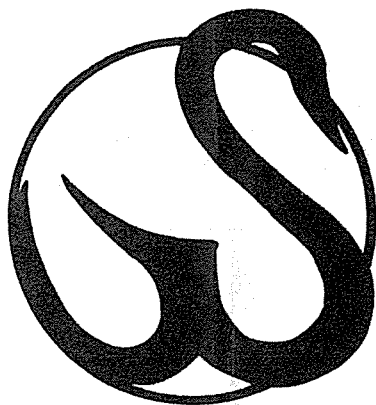


The Wagner Society

IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

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



Newsletter

No. 71, June 1998

Print Post Approved PP242114/00002

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

COMING EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
	<i>Please note the changes to our programme since the previous Newsletter</i>	
June 21	Antony Ernst: "Die Walküre and Wagner's musical sources"	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
July 19	Annual General Meeting, followed by Antony Ernst: "Siegfried and Wagnerian voices - why are they different?"	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
September 20	Antony Ernst: "Götterdämmerung and some production difficulties in staging the Ring"	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
October 18	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> video	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
November 15	Wagner Market Day (bring and buy books, recordings, videos and memorabilia) followed by video: <i>The Ring for Television</i> (Chereau production)	Goethe Institut 1.00 pm
December 13	Christmas Party	Goethe Institut 2.00 pm

COMMITTEE

President	Barbara McNulty	9487 1344
Vice President	Paul Lehmann	9552 1424
Vice President and Treasurer	Olive Coonan	9387 6403
Secretary	Barry Walters	9387 6642
Membership Secretary	Janet Wayland	9332 3926
Members	Barbara Brady (Editor, Newsletter)	9956 5132
	Clare Hennessy	9747 5664
	Shirley Robertson	9707 2225
	Terence Watson	9517 2786
Public Officer	Reg Maloney	

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

For Wagnerites this year has opened well. Despite differences of opinion about the production we are still talking about *Tannhäuser*. A brief visit to Melbourne in March allowed me to see it again. Simone Young brought all her skill to a beautifully played and sung performance. Lisa Gasteen was a really marvellous Elizabeth. Michael Lewis brought Wolfram to life, while Horst Hoffmann's *Tannhäuser* was excellent in all three acts. An invitation to meet Simone Young after the performance allowed us to express our appreciation and congratulations to Simone, Horst, Lisa and Bernadette Cullen.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Strauss/Wagner concert in April was another memorable night and Elizabeth Connell's Immolation Scene was outstanding. Again Simone Young brought a polish to the orchestra that will be long remembered.

Congratulations to Stephen Mould, this year's Bayreuth Scholar. Stephen is a repetiteur and conductor and will be rehearsing the Adelaide *Ring* before he leaves to study in Germany in late November. We wish him a safe and rewarding trip and look forward to meeting him in 1999.

The Board of Opera Foundation Australia recently gave a lunch to thank those who support the Bayreuth Scholarship; guests included the German Consul-General and the Director of the Goethe Institut and I was delighted to join them as your representative.

The level of support at monthly meetings is most encouraging. In March we all enjoyed a moving and visually beautiful performance of *Parsifal* from the Metropolitan Opera, with Waltraud Meier and Siegfried Jerusalem, and we thank Cecilia Segura for making the video available.

Congratulations to Antony Ernst for his first *Ring* lecture which was thought-provoking and stimulating, and which generated much discussion at afternoon tea. Our meeting-room bulged at the seams and it was gratifying to see so many people interested and involved. Our thanks go to Opera Australia for their assistance in promoting the lecture series in their Friends' and Patrons' Newsletter, and to the many Opera Friends who joined us. Please remember that the dates for lectures three and four have been changed to allow Antony to finish the series before he leaves for Dresden where he has a contract for six months to work on *Il Trittico* as assistant producer.

A delightful surprise was a Fax from Peter Häggblom, the Treasurer of the Wagner Society in Finland, who read our newsletter and wrote to say he would be in Riga at the Wagner Festival at the same time my group will be there. The group will have dinner with Ilkka Pajaanen, their President, the night we arrive in Helsinki. Peter will also be in Adelaide for the second *Ring* cycle in November.

Another very nice surprise was a letter from Jessie Anderson who has given me her collection of Wagner Society Newsletters. As Jessie and Keith were very early members this is proving to

be a wonderful source of information for which I am very grateful. Betty and Reg Maloney have offered to fill any gaps in the collection from their own files. I do thank them all very much and have pleasure in conveying greetings from Jessie and Keith to all their friends in the Wagner Society.

