

Wednesday 19 January 2022, 7.00pm

**Talk on the documentary 'Marjorie Lawrence:
The World at her Feet' by Wayne Groom and
Dr Carolyn Bilsborow**

A Wagner Society in NSW zoom event

About the talk



Adelaide-based film-making duo Wayne Groom and Dr Carolyn Bilsborow are well known for making feature documentaries about forgotten people. Wayne Groom has been making feature films, television dramas and international documentaries for over 40 years for his company Australian International Pictures. Dr Carolyn Bilsborow is a filmmaker and Documentary lecturer at the University of South Australia.

Their 2018 work *Missing Pieces*, helped add weight to the push for an exhumation of its subject, the so-called Somerton Man. Another film was *Paris or the Bush – The Story of the (Murray) Cods* which was about the men's eight rowing crew that represented Australia at the 1924 Paris Olympics.

Wayne and Carolyn talked about, and showed excerpts from, their latest production: *Marjorie Lawrence: The World at her Feet*, which had its world premiere in December 2021. They described the research they undertook and conversations they had with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Brian Castles-Onion, and Richard Davis, whose 2012 biography *Wotan's Daughter: the Life of Marjorie Lawrence*, inspired the directors to make the film. It celebrates the career of the woman who “was the most famous Australian woman in the world in the 1950s, but now has largely been forgotten,” according to Wayne.

In 1928, at age 21, Marjorie Lawrence left Australia for Paris to study singing. Within a few years she became the greatest Wagnerian soprano in France, before being lured to the USA to perform at the Metropolitan Opera, where she starred in *The Ring*. In 1941, at the final dress rehearsal of *Die Walküre* in Mexico City, Marjorie collapsed on stage at the end of Act 2. The same evening paralysis set in and she was diagnosed with poliomyelitis. Remarkably she partially recovered from the illness and continued singing in a wheelchair.

In 1955 M-G-M made a movie of her life, *Interrupted Melody* starring Glenn Ford and Eleanor Parker, which won an Oscar for best screenplay. Here is a link to a clip from the movie with Eleanor Parker as Marjorie Lawrence performing the *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdTc5D7uyP4>

Eleanor Parker had perfect pitch as a singer and she learned all the arias she sings in the movie until she had the breathing and phrasing memorised. When filming the scenes, instead of lip-synching to the tracks recorded by the great Eileen Farrell for the movie, she sang full voice, but an octave lower, with Eileen Farrell's voice played even louder.

Here is a link to a clip of Eileen Farrell, who was Birgit Nilsson's favourite soprano, performing the *Liebestod*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Etw5sdLa0Qg>