

The Wagner Society

IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Registered Office: 4/22 Read Street, Waverley, 2024



Newsletter

No. 67, June 1997

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PATRON: SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS
HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS: Miss RITA HUNTER, CBE
Miss LEONIE RYSANEK
Prof MICHAEL EWANS
Mr RICHARD KING
Mr REG MALONEY

COMING EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
July 20	Annual General Meeting followed by talk by David Nunn: "Knappertsbusch, Hotter and Sachs - the three Hanses",	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
September 21	"Wagner the Songwriter": Talk by Arthur Carter illustrated by recordings	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
October 19,	"Wagner Singers Old and New" Talk by Barbara McNulty illustrated by recordings	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
November 16	Lohengrin video (<i>note: this is the program postponed from April</i>)	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
S a t u r d a y , November 22	Tannhäuser day seminar covering opera, history and art. Speakers to include Prof. Michael Ewans, Antony Ernst and Robert Gay.	Art Gallery of NSW, mid- morning start: time to be advised
December 14	Christmas Party	Goethe Institut 2.00 pm

COMMITTEE

President	Paul Lehmann	9552 1424
Vice President	Barbara McNulty	9487 1344
Vice President and Treasurer	Olive Coonan	9387 6403
Membership Secretary	Janet Wayland	9332 3926
Secretary	Ira Kowalski	9597 4140
Members	Barbara Brady (Editor, Newsletter)	9956 5132
	Shirley Robertson	9521 3281
	Ivor Zetler	9871 4566 (home) 9872 2723 (work)
Public Officer	Reg Maloney	

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

After my last report to members I believe it is appropriate to pen some further comments on the bookings for the Adelaide ring cycle. As a detailed report of correspondence between myself and Adelaide would probably be dubbed "The second Epistle of Paul to the Wagnerians" I will confine my self to a brief summary of, what I perceive, to be matters which have caused concern to a not insignificant number of our members - who have expressed sentiments to me varying from irritation to extreme anger on the procedure adopted by Qantas/American express. But I must point out at the outset that not all members expressed antagonism to the procedure.

The basic problems as I see them are as follows:

1. Costs. In my particular case I received a quote from American Express for 2 "A" reserve tickets for Cycle 2 with 8 nights twin share accommodation. I then decided to compare alternate pricing by looking at air fares to Adelaide and 8 nights twin share accommodation in a 5 star Hotel in Adelaide in December 1997. This showed a saving of \$650.80 on the Qantas accommodation package, and considerable saving on the "Cycle ticket + Airline Ticket" - package. And from what I was told the alternate source would not be likely to increase its charges for December 1998 by more than 10% AND would be making advance hotel bookings to cater for its anticipated customers visiting Adelaide at that time. I therefore concluded that the Qantas/American pricing package was totally unacceptable for me.

2. The uncertainty of knowing the actual seat numbers that will be allocated to a particular member. In view of the amount of the deposit required, the obligation to pay the full balance of the package by December 1997, and the non-refundability of payments - some members objected to having to commit themselves to purchasing a ticket without being told of the actual seats that would be allocated to them. Correspondence to me at that time had made it quite clear that we were not to make any allocation of seats to our members - even though Adelaide has supplied me with a list of the actual seat numbers allocated to us - and Qantas / American Express would make the allocation sometime in or after August 1997. And although I was able to relay to Adelaide any special requirements or preferences from members I was given no guarantee that those requirements or preferences would be met.

3. The amount of the deposit. A number of members cannot see the fairness in charging what they perceive to be such a large deposit at such an early stage. Some members are also shocked that the deposit does not vary based on whether the ticket is for an "A" reserve, a "B" reserve or a "C" reserve - I point out that the deposit for a "C" reserve ticket plus the airline ticket is \$1,000 but the full price of that ticket is \$1,001.

4. The time frame for our society. I could not start contacting members regarding the booking arrangement until I received a reply to an earlier letter from me requesting information to answer questions that had occurred to me and which I knew would be asked of me by some members.

These matter were put in writing to Mr Stephen Phillips and his reply, in writing, was that the

marketing program, the amount of the deposit and the times for payment had been fixed by Qantas / American Express and he could do nothing about these aspects. However there has now been a complete about face as regards the seat allocation to the members on our list in that we are now obliged to make the seat allocation from the seat numbers advised to us. I am now trying to get information on the seating configuration - eg surtitle views - where are the "A", "B", "C" rows - etc from Adelaide. American Express - when I rang them - told me they had no information on this matter.

