

The Wagner Society

IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Registered Office: 141 Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo 2011
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Newsletter

No. 39 MAY, 1990.

Registered by Australia Post Publication No. NBH5028

PATRON: SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS
HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS: Mr WERNER BAER M.B.E.
Miss RITA HUNTER C.B.E.
Miss LEONIE RYSANEK
Professor MICHAEL EWANS
Mr LEONARD HANSEN
Mr RICHARD KING

COMING EVENTS

Sunday, April 15th	Parsifal (C.D.) Goethe Institute	1.00 p.m.
Sunday, May 20th	A.G.M. Rhinegold (Video) Goethe Institute	1.00 p.m.
Friday, May 25th	Annual Dinner Menzies Hotel	7.30 p.m.
Sunday, June 17th	Seminar - Tristan and Isolde Goethe Institute	9.30 a.m.
Sunday, July 15th	To be announced Goethe Institute	1.00 p.m.

(N.B. There will, of course be no set charge for admission to the A.G.M. on 20/5/90 but we would hope that members would offer a donation towards the hiring fee which has to be paid as usual).

COMMITTEE

President	Olive Coonan	271 3666(B)
Vice President	Leonard Hansen	326 1793
Secretary	Clare Hennessy	747 5664
Membership Co-ordinator	Annette Marshall	042 94 2992
Functions Co-ordinator	Margaret Budge	521 6097
Treasurer	Alma Straube	969 9383
Immediate Past President and Public Officer	Richard King	358 1919
Editors	Jessie Anderson Keith Anderson	
Committee	Susan Kelly Patricia Moore	909 3817

SUBSCRIPTIONS.

All subscriptions are now due and payable before April 1st.

OBITUARIES

The Wagner Society

in N.S.W. Inc.

mourns the death of tenor

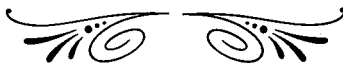
Ronald Dowd

on 15th March, 1990.

His outstanding contribution to opera and oratorio has been widely documented but we would like to especially record our appreciation of his interpretation of Wagnerian roles which, for many of us, was our first encounter with live performances of these operas.



The Society also mourns the deaths of members Professor D. Joseph and Mr Geoff Bower, and extends sympathy to their families and friends.



SEMINAR 1990

JUNE 17TH - GOETHE INSTITUTE.

Our annual seminar - this year to extend our background knowledge of Tristan and Isolde - will again begin at 9.30 a.m.. An application form is included on a separate sheet in this issue. Our splendid speakers will be Dennis Hennig to talk about the music, and Dr. Helen Fulton and Professor Andrew Riemer to talk about the Celtic World and the legends we have inherited from them. All those attending will be welcome at a reception for our speakers to conclude the day. Morning tea will also be provided as will tea and coffee at lunch time. Please bring your own lunch. It is wise to book early as numbers are of necessity limited especially as so many will be anxious to follow-up the splendid A.O. production in February.



ADELAIDE FESTIVAL REPORT

- by Leonard Hansen.

Adelaide is a quiet, orderly city which, in March, is still subject to a hot and dry summer climate. By careful tending, the parks and gardens are a show-case of green swathes and colourful flower beds.

The bi-ennial Adelaide Festival ran this year from March 1 to 18 - barely enough time to catch all the interesting events and to allow one's mind and body to recover from the heat and excitement.

Having arrived in Adelaide a few days before the festival began, we attended a two-day symposium on "Tristan and Isolde". This academic marathon was organised by the Musicological Society of Australia (S.A. Chapter Inc.) in association with the Richard Wagner Society of South Australia Inc. The program was rather daunting, and the lectures by Andrew McCredie, Malcolm Gillies, Graham Williams and John Phillips were aimed at the expert musicologist, providing only passing interest for the novice. Other speakers delved into the characters of King Mark and Brangäne, while Dennis Hennig gave a delightful talk on Tausig's Transcriptions of Wagner's music. To end the whole event, a forum was held at which Neil Armfield and Moffat Oxenbould participated.

