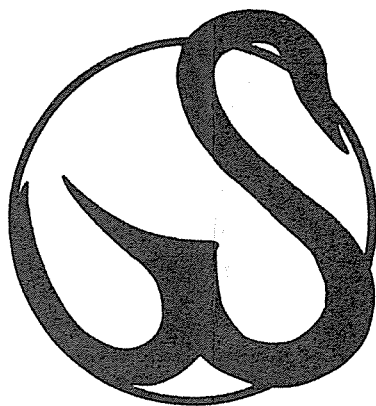


The Wagner Society

IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

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Newsletter

No. 70, March 1998

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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

<i>DATE</i>	<i>EVENT</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>
March 15	Parsifal video: Metropolitan Opera Waltraud Meier, Siegfried Jerusalem	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
April 8	SSO concert: Richard Strauss & Wagner (Group booking now filled)	Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House 8.00 pm
April 19	Antony Ernst: first of a series of lectures on <i>The Ring</i> : "Das Rheingold and Wagner the man"	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
May 24	Richard Wagner birthday luncheon	Ritz Carlton Hotel Macquarie Street 12.00 for 12.30 pm
June 21	Antony Ernst: "Die Walküre and Wagner's musical sources"	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
July 19	Annual General Meeting, followed by Wagnerian Market Day	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
September	<i>to be advised</i>	
October 18	Antony Ernst: "Siegfried and Wagnerian voices - why are they different?"	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
November 15	Antony Ernst: "Götterdämmerung and some production difficulties in staging the <i>Ring</i> "	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm

COMMITTEE

President	Barbara McNulty	9487 1344
Vice President	Paul Lehmann	9552 1424
Vice President and Treasurer	Olive Coonan	9387 6403
Secretary	Barry Walters	9387 6642
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	Clare Hennessy	9747 5664
	Shirley Robertson	9707 2225
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Public Officer	Reg Maloney	

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

We have all been looking forward to 1998 as it promises us a feast of Wagner music, and our first experience has lived up to expectations. Though some of us may argue about details of the production there is consensus that the music of *Tannhäuser* is splendid and that this is a very welcome addition to the repertoire of Opera Australia. We are proud to have been able to provide some support towards the costs of mounting this work and do congratulate artists, orchestra and production staff on their overwhelming success.

It is very gratifying that members are supporting so strongly the various opportunities this year to enjoy the music of the Master. While many of us have *Tannhäuser* in our opera subscriptions, 37 members will join a theatre party in late February. In April 56 of us will attend the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concert of Strauss and Wagner. Twelve members are off to Bayreuth for the second *Ring* cycle in August and in November/December an amazing 99 members and friends are headed to Adelaide for our own *Ring* cycle.

While this level of support more than justifies our existence it does place considerable strain on those on the committee responsible for the arrangements and I would like to ask for your co-operation. Once applications have been received and tickets bought it is not possible to change or cancel the arrangements as the Wagner Society cannot accept any financial responsibility. This particularly applies to Bayreuth though in an emergency we will help you try and find someone wanting tickets.

Our first lecture this year was a resounding success and the many who came to hear John Wegner's talk were impressed with his professionalism and charm. I think we were a little surprised to hear what an exhausting schedule can sometimes be involved and can only marvel that John takes this in his stride and continues to sound better each time we hear him. He is currently singing Scarpia in *Tosca* at the Opera House to great acclaim and he takes our very best wishes with him to Adelaide for Wotan later this year.

The Goethe Institut, who make us very welcome, advised me in December of a substantial increase in their charge for our meetings. Before agreeing to accept the proposed charge the committee is looking at several alternatives as this increase will have a significant impact on our budget. We are loath to increase membership or meeting fees or reduce our sponsorship for performances of Wagnerian works and will therefore have to monitor costs continually. The attendance at the February meeting was very heartening and if members can continue to support meetings at this level we hope to be able to meet all our commitments without any immediate increases.