The most euphemistic comment I can make about the procedure is that it is 'unfortunate'. The bottom line is that some people will not be able to attend a cycle simply because they cannot afford to pay the deposit and the balance at the time demanded by Qantas - whereas they may have been able to pay the price had they been given more time to pay AND other members are simply refusing to purchase a ticket simply because they are not prepared to put up with the policy that has been put in place by Qantas and American Express.

Please note that nothing in this update relates to the "Drive tickets" allocated to us. All I know at present is that we have been allocated 10 "B" Reserve seats for each of Cycles two and three and that these seats are in the Grand Circle - a part of the theatre that consists of only "B" and "C" reserve seats and that I will receive information from Adelaide at a later date advising how these seats are to be allocated and paid for. Except for the "Drive" tickets I doubt very much if we have achieved any benefit for our members by requesting an allocation of tickets. Members who went onto our list have certainly had to do more than those who have waited and made a direct booking with American Express. It is of course possible that the seats we have been allocated are better than what will be allocated by those booking direct. However I have some doubt about this. About the end of April I was given booking numbers for those who had booked through Sydney; these indicated that only about one half of the seats allocated to American Express had been sold. Indeed it was put to me at the time that this was the main reason for not allowing our society to allocate seats to members from our list as it might be possible for American Express to upgrade the seats available when the actual allocation was made.

On a completely different, and much more positive note, I am happy to report that the society was privileged to receive an invitation to a reception in honour of Dr Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, at the Sheraton-on-the-Park on 6th May. Olive Coonan, Ira Kowalski and I attended this most enjoyable function and were pleased at the opportunity to hear the Chancellor's address and to talk to some of Sydney's German community.

PAUL LEHMANN
President

ADDRESS

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence
The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc
GPO Box 4574 SYDNEY NSW 2001
Telephone: 9552 1414 (Paul Lehmann)

17TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held at the Goethe Institut, 90 Ocean Street, Woollahra, on Sunday 20 July at 1.00 pm

VOTING RULES

At the Annual General Meeting the office bearers (namely, President, up to two Vice Presidents, Treasurer and Secretary) must be elected, together with four additional Committee Members if sufficient nominations are received.

If the number of nominations does not exceed nine members those members are automatically declared elected to the committee. Similarly the office bearers retain their specified positions if no one else is nominated to the same position. In the case of two or more nominations to positions of office bearer a ballot will be held on the day of the annual general meeting.

Financial members may vote by proxy given to a financial member if unable to attend the annual general meeting.

If more than four members are nominated for the Committee a ballot will also need to be held.

NOMINATIONS AND PROXY FORMS SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY FRIDAY 4TH JULY 1997

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PROXY FORM

The Secretary, The Wagner Society in NSW Inc
GPO BOX 4574, SYDNEY, NSW 2001

I,
(Member's name)

of
(Member's address)

Membership number.....

Member's signature.....

cannot attend the 17th Annual Meeting to be held on 20 July 1997 but nominate as my proxy to vote for me

.....
(Proxy's name) who is a current financial member of the Society

(Address).....

.....(Date)

NOMINATION FORM

**The Secretary, The Wagner Society in NSW Inc
GPO Box 4574, SYDNEY NSW 2001**

We, the undersigned members, hereby propose and second respectively:

.....

for election as

.....

or a member of the committee of the Wagner Society in NSW Inc.

Date.....

**Signed.....
(Proposer)**

**Signed.....
(Seconder)**

**Signed.....
(Nominated member)**

=====

NOTICE OF MOTION

**The Secretary, Wagner Society in NSW Inc
GPO Box 4574, Sydney, NSW 2001**

I/we will be attending the Annual General Meeting on 20 July 1997 and would like the following motion to be placed on the agenda for discussion under general business.

.....
.....
.....
.....

Name:
.....

Membership number.....

THE FRIENDLY RING

Hamburg Opera, March 1997 (3 cycles). Musical director: Gerd Albrecht, Producer: Günter Krämer, Scenery: Andreas Reinhardt, Light-Design: Manfred Voss, Stage Director: Jasmin Solfaghari

Attending one's second Ring is a bit like losing one's virginity twice: the first experience cannot be repeated, not should it be used as a benchmark for comparison. So Ian Brady and I put all thoughts of Bayreuth 1990 behind us and went to Hamburg (for the 3rd cycle, from 21st to 31st March 1997) with open minds - and we were both impressed and delighted. This was neither a classical nor a futuristic Ring, nor was it theatre of the absurd. I call Hamburg's a friendly Ring because everything was spelt out for the audience leaving little to the imagination. The sets and staging were at times imaginative and colourful, at times lack-lustre, with costumes for the most part unobtrusive. Before describing the production, however, let me first give my impressions of the music performance, not as a critic nor even as a gifted amateur, but a representative member of the audience.

