



WAGNER  
SOCIETY  
NSW

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

# WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 29

# 156

MARCH 2020

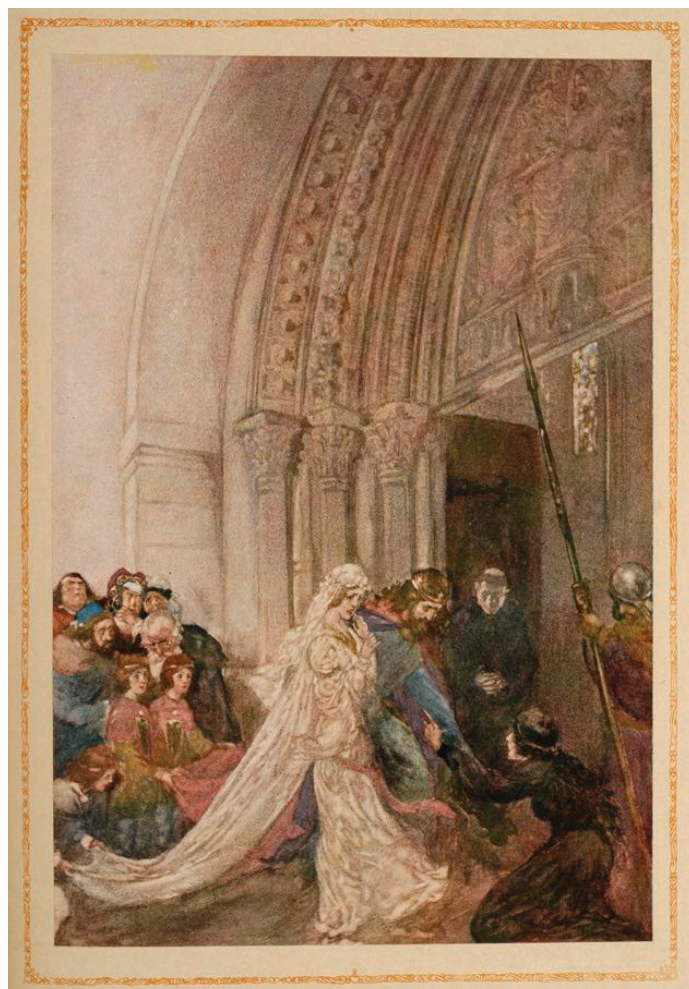


Illustration by Willi Pogany from the book *The Tale of Lohengrin* pub Harrap 1913

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I trust everyone is safe after the terrible fires, smoke storms and floods. (Remind anyone of *Götterdämmerung*?)

I'm delighted to confirm that our esteemed Patron, Maestro Simone Young AO will become Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in early 2022.

The Society started off 2020 with a very fine concert on 27 February in memory of our late Past President the Honourable Justice Jane Mathews AO. It came about due to the generosity of her friend Maestro Anthony Negus. He and his wife Carmen and our Artists' Liaison Leona Geeves did a wonderful job organizing 5 outstanding young singers performing romantic works accompanied by Anthony. Attendance was excellent and it was a good example of the Society's aims in action – promoting the music of Wagner and his contemporaries and fostering young talent. Proceeds from the concert will go into our sponsorship fund. In the last year the Society gave over \$20,000 to young performers to help with travel and tuition. This money has been raised from subscriptions and profits from the many events we hold plus generous donations from members. Thank you everyone for supporting our aims.

2020 is a very exciting year for Wagner lovers with performances of *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold* in Melbourne and *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring* in

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## SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

To promote the music of Richard Wagner and his contemporaries and to encourage a wider understanding of their work.  
To support the training of young Wagnerian or potential Wagnerian performers from NSW.



# MEMORIAL CONCERT FOR THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE JANE MATHEWS AO

HELD AT 7.30PM AT ST COLUMBA, OCEAN ST, WOOLLAHRA  
ON 27 FEBRUARY 2020



Emily Taylor, Hamish James, Laura Scanduzzi, Eleanor Greenwood, Timothy Nunn and Anthony Negus



Over 90 members and friends attended



Fidelio Quartet with Emily, Hamish, Timothy and Laura



Leona Geeves presented all the artists with Brangayne wine



Relaxing after the performance

## FOR YOUR DIARY

2020

16 – 29 May 2020	<i>Lohengrin</i> . New OA/La Monnaie co-production conducted by Johannes Fritzch	Melbourne
2, 5, 13 Aug 2020	<i>Das Rheingold</i> Melbourne Opera's first instalment of a complete Ring. Conducted by Anthony Negus. Directed by Suzanne Chaundy	Melbourne
28, 31 Oct 2020	Opera Queensland presents semi-staged <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> at QPAC	Brisbane
10 Nov – 5 Dec 2020	Opera Australia presents 3 cycles of a new Ring at QPAC	Brisbane

## COMING SOCIETY EVENTS 2020 - SUNDAY STARTING TIMES MAY VARY

PLEASE CHECK THE SCHEDULE ONLINE FOR DETAILS

DATE	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	LOCATION
22 March	<b>12.30 DVD <i>Die Walkure</i> Act 1   2.00 Antony Ernst on the <i>Ring</i></b>	Goethe Institut
19 April	<b>1.00 DVD Ludwig II castles in Bavaria   2.00 Tabatha McFadyen</b>	Goethe Institut
10 May	<b>1.00 AGM   2.00 Peter Bassett on <i>Lohengrin</i>   3.30 Wagner's birthday drinks</b>	Goethe Institut
26 July	<b>12.30 DVD TBC   2.00 Warwick Fyfe talking about his first Wotan</b>	Goethe Institut
Aug	<b>12.30 TBC</b>	
27 Sept	<b>2.00 Special event to celebrate 40 years since Wagner lovers met in Bayreuth and agreed to start a Wagner Society in Australia. Details TBC</b>	TBC
18 Oct	<b>12.30 DVD TBC   2.00 David Larkin on the <i>Ring</i></b>	Goethe Institut
8 Nov	<b>Christmas party with special guest Maestro. TBC</b>	St Columba

Advice about changes to the Program will be emailed to people who have given their email addresses to the Society's Webmaster; the latest updates will also be available on the Society's webpage: [www.wagner.org.au](http://www.wagner.org.au).  
Admission to each event will be \$25 a Member, and \$30 each non-Member, \$10 (Full-time students) Seminar/Concert \$40 (m), \$45 (n-m), \$20 (fts).

**Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)**

### DONATIONS RECEIVED SINCE DECEMBER 2019

I and B Brady, Clair Brauer, Dr A Byrne,  
John de Luca, Dr S M Kelly, Mailis Wakeham

**Our thanks for the generous donations to help the Society's objectives.**

### WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE DECEMBER 2019:

R Neville Pollard [1239], Robert Foster [1240],  
Derek Watt [1241], Andrew Byrne & Allan Gill [1242], Anna Bradshaw [1243]

### QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT continued

Brisbane. The Society is discussing ways we might be able to help with on-going sponsorship of young NSW performers taking part in the Melbourne Opera's *Ring*, which is being conducted by Anthony Negus.

Although we in Sydney are missing out on Wagner Opera performances the Society is providing backup with talks about the works plus other interesting recitals and talks by singers and creatives. Details may be found in the Quarterly.

This month we have the ever-popular Antony Ernst followed in April by the exciting singer/director Tabatha McFadyen – not to be missed.

Our Annual General Meeting is coming up in May and we are hoping some members will step up and nominate for a position on the Committee as some current members will be retiring. You will receive emails about this in due course. You need to be a financial member to attend so please ensure your membership fees are up to date.

After the AGM Peter Bassett will talk about *Lohengrin* followed by bubbles and cake to celebrate Wagner's birthday. I hope to see you there.

I was saddened to learn of the passing at age 85 of Janet Wayland, a proud member of the founding days of the Wagner Society in NSW with Len Hansen. The Society has sent its condolences to the family.

**President Colleen Chesterman**

## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear members, I hope you enjoy this March edition. I thank the members who regularly contribute notes, ideas, photos and reviews. I wish to thank a new contributor, Ross Whitelaw, for his enthusiastic review of the Singapore *Die Walküre*.

Also thanks to Peter Bassett for his piece on the Wagner performances in Brisbane later this year. (This article was published in the Queensland Wagner Society's newsletter in January). Peter will be talking to us about *Lohengrin* after our AGM in May. I'm sure readers will enjoy Honorary Life Member Past President Roger Cruikshank's witty review of Simon Callow's book *Inside Wagner*. Well worth the wait, thanks Roger

**Mike Day**

THE WAGNER SOCIETY  
IN QUEENSLAND  
REGISTERED CHARITY



Griffith UNIVERSITY  
Queensland Conservatorium  
Queensland, Australia

During the 2020 Brisbane performances of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Aida*  
**LECTURES AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS**

2 EVENTS DURING EACH RING CYCLE  
at the IAN HANGER RECITAL HALL,  
QUEENSLAND CONSERVATORIUM, SOUTH BANK

11 NOV, 20 NOV & 30 NOV 2020

## WAGNER'S HEROES

10am - 1pm Tickets \$30 (Includes Morning Tea)

## GREAT CONTEMPORARIES Wagner & Verdi

Includes a performance by Stephen Emmerson  
of Liszt's transcription from Verdi's *Aida*  
2:30pm - 4pm Tickets \$20



Lecturers Dr Peter Bassett and  
Professor Stephen Emmerson will be joined by  
distinguished panellists for Wagner's Heroes.

**BOOKINGS** [www.qtix.com.au](http://www.qtix.com.au)  
Further details at: [www.wagnerqld.com.au](http://www.wagnerqld.com.au)



## WAGNER'S HEROES

**Dr Peter Bassett** and **Professor Stephen Emmerson** will speak on Richard Wagner's approach to his heroic characters in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and, by extension, his other operatic works. How were these characters originally conceived and how did they evolve during the many years that it took to complete the *Ring*? How are they dealt with in the Brisbane production? What does the music and drama tell us about both male and female heroism and the continuing relevance of this great work?

After Morning Tea, the final session will take the form of a panel discussion focusing on aspects of the Brisbane production and involving distinguished commentators and members of the *Ring* production team.

### Great Contemporaries - Wagner & Verdi

This afternoon session will focus on the contemporary but very different approaches of Richard Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi to the opera stages of their day, their influence beyond their own immediate circles and the extent to which they were aware of each other's achievements. In 1870/71 Verdi was composing *Aida* and Wagner was nearing the end of the *Ring*. In what ways, if any, did they take account of each other's ideas, and how did they relate to their own social and political environments?

