



WAGNER
SOCIETY
nsw

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

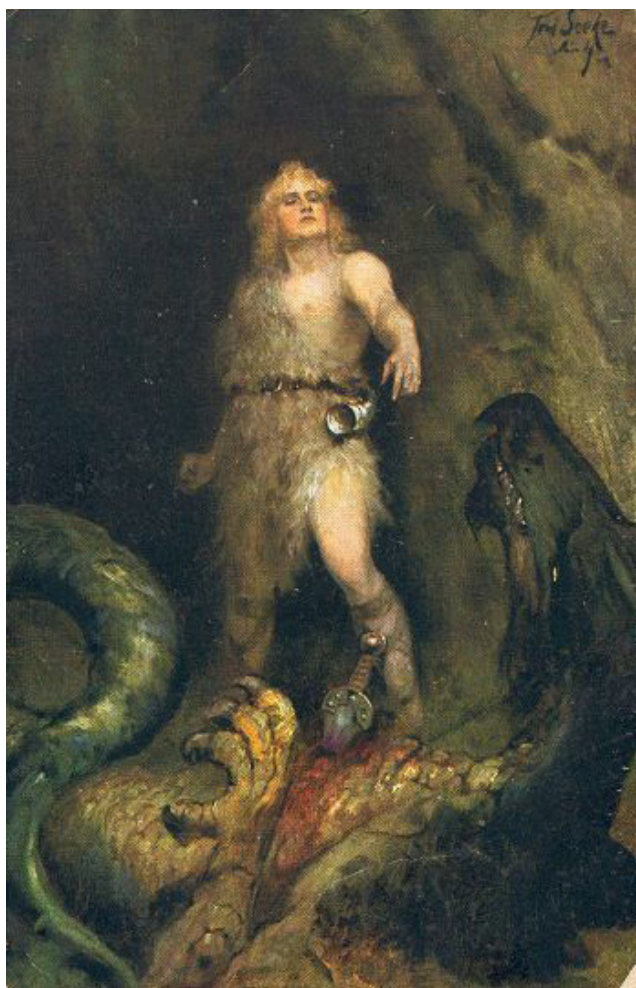
WAGNER QUARTERLY

THE DRAGON ISSUE

ISSUE NO 35

162

SEPTEMBER 2021



Siegfried Ferdinand Leeke 1859 - 1923
Commissioned by Siegfried Wagner in 1899

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear members and friends,

At the AGM I mused that I would go down in WSNSW history as the Zoom President. Little did I know that this current lockdown would be as long and deep. I hope that everyone is staying safe. Unfortunately I need to report that OA has postponed the Brisbane Ring once again. This is probably no news by the time you read this here and certainly not surprising given the circumstances. But it is no sadder or alarming particularly for all the creatives and backstage crew involved. Let us hope that the comeback is swift and that it holds. In other sad news, the popular former Chief Conductor of the SSO, Maestro Gianluigi Gelmetti, passed away on August 11 – a loss to the world of music, our condolences to his family. On a more salubrious note, I would like to extend on behalf of the WSNSW our hearty congratulations to the Wagner Society in Victoria on their 40th anniversary. Long and happy life.

This letter will be short as my President's Report to the AGM details our achievements over the last year and there is little more to add since. We've managed to convert some of our live events into zoom ones but unfortunately others, like Peter Bassett's talk and Ariadne's Thread, will need to be rescheduled for 2022. Similarly, the trip to Brangayne Winery will be postponed to the first half of next year. We will keep you posted on events through the Quarterly and the E-news. I hope everyone has had a chance to see the Bayreuth Festival performances available through DG Premium, especially the new Dutchman. Views welcomed by our editor.

One issue coming up will be a survey to take stock of where the Society is and where it would like to go. So, when you receive the online survey, please take the time to do it and more importantly provide your feedback. We want to understand how best to tailor our services, events and the content of the Quarterly for instance, to what you want to see, hear and read. Keep a look out for it.

In the meantime, enjoy this scaly and scary Fafner issue. Keep listening and watching. Stay safe.

Esteban Insausti
President, Wagner Society in NSW Inc

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.

HERE BE DRAGONS REFER TO PAGES 13, 14, 17, 20, 21



OA Melbourne *Siegfried* 2016



ROH London *Siegfried* 2005



Film *The Hobbit* 2013 Smaug



TV Series *Game of Thrones* 2011



Chicago Lyric Opera *Siegfried* 2018



Fantasy Art *Emperor Huang-Di* Austin Hsu c2012

FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 12 SEPTEMBER ZOOM

2.00PM ANNA-LOUISE COLE IN CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT MITCHELL - DETAILS ON E-NEWS

Anna-Louise was due to sing Brünnhilde in the now postponed Brisbane *Ring* Third Cycle



SUNDAY 28 NOVEMBER, ST COLUMBA, WOOLLAHRA - TBC

2.00PM CHRISTMAS PARTY/CONCERT - DETAILS ON E-NEWS

SUNDAY 10 OCTOBER ZOOM

2.00PM TALK BY RACHEL ORZECH *FRANCE'S WAGNER: 1840S TO WWI*

The relationship between Wagner and the French was complicated and polarising, and continued to be so long after his death in 1883. Debates around Wagner's place in French musical life and the French musical imagination were heated, divisive, and deeply tied up in French identity and the Franco-German political relationship. From the time that the French began to write and talk about Wagner, they used their discussions to articulate ideas about what was happening politically and diplomatically between France and Germany, and how that affected French people's sense of national identity. This talk will trace some of the flashpoints in the tumultuous story of Wagner and France up to the First World War.



Rachel Orzech is a Research Fellow and Lecturer in Musicology at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne. Her forthcoming monograph, *Claiming Wagner*, examines the Parisian press reception of Wagner during the period of the Third Reich, and will be published in University of Rochester Press's Eastman Studies in Music series in 2022.

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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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to my Dragon issue – dedicated to the background story and media coverage of the theft of a valuable gold ring and the slaying of the legendary metaphorical reclusive capitalist gold hoarder dragon **Fafner** by the fearless teenager **Siegfried**. I hope readers will forgive me for indulging myself a little by playing with Siegfried and some fierce and funny dragons – hopefully giving you all some light relief during Covid gloom. This an image rich issue - thanks go to my good friends Messrs Wiki, Google and Pinterest for the pics and quotes. I apologise if I have breached any copyrights. I've obviously had too much time on my hands during Covid lockdown and had pages available since we haven't had many events to report on or reports from members who attended performances – all sadly curtailed by Covid travel restrictions. The upside has been the marvellous array of Wagner performances available on-line.

I want to make a really long, bad lizard joke...

But I don't want to let it dragon.

If some readers find too much 'Boys Own' toxic masculinity here, I can balance it in a future issue with a feminine slant. Possible examples: 'How the Rhinemaidens swim', or; "My little Grane" (rhymes with pony). Feel free to email me with any ideas for suitable topics. You may gather that I have a particular interest in stagecraft but I am happy to research anything Wagnerian. The December issue will focus on *Die Walküre*, in preparation for the Melbourne production in February.

Mike Day

michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held at 1.00pm on Sunday 11 August, hosted on Zoom by President Esteban Insausti, with 25 members participating online. Official minutes of the meeting will be posted on the website in due course.

The minutes of the 2020 AGM were accepted and the 20/21 President's Annual Report and the 2020 Financial Report were accepted by the meeting.

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:

Helen Meddings, Richard King, K. Powell, Dennis Mather & John Stoddard.

WE WARMLY WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE JUNE 2021:

Jacqueline Ruth Grahame 1257



wagner society nsw
6 subscribers

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WAGNER SOCIETY 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 62) 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.

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

Welcome to the 41st Annual General Meeting of the Wagner Society in NSW Inc. For a second year we are forced to undertake this via zoom. Whilst this current abnormal situation will abate and we will eventually return to normal, I am glad that we can meet, albeit not in person, to partake of this annual ritual.

My report to the Society of proceedings and achievements for the last year is a positive one and a testament to the resilience of the membership as a whole. 2020 was unusual and paralysing with respect to our social and cultural activities but we managed towards the end of that year to rally and start a series of zoom events which were entertaining and rewarding. We ensured that our communications to the membership via E-news became regular and highly informative. 2021 started in a more positive manner and for a while things appeared to be heading back to normal. Alas, we are enduring another setback. And this too will pass. Nevertheless, the Society and your Committee have continued to prosecute its remit to celebrate the music of Richard Wagner and support the artists that bring us that joy as well as continue to engage in the never-ending conversation that his works and interpretations generate.

I will now comment and summarise some specific aspects of our Society in the year 2020-21.

On Membership

Our membership remains steady at around 250 financial members. There has been a decrease from previous years due to natural attrition, the complications of the pandemic through 2020-21, no access to the Bayreuth Festival or indeed much in the way of Wagner productions anywhere. A deep dive into our membership list by our Membership Secretary, Lis Bergmann, refined the current list. She was ably supported by Treasurer Margaret Whealy and long-term member and Artists Liaison Leona Geeves.

Whilst the overall number of members will fluctuate over time, I am confident that we can grow as music making and opera goes back to normal coupled by our ability to travel internationally. The interest and enthusiasm in the lead up to the Brisbane Ring needs to be harnessed in terms of membership recruitment. A larger membership allows us to do more to support artists and causes. So, I challenge every member to spread the word to join us.

On Financials

I can report that our bottom line remains healthy. However, the number is decreasing as a result of the reduced revenue due to a lack of live events through 2020 and part of 2021, plus our decision to continue to support artists and causes through the catastrophic setback suffered by the Arts industry in general.

On Support and Donations

The Committee felt that the Society was in a position to help artists and causes through 2020 and 2021 despite our reduced revenue. It was important to show our support in such a time. Individually we sponsored Nathan Bryon in 2020 and so far in 2021 three singers; Pamela Andrews, Jessica Harper and

Jessica Blunt. More ambitiously, we focused two donations on FARA (Freelance Artist Relief Australia founded by Nicole Car) and Melbourne Opera's Das Rheingold.

FARA directly supports singers and we are listed as Advocate Donors on their website. The other large donation from us in 2020 went to Melbourne Opera for "Das Rheingold", the start of their Ring journey. Our donation was used towards purchasing two of the four Wagner Tubas that had to be procured because under Covid they couldn't be borrowed. We believe that Melbourne Opera's venture needs our continued commitment, hence the soft launch at the Birthday Event of the Wagner Tuba Fund (thank you to Robert Mitchell for the poster). The target is to raise another \$15,000 to complete the purchase of the Wagner Tubas which will see action throughout the Ring. This is our target and challenge for 2021. The membership and your future Committees will need to ascertain the level of support for Melbourne Opera as they approach performances of full cycles into 2023-24.

If it is the wish of our membership to continue the sponsorship and donation program at this level then we must become more rigorous and focused with our charity. Our Vice President Marie Leech is championing the establishment of a more formal process for donations and we hope to be able to share through 2021 both the historic findings (how many individuals and causes we have assisted over 40 years and how much money we have contributed) as well as a methodology and mechanism to formally continue our support.