The response to our Wagner birthday dinner has been very positive and some 70 people will toast the master on 24 May at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. Our next meeting will be Antony Ernst's second *Ring* lecture on *Die Walküre* and I am sure it will provoke as much discussion as the first so please be sure to come and bring your friends.

BARBARA McNULTY

ADDRESS

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

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

NEW MEMBERS

The Society is delighted to welcome the following new members:

Robin J Accola, Mr & Mrs M Allman, Carl Andrew, David and Alice Balog, Margarcta Baxter, Ian & Sylvia Gzell, Erika Jumikis, Stephanie Lee, Lindsay Knight & Marc Greyling, Lea Maher, Ray McDonald, Barbara & Charles Newton, and John Studdert.

DONATIONS

The Society wishes to acknowledge with thanks the generosity of the following members:
Dr Sue Kelly, Ms Pauline Thomson, Dr Anna Ziegler, and an anonymous donor.

The Society welcomes all donations and they can be addressed to the Treasurer, Wagner Society in NSW Inc at the above address. Donations are tax-deductible and receipts will be issued. If members wish to earmark their donations for a particular project they should indicate this.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

The Society acknowledges with thanks receipt of the following publications from Wagner societies and related organisations:., *Kulturchronik*: (Federal Republic of Germany) No.1, 1998; *Leitmotive*: the journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California, Vol. 11 No.3, Fall 1997; *Der Meister* (Newsletter of the Richard Wagner Society, Victoria, Vol. 8 No. 1, Feb. 1998; *News and Notes* (Wagner Society of Northern California) Vol.III No. 1, Jan. 1998; *Newsletter, Richard Wagner Society of South Australia*, No.113-115, Mar-May, 1998; *Newsletter* (Wagner Society of New Zealand) Vol.1 No. 10, Jan. 1998; *Richard Wagner Nachrichten*: (Österreichische Richard-Wagner-Gesellschaft) Jahrg.9/Folge 5 & Jahrg.10/Folge 2, Dez. 1997 - Juni 1998.; *Wagner News* (Toronto Wagner Society) Vol. 9 No. 3, Feb. 1998; *Wagner Notes* (Wagner Society of New York) Vol. XXI Nos.1-2, Feb.-Apr. 1998; and *Wagneriaani: Suomen Wagner-Seuran* (the Finnish Wagner Society) no.11, 1998.

RECOLLECTIONS OF LEONIE RYSANEK

Members will have noted with sadness the death of internationally acclaimed soprano, Leonie Rysanek, in Vienna on March 7 aged 71. Her operatic career spanned fifty years and she performed a total of 3000 times, 600 of those at the Vienna State Opera, but the house she most loved singing in was the Metropolitan Opera, New York. Here she made her Met debut in the role of Lady Macbeth when Maria Callas was fired in 1959. Her stage debut was in 1949 as Agathe in *Der Freischütz*, but only two years later in 1951 she sang the part of Sieglinde at Bayreuth at the age of 24, after which she was frequently invited to return. Her Wagnerian repertoire subsequently included Senta, Elsa, Ortrud and Kundry. Those who heard her in Australia and overseas have their own cherished memories of these performances.

Not only did Leonie Rysanek have an outstanding international career, but the Wagner Society in New South Wales had the distinction of counting her as one of its honorary life members. This came about in 1983 when she came to Australia to sing Tosca for the Australian Opera. Here are some extracts from our Newsletter of the day, No. 10, 1st March 1983:

“The month of January 1983 was dominated by the personality of Leonie Rysanek, that dynamic Prima Donna of the Vienna State Opera, who came to Sydney to sing the title role in *Tosca*. Madame Rysanek’s long career in Wagnerian roles gave us special reason to pay tribute to her and honour her with honorary life membership of the Society...

“Members of the Society and the Opera Guild enjoyed a very pleasant dinner at the Wentworth Hotel on February 5th - our Guest of Honour was Leonie Rysanek who was accompanied by her husband, Dr Gausmann.

Prior to the dinner, guests had the opportunity of speaking to Madame Rysanek at some length. During dinner, our President, Dr. Hansen, gave a witty survey of Leonie Rysanek’s career, with some musical examples worked into the speech, with the aid of taped recordings.

Madame Rysanek then spoke briefly and answered questions from the floor. She was particularly interesting on the discipline needed to be a singer, especially with regard to lifestyle - moderation in all things except work! In this context it is interesting to note that this dinner was the only social function attended during her Sydney visit.

