



WAGNER
SOCIETY
nsw

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165

JUNE 2022

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR AGM 2022

Welcome to the 42nd Annual General Meeting of the Wagner Society in NSW Inc. This year back in physical form. In fact it has been good to attend so many live performances in a theatre and also be able to travel to some of them. Those of you who managed to get to Melbourne for the *Lohengrin* with Jonas Kaufmann (leaving aside the question of the production) would agree.

I will now comment and summarise each of the core aspects of our Society for the year 2021-22.

Membership

Our membership currently sits at 215 financial members. 31 members remain unfinancial. We continue to seek more members and hope that the wave of Wagner productions in Australia will stimulate interest in joining us. *Die Walküre* in February and *Lohengrin* just now will be supplemented with a concertante *Siegfried* in September and then the two *Rings* in Bendigo and Brisbane to come in 2023.

This plus the return of a full Bayreuth Festival, the Leipzig 2022 project and a new *Ring* at the Staatsoper Berlin in October, should generate some new members.

Survey

Late in 2021 and early 2022 we held a membership survey to ascertain a few things about us. We are hoping to issue a series of surveys to drill down on aspects of the Society and in particular what you want the Society to be. We had 45 respondents, which is a considerable percentage of the



Parsifal by Pablo Picasso 1934 (Refer to page 13)

membership. We will publish the result in detail in future Quarterlies but allow me to share some highlights of the information we garnered from this first survey. 75% of those who completed the survey had been members for more than 6 years, 25% for more than 21 years. 70% are over 70 years of age. 38% joined to learn more about Wagner, 31% to meet and mix with like minded people and 20% joined to support the development of young artists.

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SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

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

PHOTOS OF RECENT EVENTS



AGM and Concert 29 May 2022 at St Columba



Bradley Gilchrist, Jane Ede, Brad Cooper



March 13 at St Columba. Christina Henson Hayes Masterclass participants with Brangayne wine gifts.



March 27 at Goethe Institut - Ralph Myers talk. Prof Thea Brejzek, Dan Potra, Ralph Myers, Esteban Insausti

FOR YOUR DIARY

2022

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 26 Jun	2.00 DVD Marjorie Lawrence: the World at her Feet	Goethe Institut
Sun 31 Jul	2.00 Recital with Valda Wilson and Nathan Bryon	Mosman Art Gallery
Sun 21 Aug	2.00 Recital by Rachel Bate and David Miller	Mosman Art Gallery
Sun 18 Sept	2.00 Robert Gay continues his talk on French Grand Opera	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)

JANE MATHEWS AO SCHOLARSHIP

The Society joined with PACIFIC OPERA to establish a \$5,000 annual scholarship to help young potential Wagnerians. It is named for our late President. The first awardee is Ellen McNeil, whose story appears on page 25.

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 SINCE MARCH 2022
FROM THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS:**

Anna-Lisa Kletttenberg, Diana-Rose Orr and Derek Watt

Patron:

Ms Simone Young AM

Honorary Life Members:

Mr Richard King
Prof Michael Ewans
Mr Horst Hoffman
Mr Roger Cruickshank
Dr Terence Watson
Dr Dennis Mather
Dr Colleen Chesterman
Ms Leona Geeves

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Financials

We are still holding a reasonable balance and I'll let Margaret Whealy, our Treasurer, say more about that. Whilst we are still recovering from the lockdowns and pandemic regime, the muscle memory of live events and generosity of both time and money is coming back. The question to us all remains what exactly do we want to do as the Wagner Society in NSW Inc, beyond events and talks fostering the understanding and appreciation of the music of Wagner?

Support and Donations

I report that the Society continues to support young artists. Since the last AGM we have sponsored Jessica Harper, Michele Ryan, Chris Curcuruto and Livia Brash. We concluded the second part of the Wagner Tuba Support for Melbourne Opera, another \$15,000. And we committed to a \$5,000 annual Scholarship with Pacific Opera named for our late President the Honourable Jane Mathews OA. I'd like to thank Ian Hutchinson, the Chairman of Pacific Opera and member of our Society, for suggesting this and for kick starting the donations towards it. We look forward to hearing Ellen McNiel, the inaugural recipient, in a future event.

We are still working on our philanthropy strategy. But I can report that the research done by Marie Leech, Lis Bergman, Margaret Whealy and Leona Geeves has unearthed a very long list of artists and causes we have sponsored over the last 40 years. I'm not sure about the exact amount of money that has been raised and passed on in that time but it is not an inconsiderable amount. We want to continue doing this. And we will need your help and generosity. We have "projects" that you can donate to right now: the Jane Mathews Scholarship and our ongoing sponsoring of artists for instance. There are more things we can do and should do. Please help us.

Events and Communications

Since the last AGM we have organised 14 events. We've had 6 Zoom events, mainly overseas or interstate speakers such as Rachel Orzech, Christopher Cook and Erica Miner. We've had 3 Talks, including Ralph Myers, Peter Bassett and Robert Gay. We showed "Siegfried", Part 1 of the "Die Nibelungen" a silent film by the legendary Fritz Lang. Today's recital is the 4th musical event in that period, 3 of which have been in 2022, including a Masterclass led by Christina Henson Hayes. Today's recital is the 10th event for 2022. This year the number, variety and frequency of events is not a coincidence but a strategy to get you, our members to engage again, and also to give us some feedback on what is working and what is not. So please let us know – and don't wait for a survey to provide that feedback.

Bayreuth and Wagner performances

The 2022 Bayreuth Festival is on and some of our members will be attending. Travel is still a risky proposition for some and the take up of interest in tickets to Bayreuth 2022 was surprisingly low. Consequently there is an abundance of tickets, all our requests were met, something that may not occur again.

Bayreuth, together with the Leipzig 2022 Project (where they are performing all 13 Wagner operas), and a new *Ring* at the Staatsoper in Berlin under Daniel Barenboim, means that overseas travel is back on the agenda. Not to mention the unprecedented situation of 2 *Ring* productions in Australia in a calendar year with Bendigo (MO) and Brisbane (OA) in 2023. So live Wagner is back.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

In this issue I'm not focussing on a particular opera but am providing an eclectic, and somewhat gay, assortment of more personal articles about Wagner and his family at Bayreuth. I have been saving these for a rainy day, and we have certainly had a lot of these this year. Hopefully this issue will bring some sunshine into your soggy lives.

Mike Day, michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com



Wagner's Newfoundland dog 'Fafner'

I would also like to report that some of us were delighted to meet up with our counterparts in Victoria and South Australia during the *Die Walküre* performances in February at Her Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne. And also see and hear first hand the Wagner Tubas that we helped purchase for Melbourne Opera. And just in the last week we had opportunities to catch up once again during the 4 performances of *Lohengrin* at The State Theatre in Melbourne. It is important for the Australian and New Zealand Societies to continue our friendship, especially as travel continues to open up.

The Committee

First of all I would like to thank all of the Committee for your hard work and perseverance over the course of the last year. And I would like to welcome June Donsworth and Julie Clarke to the Committee. In particular I want to single out Mike Day for the wonderful Quarterlies, Ross Whitelaw for setting up and analysing the Survey, Robert Mitchell for organising the Tuba pins (some of which I still need to issue to some of you wonderful donors) and Leona Geeves who continues to supply us with wonderful talent to entertain us. But I would like to make a special callout to Lis Bergmann for the Communications and membership interface, the glue that keeps the Society together. I make this plea for help from the membership to keep this wonderful work going whilst Lis takes a well deserved break. So if you are interested or know someone who might be able to help with IT, please contact me.

On the issue of talent I want to underscore our commitment to deepen our friendship with institutions such as Pacific Opera and Melbourne Opera, amongst others. It is critical to foster young artists as much as continue to provide forums for the discussion and understanding of Wagner and opera in general, as an artform.

With that I conclude my report and commend it to the membership.

Esteban Insausti
President, Wagner Society in NSW Inc
29 May 2022

FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 26 JUNE AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

2.00PM DVD *MARJORIE LAWRENCE: THE WORLD AT HER FEET*

Following the excellent Zoom talk by documentary film makers Wayne Groom and Dr Caroline Bilsborow about their splendid film, members will have a chance to see the film on a large screen. Highly recommended. Please refer to December 2021 Quarterly for more details.

SUNDAY 31 JULY AT MOSMAN ART GALLERY

2.00PM RECITAL WITH VALDA WILSON AND NATHAN BRYON ACCOMPANIED BY BRADLEY GILCHRIST



Valda Wilson initially trained at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music before winning Opera Foundation Australia's scholarship to the National Opera Studio London. From 2010-2012 she was a member of the Junges Ensemble at the Dresden Semperoper where she has since returned regularly as a guest artist. Valda is considered to be one of the most versatile, exciting and musically curious sopranos of her generation. In the 2018-19 and 2019-20 European seasons, Valda debuted to critical acclaim as Violetta (*La Traviata*), Elisabeth de Valois (*Don Carlos*), Marschallin (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Marguerite (*Faust*) and Sylva Varescu (*The Gypsy Princess*). She thrilled and delighted audiences as Contessa d'Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) and reprising her signature role of Hanna Glawari (*The Merry Widow*).

Valda has worked with the orchestras of Covent Garden, the Semperoper Dresden, Strasbourg Philharmonique, Bremer Philharmoniker, deFilharmonie Antwerp, Teatro di San Carlo Naples, Orchestre des Champs-Elysees, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and the Hallé, and such notable conductors as Richard Bonyngne, Sir Antonio Pappano, Christian Thielemann, Charles Dutoit, John Fiore, Fabio Luisi, Philippe Herreweghe, Theodor Guschlbauer, Marko Letonja, Marcus Bosch and Sébastien Rouland.

Nathan Bryon is a young Australian tenor, currently the Ruskin Opera Scholar and the Ryman Healthcare Scholar with Melba Opera Trust. Roles include Il Podestà di Lagonero (*La finta giardiniera*) for Operantics and Acis (*Acis and Galatea*) for Ensemble Polypheme, an opera company in Sydney he recently co-founded, focusing on the development



of baroque performance practice skills for young artists. Nathan holds a Bachelor of Music (Performance) from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He has held scholarship positions as Associate Artist with Pacific Opera, Tenor Scholar at St Stephens Uniting Church, and performed as Featured Ensemble with Coast Opera Australia. In 2019, Nathan attended the Melbourne International Festival of Lieder and Art Song, where he took part in masterclasses with Dr Graham Johnson. He performed across Tasmania as a part of an operatic tour with Simon Kenway, Peter Coleman-Wright AO and Cheryl Barker AO and, through his scholarship with Pacific Opera, travelled to Germany as one of four young Australian artists to participate in an intensive networking and performance program facilitated by the German Embassy in Australia. In the same year Nathan attended the New Zealand Singing School, where he was presented with the Beatrice Webster Award for the pursuit of excellence. He was also a finalist in the Bettine McCaughan Memorial Scholarship and winner of the inaugural Demant Dreikurs Lieder Competition, as well as the Sydney Conservatorium Association Award for Excellence in Vocal Studies for 2019 at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Nathan sang for the Wagner Society in March at the **Christina Henson Hayes Masterclass**. His future plans are outlined in a note from him that can be found in the supported artists section of this Quarterly.