Our annual lunch is again at the Ritz Carlton Hotel on 24th May, 1998 when we celebrate the birthday of Richard Wagner, so please mark this date in your diaries. We hope our guest speaker will be Bill Gillespie, the Artistic Director of the State Opera of South Australia. This year we have some wonderful prizes for the raffle - a weekend for two at Catersfield in the Hunter Valley, courtesy of Rosemary Cater-Smith and Alec Cater, two opera tickets to an opera of your choice during the winter season of Opera Australia and an autographed copy of the official 1997 Bayreuth Program, a gift to the Society by John Wegner. We do thank John, Rosemary and Alec for their generosity.

In March we will screen a video of *Parsifal*, the New York production with Waltraud Meier, Siegfried Jerusalem and James Levine, and in April Antony Ernst will commence his series of four *Ring* lectures. I do encourage you to come along and please bring your friends as they are always welcome.

BARBARA McNULTY

ADDRESS

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence
The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc
GPO Box 4574 SYDNEY NSW 2001
Telephone: 9487 1344 (Barbara McNulty, President)
E-Mail: bradywav@acay.com.au (Barbara Brady for *Newsletter* items)

All contributions to the *Newsletter* are gratefully received and may be sent to the editor at the above address; copyright permission for extracts from publications will be sought by the editor where appropriate.

NEW MEMBERS

The Society is delighted to welcome the following new members: Ms Susan Gabriel, Mr Robert and Mrs Marie Chalmers, Dr Esther Janssen, Mrs Barbara Carfrae, Ms Sandra Beesley, Ms Cecilia Segura, Ms Melinda Hayton, Ms Simone Ansell, Mr Peter Phillips, Mr David Delany and Mr Alister Wong, Mrs Nanette Conigrave, Dr William Brooks and Mr Alasdair Beck.

DONATIONS

The Society wishes to acknowledge with thanks the generosity of the following members:
Winifred Hinds, and Willi and Hanna Spiller

The Society welcomes all donations and they can be addressed to the Treasurer, Wagner Society in NSW Inc at the above address. Donations are tax-deductible and receipts will be issued.

<i>DONATION FORM</i>
The Treasurer To The Wagner Society in NSW Inc GPO Box 4574, SYDNEY NSW 2001
Please find my cheque/money order attached for \$..... being a donation to the Wagner Society in NSW Inc.
Name:
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PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

The Society acknowledges with thanks receipt of the following publications from Wagner societies and related organisations: *Gesellschaft der Freunde von Bayreuth*, Jahresberich 1997, *Leitmotive*: the journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California, Vol. 11 No.2, Summer 1997; *Newsletter, Richard Wagner Society of South Australia*, No.112, Feb. 1998; *Richard Wagner Nachrichten*: (Östereichische Richard-Wagner-Gesellschaft) Jahrg.9/Folge 4, Okt-Nov. 1997; *Wagner News* (The Wagner Society, UK) No.124, December 1997; *Wagner Notes* (Wagner Society of New York) Vol. xx No.5, December 1997; and *Wollen wir hoffen*, a pamphlet of illustrated essays with an abbreviated 1998 Bayreuth program, sent with the signed good wishes of Wolfgang Wagner and Gudrun Wagner.

SOLTI ON SOLTI ON WAGNER

The following extracts are from the autobiography of Sir Georg Solti: Solti on Solti, London: Chatto & Windus, 1997 and are reproduced with the permission of the publishers (Chatto & Windus and Random House UK Limited)

“During the summer of 1983, I conducted the *Ring* at Bayreuth, in the festival theatre that Wagner himself had created and in which most of the great Wagner conductors had worked. Performing at Bayreuth ought to have been a particularly gratifying experience, but in the end it caused me endless suffering... The festival had two outstanding features: the phenomenal acoustics of its theatre and the excellence of its chorus, directed by Norman Balatsch. But the basic problem at Bayreuth was that the festival’s musical standards were low because there was not enough money to pay for the stars. And in the 1980s this was as true for the orchestra as it was for the singers...

My biggest problem, however, was casting. Twenty years earlier, when I recorded the *Ring*, I had had Nilsson, Hotter and Windgassen at my disposal. The singers available to me in 1983 were not in the same league... But the main difficulty was with Reiner Goldberg, whom I had engaged to sing Siegfried. I had auditioned him first at Covent Garden and then in the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, and both times I had said to myself: “This is the voice. Not since Lauritz Melchior has there been such a natural Heldentenor”. But what I did not know about Goldberg was that he was unable to master text... There was nothing to be done; we had to replace him...