On Events and Communications

One of the wonderful biproducts of our sponsoring artists include concerts and recitals that are exclusive to the Society. Equally our friendships with individual artists have allowed us insightful access to their craft. Since the 40th AGM in August 2020 we ventured into Zoom Events with David Larkin, Tabatha McFadyen (from Berlin) and Warwick Fyfe. We opened 2021 with two conversations led by Robert Mitchell with Susan Bullock and Lise Lindstrom from London. This was followed by our first live event since February 2020 - a wonderful concert by Bradley Gilchrist, Laura Scandizzo and Cedar Newman at the Mosman Art Gallery This concert was titled *Wagner at 40* and started our celebrations culminating in a double birthday bash (our 40th and RW's 208th) full of reminiscences together with an amazing recital by Tamara-Anna Cislowska. Not to mention Barbara de Rome's cake! In between we hosted Heath Lees on Wagner after Wagnerism via zoom from New Zealand and Dr Thea Brejzek on Adolphe Appia and the emergence of modern scenography - our return to the Goethe Institut after nearly 18 months. And just a few weeks ago we hosted Alex Ross, author of *Wagnerism*, in conversation with David Larkin (doing double duty for us).

Special thank you to Leona Geeves for continuing to provide all of our singers for events and liaising with the Committee on sponsorships. And to Vice President Mike Day for championing the double birthday event and for coaxing two former Presidents from Tasmania and New Zealand as well as securing Tamara-Anna Cislowska.

Our main communication remains the Quarterly - our publication of record. It is going from strength to strength under the Editorship of Mike Day and is considered to be the best publication amongst the global family of Wagner Societies, so well done Mike. All members receive a hardcopy. But we also send electronic versions to a number of our interstate and overseas friends and associates. We are also on Facebook and have our own YouTube channel where many of our performances are available for your enjoyment. And we have E-news, which are distributed to an even wider audience than the membership. All in all, we have elevated our presence considerably in the last year. Much appreciation to Lis Bergmann who curates these fragments contributed by many into a comprehensive, informative and very rich pack for everyone.

On Bayreuth and Wagner performances

Theatres, concert halls and opera houses went dark through 2020 all over the world. Some have reopened through 2021 but as we have seen in Sydney in the last two weeks they can easily be closed again. The Bayreuth Festival was cancelled in 2020 for the first time since the war. It is back in reduced form and capacity this year. Alas no one from Australia will be in attendance. We hope that we will be back there in 2022.

The Society has retained its membership of the International Verband (RWVI) as well as our subscription to the Friends of Bayreuth despite not being able to opt on tickets for the Festival. We have done this as a show of support for the cause and the Festival but also in the hope that our loyalty will be rewarded in 2022.

Locally, some of us enjoyed the Melbourne Rheingold in February, a production that augurs well for the Ring to come and further cements this company's reputation for producing solid Wagner at every level. I regret that Peter Basset's lecture which was to proceed this meeting had to be rescheduled for 2022 for obvious reasons. The lack of physical productions of Wagner is in direct contrast to the plethora of recent and historical productions available on every digital platform throughout the pandemic. I hope that many of you indulged in all those links sent in the E-news.

On the Committee and Vacancies

I would like to thank all of the Committee for your hard work and perseverance over the course of the last year and a half. We have achieved some impressive things under less than ideal circumstances. And for that I am proud to be amongst your company. But some things must come to an end and later this year we will be losing Florian Hammerbacher from the committee as he and Sonja move back to Europe for their next gig. I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank Florian for his contribution to the Society. You will be missed but I hope that you might be able to maintain a connection with our Society into the future.

This means that we will have a vacancy, possibly two according to the Constitution, which we will be looking to fill over the life of the next Committee. We will formally notify the membership for expressions of interest to join our hard-working group via our many platforms.

With that I conclude my report.

Dear friends, I commend this report for the year 2020-21 for your approval.

Esteban Insausti

President, Wagner Society in NSW Inc, 11 July 2021

WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW INC.

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2020

	Note	2020	2019
		\$	\$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Westpac Cheque Account		13,203.73	13,813.42
Westpac Cash Reserve		57,521.25	57,418.12
Cash at Bank		70,724.98	71,231.54
Total Current Assets		70,724.98	71,231.54
TOTAL ASSETS		70,724.98	71,231.54
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Membership Revenue in Advance		765.00	9,748.65
Total Current Liabilities		765.00	9,748.65
TOTAL LIABILITIES		765.00	9,748.65
NET ASSETS		\$69,959.98	\$61,482.89
MEMBERS EQUITY			
Retained Profits		69,959.98	61,482.89
TOTAL MEMBERS EQUITY		\$69,959.98	\$61,482.89

PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2020

	2020	2019
	\$	\$
INCOME		
Membership	14,438.65	14,604.00
Lectures and Functions	4,210.00	14,629.00
Donations	1,975.00	4,323.64
Bayreuth Ticket Sales	1,350.00	16,689.00
Advertising Income	650.00	700.00
Ring 2020 Donations	3,200.00	17,500.00
Interest Received	112.88	466.21
Total Income	25,936.53	68,911.85
Less EXPENSES		
Bank Charges	94.79	-
Newsletter	7,705.81	7,383.27
Function Catering Expenses	264.39	1,464.87
Function Room Hire	528.00	4,880.00
Payments to Presenters	900.00	1,872.24
Bayreuth Ticket Expenses	695.63	16,919.36
Bayreuth Memberships	1,254.34	798.00
Sponsorships/Scholarships	3,940.00	26,739.00
Ring 2020 Donations	-	17,500.00
Other Operating Expenses	2,076.48	2,181.99
	17,459.44	79,738.73
Operating Profit	8,477.09	(10,826.88)
Total Available for Distribution	\$8,477.09	(\$10,826.88)

REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS

SUNDAY 11 JULY ZOOM

THE SCHEDULED TALK BY PETER BASSETT HAD TO BE CANCELLED BECAUSE OF THE COVID LOCKDOWN. WE HOPE THAT PETER CAN TALK TO US NEXT YEAR.

SUNDAY 8 AUGUST ZOOM

The WSNSW had the great pleasure of hosting Dr Stephen Mould to address us on some of the issues discussed in his latest book “Curating Opera – reinventing the past through museums of opera and art”. This talk was supposed to be a live event but due to the current lockdown, Stephen very generously agreed to do the lecture via zoom. We were delighted that the commitment was kept.

The ideas covered in Stephen’s book span the world of opera and art – with respect to the latter Stephen has published in the area of the visual arts including a monograph on the émigré surrealists Dušan and Voitre Marek. I suspect that we will need several sessions to begin to unpack some of the strands in his book. Not unlike the content of the encyclopaedic “Wagnerism” by Alex Ross, the subject of “Curating Opera” is a very long conversation. Almost fractal in its properties. What a pleasure to have such books and ideas to contend with, to challenge and confound our understanding of opera. The works of Wagner are fodder for a myriad of postulations and studies, let alone Wagner in the context of opera as a living art form.

The role of curator outside of the visual arts is a relatively new phenomenon. A term freely and loosely applied to Arts Festival directors and stage directors alike. But like the role of scenographer and dramaturg in the theatre (and opera) it can also be specific and laden with certain traditions and associations. Curating opera can be applied to both the music and the performance tradition. Historically informed performances, for instance, embrace both aspects at the same time. And this is its connection to the visual arts. Opera as a frozen exhibit, a museum piece, rather than as a living (and relevant) work, alive at the time of its performance. The distinction can be moot and academic. However, it goes to the core of how/why we react (favourably and unfavourably) to certain productions by certain directors of the works of Richard Wagner. The curatorial role of specific institutions and stage directors “has acquired previously undreamt-of licence to interrogate operatic works, overlaying them with new concepts and levels of meaning in order to reinvent and redefine the operatic repertoire for contemporary needs”.

The Bayreuth Festival post the death of The Master in 1883 was set in aspic by his widow, and new Festival Director, Cosima. The productions of The Ring and Parsifal overseen by the composer/librettist/dramaturg were considered by Cosima to be definitive. Nothing changed much until her death in 1930. Such was, and is, the hold of that “tradition” that even to this day we feel more comfortable watching a Ring with horned



helmets and bearskins, spears and naturalistic looking rocks and trees. With the advent of the New Bayreuth, starting in 1951, Wieland Wagner, the grandson, managed to blow away decades of tradition (“varnish” to use one of Stephen’s analogies) with minimal sets and light to create a world closer to the roots of the Ring as a piece of theatre – the world of the Classical Greeks. So, by removing the yellowing opaque varnish of the Bayreuth tradition, Wieland reset the operas of his grandfather in a new light, a new tradition (?), that at the same time reflected the theatrical origins of the work and as myths. Myths that spoke to the post war audience of universality, of cautionary tales, of the human condition. So, Bayreuth became once again a laboratory for renewal and experimentation, closer to Wagner’s ideal, rather than an operatic museum. This process of stripping away the layers of varnish, of tradition, reveals the work as new, sometimes shockingly so.

The thesis is inconclusive in that each generation will look at and appreciate works of art in different ways. The beginnings of opera, discussed in the book, could be both an exploration in reconstructing the performance traditions of Ancient Greek plays or the expensive entertainment of the aristocratic class. Assuming the role of opera developed from an ephemeral experience in a temporary space, a ritual even a religious ritual, to a commodified event in a physical permanent space, the commercial theatre, what is the art form to become as we head well into the 21st century? Is Bayreuth going to remain



Time Smoking a Picture (c1761)
by William Hogarth (1697–1764)

an experiment, a public institution of contemporary relevance and social value, or is it a private operatic museum? Can it sustain the Wunderkammer approach of a Frank Castorf and antagonise the audience into non attendance? Temple/museum or commercial enterprise? Or both?

Towards the end of the talk we discussed, all too fleetingly, the various reformers of opera over its 400 or so years: Monteverdi, Gluck, Wagner and Glass. There is no clear idea as to where opera as an art form, and Wagner with it, is heading. Time will do its work. The varnish of tradition will obscure some works only to be restored and revealed in a new light by a future curator, a stage director or scenographer or dramaturg of genius. There is still much to discuss. The role of the Artistic Director for one. Think of Richard Bonynges’s tenure as head of The Australian Opera and the repertoire he championed and cemented into the company. I’ve made this review Wagner-centric, not doing justice to Stephen’s talk or the importance of his book. I wholeheartedly commend Stephen’s book for the simple reason that just reading through the contents page is enough to set the mind ablaze in debate about this difficult and unwieldy artform we all love. I hope we can tempt Stephen back for another tranche of this fascinating thesis.

Esteban Insausti (0433)

Stephen is very generously providing access to his book online for a small donation to the Wagner Society. For access details email Lis at lisbergmann89@gmail.com

REPORTS OF RECENT PRODUCTIONS

CHICAGO STAGES DRIVE-THROUGH WAGNER IN UNDERGROUND GARAGE

A BIT OF RICHARD WAGNER’S “RING” CYCLE IS BEING PERFORMED IN AN UNDERGROUND PARKING GARAGE IN CHICAGO by Mike Silverman Associated Press 29 April 2021

CHICAGO -- Amid signs pointing “To Elevator” and advising drivers to “Take Parking Ticket With You,” the Rhinemaidens lament the theft of their gold, Siegfried is murdered, and Brünnhilde drives off in a red Mustang convertible to redeem the world.

Welcome to opera in an underground parking garage.

A year after Lyric Opera’s production of Richard Wagner’s complete “Ring” cycle was scuttled by the pandemic, the company has brought a bit of the epic back to life. But instead of walking into the opera house and taking their seats, spectators drive down into the garage and stay in their cars.