SUNDAY 21 AUGUST AT 2.00PM AT MOSMAN ART GALLERY

2.00PM RECITAL BY RACHEL BATE OF LIEDER, CHANSONS, AND OPERA ARIAS,
WITH ASSOCIATE ARTIST DAVID MILLER AM



Wollongong born Soprano **Rachel Bate** graduated from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music with a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and an Advanced Diploma of Opera Studies. Rachel has been fortunate to win many of Australia's most prestigious Operatic Scholarships and

awards, including the Opera Foundation of Australia German Opera Scholarship, The Australian Singing Competition's Marianne Mathy Scholarship, the Sydney Eisteddfod Opera and Arts Scholarship, the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé Foundation Deborah Riedel Scholarship and the Joan Carden Award. Rachel worked as a young artist in the Cologne Opera House, performing various roles in the Kinderoper and on the main stage. Rachel was handpicked as one of 15 singers worldwide to study at the **Internationale Meistersinger Akademie** in 2012. There, Rachel was fortunate to work with many of the affiliates of the Bayerische Staatsoper, The Metropolitan Opera and The Juilliard School, New York. Rachel has been fortunate to work under the baton of many esteemed conductors, including Maestro Helmuth Rilling in Stuttgart, Maestro Michael Hofstetter and the Bayerische Rundfunk Orchester, Maestro Giovanni Reggioli at the Opera House, and in 'Anitra' under the baton of Maestro Vladimir Ashkenazy with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in Grieg's Peer Gynt.



David Miller AM is widely recognised as one of Australia's leading chamber musicians and vocal accompanists. His distinguished career has included partnerships with prominent Australian singers including Lauris Elms, Marilyn Richardson, John Pringle, Elizabeth Campbell, Geoffrey Chard, Peter Coleman-Wright AO, and visiting international singers such as Luigi Alva, John Mark Ainsley, Malvina Major and Caroline Watkins. During his tenure at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music Mr Miller introduced an innovative and comprehensive program of study for collaborative pianists. He was instrumental in setting up the Geoffrey Parsons Australian Scholarship to develop the careers of young pianists. Mr Miller continues to be in demand for performances, recordings, masterclasses, lectures, conferences and interviews. The Accompanists' Guild of NSW has created the David Miller Award to honour his outstanding service to young Australian musicians and to the discipline of collaborative piano.

WAGNER SOCIETY MEMBERS SPECIAL OFFERS AND 10% DISCOUNTS - ASK BEFORE YOU PURCHASE AT:

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.

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REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS

WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH ON ZOOM

7.00PM CHRISTOPHER COOK: 'AMFORTAS! DIE WUNDE... TWO WOUNDED DISCIPLES'

Report by Ross Whitelaw

I'm not sure what the 25 members and guests expected to hear when we sat by our computers and logged in to **Christopher Cook's** talk, but for those of us already entranced by the beauty and majesty of this opera and I imagine those who would like to discover more about it, they were treated to an exceptional and fascinating hour. Christopher's knowledge of his subject, the depth to which he plumbed the material and his easily understood and clear style of delivery made this one of the highlights of our educational calendar. Neither a musicologist nor a Wagner scholar in the true sense, Christopher prefers to be known as a cultural historian although one who, in his own words has been "completely absorbed by both the man and his music for over half a century". His interest in the relationship of *Parsifal* to Christianity and, in particular, to Christian beliefs in the nineteenth century is expressed in his reactions to Amfortas and Klingsor, a pair of "wounded protagonists".

The late nineteenth century was an age of faith but also an age of doubt, where the gathering of facts and their interpretation began to overtake religious certainties. Wagner stated that Art proceeded from God and that through Art, all men could be saved. Certainly, both ideas were in play at the end of the

century and Christopher explores the ambiguity with erudition and insight. He shows us that it is all too easy to close our eyes and just listen to Wagner's music while missing a complete work of intentionally ambiguous meaning. The opera even ends with a new beginning. Death and resurrection? Reincarnation? Take your pick. Christopher sees the role of the of Kundry as pivotal – her Eve to Parsifal's Adam, He leads us through the prism of Freud, the window of Schopenhauer and contemporary productions he has seen in Barcelona and Zurich. He provokes and challenges and entertains at the same time. It will send you away to contemplate. It will send you away to dust off those books and articles you will want to read again. It will, above all else send you back to your favourite recording of *Parsifal* with new understanding.

I look forward to hearing from Christopher again. If you missed him this time, he has generously allowed us to record his talk and to publish a written copy, all available from our website at [.https://wagner.org.au/events/wagner-society-events-online](https://wagner.org.au/events/wagner-society-events-online) . If you would like to hear more of him, particularly his interview with noted Wagnerians, look on the website of the London Wagner Society for past and upcoming events (although they are generally live at 5am).



Amfortas, Kundry, Klingsor. Bayreuth 2019

SUNDAY 13 MARCH AT ST COLUMBA COMMUNITY CENTRE 2.00PM CHRISTINA HENSON HAYES MASTERCLASS WITH EMERGING YOUNG SINGERS

Report by Linda Foulsham, Photos by Lis Bergmann

An attentive audience was treated to an excellent Masterclass with American voice/operatic coach, **Christina Henson Hayes**. Among those present was our member **Warwick Fyfe** who has been working with Christina to sustain the stamina required to perform Wotan in Melbourne Opera's *Die Walküre*.

Christina specialises in the biomechanical function of the voice, treating patients and teaching voice maintenance to singers. On this day, her expertise was evident as she advised and inspired the soloists: **Nathan Bryon** (tenor), a recent recipient of NSW Wagner Society funding; new member **Paul McLeod** (tenor); **Damien Noyce** (tenor), also a recipient of Wagner Society funding and the new Pacific Opera Jane Mathews AO scholarship winner; **Ellen McNeil** (soprano). They were joined by three of Christina's students: **Ashlee Woodgate** (soprano), **Anita de Lisen** (soprano) and **Michael James** (heldentenor). **Bradley Gilchrist** provided his usual sensitive and supportive piano accompaniment.

Each soloist received valuable individual technical feedback, at all times gentle and encouraging. What one soloist was advised could often be applied universally. Wisdom such as 'Make the audience love your voice' and 'Prepare to be fabulous before you sing', would encourage any singer the world over.

More specific advice included:

- Push the notes into the middle of the phrase in order to propel forward and build to a climax. Keep driving high sustained notes.
- Give tonal quality to every note; use the head as a bell.
- Grow into a gentle crescendo, don't blast into top notes.
- Never use the jaw for note leverage; it will cause tension.
- Feed the voice air to support the note and let it grow; don't shy away!
- Balance head to spine and utilise chest expansion for vocal depth.
- Plant yourself on the tough bits.

Keep a loose jaw and remember dynamic variety.

The application of this invaluable individual advice rendered instant improvement; technical tweaks as simple as expanding the chest produced extra tonal quality.

The audience was immediately aware of the difference as each soloist slightly altered their performance by applying Christina's advice.

These valuable lessons will no doubt assist the audience in appreciating future singers. The soloists also will long remember their afternoon with Christina Henson Hayes.



Ashlee Woodgate



Michael James



Damien Noyce



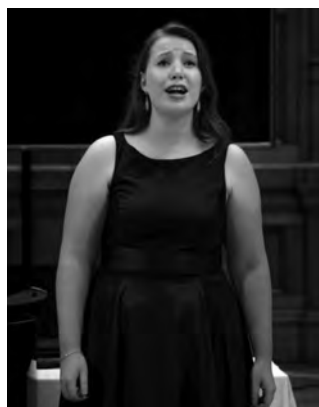
Nathan Bryon & Christina Henson Hayes



Paul McLeod



Bradley Gilchrist



Ellen McNeil



Anita de Lisen

SUNDAY 27 MARCH AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

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

This pioneering 1913 silent movie 'bio-pic' by **Carl Fröhlich** was a surprising hit with our members, who were very amused by the witty commentary by **Tony Palmer** about what was happening on the screen and also events from his career as a Wagner chronicler.

2.00PM RALPH MYERS TALKED ABOUT *ISOLDE IN AIX*

Esteban Insausti reports - For our second venture into scenography we were very lucky to host the designer and director **Ralph Myers**. Ralph, who has had a successful career as a designer in Australia and overseas, as well as running the iconic Belvoir Street Theatre as Artistic Director from 2011 to 2015, talked to us about his experience designing the **Simon Stone** directed *Tristan und Isolde* at Aix-en-Provence. It was a candid exposition of the process of "putting on a show" as well as the toll its reception has on individuals. It was surprising that the negative reception had a toll on Ralph, given that it is well known that this is a form of "sport" in European houses. It was also surprising that he felt that part of the blame fell on his shoulders rather than on the director. It was very interesting to hear about Simon Stone's process or thinking for the production and the cavalier way that he treats the creative team (who would do cartwheels for him). This underscores the subservient role of a designer to the director. Perhaps why some

directors cut to the chase and design themselves or designers become directors (for the reverse but similar reason: control). Ralph's many versions of the design for *Tristan* (see the slides on our website) document Simon Stone's "thinking" process and highlight Ralph's professionalism to deliver on the vision. The Aix *Tristan und Isolde* may be "challenging" conceptually but there is no doubt about the quality of the "realistic" set and the beautiful images of the skyline and sea backing the set. I recommend a viewing (it is still available to watch through the Aix website and Medici). On a separate note, the 2021 Aix-en-Provence festival was largely an Aussie affair with 4 major productions by two of our "enfants terribles", Barrie Kosky (*Falstaff* and *Golden Cockerel*) and Simon Stone (*Tristan und Isolde* + *Innocence* by Kaija Saariaho), as well as Ralph's designs for Tristan and Stuart Skelton as Tristan himself. Should have been something for us to celebrate as a cultural nation "punching above our weight" but alas only those in the know got to know.