[At this point Solti relates some anecdotes about technical problems] Nevertheless, the main problem remained the singers. It is possible to cast *Meistersinger*, *Tristan* and *Parsifal* these days, although with difficulty, and you can probably cast *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, but you cannot cast the *Ring*. I am not nostalgic about the old days. Generally speaking, Mozart operas are sung better today than in previous generations, and many works by Verdi, Puccini and others can be cast better than ever. Where, three generations ago, was there a tenor with Domingo’s versatility, musicality and intelligence? And today there are many promising young singers, from Ben Heppner to Bryn Terfel and René Pape, from Angela Gheorghiu to Renée Fleming. But with respect to the *Ring* I stand firm in my opinion. There is no dramatic soprano capable of singing Brünnhilde, no Heldentenor capable of singing Siegfried, and no Wagner bass-baritone capable of singing Wotan as the parts should be sung.

What then should Wolfgang Wagner do: Close the Festspielhaus? On the contrary, he ought to open it further. Wagner intended it as a centre not only for his own works but for German opera in general. Why not perform Weber’s operas, Strauss’s operas, Henze’s operas, Pfitzner’s *Palestrina*, Hindemith’s *Mathis der Maler*? Abolish Wagnerism as a religion and let some fresh air into the theatre, as Wagner wanted. The Wagner Festival as such has outlived its time and new thinking is needed.”

[After relating the story of the legendary 1958-65 Ring recording, and surveying some of the operas, Solti concludes:]

“Today we tend to look too much into the psychological motivation and character defects of the great composers at the expense of really listening to the music. I am not interested in Wagner’s political or philosophical ideas, or his betrayal of his friends, including his father-in-law, Franz Liszt. What interests me is the creation of his music - for example, the love motif of *Tristan*, the miracle and completeness of the first four bars, now regarded as a bible of love and beauty. I understand that he wrote several versions before this motif occurred to him - a harmonic and melodic miracle. To me, anybody who can create such beauty, whether he be half-Jewish, anti-Semitic, revolutionary, liberal or royalist, is first and foremost a musical genius and will remain so as long as our civilization lasts.”

THE RING DISC

Your editor has acquired her own copy and is now enjoying this amazing instrument. Buying the disc was easy but first we had to acquire a new personal computer with Windows 95, a Pentium processor and, of course, a CD-ROM drive.

Previous issues of the newsletter have foreshadowed some contents of the *Ring Disc*. This is what you get: the music starts and after a few seconds it launches into *Das Rheingold*. Across the screen are three parallel bands, a bit squashed unless one opts for two out of the three. The middle band is the score, synchronised with the music you hear; above it is a running commentary on the current scene, characters, music and leitmotifs, and along the bottom are the lyrics in German and English. As for the music, the sound is quite acceptable bearing in mind the effects of audio compression and the small inferior speakers which are part of a multimedia kit. Certainly the voices (Nilsson, Windgassen, Flagstad, Fischer-Dieska, Hotter) come across more truly than the orchestra. But it is not for the sound you purchase this disc - you can get the remastered Solti set now - it is for all the search tools and links from essays to music in small or large bites that are immensely helpful in one's understanding of the *Ring*.

There are tools for ranging through the music, selecting one opera or one scene in a particular act, and there are keys to moving backwards and forwards and accessing the hundreds of essays, images and musical excerpts. A contents list gives access to the following: Synopses, Characters, Leitmotifs, Symbols, Images, Bibliography, Credits. The essays are short, informative and extremely clearly written. Taking the group of leitmotifs for example, there are some one hundred offered (some descriptive terms for these familiar through other Wagner scholars and others not). Click on Valhalla in the list of leitmotifs and there is a short essay on the Valhalla theme interspersed with occasional figures of music notes (semi-quavers). These are the links to the music, and a click on one of these figures will bring in the appropriate leitmotif in two or three bars of music. As this point there is also the option, instead of settling for a couple of bars, of going right over to the recording at the point of the leitmotif and remaining there. I found this example particularly helpful because at the end of the essay on Valhalla there is an explanation of how the initial segment of the Valhalla motif grew out of the Ring motif during the scenic transformation between *Rheingold* Scenes 1 and 2. Each step in the transformation is illustrated by a musical excerpt. No excuse now for getting mixed up between the Ring and Valhalla.

