



CELEBRATING
40 YEARS 1980 - 2020



WAGNER
SOCIETY
NSW

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 33

160

MARCH 2021



Swan Maidens Walter Crane 1894

Refer to Peter Bassett's article on page 13: *An Opera that Wagner Almost Wrote*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear members and friends,

Whilst we are well into the first quarter of the year, nonetheless, I extend a hearty WELCOME to you for a music filled 2021. The Society has begun the year with two early zoom events featuring two wonderful Brünnhildes, Susan Bullock and Lise Lindstrom, interviewed by our own Robert Mitchell. And as I write this we are about to have our first live event since February 2020 – a recital to properly kick off our 40th anniversary celebrations which were unfortunately curtailed last year. Hopefully we will be able to bring more live events in the second half of the year. April sees our return to the Goethe Institut after quite a while for a lecture by Professor Thea Brejzek on the visionary scenographer Adolphe Appia - the first in what I hope will be a series on important designers and directors with a strong connection to Wagner. Please see details of what is coming up in the next pages and in our regular enews.

Late last year your Committee made a conscious decision to support two causes which go to the heart of what the Society is all about – helping young artists and supporting the production of Wagner's music dramas in Australia. We felt that at a time when the survival of The Arts and artists is at risk, that a generous gesture was both a necessity and a moral/political requirement. I have to admit that the response from the membership was less than impressive despite some very generous individual contributions (and I can't thank those

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SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

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

'WAGNER AT 40' CONCERT

AT THE MOSMAN ART GALLERY ON 7 MARCH 2021

Photos by Lis Bergman, Leona Geeves and Mike Day



Audience members



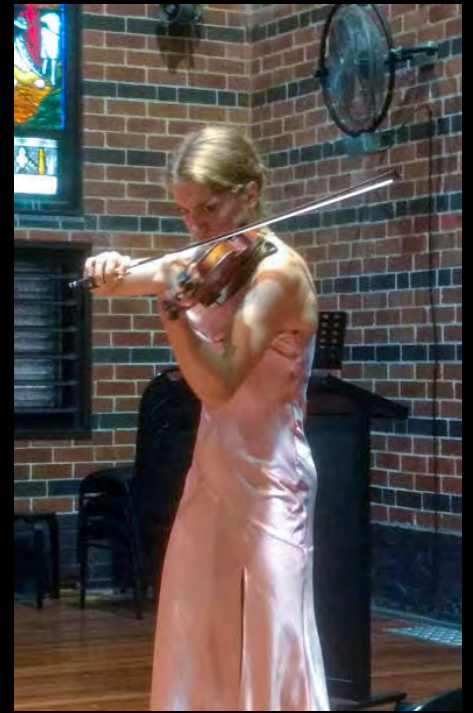
Anniversary cake



Bradley Gilchrist



Laura Scandizzo



Cedar-Rose Newman



Brangayne wine gifts



Cedar-Rose Newman and Bradley Gilchrist

FOR YOUR DIARY

2021

28 Oct - 21 Nov 2021	Opera Australia presents 3 cycles of a new <i>Ring</i> at QPAC	Brisbane
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COMING SOCIETY EVENTS 2021 – SOME EVENTS WILL BE ON ZOOM DAYS AND STARTING TIMES MAY VARY.

PLEASE CHECK THE SCHEDULE ONLINE FOR DETAILS

DATE	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	LOCATION
Sunday 21 March	4.00pm Heath Lees talks to us from NZ about <i>Wagnerism after Alex Ross</i>	Zoom
Sunday 18 April	12.30pm DVD Ludwig II castles in Bavaria 2.00pm Prof Thea Brejzek talks about revolutionary Swiss stage designer Adolphe Appia	Goethe Institut
Sunday 23 May	1.00pm AGM 2.00pm Concert 3.00pm Wagner's birthday drinks and Celebration of 40th Anniversary	St Columba, Woollahra
Sunday 6 June	2.00pm (TBC) Alex Ross talks about his recent book <i>Wagnerism</i>	Zoom
Sunday 11 July	12.30 DVD (TBC) 2.00 Peter Bassett talks about the Ring from an Eastern perspective	Goethe Institut

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

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

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

Dr Colleen Chesterman

Ms Leona Geeves

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members enough – you are rightly recognised in the following pages). The collective effort to overcome the pandemic and the restrictions it imposed on cultural life needs an outlet, in our case the generosity to help those artists whose livelihood has been dramatically disrupted. Our commitment and resolve continues, so I ask once again that we all consider even a small individual donation as collectively we can make a difference.

One of the two causes that we contributed to was Melbourne Opera's production of *Das Rheingold*. A bold move by a company that consistently places Wagner on the Melbourne stage. They have achieved wonders and manage to maintain a very high artistic standard on budgets that other opera companies would find challenging. Those that bravely managed to get to Melbourne to see this live will attest as to the high quality of this production at all levels. Melbourne Opera's tenacity in getting this *Rheingold* on the stage after one of the harshest lockdowns in the world and with the risk of further restrictions at any time plus the confidence to begin a new Ring production with *Rheingold* (instead of the "easier" *Walküre* which most companies tackle first) demands our admiration and continued support. Due to the fraught nature of the undertaking the Committee suggested to Melbourne Opera that they use the money donated in any way they saw fit. They came back with the suggestion that the money go towards buying the Wagner Tubas required for the Ring (the story of their procurement is as epic as the Ring itself). We contributed towards the purchase of two of the four instruments this year and we hope to complete our contribution towards the purchase of the other two in 2022. This is the challenge for the Society, to raise enough donations for that to occur and then onto the full cycle in 2023. Of course attendance at these performances is showing the ultimate support (as was watching the streamed version).

With the reopening of theatres and concert halls cultural life seems to be making a resurgence. How great it is to sit in a space to see things live again. Of course the hardship and risk of it all disappearing is still there. Government support has been and continues to be poor and our modest contributions both in donations and subscriptions, whilst welcomed, hardly cement the viability of mounting performances.

Despite administrative issues Opera Australia have launched their Summer Season with Daniel Sumegi (the Brisbane Wotan in waiting) giving us a taste of his voice as Duke Bluebeard in Bartok's one acter. A surprise, albeit a happy surprise, with respect to the Brisbane Ring was the announcement that

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I offer my thanks for the contributions by the committee, our members, and our sponsored singers.

Special thanks to Hilary Oliver from the Florence Austral Society for her moving tribute to a sadly neglected diva.

Thankyou Peter Bassett for another fascinating article and thanks to past Quarterly Editor Terence Watson for his review of the Melbourne *Das Rheingold*. As usual I encourage everyone to submit articles for publication.

I remind readers that all the past newsletters and Quarterlies are available on our website

For readers who crave more about Wagner I can thoroughly recommend thewagnerjournal.co.uk

Apology: Last issue's article *Somerset Maugham and Wagner* was incorrectly attributed to Minnie Biggs. The original source was: librarything.com/topic/102756 19.Nov 2010

Mike Day
michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com

Lise Lindstrom will return to Australia to reprise the role of Brünnhilde for the first two cycles with Australian Anna-Louise Cole singing the role in the third cycle. With Europe still dealing with continued waves of the pandemic it is possible that Brisbane may well be the only full Ring available to Wagnerians in 2021. Lets hope not but it is unlikely that any Australians will be travelling overseas for Wagner for quite some time. And the restrictions mean that Bayreuth will not be a possibility for us this year despite the Festival going ahead with a reduced programme and number of seats.

As we continue to plan events into the second half of 2021 I ask you, our members, to please provide feedback and also make suggestions as to what you may want to see and hear into the future. Please enjoy the first Quarterly for 2021 ably put together by Mike Day (thanks Mike, and also thank you to all the contributors/reviewers/writers). Happy listening and see you at the next event.

Esteban Insausti
President, Wagner Society in NSW Inc.

A MESSAGE FROM ANDREA BUCHANAN, VICE-PRESIDENT OF RWVI

Firstly, the not-so-good-but-not-at-all surprising news that the RWVI will not be getting an allocation of tickets to the Bayreuth Festival this year. As only 200 people can attend each opera, and as the Festival has prioritised those who did not ask for refunds last year, there are simply not enough tickets to go round. I have been informed that there may be some last-minute offers on unsold or returned tickets, but these are likely only to be of use to local German Wagner societies.

Some of you did leave your ticket money with the Festival, and I hope you can get the tickets you want if you/your members intend going this year. Given the uncertainty around infections and travel, the unusual arrangements and the restrictions in place, most of us will look forward to going in 2022 and are resigned to writing off this summer.

<https://www.richard-wagner.org>



FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 21 MARCH - 4.00PM via ZOOM

HEATH LEES TALKS TO US FROM NZ ABOUT WAGNERISM AFTER ALEX ROSS

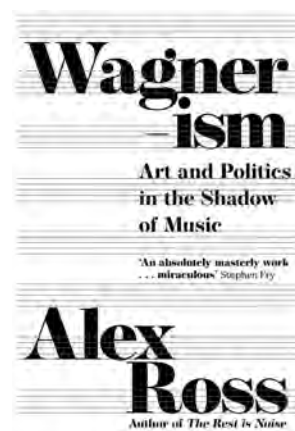


Heath Lees is Emeritus Professor of Music at Auckland University, and divides his year equally between New Zealand and France. Heath has presented many arts programmes on television, including the music series *Opus*, and the weekly arts show *Kaleidoscope*. In 1994, Heath founded the Wagner Society of New Zealand.

Heath has lectured on musical subjects in general, and Wagner in particular, in the UK, France, Portugal, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. As a writer, he has published many books and articles on different musical influences in literary works, including *Mallarmé and Wagner: Music and Poetic Language*, which deals with Wagner's influence on the French poet Mallarmé.

In *Wagnerism, Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*, **Alex Ross**, renowned New Yorker music critic and author of the international bestseller and Pulitzer Prize finalist *The Rest Is Noise*, reveals how Richard Wagner became the proving ground for modern art and politics—an aesthetic war zone where the Western world wrestled with its capacity for beauty and violence. For better or worse, Wagner is the most widely influential figure in the history of music. Around 1900, the phenomenon known as Wagnerism saturated European and American culture.

In his new book Ross ranges thrillingly across artistic disciplines, from the architecture of Louis Sullivan to the novels of Philip K. Dick, from the Zionist writings of Theodor Herzl to the civil-rights essays of W.E.B. Du Bois, from *O Pioneers!* to *Apocalypse Now*. In many ways, Wagnerism tells a tragic tale. An artist who might have rivalled Shakespeare in universal reach is undone by an ideology of hate.



SUNDAY 18 APRIL - GOETHE INSTITUT

12.30PM - DVD: LUDWIG II CASTLES IN BAVARIA



Ludwig II of Bavaria followed family precedent in undertaking an extravagant building programme during his relatively short reign from 1864 to 1886.

