



CELEBRATING  
**40 YEARS** 1980 - 2020



WAGNER  
SOCIETY  
NSW

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

# WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 31

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SEPTEMBER 2020



Reg & Betty Maloney and Leonard Hansen in Bayreuth 1980



**Bayreuth 1989** Margaret and Clare Hennessy, Reg and Betty Maloney, Unknown, Shirley Robertson, Dennis Condon, Robert Mitchell, Judith Jacks, Joan Klein, Unknown, Alec and Aviva Cohen

## LETTER FROM OUR NEW PRESIDENT ESTEBAN INSAUSTI

Dear members and friends,

This is my first letter to you as President, the 10<sup>th</sup> in our 40 year history. I am very honoured to have the opportunity to lead this Society into its fifth decade . But at the same time I approach my tenure with trepidation in a time of pestilence, of societal change, a time when known structures are being questioned, certainly challenged. A time of revolution perhaps, a circumstance the Master may have revelled in. Into this environment of masks and isolation and dark theatres, your new Committee is wrestling with how best to continue our tenet under such circumstances. Expect Zoom Events. What else we might offer is under discussion and planning as I write. We are also keen to properly celebrate our milestone, in person, within an appropriate timeframe.

Despite the negative aspects of the current situation, particularly in cultural terms, it has been a very rich time to wallow in a panoply of Wagner productions presented on various internet platforms. Productions both new and historic have been streamed or made available by just about every major company on the planet. I hope that most of you have and continue to take advantage of this smorgasbord of Wagneriana. The

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 3 >**

### SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

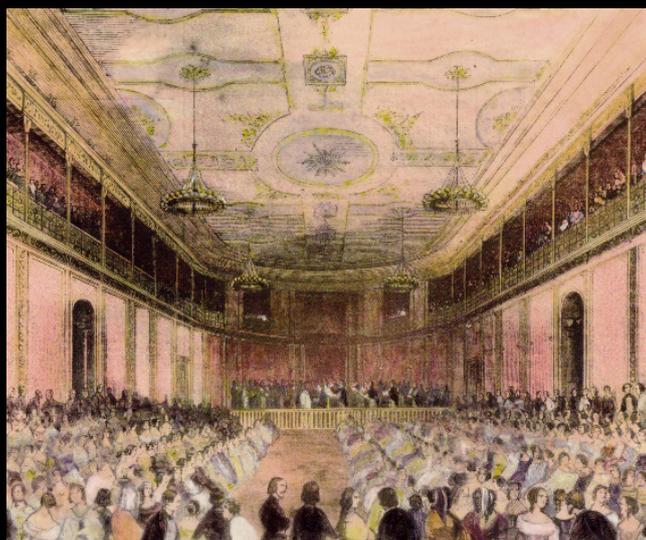
To promote the music of Richard Wagner and his contemporaries and to encourage a wider understanding of their work.  
To support the training of young Wagnerian or potential Wagnerian performers from NSW.

# WAGNER AND BEETHOVEN

REFER TO PETER BASSETT'S ARTICLE ON PAGES 13 - 17



The exterior of the Leipzig Gewandhaus as Wagner would have known it



The interior of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, where Wagner first heard Beethoven's Seventh and Ninth Symphonies



The Margravial Opera House in Bayreuth, where Wagner conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on 22 May (his birthday) in 1872, to mark the laying of the foundation stone of the Festival Theatre.

good news, and we need good news, is that major opera companies around the world are finding ways to present live productions. In Germany, parking lots and loading docks are being used as quasi theatres. It is only a matter of time before we will be able to go back into theatres. Opera Australia, quite understandably, had to cancel the Brisbane Ring, but has been exemplary in announcing new dates for the production to take place a year hence. Personally I am really looking forward to a digital staging of the Ring and what images and world that technology will be able to conjure for us. Not to mention what kind of Alberich our very own Society member Warwick Fyfe will come up with this time around.

Now is a time to support The Arts and in particular singers – this is a core function of the Society. Your Committee is looking at ways of doing more to support individuals as well as future projects such as the building up over several years of the Melbourne Opera Ring (also deferred due to the Covid pandemic) to be conducted by the wonderful Maestro Anthony Negus.

Usually the President's letter includes a list of the achievements and events that defined the preceding period. Due to the late scheduling of the AGM most of that is covered in Colleen Chesterman's last President's Annual Report published in the following pages which I commend you to please read. So instead I would like to use this space to say a little about me, as well as attempt to explain why I have been a member of the Society for some 33 years (joined in 1987 – member number 433). To do that I need to explain how I arrived at being obsessed with the music dramas of Richard Wagner. I was aware of the music from an early age but not the scenography and dramaturgy. This came later as I became obsessed with theatre. The trigger for diving headlong into the world of Wagner productions and set design in particular was the 1976 Centenary exhibition of models from Bayreuth. I clearly remember going to the Opera House with my father where we spent the best part of a couple of hours looking at those magical models whilst listening to slabs of Wagner. I was sold. As

an architecture student I was fascinated by the Bayreuth Festspielhaus (still am). I was also filled with dreams of becoming a set designer, flirted with NIDA for over 30 years, getting accepted once (1982) and rejected once (2016). Thank goodness that I kept my head and stayed a jobbing architect.

The initial reason I joined the Society is one most of you may relate with – getting tickets to Bayreuth. The idea to join was facilitated by George Fleischer, a wise Viennese, who liaised, on behalf of the ABC, with a group of young people known as The Youth Concert Committee (more on that in the future perhaps). Over time that initial selfish reason expanded to an appreciation of the wider aims of the Society which is the enjoyment of participating in a venture to better understand the work of Richard Wagner and supporting the artists who bring his music and drama to life. My involvement and engagement with the Society has been sporadic but intensified over the last few years, coinciding with the acceleration of Ring cycles being accumulated. Also a number of key members of the Society begun to prick my conscience and recruitment into the Committee quickly ensued. Some of these key members I am pleased to call my friends, some for most of my adult life. Leona Geeves, for instance was an early introduction to the Society by our late mutual friend Robert Lloyd (also a member). Whilst Dennis Mather and Robert Mitchell were both my teachers at Fort Street sometime last century (sorry gentlemen). A large part of being a member of the Society is its people, its membership, as much as it is about Richard Wagner. In that vein I hope to get to meet all of you at some stage in the future.

Happy listening. Stay healthy. And best wishes,

**Esteban Insausti**

## FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

Because of the Covid 19 assembly restrictions it is not possible to confirm which planned live events will proceed over the rest of 2020. We certainly hope that we can hold a Christmas Party and celebrate our 40th Anniversary.

The committee is negotiating with cancelled speakers to deliver talks on Zoom.

Members will be kept up to date by email.

## QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

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<b>AGM REPORT</b>	<b>P.11</b>
<b>WAGNER AND BEETHOVEN - Peter Bassett</b>	<b>P.13</b>
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<b>CAMERON MENZIES - REFLECTIONS</b>	<b>P.19</b>
<b>NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY</b>	<b>P.22</b>
<b>THE RAVEN'S REPORTING</b>	<b>P.25</b>

## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

To celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, starting with this issue and continuing in the December and March issues, you will find a variety of articles, photos, letters and anecdotes from members celebrating the founding and achievements of the Society. I'd like to thank Clare and Margaret Hennessy for the lovely photos they sent me. I hope I have got the names and dates correct on all the photos I'm publishing – please forgive any errors – memories aren't what they used to be.

I invite all members to send me photos or a few (or many) words to share with other members about what the Society has meant to you, how you came to join, outstanding talks or performances you attended in Sydney or elsewhere, or anything else of interest. Please send to [michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com](mailto:michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com) To jog your memory all the past issues of Newsletters and Quarterlies are available to members on our website. I particularly recommend issue 100 which has a comprehensive history of the Society and its achievements. I have republished a couple of articles and photos from that issue. <http://wagner.org.au/sites/default/files/2018-05/100.pdf>

I'd like to thank readers who have written to me expressing their enjoyment of the Quarterly. I appreciate the feedback and I enjoy the search for the right mix of the informative, personal, academic and light-hearted in our currently disrupted Wagnerian world. This is my 11<sup>th</sup> issue and I must acknowledge our printer, Michael Ritchie of MKR Productions, and the outstanding work he has been doing for us.

I'd like to thank regular contributor Peter Bassett for his wonderfully researched essay about Wagner and Beethoven to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beethoven's birth in December 1770.

Thanks are due to Leona for organising and proofreading the fascinating reports from artists who we have supported – they are remarkably optimistic considering the effects that Covid-19 is having on their careers

The pandemic has certainly played havoc with the world of live music hasn't it? At least we have had access to an outstanding series of online videos from the Met, Glyndebourne, Grassington and other opera companies. Thanks to Lis Bergman and Marie Leech for the excellent links and news that they have been emailing members and for the great short clips on our 'Wagner Society NSW' YouTube channel. It can be accessed via link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpgwUznzAzNdUkP2JK1cDew>

**Mike Day**  
[michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com](mailto:michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com)

## MESSAGE FROM OPERA AUSTRALIA

We recently announced the postponement of our productions of the Ring Cycle and Aida in Brisbane as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We're excited to now be able to share the rescheduled performance dates for these productions in 2021.

### The Ring Cycle rescheduled dates:

<b>Cycle 1</b>	was 10–16 November, 2020	now 29 Oct - 4 Nov, 2021
<b>Cycle 2</b>	was 19–26 November, 2020	now 6 - 12 November, 2021
<b>Cycle 3</b>	was 28 Nov – 5 Dec, 2020	now 14 - 20 November, 2021

## DONATION RECEIVED SINCE JUNE 2020

**Our thanks to Camron Dyer for a generous donation to help the Society's objectives.**

## 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!

## 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.

## DA CAPO MUSIC SECONDHAND AND ANTIQUARIAN MUSIC BOOKSTORE

Upstairs at 51 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, NSW, 2037 - Above SAPPHO BOOKS

Website: <http://www.dacapo.com.au>

Please phone Da Capo if you have any queries: +61 2 9952 4498

Or email Da Capo at: [music@dacapo.com.au](mailto:music@dacapo.com.au) or **Meredith Baillie** - on [shop@sapphobooks.com.au](mailto:shop@sapphobooks.com.au)

The cafe attached to **Sappho** serves great coffee, wine & snacks.

# FREELANCE ARTIST RELIEF AUSTRALIA

## **Freelance Artist Relief Australia (FARA)**

has been established in a time of crisis to provide emergency assistance to Australian classical singers. Whether based at home or around the world, Australian classical singers are facing an indefinite period of income loss and contract cancellations. Singing is an art, a discipline and a lifestyle. Like dancers or athletes, singers need constant practice to maintain and develop their voice and repertoire. When the world shut down in March, Australian singers around the world lost months of contracts. Months of practice, rehearsals and performances.

Beyond the immediate financial help to enable singers to survive during this time, FARA is fighting for our fragile ecosystem of artists to survive this crisis. Whether they are young and just starting their careers, or are established singers, all of them have lost months of work. This will threaten the capacity of many singers to be able to stay in this industry after years, perhaps decades of training, dedication and experience. Losing these singers would represent a tragic loss of artistry and endanger, more broadly, the vibrancy of the performing arts sector, now and into the future.

**If you love music, if you love this art form, the best way to help at the moment is to make donations to ensure artists will still be there on the other side of this crisis, ready to bring their roles back to life and to perform for you once again.**

**For further information about Freelance Artist Relief Australia, please contact:**

**Anna d'Ersu, Director of Development**

**E** [anna@freelanceartistrelief.com](mailto:anna@freelanceartistrelief.com)

**T** +61 4 88 011 713

**Website:** [www.freelanceartistreliefaustralia.com](http://www.freelanceartistreliefaustralia.com)

**Instagram:** @freelanceartistrelief



*"Arts venues were among the first institutions to close due to the current pandemic. As of today, nobody knows when it will be possible to perform again. Freelance artists engaged for single projects and performances have seen their contracts annulled and income disappear for the foreseeable future.*

*"There is no safety net ... and there was no time to prepare. We need to do something to help."*

**Nicole Car, Patron and Founder**

**The Wagner Society in NSW is an enthusiastic supporter of FARA and is negotiating with the organisation about potential Zoom presentations and eventually live concerts in return for our sponsorship. Members may donate directly to FARA or through the Wagner Society so we can have collective influence to channel the (tax-deductable) money to Wagnerian singers. Details will be emailed to all members.**



## CELEBRATING 40 YEARS 1980 - 2020

In the September, December and March issues we are featuring a variety of articles, photos, letters and anecdotes from members to celebrate the founding and achievements of the Wagner Society in NSW. Long-time members will recognise the original 'swan' logo, designed by founding member Michel Arnould at the first meeting of the society.