The illustrations are mainly photos from the San Francisco Opera and the bibliography is a good standard list of writings on the *Ring*. This is not only a user-friendly CD-Rom, but a brilliant resource for the study of Wagner's *Ring*. At this point I will extract essential information from the rolling credits at the end of the disc (there doesn't seem any way of making them stand still or printing the screen). The *Ring Disc: an Interactive Guide to Wagner's Ring Cycle*. Produced by Media Cafe Productions, 1997. Author and creator Monte Stone. Additional character essays J. K. Holman. Recording courtesy of the Decca Record Company. More information on the Web : www.ringdisc.com. Available in Sydney from State of the Art Publishing, PO Box 243 Kings Cross NSW 2011, phone (02) 9360 7755 or Fax (02) 9360 7740, or E-mail: editor@stateart.com.au, or visit the Web at www.stateart.com.au. Price A\$175.00.

WAGNER ON THE WEB

I am exploring very tentatively the vast array of information on the Internet. I was referred to a site called *Wagner On The Web* which lists coming performances, and provides performance reviews, links to other sites, book reviews, news group archives, selected CDS and CD reviews, and an index to Wagner's Life and Music (biography, operas, other works). There is much more to it, and it is updated regularly. To view the site go to: <http://www.zazz.com.wagner>
Ed.

RESULT OF VIDEO SURVEY

Ten answers to our December Newsletter questionnaire were received which seems to suggest that the screening of videos has appeal to only a minority of our members (though perhaps this proportion should be calculated at a higher rate dependent on the number of members who regularly attend our meetings).

As to the most desired works, 100 per cent would like to see a *Ring* cycle, the most requested being the Bayreuth Kupfer or Metropolitan, NY (current production). To the other repertoire there was a much smaller response but the Munich and Savonlinna *Holländer* (30% each) the Bayreuth *Meistersinger* (30%) and Vienna *Lohengrin* (30%) were the favourite requests. Too late for the survey but much appreciated is the offer by Cecilia Segura, a new member, to lend from her collection a Metropolitan *Parsifal* with Jerusalem and Meier, a Metropolitan *Lohengrin* with Hofmann and Marton, and a Bayreuth (1980) *Lohengrin* with Hofmann and Connell, all of which sound enticing to me. Thanks to those who participated.

SHIRLEY ROBERTSON

(As members will note from the program table on the front page, we have virtually filled up the 1998 program so these videos will have to be considered in 1999). *Ed.*

WAGNER AT THE MILLENNIUM - ADELAIDE SYMPOSIUM

The Musicological Society of Australia, SA Chapter Inc, and The Richard Wagner Society of SA Inc will be holding an International Wagner Symposium in Adelaide on the occasion of the first complete Australian performance of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Entitled "Wagner at the Millennium", the symposium will be held at the University of Adelaide from Wednesday 25th to Friday 27th November, 1998. These dates fall between the end of the first cycle of the *Ring* and the beginning of the second cycle.

The theme of the symposium will emphasise new ways of interpreting and understanding Wagner, and will include keynote addresses and panel discussions by leading Wagner authorities.

Registration will be from 9 am on the Wednesday followed by an opening plenary session at 10 and papers following thereafter. A reception and concert is planned for the evening. Thursday will again begin with a plenary session and further papers; a round table is planned for the afternoon, with a dinner in the evening. The symposium will conclude Friday at lunchtime with further paper sessions and a closing plenary session in the morning.

