

# The Wagner Society

IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Registered Office: 141 Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo 2011  
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## Newsletter

No. 41 NOVEMBER, 1990.

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**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

THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE  
WISH YOU ALL THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON

COMING EVENTS

Sunday, November 18th	Short service to commemorate the life of Leonard Hansen.	12.00 p.m.
	Götterdämmerung Goethe Institute	1.00 p.m.
Sunday, December 16th	Christmas Party Goethe Institute	2.30 p.m.
Sunday, February 17th	An Afternoon with Arthur and Michael. Goethe Institute	1.00 p.m.
Sunday, March 17th	Parsifal Goethe Institute	1.00 p.m.

We will announce the rest of the year's program  
in the next newsletter, as we have yet to make firm  
bookings with the Goethe Institute.

COMMITTEE

President	Olive Coonan	337 6403
Secretary	Clare Hennessy	747 5634
Membership Co-ordinators	Annette Marshall Margaret Budge	042 94 2992 521 6097
Functions Co-ordinators	Sue Kelly Richard Steele Paul Lehmann	365 4306
Immediate Past President and Public Officer	Richard King	358 1919
Newsletter Editors	Jessie Anderson Keith Anderson	048 68 3651
Catering	Margaret Budge Jessie Anderson Annette Marshall	

LIFE MEMBER

## LEONARD HANSEN

died on 22nd October, 1990 after a long illness.

Foundation Member

First President and Office Bearer  
since the formation of our Society.

Our representative on the Verband of Richard Wagner Societies.

Leonard gave great financial support to the Arts,  
especially Opera and in particular the works of Richard Wagner,  
of which he had vast knowledge.

HE WILL BE SADLY MISSED.

Members asked to come to the Goethe Institute  
on Sunday, 18th November at 12.00 p.m. for a short time  
together, honouring Leonard's contribution to our Society.



EXHIBITION OF LOHENGRIN COLLECTION

On Monday, 24th September the Society held a special evening to open its exhibition of the Murray Smith Lohengrin Collection. Richard King donated two weeks of his Gallery time for this event. Although it is over a year since the Society purchased this valuable collection of Set and Costume Designs by well-known artist Frank Hinder, for the 1958 production of Lohengrin at the Elizabethan Theatre in Newtown, it was the first opportunity members had had to see this splendid acquisition. It was interesting to note that in news programs during that week, mention was made of the sale of similar collections as individual items, thereby losing an opportunity to keep such memorabilia in Australia. Independent valuations given to Richard King during the exhibition suggest that the collection is now worth five times the price we paid, so we are grateful for the generous donations of members who together donated the full amount needed to buy it and especially the late Murray Smith who made an extra donation to mount the drawings prior to the showing. Richard King and Olive Coonan spent many hours hanging the frames ready for opening night.

Our President, Olive Coonan welcomed Leo Schofield, who has introduced many Wagnerian Operas on National Television, and is a well-known lover of Wagner's music, and thanked him for accepting the invitation to open the Exhibition. His speech was as follows:-

"There are three reasons why I agreed to open this evening's exhibition.

The first is that I was invited to do so by Len Hansen. When I first met Len and he tinkered with my teeth with Tristan playing in the background, I knew that at last I had found a truly civilised dentist. Later we often met at Bayreuth and a certain bond springs up between people who travel that far to hear Wagner, even though the performances are sometimes less memorable than the occasion.

The second is that I have a great fondness for Wagner. Not the man... I feel he must have been rather a nasty bit of work as a human being....but certainly for his music which I never cease to admire.

And that brings me to the third reason. Frank Hinder is not the only artist to have had a stab at designing for this opera. Many, many years ago, when I was sixteen or seventeen, I used to escape the tedium of life in suburban Stanmore by sketching up costumes for various shows. I had read the story of Lohengrin in a well-thumbed copy of the Victor Book of Opera, which a music-loving uncle, the only member of my family who was not a dyed-in-the-wool philistine, had given me for my birthday in 1946.

