



WAGNER
SOCIETY
NSW

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 37

164

MARCH 2022



Warwick Fyfe as Wotan in *Die Walküre*, Melbourne Opera, 9 February 2022. Photo by Robin Halls



Wagner Society NSW members and Melbourne Opera brass players with Wagner tubas donated by the Society at *Die Walküre*, 13 February 2022. Photo by Ruth Francis

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear members and friends,

I am writing this shortly after returning from Robert Gay's wonderful talk on the influence of French Grand Opera on Verdi and Wagner. That was our third event so far in 2022. And it is not even the end of February! We are making up for lost time but also trying to diversify the type of events we present to you. I hope it proves a successful approach. Certainly the attendance numbers for the first three events seem to suggest that we are on the right path.

We also have fresh in our ears and minds the Melbourne Opera's production of *Die Walküre*. Those of you who attended in person or saw it streamed, would testify to the outstanding effort of all concerned. But to be parochial, Society member and New South Welshman (via Canberra) Warwick Fyfe took out the honours. There are more views and reviews inside. The great news that followed the Sunday performance was that Melbourne Opera are committed to performing Ring cycles between March and May 2023 in Bendigo at the new Ulumbarra Theatre. That's the prospect of TWO Rings in Australia in one calendar year. I hope that becomes the norm rather than a rarity.

The programme for Bayreuth 2022 has finally been announced. Now we have dates. However, the order form from the Friends of Bayreuth (to which

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 >

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.

PHOTOS OF RECENT EVENTS



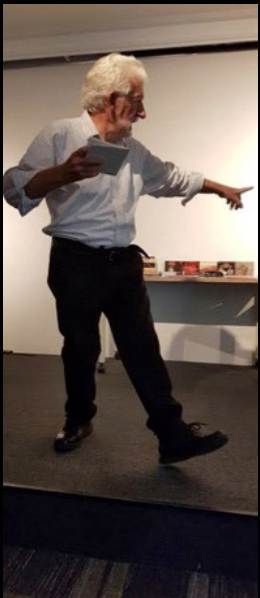
Bronwyn Douglass, Rebecca MacCallion and Bradley Kunda at our recital at Mosman Art Gallery on 30 January 2022. Photos by Lis Bergman



Die Walküre in Melbourne Bradley Daley (Siegmond), Leona Geeves (Wagsoc NSW), Warwick Fyfe (Wotan), Lee Abrahmsen (Sieglinde), Steven Gallop (Hunding)



Leona Geeves (Wagsoc NSW), Dimity Shepherd (Schwertleite), Zara Barrett (Brünnhilde) Eleanor Greenwood (Ortlinde)
Photos by Ruth Frances



Talk by Robert Gay at the Goethe Institut on 20 February 2022. Photos by Leona Geeves and Lis Bergman

FOR YOUR DIARY

2022

14 - 24 May 2022	Lohengrin. New OA/La Monnaie co-production. Conducted by Tahu Matheson	Melbourne State Theatre
25 Sept 2022	Siegfried Part 3 of the Melbourne Opera Ring Cycle	Melbourne Recital Centre
24 March - 1 May 2023	Complete Melbourne Opera Ring Cycle	Bendigo

COMING SOCIETY EVENTS 2022

DAYS AND STARTING TIMES MAY VARY - PLEASE CHECK ONLINE FOR DETAILS

DATE	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	LOCATION
Sun 13 Mar	2.00 Masterclass with Christina Henson Hayes	St Columba, Woollahra
Sun 27 Mar	12.30 DVD Silent Wagner 2.00 Ralph Myers talk - Isolde in Aix	Goethe Institut
Sun 10 April	12.30 DVD Die Feen. Delightful children's version 2.00 Talk: Peter Bassett: "Hurry away then towards the East"	Goethe Institut
Sun 1 May	1.30 DVD Fritz Lang's masterpiece Siegfried	Goethe Institut
Wed 4 May	12.30pm Award winning Author, Scriptwriter, Lecturer and Journalist Erica Miner talks to us from Seattle about Berlioz and Wagner.	Zoom
Sun 29 May	1.00 AGM 2.00 Concert: Brad Cooper 3.30 Wagner's Birthday Celebrations	St Columba, Woollahra
Sun 26 Jun	2.00 DVD Marjorie Lawrence: the World at her Feet	Goethe Institut
Sun 24 Jul	2.00 Talk by Antony Ernst TBC	Goethe Institut

Advice about changes to the Program will be emailed in our e-news to people who have given their email addresses to the Society's Membership Secretary; the latest updates will also be available on the Society's website: www.wagner.org.au.
Admission to each event will be \$25 a Member, and \$35 each non-Member, \$10 (Full-time students); Seminar/Concert \$40 (m), \$50 (n-m), \$20 (fts).
For Zoom events members will be requested to register; admission is \$10.

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

Patron:

Ms Simone Young AM

Honorary Life Members:

Mr Richard King

Prof Michael Ewans

Mr Horst Hoffman

Mr Roger Cruickshank

Dr Terence Watson

Dr Dennis Mather

Dr Colleen Chesterman

Ms Leona Geeves

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

PRESIDENT'S REPORT	P.1
FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS	P.5
REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS	P.8
MELBOURNE OPERA'S <i>DIE WALKÜRE</i>	P.10
KANDINSKY AND MUSIC BY MIKE DAY	P.14
THE LEGEND OF LOHENGRIN	P.16
NIETZSCHE MEETS WAGNER BY DR TERENCE WATSON	P.22
STAGECRAFT	P.26
NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY	P.28

we subscribe), is expected in March. And we have no indication about an allocation of tickets from the Verband (to which we are affiliated). In the meantime I will resurrect the list of attendees for 2020 as they have priority. After that I will communicate any news as I receive it. Given that there will be a new Ring and that there may still be capacity restrictions in the Festspielhaus, tickets will be difficult to obtain. As the Society would normally receive a limited number of tickets and usually for the third cycle of performances, I recommend to those who really want to attend on specific dates that they try ordering directly through the Bayreuth box office (go on their website). On the other hand one of the advantages of being a member of a Wagner Society is the extensive worldwide network and there is always someone who can't attend a performance. If you want to get to Bayreuth the chances are that tickets will somehow become available.

It is my hope that through 2022 all members continue to demonstrate their support for the aims of the Society by renewing their subscriptions, attending our events and donating generously. My heartfelt thanks to all those that have donated to our various projects in the last few difficult years. Welcome to new members! And spread the word, we would like more music lovers to join us.

On philanthropy: the Jane Mathews AO Scholarship, partnering with Pacific Opera, is now the focus of our donation drive. Please consider giving as we seek to consolidate and grow our relationship with Pacific Opera. Our two organisations share much in common, not least the support of young singers and opportunities for them to perform. Of course the WSNSW will continue to run its project supporting young artists and creatives, as we have for 40 years, where we can and with as much as we can afford.

The Melbourne Opera Ring cycles are a little over a year away, and I believe the Society needs to discuss how we can continue our relationship with this bold venture through 2022 leading to the Ring Festival in 2023. We have completed the Wagner Tuba project, what is next? There are many prospects and opportunities, particularly as there will be a side programme of events between performances, turning Bendigo into a Festival town - perhaps the Bayreuth of the south, with a touch and scale of Aldeburgh or Glyndebourne. As Wagnerians how can we not get involved!

It has been good to have two live events in a row at the start of this year. But it is quite busy for the Committee on the day with so many tasks to be undertaken. So, my thanks to the Committee for accomplishing what looks like a seamless routine so that everyone gets the maximum enjoyment from the event. And in that busyness I often forget on the day to thank the catering, the many wonderful donations of plates of food that appear as if by magic and those who set it all out and make it look very appetising. These selfless acts are an essential component towards the success of live events. So, thank you, and keep doing it. And if anyone wants to contribute or help, please make yourself known.

To end, I would like to note the passing of Australian composer Nigel Butterley, who has made a tremendous contribution to music in this country. And finally, I would like to send special best wishes and love from all members to our Immediate Past President Colleen Chesterman.

Esteban Insausti

President, Wagner Society in NSW Inc



NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

In this issue I give some background to the story of the Swan-Knight *Lohengrin* and the role of swans in the life of King Ludwig II. in preparation for the OA/Monnaie Lohengrin production in Melbourne in May. I appeal to members who are going to the performances to please send me your impressions afterwards. Thanks to Terence Watson for his review of the recent excellent Melbourne Opera's *Die Walküre*. Thanks also to Terence for his fascinating article about Nietzsche and Wagner. Thanks to Leona for her eagle-eyed proofreading.

Mike Day

michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com

DONATIONS TO HELP THE SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

We encourage members to donate to the Society to help with our regular support for artists. We also have a number of special projects for which we encourage your contribution.

GENEROUS DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS:

Ian and Pam McGaw, Richard Mason and Camron Dyer.

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.

FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 13 MARCH AT 2.00PM AT ST COLUMBA COMMUNITY CENTRE,
53A OCEAN ST, WOOLLAHRA, 2025

CHRISTINA HENSON HAYES MASTERCLASS WITH UP-AND-COMING YOUNG SINGERS



Christina Henson Hayes is an American born, Juilliard trained singer and vocal coach and also a graduate in medicine from the University of New Jersey. She has pioneered research and practice in biomechanical vocal function, working with both career singers and cancer/reconstruction patients. She has

worked with concert artists who have sung at the Met, Covent Garden, La Scala and Opera Australia. Christina is coach and choirmaster with the Lyric Opera of the Central Coast and is the founder of **Outlaw Opera**, which is a concert series in two

acts that highlights the most villainous and thrilling moments from operatic history. It breaks down some of the art form's most famous works into palatable, bite sized theatre. It is a fantastic format for those wanting to give opera a try and for those starting to refine their tastes. Society members should find this a fascinating session - giving insight as to how singers are professionally coached and guided when preparing new roles.

Christina will listen to singers Michael James, Heldentenor, Anita de Lisen, soprano, Ashlee Woodgate, soprano, Damien Noyce, tenor, whom we sponsored for a German course a few years ago, Ellen McNeil, soprano and winner of our Jane Mathews AO Scholarship, and Nathan Bryon, tenor, whom we supported on a fact-finding trip to the USA where he was looking at young artist programs for young dramatic male voices.

They will be singing works from mostly the Wagner and German repertoire and Christina will give them detailed feedback. We also hope to include new member and Pacific Opera alumnus, tenor Paul McLeod.

SUNDAY 27 MARCH AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT, 90 OCEAN ST, WOOLLAHRA, 2025

12.30PM DVD SILENT WAGNER 'THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RICHARD WAGNER'

The film *'The Life and Works of Richard Wagner'*, directed by **Carl Fröhlich**, was first released on 20th November 1913. It was the first ever 'bio-pic', and as such about who else but Wagner? What is extraordinary, however, is that it predates **D.W.Griffiths** and *'Birth of a Nation'* (1915), usually described as the first 'long' silent, at a time when the great majority of silents ran for 10 minutes at most. Fröhlich's film runs for over 80 minutes. The DVD includes commentary from **Tony Palmer**, acclaimed director of the 1983 TV series about Wagner, starring **Richard Burton**.



2.00PM RALPH MYERS TALKS ABOUT *ISOLDE IN AIX*

Ralph Myers was born in Australia in 1979. From 2011 to 2015 he worked as artistic director for the Belvoir St Theatre in Sydney, one of the most important theatres in Australia. During his time as director he engaged **Simon Stone** as in-house director and developed numerous stage designs for him. As stage designer he worked in Australia and England with several important Australian directors, such as **Neil Armfield**, **Benedict Andrews** and **Barrie Kosky** in the areas of dance, circus, film and opera. During the 2005/06 season he served as resident designer for the Sydney Theatre Company. In addition to his work as stage designer, Ralph Myers also stages his own productions, most recently his own play *«The Cat/The Dog»* at the Belvoir St Theatre. In 2021 Ralph worked with Simon Stone and Sir Simon Rattle on a bold new production of *Tristan und Isolde* at the Aix-en-Provence Summer Festival. The September Wagner Quarterly had reviews and photos of the production, which starred Stuart Skelton and Nina Stemme.

SUNDAY 10 APRIL AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT



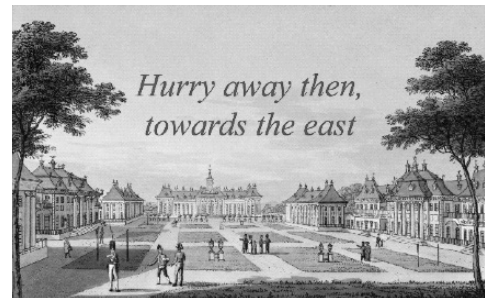
12.30 DVD
DIE FEEN

Die Feen (*The Fairies*) was Wagner's first completed opera, composed in 1833 when he was a teenager but never performed

in his lifetime. It is a charming fairy tale about the magic of love and music. This delightful (shortened for children to under 50 minutes) performance from the Wiener Staatsoper in 2013 was adapted by **Marc-Aurel Floros**, directed by **Waut Koeken** and conducted by **Kathleen Kerry**

2.00 TALK: PETER BASSETT:
"HURRY AWAY THEN TOWARDS THE EAST"

Richard Wagner grew up in early 19th century Saxony when there was growing fascination with Chinese porcelain and decoration, Persian stories and poetry, and Indian ideas and philosophies. Mozart, Spohr and Weber had already drawn on eastern subjects in their works, and other composers followed suit. In the 1830s, Wagner toyed with an opera inspired by *The Thousand and One Nights*, and in the 1850's, disillusioned and in exile, he talked about settling down in what was then the Ottoman Empire. His interest in the Orient and its philosophies never left him, as *Tristan und Isolde*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* and *Parsifal* demonstrate beyond doubt. As we contemplate the planned Brisbane *Ring* production directed by **Chen Shi-Zheng**, it is timely to look at Eastern influences which played such an important part in Wagner's creative endeavours.



SUNDAY 1 MAY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

1.30 DVD FRITZ LANG'S MASTERPIECE *SIEGFRIED*

A showing of Fritz Lang's masterpiece *Siegfried*, the first part of his epic film *Die Nibelungen*. The second part, *Kriemhild's Revenge*, will be shown at a later date. The print has been remastered and the original orchestral accompaniment rerecorded. (None of Wagner's music is used)

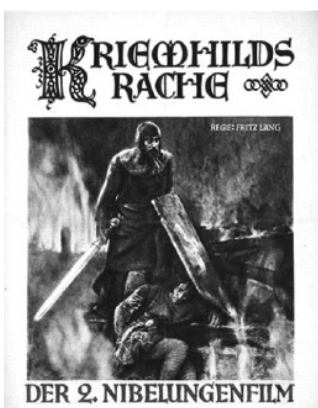


Fritz Lang Defined Film Fantasy with Die Nibelungen

Tristan Ettleman Jul 6, 2019

Dragons, dwarves, invisibility, transformations, kings and queens, massive castles, deep forests, foreboding swamps and caves; Fritz Lang rendered this and more with fantastic brilliance in his pair of DIE NIBELUNGEN films, based on the (circa) 1200 AD Germanic poem NIBELUNGENLIED. The technical is impressive but there's more to the films than that. The artistry of the sets and costumes and special effects pull the magic together, but the very structure and scope of the legend told does the form justice. Too often is some form of the term "cinema as poetry" used but DIE NIBELUNGEN may have to be one of the true exceptions. It is literally accomplishing the feat of true epic poetry. What I mean is that DIE NIBELUNGEN does feel like an artifact out of history, a looming work older than its relatively short 95 years at the time of this writing. "Otherworldly," encapsulates DIE NIBELUNGEN's incredible ability to draw investment. Its length (all told, nearly 5 hours long) allowed Lang to let no stone go unturned, giving so much time to each of the archetypal characters. The mythology becomes less distant or theoretical because of it.

By the end of DIE NIBELUNGEN, the initial impression of a straightforward myth is transformed into a complex legend. Siegfried becomes less of the



uncomplicated hero; he has the capriciousness and moral ambiguity of even the Greek tragedians. Kriemhild becomes a ruthless manipulator who we nevertheless root for. These portrayals are Lang's, coaxed from the incredible cast of his film and the structure of the original poem. He saw in NIBELUNGENLIED another story, a morally ambiguous one revolving around two men's deception of women. These deceptions and circuitous sequences of dramatic elevation make DIE NIBELUNGEN more than just a pretty face, which indeed it was. Its fantastical elements are so perfectly

realized. Lang's films were not truly Expressionistic, and perhaps the effects of DIE NIBELUNGEN could be termed as realistic for their time. But because they were really not, because the dragon and the costumes and architecture and deep forests are so stylized, more Impressionistically than Expressionistically, Lang's fantasy still feels timeless, deepened by a compelling family drama.