“*Twilight: Gods*,” as the production is called, is the brainchild of **Yuval Sharon**, who premiered it last October in Detroit, where he had just been named artistic director of Michigan Opera Theater.

It’s a reimagining of “*Götterdämmerung*,” the final instalment in Wagner’s four-part saga of gold, greed and the downfall of the gods. Using his own English translation, Sharon has

distilled the four-hour-plus opera down to six episodes lasting just over an hour all together.

“He came to me with this amazing, wonderful, crazy idea,” said Anthony Freud, Lyric’s general director. “The cancellation of our ‘Ring’ ... certainly made it seem particularly appropriate. There’s great excitement around it.”

So much so that all three performances, April 28-May 2, sold out almost immediately, as had all the Detroit shows. Still, the total audience for “*Twilight: Gods*” will be a fraction of the number who could watch a single performance in the Lyric Opera House, which has a seating capacity of 3,276.

But for now, the house remains closed to live opera, as do other major houses in the U.S., including New York’s Metropolitan Opera. Many companies have instead reached out to audiences by streaming new content and videos of past performances or presenting opera in outdoor venues.

For “*Twilight: Gods*,” nine cars at a time, each paying an entry fee of \$125, enter the Millennium Lakeside Parking

Garage, a 13-acre underground structure near the shore of Lake Michigan. Spectators watch the action through their windshields and listen to the music on their car radios.

When the first group of cars has finished a scene, they drive to the next location — the speed limit is 3 mph — and another nine enter. This continues until 14 groups of cars have cycled through the whole show, requiring the singers to perform their scenes 14 times each day.

In Detroit, Sharon used the company’s own parking structure, which is above ground and allowed scenes to be played on ascending levels open to the air at the sides. By contrast, in Chicago the action all takes place on the same subterranean level.

“It’s likely to have a much more labyrinthian feeling, a sense of being kind of lost in the space,” Sharon said. “It’s very appropriate for where we are now as a society, as we feel our way to where we are going next.”

And, indeed, at Monday’s dress rehearsal, winding in the dark through vast stretches of empty parking spaces from scene to scene created a disorienting sensation. This feeling was heightened after Siegfried’s death when the procession of cars was directed to snake through a section where 2,880 battery-powered candles burned on the floor, while his funeral march played in an arrangement for jazz combo.

The cast is largely the same as in Detroit, headlined by soprano **Christine Goerke** as Brünnhilde — the role she was to have sung in Lyric’s full production — and tenor **Sean Panikkar** as Siegfried. One key difference is the narrator who connects the segments.

In Detroit, Marsha Music, a local Black writer and cultural historian, portrayed Erda, the mother of the universe,

who appears in two earlier “*Ring*” operas. For Chicago, Sharon chose **Avery R Young**, a Chicago-born Black poet, composer and activist. He portrays all three of the Norns, the daughters of Erda who foretell destiny.

Young said Sharon “asked me to put a modern-day spin on the work, to tell the story the way a Chicagoan who grew up where I did would tell it.”

“A lot of the themes are aligned to things we see today in this political climate,” young said. “Who in this current America is given value and who is still protesting and advocating that they should be valued.”

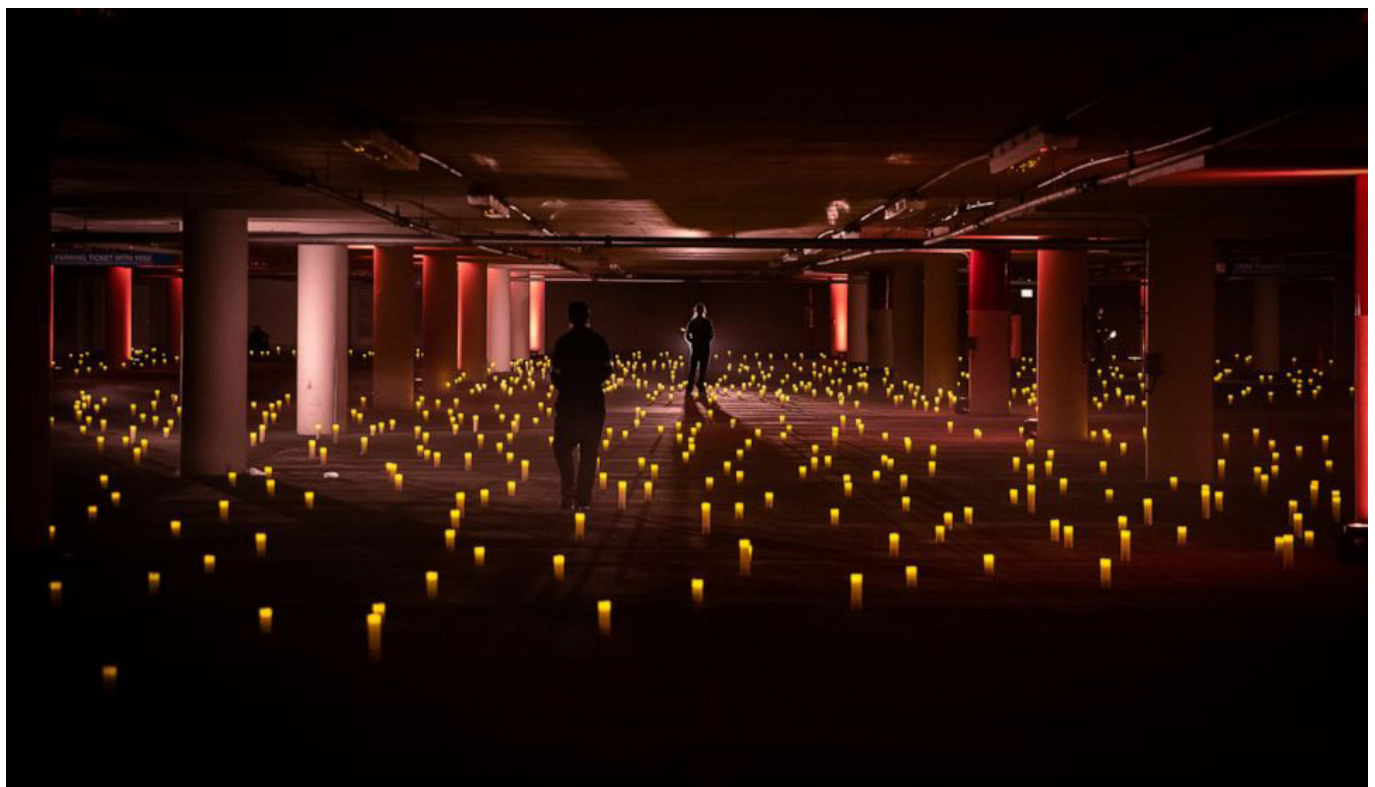
In his version, Brünnhilde’s rock becomes a “stony island,” a reference to Stony Island Avenue, the thoroughfare that runs the length of Chicago’s predominantly Black South Side.

And Young’s narration includes images of police brutality and the murders of black men, as in this passage about lynching: “like him know rope/ like him know tree/ like him know how much of dead/ make a bough break.”

Because a full orchestra was out of the question, Sharon had composer Ed Windels adapt the score for an unusual assortment of instruments, including an accordion in one scene and a marimba in another.

Freud said that once the pandemic is past, the company remains committed to presenting its full “*Ring*” in a future season. Meanwhile, a film of the Chicago “*Twilight: Gods*” will be released this summer and available for streaming free of charge.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory/chicago-stages-drive-wagner-underground-garage-77364323>



Candle-lit carpark

STAGING *DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER* AT BAYREUTH UNDER COVID RESTRICTIONS



Instead of a red carpet, this year's opening performance featured pink armbands, proof that each of the 900 audience members (the hall seats 2,000) was certified Covid-free. Food trucks appeared opposite the illustrious opera house, to help shorten the wait as the public trickled through the security and Covid checks. Restrictions included splitting the famed

Bayreuth chorus into two halves, one half singing in plastic boxes in their rehearsal room and piped through to the hall, with a second chorus miming onstage. It was the first time in the festival's 145-year history that a female conductor, Ukrainian **Oksana Lyniv**, has taken the lead. Why it has taken the festival so long to hire a woman, when **Simone Young** has been leading the field in Wagnerian repertoire for decades, remains a mystery. But it is a start.

It was also Russian star director **Dmitri Tcherniakov's** Bayreuth debut. His bleak take on the work, set in a Baltic coastal town some time in the middle of the last century, is told as a revenge thriller. The titular Dutchman, after a childhood trauma, returns as an unrecognised adult to avenge his mother. His "sailors" are fascist apparatchiks, pushing back the villagers as the Dutchman guns them down and torches their homes. In the end Mary, here played as Senta's mother, shoots him dead. The style moves from Lars von Trier through David Lynch to Tarantino.

Material from Shirley Apthorp's review in the Financial Times, July 27, 2021

AUSTRALIANS AT THE AIX-EN-PROVENCE FESTIVAL 2021 *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*

This year's Festival was dominated by Australian artists: **Barrie Kosky** staged Verdi's *Falstaff* and **Simon Stone** mounted a stellar *Tristan und Isolde* plus the world premiere of Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho's latest opera, *Innocence*. Given that Stone's pair of shows opened on consecutive nights, the logistics of preparing them simultaneously must have required prodigious forward planning. Each was meticulously mounted on a massive scale and together they amounted to an extraordinary technical achievement. Tristan was Tenor **Stuart Skelton**, whom the Wagner Society has supported from his earliest days. Director Simon Stone and Designer **Ralph Myers** made substantial contributions to Sydney's theatre culture (Belvoir St and STC) before achieving international success. I watched the *Tristan* performance on the Aix website and found it fascinating and in the end surprisingly poignant, despite the disconnect between what was happening on stage and what Wagner wrote.

Here are some web snippets about the production:

Aix-en-Provence Festival publicity material

Honour called for a death potion; the subconscious responded with a love potion. And forbidden passion, repressed for so long, suddenly burst into the light, shattering all the barriers. Uncontrollable desire has never been expressed as powerfully as by Wagner in *Tristan und Isolde*, the most absolute representation of love-as-passion in the West. But is this perpetual devouring, which is as painful as it is orgasmic, a form of mystic knowledge or a dangerous illusion? For this sacred pair of lovers, dissolution into the eternal night seems like the only possible way out. Wagner feared that his opera would drive people insane; but for audience members immersed in the endless melody until the final climax, *Tristan und Isolde* offers a unique experience. And to do the smouldering content and the purity of the form justice, it takes

the infinite talent of **Sir Simon Rattle** conducting the London Symphony Orchestra; **Nina Stemme** and **Stuart Skelton**, the legendary artists in the title roles; and **Simon Stone**, the ideal director to reveal what a black sun signifies to today's audience.

Review by Michael Milenski in *Opera Today*

Soprano Nina Stemme, tenor Stuart Skelton, bass Franz-Josef Selig and conductor Sir Simon Rattle create a *Tristan* of transcendent music in a revelatory staging by Simon Stone. The London Symphony Orchestra possessed Aix's Grand



Act II

Théâtre de Provence in unprecedented volumes with three short stories unfolding one by one in a visual strip across the stage, Wagner's music drama probing ever more deeply into its three protagonists' psyches. Stage director Stone invented a separate, very present, vividly contemporary world for each act.