Undoubtedly the star was our Brünnhilde, Gabriele Schnaut, whose singing was strong and clear and effortless throughout (she is evidently a current favourite as she went from Hamburg to the Met in May). We had three Wotans which we liked better successively: Alfred Muff was a suitable Wotan for *Das Rheingold*, being relatively young, with a pleasant voice; Simon Estes's rich mellow bass was a great pleasure to listen to in *Die Walküre*. Our third Wotan (Wanderer) was Sigmund Nimsgern whose somewhat more resonant quality was for us the most satisfying. We were fortunate to hear some seasoned Wagner singers, especially in the bass range, such as Kurt Moll as Hunding, and Kurt Rydl (a commanding actor) as Hagen. Both Alberichs were impressive (a younger Franz Josef Kapellmann in *Das Rheingold*, and Günter von Kannen for later operas) and Fasolt (Harald Stamm), Gunther (Jürgen Freier), and Fafner (Aage Haugland). Maybe we were too busy being entertained to appreciate the singing in *Das Rheingold*, but Heinz Kruse (Loge/Siegfried) and Susan Anthony (Freia/Gutrune) made more of an impact in their second roles, and so did Violeta Urmana as Fricka in *Die Walküre*. On the other hand the moment the curtain went up on *Die Walküre* and we were possessed by the human emotions of the characters, the singing became so much more important. Scene I with Nadine Secunde as Sieglinde was electric; it is a tribute to her Siegmund, Robert Schunk that he survived *Winterstürme* lying on his back (but not a tribute to the director who put him there). Mime (Tomas Harper) played down the comic side singing a straight tenor without falsetto whinges. The Philharmonische Staatsorchester Hamburg was very fine under the direction of its permanent conductor, Gerd Albrecht; we liked the good pace and majestic surges of grand sound. The rousing chorus of the Gibichung vassals was excellent and so too was the separate and combined singing of the Walkyries.

Das Rheingold was brightly lit and fun (provided you aren't Alberich), with the panto element given full reign. The Rhinemaidens wore spangled long gowns with trains and moved gently on swings suspended from the ceiling flies. Alberich was a dwarf, skidding about on the floor of the Rhine on his knees - a naive and frustrated wooer. His transformation to the dark and sinister character was effectively made as he discarded the knee-pads and rose to his full height to seize the gold. The Rhine, once it was illumined by the gold, was shimmering layers of brilliant blue and green. The rainbow bridge was equally gorgeous as it was lowered from above. It was a real bridge which the gods climbed onto confidently (with the exception of Freia who teetered onto it



Das Rheingold. The Rhinemaidens guard the gold while Alberich plots its theft. Günter von Kannen, Gabriele Rosmanith, Renate Spingler, Mechtild Georg. Photograph courtesy Hamburgische Staatsoper. **Copyright:** A. Capuano, photographer, by permission.

reluctantly - perhaps her experience with the giants had given her a fear of heights). You knew the gods were on top of the world because they literally moved about on top of a large globe. Freia competently peeled Grannies without breaking the spiral, but there was no Walhalla. As for Loge, he literally had flames shooting from his fingertips (no matter that the gas cylinder was obvious under his jacket). I found the transformation of Alberich into the serpent and the toad particularly convincing; here the Nibelung hoard were put to good use: their multi-coloured tights suddenly became visible as each slung a leg over the back of his neighbour to form a crawling Conga line that seethed and twisted as an immense *Wurm*. Again, a dozen or so of the Nibelungen doing bunny hops with their coloured rears in the air became a mass of toads. Wotan stood above them peering into the mass until he spotted Alberich in their midst then pounced.

This was a friendly Ring also in that characters were in close contact with each other. The giants did not use high headgear or stilts but appeared as themselves - well-built honest labourers - with the giant element supplied by troupes of acrobats on each other's shoulders behind each giant. Fasolt strode around amongst the gods, negotiating. In *Siegfried*, the same acrobats were ranged behind Fafner operating several sets of opening and closing jaws. Fafner however kept his human form which enabled Siegfried to come close to him and even to cradle him in his arms as Fafner died. A charming live woodbird, Hellen Kwon, was dressed in green gown and feathered hat a bit

like a Papagena - (for that matter, Siegfried with his puckish appearance in britches and braces could have passed for Papageno). Again, they were in friendly communication. A thoughtful idea was to dress Alberich and the Wanderer identically in *Siegfried*, swapping hats, so as to enhance the notion of "Licht Alberich" and "Schwarz Alberich". Less convincing were Siegmund and Sieglinde laid out across the front of the stage asleep while Wotan and Fricka were deciding their fate, and Brünnhilde's rock in *Götterdämmerung* - a junk yard of past glories - dead horses, chariots, heroes. Since Wagner creates such evocative musical images there was no need for the visual clutter.