<https://trettlemann.medium.com/fritz-lang-defined-film-fantasy-with-die-nibelungen-71ae52ddbee7>

WEDNESDAY 4 MAY 12.30PM ZOOM

AWARD WINNING AUTHOR, SCRIPTWRITER, LECTURER AND JOURNALIST ERICA MINER
TALKS TO US FROM SEATTLE ABOUT BERLIOZ AND WAGNER



Hector Berlioz the French composer and his German rival compete to see who can put the other to sleep

Berlioz and Wagner

Wagner openly admired Berlioz and made frequent references to him in his writings. Berlioz, however, was much more reticent about Wagner. They attended each other's performances, exchanged letters, and met on more than one occasion. Erica discusses the fascinating relationship between these eccentric masters, two of the most prominent geniuses of their time.

Former Metropolitan Opera Orchestra violinist **ERICA MINER** is now an award-winning author, screenwriter, arts writer, and lecturer. She studied violin at Boston University, where she received her Mus. B, *cum laude*; New England Conservatory of Music; and Tanglewood Music Center, where she performed with such musical luminaries as Leonard Bernstein. A member of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra for 21 years, Erica worked closely with distinguished maestro James Levine and other celebrated conductors. Erica's lectures, seminars and workshops have received kudos on both coasts and on major cruise lines. She regularly presents

opera lectures for Wagner Societies on both coasts, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at University of Washington and University of California San Diego, and the Creative Retirement Institute at Edmonds College (Seattle North). As an author, Erica won the Fiction Prize in the Direct from the Author Book Awards for her debut novel *Travels with my Lovers*. Her 'opera mystery' novel series includes *Murder in the Pit* (assassination and intrigue at the Metropolitan Opera); *Death by Opera*, (Santa Fe Opera); and *Staged for Murder* (San Francisco Opera). Erica is also an active contributor to major arts websites and magazines. <https://www.ericaminer.com>

14 – 24 MAY 2022

LOHENGRIN AT THE ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE

A co-production between **Opera Australia** and the **Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie**. **Tahu Matheson** conducts a stunning cast. Superstar **Jonas Kaufmann** is the noble Lohengrin, **Emily Magee** is Elsa, while **Elena Gabouri** sings the conniving Ortrud and **Marco Vratogna** performs as the deceived Telramund. Director **Olivier Py** sets this battle between good and evil in the ruins of Berlin in the aftermath of World War II. A monumental revolving tiered set depicts a decaying theatre, where emblems of German Romanticism gather dust.



SUNDAY 29 MAY AT ST COLUMBA COMMUNITY CENTRE, WOOLLAHRA

1.00 AGM FINANCIAL MEMBERS ONLY

2.00 CONCERT: TENOR BRAD COOPER. PROGRAM DETAILS TO BE CONFIRMED

3.30 WAGNER'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS - CAKE AND BUBBLES

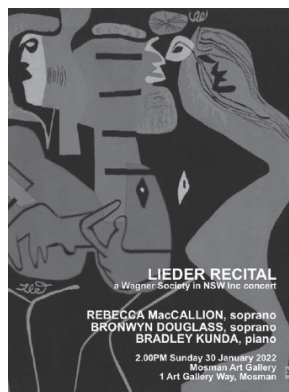
REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS

WEDNESDAY 19 JANUARY ZOOM AT 7.00PM MARJORIE LAWRENCE: THE WORLD AT HER FEET

Documentary film makers **Wayne Groom** and **Dr Caroline Bilsborow** entertained over 30 members with one of the best Zoom presentations the Society has had since the start of Covid lockdowns. They talked about, and showed excerpts from, their latest production: *Marjorie Lawrence: The World at her Feet*, which had its world premiere in December 2021. Wayne and Caroline talked about the trials and tribulations of trying to travel and hold interviews during Covid restrictions, and

about the research they undertook and conversations they had with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Ita Buttrose, Brian Castles-Onion, and Richard Davis, whose 2012 biography *Wotan's Daughter: the Life of Marjorie Lawrence*, inspired the directors to make the film. Most memorable were the interviews with friends and community members from the soprano's early days and her return to her hometown in triumph. The Society will be showing the film to members on 26 June.

SUNDAY 30 JANUARY AT 2.00PM AT MOSMAN ART GALLERY RECITAL BY BRONWYN DOUGLASS, REBECCA MACCALLION AND BRADLEY KUNDA Report by Leona Geeves



Late last year I took advantage of the homecoming of two of our supported artists from Berlin, accompanist **Bradley Kunda** and his wife, soprano, **Rebecca MacCallion** who had retreated from Covid ravaged Berlin to ask if they could perform for us. They had returned to family in regional NSW to await the arrival of their firstborn child, a son. They had entertained us in a very beautiful and funny Christmas concert a few years

ago along with their friend baritone Daniel Macey, who had won the Sydney Song Prize, which we supported. For January 30th, Bradley and Rebecca organised a melodic and nicely-arranged recital of Lieder by Richard Strauss, Hugo Wolf, Robert Schumann, Franz Schubert, Alban Berg and the rarely-heard, Joseph Marx. What a treat! It was to be held in the St Columba Centre at Woollahra.

Well Covid restrictions meant the church who owns the centre, would no longer allow us to use the church for singing on the 30th January, the day after was fine apparently!! Some very fast work by Vice President, Mike Day meant that fortunately we could transfer the concert to the **Mosman Art Gallery**. Then early this year Bradley flagged that the rigours of motherhood were preventing Rebecca from devoting the amount of time she wanted to learn the new repertoire for a solo recital. They asked if they could bring in their dear friend, **Bronwyn Douglass**, who had been long on my radar. She was turning from a warm voiced mezzo into a dramatic soprano and was offering to sing some of the *Wesendonck Lieder*. How lovely to have some Wagner sung by an up and coming singer. Bronwyn has won many prizes including **The Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngel Canto Award** and **The Opera Foundation for young Australians Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship**.

Having a choice of voices meant Bronwyn opened the concert with two songs by Brahms followed by Rebecca with Hugo Wolf, and Bronwyn singing three of Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*. Wagner himself called two of the songs "studies" for *Tristan und Isolde*, using for the first time certain musical ideas that are later developed in the opera. In "Träume" can be heard the themes of the love duet in Act 2, while "Im Treibhaus" (the last of the five to be composed) uses music later developed extensively for the prelude to Act 3 of *Tristan*.

Rebecca sang Austrian composer Joseph Marx's *Nachtgebet* and *Selige Nacht*. (Marx wasn't completely new to us, as Emily Turner had sung *Selige Nacht* at the Jane Mathews Memorial concert in 2020, and Bradley Cooper had sung both Lieder in our *Faeries & Vampyres* concert in 2013). Personally I was thrilled to have more Richard Strauss in the program, and we look forward to hearing more from them in the future and wish them all well in their careers.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)
Von ewiger Liebe, Op. 43, No. 1
O kühler Wald, Op. 72, No. 3
Bronwyn Douglass

HUGO WOLF (1860 – 1903)
Das verlassene Mägdlein (Mörke-Lieder)
In dem Schatten meiner Locken (Mörke-Lieder)
Die Bekehrte (Goethe-Lieder)
Rebecca MacCallion

RICHARD WAGNER (1813 – 1883)
from Fünf Gedichte von Mathilde Wesendonck:
Der Engel
Im Treibhaus
Träume
Bronwyn Douglass

JOSEPH MARX (1882 – 1964)
Nachtgebet
Selige Nacht
Rebecca MacCallion

ALBAN BERG (1885 – 1935)
Die Nachtigall (Sieben frühe Lieder)
Rebecca MacCallion

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864 – 1949)
Cécilie, Op. 27, No. 2
Die Nacht, Op. 10, No. 3
Morgen!, Op. 27, No. 4
Zueignung, Op. 10, No. 1
Bronwyn Douglass and Rebecca MacCallion

I feel we need to add that a change in venue is totally out of our hands, particularly during Covid, as is a change in artists (which happens more often than you would think for a range of reasons) and a change in repertoire. Our Webmaster had sent three ENews reminders flagging these changes, but not everyone had noted them. Please **always check on the website for venue locations**. The year's program listed in *The Wagner Quarterly* is a very rough guide, as it goes to press months before the events.

**SUNDAY 20 FEBRUARY AT 1.30PM AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT
TALK BY ROBERT GAY THE IMPACT OF FRENCH GRAND OPERA
ON THE WORKS OF VERDI & WAGNER**



60 members enthusiastically acclaimed popular music educator and favourite tour-guide Robert Gay after his very entertaining stroll through the extravagant world of the Paris Opera in the 1830.s and 1840's. Robert spoke for nearly 3 hours, with a break for Champagne and French cheeses, but didn't actually get through his entire talk, or play all the planned musical examples. At the end he broke into a canter and drew his themes together to illustrate his ideas about how Verdi and Wagner were influenced by the earlier composers writing for the Paris Opera. He will be coming back to us later this year to finish it off. He handed out notes outlining the main features of French Grand Opera

and the principal composers. These notes are available in our E-News. Robert played recordings of very beautiful and dramatic scenes by Auber, Rossini, Halévy and Meyerbeer and performed hilarious impressions of the exhausted pilgrims in *Tannhäuser*, plus a duet between a soprano and a mute ballerina, from Auber's *La Muette de Portici*. The talk was especially useful as an introduction to Halévy's *La Juive*, which Opera Australia is staging in March 2022.

Above left: Giacomo Meyerbeer 1791 - 1864
Above middle-left: Fromental Halévy 1799 - 1862
Above middle-right: Giuseppe Verdi 1813 - 1901
Above right: Richard Wagner 1813 - 1883



wagner society nsw
a subsidiary of the wagner society of australia

HOME VIDEOS PLAYLISTS CHANNELS DISCUSSION ABOUT Q

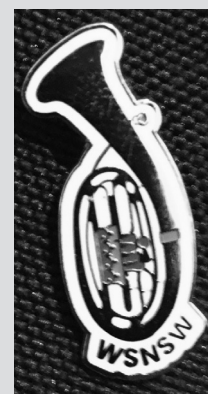
WAGNER SOCIETY YOUTUBE CHANNEL

We encourage members to visit our YouTube channel. In addition to including many fascinating early recordings and illustrations, there are clips from earlier and recent Wagner Society concerts and talks. We now have 100 subscribers and a more user-friendly link has been created, but it has not taken effect yet. Until that happens, to access the channel, it is easiest to search for YouTube Wagner NSW.

WAGNER TUBA APPEAL

We thank the following members who gave generous donations since December 2021 towards the purchase of the second pair of Wagner tubas for Melbourne Opera:

- Anonymous, Minnie Biggs, Alasdair Beck and Bill Brooks, Jenny Edwards, Robert Mitchell, Barbara Dorsch, Helen Meddings, Jan Roberts, Lyn Stephenson, Mike Day, Barbara Brady, Kristine Neill, Francois Kunc, Lis Bergmann, K. Powell, Pauline Holgerson, Helen Halley, Esteban Insuasti, Leona Geeves, Richard Bloor.



The Society has had made a special tuba pin/badge that is being presented to all the donors. Melbourne Opera has expressed gratitude for our gift and acknowledged it in the printed opera program. We will continue to accept donations towards Melbourne Opera's Ring project to be performed in Bendigo between late March and May 2023. We haven't decided what we will support in 2023 but if Warwick Fyfe's Wotan is any indication that in itself may well be a very worthy cause.

MELBOURNE OPERA'S *DIE WALKÜRE* - A WAGNERIAN PEAK CONQUERED

by Dr Terence Watson, 11 February 2022

Cast:

Warwick Fyfe - Wotan; **Zara Barrett** - Brünnhilde; **Lee Abrahmsen** - Sieglinde; **Bradley Daley** - Siegmund
Sarah Sweeting - Fricka; **Steven Gallop** - Hunding; **Rosamund Illing**, **Eleanor Greenwood**, **Jordan Kahler**,
Olivia Cranwell, **Naomi Flatman**, **Caroline Vercoe**, **Sally-Anne Russell**, and **Dimity Shepherd** as the Valkyries.

Anthony Negus - Conductor

Melbourne Opera Orchestra Production Team:

Suzanne Chaundy - Director; **Andrew Bailey** - Sets; **Rob Sowinski** - Lighting; **Harriet Oxley** - Costumes



Sieglinde and Siegmund Act I. Photo by Robin Halls

As you might have read in a previous issue of the *Wagner Quarterly*, I left the Melbourne Opera's production of *Das Rheingold* last year with some misgivings about the production (primarily the costumes, but also the interpretation of Alberich, and the suitability of some of the singers to their roles). I am very happy to say that the company's production of the second of The Ring Cycle music-dramas leaves behind the somewhat jokey presentation of many of the *Rheingold* characters as Arthur Rackham caricatures, and focuses on a straightforward, mainly naturalistic interpretation, which reminded me strongly of the Otto Schenk production for the New York Metropolitan Opera during the 1980s. It was much loved for, among other things, its very adherence to Wagner's stage directions—an oasis of sanity among excesses of European *Regietheater* or Eurotrash productions, many people felt.

With Melbourne Opera's *Die Walküre*, the significance of Andrew Bailey's conception of the major set elements of *Das Rheingold* became clearer. The platform that descended and

rose as needed in the first work to distinguish between the upper and lower realms of the gods and Nibelheim, served again generally to separate the world of the gods from the world of Sieglinde, Siegmund, and Hunding. When raised, the platform, with its hole in the middle, served as part of the backdrop, within which Rob Sowinski's lighting effects produced a variety of skylines from glorious dawn to threatening storm clouds, as well as effective changes of mood lighting on the stage, including an intensely bright light for Fricka's interrogation of Wotan. Out of a hole in the stage of A1, the tree Wagner calls for at the centre of Hunding's home stretches high into the flies, but it looks dead and wrecked, with all its branches broken off, as if Wotan had broken off most of the branches as he practised to make the spear that now has his runes of contract burned onto it. Sieglinde has a table and chairs, as well as a kitchen bench, that enable her to carry out her tasks of quenching Siegmund's thirst, and feeding the three of them. These fitted comfortably into the pared-back naturalism of the whole approach. In her Director's Notes in the program, though, Suzanne Chaundy describes the aesthetic of the set as "modernist/brutalist," which might simply indicate our different experiences of architecture and sets. I have described to others the sets of the recent Joel Cohen film of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as brutalist nightmare, since they are shockingly intimidating and surreal, far more so than the sets of this opera.

Around the base of the tree are two large lumps, that remain after the tree is flown away for A2. They seemed to me quite anthropomorphic. One looked like a Salvatore Daliesque melting Pietà; the other seemed as if it could be Erda turned to stone waiting to be called to rise again by Wotan in *Siegfried*. The platform remains the same for A3.

I was particularly relieved to see that the costumes for the characters of *Die Walküre* matched their roles, without any overt jokiness. Fricka's costume was the most elaborate, being a gorgeously exaggerated Kimono-style gown, with rich Japanese looking embroidery of gold on green fabric. Wotan's costume, also including a Kimono-looking cloak, though, looked appropriately travel stained and worn. Sieglinde was dressed as any mediaeval *Hausfrau* might look in very sensible dress and apron. Siegmund was dressed in travel- and battle-worn clothes, befitting one who spent his life foraging in the forest and fighting predating Neidings. Hunding was dressed, as he often is in other productions, in leather-look fighting gear, sinister and inhuman, though he relied a little too much on exaggerated facial expressions to convey his brutality.

Brünnhilde's battle dress looked rather more like the version that a Valkyrie, like a contemporary soldier, might wear to a formal social function, rather than to a battlefield. Her sisters, as well, were dressed in much the same kind of *haute couture* outfits, that seemed a little too elegant for their tasks, though I have no idea what a Valkyrie would wear for the task of collecting dead human warriors from a battlefield. I have seen productions in which they wear something closer to battle fatigues.

In all cases, the singing in this production was admirable, and easily comparable with the standard in many other productions of *Die Walküre* I have seen. I was impressed by the cast's clear diction making it possible for me, with a smattering of German to follow their utterances quite well. The acting, the interaction between the characters, though, was an order of magnitude better than I have seen in many other productions. Chaundy is to be commended for eliciting such committed performances from her cast and having them move on the stage as if they really lived in the world of the music-drama. As the most immediately, emotionally arousing of the Ring Cycle operas, deliberately intended as such by Wagner, it can be easy to arouse superficial responses at particular moments during the drama, but it is much harder to craft a series of related actions and relationships that lead inexorably, it should feel, to each act's climax, but Chaundy achieves this with great skill. It would be hard to find a better incarnation of Sieglinde and Siegmund than Daley and Abrahmsen, whose growing arousal of themselves and each other is revealed with a complex mixture of intensity and restraint. Their range of vocal delivery matched their emotional expression impeccably. The tenderness between them helped Chaundy achieve her aim "to portray this epic work in a truly affecting way."

