

# The Wagner Society

IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

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## Newsletter

No. 46, March, 1992.

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**PATRON:** SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS  
**HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS:** Mr WERNER BAER, M.B.E. 1914 - 1992  
Miss RITA HUNTER, C.B.E.  
Miss LEONIE RYSANEK  
Professor MICHAEL EWANS  
Mr LEONARD HANSEN 1937 - 1990  
Mr RICHARD KING

## COMING EVENTS

Sunday, March 15th	Afternoon Tea Clifford Grant Galleries 77 Glebe Point Road Glebe NSW 2037	2.00pm
Sunday, April 19th	Easter Sunday	No event scheduled
Sunday, May 17th	Annual General Meeting & Program of Music The Print Room 141 Dowling Street Woolloomooloo 2011	2.30pm
Friday, May 22nd	Annual Dinner The Menzies Hotel	7.30pm
Sunday, June 21st	Talk Speaker to be advised The Cole Room The Church in the Marketplace Bondi Junction Plaza	2.00pm

## COMMITTEE

President	Olive Coonan	387.6403
Vice-President	Paul Lehmann	552.1424
Membership	Clare Hennessy	747.5664
Treasurer	Sue Kelly	
Secretary	Annie Marshall	042 94.2992
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Newsletter	Janet Wayland	332.3926
Newsletter	Arthur Carter	047 58.8332
Public Officer	Richard King	358.1919
Liaison Officer (AO)	Richard Steele	365.4306

## NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Further to my last report we now have updated news about the Goethe Institute. Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that it will be available for our use this year as renovations are taking longer than anticipated.

We were lucky enough to obtain fifteen tickets for Bayreuth this year. For those who missed out, next year is always hopefully on the horizon. Please try again.

In December I was invited to Fairwater for lunch with Lady Mary Fairfax and the Executive of Opera Foundation as one of the guests of honour. It was to thank us for our yearly participation in providing the air fare for the Bayreuth Scholarship winner.

I apologise for the change of dates and events in February and March, for which you should have received information by special mailing. I do implore you to please bear with us this year as circumstances have forced us to change our choice of venues.

We will strive to continue our Sunday afternoons as usual as circumstances permit. Please watch for times and venues in June newsletter.

As I mentioned previously Parsifal is to be performed in the Summer Season of 1993 in Sydney. This is one of our main aims, to have Wagner performed here in Australia. Please start to save your pennies so we can continue our support with a substantial donation to the Australian Opera for this new production.

Olive Coonan  
President

## THANK YOU TO PATRICIA BAILLIE OF DA CAPO MUSIC BOOKSHOP GLEBE

Patricia Baillie of Da Capo Music Bookshop, Glebe, provided the back page comments last issue which caused great interest among our readers. We were most grateful to receive them and take this opportunity to acknowledge Patricia's contribution.

*[Members of the Society are invited to submit their views on Wagner productions or any aspects of Wagnerian opera that they wish to have aired - the newsletter is keen to reflect the views of the Society's membership]*

## MEMORIAL SERVICE - WERNER BAER

A non-denominational memorial service for Werner Baer at the Great Synagogue, Elizabeth Street, Sydney, on Wednesday 24th March at 7.00pm will be held under the auspices of the ABC.

## LIFE MEMBER WERNER BAER 1914 - 1992

When our Society was founded in 1980 Werner was one of our keenest supporters. His knowledge of the Wagnerian repertoire was immense. Always ready to accompany and talk at all our dinners, seminars etc, he would rehearse our nominated guest singer, ensuring the highest musical standard.

A native of Germany, he began composing at the age of nine, having shown unusual talent from the age of three!

At 18, he was enrolled at the Berlin High School of Music, studying with such masters of the keyboard as Arthur Schnabel, who was on the teaching staff.

In 1938 he was interned in a concentration camp but fortunately issued with a visa to go to, of all places, Thailand! Instead he came to Australia, where he served in the Army until the end of the war. His career with the ABC shaped the musical content of symphony concerts in this country for many years.

He never really "retired", as he wrote critical reviews for newspapers, coached many of the great singers of our time and, again, when his health permitted, gave his all to our Society. He will long be remembered by all who knew him, with love and gratitude.