### LETTER FROM PAST PRESIDENT AND FOUNDING MEMBER RICHARD KING TO THE WAGNER SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Dear Lis,

Thank you for the invite to the Annual General Meeting.. My apologies as I regret I am unable to be there at this time..

I was 37 years young when my esteemed friend, the late Dr Leonard Hansen and I laid the foundation for the first ever Wagner Society in Australia.. This year marks it's fortieth anniversary. A lasting living monument to the enthusiasm and hard work of all who helped and toiled to make it all happen and thrive. Long live the Music Dramas of the Master and may the future reveal the deep esoteric initiation for those whose destiny leads them to experience his legacy and the spiritual journey it contains..

The Society has altered many lives as a result of its existence on so many levels and also the performances and careers of so many artists who have resonated with the musical impulse Richard Wagner bestowed upon a world so deep in its descent into matter. Richard Wagner's message is redemption through love and man's destiny towards true freedom.



Richard King and Dr Leonard Hansen with Wolfgang Wagner 1994

May the work of the founding members and our fellow pilgrims flourish for centuries to come..

With all good wishes,

Sincerely,

**Richard King, 27 July 2020**

### REPLY FROM VICE PRESIDENT ESTEBAN INSAUSTI

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your generous and superb email. We are all eternally grateful to the founding members for their vision, resolve and tenacity in creating this Wagnerian family in Sydney. We are hoping to properly celebrate and mark this 40 year milestone later this year, restrictions permitting, with as many of the foundation members and former Presidents as can be managed.

On a personal note, having joined in 1987 as member 433, I am very aware of the honour and responsibility that falls to me as the next President of the Society, the tenth in line from Dr Leonard Hansen and yourself. I hope that I can live up to the very high levels set by my predecessors as the Society enters its fifth decade.

Despite the challenging times, the restrictions, the cessation of international travel and all the opera houses remaining dark, the music of the Master remains with us in many forms. And is a source of strength that makes endurance of these times bearable. Of course we will all be sitting in the dark soon enough, waiting for those first sounds to emerge from the pit and onto another journey down the Rhine or across the Irish Sea.....

Once again thank you. I hope to see you later this year as we celebrate 40 years.

With respect, thanks and my best wishes,

Esteban Insausti

**Vice President, Wagner Society in NSW Inc.  
29 July 2020**



## JENNY FERNS, MEMBER NO. 34 - REMEMBERS THE EARLY DAYS

Many years ago, last century (1967), when I was on the typical “working holiday”, a couple of years after leaving school, I was living and working in London. One evening I lined up at the English National Opera to obtain “standing room” tickets (10/-, at the rear of the stalls) for Wagner’s *“Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg”*. An opera, I believed was the favourite opera of my father, in Sydney. In those days, communication was either by letters, aerogrammes, or, if you were very technologically up-to-date, by sending reel to reel tape recordings. When I gleefully explained to my father that I had been to see his favourite opera, he replied that if I had seen “Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg” sung in English, then I hadn’t seen “*Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg*”. Naturally, I was very disappointed.

Eventually, on my return to Sydney in 1980, I discovered that the WEA (Workers’ Educational Association) was conducting a 10-week lecture series explaining Wagner’s *“Der Ring des Niebelungen”*. I duly enrolled in this course, conducted by **Werner Baer**, in the Bathurst Street headquarters of the WEA. Those days we followed a photo-copied text, learnt about plot, leit-motiven and the poetry of the libretto. The themes were displayed on slides on a screen with an assistant helping the co-ordination from a tape-recorder and the slide projector.

Sometime later, Mr Baer announced that there would be a meeting arranged to create a Society to support the wider education of artists and audiences with, possibly, the opportunity to collectively apply for tickets to performances in Bayreuth, Bavaria, West Germany during the annual Wagner Festival. This attractive idea appealed to me. I joined a group attending, in an Art Gallery in Woolloomooloo, when **Richard King** and **Dr. Leonard Hansen** took the initiative to conscript a Committee. Mr Werner Baer together with his wife, Sybil were there together with **Clare** and **Margaret Hennessey** and **Dr Sue Kelly**. Otherwise I knew no-one.

As a result of this gathering many activities were planned. Events were held in the Gallery and other venues around Sydney, such as the Theatre at the relatively new AMP Centre, Circular Quay and at the German “Concordia Club” in Stanmore. For me the most important activities were the Sunday afternoon sessions where LP recordings of the great Wagner operas were played and participants followed photo-copied bi-lingual librettos. Relatively minor social activity was included. These sessions were conducted by **Jean-Louis Stuurop**, a very enthusiastic, generous supporter. Later, my parents also participated in membership of the Wagner Society of NSW, enjoying the opportunity to meet other members as well as to apply for tickets for Bayreuth. One year they did have the chance to make a pilgrimage to Bayreuth, a life-long ambition of my father.

When Richard King relocated to Sussex Inlet in the mid-nineties he invited a group of members to visit him there. That was a major exodus and a very lovely “family” occasion. Many other functions were held with the objective of raising funds to offer prospective Wagnerian singers the opportunity

to have their German lessons subsidised, or even some air-fares provided, for their further study trips to Germany. Usually a repayment came in the form of a discussion or performance opportunity at a Sunday meeting of the Society, to show members what had been achieved as a result of their support. Every year, during the function held closest to the anniversary of the birthday of Richard Wagner (22 May 1813), the gathered members hold a celebratory toast to his memory and achievements.

Over the years I have visited Bayreuth Festspiele during many summers, both alone, or with friends, having acquired tickets either through the Wagner Society of NSW or the Box Office of the Festspielhaus. I have seen most of the productions of the operas, sometimes twice. Consequently, I have stayed at several private accommodations as well as hotels, small and large. Usually I have been to lectures downtown (City Hall, Hofgarten), the American presentations at the Hotel Kongress, or at the Festspielhaus (in German) on the morning of a performance, as well as the new concept of the “Caesuras”. These are presentations in a choir rehearsal room at the Festspielhaus, in German, which describe and elaborate details of the individual productions, including manufacture of props, directorial information or backstage displays of curiosities of great interest to spectators. The long intervals during performances are for mingling or dining and are usually an opportunity to catch-up with “regulars” who may be members of the NSW Wagner Society or folk one has met along the way, from far and wide.

The traditional post-travel presentations held by the Wagner Society of NSW (usually in September or October) at the Sydney Wagner Society meetings, are a refreshing opportunity to re-live the Bayreuth experience in English, sharing ideas with like-minded folk, and newcomers, as well. It’s always surprising what details and impressions arise.

In writing this story, the immensity of the experiences spending a week or more doing Wagner related activities during every European summer, for consecutive years (other than this one) has felt quite normal. The chances to attend other performances of Wagner in many other cities has been afforded with the help of the regularly updated, listing provided in the Quarterly of the Wagner Society of NSW, from time to time by Camron Dyer, known as “The Raven’s Reporting”. This unique facility is such a valuable reference forum, suggesting travel ideas and performance opportunities, the source of food for thought, throughout the year.

Thank heavens for the existence and continuation of the Wagner Society of NSW. Not only have the regular monthly meetings been an opportunity for endless stimulation, as well as renewed contacts of members, but also the lectures, performances, forums, film-showings and discussions have been a much valued, on-going contribution to my cultural life.

Where else could that happen?



## MESSAGES FROM OTHER WAGNER SOCIETIES



### RICHARD WAGNER VERBAND INTERNATIONAL E.V.

The Richard Wagner Verband International is proud and delighted to offer its congratulations to the Wagner Society in New South Wales on your 40th anniversary.

The international nature of our organisation is one of our greatest achievements - that we can bring together and facilitate strong links between Wagner Societies from all around the world. The Wagner flame burns especially brightly in Australia, and we value the significant contribution that your societies make to our core aims and goals.

From your strong presence in Bayreuth, your excellent and thought-provoking Wagner productions in your world-class opera house, your many and varied activities for members and your support for talented young Australian singers and musicians, the Wagner Society in NSW is a benchmark for societies around the world.

We wish you all the best for your anniversary and here's to a long and fruitful collaboration.

**Andrea Buchanan**, 4th Vice-President,  
Richard Wagner Verband International e.V.



### THE RICHARD WAGNER SOCIETY (VICTORIA)

Congratulations to the Wagner Society in New South Wales on its fortieth anniversary. This pandemic year forces us to reflect on the feast of Wagnerian productions we have enjoyed in Australia, particularly in the last fifteen years. Elke Neidhardt's 2004 Adelaide Ring was a beacon, so too the 2013 and 2016 Melbourne Rings. We have also had wonderful performances in Hobart, Perth, Adelaide and Sydney. Noteworthy was Opera Australia's 2017 concert version of Parsifal.

We would never have predicted forty years ago that there would be such a vibrant Wagnerian operatic scene in Australia. This has been enhanced by the Australian Wagner Societies and their members, who have been strong supporters and patrons of these productions.

Whether we are from Societies in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia or South Australia, the camaraderie of Australian Wagnerites is always evident in Australian and international Wagner performances and especially at the annual Bayreuth and Adelaide Festivals.

The absence of live opera in 2020 will make it all the more exciting when we meet in Brisbane in late 2021 for Opera Australia's Ring production, directed by Chen Shi-Zheng.

Thank you to the Wagner Society in New South Wales for initiating the promotion of Wagner's music in Australia. Enjoy your fortieth anniversary celebrations.

**Dr Susan Cumming**, President,  
The Richard Wagner Society (Victoria)

### THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN QUEENSLAND

Forty years on, the Wagner Society NSW has certainly lived up to the expectations of its founders. It has built a fine reputation for encouraging the appreciation of Richard Wagner's life and works, and in supporting many performances and artists. I have greatly enjoyed my contacts with the Society over the years, and I send warmest congratulations at this impressive milestone.

**Peter Bassett**,  
President, The  
Wagner Society in  
Queensland

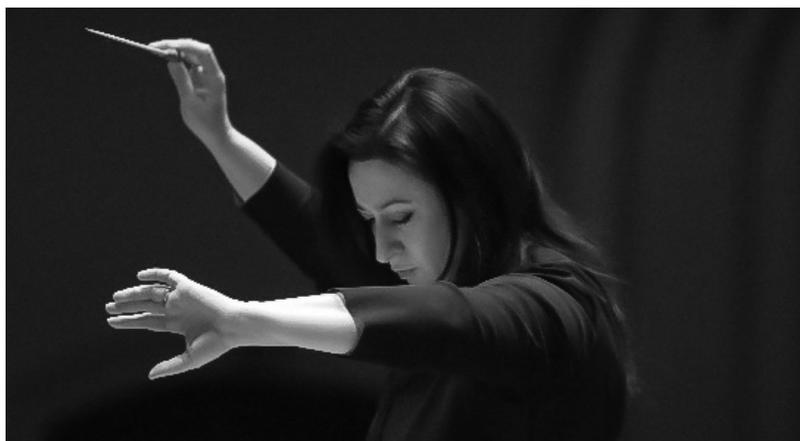


## FOR THE RECORDS

### PATRONS



**Sir Charles Mackerras** 1981 - 2010



**Simone Young AM** 2011 - Present

### HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS

Werner Baer MBE	1981 - 92
Leonie Rysanek	1983 - 98
Rita Hunter CBE	1985 - 2001
Michael Ewans	1985 -
Leonard Hanson	1981 - 90
Richard King	1981 -
Reg Maloney	1993 - 2001
Horst Hoffmann	1998 -
Joseph Ferfaglia	1998 - 2013
Barbara McNulty OBE	2005 - 09
Roger Cruikshank	2014 -
Dr Terence Watson	2014 -
John Wegner AO	2015 - 19
Dr Dennis Mather	2018 -
Hon Jane Mathews AO	2018 - 19
Dr Colleen Chesterman	2020 -
Leona Geeves	2020 -

### PAST PRESIDENTS

Leonard Hansen	1981 - 1986
Richard King	1986 - 1989
Olive Coonan	1989 - 1994
Ramon Josey	1994 - 1995
Paul Lehman	1995 - 1997
Barbara McNulty	1997 - 2002
Roger Cruikshank	2002 - 2011
Hon Jane Mathews AO	2011 - 2017
Dr Colleen Chesterman	2017 - 2020

## RECENTLY ELECTED HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS



### DR COLLEEN CHESTERMAN MEMBER NO 649

Colleen joined the Society in 1994 and has been Secretary, Vice President and President.