Stephen Emmerson will perform the beautiful piano transcription by Franz Liszt of the *Danza Sacre e Duetto Finale* (1879) from Verdi's *Aida*.

## REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS

### THE MEMORIAL CONCERT FOR THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE JANE MATHEWS AO

Held at 7.30pm at St Columba, Ocean St, Woollahra on 27 February 2020

In late 2019 Maestro **Anthony Negus** had very generously offered to contribute a musical evening in honour of his recently deceased close friend and the Society's Past President **Jane Mathews** and it came to fruition in a remarkable concert on 27 February. Anthony was greatly assisted by his wife **Carmen Jakobi** and the programme was selflessly organised by the Wagner Society's past Vice president and recently appointed Artists' Liaison **Leona Geeves**, who recruited five exceptional singers. Anthony's commitment to nurturing young voices is very admirable and the Wagner Society in NSW is proud of the sponsorship and support it continues to give to young dramatic singers.

**Eleanor Greenwood** is now well established and we were honoured by her participation. She demonstrated her solid technique, beauty of tone and commitment to bringing out the full meaning of her characters' emotions.

**Laura Scandizzo** was one of Jane's favourite singers and she never disappoints with her strong stage presence and confidence. She brought the concert to an ecstatic conclusion with Isolde's *Liebestod*. This had followed on without a break from the Schubert Adagio played by Anthony – a fascinating and unexpected combination.

**Emily Turner** stepped in to perform at very short notice when Pamela Andrews was indisposed. Emily has a delightful bright and fresh voice and performed Marx's paean to post-coital bliss with aplomb.



**Hamish James** is a real treasure – barely into his twenties he broke our hearts with his deeply felt interpretations of the Strauss lieder.

**Timothy Nunn** took control of the hall, equally at home with the passion of the Song to the Evening Star and the song by inebriated Father from *Hänsel und Gretel*

**In conclusion;** Nearly 100 members and friends were treated to a concert that would have greatly pleased Jane – sharing wonderful music and encouraging the next generation. Thanks again to Anthony, Carmen, Leona, Eleanor, Laura, Emily, Hamish and Timothy.

**Mike Day**

### ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

**MAESTRO ANTHONY NEGUS** studied clarinet and piano at the Royal College of Music London and gained a music degree at Oxford University. He has worked with many opera companies and has a wide opera and concert repertoire. Working with the legendary Wagnerian conductor and coach Sir Reginald Goodall in the 1970s and 80s was a formative and highly influential period which led to his conducting *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde* for *Welsh National Opera*. He has conducted *Parsifal* for the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra in Wellington, and in Lübeck, Germany; after working with Vladimir Jurowski on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* for Glyndebourne. Over many years as Music Director of Longborough Festival Opera, he has established himself as one of the most perceptive and original conductors of the Wagner repertoire, culminating in the highly acclaimed Ring Cycle in 2013, followed by *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Die Zauberflöte*. The 2017 revival of *Tristan und Isolde* prompted unprecedented critical and audience acclaim.

In Melbourne, Anthony Negus conducted Melbourne Opera's *Tristan und Isolde* in 2018, *The Flying Dutchman* in 2019, *Fidelio* in February this year and returns to conduct *Das Rheingold* in August.

Award-winning Soprano **ELEANOR GREENWOOD** has sung on stage and on radio, in the UK, Europe, Australia, and throughout China. A graduate of London's **Royal Academy of Music Opera School**, and of the **Australian National University**, she has performed various roles and concerts, and is a winner of the **Sydney Eisteddfod** Opera Scholarship Competition. In opera productions Eleanor has been broadcast on **BBC Radio 3**, **Schweizer Radio DRS**, **RTE Radio**, Ireland and **ABC Classic FM**.

The Wagner Society in NSW sponsored Eleanor for Wagner coaching in Berlin several years ago.

Soprano **LAURA SCANDIZZO'S** operatic roles include *Ariadne* in *Ariadne auf Naxos* for Land of Enchantment Opera in New Mexico, USA and *Donna Anna* in *Don Giovanni* at the **Varna International Opera Academy, Bulgaria**. Laura is an alumna of the **Pacific Opera Young Artist program** and she has performed with the **Opera Australia** chorus in *King Roger*, *Handa Opera's Carmen*, *The Nixon Tapes*, *Verdi Requiem*, *Aida*, *Turandot*, and she joins OA again for *La Juive*, *Roberto Devereux*, *Aida*, and *Eugene Onegin* in the 2020 Winter Season. She is also honoured to be the 2020 recipient of the **Prue Kennard Career Development Scholarship**.

**The Wagner Society in NSW** sponsored Laura at the **Varna International Opera Academy, Bulgaria** and assisted with her involvement with covering *Ariadne* at the **Lisa Gasteen National Opera School**.

Soprano **EMILY TURNER** has performed as a soloist in Opera Queensland's production of *Mozart Airborne*, and in the chorus for *Don Giovanni*, *Madama Butterfly*, *La Traviata* and *The Perfect American*. Her operatic roles include Gretel & The Dew Fairy (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Barbarina (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Yum (*The Mikado*), Suor Dolcina (*Suor Angelica*) and Harry (*Albert Herring*). Emily was a Young Artist for the Pacific Opera Program in 2019, 2018 and 2017 and an Emerging Artist for Coast Opera Australia in 2019. Emily holds a Graduate Diploma of Music Studies (Opera) from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music.

Tenor **HAMISH JAMES** recently graduated from the **Sydney Conservatorium of Music** with a Bachelor of Music (Performance) where he was awarded the Bud Brown Memorial Scholarship for opera studies. In 2019 Hamish was a member of the Associate Artist Program with **Pacific Opera**. Singing as a boy soprano at a young age, Hamish discovered his passion for singing through the **St Andrew's Cathedral choir** where he was also appointed head chorister and performed frequently as a soloist. Hamish is looking forward to commencing his postgraduate studies later this year as a scholarship holder at the **Guildhall School of Music and Drama** in London.

Baritone **TIMOTHY NUNN** is a Young Artist with **Pacific Opera** and an Emerging Artist with **Coast Opera Australia**. His performances include the title role in the **Phoenix Choir's** production of Mendelssohn's Oratorio *Elijah*, the role of The Leader in Pacific Opera's Production of Kurt Weill's *Down in the Valley*, and Pangloss in a concert celebrating 100 years of Leonard Bernstein at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

He also performed in the Ensemble for Patti LuPone's concert *Don't Monkey with Broadway* at the Sydney Opera House. In 2020 Timothy will be performing in Verdi's *La Traviata* on Sydney Harbour with **Opera Australia** and as a soloist in the **Willoughby Symphony Orchestra's "Star-Spangled" Gala**

## CONCERT PROGRAMME

### LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN 1770 - 1817

- *Fidelio O wär ich schon* **Emily Turner**
- *Mir ist so wunderbar* **Emily Turner, Laura Scandizzo, Hamish James, Timothy Nunn**
- *Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin?* **Eleanor Greenwood**

### CARL MARIA VON WEBER 1786 - 1826

- *Der Freischütz Und ob die Wolke* **Laura Scandizzo**

### RICHARD WAGNER 1813 - 1883

- *Tannhäuser O Du mein holder Abendstern* **Timothy Nunn**
- *Die Walküre Du bist der Lenz* **Eleanor Greenwood**

## INTERVAL

### RICHARD WAGNER 1813 - 1883

- *Wesendonck Lieder Träume* **Laura Scandizzo**

### RICHARD STRAUSS 1864 - 1949

- *Lieder: Das Rosenband; Heimkehr and Allerseelen* **Hamish James**

### JOSEPH MARX 1882 - 1964

- *Selige Nacht* **Emily Turner**

### RICHARD STRAUSS 1864 - 1949

- *Morgen* **Emily Turner**

### ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK 1854 - 1921

- *Hänsel und Gretel Father's song* **Timothy Nunn**
- *Evening Prayer* **Emily Turner and Eleanor Greenwood**

### FRANZ SCHUBERT 1797 - 1828

- *Piano Sonata in C Minor D598 Adagio* **Anthony Negus**

### RICHARD WAGNER 1813 - 1883

- *Tristan und Isolde Liebestod* **Laura Scandizzo**

## WAGNER 2020 SYNDICATE FUNCTION

On Wednesday 11 December at The Opera Centre in Surry Hills Opera Australia held the first of several planned events in Sydney for members of the Wagner 2020 Syndicate, in preparation for the Brisbane Ring. OA Director of Philanthropy Laura Dee welcomed about 20 Wagner Society members plus several other Ring 2020 subscribers and introduced guest speaker OA's Head of Music **Tahu Matheson**, a Wagner expert and enthusiast.

Tahu gave a wide-ranging talk about various influences on Wagner's philosophical and musical development from Nietzsche and Schopenhauer to Bach and Beethoven. He played many musical examples to demonstrate the type of thematic development that Wagner admired in Beethoven. (Tahu got rather carried away with extended virtuosic variations on *Advance Australia Fair*). Of particular interest was his illustration of the way Wagner took simple melodies and chords and developed them to create the many leitmotifs in *The Ring*.

The talk was followed by drinks and canapes. We look forward to the next event.

**Background:** Tahu has worked for Opera Australia since 2007 and in 2017 became Head of Music for the company. He studied piano with Kalle Randalu in Germany, and with Oleg Stepanov and Natasha Vlassenko at the Queensland Conservatorium, where he completed his Master of Music. He is a frequent accompanist for international artists including Teddy Tahu Rhodes, Anthony Dean Griffey, Yvonne Kenny and Emma Matthews.



**Opera Australia repertoire:** Conductor: *Tosca, Lelisir d'amore, The Magic Flute* and *The Pearlfishers* at Sydney Opera House; *Aida* on the Beach and tours of *Don Giovanni*. Assistant Conductor: the Ring Cycle, *Bliss, Falstaff, Otello, Rigoletto, Carmen, Capriccio, Of Mice and Men, The Barber of Seville, Lucia di Lammermoor, Werther, The Magic Flute, La Bohème, La Traviata, Madama Butterfly, La sonnambula, Orpheus in the Underworld, A Streetcar Named Desire, Billy Budd* and *Don Giovanni*.



## FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

**22 MARCH - 12.30PM**

DVD *DIE WALKÜRE* ACT 1

This *Walküre* was staged at Salzburg in 2017 but harks back to an earlier era. That year marked the 50th anniversary of the Salzburg Easter Festival, and to commemorate the occasion, the first production in the event's history was re-created.