The Society extends our sympathy to his great supporter and life partner, Sibilla, and their children Miriam and David.

History will judge the great musical legacy of this man.

**Richard King**  
**Past President**

*A personal appreciation of Werner Baer by Keith and Jessie Anderson will appear in the Newsletter's next issue.*

## STUART CHALLENGER, AO

With the death of this outstanding Australian-born conductor in December last year, we lost not only a first class musician but a man who presented the works of Richard Wagner not only with great skill but also with love.

Our Society and music lovers everywhere have lost an individual on the brink of an even greater international career. He is one of the finest conductors to have come from this country.

During the years he attended various gatherings of our Society, giving insights into the complexities and mysteries of Wagner's world.

A shy man, he transformed any orchestra he conducted.

His intuitive knowledge brought new life into even the most hackneyed compositions.

The marvellous obituaries in the press and on television, the wonderful memorial service at Sydney Town Hall, can only salute this genius.

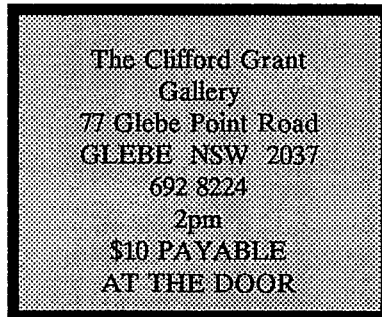
We who are left honour him - grateful to have known him and to have experienced first hand his musical gifts.

Others who also knew him, including members of our Society who have gone before him, will have welcomed him with the music of the spheres.

His music making will be beyond time.

**Richard King**  
**Past President**

## **CLIFFORD GRANT AFTERNOON TEA**



As members know, we have had to alter our schedule for the first half of the year. Stephen Bennett, about whom we wrote last issue, kindly agreed to step into the breach when we found out that Clifford Grant would be overseas in February. Consequently, we have moved the Clifford Grant Afternoon to March. We recommend that members book with the Gallery for this afternoon, especially if they wish to bring friends.

## **MEMBERSHIP DRIVE**

The Committee is keen to increase our membership given the renewed emphasis on Wagner's music in the Australian Opera's program in 1993 and we would urge all our members to pass on information about the Society to friends. Membership forms for new members are obtainable at meetings or by writing to the membership secretary at the registered office.

Renewal notices have gone out to current members under separate cover at present and these may be returned to Committee members at meetings or by post. If you are

returning your renewal form please quote your membership number on it.

## "MEETING VENUS" THRICE

*We give here three diverse views of this film which, of immense interest to Wagner lovers, opens at the Village, Cinema City, George Street on 23rd April, starring Glen Close, Niels Arestrup and Erland Josephson. Significant production details and singers are listed below.*