Cost is \$140 for those registering before 30th May and \$180 for those registering after 30 May. (Details of concessions not yet known). To request a registration form, write to The International Wagner Symposium Organising Committee Inc, c/- Dept of Music Studies, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide SA 5005. Facs (08) 8303 4414, or John Phillips, The Secretary: Ph./Facs: (08) 8395 5332. E-mail: johngreg@maxisp.com.au

GOOD NEWS FROM SINGER ADELE JOHNSTON

Society member Adele Johnston, soprano, who won the 1997 City of Melbourne Song Recital Award, has been awarded as part of her prize a Sydney concert and her own CD, both of which members might like to share. The Concert is sponsored by Musica Viva and will be held at Government House, Sydney on Saturday 21 March 1998 at 3.00 pm. It is entitled *Great Classics in Recital* and Adele, accompanied by Fiona McCabe, will be performing songs and lieder of Haydn, Wagner, Korngold, Britten and Donaudy. The CD is due to be released by MOVE Records later next month and will be available in major music stores. It is entitled *Wagner and Korngold Lieder*. In it Adele will be singing the Wesendonck Lieder and other Wagner lieder (many of which were presented by Arthur Carter in his program: "Wagner the Songwriter"). Her accompanist is Andrew Greene.

CD NEWS: My spies at Polygram inform me that the response to the remastered set of the *Solti Ring* has been far beyond expectations. I have had a listen to it and have noticed a significant improvement in the sound quality. There is some reduction of hiss and the sonics are somewhat clearer and better defined. *Rheingold* is now on 2 discs. Attractive packaging and restoration of the original artwork on the covers. Owners of the previous CD issue can hang on to their copies unless they have sophisticated audio equipment. If this is not the case the sonic difference is likely to be minimal.

BMG have reissued a *Ring* cycle featuring the Staatskapelle Dresden conducted by Marek Janowski. Recorded in 1981, it had the merit of being the first digital recording of this work. Although the balance of the sound is natural, there is a haziness and lack of clarity that may disturb some listeners. Of the individual sets, *Walküre* would be my preference as it features the youthful voices of Siegfried Jerusalem and Jesse Norman as Sigmund and Sieglinde. Jeannine Altmeyer makes a dependable if somewhat plain Brünnhilde and the Wotan sung by Theo Adam is authoritative but the voice betrays signs of unsteadiness. Janowski's conducting is reliable rather than inspired. The impecunious will note that the 4 disc sets cost a modest \$36.

On further matters fiscal, let it be noted that EMI have drastically reduced the prices of some of their opera sets. The famous Furtwängler/Flagstad *Tristan* now sells for around \$50 (down from \$120) and the Kempe *Meistersinger* as well as the legendary 1936 Flagstad/Melchior *Tristan* are going for a virtual song. Another *Tristan* due for release in the near future hails from a 1943 Metropolitan Opera live broadcast. Starring Melchior, Traubel, Thorborg and Kipnis with Leinsdorf conducting. Fabulous cast and the sound is claimed to be "superb". The cost is a mere \$30. Naxos 8.11008-10.

IVOR ZETLER

BOOK NEWS: *Wagner Handbook* edited by Ulrich Muller and Peter Wapnewski is a treasure trove of informative and stimulating essays on the composer. Amongst the many chapters one may read discussion of the individual musical works, surveys of performance questions over the years, Wagner's influence on psychology, politics, art and film. In fact it seems that any subject related to the composer can be souced in this tome. Although I cannot pretend to have read all 640 pages, this book has served as an invaluable reference text and deserves to belong in any self respecting collection of books on the composer. Published by Harvard and best purchased via the Internet at Amazon.com. I paid only A\$55.

IVOR ZETLER

PERSONAL NEWS: A somewhat belated mention of a truly memorable lunch held in August last year at the home of Kevin Kelleher. It reunited the group which attended the 1996 Bayreuth festival. The splendor of the event would undoubtedly have appealed to Herr Wagner given its extravagance and expense. Proceedings began with French champagne in the outside winter chill. The thirteen guests were then serenaded by a five piece brass ensemble who played extracts from the *Ring* positioned on the upstairs balcony in the appropriate Bayreuth fashion. A splendid five course lunch was then served accompanied by copious quantities of the finest wine, including a substantial number of bottles of vintage Grange Hermitage. The eating area was bedecked with large flags of the city of Bayreuth.

Although the guest of honour, Christopher Hogwood, cannot make claims to have Wagner as one of his favored composers, his presence added an extra lustre to the occasion. Needless to say, the guests returned home in taxis!