The castles constructed on his orders included the romantic Neuschwanstein and the magnificent Schloss Linderhof, with its elaborate formal gardens, grottos and fountains. Ludwig was fascinated by Wagner and his operas, on subjects that had long been dear to him. These include *Lohengrin*, which Ludwig first saw in 1861, the beginning of his preoccupation with Wagner, and the earlier *Tannhäuser*. This beautiful documentary explores Neuschwanstein, Linderhof and the Munich Residenz Nibelungen Hall, with music by Wagner and Marschner.

2.00PM - PROF THEA BEZEK TALKS ABOUT REVOLUTIONARY SWISS STAGE DESIGNER ADOLPHE APPIA

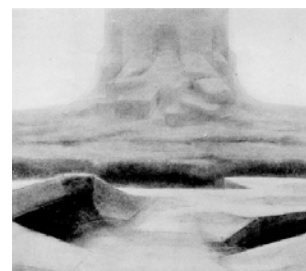


Dr Thea Brejzek is Professor in the Interior Architecture Program at UTS and teaches regularly at the Institute for Theatre, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna. Thea has a background in opera stage directing and theatre studies and until 2012 was a Professor at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Switzerland and the Director of the practice-informed PhD program Scenography in a collaboration between Zurich and the University of Vienna. Professor Brejzek publishes and lectures widely on the history and theory of scenography and performative environments.

Adolphe Appia is best known for his many scenic designs for Wagner's operas. He rejected painted two-dimensional sets for three-dimensional "living" sets because he believed that shade was as necessary as light to form a connection between the actor and the setting of the performance in time and space. Through the use of control of light intensity, colour and manipulation, Appia created a new perspective of scene design and stage lighting.



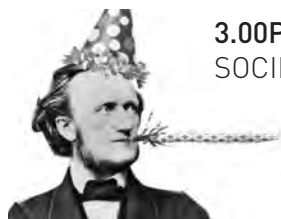
Appia's design for *Tristan und Isolde* 1896



Das Rheingold 1924

SUNDAY 23 MAY - VENUE TO BE CONFIRMED

1.00PM - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING | 2.00PM - CONCERT (DETAILS TO BE CONFIRMED)



3.00PM - WAGNER'S BIRTHDAY DRINKS AND CELEBRATION OF SOCIETY'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Join us for bubbles, nibbles and sparking music and catch up with old friends to reminisce about past trips and performances and celebrate the achievements of the Society over the past 40 years. Founding Member, Past President and Life Member Richard King will talk about the initial impetus to form the Society.

SUNDAY 6 JUNE - 2.00PM via ZOOM (TIME TO BE CONFIRMED)

TALK WITH ALEX ROSS



Alex Ross will talk to us from San Francisco about his monumental book *Wagnerism, Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*.

Alex Ross is a 1986 graduate of St. Albans School in Washington, D.C., having previously attended the Potomac School in McLean, Virginia. He is a 1990 graduate of Harvard University, where he studied under composer Peter Lieberson and was a DJ on the classical and underground rock departments of the college radio station, WHRB. He earned a Harvard A.B. in English summa cum laude for a thesis on James Joyce.

His first book, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century, a cultural history of music since 1900*, was released in the U.S. in 2007 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux and in the U.K. in 2008. The book received widespread critical praise in the U.S., garnering a National Book Critics Circle Award, a spot on The New York Times list of the ten best books of 2007, and a finalist citation for the Pulitzer Prize in general nonfiction. The book was also shortlisted for the 2008 Samuel Johnson Prize for nonfiction.[1]

His second book, *Listen to This*, was released in the U.S. in September 2010 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux and was published in the U.K. in November 2010. In September 2020, his third book *Wagnerism, Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* came out.

DONATIONS TO HELP THE SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

We encourage members to donate to the Society to help with our regular support for artists.

GENEROUS DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS:

John Barrer, Minnie Biggs, Barbara Brady, Colleen and Michael Chesterman, Barbara Dorsch, Jenny Edwards, Jenny Ferns, Richard Gastineau-Hills, Ms H Gillam, Florian Hammerbacher, Esteban Insausti, Susan Kelly, Richard King, Pam McGaw, Ross Whitelaw.

These donations were used for the SPECIAL DONATIONS detailed below.

FREELANCE ARTIST RELIEF AUSTRALIA (FARA)

\$5,000 was given to FARA for assisting struggling artists overseas.

We received the following acknowledgement from Anna d'Ersu, Director of Development, FARA

Dear all,

Thank you so very much for the donation from the Society which we just received. I will send you a tax receipt very shortly for this generous donation.

The situation for a lot of companies is slowly getting better but most of our artists are still struggling. There is a long path ahead of us to recover from this crisis. Your support will be instrumental in helping our artists survive this challenging time. Thank you so very much.

Best wishes to you all,

Anna

MELBOURNE OPERA

The Society donated \$15,000 for the purchase of Wagner tubas for Melbourne Opera's production of *Das Rheingold*

We received the following acknowledgement from Robbie McPhee, Company Manager, Melbourne Opera

Hi Esteban,

A very big THANK YOU for your advice of the wonderful support from the NSW Wagner Society. This means so much to us, and we are thrilled to be working with you all. Please thank your members for their vote of confidence in Melbourne Opera. We are very excited to be doing the first of the Cycle, and with the great support too of the Richard Wagner Society in Victoria we feel we are placed very well to deliver a fabulous show.

We are looking forward to seeing as many of our NSW Wagner Society colleagues as possible!

Kind regards

Robbie

REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS

THURSDAY 28 JANUARY via ZOOM AT 8.00PM

SUSAN BULLOCK IN CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT MITCHELL

Minnie Biggs reports

Nearly 30 Wagner Society members and guests enjoyed meeting English dramatic soprano Susan Bullock on Zoom from London on January 28th.

Susan started by describing rehearsing *Elektra* last March, a role she has sung many times in many great houses, and being rudely and effectively disrupted at the end of the rehearsal with the announcement that indeed it was the end. The end of opera as we know it. The end for many months to come. Other cancelled performances included *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Kát'a Kabanova*, and some recitals.

That she was fortunate to be able to record a performance at the Grange Opera in September plus some individual short pieces for the 'bite-size' Proms, which raised money for struggling artists, was little comfort in nearly a year of absolutely no other singing engagements of any kind. For a singer who is accustomed to constant travel, out of one suitcase into another, nearly a year at home in London. With her husband and a piano and occasional walks and trips to the store. Not even a hairdresser. For a lifelong stage performer! Of course, we are all aware of this kind of situation, we have all shared in it to one degree or another but hearing from her, out of the mouth of one of the great Brünnhildes, was quite another thing. Sobering.

And speaking of mouths, she spoke most interestingly about learning the Wagner roles. Her first was Isolde for the ENO in English but she was determined to learn the opera in both English and German at the same time, and indeed, soon after her first performance, she was asked to sing it in Frankfurt. In German. A subtle difference in the languages is the pronunciation of the last consonant, often dropped off in English and most often necessarily precisely pronounced in German. She talked of the work and concentration of learning the words, some of which Wagner actually made up, the sense of which is apparent. She would literally take the syllables and form them in her mouth, learning them from the inside out, as it were, ingesting, understanding them fully. And later she was aware of other singers who said the words with a glazed expression, no idea of really what they meant or said.



Susan gave us some fascinating background to her surprisingly unplanned career – starting with great success as Madama Butterfly and leading to Elektra and Brünnhilde, which many members were thrilled by in the 2013 Melbourne *Ring*. Susan acknowledged that it was a great gift to her to be invited to sing such demanding and complex roles.

What is ahead? Who knows? Planning for Klytaemnestra, Mrs Lovatt in *Sweeney Todd*, and Mother in *Jenůfa*. Plenty lined up in the imaginary future but much uncertainty. Travel allowed? Quarantine restricted? All challenges relatively easy for us laypeople but for a singer, preparing for a role, another story. Locked in, alone.

And another snag. Who of us in Australia is aware of some of the ramifications of Brexit? Suddenly the English are obliged to obtain visas to go to ... not Europe, but France, or Spain. Or both. Different consulates. Not (yet) fully (?) prepared for this work. Queues, paperwork. A nightmare.

Thank you, dear Susan, and may your beautiful voice soar once again. Before too long.

THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY via ZOOM AT 8.00PM

LISE LINDSTROM IN CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT MITCHELL

Minnie Biggs reports

There was yet another excellent turnout (nearly 40) of Society members and guests to meet Lise Lindstrom in London on Zoom. A great follow up to Susan Bullock’s talk. And yet another Puccini to Wagner journey (but Turandot rather than Butterfly). Perhaps not so surprising given the similarity of their voices. Lise came from California and both of her parents were singers. In fact, she made her debut as Donna Anna - her father was the Commendatore - with the Berkeley Opera in California. Interestingly, her first real teacher was the beautifully named Met Opera star Blanche Thebom who came from Ohio, middle America.

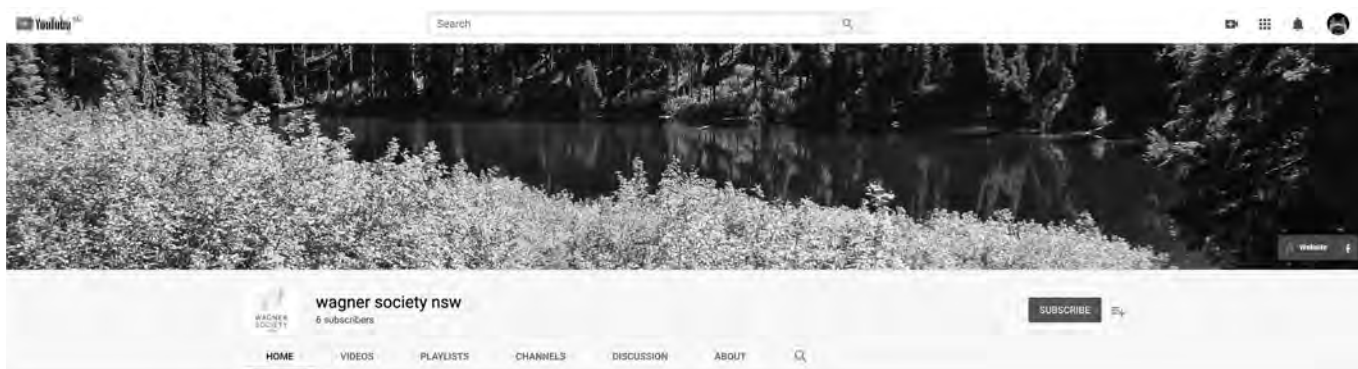
Like Susan Bullock, it took a long time for Lise to find her voice, no one knew quite what to do with it, until Turandot was suggested and initially resisted and finally turned out to be the perfect match. She has sung all the different endings of Turandot. Lise paid tribute to director Graham Vick, who taught her how to analyse every phrase to give deep meaning to the words to make the characters believable.