*Producer*

*Director*

*Music*

*Extracts from **Tannhäuser** conducted by*

*Tannhauser*

*Elizabeth*

*Wolfram von Eschenbach*

*Venus*

*Chorus*

*Chorus Master*

*Orchestra*

*Running time*

*David Puttnam*

*Istvan Szabo*

*Richard Wagner*

*Marek Janowski*

*Rene Kollo*

*Kiri Te Kanawa*

*Haken Hagegard*

*Waltraud Meier*

*The Ambrosian Singers*

*John McCarthy*

*the London Philharmonic Orchestra, London*

*117 minutes*

### WAGNER NEWS - London (James Pritchard) - November 1991

"The scenario seems very familiar: the conductor enters the rehearsal room and addresses the polyglot cast, chorus and orchestra in fractured English; he is not very well understood. Before the first orchestral rehearsal the orchestra is chatting, scratching, throwing paper darts at the female members of the chorus; doing everything in fact but study their music. The conductor raises his baton, the leader almost immediately halts the rehearsal to mention that in a few minutes a number of members of the orchestra must leave to go and negotiate with the opera's management concerning their ongoing pay and conditions dispute. Out of the rehearsal room and into the theatre the conductor finds he is now rehearsing a totally different orchestra because the players work a rota system. The ash-blond soprano arrives at last to rehearse and begins an aria; before she has finished the alarms of the chorus' digital watches beep in unison to signify that it is time for their tea break and so they resolutely march off the stage. At the appointed hour the répétiteur closes the lid of the piano and padlocks it! He is not allowed by his union to work one minute longer. The conductor bemoans those media bureaucrats who are in charge of the venture and think they are artistes. The tenor is a hypochondriac and cancels his rehearsals at the last moment, also the sets are an abomination. The first night is delayed because a general strike means that the safety curtain will not be raised. The conductor finally raises his baton to begin the overture; he makes all the right gestures and obtains all the right sounds from the orchestra without convincing anyone that he is a true Wagnerian conductor. Well, what is all this about? *Not* as you might think the start of the Royal Opera's new season and the *Ring* conducted by Bernard Haitink but Opera Europa's Paris production of *Tannhäuser* as depicted in Istvan Szabo's film "Meeting Venus".

### WAGNER NOTES - New York (Harry L Wagner) - December 1991

When all is said and done and the petty intrigues and inside politicking are over, the

music unites all. With its tongue planted firmly in its cheek, the movie even awards the conductor with the ultimate *Tannhäuser* sign of redemption. Thinking back to the disastrous first performance of *Tannhäuser* in Paris, one realised that little in the way of human double-dealing has changed. If only "Meeting Venus" had captured some of the madcap quality of that fiasco!... Still Wagnerians will find a lot to appreciate here.... As one watched the antics of Communists, ex-Communists, Greens, labor agitators and star-crossed lovers; one saw clearly why they were all trying to plug into the high voltage of the music. Great art has the power to infuse an energy and an authenticity into love, sex and politics that they all too often lack in what for what of a better term we call the real world."

**VARIETY - Los Angeles (Derek Elley) - September 16, 1991**

"Glenn Close hits the high notes as a cool diva ... but lopsided pic won't get Warners many curtain calls beyond specialised situations. Romantic comedy set in a strife-torn Paris opera house is knocked on the head by a central love story that's dumb and uninvolved.... What must have seemed on paper like a lighthearted satire on Euro-squabbling and the multilingual opera scene works okay in the opening rounds....[the] script takes neat potshots at "modern" productions, out-of-control egos and slick sponsors.... Szabo directed the same opera [*Tannhäuser*] in Paris six years ago and makes no secret that the pic was inspired by his experiences. Playing by a large cast with mixed accents is also fine, with pic starting to recall Ernst Lubitsch ensemble comedies.... Lipsynching is realistic, with Kiri Te Kanawa supplying Close's warbling and Rene Kollo standing in for Saunders."

## **ROBERT ALLMANN OUR GUEST SPEAKER AT THE ANNUAL DINNER**

Friday 22nd May at the Menzies Hotel once again sees our Annual Dinner in honour of Wagner's birthday. The Guest of Honour this year is Robert Allmann, singing Scarpia in *Tosca* in the Winter Season of the Australian Opera, and the usual activities will take place, including our time-honoured raffle. The cost for 1992 has risen very slightly to \$45 per head.

Pre-dinner drinks will be served from 7.30pm, dinner commences at 8.00 and we look forward to your company. Please return your flyers soon.

## **SYDNEY SYMPHONY'S GALA WAGNER CONCERT 1991**

Some Wagner Society members attended the Sydney Symphony's Gala Wagner Concert in 1991. Heinz Fricke, Resident Conductor of the German Opera of Berlin, managed to produce a unique experience for me. As I left the Opera House, I thought how wonderful it would be if there was an annual Wagner Concert. This leads me to the question: What can the Society do to promote more performances in Sydney of our beloved composer's works? At present we do not enjoy enough.

About ten years ago I wrote to the newspaper "Opera Australia" complaining about the absence of Wagner from the Australian Opera program for that year. This generated a lively debate in subsequent issues. One letter writer even suggested that Wagner was a decadent person (probably true) and thus his music should not be performed!



Anyway, I wonder what we can do? Perhaps, in any year when no Wagner Opera is scheduled, the Society could promote a concert similar to the one in 1991. What about a concert of excerpts from one opera? Maybe a concert tour by a leading singer of Europe? What do the society members think?