Act I was the penthouse apartment of a successful career woman, perhaps a mother, celebrating Twelfth Night with her friends, maybe family, all sporting the paper king crowns of the celebration, she, their queen. Yet in this precise, comfortable world there is a disrupter, the tattooed punkster Brangäne. Guests departed, Isolde's well-known story unfolds, neither dream nor fantasy, the vast expanse of windows becoming the Celtic Sea.

Act II was a vast, windowed industrial administrative workspace, with its glassed-in supervisor's cube. Isolde, now a manager, bids farewell to a visiting male business associate. The windows become a darkening sky; he returns. Love music begins, soon youthful alter-Tristan/Isolde lovers enter the glass cubicle, physically caressing. A young boy enters, watches their caresses. Yet another Tristan/Isolde enter the workspace with their young male offspring. It heats up, we keep waiting for the young lovers in the cubicle to couple. They don't. Yet another couple with male child appears, etc. The disrupter Brangäne intones from afar that everything is fine. It isn't. Marke confronts the betrayal of his surrogate son Tristan, the male child of the tryst, now Melot, stabs his father Tristan in oedipal rage.

Act III is a moving Paris Metro car; the English horn solo is an on-board street performer. Among the passengers is an older, formally dressed couple, Tristan and Isolde, their young male progeny close by. There is some sort of disagreement, the post-adolescent male stabs his father, the doors slide open, the son flees with his mother. The great Tristan monologues ensue, the windows reveal the passing stations, moving through tunnels into a verdant countryside, passing expanses of northern seas. We are at one with the Tristan vigil, it is never ending, it is always vividly present. Kurwenal, we perceive, is and was always the storyteller. Isolde is now back on the train with Marke and

entourage. Marke kills Kurwenal. Isolde sings her Liebestod. The train stops at the Châtelet, everyone exits. Except Tristan. The doors close, the train moves on.

...Australian tenor Stuart Skelton as Tristan possesses a very beautiful voice that was shown splendidly in the Act II love duet, and achieved rare, tortured beauty, intimacy and urgency in his Act III agonies, the tenor becoming physically one with his character. It was a total performance. In the end, standing alone, silent, on the train we knew that he knew that the opera was about him, though understood by Isolde. <https://operatoday.com/2021/07/tristan-und-isolde-at-the-aix-festival/>

Romain Daroles in *Bachtrack* 10 July 2021

...a stratospheric Isolde and Tristan from Nina Stemme and Stuart Skelton. Breadth, nuance, emotion, power, correctness of sound emission, yet more emotion: all these words provide only a partial and inadequate description of the extraordinary palette of two performers at the summit of their art.

Mark Valencia in *Musical America* 13 July 2021

Stone followed in the wake of countless *Regie* directors and imposed an unhappy framework. Wagner's tragedy of bewitched lovers wracked by romantic overload was appropriated by the director and used as fodder for a hi-tech toybox. His scenic tricks, inventive though they were, neither elucidated the scenario nor complemented the score..... the three environments had secrets to reveal, thanks to some dazzling lighting and video effects, as outwardly humdrum shared spaces were transfigured at a flicker of neon into the characters' inner worlds. Thus, Stone used the opera as a repository for the private yearnings and unspoken heartaches that most people keep to themselves in a functioning society. On its own terms his concept was bold and breathtaking; however, it alienated spectators who expected empathy with what Wagner wrote (i.e., most people, to judge by the boos) and who had hoped to be moved by the Isolde and Tristan whom we hear in their musical context. For the boosers, it hardly helped Stone's cause that from a musical perspective this was one of the great *Tristans*.



TWO APPROACHES TO REGIETHEATER (DIRECTOR'S THEATRE)

“Regietheater is an evil and malignant phenomenon that has managed to take hold without encountering any significant opposition. People will look in vain for intellectual justification. Regietrash is an expression of a so-called “modern sense of life”, a cherished gem in the cultural baggage of Today’s People; if you don’t surrender to it, you belong to a fossil generation that polishes its 78 rpm records every day”.

Yes, Wagner said: “Kinder schafft Neues”: This quote

has absolutely nothing to do with Regietheater. It is a quote from a letter to Liszt, in which Wagner denounced Berlioz for continuously tinkering with his *Benvenuto Cellini*. Wagner meant: “Children make new compositions”. He certainly did not mean: “Kinder schafft Regietheater”. Wagner did not say: let the Rheintöchter become prostitutes or let Castorf work in my Festspielhaus. He did not say let Venus drive a caravan and let Tannhäuser eat at McDonald’s. As we know, Wagner, who grew up in the romantic tradition of Beethoven, Weber and Heinrich Marschner, created a new type of opera, the Musikdrama, revolutionizing not only the formal structures of opera, but shifting harmonic rules with the *Tristan* Chord. “Kinder, Papa Wagner hat Neues gemacht!” Wagner cared a lot about the sets, costumes and stage machinery for the performances of his works – he was very frustrated about the technical limits of his time, and, for instance, was very upset about the disappointing dragon in the staging of the *Siegfried* World Premiere. Wagner was indeed the champion of the **Performance Faithful to the Libretto**. Marco Ziegler & Olivier Keegel <https://operagazet.com/opera-is-not-a-museum/>

Regieoper

In Wagner’s own productions of his later music–dramas at Bayreuth, he was insistent that what was seen onstage and what was heard from the orchestra should align rather than occur in counterpoint. Today, however, it is generally accepted that the Wagnerian orchestra functions as a kind of Jungian collective unconscious, adding layers of meaning and depth to the stage action, but not slavishly illustrating it..... How a stage director interprets and works with the musical tissue supplied by the composer is the basis of musical dramaturgy, which realises the essence of the drama from the score.

“Kinder, schafft Neues”**[Children, create new things!]**

Wagner (1852)

Wieland Wagner wrote in 1951 that *‘the works of Richard Wagner tolerate no change. Like all elemental works of art, they remain inviolable and sufficient unto themselves. ... The actual staging – and it alone – is subject to change. To avoid change is to transform the virtue of fidelity into the vice of rigidity’.*

Wieland led the way to a new aesthetic of opera production, which has come to be known as *Regieoper* (the term is used both to define a category and also on occasion as a pejorative condemnation), which remains influential today..... This new direction was driven in part by a determination to establish relevance for the traditional opera repertoire in post-war society. In effect, operatic works became ‘open works’ or ‘negotiable works’ – with the opera libretto becoming the main point of discussion.....The director has come to dominate the operatic hierarchy, playing an active, quasi-authorial role in the presentation of opera; it has become common practice to interrogate the work of the opera librettist: to examine the text, analyse it and identify wider themes that can be grafted onto the original story, on occasion even completely reinventing the original story, using the tool of dramaturgy, to update the original work for modern sensibilities.

Extracts from Dr Stephen Mould’s book *Curating Opera - Reinventing the Past Through Museums of Opera and Art*

COMMITTEE 2021 - 2022

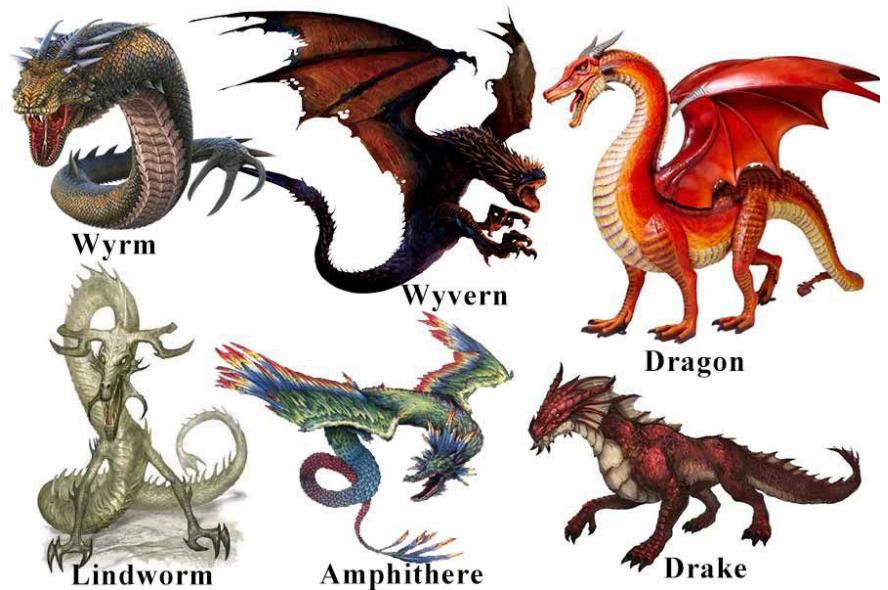
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HERE BE DRAGONS

(*HC SVRT DRACONES* - NOTE ENGRAVED ON THE LENOX GLOBE 1510)

Compiled by Mike Day

In Act 2 of Wagner's music drama *Siegfried*, the eponymous hero slays a dragon (Fafner the giant in disguise), takes the cursed ring and the Tarnhelm that Fafner has been guarding, and tastes the dragon's blood, which enables Siegfried to understand the song of the wood-bird, which leads him towards his destiny with Brünnhilde. It is a major turning point in the *Ring Cycle* and poses substantial stagecraft challenges. It was also a major turning point for Wagner, who put the composition of the *Ring* aside and didn't return to Act 3 for 12 years. (Trivia question for Ring tragics – Siegfried only takes the ring and the Tarnhelm – what happened to the hoard of gold? Does Alberich take it?)



Dragons, in one form or another, have been around for millennia in almost all of the world's cultures. Through epic fantasy fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien, fantasy art, films and TV series, dragons have continued to spark our collective imagination and — unlike the dinosaurs whose fossilised bones helped inspire stories about them — show no sign of dying out.

FAMOUS DRAGONS

Typhon - Commonly called the “father of all monsters” in Greek mythology. Had a hundred dragon heads sprouting from his shoulders, which must've been inconvenient in social situations.

Ladon - The dragon who guarded the golden apples in the Garden of the Hesperides. Defeated by Hercules.

Python - was slain by the god Apollo. The ancient Greeks thought that Python lived at the centre of the earth, which they deduced was Delphi.

Tiamat - The primordial dragon-goddess of the cosmos in Babylonian legend. Her death enables the Earth's creation.

Jörmungandr - The Midgard Serpent, or World Serpent, from Norse mythology. The archenemy of Thor, God of Thunder.

Níðhöggr - Teutonic myths say that in Niflheim, near the Spring of Hvergelmir, Nidhogg the dragon and his accomplices gnaw at the roots of Yggdrasill, the World Ash Tree, trying to loosen its foundation and thereby put an end to all eternally.

Fáfnir - In Nordic mythology - A man who became a great dragon because of his greed. Defeated by **Sigurd**. (See below for more background)

The origin of the dragon is a mystery, even the exact etymology of its name is disputed. But you can mostly trace the meaning of *dragon* back to “serpent” (as with *drakon* in Ancient Greek and *draco* in Latin, for instance). If you dig deeper, its root *derk-* (or *drk-*) is the equivalent of “to see” in Ancient Greek—suggesting that *drk-on* also indicates “seeing one,” or “I see.”

The Dragon from *Beowulf* - A terrible dragon from the Anglo-Saxon epic. The dragon-fight ends with the deaths of both Beowulf and the dragon.

The Dragon from *St George and the Dragon* - An unnamed dragon that was only appeased by human sacrifices. Dramatically defeated by St. George.