After Turandot Lise continued with the great Strauss roles, Electra and Salome, and finally Brünnhilde in Melbourne in 2016. Lise spoke warmly of the collegiality and enthusiasm of the Melbourne company. We will be able to hear her Brünnhilde again in the OA Ring in Brisbane in November.



When asked her dream role not yet performed: Minnie in *La fanciulla del West*. Her two great grandmothers were named Minnie and they all came from the Golden West.

With pleasure from Minnie Biggs.

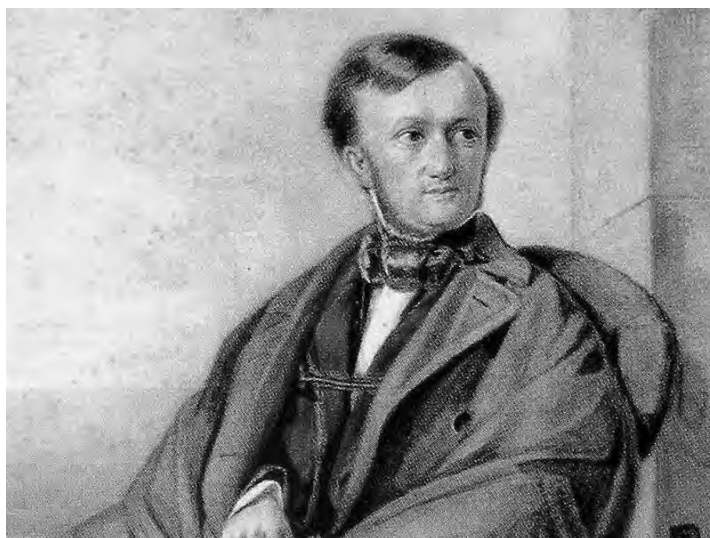


WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW YOUTUBE CHANNEL

We encourage members to visit our YouTube channel. In addition to including many fascinating early recordings and illustrations as well as clips from some earlier Wagner Society concerts, we intend to include some future concerts and talks as well. Once we reach 100 subscribers (currently there are 41) we will be able to have a much more user-friendly link to the channel than at present. To access the channel, it is easiest to search for YouTube Wagner NSW.

SUNDAY 7 MARCH AT 2.00PM AT THE MOSMAN ART GALLERY
WAGNER AT 40 - CONCERT RECITAL BY LAURA SCANDIZZO (SOPRANO),
CEDAR-ROSE NEWMAN (VIOLIN) AND BRADLEY GILCHRIST (PIANO)

Finally, after a year of lockdown, about 50 society members and guests gathered to hear some live music in celebration of our 40th anniversary. Two of our favourite performers delighted us with a selection of Wagner and Liszt pieces, plus a newcomer to the Society, an amazingly talented 17 year-old violinist, Cedar-Rose Newman, performed Beethoven and Ysaÿe. Bradley explained the context of the works and their relationship to the year 1853, when Wagner turned 40 and was at a major turning point in his career. At interval we served wine and food and shared a wonderful cake made by Barbara deRome and sang 'Happy Birthday Wagner Society in New South Wales'. Many thanks to Leona Geeves for her tireless efforts in organising the concert.



Wagner in 1853 aged 40

PROGRAMME

Wagner - Senta's Ballad from *Der fliegende Holländer*
Laura Scandizzo

Beethoven - Sonata for piano and violin 1&2 movement
Bradley Gilchrist and Cedar-Rose Newman

Liszt - Hungarian Rhapsody
Bradley Gilchrist

Wagner - "Einsam in Trüben Tagen" from *Lohengrin*
Laura Scandizzo

Wagner (arr Liszt) - "Lohengrin's reproof to Elsa"
Bradley Gilchrist

INTERVAL

Wagner - "Dich, Teure Halle" from *Tannhauser*
Laura Scandizzo

Eugene Ysaÿe - Movement from Op27 Sonata No2 for solo violin
Cedar-Rose Newman

Wagner - Sonata in A-Flat Major, WWV 85 (Eine Sonate für das Album von Frau Mathilde Wesendonck)
Bradley Gilchrist

Wagner - Wesendonck Lieder: Träume
Laura Scandizzo

COMMITTEE 2020 - 2021

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FLORENCE AUSTRAL - OUR FORGOTTEN DIVA

By Hilary Oliver



Australia has had three mega superstars of opera: Dame Nellie Melba was undoubtedly the first; followed by Florence Austral; and later, Dame Joan Sutherland.

Florence Austral is the least well known of the three, so who was she?

At the age of 18 years, Florence Fawaz's Lebanese stepfather financed her singing lessons and in 1913 at 21 years, she entered the Ballarat singing competition and won 2nd prize. She sang *L'été* by Cécile Chaminade which is a light, allegro art song which requires the voice to sit on the breath and dance lightly through the music. Two years later, she won 1st prize in both Mezzo Soprano & Soprano sections and the report was full of glowing praise. This set young Florence onto her musical career.

Florence commenced studies in Melbourne with Elise Wiedermann who had studied with Mathilde Marchesi and had had a significant career. Her repertoire consisted of 99 roles which demonstrated her range and versatility of voice. This versatility must have been imparted to her promising student.

The Marchesi Method holds the principles of Bel Canto singing. Mme Wiedermann knew that installing this technique would allow her protégé to sing any style or composer.

Through concerts up to 1918, Florence's voice and popularity in Melbourne were now confirmed. In one concert she sang *Ritorna Vincitor* from *Aida* (Verdi) and *One Fine Day* (in English) from *Madam Butterfly* (Puccini). Today, it would be unusual for a soprano to sing these two Arias in the same program as they are of a different fach.

A week later she sang *Ocean Thou Mighty Monster* from *Oberon* (Weber). This aria suited her voice perfectly.

In 1919 Florence contracted the Spanish Influenza which may have caused her continuing health problems with bronchial, sinus and throat problems. Nevertheless, she sang very demanding arias. For example, *Elsa's Dream* (*Lohengrin*) and *To the Forest* (Tchaikovsky), and forty-eight hours later, she sang *One Fine Day* and some songs by Graham Peel. Listing all these diverse arias demonstrates the versatility of Florence's voice

Later that year virtuoso flautist John Amadio and Florence took over from Peter Dawson to provide medleys of classical and popular items between films at the cinema in Melbourne, often twice daily.

By this time, the friendship between Amadio and Florence may not have been just professional and platonic.

For the first time in public, Florence sang Brünnhilde's Battle Cry which later became her signature aria.

Preparing for her departure to America, in her farewell concerts she sang *Softly*

Sighs the Breath of Even (Agatha's Aria) from *Der Freischütz* (Weber) & *Ocean Thou Mighty Monster* (Reiza's aria) from *Oberon* (Weber), with encores which included the Bach-Gounod *Ave Maria*. Her voice was by now truly fabulous.

Late in 1919 Florence left for America and would not return to her homeland for another 10 years. She probably chose America because Mme Wiedermann's soprano daughter was having considerable operatic success in New York. The trip included sailing to Vancouver and travelling by train to New York. It was November and Florence arrived in a severe New York winter. Although Florence was cold and lonely it was not for long as John Amadio arrived six weeks later.

Her sojourn in America was complex. She commenced Italian lessons with Maestro Sibella who taught her to lean on the voice in soft tones, toward the back of the head and she soon gained command of *mezzavoce*, and *pianissimi*. Sibella was impressed by her technique and the Marchesi method. Her voice was an exceptional instrument in terms of power, production, compass (pitch), dynamic control, flexibility, and sheer beauty of timbre.

With less than 6 months in America, she had two options: to return to Australia which would have looked like a failure; or sail to Britain with John Amadio. They arrived in London April 1920.

Florence Fawaz auditioned at Covent Garden and in a letter to her mother, after the first Aria (from *Tannhäuser*) she wrote, "I let it rip. It fairly staggered them!" Then after the 2nd Aria (from *Aida*) she wrote: "I nearly took the roof off!" Clearly, she was overjoyed and received a contract.

The General Manager of Covent Garden suggested that Florence change her name to Florence Austral.

She received a weekly salary of £30 (the average income in 1919 was £3 per week) and a condition not to appear in public other than concerts put on by the Covent Garden Syndicate and to study the Ring Cycle at the London School of Opera.

Between 1920-1922 artistic life in London was in a healthy state. There was the Bloomsbury Group, T S Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, and Thomas Beecham, to name a few. Sibyl Thorndike and Leslie Howard (and many more) were performing in plays by Bernard Shaw, Noel Coward and Somerset Maugham. It was rich in art which drew tourists and artists to the city. It was a happy time for Austral.

The British National Opera Company (BNOC) was formed in 1921 as a cooperative with operas sung in English. It was no longer just the wealthy upper-class attending operas; the working class was enthusiastically attending too (much to Melba's disdain!). In May 1922, the BNOC was presenting *The Ring Cycle* – which had not been heard at Covent Garden since before the war.

There was considerable public excitement for *The Rhinegold* and even more for the following evening, 16 May, when the curtain was going up on *The Valkyrie*.

It has been said that Austral's big moment came when she replaced fellow compatriot Elsa Stralia in the role of Brünnhilde. However, it is more likely that there was a German soprano who was ill as Elsa Stralia's repertoire did not include *The Valkyrie* and her familiarity with Wagner's Brünnhilde was limited. Conductor Sir Landon Ronald recommended Florence Austral to the management.

Despite little or no rehearsal, in the best showbusiness tradition, she arrived at Covent Garden that night relatively unknown; and received 11 standing ovations. The critics universally acclaimed her as one of the world's greatest Wagnerian sopranos. However, there were some criticisms about her acting.

Without a doubt she was a genuine vocal phenomenon held in awe by virtually all who heard her; and from then on, hailed time and time again as having one of the most impressive soprano voices in the world. In the Melbourne Herald January 1924 Dame Nellie Melba has stated that "Florence Austral has one of the wonder voices of the world, especially in Wagner".

Florence was contracted with the preeminent recording studio HMV in September 1922 and throughout her career, made 155 recordings (99 were released) becoming one of its top selling artists.

In 1925, after returning to England from America with John Amadio, her parents came to the UK for a visit. They knew nothing of the liaison – that is, that they had been living together openly for many years as Mr and Mrs Amadio.

Although Austral and Amadio exercised the utmost discretion his wife, Leonora Soames Amadio in Australia decided to file for divorce on the grounds of "misconduct" naming Florence Fawaz.

Florence's stepfather, who was a staunch Methodist, believed that to marry a divorced man was unacceptable. The story from a Fawaz relative recalls that there was a heated argument. From that day, mother and daughter were estranged. Sadly, her mother died before they could reconcile.

Adultery was neither proved nor acknowledged by the court and Amadio's divorce was granted in September 1925 and Florence and John married on 15 December 1925.