I sketched up a number of costume designs for the opera and naturally enough I devised a white costume for the tenor. But being fairly poor I was not able to lash out on the tubes of watercolour paint for the thick impastos needed to cover the black paper on which I'd sketched the design. So I worked up Lohengrin's outfit in some Kiwi white cleaner that we used on our Dunlop sandshoes. The substitute white paint went on to the paper pretty well in nice solid brushstrokes and the finished design looked quite handsome even if the drawing was a little clumsy.

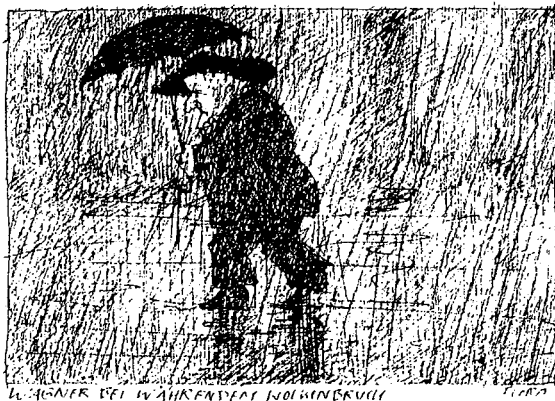
Some time later a well-known Sydney artist arranged for me to show a folio of designs to the amazing Mrs. C.T. Lorenz and Robin Lovejoy. As I pulled out the Lohengrin costume a kind of snowstorm struck the room. White powder flew up in the air and settled in Mrs. Lorenz' je

black coiffure affording it a more natural look than it had under normal circumstances while somewhat larger flakes clustered in a flurry around Mr. Lovejoy's collar like terminal dandruff. They were very nice about my gaucheness and helped put me at my ease. They even had some encouraging remarks to make about the drawings. But my designs, unlike Mr. Hinder's were destined never to see the light of day. His are, if memory serves me, rather better than my fumblebum efforts.

I didn't see that particular production which seems to have distinct Wieland Wagner overtones. But I was delighted to see the programme, photographs, press cuttings and correspondence about it that is on show here with this exhibition. Particularly interesting is the letter from Stefan Haag to Frank Hinder, written from Melbourne where he describes the local critics as "a lot of stick-in-the-muds". He speaks about this show and about Fidelio with Sylvia Fisher which I did see in that season. Stefan writes that she looked very well in her costume but I seem to remember she looked like Mr. Pickwick with his waistcoat undone. I was less critical in those days.

In those days too, as in my days directing for companies at Sydney Uni, we used amateurs to help with the costumes and even the A.E.T.T. had to rely on student labour to paint designs on shields and chain mail. I'm sure Donald McDonald and Moffat Oxenbould would like to be able to cut costs in that way in 1990.

As a once-budding costume designer later nipped firmly in the bud: as an opera lover blooded on productions at the Tivoli and Newtown: as a Wagner buff: as a great admirer of the late Ronald Dowd whose photograph wearing what appears to be a lightning track cycling helmet, is included in this show and who sang the title role....wearing any of these hats I am honoured to be asked to open this exhibition and delighted to do so."



## MOZART ANNIVERSARY 1991

All anniversaries are important, but surely one of the most important is the 200th anniversary in 1991 of the death of Mozart. Perusal of any Guide to Programs in most countries shows that more Mozart music is broadcast than that of any other composer. His compositions are used as background music in many films and very few Opera Companies fail to have at least one of his operas in each season. The anniversary will be celebrated by live performances of as many of his works as possible and be supported by videos, C.D.'s, cassettes and records in every country in the world - such a contrast to the tragic way he died and was buried. Philips Classics are promising a collection of his complete works and we are indebted to Stereo Review of November, 1979 and Mozart Magazine for this cartoon which we couldn't resist including!

Nice To Have You Join Us



Reprinted from "Stereo Review" magazine, November 1979, by permission.