...and good news, she has been invited to sing Sieglinde in two years’ time. Watch this space!”

As members would know, Leonie Rysanek did indeed sing Sieglinde for the Australian Opera’s production of *Die Walküre* in January/February 1985 and in the same Sydney season sang the Kostelnicka in Janacek’s *Jenufa*. It is said that this role persuaded her to rebuild her career as a mezzo specialising in wicked old women (The Kabanicha in *Katya Kabanova*, Herodias in *Salome* and the old Duchess in *Queen of Spades* followed).

Leonie Rysanek was a Commandeur dans l’Ordre des Arts et des Letters, Recipient of the Great Golden Symbol of Honour for her services to her country, The Republic of Austria, and recipient of numerous other awards of distinction.

18TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held at the Goethe Institut, 90 Ocean Street, Woollahra, on Sunday 19 July 1998 at 1.00 pm

VOTING RULES

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

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

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

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

NOMINATIONS AND PROXY FORMS SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY FRIDAY 3RD JULY 1998

=====

PROXY FORM

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

I,

.....
(Member's name)

of

.....
(Member's address)

Membership number.....

Member's signature.....

cannot attend the 18th Annual General Meeting to be held on 19 July 1998 but nominate as my proxy to vote for me

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

(Address).....

.....(Date)

NOMINATION FORM

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

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

.....

for election as

.....

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

Date.....

Signed.....
(Proposer)

Signed.....
(Secunder)

Signed.....
(Nominated member)

=====

NOTICE OF MOTION

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

I/we will be attending the Annual General Meeting on 19 July 1998 and would like the following motion to be placed on the agenda for discussion under general business:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Name:

.....

Membership number.....

ANTONY ERNST

Antony Ernst's first lecture in this year's series was received with wrapt attention by a record audience at the Sunday afternoon function on April 19. It is now being transcribed for eventual publication. Some background information we have gleaned is that his academic qualifications are a BA Hons in Performance Studies (with major essays on Wagner, Richard Strauss, Otello and the Nazi Party) followed by a PhD in progress under Michael Ewans at Newcastle University (pursuing Janacek in 1997/98). During his postgraduate studies he has translated and directed a performance of *Il Seraglio*, won a Churchill Scholarship and studied in Germany. He has also directed Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* in his own translation. He was awarded Opera Australia's Young Artist of 1995 (Dramaturg) and wrote dramaturgical kits and gave - and still gives - pre-performance talks at the Opera House. In 1997 he was dramaturg for the Bell Shakespear Company and in 1998 was engaged as Assistant Producer of *Il Trittico* for the Dresden Opera.

WAGNER SOCIETY SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

This scholarship, which is given every year to a musician chosen by Opera Foundation Australia, is this year awarded to Stephen Mould. Stephen mainly works as a répétiteur and chorus master and won the Australian Opera Foundation Award for a répétiteur in 1990. This scholarship pays the fare for a return flight to Europe where he will be touring for three to four months from November this year. After general and specialist music degrees and postgraduate diplomas at the NSW Conservatorium of Music, the Royal Academy of Music, London and the English National Opera, Stephen Mould's career has included being music director of various English orchestras and musical societies, Head of music staff, Lyric Opera of Queensland, répétiteur/conductor in a number of German opera theatres and since 1996, répétiteur for Opera Australia. Recently he has been the chorus master for various concerts with the Sydney Philharmonia Chorus and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and gives pre-concert talks for Symphony Australia. Stephen Mould is engaged as répétiteur for the *Ring Cycle* in Adelaide.

THE RITA HUNTER SIGNATURE COLLECTION

We have received a catalogue of this collection. It is a unique collection of previously unreleased complete live performances of Miss Hunter's most famous roles. Each CD comes with an illustrated booklet containing photos of Miss Hunter in the relevant roles, and every CD has a special commemorative label personally signed by Miss Hunter. This collection is not sold commercially but is available by mail order addressed to (cheques to be made out to) The JDT Trust, 305 Bobbin Head Road, North Turramurra, NSW 2074 (Phone: 9144 5062, Fax: 9488 7526, E-Mail: whiplash@galnet.net). While it is not possible to reproduce the entire catalogue here is one example of an all-Wagner set out of (to date) four sets from mixed operas:

4 CDs	\$80.00 plus \$10.00 P&P	
<u>Catalog No.</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Cast</u>
RHSC120	Siegfried - Seattle	Remedios, Garrard, Mangin, Crook, c:Holt
RHSC122	Götterdämmerung - Seattle	Remedios, Drake, Mangin, Rivers, c:Holt
RHSC108	Götterdämmerung-the Met	Brillioth, Rintzler, c:Kubelik
RHSC110	Götterdämmerung - Munich	Cox, Ridderbusch, Keleman, Varnay, c:Sawallisch
RHSC119	Tristan & Isolde-Melbourne	Remedios, Elkins, Martin, Shaw, Gard, c:MacKerras

RAYMOND MYERS, AM (*Extracts from a tribute issued by Opera Australia*)

Raymond Myers died at Bowral on 26th February. His long association with Opera Australia began in 1963 when he sang the role of Don Fernando in *Fidelio*. Over the next years he studied and performed in Italy and sang in opera, concert and recordings in many European countries, the USA, New Zealand and Australia. At the opening of the Sydney Opera House in 1973 he sang the first operatic performance in the opera theatre - as Napoleon in Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. In 1973 he returned to Australia and resumed his association with the Australian Opera. Wagner roles included Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*, Alberich in *Das Rheingold*, Wotan in *Die Walküre* and Telramund in *Lohengrin*. Raymond Myers served on the board of Opera Foundation Australia for 18 years with two terms as chairman, and was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1982. In the late 1980s he established Avere Artists Management, which managed and developed the careers of many leading Australian artists. His final operatic appearances were in the leading role of Rabbi Loew in Larry Sitsky's *The Golem* in 1993. "He was a constant source of inspiration through wonderfully positive, professional example".

The survey shown below is reproduced with permission of the publishers of Wagner on the Web

YOUR FAVORITE WAGNERIAN SINGERS AND CONDUCTORS

"Thanks to all of you who participated in our February survey by telling us your favorite Wagnerian singers and conductors. In order to arrive at quantitative results, we assigned three (3) points for each first-place vote, two (2) points for each second-place vote, and one (1) point for each third-place vote. Your top ten choices in each category are shown in the table below. A difference of five or fewer points between any two singers or conductors should be considered statistically meaningless."

FEMALE SINGER		MALE SINGER	
Birgit Nilsson	172	Lauritz Melchior	95
Kirsten Flagstad	122	Wolfgang Windgassen	56
Christa Ludwig	34	Hans Hotter	50
Waltraud Meier	33	Friedrich Schorr	40
Frida Leider	31	Jon Vickers	38
Leonie Rysanek	24	Gottlob Frick Matti Salminen	24
Hildegard Behrens	19	Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau	22
Gwyneth Jones Astrid Varnay	19	Siegfried Jerusalem	21
Lotte Lehmann Martha Mödl	12	James Morris Jess Thomas	20

CONDUCTOR		OPERA /MUSIC DRAMA	
Sir Georg Solti	123	Tristan und Isolde	129
Wilhelm Furtwängler	114	Die Walküre	116
Hans Knappertsbusch	48	Parsifal	95
Karl Böhm	45	Götterdämmerung	75
Herbert von Karajan	41	Die Meistersinger	55
James Levine	39	Lohengrin	47
Clemens Krauss	27	Tannhäuser	29
Daniel Barenboim	20	Der fliegende Holländer	16
Arturo Toscanini	18	Das Rheingold	16
Bruno Walter	16	Siegfried	15

(Wagner on the Web <http://www.zazz.com/wagner>)

HISTORICAL WAGNER RECORDINGS

Jonathon Brown of Canberra is evidently a music scholar who makes a study, among other things, of early recordings. He has compiled a list of the 84 items included in the following set for an Internet site called "Opera L". Mr Brown is happy for any of his listings on the Web to be distributed and shared, so his introduction and comments on the Preiser set are reproduced below:

"Preiser have recently issued a 4-CD set "Richard Wagner on Record" in their "Lebendige Vergangenheit" series (89404). It is an incredible array of riches. There are 84 items, some of them never released before on Preiser's LPs or CDs, or not at all. The set amounts to more than 5 hours of music. What's more, there are only 5 items duplicated from the other four CDs they put out last year:

- "Four Famous Wagnerian Tenors" (89981) - (Melchior, Lorenz, Ralf, Svanholm)
- "Four Famous Wagnerian Baritones" (89982) - (Bockelmann, Nissen, Herrmann, Berglund)
- "Four Famous Wagnerian Basses" (89983) - (Andrésen, List, Kipnis, Manowarda)
- "Four Famous Wagnerian Heroines" (89984) - (Leider, Larsén-Todsen, Flagstad, Traubel)

The new set is the best thing since EMI's "Wagner on Record" (RLS 7711 -7LPs) appeared in 1983, or more particularly the German sister set "Sänger auf dem grünen Hügel" (IC 181-30 669/78M - 10 LPs) which appeared in 1976 and which it more closely resembles. The Preiser set doesn't have the same extensive booklets, but it has crammed 88 photos of the singers into its little booklet, with identification of each one".