Zmey Gorynych - A three-headed dragon living in Russia. In Slavic folklore, the dragon guards Kalinov Bridge, the border between life and death. He's terrifying and can spew sparks, smoke, and fire.

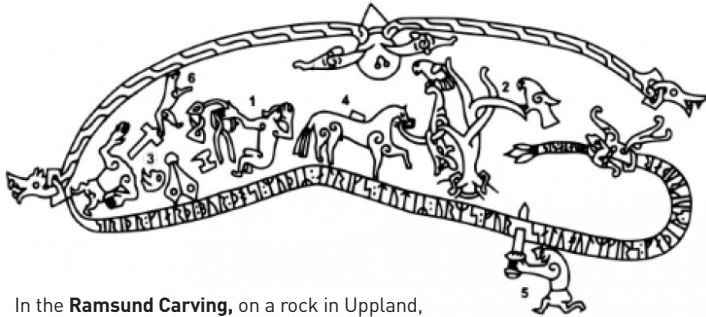
Vritra - Vedic serpent, dragon or demon in Hinduism, appears as a dragon blocking the course of the rivers and is heroically slain by Indra.

Loong - A benign Chinese serpent associated with rain and closely identified with the Han and Qing dynasty Emperors. The dragon is the most powerful sign of the Chinese Zodiac

Quetzalcoatl - The feathered serpent, Aztec god of wind, air and learning

Errour - A serpent-monster from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*. Defeated by the Redcrosse Knight.

Smaug the Golden - The last of Middle-Earth's "great" dragons. Defeated by Bard the Bowman in the Third Age, as recounted in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Though Smaug is crafty, intelligent, and quite vicious, he's also a major gold hoarder, and possesses the paranoid mindset of someone who thinks that everyone is as much a cheat as he is.



In the **Ramsund Carving**, on a rock in Uppland, Sweden, that dates 1030 AD, the hero Sigurd can be seen plunging his sword into Fafnir's underside, tasting the blood on his finger, the Woodbird legs - they are serpents rather than dragons and Sigurd cutting off Regin's (Fafnir's) head.

The Jabberwock - The eponymous dragon of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" nonsense poem, and winner (or perhaps loser) of the best dragon name... and there are certainly a lot to choose from.

Drogon, Viserion, and Rhaegal - Daenerys Targaryen's 'children' in the TV epic *Games of Thrones*, largely portrayed as loving creatures that simply want to protect their mother. Any aggressive actions they do take, over the course of the series, can usually be chalked up to human direction rather than stemming from some "evil" nature.

NORDIC BEGINNINGS

The *Völsunga saga* is the most important of the Icelandic sagas called *foraldarsögur* ("sagas of antiquity"). Dating from roughly 1270, it is the first of the *foraldarsögur* to have been written down. It contains the Northern version of the story told in the German *Nibelungenlied* (c 1200). The saga was based on the heroic poems in the *Poetic Edda* and is especially valuable because it preserves in prose form some of the poems from the *Edda* that were lost. It became one of the sources of Wagner's *Ring* tetralogy.

POPULAR ILLUSTRATIONS OF SIEGFRIED SLAYING THE DRAGON

These types of illustrations, generally for reproduction in books, magazines and posters, were very popular when Wagnerism was at its peak, with dynamic expression, sinuous forms and partially clad muscular men in histrionic poses. The English fairy-story artist, Arthur Rackham, to paint scenes from the operas.



Siegfried and Fafnir Drawing in The Illustrated London News 7 June 1913 Published during the May 1913 performances of the *Ring Cycle* at Covent Garden



Siegfried and the Dragon 1889 **Konrad Dielitz** 1845 - 1933

In the *Ring* Wagner uses the word Wurm for the creature that Fafner uses to disguise himself. In Norse mythology, **Lindworms** (Old Norse linnormr 'ensnaring snake', Norwegian linnorm 'dragon', German **Lindwurm** 'dragon') were serpent-like **dragons** with two arms and no legs.

Fafnir, in Nordic mythology, is the name of the great dragon slain by **Sigurd**, the Norse version of the German hero **Siegfried**. As told in the *Völsunga saga*, Fafnir slew his father, Hreithmar, to obtain the vast amount of gold which Hreithmar had demanded of Odin as a compensation for the loss of one of his sons. Odin gave the gold but put a curse on it. Full of greed, Fafnir changed into a dragon to guard his treasure and was later slain by the young hero Sigurd. Sigurd was spurred on by another brother of Fafnir, the blacksmith Regin. Once Sigurd, under the advice of Odin, had killed Fafnir, Regin asked him to cook the dragon's heart for him. Sigurd touched the heart as it was cooking to test if it was done and burned his thumb. He put his thumb into his mouth and was then able to understand the language of birds. (In this tale, knowledge is given to one who eats the heart of a dragon.) The birds told Sigurd that it was Regin's intention to kill him, so instead Sigurd killed Regin and left with Fafnir's treasure.
<http://www.germanicmythology.com/index.html>



11th C Icelandic carving of Sigurd and Fafnir. Note these early monsters have no wings or legs – they are serpents rather than dragons

peak at the turn of the 19th century. The subject matter is a dream commission for an artist, whose imagination can run riot playing
 ham, was the most prolific, providing 64 drawings for a complete *Ring* libretto in 1911. Wagner's son, Siegfried, commissioned artists



c1911 Illustration by **Franz Stassen** 1869 – 1949 Stassen was a personal friend of Siegfried Wagner



Sigurd pierced him with his sword 1901 **Arthur Rackham** 1867 - 1939

THE GREEN-EYED DRAGON WITH 13 TAILS

LYRICS BY GREATREX NEWMAN MUSIC BY WOLSELEY CHARLES 1926

I remember first hearing this song (By Peter Dawson or Wilfrid Thomas?) on ABC radio's *The Argonauts Club* in around 1950. Sadly, I can't remember my Argonaut's name. Can any of my readers remember theirs? Is this too trivial and parochial for a serious Wagner Journal? Ask: what would the Master do? Send me a letter Ed.

Once upon a time lived a Fair Princess most beautiful and charming;
Her Father, the King, was a wicked old thing, with manners most alarming.
And always on the front door mat, a most ferocious Dragon sat,
Who made such a fearful shrieking noise that all you little girls and boys
Beware, take care, and creep upon tiptoe,
And hurry up the stairs, and say your prayers,
And tuck your head, your pretty curly head,
beneath the clothes, the clothes, the clothes.

The Dragon lived for years and years, and never got much thinner.
For lunch, he'd try a Policeman pie, a roast M.P. for dinner;
One brave man went 'round with an axe and tried to collect his income tax -
The Dragon smiled with fiendish glee, and sadly murmured 'R.I.P.'
Beware! Take Care! And creep upon tiptoe,
And hurry up the stairs, and say your prayers,
And tuck your head, your pretty curly head,
beneath the clothes, the clothes, the clothes.

The Dragon went down to the kitchen one day
Where the Fair Princess was baking;
He ate, by mistake, some rich plum cake
which the Fair Princess was making.
This homemade cake, he could not digest;
He moaned and he groaned, and at last went west -
And now his ghost, with bloodshot eyes
At midnight clanks his chains and cries:
Beware! Take care! And creep upon tiptoe,
And hurry up the stairs, and say your prayers,
And tuck your head, your pretty curly head,
Beneath the clothes, the clothes, the clothes. . .
AAAAGH!



DRAGONS IN 20TH CENTURY POPULAR CULTURE

SEE INSIDE FRONT COVER FOR MORE ILLUSTRATIONS

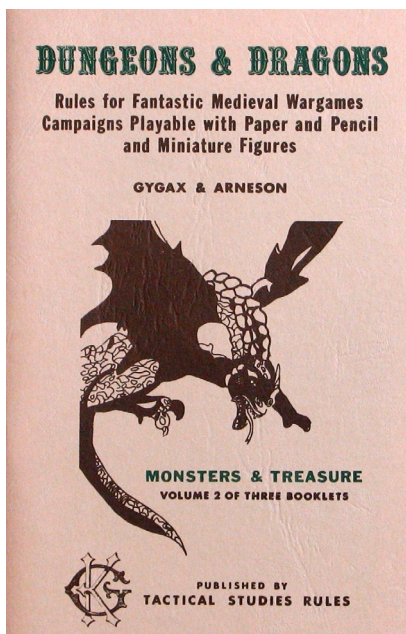
Monsters fascinate us – Leviathan, the Minotaur, Godzilla, Jaws, T-Rex, Alien..... Being torn to pieces by sharp fangs is a deep, rational, universal fear. But we do like to be scared, from an early age, preferably tucked up in a warm bed being told a tale by mum or dad. The growth of science fiction and fantasy fiction as very popular forms of literature has provided artists with opportunities to show their imaginative and technical skills. In the last 100 years tales have been told not just through traditional books, theatre and movies but also through an ever-growing range of toys, games and mass media; cinema, animation, TV, graphic novels, anime and online computer games, YouTube, podcast, virtual reality, augmented reality, etc. Computer generated images, green screen photography, 3D rendering, etc, mean that anything can be depicted with a

greater or lesser degree of ‘realism’ and complexity. Currently we seem to be in an adolescent ‘Marvel Comics’ era; seduced on screen by bulging lycra-clad super-heroes, many of whom can be traced back to Hercules or Siegfried. Fantasy Art has a huge following; fairies and (cute) dragons are very popular with girls and younger children, but, for boys, heroes and monsters feature rather prominently. Many of the dragons bear more than a passing resemblance to Tyrannosaurus Rex (King of tyrant lizards) or Boa Constrictors. Here is a selection of dragon related enterprises that I find entertaining. Readers of a certain age might feel some nostalgia.

<https://www.tor.com/2014/07/16/picturing-dragons> is a great source for fantasy art



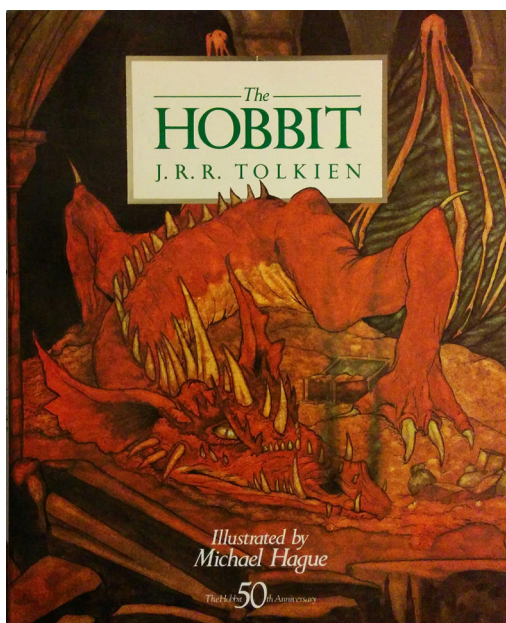
Fritz Lang's silent movie *Siegfried* 1927



Board Game 1974



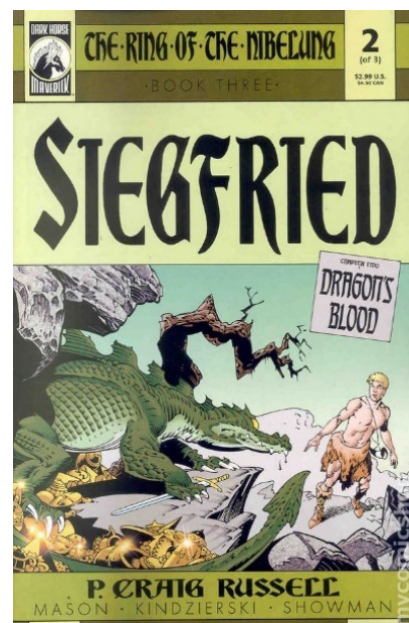
Song/Cartoon 1978



Book cover **M Hague** 1984



Fantasy Art **Karl Kopinski** b1971



Graphic Novel 2000

Siegfried-Wagner hebt den „Schatz“ der Nibelungen.