## CHRISTMAS PARTY

Our annual Christmas Party will be held on Sunday, 16th December at the Goethe Institute, commencing at 2.30 p.m. Elizabeth Allen, who was a prominent member of the Australian Opera Chorus, until her recent retirement, will be our guest and will no doubt tell us of some of her more interesting experiences.

You will have the opportunity to win some worthwhile prizes in our raffle, and enjoy the company of your friends in the Society. Guests are welcome but we will ask you to pay a small amount to cover their costs.

BAYREUTH 1990

- contributed by Annie Marshall

The third cycle at Bayreuth was accompanied by hot and steamy weather matching the performances on stage. Elizabeth Connell sang an electrifying Senta in a production of the Flying Dutchman that crackled with humour : not only did the earth move for the Dutchman and his lover, but the world turned upside down!

Paul Frey was in fine voice for Lohengrin and the production continues to hold its magic despite difficulties when emptying the water in Act Two, Scene One. There were some extraneous gurglings accompanying Telramund and Ortrud which were more than overcome by the fine singing, especially that of Gabriella Schnaut.

Parsifal was a mixture - the sets and staging were dull, the trees resembling extremely nasty supermarket Christmas decorations. There was fine orchestral playing and tremendous singing especially from Waltraud Meier as Kundry and Gunter von Kannan as Klingsor - he is rivetting in everything he sings. Hans Sotin sang with his customary authority - did he really make his debut in this role nearly twenty years ago? Bernd Weikl sang Amfortas with great musicianship.

The Ring - as usual the public has become used to the concept and greets all the paraphernalia with unconcern. This year the singers, with two small exceptions, were secure in their voices and the overall success of the cycle was unchallengeable. Even Barenboim was acclaimed and together with Kupfer made a beaming exit after numerous curtain calls.

John Tomlinson perhaps grew a little tired at the end of Walküre but returned fresh for Siegfried to great acclaim. Graham Clark is hugely popular with his Loge and Mime and rightly so. Gunter von Kannan creates a wonderful Alberich, and Linda Finnie a superb Fricka... it is impossible to do justice to them all. Perhaps the outstanding impressions I gained were of Anne Evans rising above last year's reported problems to give a secure, forceful Brünnhilde - not often thrilling or moving but always thoughtful and musical and of Siegfried Jerusalem achieving a wonderful rounded portrait in the name part - voice and performance welded into an artistic whole. Indelibly for me remains the magic performance of Nadine Secunde as Sieglinde in Die Walküre. She has honed this part and turned it into a dramatic and vocal tour de force, since I saw her last two years ago. She set the standard for the cycle.

In conclusion I would like to add how much I enjoyed this year's Wagner Society of New York lectures given by Professor Robert Bailey, who is currently Professor of Music at New York University. These lectures raised almost 4000DM for the Freunde von Bayreuth. Meeting other English-speaking Wagnerites is always helpful, but it was particularly rewarding to meet Martin and Barbara Hunt of the English Wagner Society. He is the Editor of Wagner News and we had several wide ranging discussions.

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\* Ernest Newman \*  
\* Said, "Next week Schumann" \*  
\* But when next week came \*  
\* It was Wagner again! \*  
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\* \* \* \* \*

WAGNER ALIVE AND WELL AT SAN FRANCISCO

A "RING" IN OUR PACIFIC REGION - JUNE 1990.

-contributed by Arthur Carter.

San Francisco War Memorial Opera House June 20th - July 1st.

3rd and 4th cycles of the Ring with Robert Hale/James Morris (Wotan): Gwynneth Jones/Hildegard Behrens (Brünnhilde): Gary Lakes (Siegmond): Helga Dernesch (Fricka): Tom Fox/ Franz Mazura (Alberich): Rene Kollic (Siegfried): Rebecca Blankenship (Sieglinde): Jacque Trussel (Loge): Conductor Donald Runnicles: Producer Nikolaus Lehnhoff; revised by L. Feldman and P. McClintock: Sets and Costumes John Conklin.