IVOR ZETLER

WAGNER AROUND THE WORLD.

The first report is from one of the Society's own members; the next group is written by music critics and published in the London press or the Opera magazine, while the third group is extracted from reports on the Internet contributed by members of the public.

Notes on Deutsche Oper Ring, 1st Cycle 1997

This Götz Friedrich production has been going since 1984 and is still very effective. The 'time tunnel' is the central idea and remains in place throughout. The great depth of the DO stage plus what must have been mirror effects gives an illusion of at least 100 metre depth and even infinite depth. It does look for all the world like the Washington DC metro however, particularly the ribbing of the tube and its dimensions. Often the singers are placed a long way back, but on occasions come right to the front (Siegfried's death for example). Some telling effects for me were the morgue scene on the Walküre rock where the really fiercesome warrior maidens checked over the bodies of their dead heroes on post mortem room trolleys, the moving Funeral March where Siegfried's body remained in front centre stage throughout the march and the general use of depth effects where for example Siegmund and Sieglinde could be seen running away and Wotan storming off.

The conductor Jiri Kout had a firm grasp and pace and the orchestra was excellent. I note many of its members were invited to Bayreuth in 1997. Woodwind and brass totally in control. The orchestra pit is very well covered and the players and conductor can't be seen at all from the front stalls, so it was possible to focus entirely on the stage.

It was good to see Rene Kollo, who at 60 still runs and jumps around like a boy and his acting generally is marvellous. The voice is still there too. I had not seen Hildegard Behrens (Brunnhilde) before but she too looks marvellous and acts and sings well. Hanna Schwartz received special acclaim as Fricka and Waltraute (*Götterdämmerung*).

A feature of Wagner in Germany is that it is just another opera, and all the Bayreuth hoo ha is absent. Indeed I notice the German musical press tends to poo poo Bayreuth somewhat. Wagner is de-sanctified in Berlin in particular. The Deutsch Oper put on a ballet Ring um den Ring, (Bejart), a one night arrangement of the Ring operas (Loriot) and a children's one hour version "Klein Siegfried" in the foyer (Roesler). The principal singers of the Ring cycles are in this.

DR JIM LEIGH

Extract from *Opera* (UK), December 1997

Argentina - a Siegfried for today

Buenos Aires:

With the new production of *Siegfried* on June 8, third instalment of the Teatro Colón's ongoing *Ring* cycle, it was a wonderful surprise to hear a Siegfried who was almost ideal: the Dane Stig Andersen, a captivating, spontaneous actor who looks every inch the young hero, and who sings with sonority, ring, freedom and bravura in the high moments - vocally he recalls Set Svanholm, even if he has slightly less volume. Undoubtedly he is the Siegfried for today, but unfortunately he is already too busy to return here as our Siegfried in the 1998 *Götterdämmerung*...

EDUARDO ARNOSI

Extract from *The Times*, London Wed. 4 Feb.

Aces on the second set

Die Walküre, Amsterdam

The Netherlands Oper's new *Ring* cycle reached its second instalment at the Muziektheater on Saturday... Any notion that George Tsy-pin's four-stage, metallic *Rheingold* set was going to serve

for all the operas was swiftly dispelled. A wholly new wooden, tilted circular stage has been built thrusting far out into the stalls area, with a square segment removed to accommodate the Netherlands Philharmonic more or less where the real stage would be - the exact opposite of Wagner's ideal of an "invisible orchestra".

This *Walküre* is far more gripping than the slightly bland, technology-dominated *Rheingold*, not least because the singers are much more assured. John Bröcheler's Wotan, especially, is transformed from the anonymous deity of the prologue into an ideally shifty, bullying autocrat, and he sings with a healthy young tone. John Keyes (Siegmund) is infinitely more at ease on stage than when he first appeared in the Richard Jones ring in Glasgow and, as always, Nadine Secunde gives her all as Sieglinde. Jeannine Altmeyer's Brünnhilde is as athletic of appearance as of voice.. The one big problem with the unfolding cycle is Hartmut Haenchen's desperately ordinary conducting."