So what we have is the Karajan/Schneider-Siemssen with some slight adjustments for modern times by director Vera Nemirova. The cast is outstanding, with Christian Thielmann conducting the Staatskapelle Dresden.

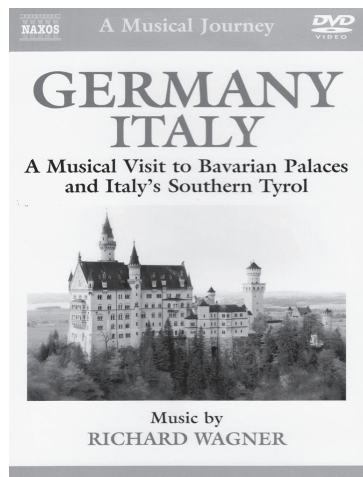
**22 MARCH - 2.00PM**

DR ANTONY ERNST - 'THE RING'

*"The Ring emerged out of disparate traditions and currents in Wagner's time. In order for it to be created, existing philosophical, artistic, and operatic threads had to merge with unprecedented orchestral, theatrical and psychological concepts. How these combine in this unique synthesis, and how the finished work reflects all its various roots, is a fascinating exploration, taking into account its era and the thinking which underlay it."*

**Antony Ernst** is currently the orchestra director of the Royal Danish Orchestra, the world's oldest orchestra. He has worked as a dramaturg, opera director, translator, writer, lecturer and artistic planner, most recently as Artistic Planning Manager of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg. Previously he has worked with the Semperoper Dresden, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Oper Frankfurt, Teatro de la Maestranza, Seville, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and Opera Australia, as well as being a tour leader for Renaissance Tours and regular contributor of programme notes, articles, surtitles, translations and lectures for Symphony Services and numerous other organisations.

Antony was born in Sydney and obtained his doctorate from the University of Newcastle. He is a frequent very popular guest lecturer on opera and previous presentations to the Wagner Society include *Parsifal* (2019), *Tristan und Isolde* (2018), *Lohengrin* (2017), *Bach to the Future: Wagner's Roots and the German Nation* (2016), *Beyond the Twilight of the Gods: Wagner's Musical Legacy* (2014), *From Malediction to Valediction - curses and dramatic resolution in Wagner* (2009), *Tristan und Isolde* (2007), *A survey of Ring Cycle production styles* (2004), *Parsifal* (2003) and *Die Feen and Das Liebesverbot* (2002).



**19 APRIL - 12.30PM**

DVD A MUSICAL JOURNEY - THE CASTLES OF LUDWIG II OF BAVARIA

Ludwig II of Bavaria followed family precedent in undertaking an extravagant building programme during his relatively short reign from 1864 to 1886. The castles constructed on his orders included the romantic Neuschwanstein and the magnificent Schloss Linderhof, with its elaborate formal gardens, grottos and fountains. Ludwig was fascinated by Wagner and his operas, on subjects that had long been dear to him. These include *Lohengrin*, which Ludwig first saw in 1861, the beginning of his preoccupation with Wagner, and the earlier *Tannhäuser*. This beautiful documentary explores Neuschwanstein, Linderhof and the Munich Residenz Nibelungen Hall, with music by Wagner and Marschner.

## 19 APRIL - 2.00PM

### TABATHA MCFADYEN, TALKS ABOUT HER WORK AS AN OPERA DIRECTOR AND PERFORMER

Tabatha's first engagement with Opera Australia was in 2015 as an extra chorister in Graeme Murphy's production of *Turandot*. In 2020, Tabatha is delighted to return to the company as a Trainee Director, under the umbrella of the Opera Australia Young Artist Programme. In 2019, she worked alongside director Tomo Sugao for his acclaimed new production of *Götterdämmerung* for Mainfranken Theatre, Würzburg (Germany). Tabatha directed Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for the Brisbane Shakespeare Festival in October 2019. Tabatha acted as the Assistant Director for Tahu Matheson's production of Brian Howard's *Metamorphosis* for Opera Australia (Helpmann Award Nomination: Best Opera). She then worked with Mr Matheson once more, this time at the Manuel Theatre in Malta, where she was Assistant Director for *Amahl and the Night Visitors* by Menotti.



Tabatha also actively engages as a performer, most recently featuring as the soprano soloist in *A Christmas Carol* in the Royal Albert Hall (Words and Music), and jumping in for the Sydney season of *Metamorphosis* as Greta. She has performed with conductors such as Johannes Fritzsich, Giordano Bellincampi and Vladimir Ashkenazy, and also, having a particular bent towards contemporary composition, with some of Australia's finest chamber musicians. She has been

a finalist in the Australian Singing Competition, the Hans Gabor Belvedere International Singing Competition (Latvia), and was the first prize winner of the 49th International Antonin Dvorak Singing Competition. She also won the National Liederfest and the Mietta Song Prize with long-time musical collaborator, Alex Raineri. Much to the incredulous amazement of her then-lecturers, Tabatha managed to complete both a Bachelor of Music with First Class Honours and a Graduate Certificate in Opera at Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University, which she followed with post-graduate study at the Universität Mozarteum, Salzburg. In the OA 2020 season, Tabatha will be assisting director on *Lohengrin* in Melbourne as well as directing a new production of *Rembrandt's Wife* by Australian composer Andrew Ford.

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## 10 MAY - 1.00PM

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Financial members are encouraged to come to the AGM to elect a new Committee and discuss ideas about sponsorship plans for 2020 and beyond

## 10 MAY - 2.00PM

### PETER BASSETT TALKS ABOUT *LOHENGRIN*

**Dr Peter Bassett** is the President of the Wagner Society in Queensland. Peter was Dramaturg and Artistic Administrator for the 2004 Adelaide *Ring* and is a regular contributor to the programs of Opera Australia and other companies. He has published widely on Wagner's works, recorded talks on the *Ring* for Decca, and has lectured in Europe, North America and throughout Australia and New Zealand. For two decades Peter served in the Australian diplomatic service and since 2001 he has led 40 overseas tours for Renaissance Tours.



## 10 MAY - 3.30PM

### WAGNER'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Join us for bubbles and birthday cake to celebrate the anniversary of Wagner's birth.



## LOHENGRIN IN MELBOURNE - STATE THEATRE AUGUST 16 - 29

An Opera Australia co-production with Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie

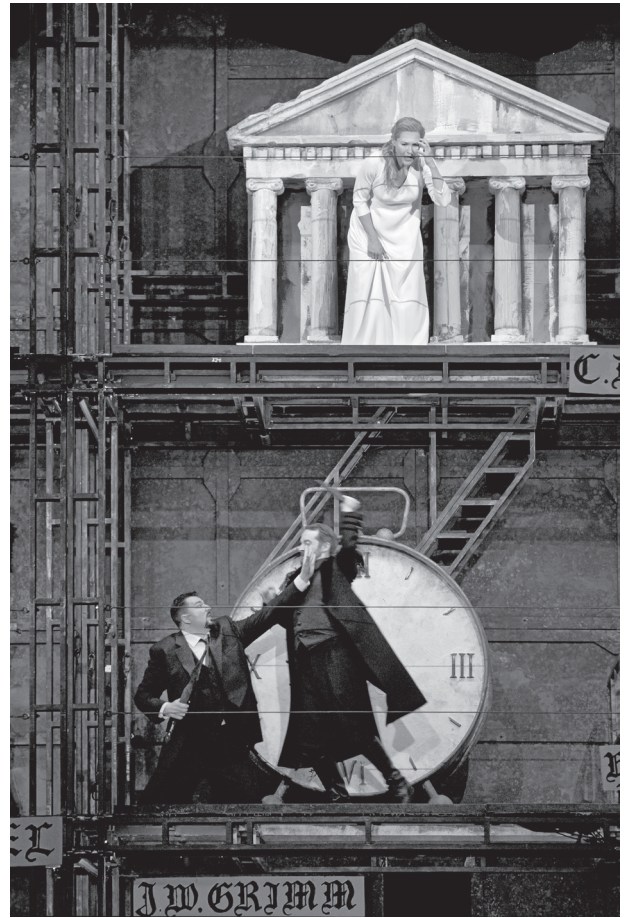
Can a heart love without doubt?

Can you trust the happiness that comes through faith alone?

Elsa stands accused of a horrible crime. She prays for a champion, and a noble knight appears. But his help comes with a condition: she must never ask his name. Does true love demand blind faith?

*Lohengrin* is a fantastical romance. It's filled with shimmering string passages and angelic choruses, including the famous Bridal March. Wagner described his music as "streams of gold, ravishing the senses of the beholder." (OA publicity)

CONDUCTOR	Johannes Fritzsch
DIRECTOR	Olivier Py
REVIVAL DIRECTOR	Daniel Izzo
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Tabatha McFadyen
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER	Pierre-André Weitz
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Bertrand Killy
LOHENGRIN	David Butt Philip
ELSA	Jennifer Davis
ORTRUD	Elena Gabouri
TELRAMUND	Alexander Krasnov
HEINRICH	Daniel Sumegi
HERALD	Warwick Fyfe
FIRST NOBLE	Dean Bassett
SECOND NOBLE	Tomas Dalton
THIRD NOBLE	Alexander Hargreaves
FOURTH NOBLE	Ryan Sharp



*Lohengrin* at Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie



*Lohengrin* at Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie

## EXTRACT FROM A REVIEW IN OPERA JOURNAL OF THE 2018 BRUSSELS PERFORMANCE:

When it comes to *Lohengrin*, a more cautious director would seek to downplay rather than actually highlight any associations that might be made between Richard Wagner and the Nazis. It's an issue however that is hard to avoid, since the question of German nationalism lies very much at the core of the opera and, regardless of it certainly formed a view of it that Hitler and his adherents took in another direction. **Olivier Py**, directing for La Monnaie in Brussels, however, tackles the issue head-on ...in a roundabout sort of way.

.....Py sets his production in 1945 at the end of the war when Berlin and much of Germany was lying in ruins. Mainly it's because he believes that Wagner's *Lohengrin* is not just a nationalist display, but a warning of where such sentiments can lead. Wagner can't be entirely exonerated for his antisemitism, for a sense of jingoism in his works or for their and his family's later association with the Nazis, but there is certainly a case that *Lohengrin* is a work of artistic and cultural expression that does consider the disastrous future impact of nationalistic sentiments that can take art and culture and twist it toward personal and political interests.