Since the confrontation of Wotan and Fricka at the beginning of Act II is, in part, an elevation of Richard and Minna's domestic arguments to mythic status, we find the characters arguing about the much the same problems we know Minna had with Richard: marital fidelity, power, status, responsibility, guilt, rationality versus emotion, honesty, and obligations, among others. It is this domestic quality that gives this scene so much of its power, when delivered well. Sweeting and Fyfe persuaded me that this was just one more of a continuing series of such battles of wills, disguised as a defence of principles, as they both enact longstanding frustrations with the constraints of marriage.

Except that this confrontation suddenly takes a turn against Wotan's usual defences and evasions when Fricka reveals she understands what Wotan is planning (to use Siegmund to retrieve the ring), but

also objects to his condoning of the twins' incest, since he believes it has nothing to do with his larger project. His attempt at a sentimental rationalisation—but, they love each other!—simply aggravates Fricka further. Chaundy rightly notes that the artwork "...starkly raises the question of what is 'right' according to law versus what is 'right' from the depths of feeling." While Wagner clearly sides with the latter, through Wotan, Fricka presents the case for the former. The longstanding debate about the priority of the rule of law or the rule of emotion has no clear resolution in principle, but generally depends on the circumstances of each case. Wagner is not interested, of course, in such a philosophical discussion, but is very interested in persuading his audiences to his accept his/Wotan's position, and devotes his considerable talents to skewing the debate in their favour. The success of the portrayal of this scene depends greatly on the commitment of the performers to their character's stance, and Sweeting and Fyfe gave a passionate and intelligent account of an existential human dilemma, under Chaundy's insightful direction.

Barrett's presentation of Brünnhilde, though, was for me an unexpected highlight of the night. I have to confess to not being aware of her presence in Australian opera performances. Among many other roles, the one to compare with Brünnhilde in range and difficulty would have been her 2014 title role in *Turandot* for Opera Australia. She tackled this Wagnerian peak of western opera with assurance and great sensitivity. One of the tests for a singer of this role is her delivery of the *Todesverkündigung*, the Valkyrie's announcement of a hero's death. Siegmund's refusal to accept the annunciation seems, though, to cast some doubt on Chaundy's claim, in her Notes, that "Siegmund is not a hero with free will, he is a helpless (though heroic) extension of Wotan's will." In the artwork, Siegmund, like us in real life, hovers awkwardly and insolubly between believing he has free will and feeling controlled by forces, but he takes a stand and is prepared to accept the consequences—that is what makes him heroic, in my eyes.



Brünnhilde, Siegmund, Sieglinde Act II Photo by Robin Halls



Maestro Anthony Negus curtain call

The *Todesverkündigung* is another of the moments in which Wagner pulls the heartstrings almost to breaking point. Barrett and Daley wrought a great deal of genuine pathos out of this scene, while also persuading me that this was a discussion between two highly intelligent people about the best course of action for all three characters. I have always understood this scene as the beginning of Brünnhilde's awakening into a subjectivity independent of her father, through the expansion of the compassion she has already shown Wotan after his demolition by Fricka, and which will eventually blossom into the self-realisation and self-overcoming of *Götterdämmerung*. In parallel with Brünnhilde's emergence as an autonomous entity, Barrett's singing grew in intensity and expressiveness. The conclusion of this scene was also reinforced by the striking scenic image created with the lovers in the well of the ring circle of the stage, and Brünnhilde standing statuesquely above and behind them as she promises to protect him against her father's express command.

The swarming of the Valkyries at the beginning of A3 was very effective; their movements around the stage showed their agitation and increasing fear of Wotan's anger as Brünnhilde reveals to them what she has done. Each of the Valkyries

was nicely characterised by some gesture or movement and intonation. Their combined voices contributed marvellously to one of the most famous "bleeding chunks" of the Wagnerian canon.

Then Wotan storms in, bellowing anger, resentment, and betrayal. I have always admired Fyfe's voice and wonder why Australian opera companies have not capitalised on its power. His voice, at least in this role, does not convey as much nuance and variation as some other Wotan's I have heard, but I have rarely heard any Wotan who has reached the end of *Die Walküre* sounding as if he could start again, without stopping to draw breath. Fyfe's power is something to witness. His skills in characterisation have grown with his vocal power, building on his chilling Alberich for Opera Australia's Neil Armfield Ring Cycles in 2013 and 2016. Readers might not know, though, that Fyfe had a very successful "run through" of the role in Singapore on 5 January 2020, with Chan Tze Law, conductor, director Edith Podesta, and the Orchestra of the Music Makers who presented the artwork at Singapore's Esplanade Concert Hall. You can watch the very impressive semi-staged performance at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBSp8qQiiiQ&ab_channel=OrchestraoftheMusicMakers.

You can also read an informative article about this unique and inspiring orchestra at: <https://bachtrack.com/interview-chan-tze-law-orchestra-of-the-music-makers-wagner-die-walkure-singapore-november-2019>.

We can hope that they will soon stage a full Ring Cycle. I would be very happy to make a trip on the strength of the performances in the video.

Returning from my detour promoting Fyfe's career to his performance in Act III! As with his little shoulder shrug and moue when Fricka demands to know what her faithless husband is going to do about the twins' alleged insult to her divinity in Act II, in the final scene of Act III Fyfe is able to use small gestures very effectively. Small moves to embrace Brünnhilde, then pulling back and sighing in frustration; waving his spear ineffectually; walking around in apparent

DIE WALKÜRE - NOTES BY MINNIE BIGGS

Some very personal comments on the outstanding production of *Die Walküre* by Melbourne Opera.

Everyone's reaction is different, and we all largely agree on the brilliance of this production. Just some few personal observations and feelings.

Warwick Fyfe's German accent and understanding of the language were commanding. In a class of their own. And his acting, almost but not overdone, brought to life a Wotan we could relate to, the human aspects of a God, the felt sense of his actions and agonising decision making. Not to mention his marvellous voice (about which everyone has commented!)

Sarah Sweeting's Fricka was the most elegant Goddess ever seen by me. Stately Fricka, worthy of being the wife of a God. Her heavenly costume was goddess worthy.

(And coveted by most women.) Not to speak of her rich expressive voice.

The Walküres were never more beautiful, separate voices and personalities, characters, individuals. The utter simplicity of the gathering featured their wonderful voices, and the two extras on poles added sheer delight, not at all gimmicky.

Bradley Daley and Lee Abrahmsen's Siegmund and Sieglinde had a real connect, love at first sight. We experienced it with them. Convincing, again simple, their acting. No bells and whistles needed in this superb production.

Hardly any need to go to Europe for Wagner anymore.

Minnie Biggs, February 2022

aimlessness; then stabbing his spearpoint into the stage in impotence—all convey the impasse to which Wotan's own ambition, lust, self-disgust, and laws have brought him. I have not seen any farewelling of Brünnhilde with so much physical contact and brokenness in the god, nor so much understanding and compassion as Brünnhilde bestows on the god who is falling to pieces before her eyes. Their hugs, and his kisses, reminded me again of the Otto Schenk production in which James Morris and Hildegard Behrens bring heart-wrenching intensity to the Farewell scene. The DVD recording of this production was only the second Ring Cycle I had seen, after the ABC's broadcast of the Boulez-Chéreau centennial production at Bayreuth. It is perhaps the adherence of the Schenk production to Wagner's stage directions that made it such an effective counter proposition to Chéreau's innovative interpretation. The Chaundy production, in the spirit of the Schenk production, helped make it a very powerful experience for me. In addition, it was also very moving just to be in a theatre to see a production of the Wagnerian masterpiece after having so many performances pulled from under my feet over the last few years, as we all have.

As with the entry into Valhalla in last year's *Das Rheingold*, the production team produced a memorable Magic Fire ending to

Die Walküre, with Brünnhilde lying on a ledge among the basalt slabs of the mountain peak, with flames flickering menacingly around. Wotan leaves stage left, a broken figure, despite having delivered a resoundingly defiant farewell to his favourite daughter—perhaps it was also delivered to Fricka watching from Valhalla, but it rocked the rafters of Her Majesty's Theatre and sent shivers down my spine.

A large part of the success of the production was due to the inspiring playing of the Melbourne Opera Orchestra who again put their hearts and souls into bringing the music to life. There were many goose-bumpy moments with the playing of the clarinetist and oboist in the solos in which they accompany many of the most touching moments in the work. All the players were guided by the experience of Anthony Negus, who has conducted many Wagner performances here and overseas. I found his tempi matched very satisfyingly the rises and falls of the emotional intensity of the drama. Negus and the orchestra players were also helped by the warm acoustics of the theatre and an orchestra pit that is reminiscent of Wagner's own pit in Bayreuth, as it falls down and away from the conductor's podium, enabling a sound that is both warmly blended, but also very clear, to be projected into the theatre.

REFLECTIONS BY OUR PRESIDENT ESTEBAN INSAUSTI ON *DIE WALKÜRE* IN MELBOURNE

It has taken a few days to process the two performances of *Die Walküre* (Friday and Sunday) as well as the announcement of full cycles in 2023 in the wonderful Ulumbarra Theatre in Bendigo. Bendigo! A true Festival venue soon to become the Bayreuth of the South. We owe nothing short of unequivocal admiration and deep gratitude to Melbourne Opera for embarking on a Ring production during the Covid pandemic. This is the kind of vision and leadership lacking in the Arts (and the nation) at the moment. Bold. Inspiring. Crazy brave but designed to attract devotees that will stick.

Das Rheingold in 2021 was an act of will and defiance in the face of the damage the pandemic was reaping on the Arts. This year's *Die Walküre* was both a consolidation of the great work started in the Vorabend and a confirmation of what a potentially solid (and exciting) *Ring* this will be. Economic necessity, a combination of experience and youth led by the veteran Maestro Anthony Negus (is there a more knowledgeable Wagnerian in any pit around the world?) and crystal clear narrative from Suzanne Chaundy and her creative team, delivers all the bang one wants in Wagner. It looks like Wagner. It sounds like Wagner. There is no skimping here.

The performances themselves improved from Friday to Sunday. The Sunday Act 3 was incredible and it would be a long time before you hear something as good (well hopefully in 2023). The cast was uniformly solid. This

production has the best gang of Valkyries I've seen and heard anywhere. Led by the legendary Rosamund Illing. But there were two exceptional turns: Lee Abrahamsen as Sieglinde and Warwick Fyfe as Wotan. Both turned it up several notches in Act 3 with singing of a very high quality and acting to match.

Warwick, an inveterate scene stealer at the best of times, just was Wotan. Adding to an unforgettable Alberich in an undistinguished production by Neil Armfield in 2013 and 2016, Warwick has to be Australia's premier Wagnerian voice at the moment (among a number that are already making waves overseas). So to any directors, conductors and producers looking for a Wotan, look him up. He convincingly evoked the god hemmed in by his own machinations and ultimately emotionally broken by the loss of two of his favourite children. The defiant farewell salute to Brünnhilde with hunched shoulders was heartbreaking. I won't dwell on his vocal power, control, nuance and intelligence. He KNOWS and UNDERSTANDS the text. Just as Maestro Negus conveys his conception of the enormous musical structure to, what is for all intents and purposes, a scratch orchestra and inspires them to produce committed and exciting sounds. My only quibble was that the orchestra on Friday sounded muffled in the dry acoustics of Her Majesty's Theatre. More than half them were under the stage in an expanded pit to fit them all in. But on Sunday the playing was of such ferocity that it didn't matter. All hail this production!

WASSILY KANDINSKY AND MUSIC

by Mike Day

One of the pioneers of abstract modern art, **Wassily Kandinsky** exploited the evocative interrelation between color and form to create an aesthetic experience that engaged the sight, sound, and emotions of the public. He believed that total abstraction offered the possibility for profound, transcendental expression and that copying from nature only interfered with this process. Highly inspired to create art that communicated a universal sense of spirituality, he innovated a pictorial language that only loosely related to the outside world but expressed volumes about the artist's inner experience.



Composition 111 (Concert) 1911

Kandinsky and Wagner

After having an unusually visual response to a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin* at the Bolshoi Theatre he abandoned his law career to study painting at the prestigious Munich Academy of Fine Arts. The performance conjured for him visions of a certain time in Moscow that he associated with specific colors and emotions. It inspired in him a sense of a fairy-tale hour of Moscow, which always remained the beloved city of his childhood. His recollection of the Wagner performance attests to how it had retrieved a vivid and complex network of emotions and memories from his past: "The violins, the deep tones of the basses, and especially the wind instruments at that time embodied for me all the power of that pre-nocturnal hour. I saw all my colors in spirit; they stood before my eyes. Wild, almost crazy lines were sketched in front of me. I did not dare use the expression that Wagner had painted 'my hour' musically..... It became quite clear to me that art in general was far more powerful than I had thought, and that painting could develop just such powers as music possesses."

Kandinsky and Scriabin

Among his musical contemporaries, Kandinsky admired the work of Aleksander Scriabin, whose innovations he found compatible with his own objectives in painting. What especially intrigued Kandinsky were Scriabin's researches toward establishing a table of equivalencies between tones

in color and music, a theory that Scriabin effectively applied in his orchestral work *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire* (1908). These tonal theories parallel Kandinsky's desire to find equivalencies between colors and feelings in painting: indeed, one of the illustrations included in the essay on Scriabin published in the Blaue Reiter Almanac was a colour reproduction of *Composition IV*.

Kandinsky and Schönberg

Kandinsky's conviction that music is a superior art to painting due to its inherent abstract language came out forcefully in the artist's admiration for the music of the Viennese composer Arnold Schönberg, with whom he initiated a longstanding friendship and correspondence and whose *Theory of Harmony* (1911) coincided with Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art*. Kandinsky's complex relationship to Schönberg's music is central to his concept of Composition, since Schönberg's most important contribution to the development of music, after all, occurred in the area of composition.

Kandinsky's Synaesthesia

Kandinsky once said, "the sound of colors is so definite that it would be hard to find anyone who would express bright yellow with bass notes or dark lake with treble."

The neurological phenomenon Kandinsky experienced is called synesthesia (or "joined perception," from the Greek

word *syn* meaning “join” and *aisthesis* meaning “perception”). It’s a rare but real condition in which one sense, like hearing, concurrently triggers another sense, such as sight. People with synesthesia might smell something when they hear a sound or see a shape when they eat a certain food. Kandinsky literally saw colors when he heard music and heard music when he painted.

The artist explored these sensations in unconventional, artistic ways. Conceived for the theatre, Kandinsky created experimental performance-based expressions of synesthesia—*The Yellow Sound* being the most famous—which utilized original musical scores, lighting, and various media to explore prevalent color theories of the time.

For Kandinsky, color also had the ability to put viewers in touch with their spiritual selves. He believed that yellow could disturb, while blue awakened the highest spiritual aspirations. Just a year before he painted *Fragment 2 for Composition VII*, Kandinsky wrote *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. An important statement of Kandinsky’s theories on art’s potential to evoke psychological, physical, and emotional responses, the treatise is considered the first theoretical foundation of abstraction.

Fragment 2 for Composition VII, 1913 is reproduced on the back page of this Quarterly



Kandinsky self portrait

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to new members: **Ron and Kim Bennett 1258, Susan Kirby 1259, Dr Sam Elmi 1260, Will Johnston 1261, Paul McLeod 1262 and David Geer 1263**

In future we plan to ask for and publish brief bios of new members to assist with introductions at events and make them feel welcome. We start off with:



Dr Sam Elmi is a General Medical Practitioner as well as an emerging tenor. He began his voice studies in Mashad, Iran and moved to Australia in 2016 when he continued vocal training with former Opera Australia principal Dr Jennifer Barnes. He has since worked with international opera star Deborah Humble and revered vocal coach, Sharolyn Kimmorley as well as pursuing his studies with the sublime tenor, Shahram Yazdani in Berlin. He has performed with the London Philharmonic Orchestra for the London Bel Canto festival. Sam is a concert soloist, principal and member of the chorus for Opera Hunter. In 2021, Sam took out first prize in Taree Eisteddfod’s Vocal Championship. Most excitingly, he has been amongst the semi-finalists of Sydney Eisteddfod’s prestigious Opera Scholarship in 2021 which was postponed to 2022. In 2020, at Sydney Eisteddfod, he was awarded crowd favourite! Sam is excited to be part of the Wagner Society NSW to expand his knowledge and connections as well as meeting professionals while being more familiar with the repertoire related to Wagner by attending concerts and webinars.



Ron and Kim Bennett. “We have been thinking about joining the Wagner Society for quite a time, and as we are now both retired (Kim from the law, and from teaching for myself. We have a lifelong relationship with music and we met in a military band many years ago. I was a high school music teacher for 34 yrs and specialised in brass. I now sing in the Canberra Choral Society. Kim retired from litigation law a couple of years ago. Our love of Wagner’s music really developed after attending the Adelaide Ring, we have since attended Rings in Paris, Hamburg and Munich. Unfortunately we have missed out on Chicago, Paris and Leipzig thanks to Covid, but do strive to attend any Wagner performances in Australia. We look forward to advance notice of Wagner Society events and hope to participate in gatherings when the pandemic restrictions ease.”