The most striking single contribution that Colleen made to the Society during her time as an

office bearer was to encourage members to make donations towards and subsequently attend the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra's performances of *Tristan und Isolde* in 2018. They were conducted by Asher Fisch and starred renowned Australian tenor Stuart Skelton. Everyone who made the journey to Perth for this event agreed that the performances were quite thrilling. Colleen also feels gratified that she played a major role in persuading numerous speakers

to give presentations of particular interest to the Society. These include conductors and singers such as Simone Young, Stuart Skelton, Warwick Fyfe, David Robertson, Asher Fisch and Anthony Negus, directors such as David McVicar and Neil Armfield, and scholars such as Peter Bassett and Antony Ernst

Colleen also played an important role in helping Pinchgut Opera get established. Early in Pinchgut's life (its first production was in 2002), Colleen boosted its box office takings considerably by encouraging friends to join her and husband Michael at the opening night of each opera. The party thus assembled would often have dinner beforehand in a restaurant nearby. On occasions the number involved was of the order of 100. She was designated a Pinchgut Heroine in recognition of this important work in helping the fledgling opera company to survive its early years.

**CONTINUED OVER >**



## RECENTLY ELECTED HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS continued



Photo: David Slezak

### LEONA GEEVES MEMBER NO 87

Leona joined the Wagner Society in 1982 and has held many positions on the Committee over the years, including most recently Vice President. Even before joining the committee, she was active from early days helping with speaker

selection, choosing singers and musicians for funding, and arranging concerts and seminars.

Her work promoting young singers and organising concerts has been tireless and invaluable to the Society and the cultural life of Sydney.

Fostering the talents of young singers over decades has brought her incredible amounts of joy, as well as opportunities for travelling to see them perform in the opera houses of the world.

Although a descendent of Jacques Albert (J Albert & Son), her musical taste stems from her father, a talented baritone and radio executive. He was passionate about opera, particularly Wagner and the entire record library at his workplace seemed to come home from time to time, for which Leona remains eternally grateful. Leona studied singing in her teens but realised very quickly that it was best left to others.

Leona's friends admire her knack of meeting international performers at after parties and successfully snaffling them for future events.

Leona is on the Advisory Council of Pacific Opera (a young artists program, based in Sydney) as well as being the Alumni Manager. She is President of the Sydney Opera Society (an opera and music study group), a supporter of the Dame Nellie Melba Trust and helps with selection of speakers and singers for Opera Lunedi (an opera study group).



Leona with Wolfgang Wagner in Bayreuth 1995

## FINANCIAL WAGNER SOCIETY MEMBERS AS AT 27 AUGUST 2020

Ms K Abrahams [956], Dr C Adams [1158], Mr P Alger [255], Mrs U Armstrong [1061], Dr J Arnold [1205], Dr F J Augustus & Mr K Ryrie [963], Ms M Bachmann [1132], Mrs C Bailey [663], Mrs R Baker [1090], Ms G Barnwell [944], Mr PJ Barrer [1227], Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO [798], Mr C Baskerville [817], Professor P & Mrs M Baumgartner [393], Ms B Beasley [1104], Dr J & Mr P Beeby [985], Mr M Belgiorno-Zegna [1109], Ms P Benjamin [987], Ms L Bergmann [1209], Mrs I & Mr F Beringer [975], Ms M Biggs [1130], Mrs R Block [745], Mr R Bloor [967], Ms A Blunden [1043], Mr S Bowden & Mr E Liew [1238], Ms J Bowen [743], Ms R Bradbury [1230], Ms A Bradshaw [1243], Mr C Brady & Mr B Freestone [840], Mr I & Mrs B Brady [380], Dr W Brooks & Mr A Beck [765], Ms M Brown [1203], Mrs F Butcher [918], Dr AJ Byrne & Mr AJ Gill [1242], Mr N & Dr M Cameron [1059], Ms G Carnegie [1207], Mr J Carrigan [1183], Dr J Casey [114], Mr H Charles & Mrs P Alexander [951], Dr C Chesterman [649, Hon Life Member], Professor M Chesterman [649], Mr JR Clarke & Ms P Landi [1160], Dr RT & Mrs JM Clarke [496], Mr J Coghlan & Ms A Beattie [1223], Mr DG Colquhoun [732], Mr M & Mrs J Connery [334], Mr R & Mrs R Cottle [843], Mr A Cozzolino [930], Mr GS Crank [1193], Dr P Craswell [1030], Mr R Cruickshank [66, Hon Life Member], Mrs R Dalton [1121], Mrs CH Davies [921], Mr M Day [606], Rev Dr John de Luca [1125], Miss B de Rome [207], Mr E de Zan [865], Professor C Deer [1064], Dr R Dingley & Dr C Lawson [1232], Dr J Donsworth [884], Dr N & Mrs B Dorsch [154], Mr CW Dyer & Mr R Mason [544], Professor J Edwards [1034], Mr G Ellis [1174], Mr K Elvy & Mr P Dunphy [988], Professor M Evans [0, Hon Life Member], Mr J Fawcett [1204], Mrs J Ferfaglia [45, Hon Life Member], Mrs J Ferns [34], Ms L Foldvary-Khouri [1231], Mrs C Ford [1088], Mr R Foster [850], Dr S Freiberg & Mr D Campbell [585], Mr V & Mrs K French [945], Mr R French [1187], Mr W Fyfe [755], Mr R Gastineau-Hills [68], Ms L Geeves [87, Hon Life Member], Ms H Gillam [1170], Mr M Gleeson-White [1085], Dr M Goodwin & Mr R Duels [1037], Dr E Gordon-Werner [878], Dr A Goy [723], Mr T Green [933], Mr M Grubb [858], Associate Professor E Hall [1191], Mr H Hallard [799], Ms H Halley [1007], Mr F Hammerbacher [1171], Dr F & Dr P Harvey [427], Mr S Hatcher [333], Mr A Hauserman & Ms J Nash [876], Ms M Hayton [757], Mr R Henderson [1005], Misses C & M Hennessy [19, 19A], Ms PS Holgerson [863], Dr R & Mrs B Hollings [1036], Mr T Hudson [489], Mr J Hughes [1199], Mr M & Mrs P Hunter [1224], Dr G Huon [1168], Mr I Hutchinson [1103], Mr E Insausti & Ms A Brejzek [433], Mr P Ivanoff [1101], Professor E Jacka [898], Dr G Johns [1120], Mr B Johnson & Mr A Ren [779, 1217], Mrs A Jones [861], Mr H & Mrs R Junker [866], Mr A Kaldor [991], Mr J Kelleher [965], Dr SM Kelly [4], Dr H Kestermann [995], Mrs J King [7], Mr RJ King [15, Hon Life Member], Ms A Klettenberg [847], Dr K & Mrs S Koller [52], Ms I Kowalski [536], The Hon Justice F Kunc SC [999], Mrs H Laundt [962], Dr MD Leech [916], Dr J & Mrs C Leigh [452], Dr D Lillystone [1219], Mr G Linnane [960], Ms L Longfoot [1222], Mr K Looser [1124], Mr C Manning [940], Messrs P Mason & H Burmester [997], Dr D Mather [696, Hon Life Member], Mr D May [1146], Mrs D McBain [419], Mr C McCabe [1196], Dr D McCarthy [648], Mr P McEachran [1049], Mr I & Mrs P McGaw [548], Mr JM McGrath [310], Ms H Meddings [1114], Mr N Mercer [737], Mr W & Mrs I Merrzet [115], Dr R Mitchell [1014], Mr M Moore [819], Mr W & Mrs H Naylor [543], Ms K Neill [1234], Ms A Nugent [1235], Mr A & Mrs M Olave [735], Mrs D Orr [844], Mr CJ Piper [222], Mr RN Pollard [1239], Mr G Polonski [1167], Mr KH Powell [1222], The Hon Dr RN Purvis & Mrs M Purvis [874], Mr K Reed AM [41], Ms V Reed [1233], Mr G Richards [366], Dr P Richardson & Mr A Lloyd-James [1208], Ms J Roberts & Mr A Leistner [1140], Ms A Robinson [1143], Mr PJ Roland [855], Mr P Rowe [1189], Dr J Sanders [972], Mrs M Saunders [683], Ms M Serra [1197], Ms R Shand [1236], Ms M Shaul [1178], Mr S & Mrs H Sheffer [101], Ms N Siano [619], Ms R Siegel [1217], Mrs P Smith [1221], Dr L St George [895], Mr RH Steele AM [838], Mr N Stoke [1136], Mr T & Mrs R Strong [1027], Mr J Studdert [696], Dr D Sturkey [902], Mrs I Sultemeyer [978], Ms J & Ms J Sykes [1210], Professor Taylor AC [990], Professor P Thom & Ms C Parkinson [1211], Mr R Thurling [830], Mr S Tinslay [1212], Ms J Tomi [1214], Mr R & Mrs E Tsenin [1226], Ms K Vernon [1039], Ms N Wagner [1100], Ms M Wakeham [1139], Dr W & Mrs S Walsh [956], Dr T Watson [657, Hon Life Member], Mr D Watt [1241], Dr G Watters [892], Mr D Wayne [1181], Mrs M Whealy [1149], Mr R Whitelaw [527], Ms D Whittlesea & Mr AM Gregg [839], Mr G Wiffen [1220], Mr G Wilson [834], Mrs J Hickson Wran [1108], Ms R Wulff [1186], Ms E Yashadhana & Mr Z Saunders [1229], Mr S Yu [1237] and Mr A & Mrs T Zaniboni [946].

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The delayed AGM was held at 12.00pm on Sunday 9 August, hosted on Zoom by Esteban Insausti, with 21 members participating online. Official minutes of the meeting will be posted on the website in due course.

The minutes of the 2019 AGM were accepted and the 2019/20 President's Annual Report and the 2019 Financial Report were accepted 'as read' by the meeting.

Esteban thanked retiring members Rhonda Dalton and Mailis Wakeham for their contributions over the past years

and Audrey Blunden thanked retiring president Colleen Chesterman for her tireless work for the society during her presidency. Members confirmed their appreciation by acclamation.

Colleen Chesterman and Leona Geeves were given Honorary Life Membership for their dedicated services to the Society over many years.

The 2020-21 committee was confirmed as follows:

### COMMITTEE 2020 - 2021

President	Esteban Insausti	0412 282 070
Immediate Past President	Colleen Chesterman	9360 4962
Vice President 1	Mike Day	0413 807 533
Vice President 2	Marie Leech	
Treasurer	Margaret Whealy	0414 787 199
Secretary	Ross Whitelaw	rosswhitelaw35@gmail.com
Membership Secretary	Lis Bergmann	lisbergmann89@gmail.com
Members	Nick Dorsch	0419 751 694
	Robert Mitchell	
Quarterly Editor	Mike Day	michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com
Artists' Liaison	Leona Geeves	lg03415@gmail.com
Technical Consultant	Florian Hammerbacher	wagner_nsw@optusnet.com.au
Public Officer	Alasdair Beck	9358 3922

### PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2019

	2019	2018
	\$	\$
<b>INCOME</b>		
Membership	14,604.00	14,034.00
Lectures and Functions	14,629.00	17,497.00
Donations	4,323.64	5,946.00
Bayreuth Ticket Sales	16,689.00	14,596.00
WASO Tickets and Donations	-	1,065.00
Advertising Income	700.00	-
Ring 2020 Donations	17,500.00	-
Interest Received	466.21	620.61
<b>Total Income</b>	<u>68,911.85</u>	<u>53,308.61</u>
<b>Less: EXPENSES</b>		
Newsletter	7,383.27	9,432.87
Function Catering Expenses	1,464.87	368.56
Function Room Hire	4,880.00	4,040.00
Payments to Presenters	1,872.24	3,750.00
Bayreuth Ticket Expenses	16,919.36	14,919.08
Bayreuth Memberships	798.00	1,616.00
WASO Tickets & Donations	-	11,670.00
Sponsorships/Scholarships	26,739.00	15,758.58
Ring 2020 Donations	17,500.00	-
Other Operating Expenses	2,181.99	2,590.38
	<u>79,738.73</u>	<u>64,172.47</u>
<b>Operating Profit (Loss)</b>		
<b>before Income Tax</b>	(10,826.88)	(10,863.86)
Total Available for Distribution	<u>(\$10,826.88)</u>	<u>(\$10,863.86)</u>

### THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW INC. BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2019

	Note	2019	2018
		\$	\$
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Westpac Cheque Account		13,813.42	19,162.45
Westpac Cash Reserve		57,418.12	56,962.32
Cash at Bank		71,231.54	76,124.77
Total Current Assets		71,231.54	76,124.77
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<u>71,231.54</u>	<u>76,124.77</u>
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>			
Membership revenue in advance		9,748.65	3,815.00
Total Current Liabilities		9,748.65	3,815.00
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>		<u>9,748.65</u>	<u>3,815.00</u>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		<u>\$61,482.89</u>	<u>\$72,309.77</u>
<b>MEMBERS EQUITY</b>			
Retained Profits		61,482.89	72,309.77
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS EQUITY</b>		<u>\$61,482.89</u>	<u>\$72,309.77</u>

**Patron:** Ms Simone Young AM  
**Honorary Life Members:** Mr Richard King  
 Prof Michael Ewans  
 Mr Horst Hoffman  
 Mr Roger Cruickshank  
 Dr Terence Watson  
 Dr Dennis Mather

## PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

This report will be my last as President of the Wagner Society in NSW. I have greatly enjoyed my period of three years in this position, particularly because it has been a pleasure to work with the enthusiastic and energetic people who have constituted the Committee.