Certainly Olivier Py and his regular stage designer **Pierre-André Weitz's** touch is all over the La Monnaie *Lohengrin*. It works in contrasts of black and white with little of shading in between. On one side we have Elsa and Lohengrin in pale blue, Lohengrin even associated with angels, while Ortrud and Friedrich von Telramund are all in black. King Heinrich incidentally (and somewhat negligibly) is dressed in grey. Py's Catholic or Christian faith may well play a part in reducing *Lohengrin* to such stark divisions, but it's perhaps more a case of emphasis as they are already there in Wagner's work. Ortrud certainly appeals to the pagan gods Wotan and Freia in a way that "allows evil to enter this house" as Telramund describes it. Is it a lack of 'faith' that leads to the ideal of the German nation being destroyed from within? And is this inevitable corruption of a pure ideal not indeed what Wagner's opera is all about?

<http://operajournal.blogspot.com/2018/05/wagner-lohengrin-brussels-2018.html>

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## WAGNER'S LOHENGRIN - AN END AND A BEGINNING

### Pre-Opera Talks for Lohengrin will be presented by Heath Lees at St Johns Southgate

Heath Lees explains the background and provides the context as he guides you through each act of the opera.

In his inimitable style, through piano, video and images, Heath brings the opera to life so that you get to know its musical motives in advance and can grasp how 'masterfully' Wagner's music tells the story of Lohengrin.

- Saturday 16 May 2020 - 10:30 AM to 11:45 AM
- Wednesday 20 May 2020 - 10:30 AM to 11:45 AM
- Saturday 23 May 2020 - 9:30 AM to 10:45 AM (prior to Lohengrin matinée performance)

Tickets are available for purchase online via TryBooking, or at the door prior to the start of each talk, Presented by The Richard Wagner Society (Victoria)



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## OUR PATRON SIMONE YOUNG TO BE SSO CHIEF CONDUCTOR

The Society is very excited and proud that our esteemed and distinguished Patron, Maestro Simone Young, has been appointed as the Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra starting in early 2022



## WAGNER IN BRISBANE 2020

by Peter Bassett

*Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Tristan und Isolde*, as well as Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* will be performed in Brisbane this year between late-October and mid-December by Opera Australia, Opera Queensland and the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. It is a rare treat to have professional productions of five of Wagner's mature works in such close proximity. I can't wait!

Opera Australia's new *Ring* production will be staged in the Lyric Theatre of the Queensland Performing Arts Centre between 10 November and 5 December. The director and designer is Chinese/American **Chen Shi-Zheng**, and we have every reason to look forward to a fascinating, beautiful and poetic realisation of this incomparable work.

Chen was born in China in 1963 and lost both of his parents during the Cultural Revolution. He developed a deep knowledge of Chinese opera, and emigrated to the USA in 1987, subsequently graduating from the Tisch School of Art at New York University. As well as staging traditional Chinese works, he has directed many western operas in the United States and Europe, including *Eugene Onegin*, *Nixon in China*, *La Traviata*, *The Coronation of Poppea*, *Orfeo*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Così fan tutte* – and *Turandot* for Opera Australia's 'Opera on the Harbour' in 2016.

Chen has been quoted as saying: "Wagner productions, in recent history, are always trying to relate the story of the *Ring* to current western society. But this story is fantasy, a myth. So, what I want to do is take the myth as a platform to dive into, and reimagine it in the 21st century, in Australia, in this very landscape. The references also relate to where I come from. What we are trying to avoid is using the familiar methods of European cultural reference. We are trying to get away from that." He has assigned a different "season" to each of the operas, starting with *Das Rheingold*, which represents spring, and ending with the winter of discontent in *Götterdämmerung*.

Chen says he'll be careful to not impose too much visual baggage on the music, as Wagner should be allowed to speak for himself. He compares his task to that of a Chinese painter; knowing where to provide detail, and what to leave to the imagination. "I think it is half and half," he says. "You have to leave enough for people to imagine, but you also want to provide a framework for people to enter into that world. When I listen to Wagner's music, I respond in my mind. I hope people will have a similar kind of journey, but I don't want to dictate every second of what people think."

How refreshing! We know from Wagner's writings that he deliberately rejected the idea of 'dictating' what people should think in the context of his stage works. "I believe it was true instinct" he wrote to August Röckel in 1854, "that led me to guard against an excessive eagerness to make things plain, for I have learned to feel that to make one's intentions too obvious risks impairing a proper understanding of the work in question; in drama – as in any work of art – it is a question of making an impression not by parading one's opinions but by setting forth what is instinctive. It is precisely this which distinguishes my poetic material from the political material which is virtually all that is current today." So, Chen's approach appeals to me very much. I think we are in for a great experience.



Chen Shi-Zheng



OA's *Turandot*

Looking for examples of how Chen Shi-Zheng has drawn inspiration from both European and Chinese sources, I was attracted to one scene in a production of *Eugene Onegin* for the Spoleto Festival in the USA which he directed in 2017. He set Tatiana's 'letter scene' very simply amongst the silvery trunks of a birch forest – so typical of the Russian landscape. We see the impressionable young Tatiana pondering and then writing her letter to Onegin, confessing her true feelings for him. As she sings, the moon rises from one side of the night sky and passes very slowly behind the bare trunks of the trees, finally disappearing from view as Tatiana comes to the end of her letter. It is simple, uncluttered imagery, but immensely moving and evocative of the poetry and beauty of Pushkin's tale and Tchaikovsky's music.

So, how does this relate to Chinese mythology? Well, consider the Chinese myth of the Moon Goddess. She had once been a woman who had rashly drunk a draught of immortality out of love for her husband. But the effect of this was to separate her from him. She then flew upwards to the heavens, and the moon became her residence. Her sad husband was left to worship her from afar – which, when you think about it, is not unlike the fate of Onegin. In the final act, he is left to observe how Tatiana, whose bold declaration of love had once resulted in their separation, is now happily married to Prince Gremin. In her palace in St Petersburg – her distant moon, if you like - she still has feelings for Onegin but has now grown beyond them and she values the love and loyalty of her husband most of all. Onegin is left devastated and alone. Chen Shi-Zheng's delicate





Eugene Onegin at Spoleto

and moving staging was, I thought, a sign of how he could bring new insights and a deft touch to a familiar operatic work. If he displays similar sensitivities in his approach to the *Ring*, then we have much to look forward to.

The conductor of the *Ring* in Brisbane will be **Philippe Auguin**, who has conducted many *Ring* productions, including for the State Theatre Nuremberg whose production I saw at the International Beijing Music Festival in 2005 – the first-ever staging of the complete *Ring* in China. He also conducted Washington National Opera's *Ring* in 2016 which I remember very well. He has conducted the Vienna Philharmonic, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Munich Philharmonic, the Royal Philharmonic and all the major French orchestras. He conducted *Tannhäuser* for Opera Australia in 1998 in a memorable production directed by **Elke Neidhardt**. The terrific Brisbane cast will be led by **Vitalij Kowaljow** as Wotan (recently seen in this role in the Salzburg Festival conducted by **Christian Thielemann**), **Allison Oakes** as Brünnhilde (she has sung Gutrune at Bayreuth and the *Walküre* Brünnhilde for Deutsche Oper), and **Stefan Vinke**, well known to Australian audiences, as Siegfried.

The season kicks off with *Tristan und Isolde*, semi-staged, on 28 and 31 October in the Concert Hall of QPAC. Conductor **Pietari Inkinen** will arrive in Brisbane immediately after conducting the new *Ring* at Bayreuth. I first met Inkinen in 2009 when, barely 29 years old, he conducted an orchestral



Pietari Inkinen

paraphrase of *Tristan und Isolde* by Henk de Vlioger with the NZSO, for which I gave pre-performance talks. “My conducting teacher once conducted *Tristan und Isolde*”, he said, “and this was a very powerful experience and stayed with me for a very long time.... Wagner’s music remains for me both a fascination and a most rewarding step in my career to climb as a conductor.” We remember him of course as the conductor of Opera Australia’s *Ring* in Melbourne in 2013 and 2016.

The demanding role of Tristan will be sung by New Zealand tenor **Simon O’Neill**, described by Inkinen as “one of my closest allies in this repertoire and we have both travelled along the Wagner road for a long time”. Simon has performed in the world’s most famous opera houses and festivals (including Bayreuth) with conductors such as Daniel Barenboim, Sir Simon Rattle, James Levine, Riccardo Muti, Valery Gergiev, Sir Antonio Pappano, Pierre Boulez, Donald Runnicles, Christian Thielemann, Simone Young, Andris Nelsons, Esa Pekka Salonen and Gustavo Dudamel. Already a celebrated Siegmund, he will sing Tristan with Santa Fe Opera in mid-2020 and will make his debut as Siegfried in a new *Ring* at the Deutsche Opera Berlin in 2022.

**American soprano Meagan Miller** will sing Isolde, a role that she has performed for Opera Leipzig. German mezzo-soprano **Anna Werle** will sing Brangäne in Italy before appearing in Brisbane. **James Roser** (Kurwenal) was most recently heard as a splendid Amfortas in Victorian Opera’s *Parsifal*. **Paul Whelan** (King Marke) performed this role for the first time in 2014 with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by **Vasily Petrenko**.

I shall be giving complimentary pre-performance talks at 10:30 am in the Concert Hall on each *Tristan* performance day. During the three cycles of the *Ring*, **Professor Stephen Emmerson** and I shall be holding talks and panel discussions on 11, 20 and 30 November 2020 in the Ian Hanger Recital Hall of the Queensland Conservatorium on South Bank. Details for bookings are available at: [www.qtix.com.au](http://www.qtix.com.au). Following the afternoon session, members of Wagner Societies are warmly invited to join their Queensland counterparts for drinks on the Conservatorium balcony.