Opera in the Park on the 2nd March was highly successful. Joan Carden, John Shaw and Bruce Sebastian all sang well. Nicholas Braithwaite conducted the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

The big event we had been anticipating - the first night of Tristan and Isolde - came on 3rd March. The set transferred to the Festival Theatre without any problems, although the impression of vast height was lost behind the proscenium arch. The two lighting technicians operating their spotlights at surtitle level were a little distracting, but added to the Hi-Tech feel of the production.

Once again the S.S.O. under Stuart Challender gave of their best, and Marilyn Richardson gave three more faultless performances. Unfortunately some of the male singers were affected by dry throats, Donald Shanks having to be replaced by Arend Baumann for the second performance. The acoustics in the large theatre seemed to soften the wonderful instrumental effects we appreciated so much in Sydney, but all-in-all it was a great success, and has no doubt introduced many new-comers to the music of Richard Wagner.

Two other functions related to Wagner's Opera were "Tristan and Isolde in Venice" by Australian author/actor Paul Sherman and "Le Vin Herbé", by Swiss composer Frank Martin, a type of secular chamber oratorio for 12 voices, piano and strings.

In straight theatre there were plays by Shakespeare, Molière, Sean O'Casey and many others. Their presentation was always refreshingly modern and exciting. Night clubbing and cabaret was very popular, with entertainment ranging from Irene Papas to Blossom Dearie to Richard Rodney Bennett. Serious music was also given its head, with two superb concerts by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, the Arcata Chamber Orchestra, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, tenor Peter Schreier, pianists Melvyn Tan, Jean-Yves Thibaudet and the duo Crommelynck. The list could go on for some time and decision-making was difficult. One thing for certain - the Adelaide Festival compares very favourably with overseas festivals and Sydney could well look to S.A. for some inspiration.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

It is appropriate that while Sydney , Adelaide and Melbourne are still basking in the glow of enjoyment from performances of Die Walküre last year and Tristan and Isolde recently that we should be made aware that such acceptance was not always the norm. We are grateful to Estelle Robinson for reminding us of shock waves moving among early audiences after the first London performances in 1882 as outlined by an English critic:-

DIE WALKÜRE: 13.5.1882.

There ensues a scene which has been defended by the admirers of Wagner as necessary to the completeness of the plot, but which in our opinion, is not only unnecessary, but is also so revolting, indecent and impure that it ought never to have been tolerated on the English stage. It is nothing less than a sudden impulse of sensual passion between brother and sister. There is no mistake about it; no excuse that the relationship is unknown, for the hero openly requests Sieglinde to become his "sister and his bride", to which the lady consents without the slightest hesitation, and the climax of the first act is when the guilty and incestuous pair agree to fly at once; the act closing with a duet, the music of which is written to suggest animal passion in its utmost excess. We have told this brutal and degrading story in as few words as our disgust will permit, but it is not thus told in the scene itself. All the resources of musical, scenic and histrionic art are employed to make this sensual incident more striking. It is not lightly passed over. His genius and skill heightens and renders more effective a situation which should never again be witnessed upon the English stage. Let us hurry over the scene, for the recollection of it is sickening. Sieglinde drugs her husband's drink so that they may be undisturbed, and the incestuous pair steal away, the musical effect being heightened by an address to the spring, the pure light of the dawn stealing into the cottage as the lovers cling to each other in unhallowed embraces. Rather should deepest night and utter silence hide such a scene. We must again repeat that nothing can justify the representation of such a story in public. Immoral and unspeakably degrading, it should have no place in true art.

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: 24.6.1882

" Herr Winkelmann in, perhaps, the most difficult tenor role ever written, came out of the ordeal with triumph. Frau Sucher, by her excellent singing and really splendid acting, was triumphantly successful. The passion and fervour of the love scene in the second act and the brilliant and intensely dramatic delivery of the passages with Tristan in the first were brilliant examples of her skill. Herr Richter conducted.

Now that the opera has been heard, we cannot refrain from making a protest against the worship of animal passion which is so striking a feature in the later works of Wagner. We grant there is nothing so repulsive in Tristan as in Die Walküre but the system is the same. The passion is unholy in itself and its representation is impure and for these reasons we rejoice in believing that such works will not become popular. If they did we are certain their tendency would be mischievous and there is, therefore, some cause for congratulation in the fact that Wagner's music, in spite of all its wondrous skill and power, repels a greater number than it fascinates. Wagner had earlier read Gottfried von Strassburg's narrative poem, Tristan, a 13th Century paean to erotic and adulterous love, bearing as it did such a strong parallel with his own."