In my opinion, we can look at our Society with some pride. We have a firmly committed group of members, including both founding members and members who have recently joined. In addition, our monthly meetings are almost invariably well attended, and we have been able to provide significant support to a number of talented young Australian singers who have aspired to perform in Wagner's operas.

It is very sad indeed to have to record here the death on 31 August 2019 of the immediate past President, the Hon Jane Mathews AO. As members will know, she devoted enormous time and energy to the affairs of the Society over many years. She was also a most generous donor to the Society and to numerous other institutions engaged in enriching Australia's musical life. It was most gratifying that the Society was able to take up the kind offer of a close friend of hers, Anthony Negus, to organise a concert in her honour. This took place before a large audience on 27 February. The Society is most grateful to Maestro Negus (who performed as both accompanist and soloist), his wife Carmen Jakobi, the five young singers who took part and the Society's Artists' Liaison Officer, Leona Geeves.

During the second half of 2019, particularly interesting presentations were given at Society meetings by Dr Antony Ernst (a regular presenter to us), by the Australian heldentenor Stuart Skelton, by the well-known Australian conductor Simone Young AM (who is our patron) and by Society member Robert Mitchell, who was for many years a member of Opera Australia's chorus. We also received 'feedback' from those

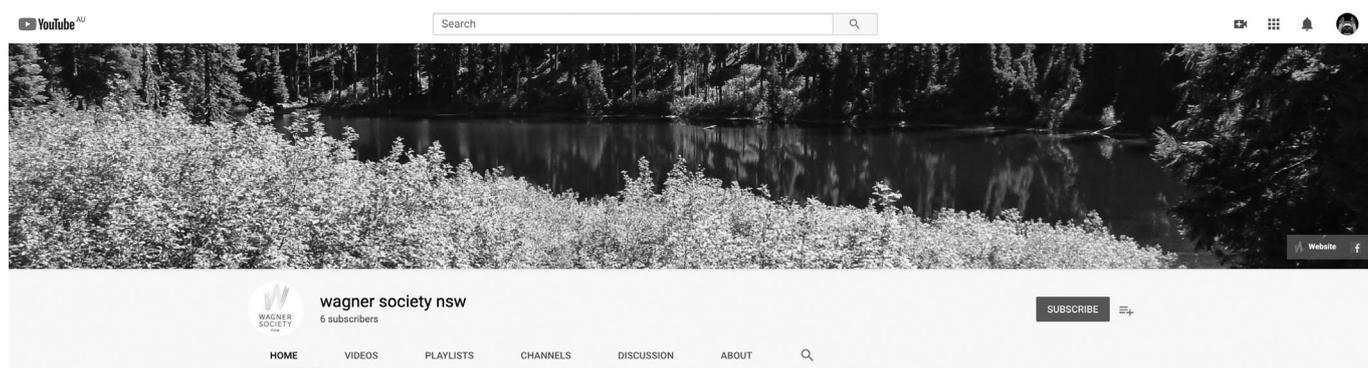
Society members who attended the Bayreuth Festival 2019 and the year finished with a Christmas concert at which two young singers and a pianist performed for us.

The first half of this year promised to deliver similar delights, but the coronavirus pandemic intervened shortly after the memorial concert for Jane Mathews. We were forced to postpone or cancel a further talk by Antony Ernst (on *The Ring*), talks by Peter Bassett (on *Lohengrin*) and Warwick Fyfe (about his first performance as Wotan) and a presentation by singer/director Tabatha McFadyen. The annual celebration of Wagner's birthday on 10 May had to take the form of a toast to him drunk by several members on Zoom. The hopes entertained by several members (including myself) that we could attend the Bayreuth Festival 2020 were dashed when its cancellation was announced.

I wish to convey special thanks to three Committee members for their work over the past year. Lis Bergmann has devoted a great deal of time and energy to improving both the Society's communications with its members and its website. Mike Day has further enlarged and enhanced the content and layout of the Quarterly. Esteban Insausti has taken on a number of tasks, including dealing with the Bayreuth Festival Box Office, the Friends of the Festival and the International Association of Wagner Societies (the 'Verband'), with regard to both the acquisition of tickets and the follow-on from the Festival's cancellation.

This expression of gratitude is additional to the thanks that I owe to all who have served on the Committee during my time as President and to the many individuals who have contributed in a number of ways – for example, by providing tasty finger-food – to members' enjoyment of our meetings.

Colleen Chesterman



## WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW YOUTUBE CHANNEL

The YouTube channel 'Wagner Society NSW' can be accessed at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpgwUznzAzNdUkP2JK1cDew>

**Videos** - will include all kinds of related videos including Society concerts (where available).

**Playlists** - includes YouTube videos from Guest performers/speakers; Society concerts; and Supported

artists. Playlists also include performances available on YouTube for Wagner operas.

**Channels** - provides links to relevant YouTube channels.

## WAGNER AND BEETHOVEN

by Peter Bassett

In his autobiography, Richard Wagner talks about the music that most impressed him as a boy. Weber's *Der Freischütz* for instance, became an obsession, and he took to staging his own performances of it at home in a marionette theatre that had once belonged to his father. Weber was an occasional visitor to the Wagner household and the family knew him well. But another powerful influence came when Wagner was just fourteen. "Another work also attracted me just as strongly" he wrote. "It was the overture in *E major* to *Fidelio*, in which the introduction gripped me especially. I asked my sisters about Beethoven and learned that news of his death had just been received. Still obsessed by the terrible grief caused by the death of Weber, this new loss of a great master who had just entered my life filled me with a strange anguish. ... I now wanted to learn more about Beethoven: I went to Leipzig and found on my sister's piano the music for *Egmont*; then I tried to get hold of some of his sonatas; finally I heard a symphony of the master for the first time at a Gewandhaus concert: it was the *A major* Symphony (the Seventh). Its effect on me was indescribable. On top of this came the added impact of Beethoven's physiognomy as shown by lithographs of the time, as well as the knowledge of his deafness and his solitary and withdrawn life. There soon arose in me an image of the highest originality, beyond comparison with anything. This image melded with that of Shakespeare: in ecstatic dreams I met both, saw and talked to them...."

We find numerous other accounts of Wagner's reactions to Beethoven: in his so-called 'Red Pocket-book' (begun in his early twenties) for instance, and in a novella called *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven* written in 1840 when Wagner was a young man living in Paris. In this story, he records an imaginary conversation in Vienna between Beethoven and a composer referred to simply as 'R'. In this conversation, Beethoven's words anticipate Wagner's own intended reforms in the field of dramatic music.

"I am no opera composer" begins the fictional Beethoven. "That is to say, there isn't a single theatre in the world for which I'd willingly write another opera. Were I to make an opera after my own heart, everyone would run away from it; for it would have none of your arias, duets, trios, and all the stuff they patch up operas with to-day; and what I should set in their place no singer would sing, and no audience listen to. They all know nothing but gaudy lies, glittering nonsense, and sugared tedium. Whoever wrote a true musical drama would be taken for a fool...."

"And how must one go to work," I hotly urged, "to bring such a musical drama about?"

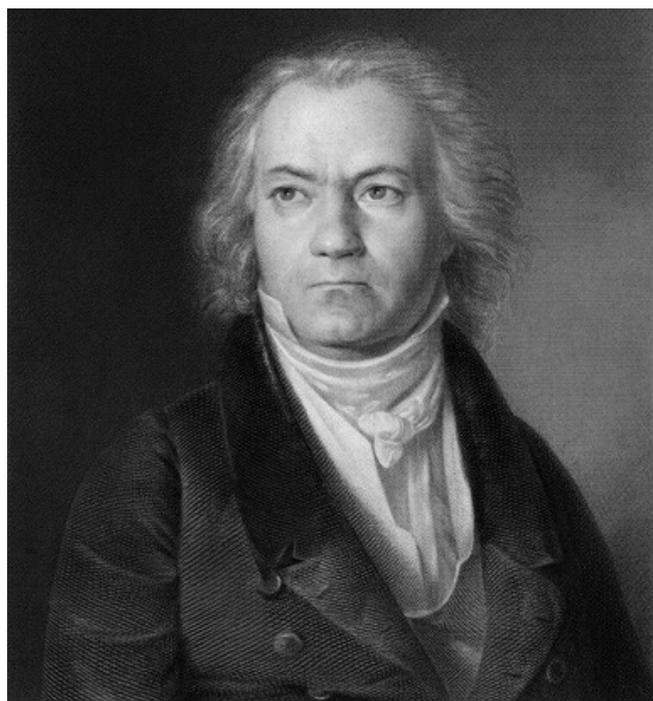
**Above:** Richard Wagner, Munich November 1864



"As Shakespeare did, when he wrote his plays." Then he went on: "He who has to stitch all kinds of pretty things for ladies with passable voices to get bravoes and applause, had better become a Parisian lady's-tailor; not a dramatic composer. ... Why shouldn't vocal music, as much as instrumental, form a grand and serious genre, and its execution meet with as much respect from the feather-brained warblers as I demand from an orchestra for one of my symphonies? The human voice is a far more beautiful and nobler organ of tone than any instrument in the orchestra. Couldn't one employ it with just the same freedom as these?"

The fictional Beethoven goes on to talk about the Ninth Symphony on which he is working, and his difficulty in finding a text that does justice to his ideas and to the music. The whole story is a fascinating statement of Wagner's views on writing opera, at a formative stage in his creative life.

In 1869, Wagner asked the publishers Breitkopf & Härtel for an engraved copy of an 1823 portrait of Beethoven by Waldmüller. This portrait was somewhat dismissed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but Wagner liked it, and he recognized in it, he said, a vision of an innermost musical world. At the time of its painting, Beethoven had been working on his Mass in D (*Missa Solemnis*) and the Ninth Symphony.



Engraving of Beethoven by Lazarus Gottlieb Sichling (1850s) after a portrait by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller (1823). Wagner's favourite depiction of Beethoven

Wagner looked past his hero's notoriously irascible behaviour to the genius beneath. In an autobiographical sketch of 1842-43, Wagner describes the shattering experience of first hearing the incidental music to *Egmont*. Goethe's play tells the story of Count Egmont who was executed by the Spaniards for leading an uprising in the Netherlands in the 16<sup>th</sup> century – Beethoven's favourite theme of the heroism of a man condemned for having taken a strong stand against oppression. Beethoven wrote just one opera, *Fidelio*, but in it, and in his *Coriolan Overture* and *Egmont*, we find the roots of Wagner's 'music drama'. Bernard Shaw - playwright, critic, Perfect Wagnerite and Fabian Socialist - had this to say about the Beethoven/Wagner connection: "A Beethoven symphony (except the articulate part of the ninth) expresses noble feeling, but not thought; it has moods, but no ideas. Wagner added thought and produced the music drama."

Beethoven's symphonies were intensely dramatic – they were dramas without the stage, made possible by the fact that the musical motives were short and pungent, yet capable of almost countless transformations. Extended melodies would have been too inflexible to allow this to happen. What Wagner proposed to do was to make this kind of music the chief expressive medium of musical theatre by taking it out of the concert hall and bringing it into the opera house. Orchestrally, the acts of such a drama would correspond to the movements of symphonies, though on a gigantic scale. They would have many times the number of musical motives that a symphonic movement had; they would be perpetually energized and swept along by the dramatic action on the stage. This was totally at odds with normal operatic practice, but it was at the heart of Wagner's revolution, and he saw it as the natural, inevitable development of the revolution that Beethoven had brought to the concert hall.

On his deathbed, Beethoven expressed regret at never having set *Faust* to music. However, in 1809 he had set one of the songs from *Faust*: Mephistopheles' *Song of the Flea*. Wagner, as a seventeen-year-old, took up the challenge of setting the same song, and it is fascinating to compare the two. When he was eighteen and studying with Theodor Weinlig, a distant successor to Bach at the *Thomaskirche* in Leipzig, Wagner wrote a sonata in *A major* which clearly took its inspiration from Beethoven. Piano sonatas were not Wagner's forte, as he soon realized, but this one was not bad for an eighteen-year-old.

One notable Beethovenian influence on Wagner's works is a passage in Act I of *Tristan und Isolde* in which Isolde tells Brangäne the story of her first meeting with Tristan, when, having discovered the wounded stranger's true identity, she had raised the sword to kill him on his sick bed. But then he opened his eyes and gazed at her, and at that moment they fell in love. Wagner wrote this passage with string quartet delicacy. By placing the viola above the violin and generating a rhythm through the slurred off-beat notes on the cellos, he conveyed the weakening of Isolde's hand as she met Tristan's glance. In the final movement of Beethoven's *Quartet in A minor* opus 132, we find the rhythmic inspiration for this passage in *Tristan*.