JONATHAN BROWN, Canberra

Space restrictions preclude a complete listing of the 84 items in the above set, so here is a sample of five.

LILLI LEHMANN (1848-1929) - Die Walküre: Du bist der Lenz
Recorded 5. 6. 1907 Odeon 50393 (XB 3147)

FRIDA LEIDER (1888-1975) - Der fliegende Holländer: Traft ihr das Schiff im Meere an
Recorded in 1925 Grammophon 72978 (881 az)

LOTTE LEHMANN (1888-1976) - Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg: O Sachs! Mein Freund!
Recorded 17. 10. 1925 Odeon 0-9518 (XXB 7241)

ALEXANDER KIPNIS (1891-1978) - Lohengrin: Mein Herr und Gott
Recorded in 1928 Columbia 7280M (98457-2)

LAURITZ MELCHIOR (1890-1974)
Lohengrin: Höchstes Vertrau'n hast du mir schon zu danken
Recorded 20. 6. 1928 HMV D 1505 (CLR 4031-111)

WAGNER AROUND THE WORLD

London

The Royal Opera begins its new season with a complete cycle of Wagner's Ring, 28th September to 3rd October 1998, conducted by Bernard Haitink and semi-staged by Andrew Sinclair for the Royal Albert Hall's concert platform. The cast includes John Tomlinson (Wotan), Ekkehard Wlaschiha (Alberich), Stig Andersen (Siegfried) and Sabine Hass (Brünnhilde).

New York (*Extracts from Wagner on the Web reproduced with the publishers' permission*)

THE MET. Lohengrin, premier 9 March, 1998. *Producer: Robert Wilson; Conductor: Levine; Lohengrin: Ben Heppner, Elsa: Deborah Voigt, Ortrud: Deborah Polaski.*

This was a controversial production in which staging was replaced by lighting, and the characters were given fixed, wooden gestures. Reviews were mixed. As **Eric Fettes** explains in the *AP Review (Foxnews)*, "With little but vertical and horizontal beams of light to divert attention, and characters confined to minimalist movements and intricate hand gestures, you might think the audience would be free to concentrate on the singing. That would have been fine, since the singing - by tenor Ben Heppner as Lohengrin and soprano Deborah Voigt as Elsa - was some of the best heard in the house in years. But Wilson keeps distracting us by all those colored shapes to guess at..." On the other hand, the *Los Angeles Times* review by **Mark Swed** rhapsodises: "Instead of the Met's usual Wagnerian nature-painting backdrop, there were beams of radiant white light, abstract geometrical shapes and a field painting of rich, subtle hues of blue light played out on a large screen at the back of the stage. During the 10 minutes or so of the prelude it seemed as if the meeting of the Met and Wilson might produce some magic of historic proportion... The effect was a mesmerizing trinity of music, color and shape, unrelated yet one." A regular opera-goer and contributor to the Wagner on the Web, **Tom Savage**, doesn't pull his punches: "Those familiar with [Robert Wilson's] work will recognize the Japanese-inspired arm motions, alienation and heavy-handed symbolism.... A bare stage with meagre props... Every so often some dark or lit geometric forms would clunkily fly into place to give a sense of something..." (The soloists were applauded, Wilson booed!). Another Wagner on the Web contributor, **Peter Caleb**, kept an open mind: "This was only my second Robert Wilson production. I find his iconographic vocabulary - the clean unshaded (or very subtly shaded) colors, the geometric patterns, the glowing light designs, the allusive or stylized representation of objects and actions - very beautiful and moving."

Vienna

The following article from *Opera (London) March 1998* is reproduced in full with permission of the author Christopher Norton Welsh, and the publishers.