Simon O’Neill

## "BEING WAGNER, THE TRIUMPH OF THE WILL" BY SIMON CALLOW

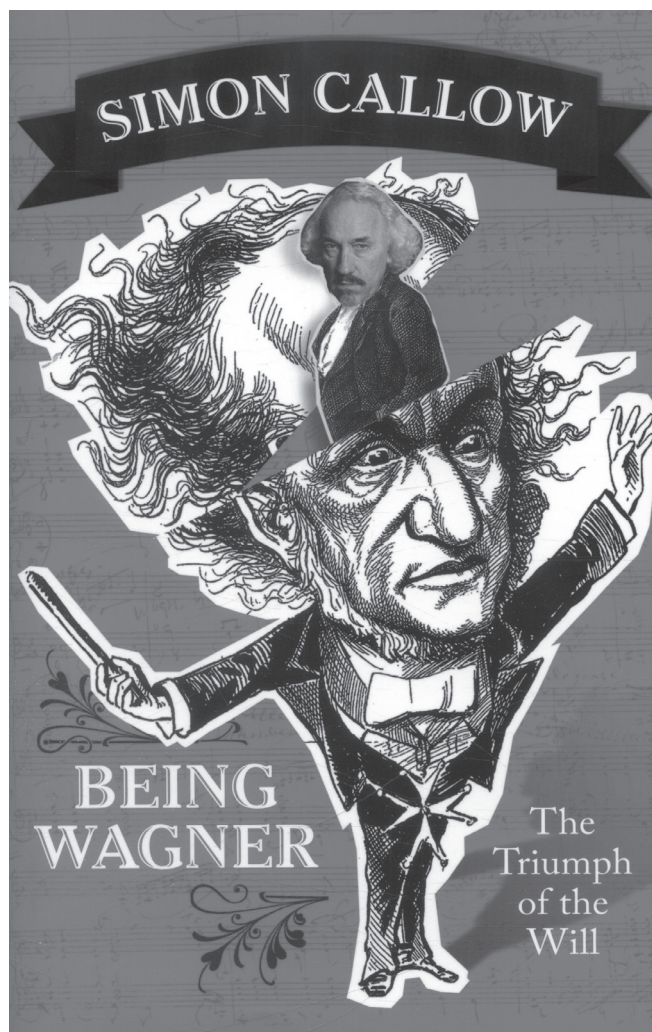
Book Review by Roger Cruikshank

There's a lot to recommend in this book, the most recent addition to the shelf of Wagner biographies. It's a good story well told, and worth your time reading. In the unlikely event that you've resisted the urge to tackle a biography of Richard Wagner, or that you're interested in brushing up on your knowledge, "Being Wagner" is well worth the read. But get it from your local Library. Its author, Mr Simon Callow, is perhaps best known in the antipodes as an Actor and the Narrator of TV programmes on classical music and travel. But he's also a well-regarded writer of biographies, including three volumes on Orson Wells, two on Dickens, one on Charles Laughton, and a recently revised autobiography "Being an Actor". Now there's "Being Wagner".

The first challenge for many readers to overcome will be a prejudice against Mr Callow the Actor, so that they can find the special voice that Mr Callow the Biographer brings to his telling of Wagner's life story. Mr Callow is not the pre-eminent English gay Wagner-loving public intellectual. That honour goes to the comedian, actor, author of fiction, television personality and self-confessed Wagnerian, Stephen Fry. Who hasn't seen his self-indulgent DVD "Wagner and Me", with the cringe-making "pinch me, pinch me" moment when seated at Wagner's piano in Wahnfried? Or seen Mr Fry in the Bayreuth car park encountering Katarina Wagner? But it would be a mistake to think that Mr Callow is in any way less of a writer than Mr Fry, simply because we don't immediately recognise him as such. (And yes, this reviewer will one day overcome his infantile prejudice against Mr Fry. Just not yet.)

According to Mr Callow, the impetus for writing this biography came after a one-man stage show he was asked to create for the 2013 Wagner bicentenary, which Callow called "Inside Wagner's Head". Starting with four and a half hours of material, he whittled it down to a manageable size for a one-man show but threw nothing away. This mass of material was the start of his book. Words are the tools of Mr Callow's trade, and he loves playing with them. His book is not that of an academic or musicologist, and his language is very 21st century, which makes it easy to read, and often delightful. Some might call his style "breezy". Even so, he occasionally sent me in search of my dusty old two-volume Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Hysterical Principles, as when he describes Wagner as a "diminutive and often rebarbative man" who, when in pursuit of his goal, was "titanic, demiurgic, superhuman, and ... more than a little alarming." In case you need to know, "demiurgic" refers to a Maker of the world in Platonic philosophy, and "rebarbative" means unattractive or repellent, and isn't a nice thing to say about someone.

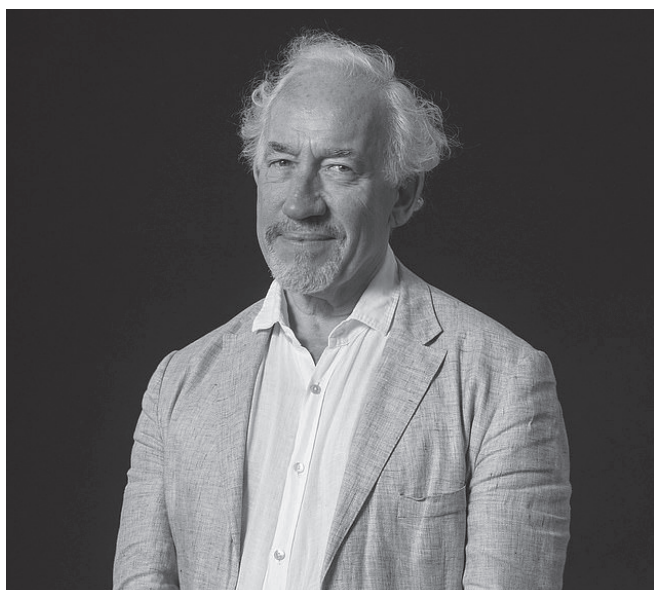
Mr Callow's love of words often gets the better of him, as for example when he takes flight, describing Meistersinger as "that cornucopious work, which is everything Wagner said an opera shouldn't be – brimming with tunes, arias, duets, ensembles, counterpoint, a huge chorus, spectacular public scenes, jokes, hijinks – recognizable human beings... Where was all that lurking inside the difficult, rebarbative, violently prejudiced, myth-forging, subconscious-probing, serially



betraying, Schopenhauer-gorging, Feuerbach-chomping pessimist with his tragic view of life?" Where indeed, dear reader. Then there are turns of phrase whose very Englishness charmed me. Mr Callow tells us that being pursued by brass bands playing his overtures might have been flattering for Wagner, but it "battered no parsnips", meaning that it didn't help pay the bills. As an aside, Mr and Mrs Google claim that, before the ubiquitous potato reached England from the Americas in the 1580s, the now-despised parsnip was the main carb of the Kingdom. People often wonder about Italian food before the tomato, but seldom about English Cuisine (which some say is an oxymoron) before the Chip Butty. But I digress.

What unique view does Mr Callow bring to a biography of someone whose life and writings have already been disinterred with such forensic thoroughness? He gives us his perspective as an actor and writer, for whom the text precedes everything. Wagner's poems (a.k.a. the libretti) are the start of each composition, and to Wagner as important as the music. The writing of each poem, and then its reading to a select group, was a ritual after which the composition of the music followed. I've heard lovers of Wagner's music say that, had they been invited to such a reading, they would have declined, preferring





Simon Callow

to stay at home and rearrange their fridge magnets. But in “Being Wagner”, Callow gives a real sense of the way in which the poems and readings were as vital a part of the creative process as the music itself, a view which is gaining some currency with the recent performances of some of Wagner’s poems as plays in their own right, without any music.

All this is the silver lining that this biography brings. Facts, whatever they may be, are the bread and butter of a biography. No-one writing about Wagner today is likely to un-earth new material, and speculation on the contents of the 70-odd letters which Cosima destroyed after Wagner’s death won’t make them re-appear. His is a life that has been minutely examined, and what makes a biography for me is the “spin” the author chooses to put on the material they include, and just as important, the material they choose to discard.

I’ve always been very fond of Wagner’s Flight from Riga and his Debts, a tale often embellished to Biblical Proportions, which can include a dangerous crossing of the border on foot by night, the overturning of their ‘stage coach’ and Minna’s miscarriage, the journey to Paris by boat rather than overland as they had planned, the monster storm which drove them to seek shelter for days, the songs of the sailors echoing around the cliffs, Wagner’s dog taking charge of the alcohol, their arrival in London on the way to Paris, and much more. Sadly, Mr Callow chooses to relegate this to only a few words.

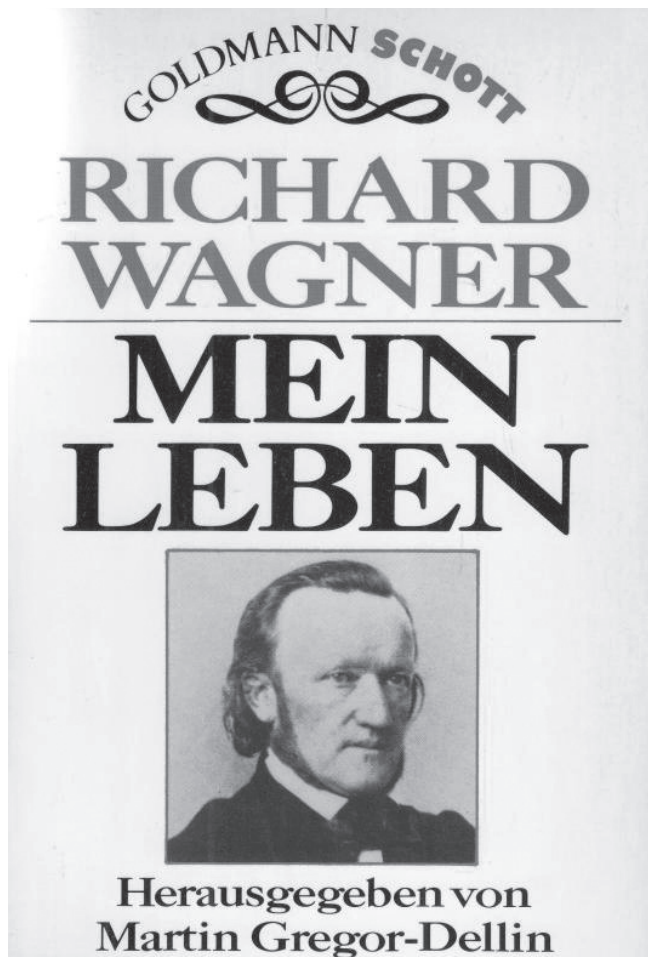
This Flight, as recounted in Wagner’s autobiography *Mein Leben* (“My Life”), reads like the Indiana Jones script of its time. But *Mein Leben* is notoriously unreliable, having been written at the request of Wagner’s dear friend and platinum donor, King Ludwig II. It’s often assumed that Wagner omitted any stories of his marital infidelities because he was dictating the work to Cosima Liszt, who became his second wife, although when they began this great undertaking she was Cosima von Bulow, with whom he was living in sin until their wedding in August 1870. I think it’s far more likely that this curious mix of fiction and memory which they created together omitted this and anything else which might have distressed their Great Benefactor. It provides a sanitized poem of Wagner’s life

creating the memory he wanted to leave to the world. I also suspect that while the book *Mein Leben* is owned by many Wagnerites, it has been read to the last page by very few. Like the more popular Richard Hawking’s “A Brief History of Time”.

