the local band was louder and more persistent than all the others, and the ancient vaults trapped every decibel and tourist till the bitter end. By the time we had suffered a final indignity of an hour's delay on the hot macadam at the frontier we longed for the familiarity of the West, but could not deny the richness of our experiences in Hungary.

More jottings from overseas.

MEMBERSHIP - SEPTEMBER 1986

Patron - Sir Charles Mackerras

Honorary Life Members - Mr Werner Baerm MBE; Professor Michael Ewans; Miss Rita Hunter.

Honorary Members - Dr G. Pagenstert; Mr P. Reitz.

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