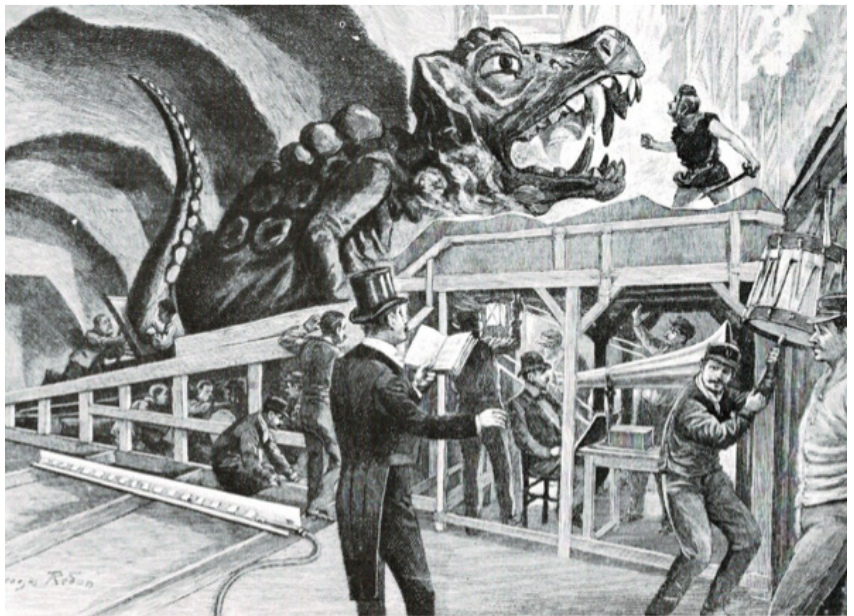
Da lieg auch du – dunkler Wurm!
Den gleißenden Hort heb' ich hurtig.

128. C. v. Grimm. Schalk. Leipzig. 1879

RICHARD WAGNER German composer and his son Siegfried, slay the Critic Dragon and gain the treasure it was guarding. CV Grimm 1879

PUTTING DRAGONS ON THE STAGE

Der Ring des Nibelungen has multiple stagecraft challenges – floods, fires, a rainbow bridge, Brünnhilde’s horse Grane, Fricka’s chariot pulled by rams, Siegfried’s bear, Wotan’s ravens, Alberich’s toad and, most fun of all, two dragons (transformations by Alberich and Fafner, using the Tarnhelm). The centrepiece of Act 2 of *Siegfried* is the hero’s confrontation with Fafner. Most productions, from the first at Bayreuth in 1876 to Chicago in 2019, have used some sort of puppet. I’m looking forward to seeing what Chinese director/designer **Chen Shi-Zheng** does with the dragon in the sadly postponed Brisbane *Ring*, which will have huge LED screens instead of conventional sets. Chen says “It will be a digital dragon - the audience will only ever see flashes of dragon, but never the full creature. To me it is almost like when you watch a video game slaying a dragon. When you do something, you go to the next level. In that sense, it’s kind of a game, you go through it until the dragon falls down.”



Drawing by **George Redon** showing how Siegfried’s slaying of the dragon was staged at the Paris Opera in 1902. An assistant conductor directs the singer of Fafner, who is seated before a megaphone.

Generally, in my opinion, the most successful stage dragons are the least ‘realistic’ - ones that stimulate an audience’s imagination. A pair of red eyes glowing in the darkness can be more effective than any amount of technical wizardry. papier-mache pantomime puppets with green scales, twitching tails, gnashing teeth and smoking breath can more easily evoke mirth rather than terror. But of course, I enjoy theatrical smoke and mirrors and love the kitschiness of it all – Wagner attracts his fair share of bad, camp, but guiltily enjoyable, art.

1876 DRAGON MAKER

Richard Wynn Keene 1809 – 1887 is mainly remembered today under his theatrical name of **Dykwynkyn**. He was a Victorian designer of costumes, props, mechanical effects and scenery for plays and pantomimes on the London stage, with a strong sense of wit and a special feeling for animals. He contributed some notable props for the first cycle of Wagner’s *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1876

The background to this prestigious commission is peculiar. Wagner had strong ideas about stage effects in his operas, but often wavered between realism and suggestion. In this case he appears to have disregarded the caution of Richard Fricke, his main adviser on staging the *Ring*, and insisted on a number of realistic mechanical props for scenes featuring mythical animals.

Wagner was advised that Dykwynkyn was the craftsman best able to make the monstrous dragon into which Fafner is transformed in the second act of *Siegfried*. As far as is known, Wagner had never seen any of Dykwynkyn’s creations on his visits to London. Yet Keene was commissioned, probably at short notice, to make not only the dragon but also a bear, a

A performance of the *Ring* is a very rich feast of magnificent music, profound ideas and daring visual effects. Between the intensity of Act 3 of *Die Walküre*, with the heartbreak of Wotan’s Farewell, and the ecstasy of Act 3 of *Siegfried*, with Brünnhilde’s awakening, Acts 1 and 2 of *Siegfried* can provide some light relief and comedy. Wagner was very familiar with Shakespeare, who knew the value of low comedy used as a foil for high tragedy, and many directors indulge in humour in *Siegfried*.

magpie and an ousel for *Siegfried*, a car with rams for Fricka in *Die Walküre*, and sacrificial beasts and a pair of ravens for *Götterdämmerung*. The snake into which Alberich is changed in *Siegfried* also came from England and was probably Dykwynkyn’s too, but that is less certain.

By late July 1876, three weeks before the cycle began, only the car and parts of the dragon had arrived in Bayreuth. Most of the missing parts turned up just in time, but Fafner’s neck-joint arrived too late. The German technicians had to sew on a clumsy and unconvincing temporary neck. This caused the first audience to be amused rather than awed by the dragon, and to cheer when Siegfried slew it and put it out of its misery, to Wagner’s fury. In general, Dykwynkyn’s creations for the *Ring*, clever and fantastic though they certainly were, were poorly received. Exotic pantomime props were unsuitable for Wagnerian mythic opera, as Richard Fricke had realized immediately the dragon arrived (‘Into the deepest junk room with the wretched thing! Get rid of it!’). Nothing was heard of the props after the opening cycle.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dykwynkyn>

NOTABLE DRAGONS FROM THE PAST 164 YEARS INCLUDE:

Bayreuth 1951 – Wieland Wagner’s revolutionary post-war *Ring*, stripped back to the bare essentials, with atmospheric lighting inspired by Adolphe Appia, featured a wonderful simple but menacing Brontosaurus type long necked creature looming out of the gloom.



Siegfried Act II Bayreuth 1951

ROH Covent Garden 1975 – In Götz Friedrich’s production, **Josef Svoboda**, arguably the greatest stage designer of the 20th Century, created a truly spine-chilling vision – partially hidden by a forest of grey fabric strips - a spiderlike formation of twelve enormous silver talons, each manipulated by an actor, crawled across the stage, controlled from the centre by a concealed Fafner, who, when pierced by Notung, was touchingly revealed as a tragic mortal.



Siegfried Act II ROH 1975

Adelaide 2004 – Michael Scott-Mitchell’s designs for **Elke Neidhardt’s** excellent production were full of imaginative and humorous touches. All that could be seen of the dragon was a huge claw with independently moving fingers built on an actual claw/scoop of a large soil excavator, controlled out of sight by Fafner, dressed as a construction worker. The dragon’s dying one finger salute to his slayer typified an Australian tendency to puncture pomposity.

ROH Covent Garden 2005 – Designer Stefanos Lazaridis’ dragon is truly repulsive - Fafner’s visage has been corrupted and infected by his association with the cursed ring. His glowing eyes radiate pain and malice. (Coloured photo is on the inside front cover)

How did you decide on Fafner’s appearance?

We had decided that everyone who covets and obtains the ring is physically affected by it. Contact with it spreads like a disease along the flesh, so that in *Siegfried* both Wotan and, even more markedly, Alberich, have more extensive scarring from contact with it than when we saw them last in the previous operas. Fafner, who has had the ring the longest, is the most horrifyingly physically disfigured. In his appearance as the dragon, this disfiguration appears at its most grotesque and frightening. We wanted something still recognizably human – again, because man is the measure of all things in our *Ring* – but greatly enlarged and distorted.

ROH *Siegfried* Director **Keith Warner** on his concept of Fafner as the dragon

Melbourne 2013 - Jud Arthur played Fafner trying out scary faces in a dressing room mirror, shown on a huge screen. No traditional scaly beast – just a vulnerable (completely naked) man. Director **Neil Armfield’s** notable strength in this production was bringing out the human and sympathetic sides of the characters. Unfortunately, design-wise the production was, in my opinion, very superficial, messy and inconsistent, but Fafner’s dragon portrayal was memorable and moving. (Coloured photo is on the inside front cover)

Bayreuth 2012 - In the Frank Castorf directed *Siegfried* Fafner doesn’t transform into a dragon and isn’t stabbed by Notung but is gunned down by a Kalashnikov. In Act 3 raptors do appear during the coming together of Siegfried and Brünnhilde in Alexanderplatz, when the couple are interrupted by a family of mechanical crocodiles, one of which tries to swallow the woodbird!! In later performances the crocs arrived with two cute babies in tow.



Siegfried Act III Bayreuth 2012

Castorf explained it like this: The crocodile is a reminder of the war, when lizards were able to free themselves from the zoo and crawled frankly and freely through the destroyed Berlin. But he may also have thought of Dostoyevsky's satire "The Crocodile", a tough reckoning with capitalism. *Regietheater* at its most provocative. *Children, create new things?*

BAYREUTH 2021

Despite the new production of the *Ring* having been postponed to 2022, Festival Director Katharina Wagner did not want to do without the work in its entirety this year. Musicians, playwrights, artists and puppeteers perform each of the four operas in very different ways and on a smaller scale, which is a novelty.