Mr Callow relies heavily on *Mein Leben* for the story of Wagner’s years up to 1864. As I’ve mentioned before, one result of Mr Callow’s re-telling Wagner’s life as told in *Mein Leben* is that you can hear it in a 21st century voice, which is refreshing. If there was a modern English translation of Wagner’s life novel for his bi-centenary in 2013 it passed me by, and we still have the quaint early 20th century translation speaking to us across the ages. But without Wagner’s own words to guide him, Mr Callow’s writing about the years post 1864 becomes a little dryer, and in places (is this possible?) a little boring. He dutifully covers all the controversial issues, such as Wagner’s anti-semitism, but has little new to say.

And that hints at the misty cloud hanging around this biography. Why was it written at all? Do we finish reading it with any insight into what it was like, “being Wagner”? I don’t think so. Is it more than just a telling of facts, an analysis which allows us to learn about a genius, without ever inhabiting him? Yes, Wagner was driven, and his output was a triumph of his will, but that seems incidental to the sweep of his life and times as told here.

The book has provoked many reactions, often in surprising places. For example, there was a passing slight in a review of the re-released full four-and-a-half hour version of the early





70s movie Ludwig by Luchino Visconti in *The Wagner Journal* (Vol 13 No 1, March 2019). The reviewer, a Mr Horowitz, reflected that "Visconti rejects the cartoon cad some made Wagner out to be (and still do – see Simon Callow's recent hatchet job, *Being Wagner*)." Two feelings engulfed me; mild outrage in defence of Mr Callow's book, and remorse, since I had promised Mike Day a review of that book and had failed miserably to produce anything. This, dear reader, remedies that second feeling.

I confess that I only read "Being Wagner, etc" three times, so something as subtle as a hatchet job could well have passed me by unremarked. The first reading was that bold venture one makes into a new book, starting at the beginning and finishing at the end. That's not something I always achieve with books. The second reading was with paper and pen in hand, to record things which might need to be accurately quoted in a review; and the third was an accident, when I took the book with me on a domestic holiday and, staying with literate friends whose library contained much of interest, chose instead to read this in the manner of a "bodice ripper", which alas it isn't. But "hatchet job"? I missed that.

And if I can question why Mr Callow wrote his book, you can surely ask why I am writing this review, other than to keep a promise made to Your Editor almost three years ago? (With any luck, the book will have been remaindered by now, and be out of print.) In the day, I was an opinionated bigot on the matter of opera, and Herr Wagner's place in it. While in my dotage I try to sound calmer and more balanced, I still am. If you asked me what my favourite opera was, I'd tell you it was *Madama Butterfly*, or *Don Giovanni*. That's because it doesn't make sense to me to speak of Wagner favourites, in the way that parents have a favourite child. Just one of his ten mature works cannot come first; they must all come first (yes, even alas, *Meistersinger*).

Would I recommend a different book to you? Yes. From left field, Sue Prideaux's biography "I am Dynamite! A Life of Friedrich Nietzsche." Among other things, it talks about the Wagner – Nietzsche relationship from Nietzsche's point of view, and of his intimate relationship with Cosima, often neglected in biographies of Wagner.

Thomas Laqueur, in his review of *Being Wagner* in *The Guardian* (10 June 2017) writes, as an aside to a comment on the appropriation of Wagner's music by totalitarians, of Siegfried's funeral music in *Götterdämmerung*: "It wasn't just the Nazis who appropriated this music for ritual purposes. A brass band of 500 played it to accompany a cannon salute at Lenin's funeral. A real orchestra played it again at the Bolshoi." Don't you wish you'd been there? And don't you wish that this reviewer was better read and had interesting snippets like that to drop into his review. I do.

**Roger Cruickshank**  
**Sunday 1 March 2020**

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### QUOTES FROM *BEING WAGNER*

*These huge shifts in his inner life did not help him to write Tannhäuser as he now called it; it was not coming easily. And they sat uncomfortably with his new respectability. Minna was thrilled to be the wife of the Royal Conductor, and busily set about furnishing their splendid new apartments appropriately: everything Wagner noted scornfully, was good and substantial, as was only right, he noted with dread, for a man of thirty who was settling down at least for the rest of his life. You can feel the rising panic, the claustrophobia as he describes his newfound stability.*

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*Wagner was not promiscuous,  
he was serially amorous*

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*An atheist, Wagner immersed himself in the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, who believed that life was essentially an illusion, and that the only contact we have with reality is when we make love. This notion struck Wagner, on the basis of wide personal experience, as deeply true.*

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## COMMITTEE 2019 - 2020

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*Part One of The Ring of the Nibelung*

**Wagner's**

# DAS RHEINGOLD

*Regent Theatre August 2, 5, 13*

**CONDUCTED BY ANTHONY NEGUS**




Melbourne Opera continues its Wagner cycle with a new production of the first of his Das Ring des Nibelungen operas, *Das Rheingold*, at the Regent Theatre this August 2, 5 & 13.

Eminent international Wagnerian Maestro **Anthony Negus** returns to conduct, after his great successes of *Tristan and Isolde* (for which he won the 2018 Green Room Conducting Award) and *The Flying Dutchman*, leading a superb international cast - **Darren Jeffrey, Hrólfrur Sæmundsson, James Egglestone, Lee Abrahmsen** and **Roxane Hislop**.

MO's recent productions of *Norma*, *The Flying Dutchman*, Rossini's *Otello*, *Tristan and Isolde*, *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser* and *Rienzi* have all received critical and popular acclaim. This new production is directed by **Suzanne Chaundy** and designed by Helpmann Award winning designer **Dale Ferguson**.

## APPEAL FOR SUPPORT FOR MELBOURNE OPERA'S PRODUCTION OF "DAS RHEINGOLD" AND FUTURE "RING"

Your Committee is considering financially contributing towards the success of this exciting endeavour. The Wagner Society of Victoria is a major sponsor and it would be a great show of solidarity to be able to join our fellow Societies in supporting the creation of a new local Ring. There are many ways in which we can contribute. The quantum and specific target of our support is still to be determined. And it is for this reason that I am writing this to appeal to the membership to consider the following:

1. Show support for Melbourne Opera's production of *Das Rheingold* by making a financial contribution via the Wagner Society in NSW.
2. Show support for Melbourne Opera's production of *Das Rheingold* by making an individual financial contribution and highlighting your membership of the Society.
3. Show support for Melbourne Opera's production of *Das Rheingold* by attending one or more of the performances in August.

At this stage we are talking to Melbourne Opera to see how we can best contribute and also what we might get in return, which may include priority ticketing, access to artists and insights into the production. The Society has already hosted both Maestro Negus and Suzanne Chaundy in the last few years. It may be that we are entering Wagner and/or Ring fatigue with the Brisbane Ring as well as *Lohengrin* (OA, Melbourne) and *Tristan und Isolde* (QO, Brisbane) all in 2020. But I remind you that one of the tenets of the Society is to support and encourage the appreciation as well as the production of Wagner music dramas. The more the better, especially local productions.

If you are interested in contributing please contact me on [einsausti@bigpond.net.au](mailto:einsausti@bigpond.net.au).

**Esteban Insausti**  
**Vice President**  
**Wagner Society in NSW**

## MEMBERS' REVIEWS

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### ***DIE WALKÜRE*** - SINGAPORE ESPLANADE, 5 JANUARY 2020

by Ross Whitelaw

This was a production I had been looking forward to ever since learning about it from Juliana Lim of the Singapore Wagner Society whilst attending Bayreuth in 2018. One of the joys of attending Bayreuth is meeting fellow Wagnerians from other parts of the world and I was especially interested in meeting a contingent from Singapore since it is the closest Society to Australia and offers new perspectives on the performance and appreciation of Wagner's operas.

Another reason to look forward to it was the news that **Warwick Fyfe** should be performing his first Wotan and many of the others in the cast were from Australia. I was not disappointed.

I had arranged to meet my friend, John Dagleish from Edinburgh, whom I met in Bayreuth in 2008 and is a member of the London and Victorian Societies. He would then come back to Australia with me and enjoy nine weeks of Aussie sea and sun. I also arranged to meet with my friends from the Victorian Society of whom there was a sizeable

contingent. The shared interest in the works of Wagner led to much discussion and reinforced the friendships I had made over the year - a mutual love of his music.

Now for the performance. I was informed that the orchestra, the Orchestra of the Music Makers (seemingly none over 30), were made up of 30% professionals and 70% music enthusiasts! Quite remarkable when you think about it. The enthusiasts were amateurs whose parents thought they should pursue "real jobs" but whose passion for music couldn't be surpassed. They were fantastic and didn't miss a beat (literally) under the more than competent guidance of **Chan Tie Law**, music director of Singapore Metropolitan Festival Orchestra and the Orchestra of the Music Makers.

Being a semi-staged performance, there were limitations, mostly relating to the positioning of the orchestra and singers as arranged around the "sets", a long table in front of the orchestra on which the singers variously walked, sat at or walked around for the first act and a "mountain" behind the



Warwick Fyfe as Wotan





Curtain call

orchestra approached from stairs on either side of the stage. This resulted in the singers singing to each other across the orchestra from left to right or from the mountain behind the orchestra to the front of the stage. Not ideal but not a bad effort on the part of the director, Edith Podesta.

There were projections of the singers on a screen at the rear of the stage. This projection also carried the subtitles and it was difficult to look at the subtitles without also seeing the enlarged faces of the singers. Should we look at them or the live singers on stage? Unlike the projections in say the Castorf Ring, where the back story was being told to great effect, this was a distraction.