John Drew

*Editor's Note: The Committee advises that many of these suggestions would be beyond the means of the Society.*

## MORE ON SEATTLE AND ITS RING

We enjoyed the notes on the Seattle Ring by Bill and Edna Watson in the recent newsletter. We attended a Ring cycle in Seattle in 1983 (not one of the years mentioned by the Watsons) at the start of a sabbatical of 7 months at the University of Washington in Seattle. Two cycles were given in 1983, the first in German and the second in English. We chose the English cycle, partly because of the dates but also because it was Catherine's first Ring and we felt that she might get more out of it - this was before the introduction of surtitles; do they use them in Seattle now?

We thoroughly enjoyed the traditional production. The Administration did everything possible to ensure that we got our tickets safely, even phoning us in Sydney in the middle of the night to tell us that we had seats! Henry Holt conducted and Lincoln Clark directed, with sets and costumes by John Naccarato. The singers were mostly unknown to us, and after 8 years it is hard to recall individual performances. Malcolm Rivers was Alberich with Anthony Raffell as Wotan (and the Wanderer). Brunnhilde was sung by Anna Levitska, and Siegfried by Elliot Palay. The twins in Valkyrie were Edward Sooter and Lyn Vernon.

We still have the program, newspaper review and postcards of the production. A very enjoyable week in a memorable half year.

Catherine & Guy Fletcher

## RESPONSE TO W J TURNER

I was astounded to read in the December issue of the Newsletter the extract from W J Turner's Variations on the Theme of Music 1924, stating that in *Götterdämmerung* Wagner failed to rise to the heights of the task he had set himself. "The music is fabricated, uninspired; and it is uninspired, I believe because, in its final stage in the poems of *Götterdämmerung*, the Ring had ceased to be true to Wagner, and that is why it has no meaning for us."

Act Two has brought together the protagonists of this drama - Siegfried, Brunnhilde, Gunther, Gutrune and Hagen. Brunnhilde fiercely denounces Siegfried's infidelity and notwithstanding her love is resolved that he must die for his perjury. Hagen agrees to be the agent of death hoping to acquire the ring. Act Three has the death of Siegfried and the most heart-breaking funeral music ever written, Brunnhilde's assertion of her deathless love for her



drugged and duped hero, her self-immolation, and in this sacrifice the ultimate triumph of love over greed and treachery. How could anyone deny that such drama is superb climax.

And the music does it justice. Let me quote Kobbe, the Complete Opera Book. "Full of pathos though this episode may be it but brings us to the threshold of a scene of such overwhelming power that it may be without exaggeration singled out as the supreme musico-dramatic climax of all that Wagner wrought. Siegfried's last ecstatic greeting in death to his Valkyrie bride has made us realise the blackness of the treachery which tore the young hero and Brunnhilde apart; and now as we are bowed down with a grief too deep for utterance - like the grief with which a nation gathers at the grave of its noblest hero - Wagner voices for us in music of overwhelmingly tragic power; feelings that are beyond expression in human speech.

"Motionless with grief the men gather around Siegfried's corpse. Night falls. The moon casts a pale, sad light over the scene. At the silent bidding of Gunther, the vassals raise the body and bear it in solemn procession over the rocky height. Meanwhile, with majestic solemnity, the orchestra voices the funeral oration of the "world's greatest hero". One by one, but tragically interrupted by the Motif of Death, we hear the motifs that tell the story of the Walsung's futile struggle with destiny... around which the Death Motif swirls and crashes like a black death-dealing, all-wrecking flood, forming an over-whelmingly powerful climax that dies away into the Brunnhilde motif with which, as with a heart-broken sigh, the heroic dirge is brought to a close."

There is so much more of this superb analysis in the pages of Kobbe, the finest I believe in the whole book. In these tragic scenes, Kobbe saw the magnificent climax to Wagner's great musico-drama cycle of the **Ring**.