RODNEY MILNES

Extract from *The Sunday Times*, February 15

Unheroic Failures

This article begins by surveying forthcoming concert performances of Wagner in London.

"To see Wagner properly - or perhaps I should say improperly - presented in a theatre, the best bets might be Paris or Amsterdam. This month the Opéra-Bastille presents a new production of *Tristan und Isolde* by the Norwegian director Stein Winge, while the Netherlands Opera at Amsterdam's Muziektheater has taken a further step towards a complete *Ring* Cycle with Pierre Audi's new staging of *Die Walküre*. Both productions, alas, underline not only the difficulty of finding riveting contemporary metaphors for Wagner's music dramas, but also the near impossibility of finding singers to do full justice to most heroic roles...

[*After comments on Tristan,*]...Musically, there is not much to be said for the Amsterdam *Walküre* either. Conducted by the pedestrian Hartmut Haenchen, the great emotional and dramatic peaks of the music drama register nil on the richter scale. The Netherlands Opera cannot secure the world's top Wagnerian singers, but instead of seeking out the coming generation they have contented themselves with a bunch of Bayreuth has-beens from the 1970s and 1980s and some never-weres. In the former category fall the Sieglinde and Brünnhilde of Nadine Secunde and Jeannine Altmeyer... John Keyes's Siegmund was an improvement on his performance for Scottish Opera in the 1980s, but he is a stolid actor and ungainly singer, while both Reinhild Runkel and John Bröcheler sound past their primes as Fricka and Wotan..."

HUGH CANNING

Extract from *Opera* (UK), December 1997

The Flying Dutchman

English national opera at the London Coliseum, October 15 (A month after the first night, this review is catching up with some cast changes).

(It was announced that Matthew Best singing the Dutchman had a throat infection but would sing anyway).. "Best himself radiated a statuesque ruggedness. He marshalled his resources carefully, singing perhaps less that full out during ensembles so that the long solo passages might emerge with elemental force. It's a big voice, as Wagner insists, hard-edged if that's not taken in a derogatory way, yet able to convince us that what we are hearing is song, not declamation. Not every Dutchman manages that. This was Best's ENO debut. I don't know why he has taken so long to reach the Coliseum, but I hope he'll be back soon, and often".

NICK KIMBERLEY

The items on this page are from the web site Wagner On The Web: <http://www.zazz.com/wagner>
Reflections on Tannhäuser as performed at the Metropolitan Opera on December 30, 1977
“My first attendance at a *Tannhäuser* performance was during the initial season of the still-current Metropolitan production. The new *Tannhäuser* had opened on December 22, 1977 with much fanfare and excitement, being highly praised by almost every critic who saw it. Without a doubt, it was the hottest ticket of that opera season.

My memory is somewhat hazy after twenty years, but two things stand out in my mind: the wonderful staging, and the magnificent performance of Grace Bumbry. As an alluring Venus in a lovely orange dress, Ms. Bumbry sang and performed the role in a manner that might not have been equalled at the Metropolitan since then. I wished to volunteer for a stint in the Venusberg. All of the singing was superb for that matter: James McCracken in the lead role and Leonie Rysanek as Elizabeth. The performance seemed at least as good as anything that had ever been put onto vinyl, and there was none of the controversy that surrounds today's performances.

For the record, here is the cast list: Conductor, James Levine, Venus, Grace Bumbry, Tannhäuser, James McCracken, shepherd, Kathleen Battle, Landgraf, John Macurdy, Wolfram, Bernd Weikl, Elisabeth, Leonie Rysanek.”

JOSEPH M. ERBACHER

Reviews of Tannhäuser as performed at the Metropolitan Opera on November 22, 1997.

There were also 3 reviews on the Internet for the opening night on October 30 with some different artists, but there is only room below to extract the comments about one singer.

“I am elated to report that the Met - and the world - finally has a singer capable of doing full justice to the role of Tannhäuser. John Frederic West gave a masterful account of the role yesterday...Best of all he got stronger with each Act, and one must applaud his ability to pace and judge this show. His singing belied the difficulty of the role, so firmly did he have it in hand!”