My subheading is not an apology for a lesser, provincial "Ring" - far from it! This past decade has seen Tokyo, Seattle and San Francisco (twice) successfully stage cycles in Festival conditions. Melbourne's turn comes in 1996!! The 3rd and 4th cycles were a civilising experience...with an integrated balance of visual production and interpretative concepts carried over from the 1985 staging that allowed the drama to flow from the musical performance direct and clear. And it was well sung, too! The cast list reads like a 1990 "Who's Who" of Wagner. The sets had the flavour of heightened illusion (in which field the west coast is master). Packed audiences were appreciative (everything and anything gets applause at a festival these days), but they also wanted to argue the merits of singers; probe and come to grips with the myth/story line and to be discerning about Wagner. Hence the title I have given this brief report. The four cycles had the complete run of the Opera House for a month and were integrated into some 30 special events; like "Ring" lectures; symposia; film; fringe performances of "Das Liebesverbot" and the like. The city even extended BART running times to oblige "Ring" patrons across the Bay. Where else in the world would this happen?

In both cycles Das Rheingold was a scenic knockout. You were left in no doubt - this was a Ring for the active imagination, with emphasis on scenic beauty. The stage was framed with 19th Century portals, as if from a dream in Wagner's mind. Right from the start, the theme of ruin and decaying stone structures was stated in the sets; from the gods' makeshift terrace in Rheingold Scene 2; to the corrupted elegance of Valhalla and its vulgarly opulent copy in the Gibichung Hall; through to the archaeological ruin on the banks of a dried-up Rhine in the opening scene of Götterdämmerung Act 3. Nothing miniaturising about this Prolog. You came away feeling this was a fully-fledged chapter in an epic. There was a cohesive line, spanning the four scenes (even allowing for the interruptive curtain drops) as the gods moved from innocence to grappling with remorseless fate. Imagine the impact of dramatic energy coming from the stage when the first tableau reveals a highly credible submarine rocky pile, around which 3 Rheindaughters and 3 look-alike supers sport in expert choreography, with the result that at any point in the scene only 3 nixies appear, and instantly re-appear, like darting fish, taunting Alberich. The colour and lighting followed the course of the music here, steadily intensifying to the opera's climax as Wotan forcibly acquires the Ring. It was as if you were watching romantic paintings transposed to a stage. Valhalla, in the distance, as a Palladio style temple, the rights to which were being debated by grecian-robed gods and a literal brood of giants, Fafner and Fasolt (well-sung) and 6 silent but scene-filling supers. A perfectly credible extension of ideas in Wagner's text. The contrast between the two American bass-baritones alternating as Wotan pinpoints a constant festival problem - grafting new-comers into an established production. Robert Hale, the new-comer, started off nervously; his lower tones being woolly and he uncertain about his stage movements. Yet his voice was

-cont



pleasing, in a pensive vein from the 2nd Scene onwards. In contrast, James Morris, a veteran of the 1985 staging, displayed a walnut-solid voice, changing from his bold arrogance towards the giants to worry-shaded tones at the opera's close. Conversely, Tom Fox was the better Alberich, almost as tall and as powerful as his Wotan; Franz Mazura being rather hollow and lacking in menace. The 3rd scene made up for any shortcoming with Alberich, as the curtain rose on a mountain of gold bedecked with cringing Nibelheim underlings and topped by an exultant Alberich. The impact was Hollywood illusion triumphant. The mountain also facilitated transformations into dragon and frog with its clefts and contours. After that scene, the blood-red skies and rainbow projections that see the gods take possession of Valhalla seemed predictable. Loge (in spite of Trussel's dry tones) was distinctively characterised in a quasi-modern frockcoat and disdainfully reading a book as the gods' procession moved upstage. Donald Runnicles was conducting his first "Ring" cycles, having only assisted Solti at Bayreuth in 1983. It was a daring risk for S.F.Opera, but Runnicles paced the drama steadily and allowed Wagner's music to breathe expansively, with good judgement.

