

Wagner Society in NSW

President's report, June 1983

The Wagner Society's second full year of operation came to an end in this, the centenary year of Richard Wagner's death. I am pleased to say that the Society was in a strong position to take part in the festivities arranged to mark the occasion, and what's more, was duly recognised by the larger and older bodies organising them. I refer firstly to the A.B.C. who willingly gave us an opportunity to share the limelight at their all-Wagner concert on the 28th January. We were allowed to set up a table in the foyer of the Sydney Town Hall to sell commemorative posters, attracting much attention, and gaining quite a few new members in the process.

Then there was the Australian Opera, who, without reservation, "loaned" their special guest artiste Leonie Rysanek to us for a radio interview and a most successful and entertaining dinner on the 5th February. It was on this occasion that Honorary Life Membership was bestowed on Madame Rysanek.

Thirdly, the German Community, and the Consul-General in particular, have been especially attentive in getting our co-operation to add cultural content to their centenary celebrations. It was, of course, through the consulate that we acquired the Wagner centenary posters.

The Wagner Society is now firmly established on the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust's list of organisations to receive grants, and indeed, during the year ended 31st December 1982 the Trust distributed to us \$3,035. This amount was of course donated primarily by you, our members, and I believe it was a great achievement, deserving the warm thanks of us all.

The Australian Opera in its latest annual report has also paid tribute to the Wagner Society for the financial support it has regularly given. I note that we are the only Music Society, apart from the Guild and the Friends, who make donations to the opera.

With radio-station 2MBSFM we also have a good reputation. They now consult us before embarking on major Wagner broadcasts. For this we have to thank member Arthur Carter for his indefatigable work in preparing the monthly Wagner Society programmes, to Leona Geeves and Michael Ewans who have contributed articles on our behalf, and Werner Baer for his introductions and commentaries. Our commitment to the radio station is an ongoing one, and there is always plenty of room for more participation by our members in compiling programmes.

Perhaps the most important step taken by the Society this year, and one which has increased the Society's standing quite considerably amongst other music bodies, is the establishment of the Scholarship, a prize of \$1,000 to be awarded to the finalist in the Metropolitan Opera Auditions who shows the most potential as a Wagnerian singer. We are very fortunate that our Patron, Sir Charles Mackerras, has consented to be our chief adjudicator, and will present the prize, on Sunday 28th August at the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall. With him on the panel will be committee members Sue Kelly and Janet Wayland. The scholarship is to be awarded annually — provided standards are met — to a singer who has applied in the approved manner, and can show that proper use will be made of the prize money.

Our donation to the Australian Opera of \$1,000 is less than in previous years, when we have given \$2,000 toward each of their concert performances, but it is now aimed at a specific project — the financing of the artwork of a special poster publicising “Die Walkure”. We have submitted the names of two competent artists to the Opera Company, and look forward to seeing not only this work completed, but the posters for the other Ring operas which we have also agreed to finance over the next three years, thus contributing to a very historic documentation of this Ring production.

In March this year we held the first of our General Meetings, and it turned out to be a great success, with some lively discussion during general business. If we could get more of this at each meeting, I’m sure the Society will keep its vitality and interest for members.

Much work has been going on behind the scenes for almost 12 months for that event we never thought could happen — a Wagner Society tour to Bayreuth. For this we have to thank the staff of Neutral BayTravel, Werner Baer who is tour leader, and the German Consul-General. Naturally all efforts will be made to make this an annual event.

Our relationship with other Wagner Societies is developing strongly. We correspond regularly with the Wagner Society in England, and the Wagner Institute International. Contact has also been made with the Cercle Nationale Richard Wagner in Paris, and the New York Wagner Society. In Australia, the Wagner Society in Victoria is becoming more active, and ways of co-ordinating our activities are being looked at. A group of Adelaide enthusiasts has contacted us regarding the formation of a society there, and in Western Australia it is possible that Mr Vincent Warriner could organise a group as a result of the interest in his Bayreuth tour.