Ralph Myers



Aix-en-Provence 2021 *Tristan und Isolde* Act III

SIMON AND LUCIA

AUSTRALIAN DIRECTOR **SIMON STONE** TALKS ABOUT HIS NEW PRODUCTION OF *LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR* AT THE MET

"Opera creates this extraordinary ability to take something that has been turned into the mythic through the sublimity of the music and at the same time to reflect on contemporary experience in a way that makes us as contemporary human beings feel like it is possible for our lives to be sublime. That's when Caravaggio doesn't take a cliched face, but he has the revolutionary moment when he puts a real Italian peasant or someone off the street that he found, or a prostitute and he puts them into a biblical story and you suddenly go... the Bible means something to me. And us. And that's what opera has been doing since the beginning of opera. It's saying it's about us. Donizetti created the music for us. We carry it around with us. And so, since the beginning I'm always trying to set it, to set all of my operas and my shows in the place, in the era and the environs of the people we are watching it. Because the gift that Donizetti wrote was to create something truly timeless, which is a gift for you as well. It can feel relieving or relaxing to escape and go to a Donizetti to see it set in a different era but I think it's less of a transformative experience than the moment that, if you can go...Wow, this is about me. my family, my friends, us. And that music was created to be utterly contemporary – and it is utterly contemporary And I think it is short changing to make it less than contemporary".

SUNDAY 10 APRIL AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT 12.30PM DVD *DIE FEEN*

Members enjoyed this charming production from the Wiener Staatsoper of Wagner's first completed opera. It was fascinating to hear that even as a teenager highly influenced by current composers, he nevertheless was starting to show a preference for certain orchestral sound combinations and dramatic effects that would become known as 'Wagnerian'.

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

Peter Bassett has been a regular contributor to the Quarterly over the years and an occasional guest lecturer. The members and friends who attended were very pleased to welcome Peter back again and were treated to a fascinating insight into Wagner's understanding and use of Buddhist and Hindu ideas. Many members are familiar with Peter's books or have attended his informative and entertaining pre-performance talks before the Melbourne *Rings*. This talk was meant to be a lead-up to the Brisbane *Ring*, postponed until November 2023.

Some highlights from Peter's talk:

Wagner's awakening, so to speak, to the literature of the east, can be traced to the early 1850s. In 1852 he wrote from Zürich to his former assistant August Röckel, languishing in Waldheim prison, about the poetry of the fourteenth century Persian mystic, Hafiz, whose works were then being edited by Hermann Brockhaus, Wagner's brother-in-law. 'We with our pompous European intellectual culture' wrote Wagner, 'must stand abashed in the presence of this product of the orient, with its self-assured and sublime tranquillity of mind.' In 1814, Goethe had been drawn to the poetry of Hafiz and used it in his collection of twelve lyrical poems *West-Eastern Divan*, symbolizing exchanges and mixtures between the orient and the occident.

In 1856, the 33-year-old artist read his first book about Buddhism. Madly in love with Mathilde Wesendonck, he conceived two deeply connected opera projects: *Tristan und Isolde* which he went on to compose and stage, and *Die Sieger* (The Victors), an opera scenario based on an Indian Buddha legend translated from Sanskrit. These two projects mirrored Wagner's burning desire for the consummation of his love and the necessity of renunciation. *Die Sieger* occupied Wagner's mind for decades until his death in 1883. When Tristan and Isolde sing: 'Then I myself am the world', they are drawing on one of Schopenhauer's favourite passages in the Upanishads: 'I am all these creatures, and besides me there is no other being'. Peter compared the texts from the Upanishads to Isolde's last words in the *Liebestod*. They are remarkably similar. It has been said that for Wagner, who lived in exile for much of his creative life and was seriously disenchanted with politics, Buddhism was a way of answering his three most fundamental questions: what does it mean to be German? What does it mean to be Christian? What is art? In his view, Buddhism wasn't remote from German thought but intrinsic to it. This connection can be demonstrated by one piece of music composed for *Die Sieger* that ended up in the *Ring*. According to Cosima Wagner's diary entry for 20 July 1878, it had been written for the Buddha himself. It is misleadingly labelled these days as 'the motive of the world's inheritance', but it was described by Wagner's assistant Heinrich Porges as the 'redemption theme'. The phrase in question is first heard

in the Wanderer's final scene with Erda. He desperately wants answers to one question in particular: how to stop a turning wheel. In Buddhist teachings, the turning wheel of karma is the inexorable working out of the consequences of one's actions, the destiny of suffering that is shaped by one's deeds. Erda is baffled and unable to

help him. He pauses to collect his thoughts and then he says that he is no longer concerned about the end of the gods and, in fact, consciously wills it. What he once resolved in despair, he will now do gladly. At that point, we hear in the orchestra the majestic theme once intended for the Buddha. During the first rehearsals, Wagner said that this passage 'must sound like the proclamation of a new religion'. Indeed it does. Peter finished with a discussion of the original text of Brünnhilde's final words, which was not used in the staged version of *Götterdämmerung*. The text makes it clear that her insight was born of her overwhelming, grieving love for Siegfried. In *Parsifal*, which has many Buddhist influences, Parsifal tells Amfortas: 'Blessed be your suffering that gave compassion and wisdom to the timid fool'. So Brünnhilde and Parsifal are both, in their own ways, redeemer and redeemed, and exemplify Wagner's idiosyncratic application of the Indian religions to his greatest works for the stage.

Peter's original ideas for this talk were published in the July 2020 issue of the Wagner Journal and can be found on: <file:///C:/Users/Bassett/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/TZQH6XT8/The%20Wagner%20Journal%20Article.pdf>.



SUNDAY 1 MAY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

1.30PM DVD FRITZ LANG'S MASTERPIECE *SIEGFRIED*

Members enjoyed a rare 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.

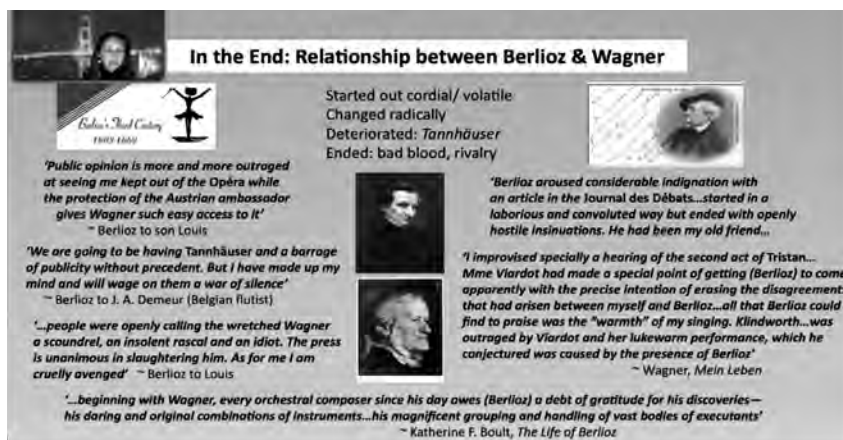
WEDNESDAY 4 MAY VIA ZOOM

12.30PM AWARD WINNING AUTHOR, SCRIPTWRITER, LECTURER AND JOURNALIST ERICA MINER TALKED TO US FROM SEATTLE ABOUT 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 did attend each other's performances, exchanged letters, and met on more than one occasion. Via Zoom, Erica talked about the fascinating relationship between these two eccentric masters.

Comments following the talk can be seen on our Facebook site. Erica posted the following:

'Many thanks to Lis Bergmann and Wagner Society in New South Wales for hosting my 'Wagner and Berlioz' presentation yesterday. What a fun group!' Fellow member Robert Mitchell has described Erica's talk as: 'A deeply fascinating insight into two of the 19th Century's most significant composers. Erica



Miner is both erudite and entertaining, enlivening her talk with both visual and musical examples.'

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** conducted a stunning cast. Superstar **Jonas Kaufman** as the noble Lohengrin, **Emily Magee** as Elsa, while **Elena Gabouri** sang the conniving Ortrud and **Marco Vratogna** performed as the deceived Telramund. Director **Olivier Py** set this battle between good and evil in the ruins of Berlin in the aftermath of World War II. A monumental revolving tiered set depicted a decaying theatre, where emblems of German Romanticism gather dust.

Members who attended *Lohengrin* were full of praise for all the performances, although not everyone was happy with some aspects of the production. Here is a brief selection from some of the press reviews.

PETER ROSE IN ABR ARTS

At the end of the opera, after Elsa's suicidal betrayal ('O Elsa! What have you done to me?'), Kaufmann moved front-stage and sang 'In fernem Land', the great aria of declaration and extrication, music we know already from the Prelude. Here, Kaufmann was at his most magnetic; rarely has a Melbourne audience held its breath for so long. Kaufmann's dynamics are always daring; he is capable of such stillness, such hush. Lohengrin is one of those idealised, lonely heroes who suit Kaufmann temperamentally. He seems most focused, most energised, when alone on stage. In 'In fernem Land', Kaufmann risked much with the inward fervour of his singing of the early passages, especially the description of the Grail and its wondrous power. It was a heart-stopping moment in the theatre. The aria ended radiantly. The Farewell was similarly poignant. In all, it was a memorable and suspenseful performance from the German tenor.



Jonas Kaufmann as Lohengrin. Photo Jeff Busby

BARNEY ZWARTZ IN THE AGE

In all, a wonderful night, and gratifying to see that, post-pandemic, opera can still fill the biggest theatres.

DAVID LARKIN IN BACHTRACK

.....re-situating operatic scenarios to the period around World War 2 is a tired cliché. It can still be done brilliantly (for instance, in Barrie Kosky's 2017 *Meistersinger*), but it seems to be Py's automatic go-to, to judge by the fact that his version of Halevy's *La Juive*, seen earlier this year in Sydney, adopts the same strategy. But while a story of persecuted

CONTINUED OVER >



Warwick Fyfe as The Herald. Photo Jeff Busby

19th-century Jews overlays easily and convincingly onto the Holocaust, here it seemed gratuitous. In the present case, Py's updating is further complicated with a thick, if hardly coherent, layer of symbolism. Lines from the poem *Todesfuge* by Holocaust survivor Paul Celan are daubed on one wall (in German, without any context), while mysterious emblems and devices are shown on banners or scrawled by characters onto the backcloth. Most strikingly, the duet between Lohengrin and Elsa in Act 3 takes place on a multi-level museum display case, in which various artefacts (a horse, a ship, a clock) are juxtaposed with iconic names from German literature and arts (Goethe, Schiller, Carl Maria von Weber). Again, there are precedents for heavily symbolic or imagistic productions of Wagner: the stagings of *Parsifal* by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg or Stefan Herheim jump to mind..... But while in these cases, the purpose of the symbolism was usually clear, even if the details required further study, here it was puzzling and distracting to the point of upstaging the singers.