As a teenager, Wagner had been given the score of Beethoven's *E flat major Quartet*, opus 127, rhythmic echoes of which were to find their way, thirty years later, into the

score of Act II of *Tristan*. Wagner drew inspiration from this in the wonderful passage beginning: 'O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe, gib Vergessen, daß ich lebe' (O come down upon us night of love, make me forget I live). The time signature is different – 12/8 in Beethoven, 3/4 in Wagner - and of course Wagner introduces voices, but we hear the same gentle unfurling opening, the same rhythm, the same dialogue of overlapping phrases, and a chamber-music subtlety.

In later years, Wagner freely acknowledged his debt to Beethoven but explained it this way: "I could not have composed in the way I have done if Beethoven had never existed, but what I have used and developed are isolated strokes of genius in my dramatic predecessors, allowing myself to be led by something other than opera." It was Beethoven's rhythmic structures that provided the most useful models and constituted, in many respects, his greatest innovation. As Wagner took what he needed from Beethoven's example, so too did Beethoven draw lessons from composers before him. There were obvious forebears like Haydn and Mozart, but in opera he also learned from an unexpected source - the Italian composer Luigi Cherubini who was born in Florence but spent his most productive years in France. Beethoven went so far as to describe Cherubini as the greatest living composer of dramatic music. Such has been the history of western music: learning from and building on existing practice.

Consider again Beethoven's *Quartet in A*, opus 132. Another half dozen bars in that quartet influenced a passage in Act III of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. The scene in question is the conversation between Sachs and Walther before the latter begins to dream up his prize song. The particular phrase of Sachs begins: 'Mein Freund! In holder Jugendzeit' (My friend! In the sweet time of youth ...). It seems to me that this music would make a beautiful string quartet. Sometimes I like to ignore the words and imagine that the voices are instrumental parts. It is a revelation.

In *Die Meistersinger*, Wagner set out, deliberately, to demonstrate his mastery over existing musical forms. He often referred to the opera as his 'masterpiece' in the strict sense of that term. Of course, it is not just an academic exercise but a work of genius, but it does demonstrate how much he had learned from other masters. He follows the advice that he puts into the mouth of the cobbler poet Hans Sachs: Embrace the new but respect the old and build upon it with inspiration. After *Tristan*, which was far in advance of its time and regarded by many as un-performable, Wagner felt the need to answer his critics by showing what he could do with the old forms - the chorale and fugue (of which J S Bach was the master), quintet, canon and counterpoint. Pervading everything, was a solid sense of tonality after the tonal uncertainties and chromaticism of *Tristan*.

As a seventeen-year-old boy in 1830, Wagner had made a piano transcription of the *Ninth Symphony* for the publisher Schott, and he was given a copy of the score of the *Missa Solemnis* in return. He conducted the Ninth many times throughout his life, notably on the day of the laying of the foundation stone for the Festival Theatre at Bayreuth in 1872. This symphony had an extraordinary effect on him in his formative years, and he described his first encounter with it in vivid terms. "On first



The seventeen-year-old Wagner's autograph of his piano arrangement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, first movement, bars 55-103

looking through the score" he said, "I was struck at once, as if by force of destiny, with the long-sustained perfect fifths with which the first movement begins: these sounds, which played such a spectral role in my earliest impressions of music came to me as the ghostly fundamental of my own life. This symphony surely held the secret to all secrets; and so, I got busy over it by painstakingly copying out the score. Once, after having spent a night at this task, I remember being startled by the dawn, which affected me so strongly in my excited condition that I buried myself under the bedclothes with a loud shriek as if terrified by an apparition."

A decade later, Wagner was to use the mysterious fifths of Beethoven's opening to create the howling, windswept fifths that introduce the overture to *Der fliegende Holländer*, his first distinctively 'Wagnerian' opera. They appear again in Senta's Ballad in Act II, a piece of music that had an electrifying effect on me as a boy and contributed, as much as anything, to my interest in Wagner's music.

Wagner could not have written *The Flying Dutchman* if Beethoven had not composed *Fidelio*, and there was a clear connection between the two in Wagner's mind. The idea of a woman providing the means of a man's redemption – Goethe's 'eternal feminine' - is central to them both.

Wagner's early recognition of the unique qualities of the Ninth Symphony came not from hearing a performance but from his study of the score. Remember, in those days, there were many people who thought that Beethoven was not only deaf but mad as well! Goethe once heard Mendelssohn playing the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on the piano and remarked: "It is stupendous. Absolutely mad. It makes

me almost fear that the house will collapse. And suppose the whole of mankind played it at once!" Beethoven's later works were so far removed from what people had been used to that they were inclined to dismiss them as ravings, but not the young Wagner. However, when he *heard* the Ninth Symphony for the first time at a rehearsal in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, he was confused and disappointed.

It was the performing custom at that time for instrumental works to be led not by a conductor standing in front of the orchestra but either by the leader of the first violins from his desk, or from the keyboard - even for a symphony. Louis Spohr described how, when Beethoven was conducting from the piano, he crouched down lower and lower to show the degree of softness. If a *crescendo* entered he gradually rose again and at a *forte* leapt into the air! The thought of someone conducting a symphony from a piano – and playing along – strikes us as very odd, but it was common practice in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and continued into the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Only when singing was involved did a conductor stand in front, to coordinate everything. On the day that Wagner attended the performance in Leipzig, the conductor happened to be a popular local figure named Christian August Pohlentz, who wielded a very imposing blue baton. Wagner later recalled that the first three movements were played through by the orchestra (unconducted) in the manner of a Haydn symphony and, only when the final movement was about to begin did the conductor at last appear. Pohlentz then proceeded to conduct the fierce, shrieking fanfare that opens this movement in a cautious  $\frac{3}{4}$  tempo – turning it into a strangely limping confusion of sound. The young Wagner went home scratching



Christian August Pohlentz (1790-1843), whose conducting of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in 1830 left the young Wagner somewhat confused.

his head, wondering whether Beethoven had written nonsense after all! Only when he heard the symphony in a decent performance in Paris some years later, was he reassured that his first assessment had been right.

Already inspired by the overture to *Fidelio*, Wagner was bowled over by the first Leonore he saw on stage - Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient. "When I look back across my entire life" he later wrote, "I find no event to place beside this in the impression it produced on me. Whoever can remember this wonderful woman at that period of her life will certainly confirm in some fashion the almost demonic fire irresistibly kindled in them by the profoundly human and ecstatic performance of this incomparable artist. After the opera was over I dashed to the home of one of my friends to write a short letter in which I told her succinctly that my life had henceforth found its meaning, and that if ever she should hear my name favourably mentioned in the world of art, she should remember that she had, on this evening, made of me that which I now vowed to become. I dropped this letter at Schröder-Devrient's hotel and ran wildly off into the night. When I came to Dresden in 1842 to make my debut with *Rienzi* and could often visit the home of this artist, who was amiably disposed towards me, she once surprised me by reciting this letter word for word. For it appears to have made an impression on her, and she had actually preserved it carefully."

Schröder-Devrient had performed Leonore in a rehearsal conducted by Beethoven in 1822, in performances conducted by Weber in 1823, and later she sang Adriano, Senta and Elisabeth under the baton of Wagner. To have been conducted by Beethoven, Weber, and Wagner - can you imagine such a thing? Interestingly, it was her acting skills rather than vocal quality that attracted Wagner's praise, and he once admitted that "she had no voice at all". Nevertheless, he chose her to create the roles of Senta and Elisabeth because she was such an intelligent actress. Beethoven too had greatly admired her performance in 1822, although he had been completely deaf at the time. He was responding purely to her physical dramatization of the role. Her famous innovation was to speak rather than sing the final word in her threat to Pizarro: 'Noch einen Laut, und du bist todt!' (Just one sound, and you are dead!) The terrific effect of this gesture, said Wagner, was the sudden and shocking return from the ideal world of music to "the naked surface of dreadful reality". The effect of Schröder-Devrient's performance was to place *Fidelio* firmly in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cult of domesticity. *Fidelio* became not so much an opera about politics as one about the ideal wife, whose love for her husband all but overwhelmed her own identity.

Commentators have often remarked about the unsatisfactory nature of *Fidelio* from a dramatic point of view, particularly its schizophrenic clash between high drama and the petty-bourgeois intrigue in the first Act. Wagner subscribed to this criticism; his admiration for Beethoven was not uncritical. His analysis of the great *Leonore Overture* No 3 makes clear how he would have reshaped the opera if he had been in Beethoven's shoes. For him, the third *Leonora* overture encapsulated the main focus of *Fidelio*. His description of the overture went something like this: The beginning plunges us directly into the gloomy dungeon, its stillness broken only



Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient as Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio*. She created the roles of Adriano, Senta and Elisabeth for Wagner.

by the prisoner's moans for freedom. The darkness is then pierced by the glance of an angel whose own freedom seems intolerable because it is denied her beloved. There follows the mounting resolve of the angel (who is in fact a loving woman) to tear down the prison walls. Finally, the last bolt falls, and redeemed and redeemer shout "Freedom! Godlike freedom!" as sunlight floods the dungeon.

That is how Wagner saw the dramatic core of *Fidelio*. As far as he was concerned, everything else detracted from and weakened the opera. The fact that Beethoven himself recast it several times, wrote four overtures and was never entirely happy with it, suggests that, instinctively, he knew there was a structural flaw but could not put his finger on what it was. Wagner's interpretation had the effect of restoring something of the opera's political muscle - its charting of the progress from oppression to liberation - which had been dissipated by its domestic focus in the mid-nineteenth century. I have no doubt that, in this, Wagner was demonstrating his superior dramatic instinct. The spoken dialogue is also a serious problem, and there have been attempts, notably by Michael Balfe in 1851, to provide recitatives - which Wagner experienced in London in 1855. Mahler greatly admired *Fidelio* but made substantial changes to it in order to reduce its *Singspiel* elements. It is to him that we owe the practice (rarely followed these days) of inserting the *Leonora* No 3 between the dungeon scene and the final tableau. Whether consciously or not, Mahler embraced Wagner's view of the *Leonore Overture* as being a symphonic expression of the opera's true centre of gravity. As one critic observed, Mahler made Beethoven Wagner's ancestor by transforming the *Singspiel* into a fully-fledged *Musikdrama*.

Wagner recognized that at the dramatic core of *Fidelio* was Pizarro's tyranny, Florestan's suffering and Leonora's heroic action to free him. The doom-laden opening to Act II in the deepest, darkest, dankest dungeon, must surely have inspired Wagner when he came to write the music for the opening to Act II of *Götterdämmerung*, where we find the malevolent Hagen, whose heart is as black as Pizarro's, brooding on the intended fate of Siegfried. Compare the ominously throbbing rhythm that opens both, and you will see what I mean - it

was a connection that struck me some fifty years ago when I first heard *Götterdämmerung*. Beethoven set his canon amidst the lighter passages of Act I of *Fidelio*, but Wagner set his immediately after Hagen had been visited by his father Alberich. Alberich exudes hatred and revenge and urges his son to do his worst – and then he vanishes into the pre-dawn darkness. Wagner’s ‘canon’ is not sung, unlike Beethoven’s, but is played by eight French Horns, announcing, as it were, the dawning of a new and terrible day - the day of Hagen’s triumph and Siegfried’s death. There are numerous other Beethovenian touches in the *Ring*. The scherzo of the Ninth Symphony for instance finds an echo in the descent to Nibelheim in *Das Rheingold* as we hear the pounding rhythms of the enslaved Nibelungs working at their anvils.

Beethoven’s music constantly inspired and rejuvenated Wagner to the end of his life. It was noted by others that parts of the *String Quartet* Opus 127 sparked an uninhibited display of cheerful reactions in Wagner – on hearing it, he danced and leapt about and teased his companions. Cosima recorded in January 1883, barely a month before his death, that he twice came dancing in whilst Liszt was playing the *scherzo allegretto* of the Eighth Symphony.

So much for Beethoven’s influence on Wagner, but what about Wagner’s influence on Beethoven or, more correctly, on the way in which Beethoven came to be understood and interpreted? In fact, that influence was profound, and I can think of no better way to describe it than to quote Daniel Barenboim, virtuoso pianist and an extraordinarily thoughtful conductor of the works of both Beethoven and Wagner. This is what Barenboim had to say on the subject in his *Parallels and Paradoxes – Explorations in Music and Society*:

“Wagner influenced the way the whole world, without exception, looked at the music that had come before him, the classics, mostly German or middle or central European music – Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, etc – without mentioning that of his contemporaries. ...and whether the conductors were Furtwängler; Weingartner, Bruno

Walter, or even, in a way, Toscanini...they could not refrain from occupying themselves with these principles. The same goes for the instrumentalists, not only for orchestras...you see all these principles of slight modification of tempo, on through Schnabel, Edwin Fischer, Backhaus, etc. All this would have been unthinkable without Wagner’s ideas. So, in this way, he influenced a whole history of interpretation of music, to the point that the reaction that came in this century...was an attempt to fight this. What we are experiencing now...with the revival of historical practices and playing on period instruments, is also, in fact – whether knowingly or not – a reaction against this Wagnerian concept of the continuity of sound....”