MARK STENROOS

“John Frederic West: What can you say?. In Acts 1 and 2 you knew you were seeing a fine singer giving a very good performance, but nothing prepared you for the magnificence of Act Three. From his entrance until the last notes of the opera, I was totally mesmerized. His singing was of an order that I simply have never heard in the role, his tortured manic, guilt ridden, portrayal was brilliant, and, for the first time in my life, I cared about Heinrich. I don't think we have heard a tenor who could really do justice to this role in any of our live experience...”

BOB RIDEOUT

BOOK REVIEW

Wagner's Ring: A Listener's Companion & Concordance by J. K. Holman. Amadeus Press, 1997. *From this comprehensive review by Joseph M. Erbacher just two important features of the book are reproduced here:*

“The final chapter, 128 pages in length, shows how the story of the *Ring* is told by the words. This seems to represent the first extensive English-language concordance to the *Ring*: an alphabetical listing of 169 principal words that appear in the operas, with every occurrence of each key word given in the context in which it is used.

Beginners are always wondering which *Ring* recordings they should start with. An annotated discography at the end of the book provides excellent overall reviews of twelve important recordings of *Ring* cycles currently available on CD”

JOSEPH M. ERBACHER

The Ravens Reporting, compiled by Camron Dyer

(Note: this listing no longer cumulates and should be read in conjunction with earlier Ravens)

- Adelaide ***The Ring*** - 3 cycles in 1998.
November 18, 19, 21, 24; November 27, 28, December 1, 4; December 6, 7, 9, 12.
- Amsterdam ***Siegfried*** - June 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 1998.
Götterdämmerung - September 8, 12, 16, 20, 23, 27, 30, 1998.
- Antwerp ***Tristan und Isolde*** - April 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 1998.
- Berlin Deutsche Oper
Ballet - Ring um den Ring - May 7,8,9,10
Meistersinger - May 17,21,24
Holländer - July 2,5
- Berlin Kommische Oper
Rienzi (restored production) April 4,12,30
- Budapest Magyar Allami Operahaz
Holländer - April 1, 3 June 17, 26, 1998.
The Ring - 2 cycles. May 10, 11, 12, 14; 15, 16, 18, 20, 1998.
Götterdämmerung - additional performances - May 1, 3, 5, 8, 1998.
Erkel Theatre
Parsifal - April 10, 14, 1998.
- Buenos Aires ***Götterdämmerung*** - May 24, 27, 30 June 2, 1998.
- Flagstaff Arizona Opera
The Ring - 2 cycles. June 1, 3, 5, 7; 8, 10, 12, 14, 1998.
- Gent ***Tristan und Isolde*** - March 18, 21, 24, 1998.
- Helsinki ***Die Walküre*** - June 11, 14, 1998.
Siegfried - May 29 June 2, 5, 8, 1998.
- Houston ***Holländer*** - October 23, 25, 28, 31 November 3, 6, 8, 1998.
- Leipzig ***Tristan und Isolde*** - June 4, 11, 1998.
- Liege ***Tannhäuser*** - May 15, 17, 21, 23, 26, 1998.
- London Royal Opera
The Ring - September 28,29, October 1,3
Parsifal - March 8, 29, 1998.
- Mannheim ***Tannhäuser*** - March 28, 31 April 3, 9, 15, 19, 1998.
- Melbourne ***Tannhäuser*** - June 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 1998.
- Palermo ***Parsifal*** - August 3, 6, 8, 1998.
- Salzburg ***Parsifal*** - August 3, 6, 8, 1998.
- San Francisco ***Tristan und Isolde*** - October 10, 14, 18, 21, 26, 30 November 6, 1998.
- Savonlinna ***Tannhäuser*** - July 4, 8, 13, 16, 21, 1998.

REASONS FOR BEING ON TIME FOR OUR FUNCTIONS

- Sometimes we have a very long program and must start promptly
- The Society is under an obligation to the Goethe Institut to station someone in the entrance foyer or keep it locked - it can never be left unattended

We understand that members and visitors can easily be delayed for traffic or other reasons, therefore when there is a 1.00pm start although we will not station anyone at the door continuously, we will be happy to send someone down to the front door at 1.15pm and again at 1.30pm to admit latecomers.