Florence's heavy work commitments continued, and an article written in the Evening News October 31st, 1927 reports that on Sunday night, after singing in Dublin, she travelled through the night to London. On arrival she changed her clothes, and motored to Norwich (125 miles), rehearsing all day for the musical festival. She motored back to London that evening, and at 8 o'clock the next morning, she was recording scenes from *Götterdämmerung* with conductor Albert Coates and the London Symphony Orchestra. At 11 am she drove to Norwich again and motored back to London the same evening after rehearsal. Early next morning, she was on the train for Nottingham, where she sang that evening. After the concert, she was packed into a bed specially made up in a car, and with her husband drove through the night to Norwich, arriving about 5 o'clock in the morning. At 11 a.m. she was singing the Brahms Requiem for the opening of the Norwich Festival. She was back in London that night and up to Norwich again for the remainder of the festival. (Phew!)

In 1929 Austral was to sing at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester Cathedral but she was banned due to her association with the Amadio divorce case. The decision was made by the church authorities and Austral was terribly hurt but held no bitterness. She explained to the newspapers that



Florence Austral's travelling trunk – now owned by Wagner Society Secretary Ross Whitelaw



Austral and Amadio

she had met John Amadio when she was a student and he was already separated.

1930 was to be her greatest moment – to sing at the Berlin State Opera - but things did not go well. Her contract was cancelled after the performances of *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* because her German pronunciation was considered unacceptable. All the lead singers were native German speakers, and her anglicised enunciation was conspicuous. Austral was humiliated. She returned to London with a feigned “indisposition” – tonsillitis.

Due to the depression in 1931, her contract with HMV was cancelled. She had been one of the highest selling artists but sales had diminished.

Around this time, she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Florence kept her illness a secret and continued to sing. Again, in 1933 at Covent Garden she sang in *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*. Then, in September that same year, she sang with a small but very reputable opera company called The Metropolitan Opera Company, in *Tannhäuser*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tristan and Isolde*, and at the same time, sang twice at The Proms and at the Palladium.

In April 1934 Amadio and Austral sailed to Australia for a gruelling tour around the country giving concerts and opera broadcasts. When they returned to England in April 1936 they sailed via New Zealand, South Africa, America and Canada. But Florence had been away for more than three years. Too long - her voice was deteriorating and Frida Lieder was now the Brünnhilde.

During the war, Florence remained in London and performed for the war effort. She did canteen work and made impossible journeys to all sorts of out-of-the-way places to sing for the soldiers. Good natured as ever, she sang popular songs as well as opera.

By 1949, both her voice and marriage which were the two things closest to her heart, had failed.

Early in 1952 Austral accepted an offer from Eugene Goossens, Director of the Sydney Conservatorium to become one of the first singing teachers at the Newcastle Conservatorium of Music.

In 1960 Austral stated publicly for the first time that she was suffering from MS. It seems she never mentioned that she'd also had breast cancer in the late 1950s and had had a mastectomy.

She was an artist struck down in the prime of her career by a terrible regressive disease and she joins many musical celebrities who were not able to continue at their full potential.

Her life was sad. Her brother was killed in an accident at the age of 10; she never reconciled with her mother; she loved John Amadio dearly, but the marriage failed; and her voice had faded.

She died in 1968 in a Mayfield Nursing Home, intestate and penniless, and all we have to remember her by is a room in the Newcastle Conservatorium and a plaque in Beresfield Crematorium (Newcastle).

Thankfully, Florence has been recognised with two biographies and two portraits.

For this article, I have referred closely to the biography, “When Austral Sang” by Michael Elphinstone and Wayne Hancock and Trove newspapers. We must celebrate this great artist and remember her through her biographies, newspaper articles, references on the internet and most of all, listen to her digitised recordings on YouTube.

Hilary Oliver

Florence Austral Society Inc

PS

There will be a digital exhibition in the “Magic Box” at the Newcastle Digital Library, Stewart Avenue, Newcastle during the first week of May and on display for 4 months.

At the moment, the library is searching for memorabilia of Florence. (Maybe someone may have a costume or prop? Who knows?)

WAGNER SOCIETY E-NEWS

Our regular Wagner Society e-news are emailed to members at the addresses they have provided. Occasionally some members do not appear to have received these emails. This could be because their email address has changed, or emails have been going into their spam or junk mail, or for some other reason. If you feel this applies to you, please let the Membership Secretary know by filling out the Contact us form on the website or by emailing webmaster@wagner.org.au and we will work to resolve this issue.

AN OPERA THAT WAGNER ALMOST WROTE

By Peter Bassett



Franks Casket

Richard Wagner completed thirteen works for the stage but left another fifteen unfinished. In retrospect, some of the latter can be regarded as trial runs or preparatory studies for the finished works of his maturity. Others were discarded because they dealt with historical subjects at a time when myth was proving a more potent and flexible dramatic vehicle. Some were unsuitable for his evolving musical style. Some were intended to be set to music by other composers, and it comes as a surprise to find that Wagner's talent as a librettist was occasionally in greater demand than his originality as a composer. But each one of the unfinished works offers a valuable insight into his thoughts and motivations.

Towards the end of 1849, when Wagner was eking out a precarious existence as a refugee in Switzerland and France, he began work on a prose sketch for what he called 'an heroic opera in three acts': *Wieland the Smith*. He hoped to interest the Paris Opéra in its performance but soon realised that *Wieland* was never going to appeal to contemporary French taste, and he abandoned it in March 1850. Its roots were deeply embedded in Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, and Germanic culture. The legendary blacksmith Wieland is called 'Wayland' in Old English and 'Völundr' in Norse. Wayland's Smithy can still be seen in Oxfordshire, dating from the 4th millennium BC. If you are looking for a prototype for Mime's smithy in *Siegfried*, then this is it. One of the earliest surviving references to Wayland is on the so-called Franks Casket, now in the British Museum. On the front of this whalebone chest, made in Northumbria possibly as early as the 7th century, is an image of Wayland at his anvil.

The old versions of the myths were far more bloodthirsty than Wagner's 19th century retelling and, not surprisingly, they did not have his philosophical focus. The original Wieland myth was a narrative of brutality, revenge, and retribution. The legend of the master blacksmith was popular throughout Northern Europe notwithstanding the fact that this hero butchered and decapitated the innocent sons of his enemy King Neiding, and drugged and raped the king's daughter! These scenes are depicted on the Franks Casket where we see, at Wayland's feet, the headless body of one of the two young princes whom he tricked and then slaughtered. The sister is standing before him, handing over a ring to be repaired – a ring that had once belonged to Wayland but had been stolen by her father Neiding, who had then crippled the smith by hamstringing him before forcing him into servitude. In the tongs in his left hand, Wayland holds the head of one of the boys, and, in his right hand a cup of drugged beer which he is offering to the princess.

Finally, Wieland takes to the air on wings of his own making and flies away, his revenge complete. Wagner chose not to dramatise these gruesome and vengeful actions, but this story, and others like it, give a particular resonance to Mime's plans to drug and decapitate Siegfried. They reinforce the fact that Mime is far from being the pathetic and comic victim we see in many productions.

By the 19th century, Wayland or Wieland had become a more civilised character; a hero fit for the Victorian age and the Wagnerian stage. In the end though, Wagner abandoned *Wieland the Smith* without composing any music for it. "*Wieland is dead*" he wrote to Frau Julie Ritter in Dresden. But he still



considered his text a beautiful poem and tried to interest Liszt in composing its music. He was even prepared to offer it to Berlioz, noting that if ever a musician needed a poet, it was Berlioz! Liszt declined with thanks, saying he had vowed never to write German operas, and Berlioz remained aloof and unapproachable.

In Wagner's sketch for *Wieland the Smith*, he describes Wieland at his anvil in the following terms: "Then with all his enthusiasm, he snatches up his tools; he sings a brisk and lusty ballad to the sighing of the bellows, to the sputtering of the fire sparks, to the clanking of his hammer." Surely Wagner remembered these words when, a few years later, he came to compose the forging scene in *Siegfried*.

Wieland's beloved is a Swan-Maiden called Schwanhilde. She and her sisters are also referred to as Valkyries and Shield-Maidens. At some point between the 3rd and 11th centuries, the Valkyries, who had once been blood-spattered choosers of the slain, picking their way amongst corpses on the battlefield, acquired a more benign aspect and became cup bearers and Wish-Maidens. They also became identified with the folklore figures of Swan-Maidens. The Valkyries' swan personae can be recognized in early costume designs when helmets were winged. The idea of giving them full wings on their backs has become popular with some production designers today (it is easier than providing horses!). Swan-Maidens often fell in love with mortal heroes and could be trapped on earth if caught without their plumage. In the Copenhagen *Ring* directed by Kasper Holten, Wotan violently tore Brünnhilde's wings from her body before putting her to sleep, thus condemning her to mortality.

In *Wieland the Smith* we have elements of both the Siegfried/Brünnhilde story *and* the Siegmund/Sieglinde story, together in the one work. Schwanhilde's mother was a mortal woman and her father an enchanted being whose identity had to remain a mystery. So, in this respect Schwanhilde resembles Sieglinde. Her father, described as the "prince of the light-elves" (Wagner's Wanderer refers to himself as 'Licht



Waylands Smithy, Oxfordshire

Alberich'), had approached her mother in the form of a swan. When, after many years, her mother (like Elsa in *Lohengrin*) was unable to contain her curiosity and asked who her husband was, he assumed the form of a swan again, and swam away. When news reached their mother that her husband had been set upon by the Neidings, who had killed him and stolen his lands, Schwanhilde and her sisters were allowed to don their swan's wings, assume the personae of Valkyries and seek vengeance. It is during this mission that Schwanhilde is wounded by a spear and falls to earth (like the swan in *Parsifal*) where she is found by Wieland. Now she becomes more like Brünnhilde. He sets her gently on a bank of moss and discovers she is wounded beneath her left wing. Looking closer, he sees that her wings may be detached. He tenderly removes them and, enraptured, reveals a lovely, perfectly formed woman. He listens closely to her breathing. Gradually she regains her senses, her eyelids open and Twenty years would pass before Wagner would write music for a similar awakening of a Valkyrie by a passing hero.

Schwanhilde is in despair because she thinks she has been caught by one of the Neidings (in *Die Walküre*, Hunding belongs to the Neiding clan). She weeps on finding that her wings have been removed, and that she is now within the power of a stranger – compare the awakened Brünnhilde, suddenly conscious of her mortality and vulnerability. “O sisters, dearest, cruel sisters! You have left me behind, helpless!” cries Schwanhilde, in an outburst anticipating Brünnhilde's bitter reproach of Wotan. Wieland comforts her, telling her to take him instead as her strength and shield. “Fairest, sweetest maid, let me shelter you with my life!” Siegmund will comfort the exhausted Sieglinde with similar words as they flee Hunding and his kinsmen.