Peter Bassett by Elizabeth Gordon-Werner



A drawing of Wagner conducting Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony at the Margravian Opera House, Bayreuth, in May 1872

## THE RING ON A LAP by Minnie Biggs

Actually the Ring Cycle took place on my laptop - unaccustomed to watching it in that fashion I could not have imagined such a thing. But when needs must.....

Up turned the UK Opera North production. Unlike some others searched for and attempted, during this time of seeming musical online abundance, it came on, and kept coming on and resuming, effortlessly, no glitches, no hitches. Time and again. In my unsuitable - for - lap - top - viewing - opera life, where other sites failed.

Increasingly concert versions of Wagner seem infinitely preferable and enjoyable. There is so much less distraction, and less emotion over horrid productions. This one was effectively presented with minimal but tasteful video background, occasionally and, as appropriate, water, fire, woods. The singers had good to excellent acting ability, moving about and interacting with each other. Dressed in evening attire for their roles, I especially liked the elegant gentlemanly Wotan in brocade vest and golden bow tie. His Fricka was an 'older' lady, similarly elegantly dressed. They looked a couple and sang and acted well as one. I have never felt more sympathetic to the pair. This is probably 'politically incorrect', or whatever the phrase might be, but I have never seen a slim, very thin and pretty Erda. Have always loved the suitably and usually very round Earth Mothers in all other Ring productions, so this was a change. A little off - putting was Siegfried, a big bald man, he looked more like Wotan's brother, dressed in an open waistcoat and bow tie undone. Bow tie on Siegfried? Never mind, he sang and acted beautifully. There were actually two of him, but they looked enough alike to be hardly confusing. There were also two Wotans, and two Brunhildes, all similar enough and in the same dress, not noticeable. None of the cast was familiar to me, nor the conductor, who was Richard Farnes. He was not inspiring to watch but his orchestra produced the goods. Credit should also go to the filming and the closeups of the different instruments.

Rather to my surprise, there is something to watching an opera- such an opera- on a small screen, close up. The sound was not bad at all, while not comparing it to a proper hall. There is an intimacy and connection to the music and the story, as though I was more inside it. In a large and beautiful theatre with the orchestra alive and brilliant and larger than life with wonderful famous singers, one is removed, at a distance, literally, in an audience, not right up there, almost next to them, as one is with the small screen.

In my still - getting - used - to - watching - on - lap top mode, sitting on a sofa with my feet up, the fire next to me, an occasional log to add, and a wine glass on the other side for an occasional sip, (Jane Mathews would approve!) one act at a time seemed enough, providing a deeper immediacy, focus, and connection. The singers sang to me, I listened to them, the words resonated deeper, the whole experience was closer, slower. I heard details not heard before, hidden in the grandness of the whole. For example the laughter of the Walkuries - their separate personalities were clear. They had differences, different sisters, not a blur of divine sound.

The horns of Siegfried waiting to talk to the bird were more brilliant and precise than usual. In *Götterdämmerung* I watched and heard the individual drumbeats against silence, surely for the first time. (Even if Barenboim's Ring drums were the most musical and exciting ever heard.) Listened to long orchestral sections against nothing happening on the stage, just clips of the conductor and occasional players in small squares around a suitable neutral but expressive perfect video- woods or water. Just the pure music.

It cannot be said that this intimate viewing experience could ever replace The Real Thing but it was nevertheless surprisingly satisfying. And quite suitable for invalids or isolated music lovers in quarantine, who have, in any case, no Wagner operas to attend anywhere in the world. Long may we be blessed with the internet!



Michael Druie as Wotan, Jo Pohlheim as Alberich and Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacker as Loge

## CAMERON MENZIES - REFLECTIONS

“Theatre Genius”, “Melbourne’s *Enfant Terrible*”, “Artistic Leader”, “Visionary”, “Perfectionist”, are a few quotes that have been used to describe **Cameron Menzies**. He has taken on many roles in his career some of which are Artistic Director, Creative Director, Writer, Designer, Associate Artist and Stage Director of Opera, Music Theatre, Cabaret and Theatre.

In 2008 Cameron was the recipient of the Bayreuth Opera Award and in 2011 the Berlin New Music Award through The Opera Foundation for Young Australians and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD). As part of these awards Cameron was generously supported in part by the **Wagner Society in NSW**. During his time supported by these awards he worked as the *hopsitant regie* on a then new production of *Tannhäuser* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, studied German at the Goethe Institut in Hamburg and worked on and researched new music and staging of new compositions in Berlin. These two years were his entrée into the international world of opera. It is where he met with international companies with which he now holds important positions and where he has quietly and very successfully forged a career both overseas and in Australia. He talks to us about his time since these awards and how he has navigated



**Cameron Menzies.** Directing on the film set creating footage for the 2016 production of Pecan Summer]

his career throughout the world over the last 12 years and how he is using this COVID lockdown period where he is currently grounded in Melbourne to reflect and to plan.

**22 February 2020**, The Palais Theatre Melbourne, I am standing on stage in the curtain call, exhausted and relieved that the audience are on their feet applauding and cheering after the opening night performance of Victorian Opera’s latest production of *Salome* by Strauss.

I had been flying up and back from Melbourne to Sydney as I had also been directing and creating a new work with International Drag Artist, Courtney Act, called *FLUID*. We had opened the previous night in

Sydney at the Darlinghurst Theatre to a sold-out season. Also thrown into the mix I had been producing and directing a huge outdoor production of Puccini’s *TOSCA* as part of my role as Artistic Director for *The Classics: Opera* for the City of Stonnington, Melbourne. My January and February were absolutely exhausting and exhilarating in equal measure. I was about to jump on a plane back to London to begin work on two new operas. I had been spending roughly 6 months of the year working overseas and 6 months working in Australia since around 2014.

### SALOME, DIRECTED BY CAMERON MENZIES - THE PALAIS THEATRE, MELBOURNE - 22 FEBRUARY 2020



*Salome*, Directed by Cameron Menzies – Victorian Opera (Gavan Swift Photography). Vida Miknevičiute as Salome, Ian Storey as Herod and Liane Keegan as Herodias, Dimity Shepherd as The Page.

★★★★½ “Directed by Cameron Menzies, this production is perhaps the company’s most impressive yet...it’s visually enthralling and unnerving”

Limelight Magazine

★★★★½ “Salome is a boiling pot of emotions and brilliance... in one of Victorian Opera’s finest quality productions, Cameron Menzies gives it a genuine potency in a curious multifaceted concept”

Herald Sun

**YMA SUMAC - THE PERUVIAN SONGBIRD, DIRECTED BY CAMERON MENZIES - ADELAIDE CABARET FESTIVAL - JUNE 2018**



*Yma Sumac – The Peruvian Songbird* (Ali McGregor). Directed by Cameron Menzies (The Adelaide Cabaret Festival)

**“The production, directed by Cameron Menzies, is excellent... First class, and top shelf. There’s no reason why Yma Sumac, The Peruvian Songbird, should not tour all over the world. It is that good.”**

The Advertiser, June 2018

**“Five stars really do not fully impart the wonder that is this show. Don’t Miss it”**

The Clothesline, June 2018

now either cancelled, postponed indefinitely or in jeopardy of not being able to go ahead due to funding reasons. When you define yourself so clearly through what you do as an artist losing this was both professionally and personally devastating. What to do? How do you react? How do you combat this?

Since this shutdown of my beloved industry and career It has forced me to look back and reflect on what I have achieved and to take stock of where I am, how I got here and where do I want to be “after” this is all over. This article for the **Wagner Society in NSW** is the perfect excuse to slow down a bit and look at all this and to share some of my experiences and my career with you.

I have always tried to maintain a career that was able to work across genres to encompass all of the styles that I love. Music and theatre have always been a huge element in my life and I love that I have been able to work with them for my entire career. I originally started out training as an actor and a singer in Sydney. I vocally

Looking into 2020, I was to be directing a new production of *Carmen* to premiere in Brive and Corneilles in France and to then direct a remount of my 2014 production of *Don Giovanni* in London for Britain’s foremost chamber opera company, Diva Opera, where I am the Associate Artist to the company. I was to then return to Australia mid-year to work shop a new musical I have been working on, to direct the Melbourne season of our cabaret show with Ali McGregor about the Peruvian Songbird Yma Sumac for Victorian Opera. *The Peruvian Songbird* premiered at the Adelaide Cabaret Festival in 2018 and has since been performed at the Sydney Opera House and at Joe’s Pub in New York. I was also booked to direct another commercial musical at the end of 2020, an iconic work that I had been hoping one day would come my way, and It finally had (hopefully postponed now until the end of 2021. Fingers Crossed).

2020 was to be an epic year for me professionally; filled with more international travel throughout the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan. I had managed for the sixth year to be working both internationally and also in Australia. I felt like my career was gaining some true momentum and I was gaining a real foot hold in the industry. Around 23 March all my engagements started to vanish one by one. I, like everyone in the live performance industry and the freelance artist world was having careers decimated over a period of a few days. The next 12 months of work was

worked with two amazing teachers whom some of you might remember - Janice and Alan Light. Two very formidable characters who took me on as a very shy and timid person who not only helped me find my own voice but taught me to listen critically to voices and to find my footing and confidence as a young singer and artist. Alan Light was a foundation principal baritone of The Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera Company (The Australian Opera) in 1956 and was one of the best-known singers throughout Australia in the 60’s and 70’s and Janice Light, his wife, joined the company in 1966. I was also studying with the renowned and equally formidable Hayes Gordon AO OBE at the Ensemble Theatre in Kirribilli at the same time. To have these three theatrical and musical forces in my corner at such an early age pushing, provoking and encouraging me was truly an extraordinary time.

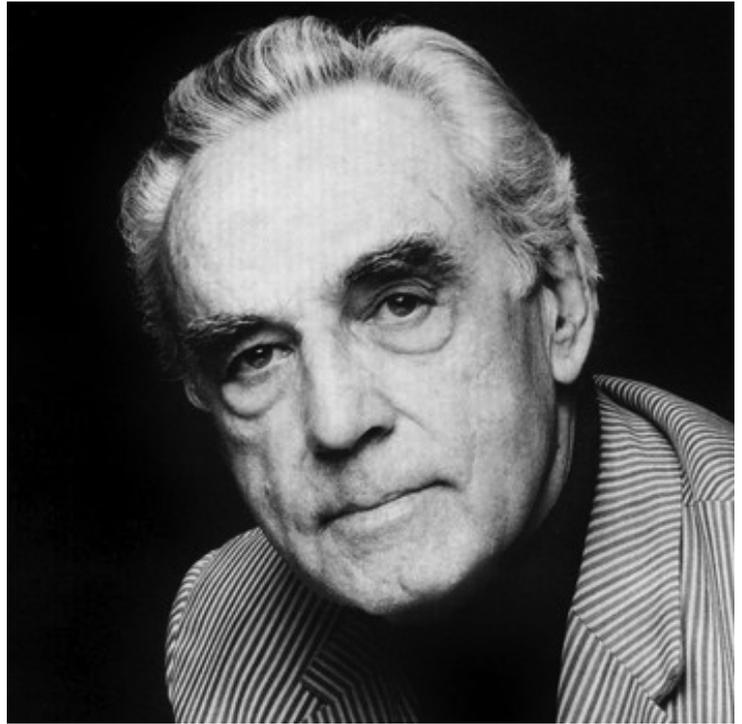
This training over nearly four years with Hayes was gruelling and filled with many successes and failures. It was certainly a time of discovery and of growth both personally and professionally. It is this period of my training where I feel I gained and built my own structure and my ability to dissect and create. Hayes Gordon was originally brought out to Australia in 1952 by the Tait Family. They were producing under the very famous name of JC WILLIAMSONS to appear in *Kiss Me Kate* starring him and Evie Hayes. He subsequently stayed in Australia after being blacklisted as

a communist during McCarthyism in the USA. He also notably starred in *Fiddler on the Roof* for The Australian Opera and as Daddy Warbucks in the 1978 Australian production of *Annie*. He was in the original Broadway productions of *Oklahoma*, *Brigadoon* and *Showboat* and his mentors included Oscar Hammerstein and acting gods Lee Strasberg and Sanford Meisner. I still feel Hayes in rehearsal rooms with me on days when I need him and the true value of these years only grows in importance as each year passes and my understanding grows deeper.