Throughout the cycle there were recurring symbols which lent continuity to the whole. The ring theme was portrayed by a circle of some sort in each act in a variety of imaginative ways. Another recurring symbol was a shield with a human outline crudely marked on it. This was useful to stand in front of as a sort of symbol of power if you were a god, or to stand behind, as in the case of Erda, or to conceal a rather messy bit of business as with the despatch of Siegmund by Hunding. The rope which hung from the flies supporting some of the props was the same thick rope woven by the Norns convincingly from one side of the stage to the other. A not-quite unseen hand offstage let the full cats-cradle collapse in a heap at the appropriate moment.

There is no space to describe the staging of the last scenes of *Götterdämmerung* except perhaps to mention one image that lingers - that of the body of Siegfried, not laid horizontally on a bier but alone in the centre of the stage supported in an upright position by two spears; it actually gave Siegfried more dignity in death than he had in life. --And now Herr Wagner may we please have a rest from the glorious music ceaselessly pounding through our heads. Ruhe! Ruhe!

BARBARA BRADY

SOME GOOD VIEWING

The society is compiling a register of videos accessible via members. The aim is to have a list available so that we can call on members who are willing to lend a Wagner video for viewing. If you own a video you would like to share with others, please tell Shirley Robertson at the next meeting or add the relevant information to the list she usually circulates. The next step is to find out who wants to see what. For example, we had an unplanned success recently when the scheduled viewing of *Lohengrin* was aborted due to a faulty copy, and a society members offered the Metropolitan Opera's *Rheingold* as a last-minute substitute; this was so well received that we may consider showing more of that Met production. We will try to gauge your feelings at the AGM.

SOME GOOD LISTENING

On Wednesday 18th June at 8.00 pm, 2MBS-FM will be playing an historic recording of *Lohengrin*. It is the 1950 Metropolitan Opera production conducted by Fritz Stiedry with Lauritz Melchior as *Lohengrin*, Helen Traubel as *Elsa*, Deszo Ernster as *King Henry*, Herbert Janssen as *Telramund* and Astrid Varnay as *Ortrud*. This is one in the series of legendary operatic performances prepared and presented by Michael Tesoriero.

Wegner and Cook shine in Karlsruhe Ring under Neuhold: opera on disc. *Opera Opera*.

The society is no stranger to the Karlsruhe Ring but as a substantial review has appeared in *Opera Opera* in the March 1997 issue, we take this opportunity of extracting a very brief portion of it here (with apologies to David Gyger for lack of room to do his review more justice - Ed).

“The chauvinistic content of this CD *Ring* cycle is two-fold. Australian bass John Wegner, who is to play the same two pivotal roles for the State Opera of South Australia in Adelaide next year, is Wotan and the Wanderer; and Edward Cook, who is to be the SOSA Siegfried, is heard as the *Götterdämmerung* Siegfried after coming up with a pretty impressive Siegmund in *Die Walküre*....Right from the outset of his role, during Scene 2 of *Das Rheingold*, Wegner’s Wotan is wonderfully clean and ample of sound, in sharp focus and of admirable quality though just a trifle lacking in responsiveness to the nuance of the text. He is perceptibly more convincing in his interview with Brünnhilde during Act II of *Die Walküre*, but even so, does not register enough angst...Wegner is in top form during *Siegfried* though, answering Mime’s dim questions in Act I with appropriate condescension and ending on an upswing during the fateful confrontation during Act III ...” **DAVID GYGER**

SOME GOOD CONDUCTING

Fans of Simone Young will be interested to learn that her very busy schedule with the Vienna State Opera includes a rich load of Wagner: she will be conducting *Rheingold* on November 20, *Walküre* on November 23 and 26 and *Lohengrin* the following April 26, 29 and May 2. In the meantime her 1997 engagements in Australia include three concerts with the SSO in August.

SOME GOOD READING

Varying reviews have been sighted for this recent book: *Wagner*, by Michael Tanner. London, Flamingo, 1996, 236p. paperback UK £6.99; also hard cover, \$A39.95. Michael Tanner is Dean of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he lectures on philosophy.