But the dramatic coincidences do not end there. Schwanhilde shows Wieland a magic ring – a ring that ensures that any woman wearing it will have the love of the man she desires. Wieland, holding the ring, begs her never to wear it, for it would be impossible for him to love her more than he does already. Schwanhilde in turn warns him never to give the ring away, for it guarantees that any man wearing it will have victory in combat. Wieland hangs the ring behind the door of his house, declaring that neither he nor his wife will have need of it. His house, incidentally, has a great chimney in the middle of it, extending up through the roof (making us think of the tree in the centre of the hut in the first Act of *Die Walküre*). As events transpire, Wieland's enemies, the Neidings, steal the ring, kidnap Schwanhilde and destroy Wieland's home. But the crippled Wieland forges a pair of wings for himself and, joining Schwanhilde, soars into the heavens and away from the earthly chaos.

Wagner's description of the closing scene has more than a little in common with the ending of the 1848 poem of *Siegfried's Death*, in which Siegfried and Brünnhilde - again a Valkyrie - are seen rising above the flames of Siegfried's funeral pyre. In the *Wieland* sketch, as the house burns,



Wieland the Smith by Moritz von Schwind

tongues of fire lick the walls and ground. Wieland becomes completely invisible amid the smoke. As the men press towards the hearth, the chimney falls in with a fearful crash. A dense body of flames leaps up on every side and, above the smoke Wieland is seen soaring into the air with outspread wings. The entire smithy crashes down and buries the evil Neiding and his men. Dawn breaks. All gaze in wonder as Wieland, his dazzling wings of steel shining like the sun in the morning light, is joined by Schwanhilde who flies towards him on her swan wings and, together, they pass from sight. For Wagner, the Wieland myth was an inspiration to ordinary people, encouraging them to make the flight to cultural freedom. “O, unique and glorious people!” he wrote. “This is what you yourself have sung. You are yourself this Wieland! Weld your wings and soar on high!” It was an image picked up by Friedrich Nietzsche who, towards the end of his life was able to write: “I suppose I know better than anyone else the prodigious feats of which Wagner was capable, the fifty worlds of strange ecstasies to which no one else had wings to soar.”

In Europe of the mid-19th century, rocked by revolutions and political upheavals, *Wieland the Smith* became Wagner's brave attempt to fashion a work that both captured and shaped the spirit of the age. It was an important stepping stone to *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

DAS RHEINGOLD - MELBOURNE, 3 FEBRUARY 2021 AND LIVESTREAM, 7 FEBRUARY 2021

Review by Terence Watson



Final Moments

Conductor - Anthony Negus | **Director** - Suzanne Chaundy
Cast: Eddie Muliaumaseali'i - Wotan | Simon Meadows - Alberich
James Egglestone - Loge | Sarah Sweeting - Fricka
Lee Abrahmsen - Freia | Jason Wasley - Froh
Darcy Carroll - Donner | Roxane Hislop - Erda
Michael Lapina - Mime | Adrian Tamburini - Fasolt
Steven Gallop - Fafner | Rebecca Rashleigh - Woglinde
Louise Keast - Wellgunde | Karen Van Spall - Flosshilde

Sway-pole Performers: Emily Ryan | Lily Paskas Goodfellow
Andrew Bailey - Sets | Harriet Oxley - Costumes | Rob Sowinski - Lights
Choreographer of the Rhinedaughters - Miki Oikawa
Sway-pole choreographer - Phillip Gleeson

In her program note, director Suzanne Chaundy explains her thinking about the way in which Wagner's work can be seen to relate to contemporary problems:

in a world of ever escalating catastrophe, I reflected that Wagner's Ring Cycle may be the story of the 'Twilight of the Gods', but our world is currently feeling unnervingly like the 'Twilight of Humanity', with the outbreak of COVID-19, worldwide disasters linked to climate change and where a petulant man-child has ruled "the land of the free."

The challenge, then, was to find a way of interpreting the artwork to reflect this political and existential program. Chaundy explains how they approached the challenge:

With my creative team...we have looked to create a world that does not drag the mythological characters of 'Das Rheingold' down to being 'normal' recognisable people. I found inspiration reading literature imagining Norse Gods

in our contemporary world and this has been influential in the creation of the production style. The other operas in cycle are largely about people—albeit some heroic ones. We have asked ourselves what is the essence of the characters; the Gods, Giants, Nibelungen and Rheinmaidens [*sic*] and how they can be presented in a way that speaks to contemporary audiences, to reinforce the eternal relevance of this story of the machinations of power, entitlement and greed.

From my perspective, I found it puzzling how the team solved the problem of not dragging the mythological characters "down" to being normal human beings. Firstly, the male gods and Loge are dressed in more or less contemporary male suits, though Donner's metallic outfit looks rather more like a costume party suit, and his hammer a little wimpy (perhaps it was his dress hammer?). In what way were the Giants supposed to be "mythological"? Since there is no such thing, why were they dressed as if they had stepped out of Arthur Rackham's illustrations? In what "mythological" world are all the female denizens dressed in swirly, opalescent, dare I say "girly" outfits? In what way are the costumes presenting us with the "essence of the characters"? Raise these queries because I could not understand how the costumes achieved the director's stated aims, which is probably to admit my limitations, but I hope that my more specific comments below will illustrate my quandary.

The opening of the artwork was wonderfully suggestive and novel. Two indistinct figures high above the stage swaying gracefully back and forth in blue light. A nice introduction to

the Rhinedaughters, except I wondered where the third might be. I soon realised that these two were at the top of two “sway poles,” whose bendy properties were exploited to the full by the two performers in quite breathtaking ways. But, later in the scene they became a little distracting as they continued their aerial dance while the main characters sang and acted down below. The two swaypolers were dressed in what was to become the costume de rigueur for the female performers, that is a layered, diaphanous, opalescent gown that flowed as they moved, and prettily reflected the light. However, after a while, I was assailed by an image of a pair of Kewpie dolls upstaging the legit performers. The Rhinedaughters were similarly attired, but each was initially seated inside a circular blue, fluorescent tube, a little like a trapeze, that moved as they did to contribute to the sense of water flowing.

Alberich arrived in a boilersuit and singlet, extensively muddied by the bottom of the Rhine through which he had arrived to startle the Rhinedaughters. More of him anon.

The Rhinedaughters now dismounted and danced around Alberich, who slipped and slid in the mud, while they sang and teased him. Wagner would have approved of this clever integration of dance, of which he was a strong advocate despite his experience with *Tannhäuser* in Paris, into the stage action. While the lighting effect for the arrival of the sun, a golden glow bathing the stage, was impressive; the gold itself was not. Alberich opened a little trapdoor and grabbed a handful of what I took to be alluvial gold and smeared it over himself, making me wonder how he made a ring and a Tarnhelm out of that small haul. But then that is what magic is for.

The curtain descended for the transition to the Valhalla scene and rose to reveal a platform descending from the back of the stage to rest some feet above the bottom of the Rhine, creating a suitably elevated dais for the gods to inhabit. The platform has a large hole in the centre, which immediately aroused OH&S concerns for me. I trust that all the cast had appropriate training. The gods assemble, the male ones in their suits and the female ones in their godly versions of the Rhinedaughters’ diaphanous gowns. I’m not sure what Wotan’s chairman Mao collar would be intended to convey, especially in the context of today’s tensions over the behaviour of the People’s Republic of China. I have to confess, though, that I almost burst out laughing when Freia ran onto the stage. I found myself thinking, oh no, here comes the easter bunny with a little basket of easter eggs!! Then I admonished myself as I realised that it was a basket of golden apples. But then her headband, from my seat, really seemed like a pair of bunny ears. I discovered, in watching the livestream, that the headband was adorned with golden flowers. Sadly, she was followed by two escapees from the Rackham illustrations. Why were they dressed so? Where was the imaginative inspiration to give us something frightening or awe-inspiring, instead of something so hackneyed? Or was I missing some meta-textual significance in making the Giants objects of ridicule, rather than creatures of such power that they terrified Wotan?

And then, thank goodness, Loge arrives, resplendent in a flame red suit with black pinstripes, a yellow T-shirt, and a cheeky porkpie hat with a red riband. Now, the costuming

seemed to make both a political and a character point. As well as being dressed like a Mafia spiv, Loge, or rather James Egglestone, behaved like a Mafia heavy as well. Indeed, Egglestone was the only performer, in my opinion, who confidently and completely inhabited his character, filling his every moment on the stage with meaningful stances, gestures, and expressions. I hope that Melbourne Opera can fit him into the remaining operas of the Cycle.

Chaundy addresses the matter of the costuming as fitting within Wagner’s characterisation of this opera as “a prologue, a kind of a Satyr play, a ‘joking tragedy,’” adding that it was for her a way to draw on “traditional mythical tales” for her interpretation of the work. On this basis, then:

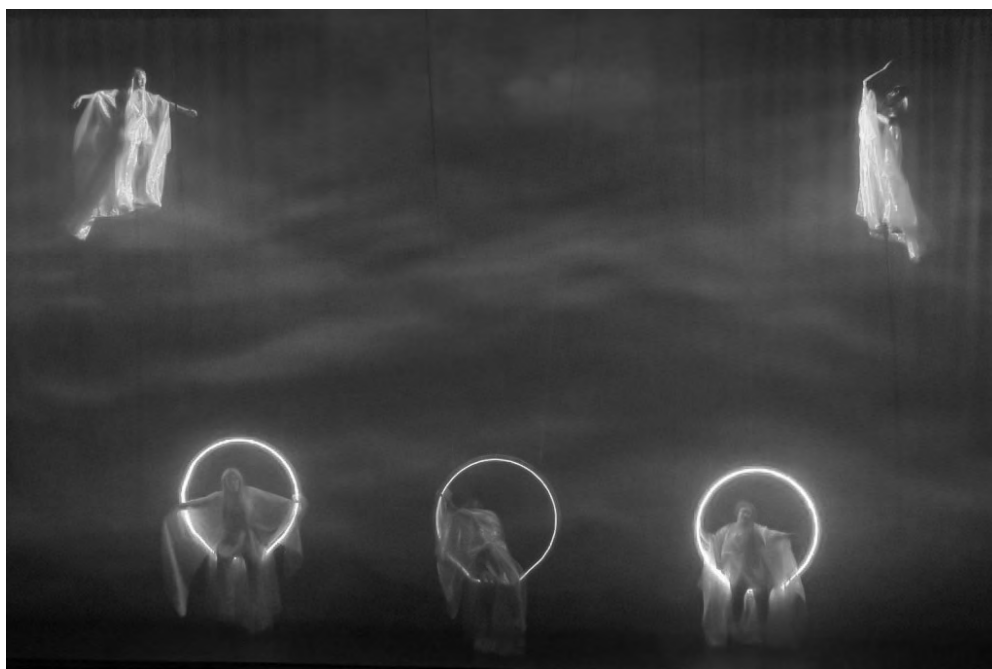
This production’s mythical past refers to the heady and hedonistic times of the sixties and seventies when the rich had seemingly endless wealth (approaching the ‘greed is good’ era of the eighties), where many of the seeds were planted for our current malaise of the environment and democracy.