THE LEGEND OF LOHENGRIN

Lohengrin, **the knight of the swan**, is a hero of German versions of a legend widely known in variant forms from the European Middle Ages onward. The first German version of this old legend—which itself probably derives from a fairy tale of seven brothers who are persecuted by a wicked grandmother and then metamorphosed into swans — appeared in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* (c. 1210), a poem chiefly concerned with the theme of the Holy Grail. In this account the swan knight’s name was Loherangrîn, and he was the son of Parzival (Perceval), the Grail hero, and heir to Parzival’s title; he arrived in a swan-drawn boat from the castle of the Grail to aid Elsa of Brabant, married her, and in the end returned to the Grail castle. An anonymous Middle High German poem, *Lohengrin* (c. 1275–90), set the story in the historical context of the reign of the German king Henry I the Fowler (876?–936), and its author elaborated the realistic elements of the story at the expense of much romantic material. A contemporary poem known as the *Wartburgkrieg* presented the story of Lohengrin as an entry in a story-telling competition; it was the contribution of von Eschenbach, who recited it in the famous singers’ contest held at Wartburg (a castle overlooking the town of Eisenach) by the landgrave of Thuringia, Hermann I (c. 1156–1217). Other German medieval versions of the story include Konrad von Wurtzburg’s *Schwannritter* (“Swan Knight”) and an anonymous 15th-century epic called *Lorengel*. The latter was the chief source used by Wagner for his opera *Lohengrin* (first performed on Aug. 28, 1850, at Weimar, Germany). In a French version of the legend, the *Chevalier au cygne*, the knight of the swan (here called Helyas) married Beatrix of Bouillon, the story being arranged and elaborated to glorify the house of Bouillon. Godfrey of Bouillon, a leader of the First Crusade, was held to be the son of a mysterious swan knight. English versions of the legend, composed in the late 14th and early 16th centuries, were strongly influenced by this French account. Through its alignment with a historical period and its integration with the Wartburg story, the Lohengrin legend became part of German popular tradition. In particular, the legend came to be associated with the town of Cleves (modern Kleve, Ger.), the rulers of which took the swan as their crest; the swan tower of the castle, as well as a statue of the knight and his swan, perpetuate the legend’s memory there.

JANE MATHEWS AO SCHOLARSHIP

The Society joined with PACIFIC OPERA to establish a \$5,000 annual scholarship to help young potential Wagnerians. The first Scholarship has been awarded to **Ellen McNeil**.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I *Antwerp, c. 900s*. On the banks of the Scheldt, a Herald announces King Heinrich, who asks Count Telramund to explain why the Duchy of Brabant is torn by strife and disorder. Telramund accuses his ward, Elsa, of having murdered her brother, Gottfried, heir to Brabant’s Christian dynasty. (Gottfried was actually enchanted by the evil Ortrud, whom Telramund has wed.) When Elsa is called to defend herself, she relates a dream of a knight in shining armour who will save her. The herald calls for the defender, but only when Elsa prays does the knight appear, magically drawn in a boat by a swan. He betrothes himself to her on condition that she never ask his name or origin. Defeating Telramund in combat, the newcomer establishes the innocence of his bride.

ACT II Before dawn in the castle courtyard, Ortrud and the lamenting Telramund swear vengeance. When Elsa appears serenely in a window, Ortrud attempts to sow distrust in the girl’s mind, preying on her curiosity, but Elsa innocently offers the scheming Ortrud friendship. Inside, while the victorious knight is proclaimed guardian of Brabant, the banned Telramund furtively enlists four noblemen to side with him against his newfound rival. At the cathedral entrance, Ortrud and Telramund attempt to stop the wedding — she by suggesting that the unknown knight is in fact an impostor, he by accusing Elsa’s bridegroom of sorcery. Though troubled by doubt, Elsa reiterates her faith in the knight before they enter the church, accompanied by King Heinrich.

ACT III Alone in the bridal chamber, Elsa and her husband express their love until anxiety and uncertainty at last compel the bride to ask the groom who he is and whence he has come. Before he can reply, Telramund and his henchmen burst in. With a cry, Elsa hands the knight his sword, with which he kills Telramund. Ordering the nobles to bear the body to the king, he sadly tells Elsa he will meet her later to answer her questions. Escorting Elsa and the bier to the Scheldt, the knight tells the king he cannot now lead the army against the Hungarian invaders. He explains that his home is the temple of the Holy Grail at distant Monsalvat, to which he must return; Parsifal is his father, and Lohengrin is his name. He bids farewell and turns to his magic swan. Now Ortrud rushes in, jubilant over Elsa’s betrayal of the man who could have broken the spell that transformed her brother into a swan. But Lohengrin’s prayers bring forth Gottfried in place of his vanished swan, and after naming the boy ruler of Brabant, Lohengrin disappears, led by the dove of the Grail. Ortrud perishes, and Elsa, calling for her lost husband, falls lifeless to the ground.

Courtesy of Opera News

A PERFORMANCE BETWEEN WOOD AND THE WORLD: LUDWIG II OF BAVARIA'S QUEER SWANS

Sean F. Edgecomb. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 25 April 2018 Extract

In her 1964 essay “Notes on ‘Camp,’” Susan Sontag includes Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* (1875–6) in a list that illustrates “random examples” from “the canon of Camp.” Though the ballet has become an integral part of the classical repertory for professional companies from Moscow to New York to Sydney as well as the inspiration for numerous figure skaters, it has, as suggested by Sontag, been creative afflatus for gay underground performers for more than a century. But what are the origins of the swan gone queer? As this article demonstrates, I suggest that one way to trace both the swan’s queer genealogy and its continuity lies in the dramatic history and lived performance of the ill-fated Ludwig II

(hereafter “Ludwig”) of Bavaria (1845–86)—the Swan King. Tchaikovsky, after all, had been inspired by the dramatic story of the effete young king (and perhaps titillated by a shared closeted gay desire), who would become a prototype for the ballet’s tragic hero, Prince Siegfried. In fact, dance scholar Peter Stoneley suggests that “*Swan Lake* confirms the virtual impossibility, in Tchaikovsky’s [and Ludwig’s] era, of accommodating homosexuality within wider society.”

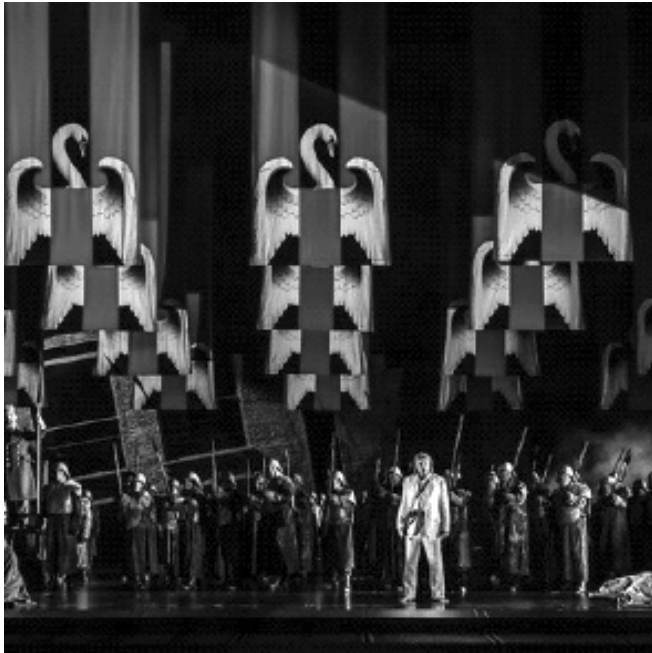
Ludwig’s desire was expressed through a lens of his same-sex fantasies and their inspired artistic interpretations, most notably taking form in the construction of his neo-Romanesque, fairy-tale castle Neuschwanstein. Ludwig’s queer positionality also arises from the theatrical way that he performed a highly aesthetic (though hardly effective) approach to monarchy with his swan-bedecked castle and its environs as a sort of meta stage-set. In this context, the swan may be read as an example of what Donna Haraway calls “a companion species,” or a personal animal symbol (real or mythical) that represents a variety of feelings that are otherwise difficult to express in the hegemonic context of a given time and place (like homosexuality in Roman Catholic Bavaria in the nineteenth century). Ludwig chose the swan (drawn from family heraldry but primarily envisioned in his own life through storybook-driven fantasy) as a means of alternative expression to that normally available to a man in his position and with his responsibilities, and also as a way to enact his forbidden desires.

In May of 1861 Ludwig first saw *Lohengrin*, with its swan-drawn boat, while on a royal visit to Vienna. Ludwig’s family



Arrival of Lohengrin. Painting in Neuschwanstein Salon by August von Henkel 1882/83

dynasty, the House of Wittelsbach, had used the swan as its symbol for centuries, a choice that took shape most dramatically in a primrose-coloured, fourteenth-century summer palace named Hohenschwangau (“place of the high swan”) in the Alps of southern Bavaria. The family laid claim that the spot had been the site of a medieval fortress of swan knights (an esoteric fraternity also known as the Order of Saint Gereon, founded in the twelfth century, that claimed secret connections to the Holy Grail); this was a place that completely shaped Ludwig’s life and his own legacy. Rebuilt by Ludwig’s father, Maximilian II, in the 1830s, the interior walls of the castle were decorated with neo-Gothic murals of Germanic heroes by the artist Moritz von Schwind, including romantic interpretations of the swan knight. These were completed more than a decade before Wagner composed his *Lohengrin*, so the young Ludwig was inundated with swan imagery throughout his childhood. Just up the steep mountainside Ludwig would later construct Schloss Neuschwanstein, on a spot where the foundations of an even older fortress still existed. (Although the cornerstone was laid in 1869, the castle was not completed at the time of Ludwig’s death in 1886.) There, high above the Bavarian valleys, he could isolate himself and dress as a romanticized version of legendary medieval knights and kings (probably closer in aesthetic to period theatre costumes than to garments that were historically accurate). To this end, the original designs for the building were drafted, unusually, by noted opera set designer Christian Jank, rather than by an architect—although architect Georg von Dollmann was given the titanic task of creating feasible plans from Jank’s artistic vision and Ludwig’s utter fantasies.



ROH 2020

Ludwig rationalized the construction of the castle as a kind of queer utopia, created in an attempt to queer both time and place, where a fantastical queer transformation of himself into Lohengrin could take place. In November of 1865, for example, Ludwig staged a grand water pageant on the Alpsee, the very lake over which Neuschwanstein would later tower and cast its watery reflection. By transforming the landscape into a theatrical site with his close friend Prince Paul von Thurn und Taxis playing Lohengrin, this performance perfectly blurred the boundaries between the real and the imagined and turned this location into an ambivalent space. The heightened theatricality of the watery journey combined with the breathtaking landscape must have made it feel like the real Lohengrin had been resurrected, not as a character from the opera, but as a hero from the mythical past who could become a saviour for Ludwig's future.

Long before Tchaikovsky or Ludwig, the swan had been a symbol of transformation and the basis for myths across pagan Europe, from Leda's anthropomorphism in Greece and Rome to the curse of the Children of Lir in Ireland. With the rise of romanticism in the nineteenth century, swan-oriented stories inspired decorative arts and theatrical performances. Napoléon's wife, the Empress Josephine, for example, was particularly fond of the swan as a decorative symbol and covered her French Empire chateau at Malmaison with images of the long-necked bird as a motif. It was in the Teutonic operas of Richard Wagner, however, that the swan was resurrected as a national symbol for the German lands to the east.

While Ludwig saw the connection to the medieval world of crusading knights as a romantic link to the past that would promote beauty through art (as well as provide the framework to play out his monarchical role fantastically), farther north around 1848 the Prussian Court resurrected the "Teutonic Order," a militaristic interpretation based on "values of willpower, loyalty and honesty, and perseverance," that

set up the German knight as a symbol of imperialism and racial purity. The swan (and other heraldic beasts), symbolic of chivalry and fraternity, would factor into new ideas and aesthetics for nationalism, even before the foundation of the German Empire in 1871. This, of course, proved prophetic for the continued manipulation of German national symbols (including Wagner's operas and Bavarian aesthetics) by the propaganda machine of the Third Reich sixty-two years later.

Wagner's *Lohengrin* (1850), which extends the story of von Eschenbach's swan knight, became the obsession of Ludwig because it provided a histrionic dreamscape with which to diffuse the harsh light of his own reality and responsibilities. Ludwig had reportedly been obsessed with Lohengrin since the age of twelve (when his nursemaid described a performance in detail to the young crown prince), and thereafter he had visions of becoming a swan king—a kind of amplified version of the swan knight for his era. This dramatic act was intended to mimic preceding absolute monarchs, such as Louis XIV of France, who had manifested their own sovereignty through the power of symbol. This pursuit, however, would prove to be purely performative, as Ludwig lost all autocratic power (which was, in any case, never on a par with the ancien régime at the court of Versailles) with the creation of the German Empire in 1870. He was a king with no kingdom but unwilling to give up his crown.

LETTER FROM PRINCE PAUL TO LUDWIG 5 MAY 1866



"Dear and Beloved Ludwig! I am just finishing my diary with the thought of the beautiful hours which we spent together that evening a week ago which made me the happiest man on earth. Oh, Ludwig, Ludwig, I am devoted to you! I couldn't stand the people around me; I sat still and, in my thoughts I was still with you. How my heart beat when, as I passed the Residenz, I saw a light in your window."

Prince Paul

25 AUGUST 1865. THE FEAST OF LOHENGRIN ON THE ALPSEE

Told by Joseph Ludwig Craemer

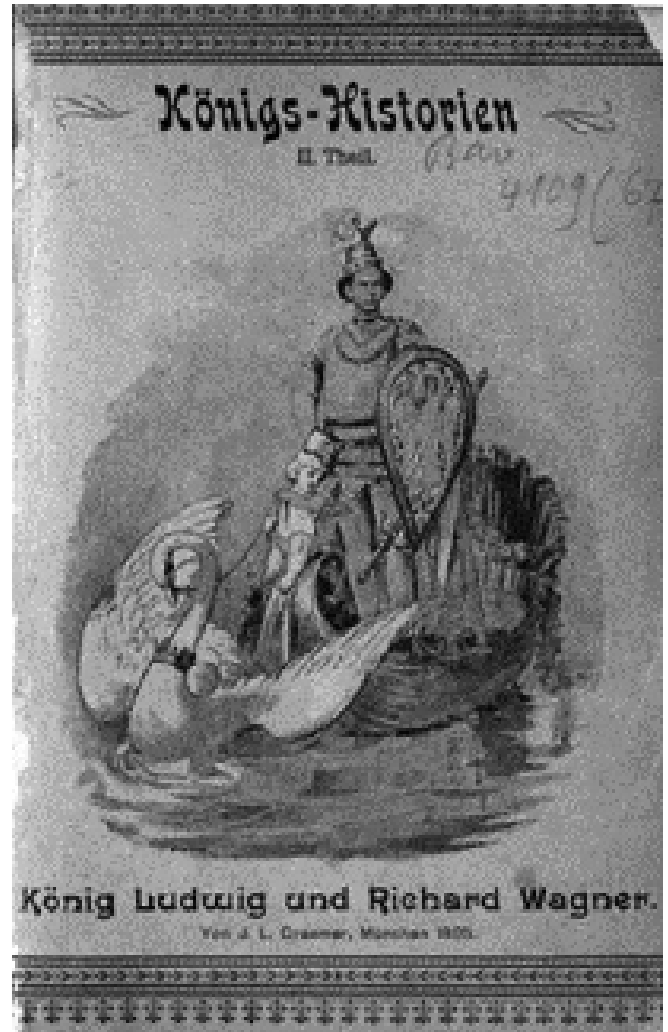
In the second part of his *Königs-Historien*, entitled *König Ludwig II. und Richard Wagner*, Joseph Ludwig Craemer tells the story of the evening of August 25, 1865, in Hohenschwangau. To celebrate his 20th birthday, the king had wished the nautical staging of the arrival of Lohengrin and his farewell to the swan. Richard Wagner, Hans von Bülow and the Prince Paul von Thurn und Taxis (King Ludwig's aide-de-camp and close friend) had joined forces for the realization of this project.

On the Alpsee, the largest of the lakes near Hohenschwangau, the king and Richard Wagner had planned the organization of a performance of *Lohengrin*. The day of the performance had been set for August 25, the king's birthday, and musical arrangements had been made in Munich by the Kapellmeister von Bülow for this purpose. Musical rehearsals were entrusted to the music master Siebenkäs of the 1st Infantry Regiment. The king asked the director of the court theatre to have his technician Benkmaier make a floating swan, whose head and wings should be able to move thanks to an internal mechanism, and in which there was room for a singer. as well as for a maneuver which can operate the mechanism.