The much anticipated Wotan of Fyfe did not disappoint. Clear, powerful and yet nuanced, his Wotan will only improve over time. Whilst he inhabited Alberich in the Melbourne Rings from his first appearance, I feel that he will grow into this role and become even better over time. I sincerely hope that he is able to build on this performance. The result will be one of the greatest Wotans of our age. American tenor

**Bryan Register** as Sigmund thrilled the audience with a sure and expressive interpretation. I'd not heard of him before this and was very impressed. If you get a chance to hear him, do so. **Lee Bisset**, a native of Scotland was a sympathetic Sieglinde. Beautifully sung and undoubtedly a rising Wagnerian star. The Brunnhilde of Lancashire born **Alwyn Mellor** was less sure, at least initially, but she warmed to the task, and the scenes with Wotan were by turns moving and assertive. Another to watch for, **Caitlin Hulcup**, making her role debut as Fricka, nearly stole the show. An Australian with quite a career overseas, she impressed with stage presence, beauty of tone and clarity of purpose. Watch for her as Medea in Pinchgut Opera's upcoming 2020 season - I'll be there! The Valkyrie themselves were made up of a capable line up including familiar names from the Australian opera scene - **Taryn Fiebig, Antoinette Halloran, Sharon Prero, Dominica Matthews, Fiona Campbell and Cassandra Seidemann.**

Altogether a worthwhile tip. A Singapore *Rhinegold* may even be on the horizon. Ross Whitelaw

## EMAIL ADDRESSES FOR EASY CONTACT AND ADVICE ON FUNCTIONS AND DEALS!

Regular emails are sent to those members of the Society whose email addresses we have on file. If you have not been receiving these emails, please ensure we have your current email address by filling in the form on the Society's contact web page: [www.wagner.org.au/contact-us](http://www.wagner.org.au/contact-us).

## TRISTAN UND ISOLDE - BAYREUTH 2019

Review by Rhodri Bradley Jones and Dr Lourdes st George

"This was my first time at Bayreuth and it didn't disappoint. The beauty of the theatre itself, the exquisite sound of the orchestra, the intensity of the audience and the class and style of everything were exceptional. And such a very powerful sense of history too. (Not all of it by any means good.)

For me it was the experience of a lifetime!

To give some background to my comments, I am an opera lover but not a musician. I love Wagner's music and will go to a production whenever the opportunity arises but I would more often go to a Verdi or Janacek or Mozart or Britten opera amongst many others.

If the staging enhances the pleasure, so much the better but, for me, everything is in the music (orchestra and voices) and whatever else happens, nothing in the staging must interfere with or distract from the music. That should never be allowed to happen! (But it did!)

Nowhere is that more the case than *Tristan and Isolde*. The music is sublime. It is the greatest love music ever written. It climaxes after over 4 hours when the last few bars resolve everything and let the listener breathe again. The music says everything. And this production that we saw on Friday 23

August, especially the second act, was an absolute travesty of distraction and confusion and obfuscation.

I understand that every director wants to make a mark artistically. It must be dull (from their point of view but not necessarily from the audience's) to repeat the same good ideas that their predecessors have had. I have seen many productions of operas that have changed the period and the dress and sometimes turned the meaning upside down. Sometimes it works! But when it doesn't it can spoil the audience's enjoyment and for those who are seeing the opera for the first time, it can make it impossible to understand.

The second act of *Tristan* was, for me, just such an occasion. This is a sizzling love scene where Isolde (who is not imprisoned except in a loveless marriage) is desperate to see Tristan, who is going to slip away from his hunting, when he can, to be with Isolde but also, she is nervous for his safety. It is all in the music. When Tristan bursts in (rather than being dragged in, as in this production) the excitement is overwhelming and a night of passion ensues. In this production, the best they could manage was a very clumsy jump into back to back positions and what could be described as a rather silly touching of bottoms. It was rivetingly inappropriate and incompetent and distracting. The beautiful, rich, flowing music had become background music to an on-



stage farce. What was going on on-stage was utterly amateur. Someone was crawling around for no apparent reason and from time to time breaking hoops off the wall. (Why were the hoops on the wall?) There was a long metal bicycle rack on stage whose purpose remained a mystery. At one point, this unnecessary artefact clunked itself, noisily, into a sort of cell. Tristan and Isolde appear not to have been given any instructions beforehand (or perhaps it was Ikea?) about how to manipulate the arms of this visual monstrosity. So, not only were we unable to relax and enjoy the music but we had on-stage visual distractions, mechanical anxieties and complete puzzlement about the meaning of everything. There was a fight going on between the music and the staging and acting. Unforgivable! Isolde had difficulty in putting a curtain up and they both had no idea of what they were supposed to do with the fairy lights. Tristan was the clumsiest actor I have seen in a very long time and he shouldn't have been asked to rip things up even if he had any idea (which I didn't) about why he was doing so! As you can see, it all made me very angry and I still haven't got over it.

The first act stage set clearly wasn't to everyone's taste but I was ok with that. The innards of a 1950s naval vessel perhaps and the steps worked well, I thought, to separate Tristan and Isolde and to allow them to come together as well. For me, it didn't get in the way of the music.

There were some wonderfully theatrical moments around the love potion that they usually drink but in this production they don't. Lots of intense and drawn out suspense which married

well with the music. I've always thought that the potion in this story is love, not magic, although this causes problems for King Marke in the final act denouement as it is harder for him to forgive his friend for his treachery if there is no magic potion involved. So this production turned King Marke into an out and out baddie and Isolde doesn't get her wish to die with Tristan but gets dragged off for more unhappiness with Marke.

Fortunately, I thought that the last act was sublime. I was happy enough with Tristan hallucinating, although I didn't fully understand the significance of the range of dolls that appeared. But that is a tiny criticism of a thrilling final act in which the music was allowed priority. The orchestra was magnificent, the music compelling and, for me, it was a great way to finish the evening and a very special trip to Bayreuth.

To a lesser extent, I have the same criticism of *Parsifal* (22/8/19). I haven't seen it as often as I have Tristan although I know the music. I should have read the reviews beforehand to better understand the strange goings on on-stage. I suppose it made some kind of sense, particularly in the context of Germany's immigration generosity around the time of the production's first outing. But once again, I found some of the action on-stage puzzling and distracting.

I feel quite guilty about being so critical. We are incredibly lucky in so many ways to be there in the first place and everyone involved is trying their best to provide an enjoyable and happy experience for the audience. And I really enjoyed the whole thing."

### WAGNER SOCIETY MEMBERS SPECIAL OFFERS AND 10% DISCOUNTS - ASK BEFORE YOU PURCHASE AT:

The Wagner Society Management Committee has negotiated a 10% discount for Wagner Society members: just mention that you are a member!

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### BRANGAYNE OF ORANGE VINEYARD

Brangayne of Orange has kindly agreed to offer Members a 10% discount if they purchase any of their wines. Please call and order by phone (02 6365 3229) and mention your membership of the Wagner Society.

### WAGNER SOCIETY NEWSLETTERS AND QUARTERLIES ONLINE

The online library of Wagner Society Newsletters and Quarterlies is now complete. Every publication, from the first Newsletter dated February 1981 to the latest March 2020 Quarterly, is now on the Society's web page: [wagner.org.au/society-newsletter](http://wagner.org.au/society-newsletter). Please note that, as this web page is accessible only to members of the Society, members will need to log in.

### THE RAVEN'S REPORTING, COMPILED BY CAMRON DYER

There is a regularly updated list of upcoming performances worldwide of Wagner's works on the Society's web page: [wagner.org.au/ravens-reporting](http://wagner.org.au/ravens-reporting) that takes the list to 2024



# NEWS FROM YOUNG SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

## UPDATE FROM SAMANTHA CRAWFORD



As Ortlinde in *Die Walküre* at Teatro Real, Madrid

Hello friends,

Hope you've had a great start to the new year. I'm working in (mostly) sunny Madrid and enjoying being back in this city for more Wagner, churros and flamenco. I'm performing Ortlinde in Robert Carsen's production of *Die Walküre* at Teatro Real, Madrid. The cast includes Stuart Skelton, Rene Pape, Ain Anger, Tomasz Konieczny, Richard Merbeth and Adrienne Pieczonka amongst others, conducted by Pablo Heras-Casado.

In September I will be debuting at Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* at Saffron Hall, conducted by Michael Hall. I'm very much looking forward to working with this cast and team. The story centres on the struggle between sacred and profane love, and redemption through love, a theme running through much of Wagner's mature work.

On 4th April, I'm looking forward to performing Verdi's *Requiem* at Southwark Cathedral, London, with All Saints Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by Jon Cullen. It's great to be returning to work with All Saints Chorus after Mozart's *Requiem* last September, and I will be performing with them again later this year.

I love Czech music, and Czech opera in particular. I recently performed extracts from the title roles in *Rusalka*, *Kat'a Kabanova* and *Jenůfa* in concert with Lada Valesova.

### Show Notes

The Podcast @SHOWNOTESTHEPODCAST  
Last month I was interviewed for the launch of a new podcast called Show Notes, hosted by mezzo soprano, Emily Edmonds. Our talk is in Series 1, Episode 8 of Show Notes.

We are both passionate about encouraging performers to achieve their best by sharing information and experiences, knitting together in our global community. Emily asked if I would be willing to share my honest (good, bad, funny) experiences of my recent journey to Motherhood. We covered; being a working parent in opera, budgets, pregnancy, babies, mental health and wellbeing. My aim is to encourage and inform. Everyone's experiences of parenthood are unique and I survived the tough moments by sharing my story and asking for help. I also laughed a lot more than I thought I would. No one told me parenting can also be hilarious!

Hope to catch you at a performance soon.

With love, Samantha

## RECENTLY SUPPORTED ARTIST, KAINE HAYWARD

**Kaine Hayward** is a Berlin-based lirico-spinto tenor from Sydney, Australia. He was given a grant by the Wagner Society in NSW late last year.

Kaine's major operatic roles have included Mario Cavaradossi in *Tosca* (Opernclub Framersheim & Pangratiushof, Erbesbüdesheim [upcoming]), Lt. B.F. Pinkerton in *Madama*

*Butterfly* (Mediterranean Opera Festival, Sicily), Don José in *Carmen* (Opera New England, Central Coast Symphony Orchestra & Mediterranean Opera Festival), Rodolfo in *La Bohème* (Pacific Opera) and Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* (Opera Australia, Sydney). He is also an experienced concert artist, having performed many oratorios and other sacred works, as well as major song cycles in solo recital.

Kaine has appeared as a guest artist on high end cruise liners (Crystal, Celebrity and Royal Caribbean) and his singing was featured in an international advertising campaign for Spotify. He has performed throughout Asia, including a major tour of Chinese opera houses as Pang in Puccini's *Turandot* with the Australian International Opera Company. Kaine is also an accomplished pianist and has worked extensively as a répétiteur and accompanist.