For me this is confusing. On the one hand, we have the gods dressed in styles that could be understood as representing the era of “greed is good,” but how do the giants’ or Alberich’s or the Rhinedaughters’ costumes fit into either that era, or the “mythical past,” since none of those costumes has any foothold in any authentic folk mythology, just Arthur Rackham’s strange imagination? Settling on a consistent allegory might help.

The descent into Nibelheim was effected by raising the god’s dais a little to reveal that the underside was fitted out with pipes and lights suitable for an underground gold smelting operation, all made indistinct through much stage smoke, of which more anon. The Nibelungs seemed to be a mixture of dancers (and moonlighting Rhinedaughters), with many executing awkward tumbles and leaps; some seemed to have disabilities. I wondered whether this feature was because Alberich’s barbaric rule had already caused injuries in his enslaved workers. The entrance of Mime, Michael Lapina, marked another moment of relief since his presentation was relatively straightforward, dressed as a worker, and able to act. Lapina’s performance was, for me, the only other one in which I felt that the performer inhabited the character, limited though it is, and which called up spontaneous sympathy for his plight.

The confrontation between Wotan, Loge, and Alberich was effectively dramatic, primarily because of the interaction between Loge and Alberich. Alberich had dressed up for his new role as king of the Nibelungs with a coat, with much gold trim, over the still muddy boilersuit. His transformations into the serpent and the toad were effected by means of a scrim at the rear of the stage and more stage smoke. The serpent was well done with a writhing, snarling creature appearing through the smoke. I couldn’t tell whether it was a projection or mechanical, but it was more effective than others I’ve seen.

Rather than clambering up through the hole in the divine dais, as I thought might happen, the trio exited to the wings and then reappeared from the wings when the dais



Scene 1 in the depths of the Rhine

had settled to its perpendicular level again. Loge was provocatively and dashing wearing the Tarnhelm over his porkpie. With the gods assembled, and the giants returning Freia, Loge, with considerable deviousness and charm,

connives the trade-off of Freia for all Alberich's gold. In this case, the gold came in the shape of 15 blocks, I think, with such emblems as hammers, apples, and bars of gold embossed on them, which were enough to hide Freia from anyone standing in front of her. After Alberich has the ring ripped from his finger, and delivers his curse on the ring, he descends to Nibelheim through the hole.

To warn Wotan to also surrender the ring to the giants, Erda arrives rather unceremoniously from stage rear right and semi-circumnavigates the hole as she sings her way to Wotan on the far side of the stage. She is also dressed in the diaphanous, opalescent style of the age. More impressively, her face is projected onto the scrim at the rear of the stage where she appears rather like a cross between Medusa without serpentine hair and a portrait on an ancient platter with crazed glaze. This face slowly mouths something, but I couldn't tell whether she was saying any or some of Erda's actual words. The image, though, added some of the *unheimlich* to the scene.

The death of Fasolt was achieved by Fafner bashing him with one of the half-tree-trunks that each giant carried to emphasise their size. Fafner then callously rolls Fasolt off the side of the dais, I hoped onto a large mattress below. Fafner then trundles the gold offstage in a mining trolley the brothers had sensibly brought with them earlier.

Having arrived at the whole point of Wotan's original plan—to move into a brand-new fortress, the gods prepare to enter Valhalla. It is at this point that I realised that the strange, sharp angular shapes around the sides of the stage

were the outer battlements of Valhalla, with the gods' new home apparently the large tower now projected onto the scrim at the rear of the stage. The razor-edges of the battlements contrasted effectively with the effete-ness of the gods; they would need something as vicious as them to protect themselves not only from giants, but also from Alberich's fury.

The final moments of the production contained some of the most effective images. As the gods process up three small stairs at the back of the set, onto the base of an enormous three-quarter circle cut into the backdrop, through which we can still

see the tower, the dais rises up to frame them, as if in a family portrait. Under the dais, and right at the back of the Nibelheim-space, a row of white-blue lights appears, with stage smoke drifting through them, suggesting the Rhine river again. Next, a row of rainbow-coloured lights appears behind. From the flies above, more rainbow lights bathe the stage and the stage smoke that is, by now, drifting up to the stage and into the auditorium—altogether a lovely image.

For the last 5 or so minutes of Wotan's dismissal of the Rhinedaughters' call for the return of the ring, and Loge's sardonic contemplation of starting the world-ending conflagration three operas too early, we are treated to the counterpoint of the fire-alarms that the smoke has set off. Commendably, no one on stage, in the orchestra, or in the audience, leapt up to flee, since it was clear what was happening. Fortunately, too, no fires rushed in to rescue us from our fiery fate. After a number of curtain calls, the audience filed out to discover two fire tenders parked out the front, just in case—perhaps an unintentional nod to the practice at the Bayreuther Festspielhaus of having fire engines outside of every performance?

I was glad to see, during the livestream, images of the orchestra playing their hearts out under the energetic and focussed Anthony Negus. The images matched my experience of the orchestra's performance during the premiere, when I was sitting quite close to the players. Musically, this was a fine performance of which the orchestra can be very proud. Negus's direction resulted in a finely nuanced performance, with none of the voices drowned by some of Wagner's more exuberant dynamics. I don't know how many of the orchestra's members have played for Melbourne Opera's previous Wagner productions, but the orchestra is building up that impalpable quality that shines through when Wagner's style seeps into the performers' own relationship to the music to create what is often called a Wagner tradition of playing.

My response to the singing and acting, though, is more qualified. I have already commended James Egglestone for his embodiment of Loge, but I wish also to praise his voice, which again seemed to me to be one of the few of the cast to fit the character's Fach like a glove. Michael Lapina's voice also seemed to me to be almost flawlessly fitted to his character, without slipping into the dubious whining and cartoonish, anti-Semitic overtones that are sometimes deployed in presenting Mime. Despite their oddly cartoonish presentation, Adrian Tamburini and Steven Gallop as Fasolt and Fafner, were also impressive in their vocal quality and range, and also took as much opportunity as they could to interact with each other and the gods. I look forward to hearing Gallop again in *Siegfried*.

The gods in general, though, failed to persuade me that their voices were ideal for their roles. While Eddie Muliaumaseali'i had the physical stature for a Wotan, and a pleasing voice for most of the demands of *Das Rheingold*, I suspect that he will find it difficult to meet the vocal challenges of the Wotan of *Die Walküre*, both its length and the range required. I had heard with much pleasure both Sarah Sweeting and Lee Abrahmsen in previous Melbourne Opera productions. Both their voices are subtle and strong, but here they seemed to be holding back, or perhaps the vocal range demanded by their roles was not quite within their comfort range? The two characters have very little to say or do, so it is perhaps not fair to judge them on the strength of this opera.

The Rhinedaughters, Rebecca Rashleigh, Louise Keast, and Karen Van Spall, sang well, even as they danced. They brought some necessary joie de vivre to the artwork, which usually disappears with the arrival of the rather self-important gods. The other male gods, Jason Wasley and Darcy Carroll, were generally adequate to the demands, though, again, they each have only one chance to lift the rafters. Sadly, Wagner did not give Erda, Roxane Hislop, much to do, apart from seeming eerie and ancient, nor much to sing, though her music is distinctive and arresting. Hislop sang the role well with a rich mezzo-soprano voice that carried well over the orchestra.

I have saved Alberich, Simon Meadows, to the end because I found the characterisation bizarre. I cannot imagine why he was asked, or chose?, to perform as a cross between a chimpanzee, the village idiot, and a zombie, when he is supposed to be a credible threat to Wotan. From his first appearance, loping across the stage like a chimpanzee, to the somewhat demented facial expressions, to the exaggerated



The rainbow bridge

leering, this characterisation seems deliberately intended to demean the character before he is given the chance to reveal himself to us as a complex, challenging figure.

How are we then to make sense of his curse on love of scene 1? This surely cannot come from the village idiot? How are we to make sense of his curse on the ring of scene 3? Is it the effect of the magic of the ring that turns him into the figure who Wotan fears? If this is the case, then we have returned Wagner's allegory to the level of a fairytale. Wagner's Alberich seems to me to clearly contain within him from the start the desires and capacities that will transform him into the fury and cunning of the later figure. How is a modern audience to find in this cartoon a psychologically credible exposition of the dark side of human nature? Does a comparison with "a petulant man-child" really take us to the central ethical dilemmas that confront us in artwork? How does a zombie enable us to understand the choice Wagner presents us in *Das Rheingold* between authentic human relationships and a desire for power over others, let alone the kind of community in which political choice can be seriously debated and humane choices made?

That said, I must praise Meadows' voice. When he rose to his full height, freed briefly of the silly mannerisms of his characterisation, he thundered his curses in a thrilling, chilling voice that I could believe belonged to a character of great malevolence and power, who was also intelligent enough to conceive plans that would challenge the putative all-powerful god of the universe. Nevertheless, I await with some trepidation how Alberich will be presented in the other operas of The Ring Cycle in which he appears.

I will, despite my reservations, be booking my ticket for *Die Walküre* as soon as they are on sale and the sooner the better, to keep up the momentum generated by a successful start to one of western art's greatest challenges. "Kinder, schafft Neues!"

ZOOM INTERVIEW WITH LISE DAVIDSEN - 3 FEBRUARY 2021

Review by Ross Whitelaw

Was it worth getting up at 5am to log into a zoom set up by the London Wagner Society with prominent BBC broadcaster, Christopher Cook interviewing Norwegian soprano, Lise Davidsen? Yes, it was!

I had the pleasure of seeing her sing Elizabeth in the new production of *Tannhauser* in Bayreuth in 2019 and she truly made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up with her rendition of “Dich teure Halle”. She didn’t let up for the rest of the night either – a remarkable performance. She will reprise the role and also sing Sieglinde when things get back to normal on the Green Hill.

Lise grew up in a household which was not particularly musical, her father preferring Lionel Ritchie but she sang in her school choir and her local church while taking up the guitar as a hobby. She didn’t see her first opera until she was 20 and then as part of an excursion with the Danish Academy where she learned to appreciate Bach in particular. She sang as a mezzo and felt more comfortable singing in a chorus. Her teacher (who had also taught Irene Theorin) encouraged her to learn soprano parts, calling her a “sopranomezzo”. She later felt that her years singing mezzo parts was valuable experience.