And it was a shame to have one's attention taken away from the singing and orchestral playing, which at times was truly outstanding. The Act 1 Prelude had the requisite ethereal quality, and Tahu Matheson conducted Orchestra Victoria with sureness of touch and sensitivity to the needs of the singers. From the first sung notes, it was clear we had an excellent herald in **Warwick Fyfe**, his stentorian delivery of announcements so forceful that it was plausible Lohengrin might have heard him in far-off Montsalvat.

SUNDAY 29 MAY AT ST COLUMBA COMMUNITY CENTRE 1.00PM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

21 financial members attended the 42nd AGM. Official minutes of the meeting will be posted on the website in due course. The minutes of the 2021 AGM were approved and the 2022 President's Annual Report and the 2021 Financial Report were accepted.

SUNDAY 29 MAY AT ST COLUMBA COMMUNITY CENTRE 2.00PM CONCERT

Following the AGM we were treated to a concert of wonderful music performed by talented and vicacious young singers **Brad Cooper** (tenor) and **Jane Ede** (soprano) accompanied by our favourite pianist **Bradley Gilchrist**. Both singers are building their repertoires and trying out new roles and Jane was excited to be performing the Leonora aria for the very first time in public. She was terrific. Brad teased and thrilled us with a snippet of Siegfried's "Nothung, Nothung..." He then told us about his rewarding and inspiring time being coached by the great Siegfried Jerusalem. (Sessions in Germany sponsored by WSNSW). He will write about this for the next Quarterly.

After the concert the singers led us in "Happy Birthday dear Richard" and the toast to his 209th birthday, followed by bubbles and nibbles. In summary - a delightful afternoon was had by all.

PROGRAM

1. Weber: Freischütz - Max's Aria (Brad)
2. Strauss: Marschallin monologue (Jane)
3. Wagner: Parsifal - Nur eine Waffe taugt (Brad)
4. Strauss: Zueignung (Jane)
5. Strauss: Allerseelen (Brad)
6. Beethoven: Fidelio - Abscheulicher (Jane)
7. Beethoven: Fidelio - O namenlose Freude (Jane & Brad)

Interval

1. Lehár: Giuditte - Freunde das Leben ist lebenswert (Brad)
2. Lehár: Land des Lächelns - Wer hat die Liebe uns in Herz gesengt (Jane & Brad)
3. Schumann: Waldegespräch (Jane)
4. Korngold: Glückwunsch (Brad)
5. Korngold: Die Tote Stadt - Glück, das mir verblieb (Jane & Brad)
6. Lehár: Meine Lippen sie küssen so heiss (Jane)
7. Lehár: Lustige Wittve - Lippen Schweigen (Jane & Brad)

PICASSO AND WAGNER

<http://web.org.uk/picasso/wagner.html>

At the turn of the century in Barcelona a number of poets and artists, including Picasso, formed a literary group called Valhalla. Although the group's activities remain to this day something of a mystery, it seems from the name Valhalla, that Wagner and his operatic storytelling may have been one of their main interests.

Wagner had been very popular throughout Europe and was at this time making an important impact on the cultural scene in Barcelona. His operas revived Norse and Arthurian legends with underlying mystical themes that an inspiration to the Symbolists and Modernistas with whom Picasso was associated.

Picasso's interest in Wagner has not gone unreported; he almost certainly attended some of the Wagner operas that were performed at his favourite haunt, Els Quatre Gats.

The 1934 drawing contains an important Wagnerian theme that appears to be unique in Picasso's work. It depicts what is probably the most dramatic scene in *Parsifal* - the moment when the spear that once killed Christ hovers over Parsifal's head after being hurled at him by the evil magician Klingsor.

This passage in the opera had special symbolic significance for Picasso in 1934 because it related closely to his personal life at that time and also to his concern about the rise of Hitler and the threat of a second world war.

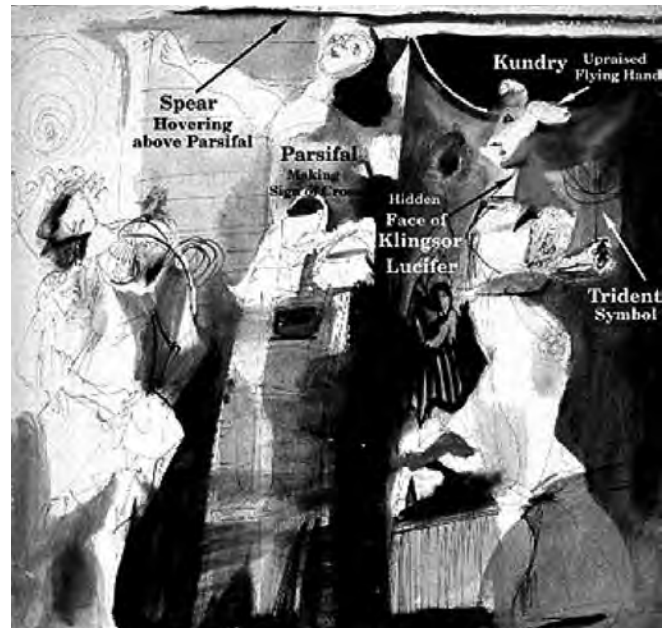
PICASSO'S PARSIFAL

Wagner's opera *Parsifal* features prominently in the 1934 drawing, it was originally based on Wolfram Von Eschenbach's thirteenth century Grail romance, Parsival.

Picasso knew Wagner's version of the story and identified himself with Parsifal. In the 1934 drawing, at the age of 52, he reveals, albeit secretly, the extent of this symbolic identification.

It has been well reported that the letters of Picasso's name had magical significance for him. The first four, Pica, means spear in Spanish; which would certainly be one reason why Picasso might identify with Parsifal in Wagner's opera. Picasso would have realised a further significant link in the final stages of the opera. In the second act, Parsifal begins to suffer the pain of Christ's wound in the process of a mystical identification with Christ. By 1934, Picasso had long identified himself with Christ and the Crucifixion in his art and the wound was already one of his personal symbols for suffering and yearning for its resolve.

The Spear that had once wounded the side of Christ is pivotal in Wagner's story. Klingsor, a powerful black magician steals it and with it wounds Amfortas, the King of the Guardians of The Holy Grail. He then flees with the Spear to his castle where he dominates the surrounding area using powerful black magic. All this while, Amfortas is destined to lay in agony from the wound which never heals; his only hope of recovery being the Spear's return.



Parsifal, an heroic fool, is prophesied to return the Spear and heal Amfortas. In an effort to prevent the prophecy coming true, Klingsor uses magic to lure the hero to his Castle where his men are hiding in ambush. Parsifal overcomes Klingsor's men but suddenly Klingsor appears on the castle ramparts and in a final attempt at the hero's destruction, he utters the following words:

Halt, I have the right weapon to fell you ! The fool shall fall to me through his master's Spear.

Klingsor hurls the Spear, but as if stopped by the hand of God, it hovers motionless above Parsifal's head. Parsifal reaches up and grasps the Spear and with it makes the Sign of the Cross, saying these words:

With this sign I rout your enchantment,
As the Spear closes the wound which you dealt him with it
may it crush your lying splendour,
into mourning and ruin.

Klingsor and his Castle then sink into the sea as if hit by an earthquake, and the gardens that once surrounded the castle turn into a wasteland.

Parsifal restores the Spear and heals Amfortas of his wound. He then becomes anointed as the new King of the Guardians of The Holy Grail.

In the 1934 drawing this pivotal scene is portrayed by the spear hovering above Picasso's head. The spear runs along the top edge of the drawing and when the image is rotated 90 degrees to the left it forms the shaft of a huge letter 'P' in conjunction with the black semi-circle in the upper right corner. The 'P' denotes a cryptic Picasso signature and refers to the artist's identifications with 'Pica' and Parsifal.

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The central figure is identifiable with Parsifal reaching up and making the Sign of the Cross.

His 'flying hand' concealed within the island of light in the right-hand figure's face can be seen to be blocking Klingsor's advance, it is located immediately to the left of Klingsor's face which in turn seems to descend from the rear end of the spear in the upper right corner.

The figure on the right would seem to characterise Kundry, the witch who was present at Christ's Crucifixion and who under Klingsor's spell attempts to seduce Parsifal. In the drawing she appears possessed by Lucifer or the Devil, both of whom are appropriate characterisations of Klingsor. Behind the hidden face there is a trident form, which seems to reinforce the hidden face's connection with Lucifer.

According to Dr Walter Stein and others, Hitler was convinced that in the ninth century he had been incarnated as the historical Klingsor, sometimes known as Landulf II of Capua !

Stein had been an acquaintance of Hitler in the years preceding World War One and claimed that Hitler had at that time undertaken a penetrating study of Von Eschenbach's story and fathomed its deepest occult meanings.

The self-identification of Picasso with Parsifal and the self-identification of Hitler with Klingsor appears by some uncanny means to have found its way into the 1934 drawing which might indicate that Picasso had access to secretive information about Hitler and his occult activities at least five years before the Second World War.

© Mark Harris 1996



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4 subscribers

WAGNER SOCIETY
YOUTUBE CHANNEL

We encourage members to visit our YouTube channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/wagnersocietynsw>

In addition to including many fascinating early recordings and illustrations, there are clips from earlier and recent Wagner Society concerts and talks.

WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW INC.

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

	Note	2021	2020
		\$	\$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Westpac Cheque Account		14,506.10	13,203.73
Westpac Cash Reserve		52,531.32	57,521.25
Cash at Bank		67,037.42	70,724.98
Total Current Assets		67,037.42	70,724.98
TOTAL ASSETS		67,037.42	70,724.98
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Membership Revenue in Advance	190.00		765.00
Total Current Liabilities		190.00	765.00
TOTAL LIABILITIES		190.00	765.00
NET ASSETS		\$66,847.42	\$69,959.98
MEMBERS EQUITY			
Retained Profits		66,847.42	69,959.98
TOTAL MEMBERS EQUITY		\$66,847.42	\$69,959.98

PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2021

	2021	2020
	\$	\$
INCOME		
Membership	15,065.00	14,438.65
Lectures and Functions	12,401.00	4,210.00
Donations	2,680.00	1,975.00
Bayreuth Ticket Sales	500.00	1,350.00
Advertising Income		650.00
Pacific Opera Jane Mathews Sponsorship	1,250.00	
Melbourne Opera Donations / Tuba	10,865.00	3,200.00
Sale of Assets	3,000.00	
Interest Received	10.07	112.88
Total Income	45,771.07	25,936.53
Less EXPENSES		
Bank Charges	247.92	94.79
Newsletter	7,573.42	7,705.81
FARA	5,000.00	
Function Catering Expenses	1,323.15	264.39
Function Room Hire	1,439.50	528.00
Payments to Presenters	3,842.40	900.00
Bayreuth Ticket Expenses		695.63
Bayreuth Memberships	1,146.45	1,254.34
Sponsorships/Scholarships	8,276.29	3,940.00
Pacific Opera Jane Mathews Sponsorship	1,250.00	
Melbourne Opera Donations / Tuba	15,000.00	
Other Operating Expenses	3,784.50	2,076.48
	48,883.63	17,459.44
Operating Profit	(3,112.56)	8,477.09
Total Available for Distribution	(\$3,112.56)	(\$8,477.09)



COSIMA WAGNER "A CONTRADICTIONARY LIFE", BY SABINE ZURMÜHL A NEW BOOK ABOUT COSIMA WAGNER

Verband President Rainer Fineske writes: You may ask, why yet another biography about Cosima Wagner? Quite simply, it is no ordinary book, but the analysis of the writer and journalist Sabine Zurmühl, who has dealt with Cosima in particular from the perspective of the female potential of her time and her role in contemporary history. Sabine Zurmühl is a member of several Richard Wagner associations and has given lectures on many topics of contemporary and women's historical perspectives. In this book, she not only takes on the ambivalent personality of Cosima, but she also places her in the historical context of her time. She shows today's readers in a clear and understandable way why Cosima was and became the way we have come to know her from previous biographies. She also illustrates under what particularly difficult situations Cosima prevailed due to her strong personality and her excellent connections to the great personalities of her time.