POUNTNEY'S "RIENZI"

“Wagner’s *Rienzi* has not been seen in Vienna for 63 years, so what audiences expected to see is only speculation. They certainly did not expect what David Pountney and his team, Robert Israel (sets), Marie-Jeanne Lecca (costumes) and Roberto Zanella (choreography), unveiled on December 13 at the Staatsoper. *Grand opéra* implies spectacle and kitsch, and Pountney played it that way with plenty of glitz, a dash of parody and huge crowds - not only drawing on all the house’s resources but also the Bratislava Philharmonic Chorus and students from the Music University and the Conservatory. Israel kept the stage spacious with chunks of grey masonry dragged on by stagehands, alternating with drop curtains to bring the occasional passage up front. The basic costume colours were grey to black, with dark red and green cloaks for the feuding noble factions. The *Rienzi* party sported high-buttoned frock-coats, later with white togas, and there was a whiff of the sinister side of recent German history in the troop of ‘*Rienzi girls*’ in white cloaks, grey gymslips and a red ‘R’ in Gothic script on their bosoms, and very little girls marching and waving flags. But not all was glamour, there were also bodybags and exhausted wounded after the victory in Act 3. Under the glitz and parody there was a solid, serious core, and even the ‘*Rienzi girls*’ joined in the final, fatal riot against the Tribune.

On paper the musical side was promising, and Zubin Mehta offered a taut view of this score, discarding the false pathos and cutting down the bombast when not strictly necessary. He also led the singers carefully but not indulgently. Indulgence was required for Siegfried Jerusalem in the title role. First-night reports suggested that all was not well, and by the third performance (December 20) he was in woeful vocal condition, forcing the heroic passages, his tone often breaking out of focus, and occasionally running out of voice completely, especially in the more lyrical passages. A great pity because one could sense the intelligent portrayal he wished to give. Nancy Gustafson was a cool but beautifully phrased Irene, and Violeta Urmana a committed Adriano, though more dramatic edge would not have come amiss. Walter Fink was indisposed but still made a suitably sinister and cavernous Colonna, but unfortunately Peter Weber was not as strong an Orsini, rather short-changing their confrontations. Torsten Kerl and Wolfgang Bankl were a time-serving pair of henchmen, clearly watching for the bandwagon from the start. Roland Schubert was a weak Cardinal and Anat Efraty the Friedensbote. Many of the Viennese hated the production, but I enjoyed what seemed to me a valid way of presenting *grand opéra* for modern audiences”.

CHRISTOPHER NORTON-WELSH

Berlin

An interview with Daniel Barenboim in the *Financial Times*, Weekend 2-3 May 1998, quotes him as promising to conduct in 2002 all the Wagner operas during the *Festtage*, the festival held around Easter time in Berlin which he created. Daniel Barenboim is music director of the Staatskapelle orchestra and the Staatsoper unter den Linden, Berlin.

The following article from *The Sunday Times*, February 15, 1998, is reproduced in full with the permission of the author, Hugh Canning, and the publishers.

Paris, Amsterdam

UNHEROIC FAILURES

“Deprived British Wagnerians will need to do a lot of travelling this year to get their fixes outside summer's Bayreuth Festival. Only English National Opera has staged any of Wagner's masterpieces so far this season - Paul Daniel inaugurated his music directorship with *The Flying Dutchman*, although the production was a damp squib. The Royal Opera will give three concert performances of *Parsifal* in March starring Plácido Domingo and Deborah Polaski, conducted by Bernard Haitink.

As a *bonne bouche*, it also offered last week a Wagner concert to mark its rapprochement with the Wagnerian diva Waltraud Meier - the world's reigning Kundry and Isolde - who was summarily replaced in the Richard Jones Ring when she turned up late for rehearsals in 1995. Meier sang out excitingly in two excerpts from *Tristan - Isolde's* Narration and Curse and the *Liebested* - and in Sieglinde's *Der Männer Sippe* and Brünnhilde's *Immolation* from *The Ring*, but her slightly nasal mezzo-soprano lacks the ideal radiance this music demands. I mustn't carp, however, for Meier is a star and too rare a visitor to these shores. She will surely be the next Isolde at Covent Garden if there is one.

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

Tristan und Isolde marks not only a watershed in Wagner's composing career but in the history of music itself. Considered unperformable by his contemporaries, the roles of *Tristan* and *Isolde* caused Wagner immense grief. He engaged the heroic tenor Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld and his wife, Malwina, from Dresden for the Munich premiere, but 10 days after that performance the 35-year-old tenor died (his doctor put it about that he had expired "of *Tristan*") and his young widow went half-mad with grief.

Ever since, these *hochdramatisch* (literally, highly dramatic) tenor and soprano parts have called for singers of rare lung power and physical stamina. Ideally, too, they should look romantic paragons and have vocal timbres of burnished gold.