Lise finished her studies in 2014 but was adamant that she did not study to compete although competitions enabled her to be heard and seen, sometimes before 6-12 directors who made up the judging panels. She went on to be the winner of Placido Domingo’s Operalia competition and the Queen Sonja competition in 2015 and made the opera world sit up and take

notice of her on stage, and in recital and concert performances. Bayreuth contacted her about a year after her competition wins. Lisa enjoyed her time at Bayreuth, even crying the first time she heard the orchestra at a rehearsal of *Tristan and Isolde*. It was a great team environment with even a “nerdy” feeling as everyone knew their Wagner, talked and debated about all things Wagnerian almost to the exclusion of all else. It was a chance to go deeply into all aspects of his work.

Lise enjoyed working with her director in *Tannhauser*, Tobias Kratzer who was super organized and gave the singers a lot of respect, a characteristic which she valued highly. Her other favourite conductors are Edward Gardner and Esa-Pekka Salonen.

She was in her fourth period of lockdown, having performed at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, the Met in New York and in Amsterdam in 2020. She said it was difficult to practise on one’s own, especially not knowing if her next performance would be cancelled or not. Above all, she missed the audience interaction.

Lise starts preparing a new role about a year before the performance, working on the text first and then adding the music. She said that she didn’t want to copy any other singer and that she wants to do it her way as after all “That’s why you come.” Her aim was to be honest and clear in her performances, making a conscious decision to perform concerts and recitals as well as singing on stage.

All in all, an (early) hour well spent.

THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS

This photo purporting to be of Richard Wagner appears frequently in the press these days. It was used in connection with reviews of Alex Ross’s recent book *Wagnerism*, and I saw it again in a 2019 TV program on Neuschwanstein Castle. Rome Lyric Opera uses it on their website. It is not Wagner at all. It is a fake, photographed in the 20th century, probably around the time of the 1913 centenary of Wagner’s birth. My first thought was that it is of the Italian actor Giuseppe Becce who played the composer in the 1913 silent film *The Life and Works of Richard Wagner*. It could well be Becce – it certainly looks like him, with a little touching-up - although Ross suggests that “It seems to derive from a series of staged photographs produced by the S. Blueh Wien Rotophot company — Rotophot being a popular consortium of postcard publishers”. Getty Images labels it ‘c. 1875’ and Alamy Stock Photography asserts that it dates from 1843, which is clearly nonsense (Wagner was only 30 years of age in 1843). It looks like a caricature of Wagner, and why would he be using an antique quill pen? There is frequent mention in his letters and in Cosima’s diaries to his fountain pens, including a beautiful one given to him by Mathilde Wesendonck.



So much twaddle is published about Wagner, including by those who should know better. Take the Rome Lyric Opera’s online article for instance. It describes the *Ring* as a “30-year-long opera”, that Richard lost his father at the age of six (actually, six months), that he received his education from his stepfather (not true) and that the *Ring*’s opening night was in 1856 (actually, 1876). But why bother with the truth when no claims about Wagner can ever be too absurd or any tale too fictitious?

Peter Bassett

OBITUARY - JEAN LOUIS STUROP (FOUNDATION MEMBER) 19.2.31 – 13.3.20

Memories of Jean Louis by his partner Catherine Walsh

Jean Louis was born in Alkmaar, North Holland and landed in Australia in 1953. As a teenager he pumped the organ in the Great Church in Alkmaar – by hand. He had to know the music by heart so that he could pump extra-hard when the big crescendos were looming. The organist knew that he'd found a gem.

In 1979 Jean Louis realised a long-held dream and managed to get two tickets to Parsifal in Bayreuth. Then in 1980 he saw an ad in The Herald for interested people to join a group to promote the works of Richard Wagner. Off we went. We met many lovely like-minded people and, at the first AGM of the Wagner Society on 22 May 1981, at the Concordia Club in Stanmore, Jean Louis was elected to the Committee, on which he served for 3 years.

After a short while Jean Louis suggested to the Committee that he would like to hold Sunday afternoon musical programmes at the Concordia Club. He called them 'Opera on Record – the Alternative Bayreuth' These were the days of vinyl (and many record changes). His audience appreciated being able to sit back and listen to the music (some following the libretto) in relaxed and comfortable surroundings with the bonus of having someone else changing the records! Mid-afternoon was coffee and cake time in the Club's café



Jean Louis and Catherine

and gave everyone time to catch up and discuss Wagner's music. These afternoons continued from October 1981 until September 1984

Believe it or not, around this time Jean Louis was the DJ at the Concordia Club. Typically, he didn't put up with any nonsense from the disco patrons. The young people loved him and used to call him "The Old Man".

Catherine Walsh

RIP ELIJAH MOSHINSKY - 8.1.1946 – 14.1.2021

We note with sadness the passing of the distinguished Australian opera, theatre and television director Elijah Moshinsky. A graduate of Melbourne University, Elijah created memorable productions for the Royal Opera. The Met and Opera Australia. In February 2019, he was awarded Opera Australia's highest honour, the Opera Australia Trophy. First presented to Dame Joan Sutherland in 1990, the Trophy was awarded to Moshinsky in recognition of his long service to the company and his important contribution to the Australian operatic landscape.



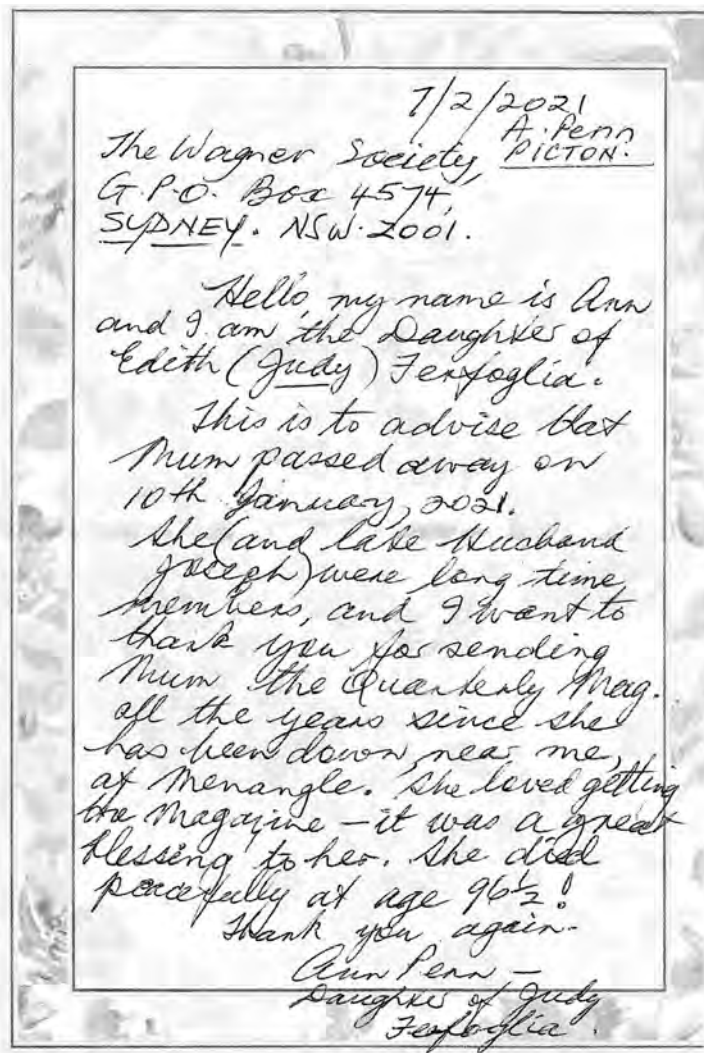
RIP JUDY FERFOGLIA

1924 - 2021



Joe and Judy Ferfoglia

We mourn the passing on 11 January 2021 of Judy Ferfoglia, wife of the late Joseph Ferfoglia. They joined the Society on 20 March 1981 - Joint Membership No 45. They were very enthusiastic members: Joseph was Treasurer from June 1984 to May 1988 and Judy was Secretary from June 86 to May 1988. We send our condolences to her family and publish below a letter received from her daughter Ann.



WE WARMLY WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE DECEMBER 2020:

Judy Carpenter 1245, Michelle Ryan 1246, Christine Moore 1247, Robert Woodley 1248, David Hurwood 1249, Fleuranne Brockway 1250, Gayl Jenkins 1251

2021 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

A reminder to those members who have not yet renewed their 2021 Wagner Society in NSW membership that their subscription payment is now due. Membership brings many benefits such as discounts at all our functions, access to tickets for Bayreuth (normally), special offers to many musical performances and the informative Quarterly Newsletter, not to mention enabling us to align our cash flow to plan events and continue our artist support program. We ask that those members please renew their membership as soon as possible. Details about subscriptions and payment methods are available on the website at wagner.org.au.

Members received advice in January and are encouraged to renew their membership for 2021. Details are available on our website.

THE RAVEN'S REPORTING, COMPILED BY CAMRON DYER

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

WAGNER SOCIETY NEWSLETTERS AND QUARTERLIES ONLINE

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

A NOTE FROM TABATHA MACFADYEN FOLLOWING UP ON HER TALK ON 27 SEPTEMBER 2020

It's very easy as an artist at the outset of her career to be forever looking ahead to what's happening next. Part of that is necessity: if you're directing an opera, you can *always* be more prepared. Part of it is anticipation: the thrill of knowing that you're about to be thrown into a new situation with dozens of people, all of whom have thought about the piece in their own way and that – no matter how prepared you are – what's about to happen next is anyone's guess. Part of it, of course, is sheer trepidation: do I have any right to be occupying a position of artistic authority?

The positive thing about the shitshow that is COVID-19 (that word has now graduated from profane to permissible – if Kanzlerin Merkel is allowed to use it in a press conference all bets are off), is that it makes all of this crystal-balling more or less redundant. Instead of looking forward to a future that we simply can't know, we can use the time to take stock of the experiences that have led us to this point. We have the chance to reflect on these formative experiences and determine what we've learnt, what we're proud of and what we might want to change in the future.

Anyone who's come within cooee of an opera company will know that even the most wonderful experiences have their 'moments' (to refer to them euphemistically) along the way. A perfectly harmonious set-up between the literally hundreds of people involved in getting an opera to stage is not only not likely, but I've started to believe that it's not even preferable. If every moment is defined by amiability above all else, it means that nobody in the room cares enough to rise above a state of mere acquiescence, and that is death to good theatre. Creativity expressed via a group requires the fuel of conflict and resistance as much as it requires cooperation and mutual respect.

And so it was in Würzburg for the production of *Götterdämmerung* for which I was a Hospitantin (or intern). It was only my third experience ever on 'the other side of the desk' after many years training and working as a singer. It has proven invaluable to me in every way. I cannot overemphasise my gratitude to the Wagner Society of NSW for their support in this endeavour. Although this internship was to be a full-time commitment, the theatre was not in a position to offer remuneration, and it required relocating to Würzburg for the eight-week-long period from first rehearsal to premiere. The living expenses alone, not to mention taking myself away from paid work, would have made my participation untenable were it not for your generosity. I learnt so much about the craft of directing and the intricacies and challenges of staging Wagner's work in particular, a vat full of learning that could not possibly be replicated in anything other than a professional situation in which everything is on the line.