The role of Lohengrin was entrusted to Prince Paul. It was Wagner himself who took charge of having the prince rehearse in Hohenschwangau. The king had ordered Lohengrin armour, which had to correspond in great detail to the results of scientific research. Of course, these preparations took a long time and required many repetitions. It should be added that the spectacle was to represent the arrival of Lohengrin on the swan and that it had to take place at night, the lake and the mountains being lit by Bengal lights, which required the assistance of a large staff responsible for lighting effects.

Apart from the king, all these projects were entrusted to the good care of Wagner, Bülow and Benkmaier. The latter said he needed more time than expected to carry out the pyrotechnics of the rockets, illuminations and other lighting effects, which displeased the king. Bülow organized a dress rehearsal in the presence of Wagner from August 11, 14 days before the night party, with which the composer was completely satisfied. This result was telegraphed to the king, after which he gave his agreement for the organization of the festival of Lohengrin on the Alpsee, agreement also transmitted by telegram.

The swan, which had been carefully tested, was installed with all its "accessories" in the extension of the Hotel Alpenrose. It was connected by wire to a wheel which was to lead it to the place where the king and Richard Wagner were waiting for the singer. The orchestra was placed at an "invisible" place between the spruces that grew above the Schwansee just below the castle. Benkmaier had made his sons converge at the top of the royal road where a temporary workshop



was installed. It was from there that he had to organize all his lighting system, which worked very well. But it was not without an accident. Rockets exploded and fell on the band, injuring several players in the head, arms and shoulders, and damaging their clothes. But the king was not made aware of the accident.

When the time came for the performance to begin, Lohengrin could be seen on his swan, and as he approached, the music began and the princely singer made his voice heard. Arrived at the shore, he disembarked, bade farewell to his swan and sang his part in front of his royal auditor. The king then hugged the singing prince all shimmering in his silver armour. He held out his hands to the composer, saying: "Thank you, Master, a thousand thanks for this precious gift. This is exactly how I imagined the arrival of Lohengrin. Today I am completely satisfied. that I have heard and seen has delighted my heart and my senses like never before!" Turning to the actor who played Lohengrin, the king said to him: "Dear Paul, you have done something divine, and the memory of that night will be etched in our memories!" Then the King, Richard Wagner

and Prince Taxis walked slowly to Hohenschwangau Castle, to the sounds of opera music.

The mountains and the lake were beautifully illuminated. The king stopped and said: "What is this music, it is no longer the music of Lohengrin, it looks like a victorious tournament march?" A valet was immediately sent to the marching band in the thicket. As the only response from Hans von Bülow, he received a small envelope addressed to the king in which was the score of the march printed in gold letters. The king liked these kinds of little surprises. So, he wanted to express his special thanks to the great musician Bülow and added a precious stone, to which the composer was all the more surprised as it was of great value.

The road which goes from the lake to the castle is in reality traversed in a very short time; but it took them nearly half an hour to find themselves in the small garden of the chateau. The music played for a long time, and finally "the farewell to the swan" came to its conclusion, which was accompanied in a grand manner by the last part of the fireworks display. Arrived in the garden of the castle, Prince Taxis took leave of the king and his friends, also shaking hands with the master, but did not leave him without Wagner again congratulating him on his grandiose interpretation of Lohengrin. Prince Lohengrin immediately stripped off his armour and cloak, then resumed his service as the king's aide-de-camp.

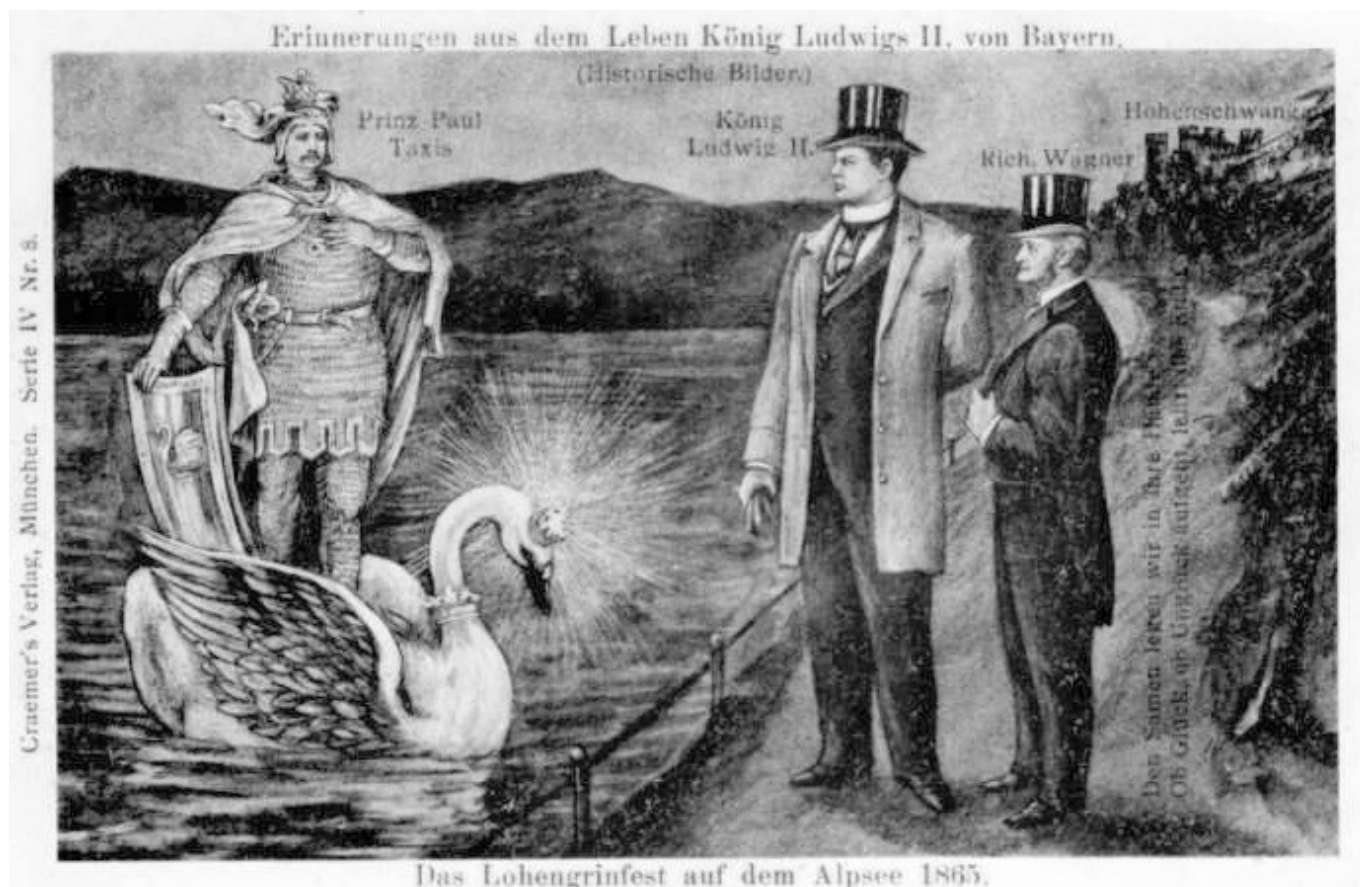
Meanwhile, the small circle of people who had made the evening a success had gathered at the Alpenrose restaurant, and they were soon joined by Taxis, to whom Bülow had also given a copy of his latest composition as a present.

Taxis had also inquired about the military musicians injured by the Bengal fires and the body surgeon, Dr. Schleich von Löwenfeld, informed him that the fireworks which had been lit had caused many more burns than initially thought so. 16 men suffered from more or less serious burns but were able to receive the necessary medical treatment.

The king stayed with Richard Wagner for a long time in the castle garden, enjoying the view offered by the beautiful moonlight. It was a charming view of the Alpsee from the vantage point from which Lohengrin's swan had approached the king. It was already past midnight: the king and the artist were still standing in front of the Alhambra fountain in the small garden of the castle. What the two friends have said to each other will probably remain an eternal secret; but insiders believe the conversation was certainly about Wagner's art and the musician's future.

The king had already expressed the wish that a real swan would tow Lohengrin, but Wagner did not agree. And yet twelve years later Ludwig did carry out this project on the small artificial lake in his cave at Linderhof. He had a living swan harnessed to his little golden gondola. The king took his place in the gondola, but of course without thinking of being towed, the strength of the swan would have been insufficient to move the heavy basket weighed down by the king's weight.

Extract from "Die Bayerischen Königsschlösser in Wort und Bild" by Josef Ludwig Craemer (published in 1898) Text translated and arranged by Luc Roger. <http://munichandco.blogspot.com/search?q=lohengrin>



NEUSCHWANSTEIN ORIGINS?

Does Ludwig's magnificent castle in the sky owe its origins to his childhood Christmas memories? One of my favourite Ludwig stories is from the Christmas of 1852, when the 7 year old who would later become mad King Ludwig II received as a fateful present from his grandfather, mad King Ludwig I.

A set of building blocks.

This fired the childish imagination of young Luddi and may have unlocked something deep within. "He loves to build," wrote the impressed grandfather

to his son, the child's father Otto: "I witnessed him construct buildings that were exquisite, astonishing, and realised with excellent taste." "I recognise a real affinity between this future King Ludwig II and myself," added the wistful grandad Ludwig I, the dreamy fantasist recently deposed after depleting the kingdom's coffers on a building spree and alienating his government.

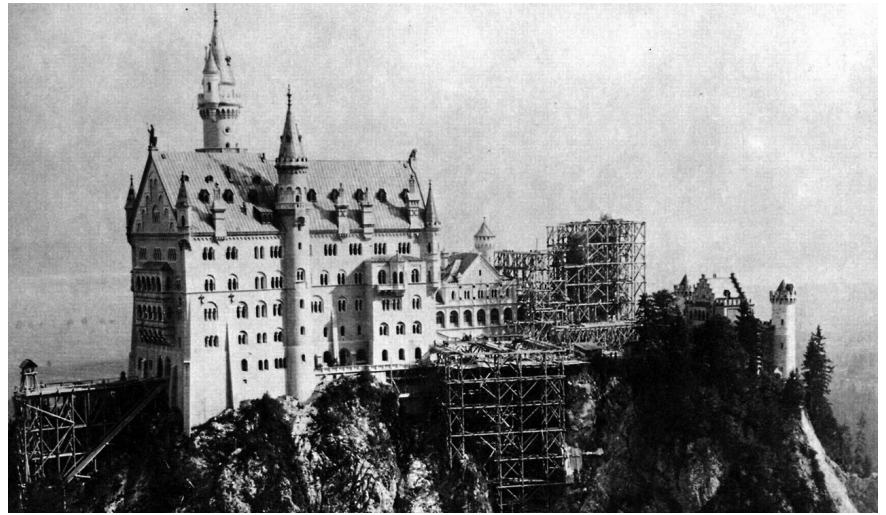
Well, indeed.

Could this have been the most consequential childhood present since the young Nero was given a scale model of Rome and a box of matches to play with? Look at the image above of the royal cherub posing happily with his Christmas toys. Look in particular to his left, where the result of his efforts with grandad's building blocks can be seen, towering majestically to the heavens in the nursery room. Behold the fantasia in white; behold the tapering spires; behold the castle made by and for a fairy-tale king.

Does it not look ... familiar?



Ludwig aged 4 in 1850



Neuschwanstein under construction

SWAN TALE

Brad Cooper remembers an incident from his very first ever Opera Australia Chorus engagement.

"During Opera Australia's 2001 production of *Lohengrin* in Sydney our Hero, Glenn Winslade, arrived in a cloud of rear lit 'haze' which had been building up behind a screen at the back of the stage all during the Act. Haze, while wonderful for lighting, is never pleasant for a singer as it can have a drying and irritating effect on the throat. Glenn had a cold one evening mid run and so asked stage management for the haze to be kept to a minimum that performance. The haze operators were obviously confused by this request (or perhaps felt mischievous) and upon Lohengrin's entrance, as the screen at the back of the stage rose to reveal him, out billowed the most enormous build-up of haze we'd ever seen, with poor Glenn barely visible at the centre of it! Glenn, as ever, sang gorgeously all act but upon the curtain falling was heard to exclaim in understandable frustration: "There's NO Act 2!" as he strode off stage. Consummate professional that he is Glenn did return to finish off the evening in glorious voice, but we mercifully never again suffered a single puff of haze during that nor any subsequent performance."

SWANS AND GEESE: WAGNER'S WILDFOWL IN HIS OPERA *PARSIFAL*

". modern research has succeeded in proving that pure, uncontaminated Christianity is no more and no less than a branch of the venerable Buddhist religion which, following Alexander's Indian campaign, found its way to, among other places, the shores of the Mediterranean. In early Christianity we can still see traces of a total denial of the will to live, and a longing for the end of the world, i.e., the cessation of all life."

[Richard Wagner to Franz Liszt on 7 June 1855, Liszt-Briefe II, 73-80, tr. Spencer and Millington]

<https://www.monsalvat.no/wagners-wildfowl.htm>

NIETZSCHE MEETS WAGNER: WHO WAS THE MASTER AND WHO THE SERVANT?

by Dr Terence Watson

I was amused by the cartoon included in Issue 162 of the *Wagner Quarterly* of Wagner the Dragon Slayer—an image I'm sure Wagner entertained of himself. I hadn't seen this cartoon before, so I was intrigued to study it more closely.

Siegfried=Wagner hebt den "Schatz" der Nibelungen
Siegfried=Wagner mounts the Treasure of the Nibelungen



Da lieg du **auch** - dunkler Wurm
Den gleißenden Hort hebe ich hurtig.
There you lie **too** - dark worm
I will quickly raise the gleaming hoard.

I'm sure that the person on his knees is Nietzsche—perhaps intended to suggest Mime in thrall to Wagner-Siegfried. Nietzsche it is because of the tell-tale moustache and the glasses for his eyes, which gave him so much trouble over his life. For a long time, and especially around the time of the premiere of *The Ring Cycle*, Nietzsche was seen as a prime defender of the Wagnerian cause—hence his bound wrists: Nietzsche in thrall to the Master—hence the “auch” in the caption. The cartoonist was certainly reflecting much public opinion about the relationship between Wagner and Nietzsche at the time. More importantly, around this time Nietzsche was pulling away from Wagner to establish himself as an independent and original thinker who not only soon left Wagner behind intellectually and psychologically, but was also able to explain his reservations about Wagner, which became progressively more acute and troubling for the philosopher who loved Wagner's music!!

The standard view is that Nietzsche's interest in Wagner dated from the 1860s when he and his two sixteen year old friends formed their own arts club, “Germania.”¹ The friends discussed Wagner's ideas and Nietzsche played the piano arrangement of *Tristan und Isolde*. One can only imagine the impact that the music and subject matter of

Tristan und Isolde had on the group of strict Lutheran, adolescent boys, and its contemporary listeners, even before most had a chance to see a production. With this intense preparation, it is not surprising that Nietzsche fell for the music and by extension its creator before he met the man.

After he graduated from the prestigious *Schulpforta Gymnasium* near his hometown of Naumberg, he moved to Leipzig. While attending lectures in philology at the University, Nietzsche was able to hear, in late 1868: “...the opening concert of the Euterpe Society and refreshed my soul by listening to the Vorspiel of *Tristan und Isolde* and that of the *Meistersinger*. For the life of me I can not preserve an attitude of cool criticism in listening to this music; every nerve and every fibre is set in motion, and it has been a long time since I have experienced a feeling of such sustained enjoyment as in listening to the last-named overture.”²

On 9 November 1868, Nietzsche wrote to his friend Erwin Rohde about another momentous event:

....when I got home I found a note stuck in my door, saying: ‘If you wish to meet Richard Wagner, come to the Cafe Theatre at a quarter to four. [A university friend, Ernst] Windisch.’ Naturally, I rushed off to the appointed place, where I found our good friend and learned further details. It seems that Wagner was in Leipzig under the strictest incognito and was stopping with his relatives; the press had not been allowed to get wind of the matter, and the Brockhaus servants were silent as graves in livery.

The histrionics were Wagner's; he had been pardoned by the King of Saxony in 1862, but had been requested by King Ludwig II of Bavaria to leave Munich in 1865 because of his interference in the governance of the kingdom and his lies to the King about his affair with Cosima von Bülow. If interested at all, the Leipzig press would have pressed him on his political and amorous activities, rather than his compositional work or his aesthetic views.

Nietzsche's own account of his first meeting with Wagner in Leipzig in November 1868 is funny and self-deprecating. He missed meeting Wagner on one invitation to the house of Hermann Brockhaus, married to Wagner's sister Ottilie, and professor of Sanskrit and oriental studies at Leipzig University. Wagner had gone for a walk, so he was invited to return a few days later:

During the time that intervened, I seemed to be living in a dream, and you must admit that the events leading up to this meeting, together with the well-known inaccessibility of this unique personality, savored strongly of the romantic. Under the impression that the soirée was to be a large affair, I resolved to don gala attire, and was overjoyed at the thought that my tailor had already promised to have my new suit of evening clothes ready by Sunday [EF-N 6].