The Paris production fields our own Anne Evans - a light-voiced and lyrical *Isolde* for both Welsh National and Scottish operas in the recent past - and the German Wolfgang Schmidt, Bayreuth's current *Siegfried* in *The Ring*. They are an ill-matched pair: she, still lovely to behold in trousers for the Act I sea crossing with a mane of red-gold tresses, he a lumpen bruiser. Vocally, too, it would be hard to imagine a *Tristan* less suited to Evans's *Isolde*, for where she is all delicacy, phrasing with scrupulous musicianship and singing with limpid tone, he rides roughshod through Wagner's notes, barely phrasing at all.

Both singers were booed: Schmidt, I suspect, for the ugliness of his vocal performance and Evans, cruelly, for the size of her voice. The dead acoustics of the Opéra-Bastille simply defeated this sensitive artist and she had to work her vocal cords hard to make herself heard above James Conlon's orchestral tumult. At last Sunday's matinee performance, she actually sang one of the most radiant Liebestods I have heard from her; small-scale, certainly, but heart-rendingly real and true. Indeed, Evans was the only reason for remaining for the third act. In Act II, we had heard the velvety bass tones of René Pape as a Marke, so youthful and vigorous-looking that he hardly qualified as *Kornwalls müden König* (Cornwall's tired King), and Jane Henschel as a somewhat blowsy, but very loud, Brangäne.

Winge's production - in sets of surpassing hideousness - had two novel ideas: Tristan and Kurwenal popped a bottle of bubbly on deck in Act I, and Kurwenal lit up a ciggy while Tristan was tearing out his entrails in Act III. Goodness, what insight! Conlon's conducting never really rose above the competent and routine.

Musically, there is not much to be said for the Amsterdam Walküre, either. Conducted by the pedestrian Hartmut Haenchen, the great emotional and dramatic peaks of the music drama register nil on the Richter scale. The Netherlands Opera cannot secure the world's top Wagnerian singers, but instead of seeking out the coming generation they have contented themselves with a bunch of Bayreuth has-beens from the 1970s and 1980s and some never-weres.

In the former category fall the Sieglinde and Brünnhilde of Nadine Secunde and Jeannine Altmeyer, who are to alternate in these roles when *The Ring* is completed in 1999. Both have been distinguished Sieglindes, but now their voices sound forced, raw and wobbly. John Keyes's Siegmund was an improvement on his performance for Scottish Opera in the 1980s, but he is a stolid actor and ungainly singer, while both Reinhild Runkel and John Bröcheler sound past their primes as Fricka and Wotan. The strident Valkyries' voices suggest that shriekiness runs in the family. Only Kurt Rydl's black-voiced, threatening Hunding made any vocal or dramatic impact.

It is a long time, too, since I have been so bored by a production of *Die Walküre*. During the long Wotan-Brünnhilde interview of Act II, one of the patrons sitting in the "adventure seats" high above the stage appeared to drop off (not literally, of course) and I would have gladly joined him in the land of nod.

Audi's production must have cost the earth: George Tsypin's spectacular wooden set looks like a cross-section of a giant tree with a square area cut out of it in which the orchestra sits. For the Ride of the Valkyries it spouts real flames, and when you expect a reprise of the effect for Loge's magic fire at the close, Audi and Tsypin "surprise" the audience by splitting the wooden circle and introducing a strange glass sculpture that itself splits into sections, cutting off Brünnhilde from the rest of the world.

Act I closes with a little hut catching fire and shooting off into the back of the stage. Fascinating! Unfortunately, nothing much happens between any of the actors. For all his gifts as an impresario, Audi has bitten off more than he can chew with this *Ring*. He seems increasingly like a grandiose window-dresser tastefully arranging mannequins against exotic backgrounds for a chi-chi and pricey fashion store".

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RICHARD WAGNER BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