Jumping forward, having graduated from the Victorian College of Music (Melbourne University) with my Bachelor of Music in Classical Voice where I trained as a Counter Tenor I found myself in a very interesting predicament. I was performing and singing around the place and had just finished a performance of a piece at the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival called *Shakespeare Sung*. This was work for two singers and I got to share the stage with the wonderful singer Helen Noonan. I was having these kind of very vivid day dreams about shows and concepts and ideas for how you might stage different works, when I had a very clear vision of building and making shows and having a real sense of not wanting to actually be inside these productions anymore but to be directing them. Almost overnight, I pulled out of a few contracts and stopped negotiations with people as a singer and went steam head into looking for how to get a chance to direct something.

Over the next few years I managed build up a fair amount of directing credits. I knew it would be important to try and quickly develop as unique a directorial voice and style as I could. I was very lucky to able to draw upon the many years of formal training and from my experience and my obsessions with the world of fashion, painting, design, architecture and history and to be able to bring these into my work as a director. Of course all my study was never wasted as I found that a director who was musically literate and who had strong languages in his background was able to be used to great advantage. Having just returned from Germany on the Bayreuth Opera Award, I found this very much the case when I was engaged to work with Maestro Richard Bonyng AC, CBE at Opera Australia on a production of Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. Richard was also such a wonderful colleague to me on this production and he would very generously spend time answering my probably very inane questions. I remember him spending a lot of time answering me when I asked him specifically about the difference in theatrical pacing and staging and how time operates when you are working compositions from Bel Canto, Verismo, in the operas which feature predominantly Da Capo arias and in real time with say the works of Wagner. I still remember this very clearly.

**To be continued in the December Quarterly**



Alan Light – Baritone – Original Company Member The Australian Opera 1956



Hayes Gordon AO OBE as Tevye in *Fiddler on The Roof*

# NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

## LETTER FROM CHRIS CURCURUTO

Dear friends, colleagues, and supporters,

I hope that this email finds you happy and healthy and adjusting to this “new normal” that we are living in. Thank you to those who have reached out to ask after my health and safety during these tumultuous times, and my apologies for not having updated you all sooner.

This year started off pretty spectacularly with my involvement in Dallas Symphony Orchestra’s semi-staged concert production of Strauss’ *Salome* under the baton of Maestro Fabio Luisi. I sang the role of the second soldier (*Zweiter Soldat*) which has a nice bit of solo singing at the beginning of the show. Soon after, I was pleased to have a visit from my mother and sister who were able to see my performance as Horace Giddens in Blitzstein’s *Regina* with UNT Opera, and to spend my birthday together.

Then... COVID.

As with all of my colleagues in the opera industry, I suffered significant cancellations owing to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This included multiple roles with the Fort Worth Opera Festival, Spotlight on Opera, and the Berlin Opera Academy. Where some of these engagements have been postponed pending a safe return to theatres, others have been sacrificed on the altar of the year that is 2020.

Regrettably, Texas is somewhat of a hotspot for COVID-19 with numbers burgeoning ever higher; but I am being responsible and am spending most of my time in my little apartment. Those of you who follow me on Facebook will know that I haven’t spent this time entirely alone, having now adopted an adorable puppy and recently fostering a pair of kittens (that were adopted yesterday) as well. It certainly added a special energy to what had become a routine-less life.

I am fortunate to have maintained my church employment, recording weekly services under strict new protocols to ensure our continued health and safety. I am also working remotely for an office on various projects, which is helping to cover my living expenses.

Moving forward, I successfully applied for and have been admitted to the Doctor of Musical Arts (Vocal Performance) program here at the University of North Texas, so I will be extending my stay. Given that performances are not likely to resume in the immediate future, this seemed a perfect



opportunity to obtain the qualification which might facilitate my teaching at a tertiary level in the future, whilst also continuing my vocal development with my teacher. I am lucky to have been awarded a significant competitive scholarship which will cover the cost of my tuition for the program.

That said, I do have *some* potential performances on the horizon...

- Fort Worth Opera have engaged me to participate in another innovative world premiere recording with music by Joe Illick and libretto by Mark Campbell. More details to come.
- At this time, UNT Opera is planning to produce a production of Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* set in an isolation ward to facilitate social distancing.
- My engagement with Nashville Opera for 2021 has also been confirmed and extended, pending the situation with COVID. I will keep you all posted about my mainstage roles once their season has been announced.

It is hard to know what the audition season is going to look like this year and whether any plans for performances are likely to coalesce. Given the present circumstances, the adage concerning the best laid schemes of mice and men has perhaps never been truer.

Regardless, I am in good spirits. This, as with all things, will pass, and when it does, I will be ready to resume my attempt to conquer the international world of opera!

Stay well and be happy.

Kind regards,

**Christopher Curcuruto**, Bass-Baritone



## BRAD COOPER'S COVID-19 SYDNEY STORY...

On March 14 I had just flown in to Sydney from three fantastic months in Europe. I'd had a series of dream lessons with Siegfried Jerusalem preparing the title role of *Lohengrin* for Opera Australia. I'd coached with the head of Music at the Vienna State Opera, met with a casting director and agent in Vienna, who were keen to help see what they could do for me and I'd just booked my first European performances since 2010 - Florestan in Beethoven's *Fidelio* for the Kammeroper Schloss Rheinsberg summer festival. All was looking up, and then March 15, whilst at lunch for my partner Christian's Birthday, news came through that the borders into Australia were closing.

As we headed into full lockdown I found myself to be in an amazingly fortunate situation. After two weeks of initial inaction, aside from being glued to ABC News 24, Christian said: "right. I want you singing every day, because as soon as the world's back to normal you'll need to be ready to go". So I started to sing in the afternoons and quickly became a hit with Christian's Zoom Meetings! We also have a neighbour who took to commenting if she hadn't heard me sing yet that day - "I'm just getting to it, I promise...!" Then, after lockdown ended, and Christian is busy as a Nurse Lead, I'm up at 6am each day to make us breakfast and see him off to work. I suspect if I didn't have these two people in my life I would have fallen into a dangerous pattern of sleeping til midday and drinking far too much white wine!

When our lockdown ended in Sydney and we could visit people at home I was so itchy making music alone, that I connected with a couple of key pianists I usually work with; Bev Kennedy (for cabaret) & Katherine Day (for Classical music). I met up with Katherine on Thursdays and Bev on Fridays and started working on new repertoire, keeping our joy of making music alive and could have a good old gas bag.

It's been wonderful - finally I've had the time to tackle a couple of pet projects I've had bubbling away in my brain for years. I've ordered new sheet music from Germany and added amazing songs to my rep.

I always believe too when you get busy things start happening - and they have. I've been asked by Opera Queensland, Rogue Opera and an online Music Theatre Festival to make videos for them. Katherine started making AMEB AURAL EXAM demonstration videos, which I've been involved in as a presenter. I was invited to sing Danilo in an online Merry Widow Workshop with Streamed Shakespeare



and Salon for the Dramatic Arts. Another friend of mine David, whose Guesthouse in the Blue Mountains I've performed at, reached out and we recently had two booked out evenings of distanced dining and song in their dining room!

With Bev and Katherine I have video recording projects in the pipeline for September & October to record and film the repertoire we've been working on: A NIGHT IN VIENNA (with Madeleine Easton on Violin) in September and COOPER & KENNEDY in October. Bev has booked us in for a new 'BERLIN' show, opening at Claire's Kitchen 24 & 25th of November. There are some other 'virtual' projects I'm working on too through KONZERT KOLLEKTIV which happily I have just secured some start-up funding for, so stay tuned!

So, in true 'Cooper Style', I can't help not going on!

Being honest, there have been a few periods when I have felt pretty down, especially when Tristan und Isolde in Brisbane was cancelled recently. But having that bi-weekly commitment to sing with someone has really helped keep me focused and motivated and led to actual paid work in this crazy time! Looking to the future, I'm happy to be rescheduled to sing Florestan in *Fidelio* next July/August in Germany - I'm hopeful as a UK Ancestry Visa holder I'll be able to travel. We'll see...

## 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).

## UPDATE FROM MICHELLE RYAN

While writing this, I am pinching myself yet again with the knowledge that I am about to undertake my first professional contract in Germany as a member of the opera ensemble at the Hessisches Staatstheater in Wiesbaden.

This year has brought many unprecedented events. I have thought often about what it must have been like for Australian opera singers during the war where careers had come to a halt. My own relative, Australian soprano Margherita Grandi was unable to pursue her career at her peak and had to wait until after the war to continue. Stories like hers have given me strength and hope as we look forward to theatres opening again and being able to bring the gift of opera to people. I am incredibly fortunate that the Hessisches Staatstheater is indeed open, meaning that I will not have to wait long at all, and am thrilled to be going overseas in time to start in August!

After receiving my roles from the theatre earlier this year, I got stuck into them immediately. I was also in rehearsals for *La Traviata* on the Harbour with Opera Australia. With the combination of chorus rehearsals as well as covering the role of Annina and preparing my repertoire for Wiesbaden, I was definitely juggling time! Of course, with large events being cancelled in March, suddenly I was not performing during March or April anymore with Opera Australia.

I made the decision to move north of NSW to stay with my parents and continue studying my roles for Wiesbaden, with



the uncertainty of when I would be going to Germany. Although things were difficult, a good thing about the changes was that I had an abundance of time to prepare my music, which I have made the most of. I am really looking forward to all of the productions, including the Ring Cycle in early 2021, where I will perform the role of Waldvogel in *Siegfried* and Helmwig in *Die Walküre*. This will be my first experience of Wagner roles on the main stage.

In a technologically advanced world, I have been able to have language coaching with many of Australia's fantastic coaches through Zoom, and am currently undertaking my Goethe Institut course online, which has been wonderful. Coaches in Sydney were

available in person again in June, so I have made sure to visit regularly since then in order to prepare my roles really well. I am so incredibly grateful to the **Wagner Society in NSW** for their support in enabling me to do this. With my roles prepared and the experience of German language lessons, I am feeling ready to jump on that plane to Wiesbaden. It has taken incredible teamwork this year with rules and regulations being very strict due to Covid-19. I would also like to thank the staff at the Hessisches Staatstheater and GAOG for all of their efforts in making this happen.

I will be in Wiesbaden in just over a week and am buzzing every day at the thought of this next chapter in my life!

**Michelle Ryan 28 July 2020**



## POSTSCRIPT

**Congratulations** are due to Michelle for receiving a Grant from **The Lisa Gasteen National Opera Program**, along with **Regina Daniel** and **Samuel Sakker**, who have performed for us in past Sunday afternoon concerts.

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

There is a regularly updated list on the Society's Website [www.wagner-nsw.org.au](http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au) that takes the list to 2024.

### September 2020

Berlin Deutsche Oper  
*Die Walküre* – September 27, 2020.  
Rouen *Tannhäuser* – September 27, 30, 2020.  
St Petersburg *Holländer* – September 29, 2020.

### October 2020

Berlin Deutsche Oper  
*Die Walküre* – October 1, 4, 8, 11, 2020.  
Staatsoper  
*Tannhäuser* – October 25, 29, 2020.  
Hanover *Tristan und Isolde* – October 11, 18, 25, 31.  
Rouen *Tannhäuser* – October 3, 2020.  
St Petersburg *Tannhäuser* – October 9, 2020.  
Stockholm *Tristan und Isolde* – October 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 27, 31, 2020.  
Tallinn *Holländer* – October 1, 3, 2020.

### November 2020

Berlin Staatsoper  
*Tannhäuser* – November 1, 2020.  
Gothenburg *Siegfried* – November 29, 2020.  
Leipzig *Lohengrin* – November 7, 15, 28, 2020.  
Prague National Theatre  
*Tristan und Isolde* – November 26, 29, 2020.  
Stockholm Folkoperan  
*Tristan und Isolde* – November 1, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 2020.

### December 2020

Berlin Staatsoper  
*Lohengrin* – December 13, 19, 22, 28, 30, 0.  
Deutsche Oper  
*Tannhäuser* – December 20, 2020.  
Duisburg *Tristan und Isolde Act 1* – December 17.  
*Tristan und Isolde Act 2* – December 18  
*Tristan und Isolde Act 3* – December 19  
Düsseldorf *Tristan und Isolde Act 1* –  
December 3, 9 27, 2020.  
*Tristan und Isolde Act 2* –  
December 5, 11, 29, 2020.  
*Tristan und Isolde Act 3* –  
December 6, 13, 30, 2020.  
Gothenburg *Siegfried* – December 6, 13, 20, 27, 30, 2020.  
Leipzig *Holländer* – December 10, 21, 2020.  
Prague National Theatre  
*Tristan und Isolde* – December 6, 10, 13, 20.  
St Petersburg *The Ring* – December 9, 10, 12, 13, 2020.  
Tallinn *Holländer* – December 11, 13, 2020.