WELL! WELL!

-contributed by Owen Marks after reading
 "MY YESTERDAYS - VANISHED POMPS"
 by Lord Frederic Hamilton - a famous diplomat of his day.

(As we look forward to seeing the videos of the "Ring of the Nibelung", this description, of how Berliners familiarised themselves with themes from the operas before the first performance in that great city, should prove interesting. The extract gives great insight into the character of Wagner himself, as well as those who surrounded him!)

"It was a privilege to be asked to Madame de Schleinitz's musical evenings. She seldom asked more than forty people, and the most rigid silence was insisted upon; still every noted musician passing through Berlin went to her house as a matter of course. At the time of my arrival from England, Madame de Schleinitz had struck up a great alliance with Wagner, and gave two musical evenings a week as a sort of propaganda, in order to familiarise Berlin amateurs with the music of the "Ring". At that time the stupendous Tetralogy had only been given at Bayreuth and in Munich; indeed I am not sure that it had then been performed in its entirety in the Bavarian capital.

In the Fest-Saal, with its involved and tortured rococo curves, two grand pianos were placed side by side, a point Wagner insisted upon, and here the Master played us his his gigantic work. I think that we were all a little puzzled by the music of the "Ring"; possibly our ears had not then been sufficiently trained to grasp the amazing beauty of such a subtle web of harmonies. His playing finished, a small, very plainly appointed supper-table was placed in the middle of the Fest-Saal at which Wagner seated himself alone in state.

Then the long-wished for moment began for his feminine adorers. The great ladies of Berlin would allow no-one to wait on the Master but themselves, and the bearers of the oldest and proudest names in Prussia bustled about with prodigious fussing, carrying plates of sauerkraut, liver sausage, black puddings and herring-salad, colliding with each other, but in spite of that managing to heap the supper-table with more Teutonic delicacies than even Wagner's very ample appetite could assimilate.

I fear that not one of these great ladies would have found it easy to obtain a permanent engagement as a waitress in a restaurant, for their skill in handling dishes and plates was hardly commensurate with their zeal. In justice it must be added that the professional waitress would not be encumbered with the long and heavy train of evening dresses in the "Seventies". These great ladies anxious to display their intimate knowledge of the Master's tastes, bickered considerably amongst themselves. "Surely, dear Countess, you know that the Master never touches white bread?"

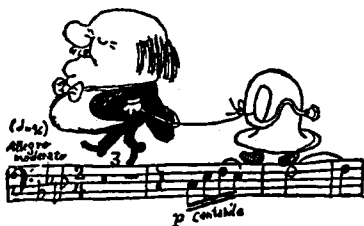
"Dearest Princess, Limburger cheese is the only sort the Master cares for. You had better take that Gruyere cheese away."; whilst an extremely attractive little Countess, the bearer of a great German name, would trip vaguely about, announcing to the world that "The Master thinks that he could eat two more black puddings. Where do you imagine that I could find them?"

Meanwhile from another quarter, one would hear an eager, "Dearest Princess, could you manage to get some raw ham? The Master thinks that he would like some, or else some raw smoked goose-breast."

"Aber, allerliebste Gräfin, wissen Sie nicht dass der Meister trinkt nur dunkles Bier?" would come as a protest from some slighted worshipper who had been herself reproved for ignorance of the Master's gastronomic tastes.

Meanwhile Wagner, dressed in a frock-coat and trousers of shiny black cloth, his head covered with his invariable black velvet skull-cap, would munch steadily away, taking no notice whatever of those around him.

The rest of us stood at a respectful distance, watching with a certain awe this marvellous weaver of harmonies assimilating copious nourishment. For us it was a sort of Barmecide's feast, for beyond the sight of Wagner at supper, we had no refreshments of any sort, offered to us.



THE END

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P.O.Box 137,
King's Cross N.S.W. 2011

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