On Sunday 24th May we enjoyed fine dining and company in honour of Richard Wagner. Special guests were the Deputy Consul-General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr Christian Brecht, and Mrs Agathe Brecht, and our guest-of-honour, Mr Bill Gillespie, Artistic Director of the State Opera of South Australia. The winners of the birthday guessing competition were first prize (a weekend for two at Catersfield in the Hunter Valley) Olive Coonan; second prize (two tickets for an Opera Australia opera) Onofria Ferrara; and third prize (a Bayreuth 1998 programme autographed by John Wegner) D & I Kallinikos. Naturally Bill Gillespie had a willing audience as he outlined the amazing organisation and planning that has seen the full cast of singers selected, with highly professional covers, the sets shipped from the Châtelet, an extra 28 orchestra players engaged to ease the burden on the 96 who will be playing in the pit at any one time, the festival theatre renovated, a computer simulation of the theatre to ensure that every seat has a view of the stage, and much more. Our concerns over the late withdrawal of Carol Yahr were allayed on hearing of the impressive Wagnerian career of Janis Martin, who will now sing all three Brünnhildes. Members who were lucky enough to hear Janis Martin sing the Dyer's Wife in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* at the Melbourne festival in October 1996 need no introduction to her. At the age of 28 she was engaged to sing Fricka in *Das Rheingold* and Magdalena in *Die Meistersinger* at Bayreuth. Two years later she changed from Fricka to Sieglinde and from Magdalena to Eva, also singing Kundry in *Parsifal*. Since then she has been regarded as a lyric/dramatic soprano singing Isolde, Brünnhilde, Ortrud, Kundry, the Dyer's Wife, Elektra, Senta and Tosca. Janis Martin was honoured at Haus Wahnfried on August 6th 1997 for having sung 10 years at the Bayreuth Festival. The mayor of Bayreuth and Wolfgang Wagner made the presentation. Her 1997 schedule gives a good indication of her grasp of Wagner: she performed Wagner concerts in Tokyo, and in *Parsifal* in Vienna, *Walküre* in New York, *Lohengrin* in Paris, *Parsifal* in Bayreuth and the *Ring* in Düsseldorf. No less impressive are her 1998 and 1999 schedules which include the role of Brünnhilde (in addition to Adelaide) in Caracas, Venezuela, and Hamburg in 1998 and in Marseille in May and June 1999. SOSA must count itself fortunate to have secured Janis Martin.



The Ravens Reporting - compiled by Camron Dyer

- Adelaide *The Ring* - 3 cycles in 1998.
November 18, 19, 21, 24; Nov. 27, 28, Dec. 1, 4; December 6, 7, 9, 12.
- Amsterdam *The Ring* - June 1, 2, 4, 7; 9, 10, 12, 15; 17, 18, 20, 23; 25, 26, 28, 30, 1999.
- Antwerp de Vlaamse Opera
Parsifal - April 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 1999.
- Brussels La Monnaie are planning a *Ring* production for 2003, 100 years after the first *Ring* at La Monnaie.
1999-2000 season will include a revival of *Die Meistersinger*.

- Chemnitz *The Ring* - Premiere dates for individual productions:
Rheingold; October 3 *Walküre* November 1 1988; *Siegfried* October 16; 1999 *Götterdämmerung* May 14, 2000. The first cycle to be performed is May 7th; May 8th; May 11th; May 14th., 2000
- Chicago *Die Meistersinger* - February 8, 12, 16, 19, 24, 27
March 3, 6, 10, 13, 1999.
- Columbus *Holländer* - February 4, 5, 6, 1999.
- Costa Mesa Pacific Opera *Holländer* - January 19, 21, 23, 24, 1999.
- Dallas *Das Rheingold* - January 8, 10, 13, 16, 1999
Dallas is planning to do each of the Ring operas over the next four seasons.
- Florence *Tristan und Isolde* - May 19, 23, 26, 30, 1999.
- Geneva *Das Rheingold* - April 30 May 3, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 1999.
- Ghent de Vlaamse Opera
Parsifal - March 20, 23, 26, 1999.
- Houston *Holländer* - October 23, 25, 28, 31, November 3, 6, 8, 1998.
- Karlsruhe *The Ring* - October 2; October 4; October 10; October 18 ;
Cycle II, November 4; November 7; November 15; November 21 1998
- London *The Ring* - Royal Opera at the Royal Albert Hall
September 28, 29 October 1, 3, 1998.
- New Orleans *Holländer* - December 16, 19, 1998.
- New York The Met
Lohengrin - September 30 October 3, 6, 10, 14, 17, 22, 1998.
- Paris Opéra Bastille
Parsifal - February 14, 17, 20, 25, 27, 1999.
Lohengrin - April 19, 22, 25, 29 May 2, 5, 1999.
- Sacramento *Holländer* - November 20, 22, 24, 1999.
- San Diego The Great Richard Wagner Concert - February 20, 1999 - Civic Theatre
- San Francisco *Tristan und Isolde* - October 10, 14, 18, 21, 26, 30, November 6, 1998.
- Santiago *Die Meistersinger* - May 14, 17, 21, 23, 1999.
- St Petersburg White Nights Festival
Die Walküre [Act 1], *Parsifal* [Act 2] - June 27, 1998.
Holländer - June 28, 1998.
- Washington,DC *Tristan und Isolde* - February 27 March 2, 5, 8, 14, 17, 20, 23, 1999.
- Wiesbaden *Holländer* - January 1, 1999.