The suit was delivered late on Sunday afternoon, but immediate payment was demanded. Nietzsche could not pay, so the suit was taken back to the tailor, leaving Nietzsche to record: “End of the 2d Act: shirt-clad, I sit upon the sofa, scrutinizing an old black coat and trying to decide whether or not it is good enough for Richard” [EF-N 6]. Perhaps appropriately for Nietzsche's meeting with the man he later calls the “old magician” and the “Minator”, their meeting was somewhat Gothic: the “weather was abominable, rain alternating with snow” then “the rain descending in torrents,” but undeterred, Nietzsche writes, “I rush forth wildly into the dark and stormy night...” [EF-N 6]. Finally, with Windisch, he meets Wagner: “We arrive at the hospitable Brockhaus home: no one there but the immediate family, Richard, and we two. Introduced to Richard and say a few deferential words. He inquires very minutely how I came to be so familiar with his works...”³

Despite the Gothic atmosphere, for Nietzsche the meeting “was enjoyment of so unique a character that I have not yet been able to get

back into the grooves of everyday life...before and after dinner Wagner played all the important episodes from the 'Meistersinger,' imitating the different voices. He is an astoundingly vivacious and high-spirited man, speaks very rapidly, is extremely witty, and is very animated when in the company of intimate friends" [EF-N 8]. To the young philologist, who was about to become a major philosopher, their primary topic of discussion was both exciting and a pointer to his future:

During the course of the evening we had a long conversation about Schopenhauer, and you can imagine my unbounded joy at hearing him say, with indescribable enthusiasm, how much he owed to Schopenhauer and to hear him called the only philosopher who had recognized the real nature of music... As we were leaving, he pressed my hand and cordially invited me to come and see him so that we might continue our conversation upon music and philosophy.⁴

In his 1868 *Retrospect on My Two Years at Leipzig*, Nietzsche describes a powerful response to entering Schopenhauer's world that is very similar to Wagner's:

At home I threw myself into the corner of the sofa with the treasure I had found and began to let that energetic, gloomy genius take effect on me. Here every line screamed renunciation, denial, resignation, here I saw a mirror in which I caught sight of the world, life and my own heart and soul in terrible grandeur. Here I saw the whole disinterested solar eye of art, here I saw sickness and health, exile and refuge, hell and heaven. The need for self-knowledge, indeed for self-gnawing seized me violently; for me evidence of that revulsion is still the restless, melancholy pages of my diary from that time with their useless self-accusations and their desperate gazing upward for sanctification and transformation of the entire core of humanity. While I dragged all my qualities and endeavors before the forum of a gloomy self-contempt, I was bitter, unjust and unrestrained in the hatred I directed against myself.⁵

At the time of his conversion, though some fourteen years earlier, in October 1854, Wagner was in a comparable, though more justified, state of despair because of his exile from his homeland and apparently futile and profitless future, but his reaction to Schopenhauer's philosophy was decidedly more positive and critical:

...I was instantly captivated by the great clarity and manly precision with which the most abstruse metaphysical problems were treated.... [...] ...whereas his treatment of aesthetics pleased me immensely, particularly his surprising and significant conception of music, I was alarmed...by the moral principles with which he caps the work, for here the annihilation of the will and complete self-abnegation are represented as the only true means of redemption from the constricting bonds of individuality in its dealings with the world [Mein Leben 509].

Nietzsche's desperate psychological state, perhaps a trifle melodramatised, contrasts with Wagner's self-confident belief that he had easily grasped the core of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Nietzsche's response parallels the reaction of many artists and members of the public in the second half of the 19th and early decades of the 20th centuries to Schopenhauer's beautiful writing style and his simple analysis of the nature of the universe and our necessary life of woes and pain. Other philosophers were less convinced that Schopenhauer's basic premise—that universe is composed of a Will to Exist. A little later, Wagner promised Mathilde Wesendonck that he would write to her with his "corrections" of Schopenhauer's ideas: he never did, though it is possible to construct a possible account of his revisions from other writings—a story for another day.

Yet, the intensity with which both men began subscribing to Schopenhauer's views, even though both men also soon began to question and revise both their estimation of his views and many of his doctrines, suggests similar conversion experiences, which might not be the most rational or reliable basis on which to conduct one's life.

For about ten years from 1868 a very special friendship developed between the then naïve twenty-four year old philologist and the worldly-wise fifty-five year old music-dramatist. Nietzsche went on to become one of Europe's most significant and controversial philosophers, while Wagner continued his controversial career by completing *The Ring Cycle* and *Parsifal* and many more polemical

essays. Wagner's friendship with Nietzsche was one of the most complex and significant interactions in Western cultural history; not as profound as that between Socrates and Plato, but worthy of mention in the same sentence.

It is clear that, when he met Wagner, the young Nietzsche, the son of a Lutheran preacher who died when he was five years old, was a shy, sexually ambivalent, highly intelligent young man, musically sensitive and gifted, who was about to be elevated to a full professorship at the University of Basle, without a doctorate. In a sense Nietzsche fell in love with Wagner and the world he seemed to represent: Plato had found his Socrates. Wagner filled a large emotional, intellectual and psychological void in Nietzsche's life and became the "revered Master," as he was addressed in almost all of Nietzsche's letters. Nietzsche had found a father figure and Wagner a receptive and worshipful adult son to complement his new child Siegfried.

Nietzsche's first letters to Wagner are a mixture of effusive admiration and naïve commitment to Wagner's cause. In May 1869, for example, Nietzsche wrote on the occasion of Wagner's birthday: "...the highest and most inspiring moments of my life are closely associated with your name...."

...if it be the fate of genius to belong to the 'select few' for the time being at least—these 'few' have every reason to feel highly honored by virtue of the fact that it has been vouchsafed to them to see the light and bask in its warmth, while the larger public stands shivering in the cold outside.

I make bold to count myself among these 'select few,' since realizing how incapable the world at large is of comprehending your personality, or of feeling the deeply ethical current by which your life, your writings, and your music are permeated—in short, of sensing an atmosphere of that serious and more spiritual outlook upon life of which we poor Germans have been robbed overnight, as it were, by every conceivable sort of political misery, philosophical nonsense, and aggressive Judaism.

It is to you and Schopenhauer that I owe my ability of holding fast to the vital seriousness of the Germanic race and to the deepened contemplation of our enigmatical and perplexing existence [EF-N 13].

One can imagine how pleased Wagner was to read Nietzsche's undoubtedly sincere letter; although the disparaging of Judaism from Nietzsche is both surprising, given his later defence of the people, and illuminating, given that Wagner had reissued *Das Judentum in der Musik* early in 1869. It seems that Nietzsche was finding common ground about Jewish people, an accommodation he later regretted.

Nevertheless, the letter hits all the main preoccupations and prejudices of the man and artist. In his response to this letter from his new "Most valued friend", Wagner ups the ante and appropriates Goethe to his own cause: "Accept my most heartfelt thanks—even though somewhat belated—for your beautiful and significant letter." "Now show yourself as you really are! As yet, my experiences with my German countrymen have not been altogether pleasurable. Therefore come and rescue my faith in that which I together with Goethe and a few others—call German liberty" [EF-N 13-14].

It is clear from Wagner's letters that Nietzsche was a god-send to the artist who had relatively few friends with the intelligence and depth of knowledge as Nietzsche possessed about many of his own favourite subjects. In early 1870, Wagner confided his gratitude to Nietzsche: "It is a wonderful comfort to be able to exchange letters of this kind! I have no one with whom I can discuss things so seriously as with you—the *only one* [Cosima] excepted. God knows what I should do without you two!" [EF-N 38-39]. While it is not surprising that the precocious, but shy, young professor of philology had only a few close friends with whom he could discuss the deeper points of Schopenhauerian philosophy and the transcendental nature of music, it is more intriguing that Wagner felt he had no real intellectual confidants with whom he could discuss such topics. After a few months and a relatively few visits to Triebchen, Nietzsche was inducted in to the inner sanctum of the Wagner's private life, although for many months the naïve professor was apparently unaware of his hosts' socially delicate relationship.

In a letter of 4 June for Wagner's birthday of 1870, Nietzsche puns on the final section of Goethe's *Faust*, addressing the "revered Master" as Pater Seraphice, "my mystagogue in the esoteric doctrines of life and art" and signs himself "One of the Blissful Youths." Wagner's response lies somewhere between self-interested effusiveness and sincerity as he also used the letter to send Nietzsche on another errand to the publishers of his autobiography: "You will already have learned from a dear hand [Cosima's], how welcome the 'Blissful Youth' was to 'Pater Seraphice'.... You will also have heard of the blissful hours, which will live in my memory so long as I am capable of emotion" [EF-N 51].

Wagner accepted Nietzsche's admiration and commitment as his due, yet the epistolary relationship gives us a deep insight into the nature of Wagner's charismatic appeal to many of his contemporaries. Nietzsche had also experienced firsthand at least one of Wagner's declamations of *Meistersinger*, with piano accompaniment, and been overwhelmed by the intensity of Wagner's performance and by the quality of the art work. Yet it took Nietzsche some time to realise the full extent of Wagner's demands of his friends. Wagner attempted to inveigle the novice professor at Basle into becoming the young Siegfried's home tutor; an appointment Nietzsche, in Wagner's view, inexplicably declined.

Nietzsche was not entirely unprepared for a mixed reception to the publication in December 1871 of *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (*The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*) that contained a large section on the relationship of Wagner's views on art to those of the ancient Greeks, whom all cultured Germans revered at this time. However, one of Nietzsche's first insights into the serious costs of aligning himself with Wagner's cause occurred during the brouhaha that followed the book's publication. The most famous response, perhaps, was the 1872 pamphlet, with its derisive pun on Wagner's *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (*The Art-Work of the Future*), *Zukunftphilologie* (*Philology of the Future*) by Dr Ulrich von Williamowitz-Möllendorff (later a professor of philology at Berlin University), and a sequel in February 1873 *Zukunftphilologie II*. These articles, however, were pre-empted by a public "Circular Letter" from Wagner to Nietzsche of 12 June 1872 that was supposed to rout the pedantic philologists, but instead prompted more covert activity to have Nietzsche removed from his university chair. The attempt by Rohde to defend Nietzsche against his enemies, *Pseudo-Philology Circular Letter of a Philologist to Richard Wagner* of October 1872, earned Nietzsche's gratitude, but did little to dissipate the critical attacks on Nietzsche.

Nietzsche was now in a similar position to that of Wagner at this time, that is, of having to identify his friends, acknowledge that he now had powerful enemies, and to work out how to deal with them. For better or worse, Nietzsche had Wagner on his side in this culture war against a common enemy, the critical and academic establishments, the politically and socially conservative; that is, Wagner's Philistines: "What is to be done with this disreputable old world," Wagner dispiritedly asked Nietzsche shortly after the flurry of essays [EF-N 142].

As with many close and intense friendships, a cooling ensued in the two men's relationship, partly because of Wagner's pre-emptory demands on his friend's time, but more interestingly because Nietzsche was beginning to feel constrained by the particular qualities of Wagner's genius. Nietzsche lamented to one of his few close friends Baron von Gersdorff in April 1873: "God only knows how often I unconsciously offend the master; each time this is a fresh surprise to me, I cannot get to the bottom of the matter" [EF-N 162]. He then confided to his friend the threat to his sanity that this uncertainty and ambivalence constituted:

Do tell me what you think of this repeated giving of offense. I cannot imagine how anyone could be more loyal to Wagner in all fundamental matters than I am; if I were able to think of any way of showing this loyalty more plainly, I should certainly do so. But it is absolutely imperative for me to preserve my personal freedom in unimportant secondary matters [such as his own career], and a certain avoidance of a too frequent personal intercourse is for me almost a 'sanitary' necessity. I only do this, however, in order to be better able to preserve my loyalty in the truest and highest sense [EF-N 163].

Nietzsche devoted precious time and energy to Wagner's cause in late 1873, by writing an *Appeal to the German Nation* in a high-minded

admonitory tone not well calculated to win the hearts of the antagonists of Wagner's cause and German people in general:

It is you who have given rise to these fears [of the failure of the Bayreuth project]; you do not wish to know what is going on, and out of sheer ignorance are about to prevent a great deed from being accomplished. Such ignorance is no longer justifiable; in fact, it seems inconceivable that any one could still be found who knows nothing of the splendid, courageous and indomitable struggle in which Richard Wagner has been engaged for decades....

We regard it as our solemn duty to remind you of our duty as Germans at a time when we are called to rally to the support of the great *Art-Work* of a German genius [EF-N 190 & 194].

Predictably, Wagner and Cosima approved of Nietzsche's text, but his friend Rohde wisely saw the inflammatory potential of the letter's tone and that it preached to the converted, rather than converting the sceptical or uninterested, and dissuaded Nietzsche from publishing it. Regardless of the commitment of Nietzsche and his friends to the cause, the rest of Germany was largely indifferent, the Bayreuth project was in danger of foundering without a large investment of money, and Ludwig II was keeping aloof. After the effort of writing the *Appeal* and the disappointment at the lack of a response from the undutiful Germans, as well as what he sensed was a change in Wagner's behaviour to a more autocratic, political pattern in response to the problems with the Bayreuth project, Nietzsche took the opportunity to reflect deeply on the nature of the project and confide his changing perspective to Rohde in early 1874:

I have been in a desperate frame of mind since the beginning of the new year from which I was finally able to free myself in a truly remarkable manner. I set to work to investigate the reasons for the failure of the [Bayreuth] undertaking; this I did in a most cold-blooded manner, and in doing so, learned a great deal and arrived at a better understanding of Wagner than I ever had before [EF-N 198].

Some of this new understanding Nietzsche confided to his notebooks and they show a sophisticated and wide-ranging analysis of Wagner and Wagnerism at a time when the "cause" was still consolidating itself:

Wagner cannot persuade the Germans to take the theatre seriously. They remain cold and unresponsive—he becomes impassioned as if the whole salvation of Germany depended on this one thing. Now all at once, when the Germans believe that they are occupied with graver matters, they regard anyone who devotes himself so seriously to art as a cheerful fanatic [EF-N 201].

In a clear-sighted account of Wagner's technique in his polemical essays, from one who trained in rhetorical, literary and philosophical analysis, Nietzsche wrote: "Every sort of exaggeration is polemically arrayed against the forces hostile to art. Religion and philosophical elements are introduced, aspirations for the idyllic—in short, everything, everything" [EF-N 203]. After this introspective analysis of the intrinsic nature of the phenomenon of Wagner, and the news that Ludwig II had again come to Wagner's rescue with a loan of 100,000 thalers, Nietzsche increasingly distanced himself from Wagner. Nietzsche was too intellectually honest and protective of both his integrity and his sanity to remain an unquestioningly loyal acolyte. Nietzsche identified 1873, the year of the Wagner's first full year of residence in Bayreuth, as the beginning of the parting of their ways and began preparing himself for the inevitable separation.

Wagner sensed this slow detachment and became increasingly hostile until all connections were severed after Nietzsche in 1876 published *Wagner in Bayreuth*, collected in 1893 into *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (*Untimely/Unfashionable Meditations*). His essay contains a qualified celebration, and an ambiguous analysis of what he saw as Wagner's genius and artistic achievement.

When the ruling idea of his life gained ascendancy over his mind—the idea that drama is, of all arts, the one that can exercise the greatest amount of influence over the world—it aroused the most active emotions in his whole being. It gave him no very clear or luminous decision, at first, as to what was to be done and desired in the future; for the idea then appeared merely as a form of temptation—that is to say, as the expression of his gloomy, selfish,

and insatiable will, eager for power and glory. Influence—the greatest amount of influence—how? over whom?—these were hence-forward the questions and problems which did not cease to engage his head and his heart. He wished to conquer and triumph as no other artist had ever done before, and, if possible, to reach that height of tyrannical omnipotence at one stroke for which all his instincts secretly craved. With a jealous and cautious eye, he took stock of everything successful, and examined with special care all that upon which this influence might be brought to bear. With the magic sight of the dramatist, which scans souls as easily as the most familiar book, he scrutinised the nature of the spectator and the listener, and although he was often perturbed by the discoveries he made, he very quickly found means wherewith he could enthral them.⁶

As with his related essays on *David Strauss, the Confessor and Writer* and *Schopenhauer as Educator*, the nominal subject of the essay is a springboard for Nietzsche to explore not only the person and his works and ideas, but also his own developing ideas about, for instance, the purpose of art, philosophy, and education, human existence, the inadequacies and meanness of contemporaneous life, and the best life for human beings. In response, Wagner ostracised him from the group of friends, and calumniated his character and personality by maliciously and inaccurately informing Nietzsche's doctor, in a letter that was published in the press in 1881, that his patient's eye and other problems resulted from excessive masturbation.