The review in *Wagner Notes*, Wagner Society of New York, vol. XIX No. 6, Dec. 1996 by Hans Rudolf Vaget was also published in *Opera Quarterly*.

Mr Vaget calls this “the most spirited and unapologetic book about Wagner to appear in a long time ... in fact it is the happy combination of sober-mindedness and emotionalism, of skepticism and admiration, that accounts for the charm of this lively, unstuffy, and highly personal book, which has the added advantage, in contradistinction to so much Wagnerian literature, of being relatively short”. A thoughtful and comprehensive appraisal ends: “This, then, is a fine, intellectually sparkling and always engaging little book - a welcome addition to any Wagner library.” The cover of the book itself (where one expects compliments) quotes Simon Heffer: “Just about the best book you are ever likely to read on Wagner”, and several other offerings in similar vein.

By contrast, Edward Said in *The Observer*, whose review is reproduced in the *Guardian Weekly*, August 25 1996, launches into attack:

“Michael Tanner’s *Wagner* is a curious performance indeed. It isn’t just a chip that Tanner carries on his shoulder but a large bundle of resentments and petulant dislikes, with which he proceeds to a laborious reinterpretation of Wagner’s life and works. This is surely the first book that suggests that Wagner was not such a bad fellow after all, his anti-Semitism, egregious narcissism, stupendously demanding character and remarkably irregular, even abnormal, life notwithstanding. Tanner manages to downplay all that, accommodating what is still unassimilable and difficult about Wagner to a string of resourceful, sometimes ingenious, interpretations of the operas and the prose works. His interpretations are marred, however, by gratuitous tilting at critics and scholars...” The debate continues in the publication of The Wagner Society (UK) *Wagner News*, March 1997, in a wide-ranging article entitled “The Wagner Experience and its Meaning to Us” by Paul Dawson-Bowling. Doubtless members will wish to form their own opinions.

THE RAVENS REPORTING, compiled by Camron Dyer

- Adelaide *The Ring* - 3 cycles in 1998.
November 18, 19, 21, 24; November 27, 28, Dec 1, 4; December 5, 7, 9, 12.
- Amsterdam *The Ring* - new production
Das Rheingold - September 4, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 1997.
Die Walküre - January 31 February 4, 7, 11, 15, 18, 21, 25, 1998.
Siegfried - June 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 1998.
Götterdämmerung - September 8, 12, 16, 20, 23, 27, 30, 1998.
The Ring - June 1999.
- Bonn *Das Rheingold* - September 7, 1997 [first night].
- Brussels *Parsifal* - April 10, 14, 16, 19, 22, 25, 1998.
- Cleveland *Holländer* - December 5, 6, 7, 1997.
- Duisburg Deutsche Oper am Rhein
Tristan und Isolde - June 6, 1998 [first night]
- Liege Royal Walloon Opera
Tannhäuser - May 98 [no actual dates]
- London The Royal Opera - Royal Festival Hall
Parsifal - April 23, 28 May 1, 1998.
- Milwaukee Florentine Opera
Holländer - May 1, 2, 3, 1998.
- New York The Met - 1997/98
Tannhäuser - October 30 November 4, 8, 13, 18, 22, 25, 29.
Lohengrin - new production - March 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 28 April 2.
Die Meistersinger - April 6, 11, 15, 18.
- Orange Théâtre Antique - Festival 1997
Tristan und Isolde - Concert performance - July 19.
- Paris Bastille - 1998
Tristan und Isolde - new production - February 4, 8, 14, 18, 21, 27 March 3, 7.
- St Petersburg White Nights Festival
Parsifal - June 29, 1997.
- San Francisco *Holländer* - September 30 October 4, 8, 12, 17, 21, 25, 1997.
- Savonlinna 1997 Festival -
Tannhäuser - July 7, 11, 16, 19, 22.
Parsifal - August 2, 4.
- Vienna Staatsoper - 1997/98 season
Tristan und Isolde - Sept 5, 8, 13. *Das Rheingold* - Nov 20 March 8, 11 June 4.
Die Walküre - November 23, 26 June 7. *Siegfried* - March 15 June 11.
Götterdämmerung - March 21 June 14. *Holländer* - Dec 3, 6 Jan 31 Feb 3.
Rienzi - new production - December 13, 17, 20, 28 January 3 April 2, 6.
Die Meistersinger - March 25, 29 April 3, 9. *Parsifal* - April 7, 11.
Lohengrin - April 26, 29 May 2. *Tannhäuser* - June 22, 26, 30