Finally, it is my welcome duty to thank all the committee members — with whom it has been a privilege and a pleasure to work, over the past 12 months — for their co-operation and loyalty. In particular I would like to thank Richard King and Murray Smith for the enormous amount of time they put in as Society receptionists, bookkeepers, treasurers, and office boys, as well as for their generosity in giving their home and gallery over to the Society for its meetings. To Jean-Louis Stuurup I speak for all when I thank him for those wonderful Sunday afternoons at the Concordia Club; to Clare Hennessy for her shorthand and typing and the immaculate minutes book; to Reg Maloney, our auditor; to Margaret Suthers and Ian Hopkins who have indicated they will not be standing for re-election; thank you all for your help.

Leonard Hansen

President’s report, September 1983

As this Newsletter reaches you thirty lucky Society Members will have just completed their exciting group tour to Bayreuth for the 1983 Festival, where they witnessed the magnificent staging of “Tristan and Isolde”, “The Mastersingers of Nuremberg” and “Parsifal”, along with the outstanding new production of “The Ring”. No doubt you have been reading the reports and critiques as they have slowly filtered back to this country, but your colleagues have a fund of first hand information which they are

most willing to share with you. At the next meeting, over a glass of wine or cup of coffee, find out what the Festival was really like. Perhaps you will get the opportunity to go next year - our organiser, Neutral Bay Travel, is certainly trying for tickets to be able to repeat the tour in '84.

The coming months in Sydney will seem for us Wagner enthusiasts like a mini-festival, with not only a part of "The Ring" being performed, but the chance for us all to meet the conductor, producer and designers, as well as the singers. It will be a busy but rewarding time, after which we can all let our hair down at the picnic. Let's all get together for this unique event.

Leonard Hansen

President's report, December 1983

As the end of the year draws close this year solemnised by the centenary of Richard Wagner's death — we can certainly say that we Wagnerites have just lived through a "golden era" in the appreciation of his life and works.

Whereas only a year or so ago we were lucky to get one concert performance of an opera, this year has seen four ABC concerts featuring important Wagner works, a fully staged opera, "Die Walkure", and a film of an opera, "Parsifal". As well there was the first Wagner Society group tour to Bayreuth — highlighted by meeting the composer's Grandson, Wolfgang — and an Australian Wagner Conference in Melbourne. The impetus will carry forward into next year, with another long feature film on the life of Wagner, and two staged operas, "Die Walkure" and "Das Rheingold". Hopefully enough tickets will arrive from Bayreuth to enable another group tour, and in the meantime your committee has organised a series of very interesting guest personalities for the forthcoming meetings.

The resignation of Jean-Louis Stuurup from the committee came as a sad blow to us, as he has been such an enthusiastic worker and supporter of the ideals of the Society from its inception. Many times we have had occasion to publicly thank him, along with his able helpers Catherine and Annette, for aid given at our social functions, and especially for his "Alternative Bayreuth" recording days. Jean-Louis took over the presentation of recorded music soon after the initial music appreciation day organised by Richard King and Murray Smith at their premises, The Print Room. He moved the location to the Concordia Club, where he arranged with the management for a suitable room to be put at the Society's disposal one Sunday afternoon each month, free of charge. Jean-Louis then made up and installed very sophisticated equipment in order to produce the realistic high-fidelity sound that has given life to the opera recordings.

Fortunately Jean-Louis will be continuing his sessions next year at the Concordia Club, giving members and their friends an opportunity to improve their knowledge of Wagner's works, and a chance to socialise and enjoy the music as they perhaps cannot at home. He intends to start on Good Friday (April 20th) with "Parsifal", conducted by Georg Solti.

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ON BEHALF OF THE COMMITTEE IT IS MY PLEASURE TO WISH YOU ALL A
VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Leonard Hansen