J A McGlade

## **AUDITIONING IN EUROPE: A SINGER'S PERSPECTIVE - JOHN WEGNER**

Have Eurail will travel! A singer auditioning in Europe must be prepared to travel and sometimes be quick about it.

In November 1990 I travelled to Europe during my holidays for a four week study and audition trip, eighty four hours of which were spent sitting in trains. That amounts to two and a half working weeks chasing auditions and vocal sessions. I wonder how many large bottles of mineral water I drank to save my vocal chords from a savaging by the railway heating system?

At the Australian Opera they are kind enough to take into account a singer's potential and to appreciate that the stress of auditioning may hamper a singer's performance. In Europe no allowances are made for the difficulties you may have had in warming up your voice and maintaining it while waiting. You are given one chance to impress and the work is allocated on the impression you left.

Why do singers need to warm up? The impulse to sing may come from the mind but it is the body that executes it. If a singer is warmed up he has the chance to work the correct

muscles to produce sound of great subtlety or power. If the correct muscles of a singer are not gradually warmed up, then volume becomes a forced affair and suppleness of tone is achieved through a faked manipulation instead of correct coordination.

Australians have a problem in choosing the right arias to sing at German auditions. We allow singers to sing a great range of repertoire and often very successfully. However, in Germany, voices are strictly classified and the auditionee must sing arias from roles that are considered in his category or "Fach!" If you audition with arias considered out of your "Fach" you are ignored even though you may have had great success with such roles in Australia. To find a person who can give the correct advice about the European classification of one's voice is also difficult to do in Australia.

To sing at Munich has been a dream of mine so I was determined to prepare well for my audition. The Hotel am Markt had agreed to allow me to warm up for this audition at 11.25 in preparation for my 12.30 audition at the Opera House. When I came down for my warm up there were still some people having breakfast. I had been hardened enough during my European stay to justify my need as being greater than theirs. So, with a brief "sorry, but I must warm up now for my big audition", I began to make the bizarre noises that singers emit in the early part of their warm up. The diners were dumbfounded for the first few minutes. As the warm up became louder, so did they. To pacify them, I had to break into something tuneful. This led to passersby trying to peer in through the windows. A couple who were signing into the hotel did not seem to know if it would be a blessing or curse to stay there.

An hour later I stood on the stage of the beautiful and acoustically magnificent Munich Opera House. Unfortunately, the three auditionees could not sing on the open stage that day because we were being heard during a break in rehearsal while a scene change occurred. So I stood in front of the house curtain singing an aria that they considered not in my "Fach", fighting the unusual acoustic feedback which was caused by my position in front of the curtain. I was bitterly disappointed with my performance at Munich but I learned to drop the offending aria and so be prepared for my Karlsruhe audition.

The call to Karlsruhe came suddenly. On 6 December 1990 I was an hour's drive north of Cologne, spending a quiet evening with my nephew after auditioning at Dusseldorf Opera, when the call came that I was required to audition at Karlsruhe in the morning. Karlsruhe is in the south of Germany at the start of the Black Forest - could I make it? I made it to bed by 11.30pm only to rise at 4.45am to catch the 7.01 train from Cologne to Karlsruhe.

I was warming up in the passageway at the end of my carriage when I was confronted by a canteen staff person, trolley in tow. Or rather, he was confronted by a screaming man wearing walkman headphones. He soon returned with a conductor. Knowing that I had to go through a thorough warm up to co-ordinate my weary body and having survived many embarrassing moments on my trip, I explained that I had an important audition today and burst forth in song. The conductor stared unbelievably, prepared to say something serious, flinched, looked at the canteen man, they both raised their eyebrows as if to say 'what does one do with such a madman?' and left.

At 11.30 I stood on the Karlsruhe stage and sang a good "Boris" monologue and Escamillo's Aria. I was taken for a chat with the Intendant and later had a vocal session with the head of music staff who took me through my paces to check out various aspects of my voice and technique. I was able to put to use much of what I had learnt over the 4 weeks and

left with a good feeling. This proved to be the last audition before I headed off to England.

Some months later I signed a contract to start a new phase in my career and life. This is to sing at the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe until July 1994 with the main project being to sing in the Wagner Ring cycle as WOTAN!