Kaine trained at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music under Barry Ryan and has also studied with the renowned heldentenor Glenn Winslade (Sydney) and legendary technician Gioacchino LiVigni (New York).



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## IN MEMORIUM

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### JANET WAYLAND

Janet Wayland (member no. 10) passed away in late February aged 85. Jane was a foundation member of the Wagner Society in NSW from her election to the Wagner Committee at the Society's first AGM on 22 May 1981 until her retirement in July 1998. Janet made very significant contributions to

the Society over the years and was at various times Co-editor of the Newsletter, Public Relations Officer, Editor, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Vice-President. Our condolences go to her family.

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### PETER MAX SCHREIER 29 JULY 1935 – 25 DECEMBER 2019

**Peter Schreier** was a German lyric tenor renowned for his performances in Mozart operas and Bach oratorios, and for the balance of vocal elegance and dramatic urgency he brought to the German art song. Midway through his career,

Mr. Schreier also turned to conducting. He would sometimes sing the Evangelist roles in Bach's St. Matthew and St. John passions as he led the performances.

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### HARRY KUPFER 12 AUGUST 1935 – 30 DECEMBER 2019

**Harry Kupfer**, who has died aged 84, was a towering figure in opera production with a career spanning 60 years. A native of Berlin, for the first two decades he worked largely behind the iron curtain, but a handful of productions in the west in the 1970s led to a landmark *Flying Dutchman* at the Bayreuth festival in 1978, followed by an equally trailblazing staging of Wagner's *Ring* there in 1988.

The two greatest avowed influences on Kupfer's dramaturgy were Walter Felsenstein and Bertolt Brecht – he called them his "spiritual forefathers". From the former (though he never worked directly with him) he imbibed the principles of realistic music theatre (as opposed to singers' opera), emphasising the importance of character, motivation and dramatic immediacy. From the latter he inherited the idea of distancing the audience from the action on stage: theatregoers should be critical and engaged rather than passive and emotionally manipulated. The result of this twin influence was a style that was intellectually rigorous but at the same time powerfully communicative.

Kupfer's Bayreuth *Ring* was a densely allusive, socially critical exploration of the cycle that integrated mythological and contemporary planes so as to address the issues of accumulated wealth and power, ruination of the natural environment and global destruction, while remaining faithful to the work's timeless universality. Before a note of music was heard, a post-holocaust group of men and women stared bitterly out at the audience, suggesting that we were observing a true cycle of human history – one we have the power to transcend if only we would learn the lesson. The ash tree in *Die Walküre* was dead and the forest in Siegfried had clearly been laid waste by an



ecological disaster. The image of Valhalla as a Manhattan-style skyscraper alluded to the role of capital in this apocalyptic scenario. Replete with socio-political awareness, psychological observation and striking theatricality, it remains one of the key productions in the *Ring*'s stage history.

Kupfer spoke of his approach to production as beginning, perhaps surprisingly, not with the text but with the music. "All my fantasy comes when I hear or read the music," he said. Having attempted to grasp the composer's meaning, he then turned to the text, creating a dialectical relationship between the two. Impatient with those who wanted opera to provide a haven from politics, Kupfer also spoke of his desire to build a bridge from the time of a work's creation to the present day and of his wish to provoke the audience to find its own context for a work. He was one of the finest exponents of what is known in German as *Personenregie* ("direction of the characters"), encompassing a fusion of text, music, gesture, mime, characterisation and stage choreography.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jan/09/harry-kupfer-obituary>

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### FRANZ MAZURA 22 APRIL 1924 – 23 JANUARY 2020

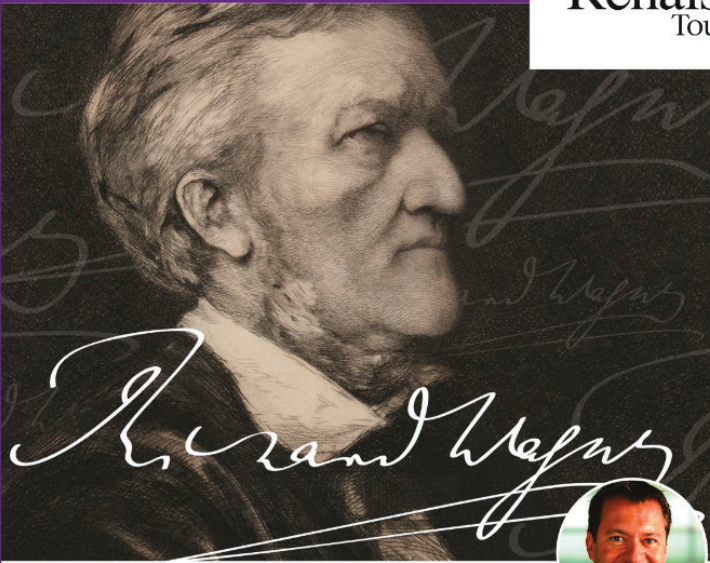
Bass-baritone **Franz Mazura** performed at the Bayreuth Festival from 1971 for 25 years and at the Metropolitan Opera for 15 years. He most often played villains and strange characters, with signature roles including Klingsor in Wagner's *Parsifal*. Mazura took part in world premieres, such as the double role of Dr. Schön and Jack the Ripper in the world premiere of

the completed version of Alban Berg's *Lulu* at the Paris Opera in 1979, and as Abraham in Giorgio Battistelli's *Lot* in 2017. Two of his recordings received Grammy Awards. His voice was described as with dark timbre, powerful and like granite, with perfect diction. He had a long career, appearing at the Staatsoper Berlin the night before his 95th birthday.





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## ADDRESS

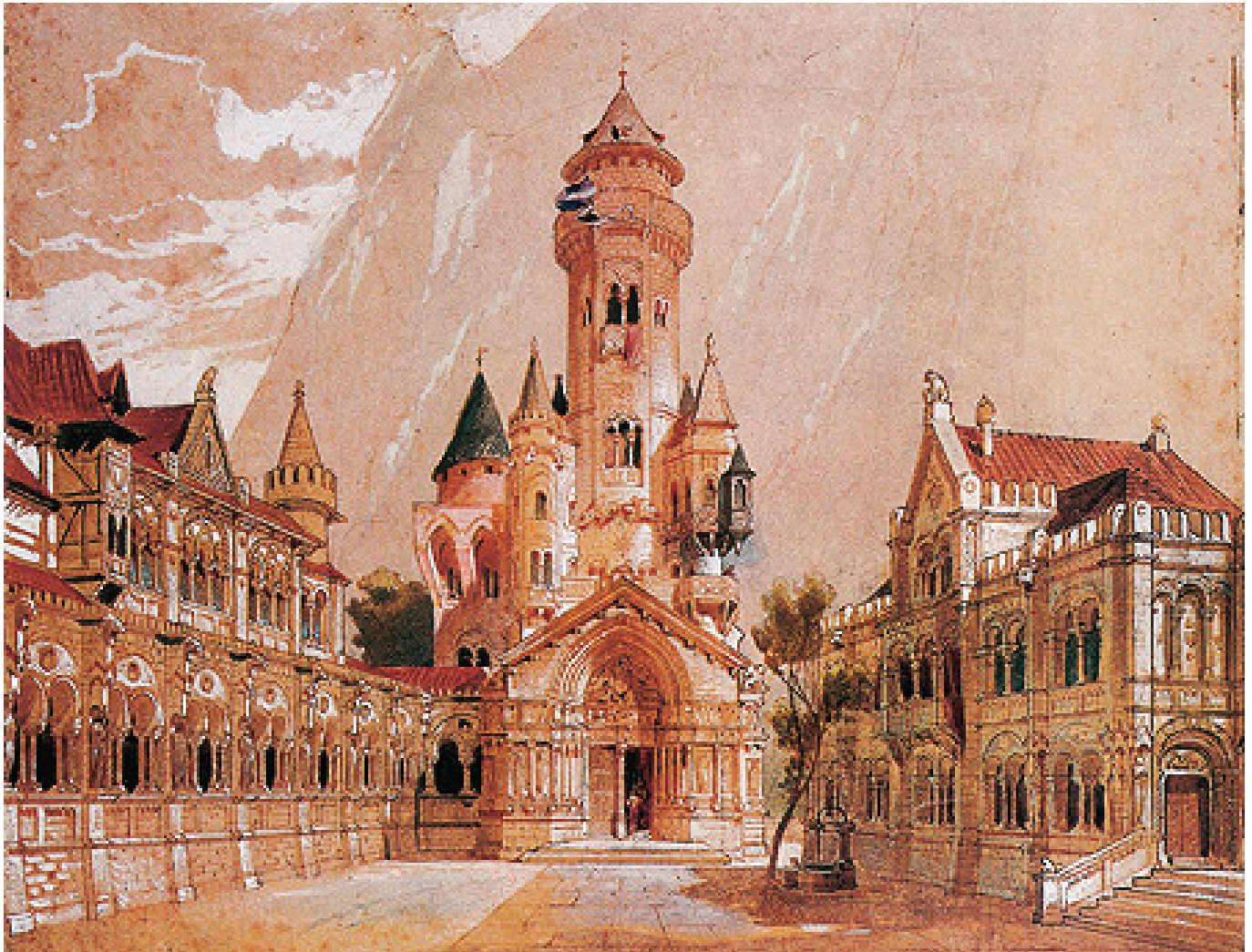
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(All website addresses used in this Newsletter are reproduced in the PDF version of the Quarterly on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article – For Members Only, members will need to log in)



**Ideal design for Neuschwanstein Castle: east view of the Upper Courtyard, with the keep and chapel in the centre by Christian Jank. 1868**

The design incorporated Richard Wagner's instructions for the set of Act 2 of the opera Lohengrin; The Government Architect selected to convert Jank's pictorial representations into plans was Eduard Riedel, who had already redesigned Berg Palace for Ludwig's father in 1849-51. In accordance with the king's wishes, Jank turned the "robber knight's castle" with late gothic elements that he had originally designed into a monumental "Romanesque" castle with a five-storey Palace in the general style of the Wartburg Palace. Neuschwanstein, which everyone now oddly enough thinks of as a typical "medieval castle", is thus not a copy of any existing building, but a characteristic example of historicism, in which architectural motifs from Wartburg are combined with those of castles from medieval book illustrations.

**NOTE:** The DVD being shown on 19 April will feature Neuschwanstein and other castles built by Ludwig II.

## ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

(unless otherwise advised in Coming Events)  
Goethe Institut, 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)

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