And my goodness was there a lot on the line here. We were all under enormous pressure, but we bore the burden together and built, what I believe, was something very special. We were

premiering a brand-new arrangement of the piece for reduced orchestral forces by Eberhard Kloke, and everybody felt a huge desire to make the arrangement work. Kloke's version requires only 63 musicians, as opposed to the 100 or so necessary to perform Wagner's original orchestration, and if we made it successful, it could help to usher in a new era in which *The Ring* is a programmable possibility for medium-sized theatres. You know, the ones who maybe don't have the space for six harps. To add an extra bit of adventure, the cast consisted exclusively of people doing role debuts – and in this I am counting both the director and the conductor.

However, this situation worked out well for me because it meant that we needed all hands on deck. I was given a great deal of responsibility by our director Tomo Sugao; I felt that I was a true part of the sleep-deprived creative team right from the beginning. Every night we would sit together and have a glass of wine and an 11pm pizza – nobody ever said that the theatre lifestyle was a healthy one – dissecting the day's rehearsal, arguing about the detail of the piece, sharing our joys and frustrations and hopes and fears, all through the lens of this piece in this theatre. It was totally exhilarating and *utterly* exhausting, and right now, sitting in the midst of our second lockdown here in Berlin, I miss it more than words can say.

I'm quietly confident that I could extol the virtues of Wagner 'til the end of my days. I was obsessed before I worked on *Götterdämmerung*, and I remain obsessed now. The feeling then, of spending day after day plumbing the depths of this work, was an absolute gift. It felt to me as though the truths that his work can unveil are so infinite that whichever lens you use to view them, the work will resonate and reveal something new. For example, in this production, our director made the decision to focus on Hagen. His thesis was that he was a child born purely to fulfil one purpose – to reclaim the ring lost by his father, Alberich – who was perpetually mistreated and indoctrinated in order to achieve it. It made questions of free will and destiny run wonderfully rampant in the rehearsal room, and the most moving moment came when the realism of the production met its more surreal counterparts head on at the end of the Prelude to Act 2 when Alberich addresses Hagen directly. At the end of the scene, Hagen saw himself as a child, and grieved for all he might have been if things had been different.

The premiere was a tremendous success, as a quick google of the reviews will show you. Our director and designers were very kind and insisted that we, the assistants, came out and took the applause with them, which was a totally unnecessary but very kind gesture, and one that meant that we all got to have that extraordinary feeling at the end with the audience on their feet. "We got there. We made something. And it just might have mattered."

Tabatha McFayden, 31 December 2020

Brisbane Ring Symposia 2021

During the three Cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Brisbane in 2021, these Symposia will feature Wagner Scholars, the *Ring* Creative Team, Musical & Production Staff, Singers, and Members of the *Ring* Orchestra.

1. Saturday 30 October

Cycle 1, between *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*

2. Tuesday 9 November

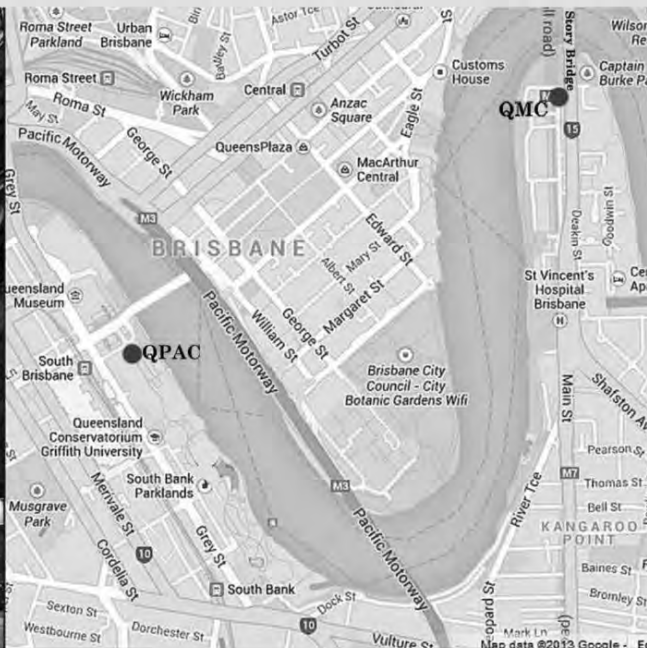
Cycle 2, between *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*

3. Monday 15 November

Cycle 3, between *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*

10.00 am to 1.00 pm each day. Symposia programs will vary.

Queensland Multicultural Centre (QMC), 102 Main Street, Kangaroo Point, Brisbane



Register your interest now at: www.peterbassett.com.au

Receive early advice and program details when tickets go on sale.

The ticket price is \$40 per person per Symposium including Morning Tea, or \$30 pp for groups of 10 or more, or \$30 pp per Symposium for 2 or more Symposia.

Conceived and chaired by Peter Bassett - Wagner Scholar, Writer, Speaker, Broadcaster and Dramaturg.



The Auditorium of the Queensland Multicultural Centre

NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

LETTER FROM MICHELLE RYAN 7 JANUARY 2021

Dear Wagner Society NSW,

I can't believe we are already into 2021! What a year we had last year:

It seems like forever ago that I was working on my repertoire in preparation for Wiesbaden in Sydney with Sharolyn Kimmorley over June and July. This was when people were finally able to start meeting together again in small numbers in NSW. It was a good thing I was based in NSW actually, as I was able to leave the borders and enter Germany from a low-risk area. It is a shame that I was unable to work with Lisa Gasteen due to border restrictions. I was really looking forward to it! Thankfully we have some fantastic coaches in Sydney and I was also able to undertake some German study online. I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your support toward my preparation, particularly during a time where it was extremely difficult in Australia.

I experienced the hottest day in summer upon arrival in the first week of August. Very soon after, the beautiful colours of Autumn came and were followed by snow on December 1st, which delightfully surprised everyone!

You will have heard that Europe is experiencing a second and much more horrible second wave of the virus, in some cases a third wave. It is something that many are still coming to terms with and I am watching many freelance artists become very badly affected by it. I am praying that this will pass and that we can stay positive and support one another, especially over the next few months of Winter that are yet to be endured. I have been lucky enough to spend the Winter rehearsing and learning music for future productions that will hopefully happen in the Spring. I spent Christmas with the wonderful and joyful Sharon Kempton, who has generously given me so much of her time since I arrived and I am very blessed to have her this year.

I don't know where I would be without the other Australians at the Theatre. There are fantastic colleagues who I work with who are from all over the world. Unfortunately, we cannot really gather together to do much, but we see each other at work and rehearse together with restrictions and still test every week to ensure we are all safe.

Rehearsals for the Ring Cycle have continued in January and so far it is most likely that we will do a concert version when the theatre can reopen to the public. We may end up having to cancel some performances and wait to do the scheduled shows in the late spring this year for Maifestspiele. I have been working on the roles of Helmwig from *Die Walküre* and Waldvogel from *Siegfried*. It has been a truly fantastic experience to be in rehearsals with performers like Catherine Foster who is phenomenal at singing the role of Brünnhilde. I have snuck into orchestral rehearsals a number of times just to enjoy the music as well. I must admit, I am now truly hooked! Hearing it live is really something else.

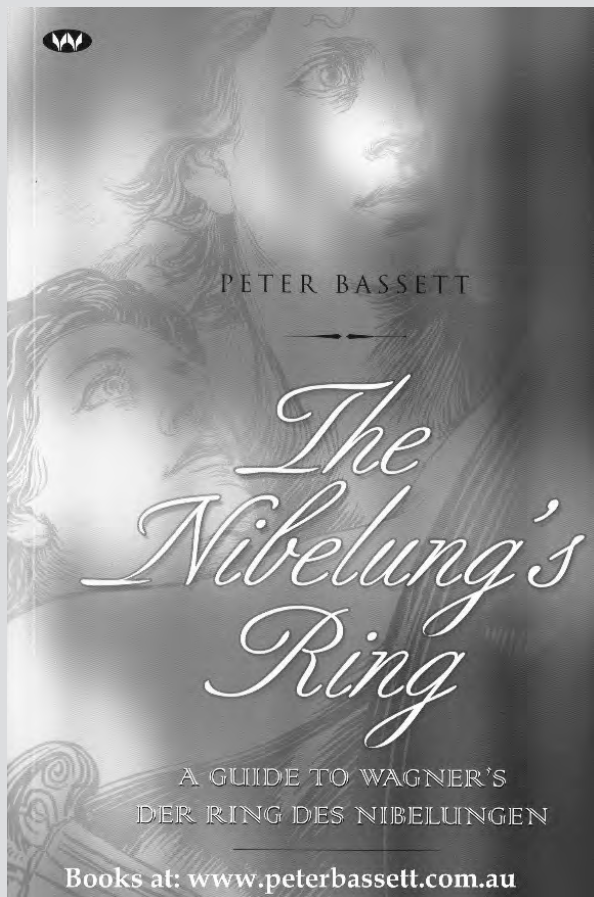


Photo out the front of the Hessisches Staatstheater, Wiesbaden with fellow Australian, Mezzo-Soprano Fleuranne Brockway

With two productions left on the schedule I have started music coaching for the very difficult modern opera *Babylon* by Widmann. We will commence the staging rehearsals in March and I very much hope that things have improved by then. The role I am working on is *Die Seele* (The soul). This will be conducted by Albert Horne, who was on the panel for the German Australian Opera Grant last year. I am really looking forward to working with him. I also have performances scheduled in June and July this year for the role of Servilia in *La Clemenza di Tito* by Mozart, which will be conducted by Konrad Junghaenel. Although Christmas was very different to what it would normally be like in Germany, I have experienced a few fun activities in the past few weeks including helping my colleagues from Ireland and the UK carry some small Christmas trees onto a public bus and helping them carry them home! I also enjoyed helping Sharon decorate her very large tree with fellow Aussie Mezzo Soprano Fleuranne Brockway. We made some lovely warm mulled wine (Glühwein) and ate some yummy baked goods! I hope you are all enjoying the New Year wherever you are! Wishing you a very happy, healthy and safe 2021!

Best Wishes,

Michelle Xx



Peter Bassett

The Nibelung's Ring: A guide to Wagner's Der Ring Des Nibelungen

Wagner's Ring Cycle is one of the great works of art of all time. The Nibelung's Ring explains the mythological background to the work, the process of composition, and the meaning of the four component operas. This expanded edition also features a prose translation of the entire cycle in contemporary language, and a section identifying and commenting on many of the musical 'themes' that pervade the cycle and bind it together musically. The Nibelung's Ring also contains forty full-page reproductions of a complete set of magnificent and rarely seen lithographs by Hugo Braune which alone make the book a collector's item.

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.

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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)



Florence Austral Howard Barron 1930
Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Australia

ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

(unless otherwise advised in Coming Events)
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