Cosima Wagner "A Contradictory Life" Published in May (German language only) by Boehloau Verlag under ISBN 978-3-205-21501-1 at a price of 39,00 €.

FINANCIAL WAGNER SOCIETY MEMBERS AS AT 31 MAY 2022

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WE WARMLY WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE JUNE 2022:

Michele Day 1264, Linden Ramsey 1265

HAVE A GOOD TIME. DANCE, BE GAY

Cinderella, Walt Disney 1951

ISADORA DUNCAN AT BAYREUTH

Isadora Duncan (1877–1927), the famous American dancer, sought all her life to rediscover the dance movements of Antiquity, revolutionizing the world of choreography. In 1904, she decided to go to Bayreuth to drink the music of the Master

In her work “My life”, the dancer devotes a long chapter to her stay in Bayreuth. She writes in particular:

“This decision (to go to Bayreuth) was unshakeable from the day I received a visit from Wagner’s widow in person. I have never met a woman who made such an impression on me, for whom I felt as much intellectual fervour as Cosima Wagner with her majestic bearing, her superb eyes, a nose perhaps too strong for a woman. , a bright front of intelligence. She was versed in the deepest philosophy and knew by heart every phrase, every note of the Master’s music. She spoke to me of my art in encouraging and admirable terms, then told me of Wagner’s contempt for the ballet dance school and for its costumes, his dream of Bacchanalia and flower girls, the impossibility of fitting Wagner’s dream into the habits of the Berlin ballet, which was to give performances in Bayreuth this very season. She asked me if I would agree to dance in Tannhauser’s performances.”

Note: It was Siegfried Wagner (Richard and Cosima’s gay son), who, having become enamoured with Isadora when he saw her perform in Berlin, encouraged his mother to bestow an invitation to “the Master’s” domain.

Every evening, the dancer is invited to Wahnfried, at Cosima’s table. There she meets “the great figure of Hans Richter, the silhouette of Carl Muck, the charming Mottl, and Humperdinck and Heinrich Thode”. She attends all the performances (That year *Tannhäuser*, the *Ring* and *Parsifal*) Often she walks with Cosima around Wagner’s grave. Cosima insists that she stage the Bacchanale ballet and Isadora Duncan seriously questions



Isadora Duncan



Siegfried Wagner

herself to imagine which would be the most adequate dances to express Wagner’s music in gestures. She then writes how she imagines this first scene of the opera. For her, this is Tannhäuser’s dreamlike vision and not a reality.

“I cannot give you a vague indication, an imprecise sketch of what most of the dancers will be later, that is to say the masses rushing in hurricanes to the rhythm of the crazy waves of this music, full of ecstasy and fantastic sensuality. If I have the courage to dare this enterprise on my own, it is because it all belongs to the realm of pure imagination. These are just the visions of Tannhäuser asleep in the arms of Venus.”

One day, Cosima visits the dancer at dawn. The latter worries about the pallor of the Master’s widow and fears having offended her. Indeed, Cosima was reluctant despite everything to let the young dancer perform dances considered at the time unworthy and shameless. Isadora Duncan refused to

dance in tights and was almost naked under her transparent white tunic. The day before Cosima’s arrival , the two women had a lively discussion about the interpretation of the dance of the Three Graces of Bacchanalia. Cosima had “searched through his relics and discovered among the Master’s writings a small notebook containing the more precise description than anything published of the meaning he gave to this dance of the Bacchanal. (Refer to the following article)

The dear woman could not wait; she had come at dawn to admit that I was right. All shaken, all agitated, she said to me: “My dear child, you are surely inspired by the Master himself. See what he wrote. It coincides exactly with your intuition. I will no longer intervene; I leave you complete freedom to lead the dance in Bayreuth.”



Publicity for 1905 *Tannhäuser* performance

Cosima is so under the spell that she wants Siegfried Wagner to marry Isadora Duncan, so that this alliance will allow the transmission of the spirit of the Master. The latter escapes despite everything. Several times, however, Isadora Duncan will make blunders with Cosima. One evening, at Wahnfried's table, the dancer allows herself to criticize the Master in front of Cosima, saying that the lyrical drama cannot exist, since the drama is essentially spoken language, the music is lyrical ecstasy and that it is impossible to imagine the union of the two. Once the blasphemy is pronounced, everyone in attendance is dismayed.

Another time, she invites Ernst Haeckel, a great iconoclast and admirer of Darwin, to the Festspielhaus, whose ideas are not to the taste of Cosima, a practicing Catholic and who takes a very dim view of the presence of this man in her home.

The premiere of *Tannhäuser* arrives, and Isadora Duncan caused a sensation:

“My transparent tunic, which showed all the parts of my dancer’s body, had produced a certain effect in the middle of the pink legs of the corps de ballet, and, at the last minute, poor Madame Wagner had even lost her courage. She dispatched one of her daughters to my dressing room, with a long white shirt, begging me to put her under the diaphanous veil which served as my costume. But I was inflexible. I wanted to dress and dance as I wanted, or not to appear.”



Munich postcard from 1908 representing the European group in *Tannhäuser*

Unfortunately, if Isadora Duncan displayed a wealth of expression and sensuality, the corps de ballet did not follow her and was satisfied with classic poses. Only Isadora Duncan’s dance solo carried the opera’s opening scene to choreographic modernity. Accompanied by two young girls, she interpreted the Three Graces, notably inspired by Botticelli’s paintings.

<https://richard-wagner-web-museum.com/famille-epoque-entourage-interpretes/duncan-isadora/>

LA BACCHANALE DE TANNHÄUSER

AN ARTICLE BY ISADORA DUNCAN PUBLISHED ON THE FRONT PAGE OF GIL BLAS OF 8 DECEMBER 1911.

Richard Wagner gave the following indications for this Bacchanal:

1. Voluptuous, amorous dance, the nymphs exciting young men to mingle with them; these descend the practicables, spread over the stage. They look for each other, run away from each other and get annoyed.
2. General dance, a sort of mythological cancan.
3. New groups arrive, Bacchantes rush in and excite couples in love to a savage joy.
4. Melee of all, fantastic dance.
5. Lascivious pleasure. (Predominance of the feminine element.).
6. Male impetuosity increases.

Always new arrivals.

7. A sort of voluptuous convulsion; you think you hear cries, howls of joy. The frenzy reaches its height.
8. Sudden change in the action; voluptuous footsteps replace convulsions. Predominance of the animal element, fauns, satyrs, lead the others. Continuous crescendo.
9. Summum of delirium and disorder. They are all about to roll to the ground.
10. The Graces rise up terrified and push the couples away with gentle violence. Dance of the Three Graces.-

To realize these dreams, a single gesture of appeal could evoke a thousand outstretched arms, a single head thrown back will represent all the bacchic tumult which is the expression of the storm ignited in Tannhäuser’s blood. It seems to me that in this music is

concentrated the unfulfilled heat, the exasperated madness, the passionate languor, in short, all the screaming desire of the world.

And when these terrible desires come to a head, when they reach the point where, breaking all the barriers, they rush like an irresistible torrent, I cover the scene with darkness, so that everyone can, without seeing, realize, in his imagination, an outcome that will always go beyond - the concrete vision.

After this explosion and destruction, comes appeasement. These are the three Graces which embody the calm and languor of satisfied amorous sensuality. In Tannhäuser’s dream, they hug and part, join, and walk away again. They sing the loves of Zeus. They tell him about Europa’s adventure, carried through the waves. Their heads bow with love; they are inundated, they are drowning in the desire for Leda in love with the white swan.

They thus order Tannhäuser to rest in the whiteness of the arms of Venus.

Should we have before our eyes the crude representation of these visions? Wouldn’t you prefer, fixing your eyes in the hazy spaces, to see Europa with flexible arms embracing the neck of the great bull, and making to her companions, who call her from the shore, a final farewell gesture? Wouldn’t you prefer, fixing your eyes in the shadows, to see Leda half covered by the Swan’s wings, panting under the close kiss? Maybe you would answer:

“ Yes “. Why are you here ? “

I am simply telling you; “Maybe I am a clue. “

Isadora Duncan

TANNHÄUSER: WHAT'S ON A MAN'S MIND

Excerpts from Wouter de Moor's review of the Dutch National Opera's 2019 production, directed by Christof Loy with choreography by Gieorgij Grzegorz. <https://www.wagner-heavymetal.com/blog/tannhauser-whats-on-a-mans-mind>

Tannhäuser in Paris in 1861 was a fiasco. Main cause: the Jockey Club, a group of men of the aristocracy who had to miss their ballet at the beginning of the second act because Richard Wagner, that stubborn Teutone, allowed artistic reasons to take precedence over the conventions of the Grand Opera. Wagner had placed the ballet at the beginning of the opera, at the end of the overture, because from a narrative point of view it was the most logical spot. The members of the Jockey Club, who were usually still having dinner during the first act, and more into the bosoms and bare legs of the ballerinas than into opera, were all but pleased. They disturbed the performances to such an extent, handing out whistles and rattles to the audience, that Wagner felt compelled to withdraw the opera after three performances.



In this production director Christof Loy brings Paris and Wagner together again. He has the Jockey Club members appear as well as the knights of the Wartburg as participants of the bacchanal in the mountain of Venus. The world of Venus and the Wartburg come together in what most resembles a painting by Degas (*Foyer de la Danse*). (The set is based on the Salle Le Peletier - home to the Paris Opéra during the mid-19th century). One world, one stage image, in which lust and prudery come together, separated only by the male perspective on the woman - the way in which the man sees a woman (as a saint or as a whore).