### January 2021

Berlin Staatsoper  
*Lohengrin* – January 2, 2021.  
Deutsche Oper  
*Tannhäuser* – January 3, 9, 2021.  
*Siegfried* – January 24, 28, 31, 2021.  
*Lohengrin* – January 30, 2021.  
Copenhagen *Parsifal* – January 10, 14, 17, 23, 26, 2021.  
Dresden *The Ring* – January 29, 30, February 1, 3  
Gothenburg *Siegfried* – January 9, 16, 2021.  
Helsinki *Die Walküre* – January 29, 2021.  
Leipzig *Lohengrin* – January 3, 2021.  
*Tristan und Isolde* – January 10, 2021.  
*Holländer* – January 29, 2021.  
London Royal Festival Hall  
*The Ring* – January 25, 27, 29, 31, 2021.

### February 2021

Amsterdam *Holländer* – February 4, 7, 10, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 2021.  
Berlin Deutsche Oper  
*Siegfried* – February 3, 6, 2021.  
*Lohengrin* – February 5, 13, 2021.  
*Holländer* – February 14, 18, 2021.  
Chemnitz *Die Walküre* – February 21, 2021.  
*Götterdämmerung* – February 27, 2021.  
Dresden *The Ring* – January 29, 30, February 1, 3; 7, 8, 10, 12, 2021.  
Helsinki *Die Walküre* – February 1, 4, 9, 13, 16  
Leipzig *Holländer* – February 7, 2021.  
London Royal Festival Hall  
*The Ring* – February 5, 6, 8, 10, 2021.  
Madrid *Siegfried* – February 13, 17, 21, 25, 2021.  
Munich *Tannhäuser* – February 28, 2021.  
Tokyo Niki kai Opera Theatre  
*Tannhäuser* – February 17, 18, 20, 21, 2021.  
Wiesbaden *The Ring* – February 2, 3, 5, 7; 14, 21, 28, June 13, 2021.

### March 2021

Berlin Staatsoper  
*Parsifal* – March 28, 2021.  
Deutsche Oper  
*Holländer* – March 7, 18, 2021.  
Chemnitz *Das Rheingold* – March 6, 2021.  
Geneva *Parsifal* – March 30, 2021.  
Graz *Holländer* – March 13, 24, 2021.

Leipzig *Holländer* – March 12, 2021.  
*Tristan und Isolde* – March 13, 2021.  
*Lohengrin* – March 14, 2021.  
 Madrid *Siegfried* – March 1, 5, 11, 14, 2021.  
 Munich *Tannhäuser* – March 6, 10, 13, 2021.  
*Parsifal* – March 29, 2021.  
 Osnabrück *Die Meistersinger* – March 13, 19, 28, 2021.  
 Tokyo New National Theatre  
*Die Walküre* – March 11, 15, 17, 20, 23  
 Valencia *Tristan und Isolde* – March 2, 5, 8, 11, 14  
 Wiesbaden *The Ring* – March 31, April 1, 3, 5, 2021.

## April 2021

Berlin Staatsoper  
*Parsifal* – April 2, 5, 2021.  
*Tannhäuser* – April 11, 17, 24, 2021.  
 Budapest Hungarian State Opera  
*Parsifal* – April 2, 5, 8, 2021.  
 Chemnitz *The Ring* – April 1, 2, 3, 5, 2021.  
 Frankfurt *Siegfried* – April 17, 23, 2021.  
 Geneva *Parsifal* – April 2, 5, 7, 9, 11, 2021.  
 Graz *Holländer* – April 7, 11, 17, 25, 29, 2021.  
 Leipzig *The Ring* – April 14, 15, 17, 18, 2021.  
 Munich *Parsifal* – April 1, 4, 7, 2021.  
 Nice *Das Rheingold* – April 15, 2021.  
 Osnabrück *Die Meistersinger* – April 2, 10, 2021.  
 Paris Theatre des Champs-Élysées  
*Parsifal* – April 7, 2021.  
 Vienna Staatsoper  
*Parsifal* – April 1, 4, 8, 11, 2021.  
*Die Walküre* – April 18, 21, 25, 28, 2021.  
 Wiesbaden *The Ring* – March 31, April 1, 3, 5, 2021.

## May 2021

Barcelona *Tannhäuser* – May 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 2021.  
 Berlin Deutsche Oper  
*Holländer* – May 22, 28, 2021.  
*Lohengrin* – May 23, 30, 2021.  
 Chemnitz *The Ring* – May 12, 13, 14, 16, 2021.  
 Frankfurt *Siegfried* – May 2, 8, 2021.  
 Gateshead *Parsifal* – May 22, 2021.  
 Graz *Holländer* – May 7, 21, 2021.  
 Helsinki *Siegfried* – May 14, 19, 22, 26, 29, 2021.  
 Kassel *The Ring* – May 5, 9, 13, 16; 31, June 1, 3, 5  
 Leeds Opera North  
*Parsifal* – May 5, 9, 2021.  
 Leipzig *The Ring* – May 5, 6, 8, 9, 2021.  
*Lohengrin* – May 22, 2021.  
 Liverpool *Parsifal* – May 27, 2021.  
 Manchester Opera North  
*Parsifal* – May 12, 2021.  
 Nottingham Opera North  
*Parsifal* – May 19, 2021.

Osnabrück *Die Meistersinger* – May 9, 2021.  
 Vienna Volksoper  
*Holländer* – May 6, 10, 16, 30, 2021.  
 Wiesbaden *The Ring* – May 19, 20, 22, 24, 2021.

## June 2021

Bern *Parsifal* – June 6, 13, 20, 27, 30, 2021.  
 Birmingham *Parsifal* – June 5, 2021.  
 Brussels *Parsifal* – June 15, 17, 19, 23, 27, 29, 2021.  
 Budapest Müpa  
*Lohengrin* – June 15, 2021.  
*The Ring* – June 17, 18, 19, 20, 2021.  
 Edinburgh *Parsifal* – June 2, 2021.  
 Frankfurt *Holländer* – June 26, 30, 2021.  
 Graz *Holländer* – June 2, 2021.  
 Halden Opera Østfold  
*Holländer* – June 16, 18, 19, 2021.  
 Helsinki *Siegfried* – June 1, 2021.  
 Kassel *The Ring* – May 31, June 1, 3, 5, 2021.  
 Leeds Opera North  
*Parsifal* – June 9, 12, 2021.  
 Munich *Tristan und Isolde* – June 29, 2021.  
*Das Rheingold* – June 30, 2021.  
 Versailles *Die Walküre* – June 27, 2021.  
 Vienna Staatsoper  
*Lohengrin* – June 19, 23, 27, 30, 2021.  
 Wiesbaden *The Ring* – February 14, 21, 28, June 13

## July 2021

Brussels *Parsifal* – July 1, 3, 2021.  
 Frankfurt *Holländer* – July 3, 7, 11, 15, 2021.  
 Munich *Das Rheingold* – July 3, 2021.  
*Tristan und Isolde* – July 4, 8, 13, 31, 2021.  
*Holländer* – July 7, 2021.  
*Tannhäuser* – July 11, 2021.  
 Portland, ME *Holländer* – July 28, 30, 2021.

## August 2021

## September 2021

Salt Lake City *Holländer* – [no actual dates].

## October 2021

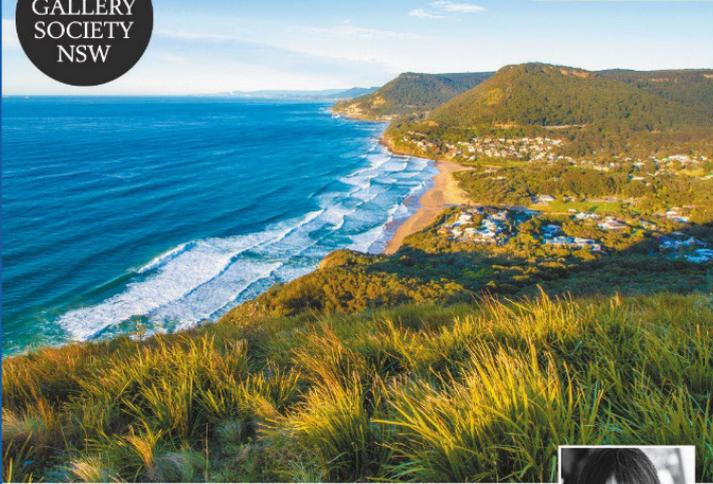
Brisbane Opera Australia  
*The Ring* – October 29, 31, November 2, 4  
 Los Angeles *Tannhäuser* – October 17, 25, 29, 2021.

## November 2021

Brisbane Opera Australia  
*The Ring* – October 29, 31, November 2, 4,  
 November 6, 8, 10, 12; 14, 16, 18, 20, 2021.  
 Gothenburg *The Ring* – [no actual dates].  
 Los Angeles *Tannhäuser* – November 1, 4, 7, 2021.

# Renaissance Tours

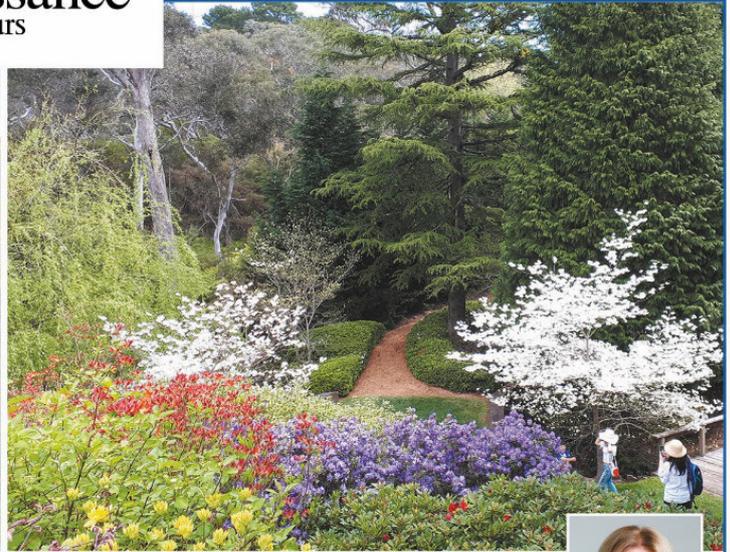
ART  
GALLERY  
SOCIETY  
NSW



## Illawarra Art Trail

*Wollongong and the Sutherland Shire*  
with Fiona McIntosh  
06–08 October 2020 (3 days)

Uncover the thriving arts communities of the NSW Illawarra region through its dynamic galleries and artists' studios.



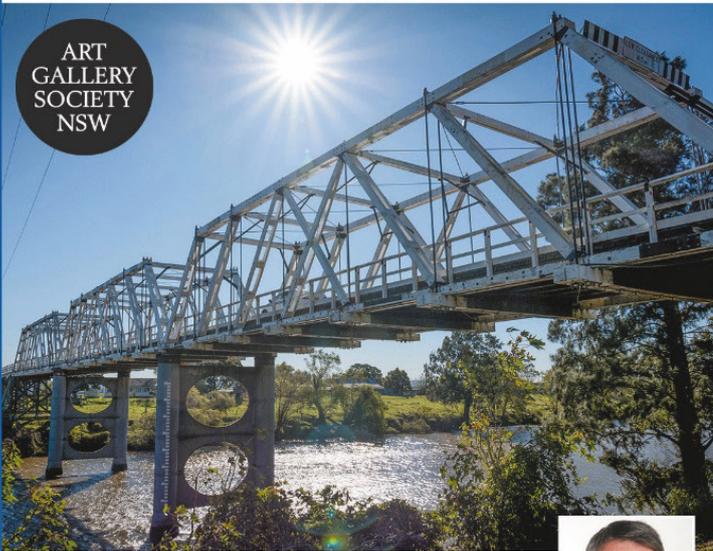
## Spring Gardens of the Blue Mountains

*Leura, Mount Wilson and Oberon*  
with Helen Young  
11–18 October 2020 (8 days)

Discover hidden treasures in the Blue Mountains' finest private gardens in their peak springtime bloom.



ART  
GALLERY  
SOCIETY  
NSW



## Galleries of the NSW Hunter Region

*Newcastle and Maitland*  
with Brian Ladd  
20–22 October 2020 (3 days)

Explore the unique character behind the NSW Hunter region's arts communities to appreciate its new identity as an arts hub.



## Gardens of the NSW Central West

*Orange, Bathurst, Cowra and Canowindra*  
with Elizabeth Swane  
02–08 November 2020 (7 days)

Gain exclusive access to the colourful gardens of historic private estates and country homesteads of the NSW Central West region.



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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)



Annual General Meeting 9 August 2020 Zoom Attendees

## ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

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