For *Siegfried* the American video and performance artist **Jay Scheib** and his team virtually streamed the dragon scene through 3D glasses. Whoever wears the glasses can virtually fight the dragon in the Bayreuth auditorium. A holographic figure moves on stage, gives instructions, and conducts Wagner's music. "The man is the African-American violinist Marcus Thompson. He leads you in the fight against the dragon," explains Scheib. It is an allusion to the Black Lives Matter movement. Scheib will be directing *Parsifal* in 2023 where there will be a combination of different things: "we build a reality and then we increase it. Mainly there will be a mixed or augmented reality that we will take to the stage, an authentic augmented reality experience. In the best of cases, you will not always be able to distinguish what is real and what is virtual". (Coloured photo is on the inside back cover)

OTHER BAYREUTH 'WURMS'



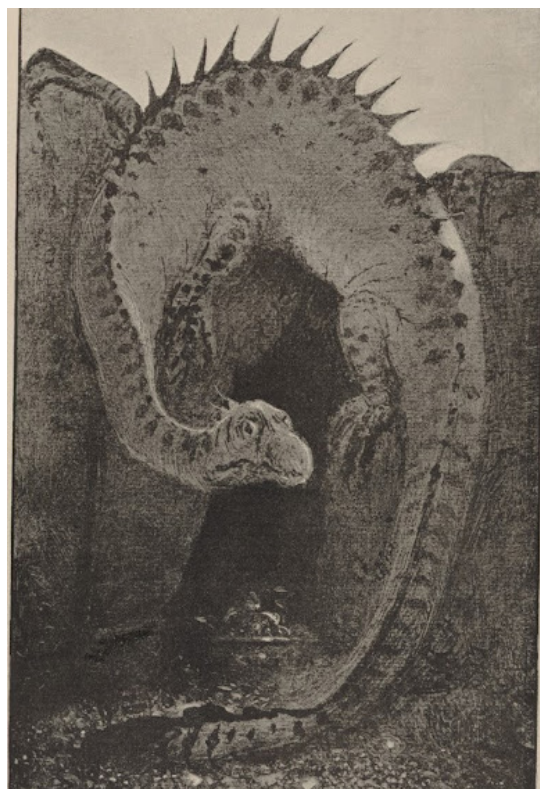
Siegfried Act 2 Set design by **Josef Hoffmann** 1876



Director **Peter Hall** and puppet team 1983



Patrice Chéreau 1976



Fafner guards the treasure. Based on a sketch by **Arnold Böcklin** (1827-1901). Published in the Bayreuther Festblaetter in 1884.

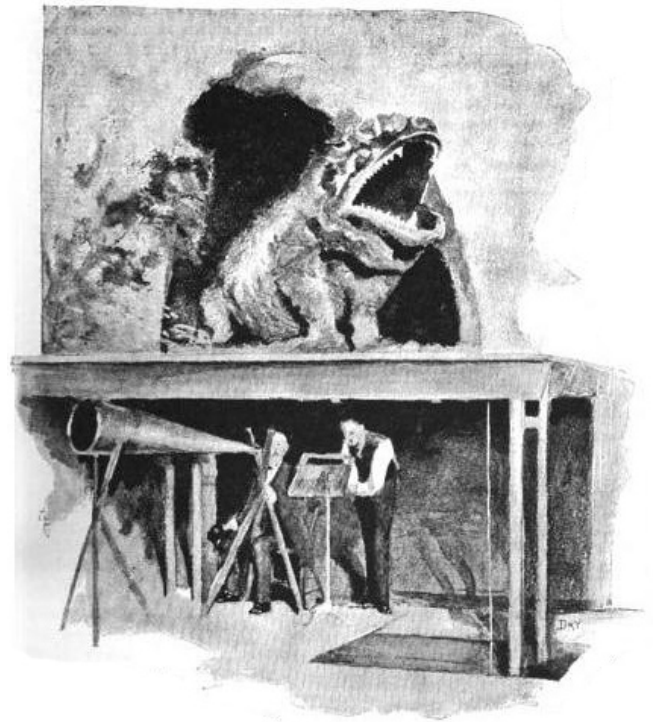
BEHIND THE SCENES OF AN OPERA-HOUSE

A BACKSTAGE VISIT TO THE METROPOLITAN OPERA, NEW YORK 1888

by Gustav Kobbé

It is noteworthy in connection with this circumstance that the apparatus was devised by an Englishman and that Wagner employed an English property-master to design and make the dragon for the "Siegfried" performances at Baireuth. The English pantomime productions, which involve the manufacture of numerous mechanical and trick properties, have sharpened the ingenuity of English property-masters until they have come to be acknowledged at the head of their profession. "Siegfried" never having been given in England by any but a German company whose scenery and properties were brought from Germany, the combat with the dragon remained as ludicrous a feature of the performances of this work as it was conceded to have been at Baireuth, until the production of "Siegfried" at the Metropolitan Opera-House. For this a dragon was designed and manufactured which the German artists declare to be the most practical and impressive monster they have seen.

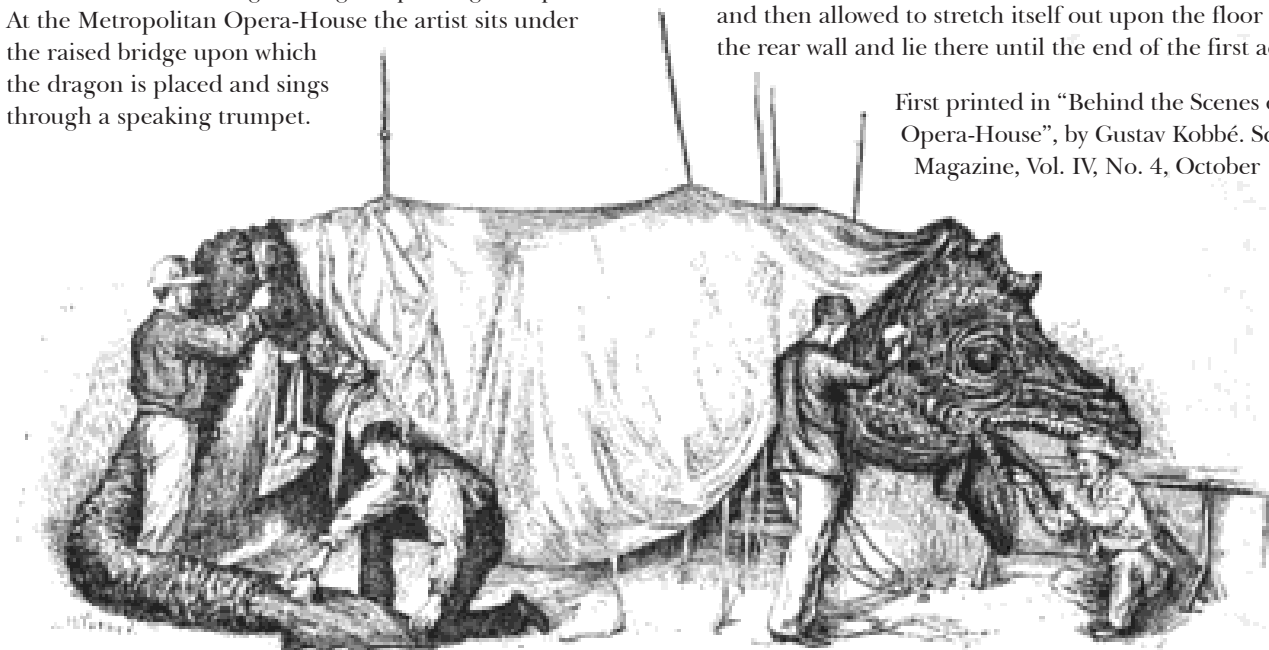
The head of this dragon is of papier-mache. The body, thirty feet long, is of thin wire covered with curled leather scales, which are bronzed and painted. This monster, in spite of its size, is worked by a boy who is the dragon's front legs. He is dressed in a suit of canvas painted the colour of the dragon's hide and having curled leather scales on the trousers below the knees, his shoes being the huge, clawed feet. He gets into the dragon behind its head, which conceals him from the waist up, his legs being the dragon's front legs. With his hands he opens and closes its huge mouth and shoves its eyelids over its eyes when it expires. The steam which it breathes out is supplied through an elastic pipe which, entering at the tail, runs through to the throat. The scene lasts about forty minutes and is very exhausting to the front legs. In Germany the artist who sings the dragon's part is inside the hide and sings through a speaking trumpet. At the Metropolitan Opera-House the artist sits under the raised bridge upon which the dragon is placed and sings through a speaking trumpet.



The singing dragon from *Siegfried*

His music is on a stand, a stag-hand throws the light of a lamp upon it, and the solo répétiteur gives him his cues from the wings. The voice sounds as though it issued from the dragon's throat. The advantage of this arrangement is that it places in the monster a person whose attention is concentrated upon working this mechanical property in the best possible manner. The dragon when not in commission is stabled in mid-air under the paint-bridge. The day of the performance it is lowered by ropes, thoroughly groomed, and then allowed to stretch itself out upon the floor against the rear wall and lie there until the end of the first act.

First printed in "Behind the Scenes of an Opera-House", by Gustav Kobbé. Scribner's Magazine, Vol. IV, No. 4, October 1888.



Grooming the Dragon

EXCERPT FROM A REVIEW OF THE FIRST ENGLISH PERFORMANCE OF *SIEGFRIED*

REVIEW

The Music Critic in *The Era*, May 13, 1882, wrote of the first English performance:

On Monday evening there was again a brilliant audience at Her Majesty's Theatre, although in actual numbers there was a decided falling off as compared with the first night (of the Cycle). This was to be expected, for, although, like the late Earl Beaconsfield, the Wagnerites have done their utmost towards "educating their party," there are still hosts of "British Philistines" who cannot, and probably will not in any future however remote, appreciate the new operatic system. For these the work appeals in vain. Nevertheless, in high quarters much encouragement has been given. The Prince and Princess of Wales have been constant visitors, and the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh have also attended, besides other royal personages; but the fact that there were four and twenty boxes empty on Monday evening, in addition to many vacant seats in other portions of the house, indicates the difficulty there will be in making the Nibelhasen Ring popular. Possibly, remembering the high mission our German teachers have set themselves, they disdain all considerations of paltry lucre. If so all is well, because without popularity profit can hardly be expected. Turning to the third performance, *Siegfried*, the hero of which "music-drama" is, as we have already shown, the offspring of an incestuous union between brother and sister, we are repelled at the very outset, and cannot feel that sympathy for the deeds of this personage which would otherwise be readily accorded. We have spoken plainly as to the horrible and revolting character of the previous drama, and have expressed the astonishment that will be shared by our readers that such an immoral subject should have been permitted without protest on the English stage. Although some portions are fine, there is much in it that comes within the scope of pantomime, and which, considered as an operatic libretto, is silly in the extreme...'

After telling the plot the critic continues...

'In reality the only incidents are the mending of the sword, the fight with the dragon, and the love scene with Brünnhilde. All the rest is mere "padding" so far as the spectator is concerned, and this is the fatal weak point of Wagner's system, that the most trifling incidents have the same importance given to them as the leading events. If one of the characters comes upon the stage to ask a simple question it is sure to lead to twenty minutes of recitative, accompanied by an avalanche of orchestral passages. In this process all real interest is completely crushed out. Take the cream of this gigantic work, for example, and compress it into a four-act opera, and it would be a masterpiece, but the dead weight of the eternal recitative wearies the listener until sympathy is lost for the fine passages when they occur. As for all the business with the dragon, it is childish nonsense, fit only for a nursery tale, and to present it seriously upon the stage, and call it "grand opera," is an outrage upon the common sense of any audience not recently released from Hanwell or Colney Hatch. The gravity with which it was received by the apostles of the new school of music was, perhaps, the most comic element of all. To watch sombre disciples following every movement of the scaly monster, and listening to his diabolical ugly noises, striving all the while to find out some deep under-current of meaning intended by the composer, was funny beyond anything we have ever seen at an operatic performance. Some considerable defects were to be noted in the representation, and we cannot say that the scenery was at all impressive. It was frequently raw, glaring and coarse. Herr Vogl, as the hero *Siegfried*, was entitled to hearty commendation for the spirit and energy with which he acted and sang. He had conceived the character in the true spirit, and, although at times more physical power was required, the general rendering had some admirable points. Herr Vogl was both chivalrous and tender, and at all times did justice to the difficult music. Herr Schlosser, as the crawling and deceitful dwarf Mime, also showed the utmost intelligence. The part is an uphill one; but the talent of the artist made it interesting, even when the scenes in which Mime appeared were disagreeable. Herr Scaria we have all along praised, and here also commendation was his due, for it was a triumph on his part that he succeeded in preventing that contemptible wretch Wotan from being hooted from the stage. Every kind of human vice and frailty...