The story of *Tannhäuser* is the story of a man who tries to find a balance between these two opposites (are they really opposites?); a search for the answer to the question how to be a man, how to be a human being. In his career, Wagner would repeatedly return to the question of lust & love, salvation and the role of women in it. In a superlative way. His talent to expose the drama hidden in the human condition with compelling musical prose can be considered awe inspiring.

Tannhäuser begins the opera that bears his name behind a piano, composing. As the overture progresses, the room changes from a quiet artist's place into a bacchanal in which members of the Jockey Club are chasing ballerinas. The staging of the overture is, as is often the case in this opera, the part that appeals most to the imagination. There is nudity and sex, with or without consent. We are in the mountain of Venus, that part of the masculine mind where the woman serves only as a prey for red hot testosterone. After a long stay there Tannhäuser has had enough. He is fed up with constant copulation, he wants to return to the mortal world, to nature, to the world where he will be able to be creative again. The instant satisfaction in Venus' garden of lust deprives him of the inner struggle necessary to give birth to a dancing star.

Wagner would later present an unsurpassed and all-encompassing argument for it with *Tristan und Isolde*, but the premise that art is unrealized sex is already hinted at in *Tannhäuser*. Tannhäuser, the minstrel of the Wartburg, is left behind in the coital world of Venus with an unsatisfactory feeling and asks the goddess of lust to let him go. The goddess feels rejected and is surprised that Tannhäuser wants to return to the mortal world; she is shocked by his ingratitude. What Tannhäuser really wants becomes not entirely clear. Once back in the world where pure love is considered the highest ideal, the Wartburg, the world in which Elisabeth is waiting for him, he insults and shocks his entourage by chanting the glory of lust. The source does not dry up by drinking from it, he tells his friend Wolfram during the *Sängerkrieg*, the singing contest in the second act. Wolfram von Eschenbach is, in this production perhaps even more so than usual, with Tannhäuser the most important male character of the opera. His struggle with his ideas about pure love, his inability to indulge in lust, puts him in sharp contrast with the rest of the members of the Jockey Club whose madonna-whore complex is as big as the hypocrisy they are guilty of. The hypocrisy, that lurks in the background when they condemning Tannhäuser, is prominently placed in the foreground by Loy. Here hypocrisy is not just suggested for those who want to see it but finds an unambiguous representation on stage.

It is Wagner's instinct, his genius, that saves *Tannhäuser* (the opera) from a grotesque gap between love and lust. He turns Venus, the goddess of lust, into a woman who also wants love while Elisabeth, a model of pure spiritual love, is longing for sensual pleasures as well. With music, he juxtaposes both body and mind, while at the same time lets them intertwine. Loy had both women, following Wagner's instinct and not his libretto, appear at the beginning of the third act. Like two women embodying together that one woman that the man does not see (or does not want to see).

SIEGFRIED WAGNER: BAYREUTH'S HERITAGE FROM A DIFFERENT COLOURED BOX



Notes about the **Expo Siegfried Wagner** organized in cooperation with the International Siegfried Wagner Society and the Richard Wagner Museum in Bayreuth, held at the Schwules Museum, Berlin, February – June 2017 Curators: Prof. Dr. Peter P. Pachl, Achim Bahr and Dr. Kevin Clarke. <https://www.schwulesmuseum.de/ausstellung/siegfried-wagner/>

The history of the Wagner clan - with all its violations of conventional moral concepts, intrigues, scandals, power struggles over Bayreuth and political positions - has occupied the German public for 150 years. The “Green Hill” and the annual festivals which have taken place there since 1951 are regarded by many as the “pantheon of the German people”, as a national sanctuary and cultural asset of the highest quality that shines out into the world.

Its central figure is the composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883): one of the most controversial figures in the history of music. Among the countless books written about his life are many historical publications dealing with the particular fascination that Wagner’s operas exerted on homosexuals. Examples include: Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1891), *Bayreuth und Homosexualität* of Oskar Panizza (1895), *Genio e degenerazione* by Cesare Lombroso (1897), *Richard Wagner und die Homosexualität* by Hanns Fuchs (1903) and *Richard Wagner’s Bisexuality* by Heinrich Pudo (1907).

On June 6, 1869, Wagner’s only son, Siegfried, was born in Switzerland. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (the future icon of the “masculinists”) was present at the time of birth, King Louis II was the godfather. The mother, Cosima von Bülow, was still married to another man at the time. And Franz Liszt is his illustrious grandfather. From the start Siegfried was destined to be the titular heir destined to carry on his father’s legacy: as a musician, conductor and artistic director of the Bayreuth Festival. He took over the direction of the festival in 1906, continuing the work of Cosima, taking the work into the modern era. His many innovations annoyed many Wagnerian reactionaries, but he successfully persevered in his projects until his death in 1930. In addition, Siegfried composed a total of 18 music-drama stage works, which were performed very successfully throughout Europe during his lifetime. And he appears all over the world as a sought-after - and well-paid - conductor of his own works, plus, especially, those of Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt.

The family knew and largely tolerated the fact that Siegfried was homosexual and led to an astonishingly open gay life for the time. Blackmailers were silenced with money from private funds. After the Eulenburg scandal, the journalist Maximilian Harden targeted Siegfried Wagner in 1914, since Eulenburg had promoted the Wagner cult and arranged for permanent financial security for the festival. In addition, Eulenburg was friends with the “race prophet” Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Siegfried’s brother-in-law. After Harden had publicly referred to Siegfried as the “saviour from a different-coloured box”, he hastily married the androgynous, still underage nanny Winifred (1897-1980), who bore him four children and with them rumours about her husband’s homosexuality disappeared. The ardent Wagnerian Winifred not only led Bayreuth into the arms of the National Socialists, with all the fatal consequences, but after the death of her husband she also ensured that his compositions were no longer performed because they were said to be “insignificant” compared to the music dramas of Richard Wagner.

In books on Richard Wagner and the Bayreuth Festival, Siegfried has so far only appeared marginally, his homosexuality is hardly ever discussed or, if it is, only in code. The circle of gay and lesbian artists that Siegfried brought to Bayreuth and the “queer” innovations in the style of staging that he implemented with these artists also remained unmentioned for a long time. His own works were completely marginalized. In 1973, Winifred did not include his private correspondence with the family documents of the Richard Wagner Foundation, but handed them over to her eldest granddaughter Amelie, daughter of Verena Lafferentz-Wagner, under the condition of the strictest secrecy. Sven Friedrich speaks of “Fafnerization” in this regard. Only the Vatican is more hermetically sealed off.

Editor’s personal note: In 1975 Siegfried Wagner’s Opera *Der Friedensengel* (*The Angel of Peace*) was performed in concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London in the presence of Friedelind Wagner. I was lucky to have obtained a ticket but very unlucky as I became unwell and couldn’t attend. I was really looking forward to seeing this brave and talented woman and hearing her father’s music. It was conducted by Leslie Head, with a superb cast, and the CD of this performance is available from Amazon.



SIEGFRIED WAGNER'S *TANNHÄUSER* by KEVIN CLARKE

<https://www.wagneropera.net/interviews/kevin-clarke-interview-siegfried-wagner.htm>

Tannhäuser was Siegfried's favourite opera, and he wanted to produce it long before 1930. Only, he never had enough money until Winifred managed to start a big collection and gave him the necessary funds as a gift in 1929, for his 60th birthday. *Tannhäuser* has always been interpreted by gay men as a metaphor of their own lives. *Tannhäuser*, as the story of a man torn between the sensual frenzy of the Venusberg and the chaste world of Christian knighthood, is discussed by Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/91). So, it's no big surprise to see Siegfried drawn to it, too. He created a special 'pink' light design for the Venusberg, he hired

Rudolf von Laban as a choreographer and made him insert homoerotic elements into the bacchanal. Which infuriated conservative right-wing Wagnerians. He hired a gay singer as Wolfram and for the title role (Sigismund Pilinszky). And he had his gay friend Kurt Söhnlein do the set designs. As it turned out: this daring production was Siegfried's greatest triumph as festival director. It was also one of the most famous productions in the history of the Bayreuth Festival. The cast made a recording in 1930, alas without Toscanini. But you can still hear what Siegfried's ideal *Tannhäuser* ensemble sounded like.

EXCERPT FROM SIEGFRIED IDYLL by JEFFREY ARLO BROWN

<https://van-magazine.com/mag/siegfried-idyll/>

Music wasn't Siegfried's first instinct. Instead, he wanted to be an architect. He was a timid kid, though, and bowing to family pressure, he took composition with Engelbert Humperdinck. He studied in Frankfurt, where he met a young British composition student named Clement Harris and fell in love. In 1892, they undertook a trip to Asia together as the only two passengers on a cargo boat belonging to Harris's family. The trip was clearly a high point in Siegfried's life: he drew and composed, and described living with Harris like "two

Adams." He also finally accepted that he would have a career as a musician during this trip. He was inspired, he wrote, after hearing a performance of the Bach Chorale "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunder" in Hong Kong. In 1893, he conducted his first concert, including works of his father. Clement Harris was killed in 1897, at the age of 25, in the Greco-Turkish War. Siegfried dedicated a 1923 symphonic work, "Glück" ("Happiness") to Harris, and kept a photograph of him on his composition desk until his death.

FROM COSIMA WAGNER'S DIARIES

At lunch a dismal occurrence; Fidi (Siegfried) behaves badly toward his father; the dreadful thought that he might prove unworthy of him takes possession of me, and this thought, instead of being turned against myself in resigned acknowledgement of original sin, turns inside me against my child, and I hit him, so violently that it causes bruises. No words, not even my sobs, can express the horror I feel about myself – oh, fortunate people who lived in times when one could atone! In this instance, as always, R. heavenly toward me. Cosima Wagner: Diaries. 22 July 1878



Cosima, Siegfried and Richard Wagner

WAGNER ON DANCE

"The most realistic of all arts is that of Dance. Its artistic "stuff" is the actual living Man; and in truth no single portion of him, but the whole man from heel to crown, such as he shows himself unto the eye. It therefore includes within itself the conditions for the enunciation of all remaining arts: the singing and speaking man must necessarily be a bodily man; through his outer form, through the posture of his limbs, the inner, singing and speaking man comes forth to view. The arts of Tone and Poetry become first understandable in that of Dance, the Mimetic art, by the entire art-receptive man, *i.e.*, by him who not only hears but also sees."