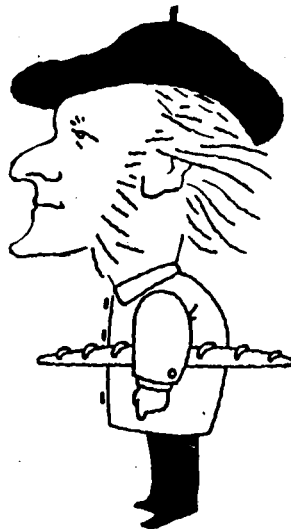
Die Walküre brought 4 American singers into focus, in main roles. Gary Lakes may not be the most expressive actor in opera to-day, but he is surely the best voice for Siegmund - just tonally astounding, luxuriant, lyrical, stentorian as required. Rebecca Blankenship was basically a mezzo (with a vibrato) venturing into soprano range as Sieglinde - a good foil for Gary Lakes - no more. Morris was in his element as this Wotan - singing the long Act 2 narrative in a hushed, half-voice that ached in your heart. He was by turn fiercely combative, assertive, affectingly tender in the final scene. It won't be easy to forget Wotan kicking away his winged helmet as the moils of his double-dealing catch up with him in Act 2. Hale was more matter-of-fact as this Wotan, but both singers looked great figures in the Magic Fire moments. Both Brünnhildes had their problems. Gwynneth Jones gave a valiant, exciting, rather insecure account of her music, and acted in a touching manner. Hildegard Behrens started her "Ring" hampered by a cold, and daunted by a strange production with perhaps little rehearsal time. The womanly quality of her smaller voice came across well, just as Jones could rely on her silver-trumpeting at the top of her range. An interesting comparison between these two Wagnerian redoubtables. John McCurdy sang a stalwart Hunding and Dernesch was a coldly imperious Fricka.

The orchestral contribution was strongly narrative, reinforcing stage action and scenic moods at most opportunities. The sets were structurally imposing especially the grandeur of Valhalla's columns; the stark monoliths of the Siegmund combat ground and the final towering rock enclave with its shattered pine in the centre. I rate it a gauge of this staging's success that you honestly did not notice time go by, until suddenly on Van Ness Avenue you realised it was almost midnight. Most of the 3000 strong audience were similarly absorbed by this most accessible day of the "Ring". Well done, Richard Wagner.

NEWS FROM OVERSEAS

The Society regularly receives newsletters and publications from other Richard Wagner Societies among them being Adelaide, Melbourne, London, New York and now Toronto, Canada. We occasionally hear also from San Francisco. Leonard Hansen has regularly represented us when the Verband of R.W. Societies has held its Congress usually in May and so far only in Europe, usually in Germany. Last May this Congress was held in Lyon and the program seemed a very entertaining one - interesting lectures, quite a few performances and local tours and social functions. Should any member be able to represent us at these Wagner "get-togethers", please contact the Committee well before May for information. Maybe one day it will be held in an English speaking country - who knows?

The two newsletters we recently received from Toronto show that they have similar programs to ours, but of course, proximity to the Met, Chicago and other major opera houses allows members to attend more performances which because of our isolation are denied us. An interesting note came from a review of Lohengrin conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras in San Francisco. The reviewer went specially to hear Paul Frey. Paul, however, was indisposed and was replaced by Ben Heppner, who is receiving great acclaim in the roles of Lohengrin, Tannhäuser and Walther. He apparently learned to sing in his Mennonite Church Choir in Western Ontario and is someone to watch for the future.