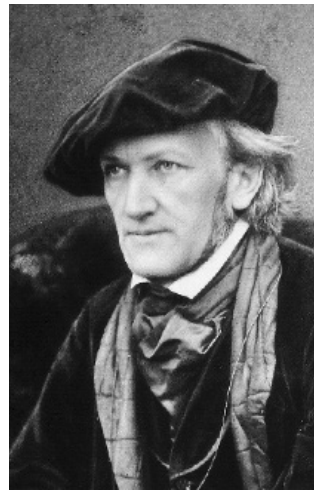
The 1879 date of the cartoon, ironically published in Leipzig, puts it in the middle of Nietzsche's extraction from the bondage he was increasingly feeling Wagner had imposed on him. It took Nietzsche a long time to exorcise Wagner's ghost from his mind. He achieved this in part through his essay *Wagner in Bayreuth*, but more strongly in his 1888 *The Case of Wagner* in which he contrasts the "healthy" music of Bizet's *Carmen* with Wagner's music, "brutal, artificial and 'unsophisticated.'" ⁷ One of his most famous denunciations asserts Wagner deceives:

Oh, this old magician! what tricks has he not played upon us! The first thing his art places in our hands is a magnifying glass: we look through it, and we no longer trust our own eyes.—Everything grows bigger; even Wagner grows bigger.... What a clever rattlesnake. Through-out his life he rattled "resignation," "loyalty," and "purity" about our ears, and he retired from the corrupt world with a song of praise to chastity—And we believed it all... [Nietzsche 1911 5].

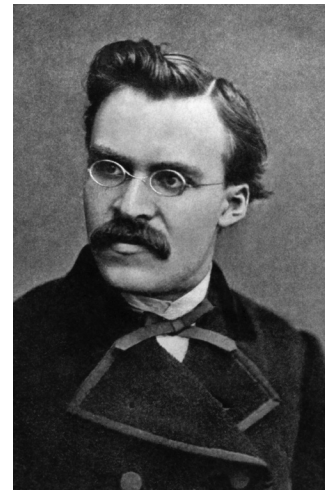
In his 1888 essay *Nietzsche contra Wagner: Aktenstücke eines Psychologen* (*Nietzsche contra Wagner; Out of the Archives of a Psychologist*, also published in Leipzig, but posthumously in 1889). This essay is a compilation of Nietzsche's thoughts about Wagner expressed in other works, but, in his Preface, he asserts unequivocally: "we are antipodes" [Nietzsche 1911 56]. His views are very funny, savage, sad, and perceptive. He pulls no punches in (psycho-) analysing his onetime hero—perhaps a riposte to Wagner's "medical" diagnosis of Nietzsche's "problems. Nietzsche asserts: "...next to the Wagner who created the most unique music that has ever existed there was the Wagner who was essentially a man of the stage, an actor, the most enthusiastic mimomaniac that has perhaps existed on earth, even as a musician" [Nietzsche 1911 60].

The essay also contains Nietzsche's most savage criticism of *Parsifal*. Amongst other things, he declaims: "an extravagant, lofty and most malicious parody of tragedy itself" [Nietzsche 1911 71]. He also makes clear when his defection from the Wagner camp began: "Already in the summer of 1876, when the first festival at Bayreuth was at its height, I took leave of Wagner in my soul. I cannot endure anything double-faced. Since Wagner had returned to Germany, he had condescended step by step to everything that I despise—even to anti-Semitism" [Nietzsche 1911 73].

The 1979 cartoon probably captures very well the public's perception the two men's relationship at the time, even if the perception is belated and inaccurate. For both men it would have been an insult, though for different reasons. Wagner could not have imagined that anyone who entered his circle of friends and acolytes could ever feel themselves enslaved, rather than elevated and edified. Nietzsche, though, clearly came to a desperate need to escape his Master and prove his value as an independent human being and thinker.



Richard Wagner 1868



Friedrich Nietzsche 1869

Indeed, their relationship is a powerful illustration of the philosopher Hegel's entangled concepts of *Herrschaft* and *Knechtschaft*—Domination and Submission—or Master and Servant dialectic as it is usually known. The servant slowly assumes all the positive qualities that the master, too lazy to do anything for herself, including thinking, and so the servant inverts the relationship, making the master dependent on herself. Hegel posits this as a necessary stage in the evolution of human consciousness and the power of *Vernunft* or Reason.

The cartoon, then, exquisitely and eloquently captures a poignant moment in the friendship of the two men, but, in a sense, it is too late and so not true of Nietzsche's position contra Wagner in 1879. It does, though, capture this Hegelian moment when a Master asserts his domination over a person he considers a servant as much as a friend. The cartoon also hints at the turmoil in Wagner's life, in the shape of his wife Cosima and his father-in-law Liszt looming over Wahnfried, as well as the Woodbird, who likely represents Judith Gautier, the daughter of the French poet Théophile Gautier and wife of the French writer and essayist Catulle Mendès. Wagner met her in 1876 and endeavoured to have an affair with her, but without success, though Judith remained a supporter of his art. Wagner produced some of the world's most impressive musical-dramatic works, while progressively becoming more reactionary. Nietzsche went on not only to write some of the most provocative and beautifully written philosophical works that proclaimed, among other things, the need for us to grasp our lives and make great artworks out of them, but also to succumb to an illness that deprived him of his powerful mind. After their deaths, both were appropriated to the cause of a vicious reactionary movement that would have offended each man. Fortunately, the works of both men survived this insult, an insult considerably worse than the cartoon inflicted.

Endnotes:

1. There is an alternative view in which Nietzsche was initially more of a "formalist" in his musical tastes and criticised the prevailing taste for emotional expressiveness in mid-19th century music. See Prange, Martine. 2013 *Nietzsche, Wagner, Europe*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
2. Foerster-Nietzsche, Elizabeth. Ed. 1921 *The Nietzsche-Wagner correspondence*. Trans. Caroline V Kerr. New York: Boni & Liveright 4-5. Subsequent citations are noted as EF-N and page number. The Euterpe Society was a famous musical organisation in Leipzig. The *Euterpe Orchesterverein*—the Euterpe Orchestral Association in Leipzig fostered old and new music from 1824 to 1886. The name derives from ancient Greek, translating as "rejoicing well" or "delight." Local musicians performed in a subscription season that ran on Tuesday nights from October to March. Among the other venues were the Leipzig Bookseller Exchange, the Central Hall, and the *Altes Theatre*. Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Robert Schumann became honorary members in 1838. Wagner records that he conducted the premiere of his Overture in C major at a Euterpe concert in 1831 (though it might have been 1832). On 15 December 1833, the Euterpe orchestra also played his Symphony in C.
3. Foerster-Nietzsche 1921 8.
4. Foerster-Nietzsche 1921 9.
5. Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2012 *Nietzsche's Writings as a Student*. The Nietzsche Channel (trans). URL= www.thenietzschechannel.com/>, accessed 10/2/2016 125.
6. Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1914 *Thoughts Out of Season*. Trans. Anthony M Ludovici. London & Edinburgh: TN Foulis V1 155-56.
7. Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1911 *The Case of Wagner*. Trans. Anthony M Ludovici. New York: The Macmillan Co V8 1. In the following citations, the title is shortened to Nietzsche 1911 page number.

STAGECRAFT



**FRIEDRICH
KRANICH**
A TRUE MAGICIAN
OF THE STAGE

Here is how Louis Schneider of the *Annales politiques et littéraires* evoked the work of Friedrich Kranich, the Chief stagehand for the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876

I prefer to lead the readers of the *Annals* to a place in Bayreuth where rarely criticism has been able to lead them; I want to let them know the other side of the scene, which is strictly forbidden to ordinary people. I owe to the great kindness of the chief machinist, Mr. Friedrich Kranich, to have been able to visit the mysterious lair where literally all our dazzles are made. Friedrich Kranich is, today, one of the very few survivors of the creation of the Bayreuth shows in 1876.

Let us hear each other: it is he who is the master of the clouds, the master of the sun, of the rainbow, of the rain, of the wind, of the dawn, of the radiant twilight, of the tormented twilight, of the spring light which inundate the rocks and the meadows. It is he who sheds light on the sets painted for Bayreuth by Professor Brückner.

Kranich is housed in the Bayreuth theater. His power begins in his apartment decorated with tributes and photographs of artists, memories of Wagner; it spans the whole stage. In the company of the famous chief stagehand, I arrived on the scene and, from then on, I could understand that the conductor and he are the two sovereigns of this empire and that the singer is, in short, no more than a simple instrumentalist in this immense musical regiment.

Here we are on the stage; moon rehearsal has just ended, because we rehearse every day, either musically, or from the point of view of sets and lighting. The shadow is thick in the room. Kranich turns an electric knob and the orchestra's deep pit lights up. I can peek into the space reserved for the instrumentalists: they are five meters below the audience; no distraction can therefore reach them. They are dominated by the conductor, who is silhouetted against a black background, lit from above by means of a lamp whose rays are projected on the score. In front of the conductor's desk, a sign forbidding musicians to make chords before playing. They are required to take the agreement in a room dedicated to them and this further explains to you that, in the silent expectation of each act, the voice of the orchestra which begins to moan, to escape gloriously, complaint of a suffering soul or triumphed over a glorious hero, has such an effect on the audience.

On the stage, everything is felted, padded. The horse Grane, who is Brünnhilde's faithful companion, cannot disturb the public by the sound of his hoof. No stagehand is allowed to enter the stage except with rubber soles; and so, these one hundred and twenty-five men - for there are one hundred and twenty-five - seem to flutter like a fly when they do set maneuvers. Here are the immense rocks from the top of which the Valkyries launched their "Hoïotoho!" In *The Valkyrie*, those rocks at the foot of which Brünnhilde sleeps in *Siegfried*, and which she walks through in awe when, in *The Twilight*, Siegfried, who has taken on Gunther's costume, comes to tear off the cursed gold ring from her. These rocks are of one huge block, they are mounted on rubberized wheels,

But how do these rocks light up, sometimes with the light of day, sometimes with the dark gleams of night, sometimes with the pale reflections of the moon? Kranich leads me to a device called an "organ set" for electric light. It is by this instrument that are controlled the four thousand lamps of the stage, distributed everywhere in five fundamental colors. Is it a question of lighting the scene red; is it a matter of lighting only the backdrop to make a rising sun; if it is a question of projecting the red light in the middle of the scene on a single character, a wheel manipulated by the electrician graduates all these light effects, can give them suddenly, slowly.

At each division of the stage, at each "shot", to use a professional term, a desk is leaned against a column for the multiple conductors of the song. There is a vocal director on each side of the wings to indicate to the stagehands the precise moment when they must move the sets; there are song leaders who are posted with their score to warn the electrician of the exact moment when he must send the blue, yellow, green, red, white light. No ringing gives the signals, they are electric lamps, as, for example, it happens at the orchestra of the Opéra-Comique in Paris, to warn the conductor that everything is ready and that he can to start.

The sets are electrically driven. The skies roll up on pulleys and walk on a simple electric call; the clouds descend, rise in the same way. In this way, there are no stagehands at the top of the theater, in what are called the "hangers", thus no accident is possible in the handling of the decorations. If by chance, up there, some fabric becomes entangled, an electric elevator transports the machinist in the twinkling of an eye, who puts everything in order and immediately descends his work.

I continue my excursion through this ingenious world of scenery and stuff which must give us the magical illusion. Here in a room the dragon of *Siegfried*, it is folded very quietly. Here is the empire of the clouds: it is by these meters of muslin wrapped around large poles that my imagination will be transported into Valhalla.

How little does it take for my “madwoman for the house” to start trotting! There are canvases of clouds costing thirty-five thousand marks, which is to say more than forty thousand francs! But what do I see up there? They are wooden barrels: it is an invention of Kranich; it is the bells of Parsifal which are relegated there to have more sonority. It’s still a secret today, Kranich is patenting it. It is also to Kranich that we owe the support of *L’Or du Rhin*, supports with stirrups, which allow Woglinde, Flosshilde and Welgunde to make us believe that they are swimming in the rushing waves of the river. It is always an invention of Kranich: the girls of the Rhine, even those of our Opera in Paris, are supported by piano strings, the resistance of which is incalculable; theaters around the world have adopted this safe system. And in the past, in Bayreuth, until 1896, they swam thrown on simple carts. O easy mirage!

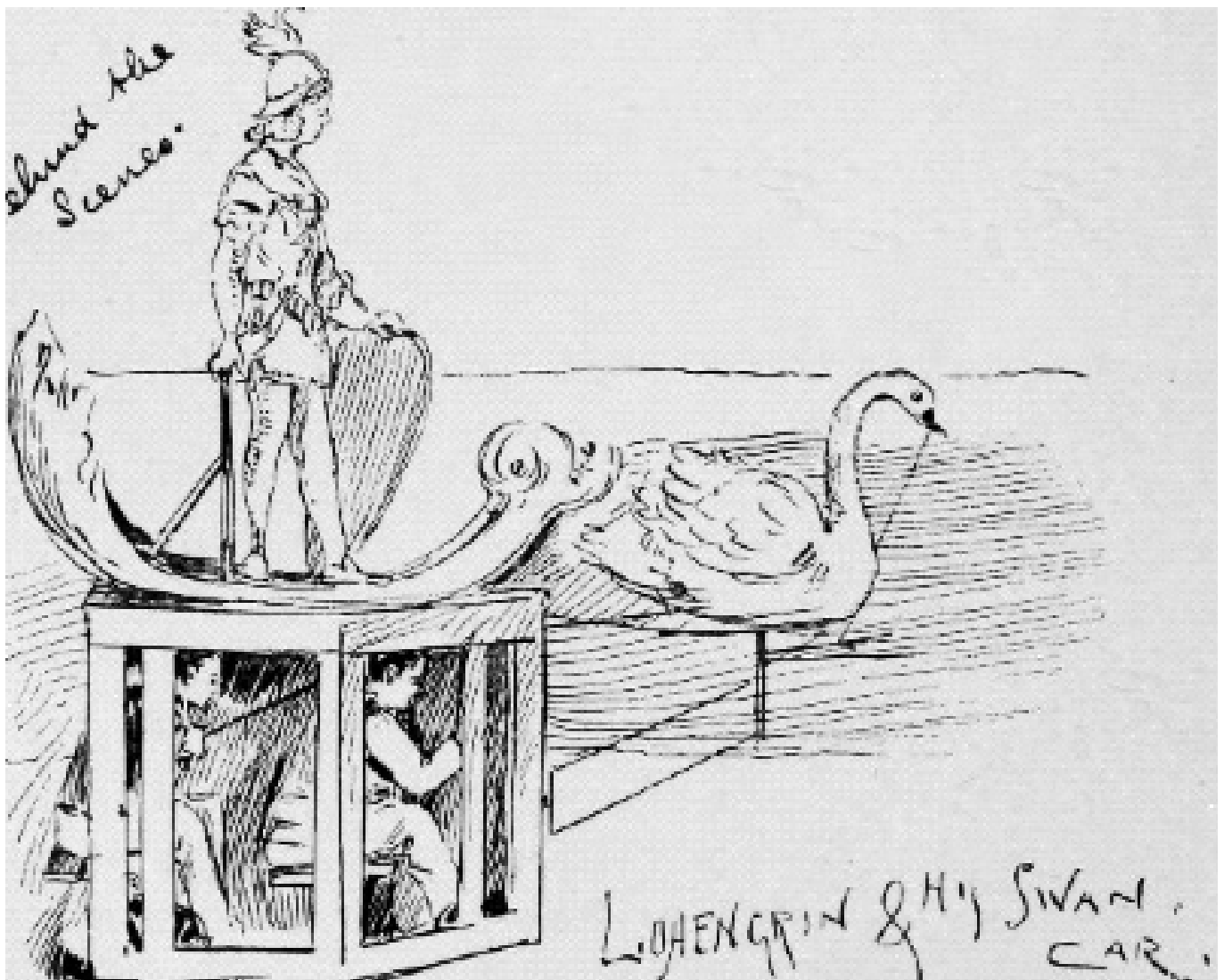
Kranich still shows me around an artist’s box. Here is a very simple one, but big, enormous, which does not in any way recall the luxurious boxes of our subsidized theaters. But, at the door, I see a blackboard with an inscription in chalk. It’s a relic! Here is what I read there: Morgen abend Generalprobe acht uhr bei mir! (“Tomorrow, dress rehearsal at my place at eight in the evening”). And it is signed: Richard Wagner! The

music giant is still there; his initial seems a threatening sword. Ah! how I understand the religious atmosphere of this house!