From "The Artwork of the Future," Richard Wagner's Prose Works, vol. I., trans. William Ashton Ellis (New York: Broude Bros, 1966)

CAN LISTENING TO WAGNER MAKE YOU HOMOSEXUAL? A TALE OF ORDINARY HOMOPHOBIA IN PARIS IN 1887

Extract from article by Luc Roger in <https://munichandco.blogspot.com/2020/05/ecouter-du-wagner-peut-il-rendre.html?spref=pi>

Lohengrin was Richard Wagner's first opera to be performed in Paris after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. On May 3, 1887, Charles Lamoureux directed the performance at the Eden-Théâtre. The announcement of this event would fuel the anger of the anti-Wagnerians, who hastened to pour it into the Parisian newspapers.

This was the case with **Aurélien Scholl** (1833-1902), a virulent journalist and novelist who signed the *Courrier de Paris* for the newspaper on the front page of the newspaper *Le Matin* on April 23. Scholl immediately attacks the very character of Wagner in whom he finds "something monstrous, fantastic and repulsive. From everything we know of him, it is clear that he was a maniac, if not a madman." The chronicler says he saw Wagner from near in 1861 at the *Tannhäuser* rehearsals: "He would arrive angry, get carried away all day and go away vociferating. He had after everyone: the conductor, the musicians, the singers, the choristers, the blower, the director had each their turn, until the moment when Wagner confused them in a general imprecation. He gesticulated, he stamped his foot, he uttered roars, constantly raising his hand to his glasses which bounced on his owl nose."

Not content with this diatribe, Scholl will then attack the Wagnerians and French Wagnerians by arguing that the mere hearing of Wagner's music could well make them change their sexual orientation. This is because, as early as 1877, the French press had largely echoed Wagner's letters to his fashion maker that the Viennese press had just published (See our article). The composer's immoderate taste for expensive silks and for dressing gowns in various tones and sewn in gold or for embroidered slippers had made several journalists say that Richard Wagner liked to dress like a woman. It is also that the tragic death of King Louis II (June 13, 1886) was still in everyone's mind and that the king's homosexuality was no longer a secret to anyone. Wagner homosexual! * (- we did not yet say homosexual at the time -), this Wagner who had had a love affair with the king! Besides, the love correspondence of the two men was known. Scholl has a threatening humour: the Wagnerians and the Wagnerians who will hear *Lohengrin* could well fire their cuti ... To good understanding, hi! Here is the end of his article, a text for the archives of homophobia:

"[...] About the strange correspondence exchanged between the King of Bavaria and the author of *Tristan et Iseult*, especially about the pleasure Wagner took in dressing as a woman, as a German magazine has just revealed, they put before me a letter from Gasperini, a well-known music critic, who was one of the first French Wagnerians.

"This music," wrote A. de Gasperini, "which tends to the imagination all its freedom, which breaks down customary barriers, which will transform the sexes of those who understand it, which will give men the charm and the tears of women, women the fever and ardour of males, to all the pleasures of the Champs-Élysées!



Champs-Élysées? At what time?

It is noted that most Wagnerians and Wagnerians seem to belong to the opposite sex rather than their own.

This transformation, superficial in France, is complete in Germany. The Wagnerians lose their natural tastes and seek ecstasy in exceptional transport.

In this time of hypnotism and suggestion, the thing will surprise no one.

Moreover, the starting point is known. The King of Bavaria took on the costume of Tristan, and the hideous Wagner that

of Yseult. We saw him in a low-cut blue dress with a rose in his hair. It was in this costume that he took to the piano and cooed duets with this poor fool who had been drowned without even attaching a stone to his neck.

Around 1350, the dance of St. Vitus broke out with appalling vigour. Michelet relates that the patients, as if carried away by the same electric current, seized each other by the hand, formed immense chains, turned, turned to death. The spectators laughed at first, then, by a contagion, let themselves go, fell into the mainstream, increased the terrible chorus.

What would have happened if the evil had persisted, as leprosy did for a long time in its very decadence? It was like a first step, a path to general epilepsy. If this generation of patients had not been cured, it would have produced another, decidedly epileptic. Terrible prospect! Europe covered with madmen, madmen, idiots!

To those who are about to undergo the dangerous test of Wagner's music, I say with concern: "Take care! Study well on yourself the effect of this deleterious concert. Young man, if after two acts you find Got * prettier than Mlle Reichenberg *; if it seems to you that Germain * has prettier eyes than Rachel Boyer *, run away, it is only time! "

And you, madam, if you had the idea of putting on cloth trousers, putting on a jacket and going to sing a romance under Leonide Leblanc's balcony, have your box opened in haste, cross the street. Auber running and their way to escape contagion. And above all that everyone resumes their sex in the locker room. We could be wrong with the label since, by an irony of fate, the director of Wagnerian propaganda is called "the lover"! "

Aurélien Scholl

Aurélien Scholl was probably unaware that *Lohengrin* had been the first opera that King Louis II heard when he was still a teenager. Had he known that he would no doubt have drawn conclusions ...

* The archives of the Paris Police Prefecture retain traces of a blackmail organized on Charles Lamoureux: a placard entitled The Anti-Wagner with the subtitle Wagner pederaste was to be distributed in Paris if a ransom was not paid.

** Famous theatre actors and actresses in Paris in 1887.

RICHARD WAGNER, ANIMAL LOVER

Excerpts from *Richard Wagner, animal lover*. An article by A. Autrand in le Temps August 1933

Richard Wagner was a great dog lover, owning many over the years and treating them with an undeniable sensitivity and kindness. As an adult, Wagner owned four Newfoundlands. The first of them was “Robber,” to whom we possibly owe the creation of *The Flying Dutchman*. See following article.

He left the names of the dogs in his Memoirs or in his Letters and he enjoyed writing their history, not without tender emotion. Wagner’s dogs included Robber, Peps, Fips, Pohl, Fafner, Fasolt, Loge, Brangayn, Marke and the famous Newfoundland Russ (Soot), who was buried at Wagner’s feet, and is immortalised in statue form all over Bayreuth.

After the journey to London and Paris, where they lost Robber, Wagner and Minna returned to Germany and acquired another dog, a Cavalier King Charles spaniel by the name of “Peps”, who lived with them in the days of the riot in Dresden. Wagner noted that Peps had a strong appreciation for music and would respond differently to melodies depending upon their musical keys. According to Wagner’s biographer, Peps constantly sat near his master at the piano and would sometimes howl piteously into his face, suggesting the music did not suit him. If it didn’t suit Peps, it didn’t suit Wagner. Some critics commented that Peps was the only critic Wagner ever listened to.

Wagner and Minna loved Peps very much and, in Switzerland, where they had had to flee, having to go to the mountains of the Lucerne to take care of their dilapidated health, they postponed their season, because of Peps’ illness. Wagner scarcely left his dog’s side - even putting off important work. After Peps passed away, the composer wrote to his friend Praeger: “He died in my arms on the night of the ninth (July 1855), passing away without a sound, quietly and peacefully.

On the morrow we buried him in the garden beside the house. I cried much, and since then I have felt bitter pain and sorrow for the dear friend of the past thirteen years.”

Peps was followed by the happy and amiable Fips, sent to him by Mathilde Wesendonck. On Fips’ death in 1861 Wagner wrote: “ With this little dog, I buried a lot of things. I want to travel and I will no longer have a companion.” (June 22, 1861). Fips’ death had serious consequences. Pets had always had a very real importance in the household of Wagner and Minna, childless. The death of their Fips seemed to be the final blow to a married life that had long since become impossible. But, despite his intentions, Wagner was not to leave Fips without a successor. Thieves having stolen a gold watch from him, a souvenir of the Moscow orchestra, an old baron, his neighbour, gave him a hunting dog. “His name is Pohl “, he writes from Penzing-tes-Vienne to Mathilde Wesendonck, “he is dark and strong, but already old. Soon, he will die like Fips and Peps, it’s a misery.” Pohl lived, however, all the time in Munich; he died in 1866 on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Pohl was replaced with the Newfoundland “Russ”, which the Swiss maid Vraeli herself had bought in Geneva, and which, for ten years, was doubly pampered.

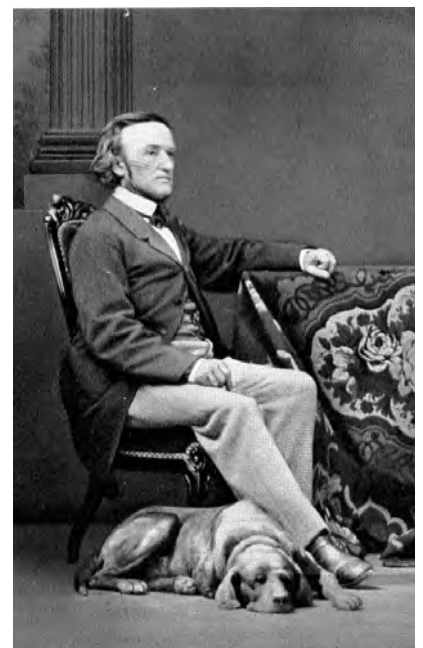
At Wagner’s royal funeral, which took place in Bayreuth, Cosima, desperate and taking refuge in her grief, did not appear, as M. Guy de Pourtalès recalls: “... But, on the doors of Wahnfried, in front of the coffin, we saw, while the snow was falling, the children holding on a leash the two dogs of their father, of the Master, of the prodigious genius, whose caresses these little animals had received and whose they had been the faithful companions.”



Minna and Peps



Russ 1866 – 1875



Wagner and Pohl



MEMORIES



BRETT JOHNSON RECOLLECTS BAYREUTH 2009

BAYREUTH THURSDAY 20 AUGUST 2009

Thirty years after my first, and until now my only Bayreuth Festival, thanks to the Wagner Society, I'm typing this in my room at the Hotel Goldener Hirsch a few hours before *Rheingold* begins.

This morning, I went to the first of the Wagner Society of New York's lectures by Professor Hans R Vaegt. I had been impressed by his explanation of the synthesis of Bayreuth production history and German history more generally in last year's new *Parsifal*, which Roger helpfully mailed with the tickets. It seemed to me that if we were in for Regietheater at full bore, some guidance by Vaegt would be helpful.

The professor did talk about Regietheater this morning: Wagner as the pioneer "Regisseur," directing the first complete cycle and finding it necessary all the time to experiment; the famous exhortation to 'make new things'. The professor opined that there was good and bad Regietheater. Good illuminates, bad merely follows a concept. I was glad to hear his views on current productions: he has, for example, 'little regard' for Katherina Wagner's *Meistersinger*.

But what about today's opera? Not an evaluative word or phrase, unless Vaegt's description of director Tankred Dorst as a 'playwright' had a barbed twist to it. I wanted to ask: What about this *Ring* production? Good or bad Regietheater? What's Dorst's main innovation, in your opinion?