Some time ago I was awarded the Bayreuth Scholarship and an Airfare donated by the NSW Wagner Society who, having seen my performance as Boris, decided that I showed Wagnerian potential. I now have the opportunity to realise that potential and bring back some exciting roles to Australia.

I thank members of the Wagner Society for their encouragement and friendship over the years and wish you all well and continued joy in music.

John Wegner

## **A CRY FOR HELP**

As members know, this year we are somewhat discommoded by the refurbishing of the Goethe Institute. Consequently we have been ringing the changes with our meeting locations and this has caused some dislocation to the Catering! If anyone within say 5 miles of Bondi Junction/Edgecliff has space in their lock-up garage that they would be willing to let us use (and also willing for us to access with a key) we would be most grateful. We are quite happy to pay an appropriate fee for the use of your premises. We need to store our urn, plastic paraphernalia, trays and perhaps some papers belonging to the Society. It adds up to several boxloads but although bulky is not heavy.

## **THE MURRAY SMITH "LOHENGRIN" COLLECTION**

The Murray Smith "Lohengrin" Collection of set and costume designs by Frank Hinder will open at Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, Bourke Street, Goulburn on Saturday, 11th April and continue until Saturday, 2nd May 1992.

Hopefully it will travel to other centres at a future date.

If you intend visiting the Goulburn Gallery, we suggest a call to request an invitation and confirmation of dates.

## **LOHENGRIN IN MELBOURNE**

Members interested in forming a theatre party (20+ needed) for the Saturday evening performance on November 28th ("A" Reserve seats) please contact either Camron Dyer (416 7197) or Arthur Carter (047 588 332) by mid-March. We'll secure the seats by the end of this

month; travel and accommodation are your individual choice but Ansett Holiday Division (tel: 131413 toll free) has offered us its help, eg return airfare and 3 nights at very convenient hotels currently range from \$248 to \$357. Feel free to phone Camron or Arthur for more details.

Casting for this production includes Horst Hoffmann as Lohengrin, Karen Bureau as Elsa, Gregory Yurisch as Telramund, Kimball Wheeler as Ortrud and Noel Mangin as King Henry. The Director will be Andrew Sinclair (after August Everding), the Designer Kenneth Rowell and the Conductor Richard Dival, a previous winner of the Society's Travel Scholarship.

## THE RAVENS REPORTING

*Here we offer advance short items/performance news of interest to Wagner lovers.*

Berlin: **Der fliegende Holländer** Mar 5  
**Tannhäuser** (new production) Mar 11, 29 with Karen Armstrong, Rene Kollo, Hans Sotin and conducted by Jiri Kout.  
 Ring Cycle May 24 - June 7

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Hamburg: **Tannhäuser** (revival) opens Mar 8  
**Das Rheingold** conducted by Gerd Albrecht Apr 12 - May 3

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Carnegie Hall: **Rienzi** with Reiner Goldberg & conducted by Eve Queler Mar 15

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Leipzig: **Der fliegende Holländer** with Eva Marie Bundschuh, Simon Estes and Kurt Rydl Mar 25, 28  
**Tristan und Isolde** with Eva Marie Bundschuh, Lang Kruse and Forsen, April 18

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The Met: **Parsifal** with Meier/Norman, Jerusalem/lakes, Weikl/Wlaschiha, Moll/Rootering and conducted by James Levine Mar 12 - April 17

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Karlsruhe: **Salome** with John Wegner opens June 23

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Bonn: **Die Walküre** (new production) with Eva Marton/Janis Martin, Schwarz, Frey, Estes, Holle and conducted by Dennis Russell Davies June 7 - July 17

Covent Garden: **Der fliegende Holländer** (new production) with Julia Varady, James Morris, conducted by von Dohnanyi, producer Ian Judge and directed by John Gunter, Opens June 8

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Melbourne: The Victorian State Opera will be presenting **Lohengrin** in Melbourne on Nov 14, 18, 21 (m), 23, 26, 28 and Dec 1 and 4. This production will be the same as Sydney 1990 but on the vast State Theatre stage with a full-size orchestra pit.