And I go out in awe. Kranich revealed to me the secrets of his art. He is, moreover, very quiet: he knows that I don’t have his brain to compete with him. But I wanted to show how they managed to give us these model representations of the *Mastersingers*, for example, and of *Parsifal*. Obviously, heads of departments like this admirable Hans Richter, who, at the age of seventy, has just triumphantly conducted, for the last time in his life, Les Maîtres-Chanteurs (let’s hope it’s an oath ... of a conductor), cannot give voice to singers who have none, or no more. But with a miraculous machinist like Kranich, with a first-rate orchestra, with disciplined artists, we manage to produce these two unique representations of the *Mastersingers* and *Parsifal*. And it is well worth the trip to Bayreuth, even with intolerant neighbors.

LOUIS SCHNEIDER September 1909

<http://munichandco.blogspot.com/2018/06/bayreuth-1909-le-che-niste.html>



NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

CHRIS CURCURUTO

The Wagner Society has been supporting Bass-Baritone Chris Curcuruto for a number of years and in February 2022 we gave him a grant to buy equipment to help with his studies at the University of North Texas. Below please read the glowing reference recently sent to our Artists' Liaison Officer, Leona Geeves, by Jonathan Eaton from UNT in support of Chris's grant application. Also below is a report Chris recently sent us updating his progress. We wish him every success and look forward to hearing him on his next trip back home. He last sang for us in April 2018

February 4, 2022

Dear Ms. Geeves,

Christopher Curcuruto, Bass-Baritone

I understand that Mr. Curcuruto is applying to the Wagner Society of NSW for support towards the purchase of computer equipment. He asked me for a recommendation, which I am delighted to supply. I have known Mr. Curcuruto for three-a-half years. He completed the advanced Graduate Certificate in Opera program that I direct at the University of North Texas last year and has gone on to study for a doctorate also at UNT. This was a savvy move, given the predations of Covid on the opera market. He has won major scholarships for both programs to attend what is now the largest public music college in America. He has a fine, strong, rugged bass-baritone voice, very well-produced, flexible and dramatic, and perfectly suited to lyric repertoire, including Wagnerian repertoire, in particular for characters such as Alberich, Hunding or Hagen. He is an exceptionally fine actor, very good musician, knows and loves the stage and the medium, is quick and reliable, and an excellent colleague. He is career-ready. I felt his talent merited me engaging him three years ago to participate as a soloist and lead-role understudy with Pittsburgh Festival Opera, of which I was Artistic Director. I invited him to sing Marco in Gianni Schicchi, to understudy the role of Gianni Schicchi, to understudy Hunding in Die Valkyre, and to perform one of the two leads in a new work about Puccini, a play which showcased a good deal of Puccini's music. He carried all this out with exemplary professionalism. He was also accepted into Jane Eaglen's Mastersingers Program for Young Dramatic Voice at the festival. I feel he is a career-ready Wagnerian singer. His career potential is very high indeed – partly because of the type and strength of his voice and his theatrical skills, but also because he is completely dedicated to the art form and the career, and lives it. He is an international opera man – an Australian who has come to the States to put a final polish on his skills. I have no doubt that he would be an excellent recipient of your support and ambassador for your program.

I recommend him without reservation.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Eaton, Winspear Chair and Director of Opera, University of North Texas

REPORT FROM CHRIS CURCURUTO

Dear friends, colleagues, and supporters,

AN ANNIVERSARY...

January 27, 2022, marks four years since I left Sydney, Australia to embark on an audition tour around the United States that led to my eventual relocation here in August the same year. That tour took me across the country from Houston to Dallas/Fort Worth, Kansas City, San Francisco, and to New York, singing for prestigious schools and singing teachers and vying for highly competitive positions in graduate programs in opera performance. Many of you may not be aware that the University of North Texas was not initially on my itinerary, and that my audition here took place by lucky happenstance. I hope you will indulge me while I get a little nostalgic and share my story.

In the summer of 2017, supported by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, I had the opportunity to

travel to Stara Zagora, Bulgaria to perform with the Varna International Opera Academy in their production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. I became aware of the program through fellow Wagner Society supported singer and dear friend, Laura Scandizzo. Laura, as many of you will know, is a native Texan and American. A former teacher of hers, Dale Morehouse, had contacted her to let her know about the Varna program and she had subsequently encouraged me to also apply. If you can believe it, I was working as an attorney at the time. I received my initial offer to sing the role of Leporello in December 2016, however at that time I couldn't see a way to balance both my legal career and an international operatic engagement so I had to decline. When the Academy came back to me in May 2017 to offer me the role of Masetto on a significant scholarship, I had resolved to pursue opera exclusively if I couldn't find a legal position flexible enough to facilitate both. I took the Bulgaria opportunity to my boss at the law firm and explained that I would need to take four

weeks leave and, when he refused, I went back to my desk and drafted my resignation which I submitted that same day. My mind was made up.

Whilst in Bulgaria I made some fabulous connections, both personal and professional. One of those was a teacher and fabulous soprano, Dr. Jennifer Glidden. As luck would have it, over the course of the Varna program, a Russian bass who was brought in to sing Leporello had to withdraw. I was offered the role on short notice which I accepted. I ended up singing Masetto with one cast and, after learning it in two weeks, Leporello with another cast. Jennifer was the Donna Elvira to my Leporello. Jennifer also gave me a number of lessons and strongly encouraged me, along with many members of the primarily American faculty, to seek out further graduate training in the United States: a country that “knows how to train big voices for big houses”.

Flash forward to December 2017. I decided to submit my applications to a number of graduate schools in the United States and was fortunate to be granted many live auditions. When I undertook my audition tour in January 2018 I decided to visit with my friend Jennifer in Dallas on my way from Houston to Kansas City. While in Dallas, Jennifer *insisted* that I take a lesson with her teacher, Dr. Stephen Austin who is a professor at the University of North Texas (UNT). She had encouraged me to apply there as well however, circumstances were such that I wasn't able at the time. In any event, while I was visiting Jennifer for a weekend, on a day's notice, she was able to arrange a consultation with Dr. Austin. In short, it was an incredible lesson that led to me submitting a late application and eventually moving from Sydney to Denton (inside the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex) to attend UNT. Even in that short one-hour lesson, I knew that Dr. Austin understood my voice and was going to do incredible things for it; and so he has.

But for my good friend Jennifer, I wouldn't have landed at UNT in the more than capable hands of the incredible faculty, including Dr. Austin. How remarkable that it all started in Bulgaria. Regrettably, Jennifer passed away somewhat unexpectedly due to cancer late last year. In addition to this four year anniversary, I also felt it appropriate to honour her with this story, and by telling you all about the role she played in my being here.

ONTO THE UPDATE...

It has been an era and a day since the last time I sent an update. The pandemic just keeps on keeping on and the lost year that was 2020 became the lost years, including 2021. That said, I have stayed busy. I am now officially halfway through my Doctorate. I have maintained a 4.0 (high distinction) average in all of my classes and have continued



Chris as Kecal in *The Bartered Bride* UNT 2021

performing both with the school and professionally. You may remember from my last update that I was singing outreach with Fort Worth Opera and the Dallas Opera, and was also engaged to perform with Nashville Opera. I am happy to say that, although part of the Nashville program went “virtual” due to COVID concerns, I did get to make the trip to Nashville to perform the role of Alidoro in an outdoor spectacle performance of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* under Maestro Dean Williamson and directed by Artistic Director John Hoopes. With school resuming in-person tuition, I was unable to continue to balance the outreach schedules for both Fort Worth and Dallas Opera, in addition to all of my classes, and so decided to continue with Dallas however I hope to have an opportunity to return to Fort Worth Opera to sing in their mainstage festival in the future.

For the 2021/22 season I have been exceedingly preoccupied with UNT Opera in the best way. In the Fall, I was cast in the role of Kecal in the *Bartered Bride* conducted by Music Director of the Czech National Theatre Opera (Prague), Jaroslav Kyzlink. I was excited to return to this role after having performed it with Rockdale Opera Company many years ago now. I performed the role in a combination of English and Czech and had the opportunity to coach the role with Maestro Kyzlink before performances. Although UNT Opera normally double-casts their shows, I was single cast in this role. It was a huge commitment, requiring attendance at double the rehearsals as well as performing all shows. The production schedule also included a one-week tour of a reduced version of the opera to traditional Czech towns throughout Texas. That was an incredibly gratifying experience and the first opportunity I have had to see some of the more rural parts of the State. In December last year, UNT Opera also facilitated an all-expenses paid trip to New York city and hosted a small recital at Opera America for invited guests, including a number of artist agents so that we might get some feedback on our audition package which was very successful.

CONTINUED OVER >

Now that we are in the Spring semester, I am well and truly “under the pump”. In addition to my course load, with UNT Opera I will be singing the roles of Dulcamara in Donizetti’s *l’Elisir d’Amore*, Collatinus in Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia*, and a number of roles from Puccini operas (Schicchi and Colline) in their upcoming Scenes Concert. We will also reprise the Scenes Concert in a special private performance for the Puccini Society of Dallas. Additionally, I was invited by the UNT Symphony Orchestra to sing the role of Lodovico in a concert performance of Verdi’s *Otello* and am also going to sing the role of Giove in the early opera *l’Europa* by Melani with the UNT Baroque Orchestra. There is a possibility that this piece will tour to the Czech Republic later in the year, provided it is safe to do so and I am also in discussions with the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas to undertake another Texas tour, this time of Dvořák’s *Biblical Songs*.

One other exciting update that I should tell you about is that I won the Greencard Lottery which entitled me to make

an application for permanent residency here in the States. In July last year, I completed that process and became a permanent resident. This has been a huge help and has alleviated a whole lot of anxiety around employment and study options. However, I am eager to return to Australia when I am able. I was offered a fabulous opportunity to return in the Summer to sing a title role in a concert work with a great orchestra and chorus, however with the situation with COVID and travel restrictions being as volatile as they are, I was unfortunately unable to accept. This would have been the first opportunity I’ve had to return to Australia since moving to the United States so I was very disappointed to have to decline the offer. Regardless, the time and opportunity will come and I look forward to not only catching up with everyone back home but also to perform for you all, to show you the work that I have done, that I have been able to do thanks to your support.

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The Wagner Society Management Committee has negotiated a 10% discount for Wagner Society members:
Just mention that you are a member!

BRANGAYNE OF ORANGE VINEYARD

Brangayne of Orange has kindly agreed to offer Members a 10% discount if they purchase any of their wines. Please call and order by phone (02 6365 3229) and mention your membership of the Wagner Society.

DA CAPO MUSIC SECONDHAND AND ANTIQUARIAN MUSIC BOOKSTORE

Upstairs at 51 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, NSW, 2037 - Above SAPHO BOOKS

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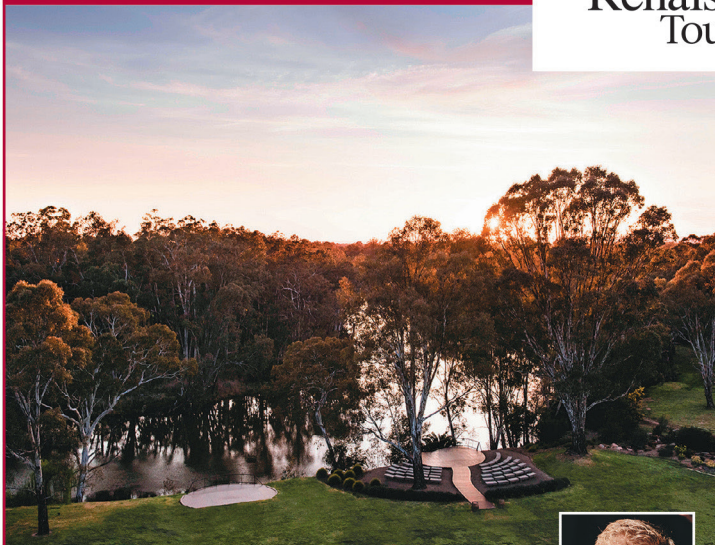
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Renaissance Tours



Chamber Music in Country Victoria

Mitchelton Winery, Nagambie
with Stewart Kelly
04–07 April 2022 (4 days)



Crafted exclusively for Renaissance Tours patrons, enjoy five distinct concerts over three days and nights in the scenic surroundings of Mitchelton winery in country Victoria.

Music in the Mountains

Blackheath Chamber Music Festival
with Andy Bromberger
22–25 April 2022 (4 days)



With the Blue Mountains' vivid autumn colours as the backdrop, enjoy sublime chamber music concerts by some of Australia's leading musicians.



Coriole Music Festival

South Australia
with Phillip Sametz
20–23 May 2022 (4 days)



Join music specialist Phillip Sametz for a unique weekend of outstanding performances at Coriole Vineyards in South Australia's beautiful McLaren Vale.

Wagner's Lohengrin

Arts Centre Melbourne
with Christopher Lawrence
23–25 May 2022 (3 days)



Join classical music expert and broadcaster Christopher Lawrence for an unprecedented opportunity to see "king of tenors" Jonas Kaufmann in the title role of Wagner's *Lohengrin*.

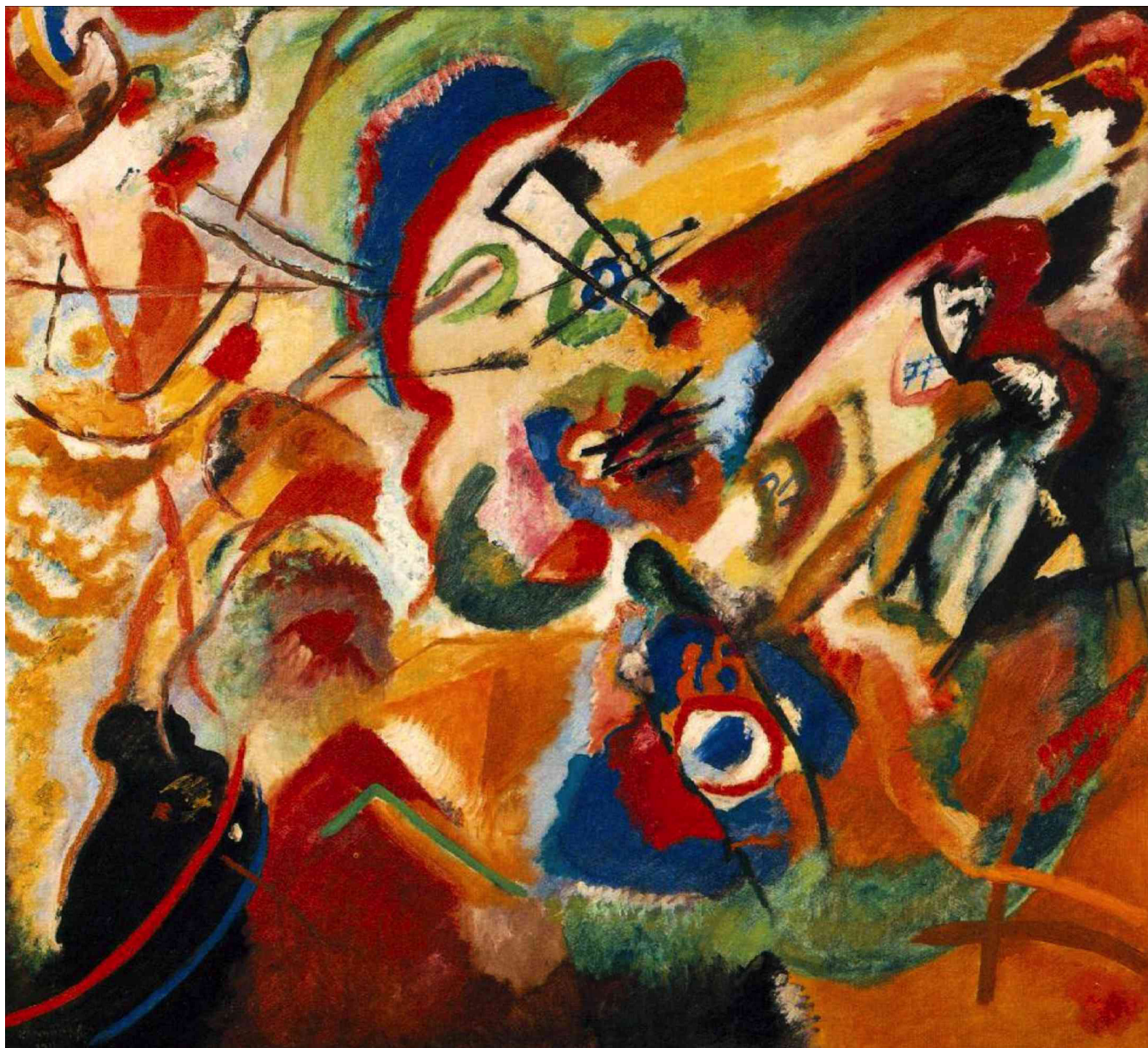
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ADDRESS

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[All website addresses used in this Newsletter are reproduced in the PDF version of the Quarterly on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article – For Members Only, members will need to log in]



Wassily Kandinsky Fragment 2 for Composition V11 1913
(Refer to page ..)

ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

(unless otherwise advised in Coming Events)
Goethe Institut, 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)

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