SIEGFRIED ACT 2 SCENE 2

LIBRETTO - ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY WILLIAM MANN 1964

As day breaks, Mime and Siegfried enter....Mime investigates the ground at the back which remains in dark shadow....He addresses Siegfried

MIME

Here we are at the place.
Stop here.

SIEGFRIED

Sits down under a large lime tree and looks around

Will I learn fear here?
You've led me a long way:
A whole night long in the forest
we two have walked.
Now Mime you must
keep clear of me.
If I don't learn here
what I must learn,
Then I shall continue by myself;
At last I shall be rid of you

MIME

Sits down opposite him, still keeping one eye on the cave
My dearest, believe me,
if today, here, you do
not learn fear,
then in other places
at other times
you'll hardly find it out,
D'you see there
that dark cavern?
In it lives
A grisly savage dragon:
(*ein greulich wilder Wurm*)
extremely fierce
and huge he is;
A terrible pair of jaws
gapes in his head;
hair and hide
at one gulp,
the brute will likely gobble
you up.

SIEGFRIED

Still sitting under the lime tree
A good thing
to close his mouth for him:
then I won't let him
bite me.

MIME

He drips poisonous
venom from it.
Anyone that his spittle's
sweat bespatters,
withers away
skin and bones

SIEGFRIED

The poisonous venom
won't hurt me;
I'll keep to one side
of the dragon.

MIME

A snaky tail
thrashes about behind him.
If he coils it coils round you
and grasps you tight,
your limbs will break like glass.

SIEGFRIED

When the tail swings
I'll defend myself;
I'll keep an eye on the beast.

.....
Siegfried tells Mime to go away

Later

Siegfried takes the silver horn from his hip and blows on it, very loudly and long sustained... There is a stir backstage. Fafner, in the shape of a monstrous pachydermatous serpentine dragon (Schlagenwurm) rises from his lair in the cave. He bursts through the bushes and lurches from the lower to the higher ground, reaching it just when he gives a loud yawn. Siegfried looks around and gazes astonished at Fafner

SIEGFRIED

Just look, my tune has
Brought me something lovely.
You would be
a pleasant friend for me

FAFNER

Sees Siegfried, stops on the plateau and remains there
What's that?

SIEGFRIED

Well now, if you're an animal
that's learned talking,
perhaps I can
find out something from you.
Someone here knows
nothing about fear:
can he learn it from you?

FAFNER

Are you being arrogant?

SIEGFRIED

Brave or arrogant –
how do I know?
But I'll make mincemeat of you
if you don't teach me fear.

FAFNER

Emits a laughing noise
I wanted a drink;
now I've found food too.
He opens his mouth and shows his teeth

SIEGFRIED

That's a pretty gob
you're showing off:
teeth laughing in a dainty mouth.
It would be a good thing
to stop the gap for you.
Your jaws are gaping too wide.

FAFNER

At empty chatter they're no good.
But for gobbling you up
my throat is just right.
He threatens with his tail

SIEGFRIED

Hoho you gruesome
angry fellow!
Being digested by you
seems to me a bad idea.
But it seems sensible and decent
for you to drop dead without delay.

FAFNER

Roaring
Bah! Come on, bragging child.

SIEGFRIED

Watch out growler.
The braggart's coming.

He draws his sword, jumps towards Fafner and remains standing provocatively. Fafner lurches further up the hillock and sprays Siegfried with his nostrils. Siegfried avoids the venom, jumps closer and stands to one side. Fafner tries to reach out to him with his tail. Siegfried jumps with one bound over him and wounds him in the tail. Fafner roars: withdraws his tail violently and rears up the front of his body so as to throw his full weight on to Siegfried. In doing so he bares his breast. Siegfried quickly sees the location of his heart and plunges his sword up to the hilt. Fafner rears himself still higher with his pain and then collapses on to the wound as Siegfried releases hold on the sword and jumps to one side.

.....
Before Fafner dies he warns Siegfried
that Mine is planning to poison him

NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

JESSICA HARPER WRITES ABOUT HER GRANDPARENTS-IN-LAW

This follows on from Alec Cohen's Personal Reminiscence published on our website in the Members Remember section on 21 November 2000.

THE STORY OF ALEC AND AVIVA, AND HOW THE MUSICAL BLOOD RUNS THROUGH THE FAMILY:

Alec and Aviva Cohen lived in Roseville, Sydney in a beautiful house surrounded by nature and gardens.

Alec's love of Wagner was initially nurtured by his first connections with a certain Mr. Whitfield or 'Mr. Whitty' whom he met upon entering university in Perth, and who gathered students around to listen to the great classics on his record player. He shared this newfound passion with his numerous siblings, who were similarly taken. Their shared love of classical music was to remain a firm bond among the siblings for the duration of their long lives.

Alec was the first Australian-born child born of Frida and Iosif, who had emigrated in the 1920s from Safed in the British Mandate of Palestine (present-day Israel). Their ancestors had probably in turn moved there as part of the Zionist movement in the latter half of the 19th century.

Aviva's family came to Australia from a 'shtetl', a typically Eastern European town with a significant (if not majority) Jewish population, near Odessa. Like many escaping the final years of the failing Tsarist regime and the subsequent period of revolution, civil war and Bolshevik rule, they were humanitarian and economic refugees.

Aviva's mother, Fanya, escaped to Palestine from the Russian revolution. There she married Samuel Cohen before he emigrated to Perth soon after to become a wool trader. Fanya joined him some years after. She was an incredibly intelligent woman; in Russia, she had been studying medicine, despite the strict limitations upon accessibility of formal education for both for women and especially for Jews, amongst others. She had, however, to forfeit her education to escape the pogroms (anti-Semitic riots rife in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union), in which half of her family were murdered.



Aviva was born in Perth and was the elder of Fanya and Samuel's two children. She was pushed very hard with her education by her mother, earning prizes in modern and classical languages and graduating with a degree in Physics at 19.

Samuel was tragically killed in a truck accident in the course of his work, which meant that Fanya had to clean houses to support herself and her children. Alec and Aviva met in Perth as youths, but she moved to Sydney in her late teens.

Alec did a physics degree in Perth and became a telecommunications engineer for the Postmaster General there, and then for the ABC in Sydney. He was also Special Projects Engineer for Telecommunications at the Sydney Opera House, New Parliament House in Canberra, and the new Parliament House in Papua New Guinea following their independence from Australia, which required systems for simultaneous translation and broadcast in 70 different languages.

Aviva taught science at Ascham School in Edgecliff and worked among other positions as a radiographer and legal secretary; she was also a computer programmer, working in those early days at the dawn of the industry with paper cards. She then pursued a postgraduate degree in environmental science at the University of Sydney and worked in the Department of Environment.

Alec and Aviva attended the Bayreuth Festspiele twice; the first time was while living in London in 1955. There wasn't much in the way of lighting and stage props, let alone air conditioning, but the sound was, they described, nonetheless incredible.

They returned again in 1970, to the same extraordinary artistry, and improved facilities. As with all Wagner enthusiasts, they knew all the leitmotifs and stories and were completely immersed in the music. Aviva made all of her own dresses to wear to the opera, being a talented seamstress who also made wedding dresses for both of her daughters.

Towards the end of Alec's life, however, he turned away from Wagner for a number of reasons. Wagner's egotism, strong associations with the composer promoted by the National Socialists, and the fact that Winifred Wagner and her family had been heavily and unapologetically engaging in Extremist Right Wing politics up until and beyond her death in 1982, somewhat doused the flame of love for Alec. Beethoven, Mozart and Mahler became his constant companions until his death.

Aviva herself was a gifted amateur pianist, who played and practised regularly until she was no longer physically able. Alec had begun the cello when he was 26, but gave up quickly after realising that it was unlikely he would achieve his goal of playing Bach's six suites. Their two daughters inherited their passion and for music; their younger daughter Natalia Ricci is a concert pianist and Lecturer in Piano at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and her daughter, Ariana, is studying classical voice and violin there as a Bachelor student.

Their grandson Joseph, with whom Alec used to sit whenever he could while Joseph practised cello, is an avid fan of Wagner and his contemporaries. He was very tempted to prioritise his trombone studies after Alec played him music from *Lohengrin*, but who wouldn't be! The seed planted by his grandparents was strongly nurtured by Dr. David Larkin at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where Joseph completed his Bachelor of Music.

Joseph now lives with his wife, soprano Jessica Harper, in Dresden around the corner from Wagner's former residence in his days as a young Kapellmeister. They are very grateful for the support she has twice received from the Wagner Society in NSW. Although no trombones have returned to their household, to the presumable delight of their neighbours, they are relocating in September for postgraduate study at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp- close enough in the spirit of *Lohengrin* to a meadow by the Schelde!

Jessica Harper

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.

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HERE BE DRAGONS REFER TO PAGES 13, 14, 17, 20, 21



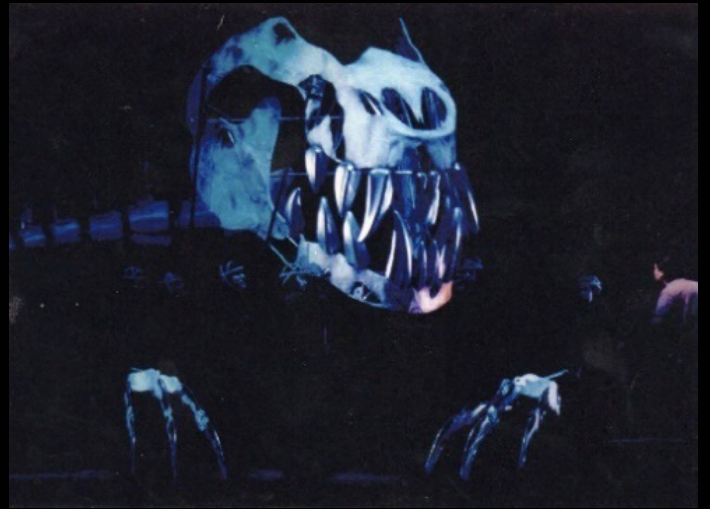
Bayreuth 2021 Virtual reality Fafner



Bayreuth 2018 2 hour *Ring* for children



San Francisco 1935 *Siegfried* Act II



Chicago 1993/2005 *Siegfried* Act II



San Francisco/Washington 2016 *Siegfried* Act II



Wiener Staatsoper 2016 *Siegfried* Act II



Met Opera 2011 *Das Rheingold*



Chicago 2016 *Das Rheingold*

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"The Mad Genius" Richard Wagner with Dragon 2013

Painted by Jason Seiler for Der Spiegel for Wagner's 200th Anniversary

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