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\* In our report on the Annual Dinner we referred to \*  
\* our Guest singer as Lucy MacPherson. It should \*  
\* have been Lucy MacFarlane. We have apologised to \*  
\* Lucy, who was very gracious, indeed. \*  
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WAGNER GOES HOLLYWOOD

Many articles and reviews are appearing in various journals about the increasing number of productions which SEEM to be competing with each other in being "modern" or "way-out" or to super-impose a political or environmental concept. The debate between traditionalists and modernists will never be resolved. Those producers who follow the modern trend seem to be trying to out-do each other and the worry is that while sets, costumes and technical assistance can be as varied as the producer wishes, will it come to the stage where the libretto will be "adjusted" to suit the theme - or even the orchestral score? Omissions are often obvious but so far seem only to be the exclusion of a whole section but could we see for instance, certain phrases omitted? An example could be Wotan's Spear - it is quite odd to see Wotan in space gear or in a grey flannel suit carrying a spear so perhaps someone will get the bright idea to eliminate any reference to the spear. The mind boggles! These extracts are printed without further comment.

A review of the Met Ring:-

The present production is the subject of much controversy: traditionalists love it: modernists violently reject it... Theirs is neither a marxist nor a psychoanalytic interpretation. It does not exude anti-nuclear or environmentalist propaganda. Those who believe that Wagner was a good enough dramaturgist not to require radical modernisation have enjoyed it.....

Tristan and Isolde in Los Angeles some time back:-

Isolde was presented as a prostitute.....

Tannhauser in Chicago:-

Venus to Tannhäuser..."Hit the road, Jack!"

Michael Walsh in Time Magazine:-

It may seem a long leap from Richard Wagner's Flying Dutchman to Warren Beatty's Dick Tracy, but in the new production of the opera in Bayreuth this year, the jump has been made....this Dutchman is a vivid, arresting comic book for adults. (He then goes on to give a favourable account of the singing.)

Werner Hertzog's production of Lohengrin owes much to Hollywood. Lohengrin's arrival in a swirl of blue cycloramic haze, the appearance of Ortrud as a beautiful redhead and the final scene where the two widows reach out to each other for support after their losses and Godfrey's appearance only half transformed from a swan (he still has wings) are all examples of the Hollywood influence on opera. Werner Hertzog was the producer of a film starring Klaus Kinski as Count Dracula in 1979, so he was no stranger to "different" stage effects.

Walsh's final paragraph gives much food for thought. It is quoted verbatim:-

Quoting Francis Ford Coppola's use of helicopters to the Ride of the Valkyrie music in "Apocalypse Now" he asks: "What of the future? Let's see now: A godfather who eliminates his rivals and forges an empire, only to see it come apart as his sons are killed, a figure who at the end is a lonely, tired old man. Sounds like.....Wotan. A Coppola Ring Cycle, anybody?"

Die Meistersinger at Covent Garden-reviewed by Edward Greenfield.

Covent Garden has revamped its 1969 production, keeping the old, vividly realistic sets of Barry Kay UNTIL THE FINAL SCENE. There he imports, in the harsh glare of unrelieved electric blue, a utility grandstand, supported by struts and wires, and surrounded by plastic and aluminium canopies with a Japanese look more apt for Madam Butterfly. It was like having a comfortable evening in a favourite armchair, only to be pitched out at the end and forced to perch on lightweight utility furniture.

- Using reviews from many sources supplied by Arthur Carter, Janet Wayland and Annie Marshall, the Editors offer these comments for your perusal.

NEW MEMBERS

We wish to welcome the following new members:- Mr. Ivor Zetler : John Iredale : Anthony Ernst : Paul. A. Gresham.

DONATIONS RECEIVED DURING LAST QUARTER

The Society wishes to acknowledge with thanks, donations from the following members:- Dr. N. Dorsch : R.P. Cordukes : Dr. A. Ziegler: M. Harris : Werner Baer : Dr. Judy Nicholas : Geoffrey Magney : Klaus Baldenhofer.

DONATIONS TO THE WAGNER SOCIETY

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The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust,  
P.O.Box 137,  
King's Cross N.S.W. 2011

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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

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We would ask you if making your donation by cheque to make it payable to the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, but post it to the Wagner Society's official address for processing before we pass it on to the A.E.T.T. We can only accept payment by cheque or credit card and this donation must be separated from any other payment included at the same time. These are Taxation rules and are beyond our control. If you have any doubts\*about the procedures please contact a committee member. Thank You.