I was too timid, however, and let others ask their questions. Back in my room, an email had arrived from an opera singer friend who saw last year's *Ring* dress rehearsals. He really liked Thielemann's *Ring*. No mention of Dorst.

AFTER RHEINGOLD

The curtain parts and it's the bottom of a river. There are boulders – lots of them – in a broadly sweeping arc across the stage, with a projection above suggesting the curve and surface of the river. How literal and refreshing, I thought. The characters are going to clamber over rocks. Thirty years ago it was the infamous hydro-electric dam.

Disappointment soon sets in: the gaudily red-costumed Rhinemaidens remain seated centre stage for almost the entire scene, languidly waving their arms. Body-stockinged nymphs appear and disappear among the rocks, teasing Alberich, while naked nymphs appear on the projection above, as though swimming on the surface of the river.

It's all naively untheatrical. If the Rhinemaidens don't act out their mindless, erotic, tactile, teasing games with Alberich, where's the sexual spark that sets off the frustration and the vengeance to come?



Bayreuth Festspielhaus

The trio's singing, however, was clear and perfectly in tune, benefiting from Thielemann's unhurried and flexible approach, which becomes a hallmark of this conductor's Wagner. The Alberich is stretched by the vocal challenges of the role and, with no real contact between him and the Rhinemaidens, fails to make much of a dramatic impact. Instead of rushing off at the end of the scene, he remains fixed centre stage clutching a piece of the 'gold' while the curtains slowly close. To sum up: the first scene reveals the director's limited range of theatrical gestures, lack of faith in the acting skills of the singers and his disinterest in creating memorable tableaux.

As the performance unfolds, this lack of insight into what Wagner's characters are about, or what an overarching view of the cycle might be, becomes more and more clear. In addition to directorial stasis, the great scene between Fricka and Wotan is hampered by two things: the singers are not up to the vocal demands of the roles – and their costumes. Wotan should have refused to wear his outfit, which looked OK when the left side faced the audience, a nicely-cut long coat, but on the other side, cut away to reveal his strange barrel body. Fricka's close-fitting moulded costume with its short train appeared to limit her gestures to semaphore hand signals and small, petulant steps.

Scene two introduces the first of Dorst's many pointless, though clearly thematic, Regietheater bits of stage business. During Fricka's diatribe, a young man who might be seen in the streets of any modern western city, comes on, looks around, takes a desultory photo of some graffiti, and walks off. This diverts attention, of course, from Fricka, who is only just coping with the vocal demands of the huge role. Later, in Scene 3, another character from the modern world, a technician, comes on, casually checks some electrical gauges, and goes off. Right



Das Rheingold Bayreuth 2009

at the end of the opera, a child comes on and finds some of the Nibelung treasure, is attacked brutally by another child, while other boys abduct a young girl. All of this during Loge's marvellous, sarcastic take on the Gods entering Valhalla, tonight over a non-existent (from my seat) Rainbow Bridge.

What is meant by all this Regietheater stage business? Perhaps the setting of the 'historic' main action in a modern world full of sometimes trivial, sometimes violent moments is meant to remind us how the mythic world led to the state of the current world, with its real people, like us, tourists with cameras, real (horrible) children. I wish Vaegert had said something to help.

FRIDAY 21 AUGUST: AFTER *DIE WALKÜRE*

Finally, a Wagnerian voice in a main role. Eva-Maria Westbroek has got to be the Sieglinde of her generation. Not only is she extraordinarily beautiful, with a clear, luminous face, she seems exactly the right age and has a big, beautiful, powerful Wagnerian voice. Dorst does nothing particularly wrong, or illuminating, in Act I. The ash tree is an electric power pylon that has smashed into a large cube-like room that seems semi-inhabited. The action begins with some children taking refuge from the storm. One of them whips back a sheet to reveal Sieglinde. There is no fireplace or fire, so Wagner's detailed lighting directions for the sword will not be relevant. Hunding arrives with five henchmen, who are not given anything to eat and retire at an appropriate moment. Siegmund is great to look at – short and chunky, with delightfully northern, dirty blond hair; stubble, and sweaty torso. From his first phrase, however, we know we aren't going to hear one of Bayreuth's great Siegmunds but, as ever in the cycle so far, Thielemann works closely with the singer, capitalising on the singer's strengths and minimising dangerous exposed moments. His inadequacy is most obvious in the final scene with Westbroek, where the contrast between her large luminous voice and his much more modest resources is stark.

Again, the director simply seems uninterested in final moments: the lovers don't rush off, there's no sense of passion about to be consummated. The singers' dependence on the conductor, whether straight ahead or sideways at monitors,

did nothing to raise the emotional temperature. I am perplexed by the level of insecurity this dependence revealed. It is, after all, the third cycle of the fourth year of this production. Perhaps in the face of inadequate direction, singers become more dependent than they otherwise would on the conductor, the one holding the show together. A more experienced director would surely incorporate key moments of eye contact with the conductor more naturally into the action.

As for Regietheater business, during Fricka's great scene with Wotan, two men bring in a trolley of suitcases. The sound of the trolley rumbling off the stage really annoyed me. This is one of my favourite scenes in the *Ring*. As I mentioned, she is not really a Fricka vocally – a sign of the vocal times here at Bayreuth – but more than getting through the role thanks to a solid, intelligent technique. Only a sadistic, or clueless, director would divert our

attention during this marvellous stretch of music drama with bits of mystifying, inexplicable stage business.

Then again, there was some major coups of theatrical and musical passion. 'O herstes Wunder' was one of them, with Sieglinde almost centre stage, close to the front, arms wide apart, a piece of Nothung in each hand, Westbroek filling the theatre with her huge voice, coping with Thielemann's slow speed almost completely, a moment when Thielemann wrongly equates slow with intense.

MARCH 2022

It's pretty negative, isn't it? I recall thinking, after *Rheingold*, that there is something seriously wrong with the casting if the best Wagnerian voice is Freia (Edith Haller).

The other roles and singers: Alberich (Andrew Shore), Siegmund (Endrik Wottrich), Wotan (Albert Dohmen), Fricka (Michelle Breedt).

I recommend Anthony Tommasini's review of the first year of this production in the 2 August 2006 *New York Times*, in particular, for his comments on the limitations of Dorst's production. Dorst famously did not return to Bayreuth after 2006 to fine-tune the staging.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/02/arts/music/02ring.html#:~:text=Before%20agreeing%20to%20take%20on,one%20exception%3A%20direct%20an%20opera.>

Apart from the *Ring*, the Wagner Society group was treated to *Die Meistersinger* in which Walther was an artist sloshing huge amounts of paint around, *Tristan und Isolde* in a fascinating, static production by Christoph Marthaler, tepidly conducted by Peter Stein, and the extraordinary Herheim *Parsifal*, which remains the most expensive-looking production I've seen anywhere, ever. I strongly recommend fellow-pilgrim Jim Leigh's insightful article on this in the *Views and Reviews* section of the Society's website: <https://wagner.org.au/index.php/views-reviews/review-redemption-ten-dimensions-stefan-herheims-bayreuth-parsifal-2010>

Brett Johnson

NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

REPORT FROM ELLEN McNEIL

Hello, for those who I haven't met, my name is Ellen McNeil and I have the honour and privilege to be your Jane Mathews' Memorial Scholarship recipient and a Young Artist with Pacific Opera.

From a very young age, I have enjoyed performing and singing. My wonderful parents sent me to Early Childhood Music at the Newcastle Conservatorium before I was 2. While I have no recollection of the event, my first impromptu performance on the stage happened at the tender age of 3 and half. My family had recently moved to Whyalla in South Australia, and I managed to convince the singer at a company function to hand over the microphone so that I could deliver a rendition of the alphabet song (apparently, I wasn't too keen to hand the microphone back). Perhaps, an early sign of things to come!

During my primary school years in Newcastle, I joined the Children's Conservatorium Choir and later, Young People's Theatre, which became a second home to me. My first significant experience of performing on stage was in a musical adaptation of the much beloved Australian novel by Ethel Turner "Seven Little Australians" playing the role of Baby. From then on, I was truly hooked. Whilst at school, I appeared in many shows with Young People's Theatre and other theatre companies in Newcastle, sang with choirs and even had the opportunity to appear as a soloist with Newcastle Grammar School's Jazz Band on the Great Wall of China.

From age 9, I started studying classical singing with Annabella Redman and continued working with her until I moved to Sydney to pursue my studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 2015.

Throughout my undergraduate and postgraduate years at the Conservatorium, I studied with Dr Rowena Cowley. As an undergraduate, I appeared as a chorus member in a number of operas staged by Con Opera Productions, as well as working as an assistant stage member and as part of the crew (Young People's Theatre had certainly taught me to be multi-skilled!). Whilst studying for my Master of Music Studies (Opera Performance), my roles included Le Rossignol in *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, Zweite Dame/ Zweiter Knabe in *Die Zauberflöte* (Lyric Opera Studio Weimar) and Serpenta in *La finta giardiniera*. In my final year, I appeared in the title role in a filmed production of *Cendrillon*, a collaboration between the Conservatorium and the National Institute of Dramatic Art. Last year, I had thoroughly enjoyable return to my musical theatre roots to appear as Anna in Bankstown Theatre Company's *The King and I*.

In 2022, I am thrilled to be part of Pacific Opera and to be generously supported by the Wagner Society in NSW. I am incredibly fortunate to have had the experience of performing the demanding title role in Pacific Opera's production of *Suor Angelica*, as well the very different comedic



role of Mum in Britten's *Albert Herring*. Later in the year, I have been cast as Dido in *Dido and Aeneas*, another exciting role to add to my repertoire.

Outside my opera training and performing, I work part time as an Educator for Sydney Catholic Early Childhood Services on the North Shore. I get the chance to play and explore my inner child - and the children and staff that I work with are delightful. I've also started a Masters in Teaching (Primary) but have put that on hold while I focus on my opera training.

My plans and aspirations for the future include further training in opera, language study and performing. I am also hoping to travel and attend international summer schools, as well audition for opera companies in Australia and around the world.

As a Young Artist with Pacific Opera, I am already gaining invaluable performance experience and training. The program will also enable me to build key connections within the Australian and international Opera community. By the end of my time as a Young Artist with Pacific Opera, I hope to emerge as a confident and employable opera singer.

Already, I am deeply appreciative of the support and encouragement that I have received from members of the Wagner Society in NSW. In March, I had the wonderful experience of performing "Senza mamma" from *Suor Angelica*, as part of the Society's Masterclass with Christina Henson Hayes. Each of the singers involved benefitted immeasurably from Christina's expertise and guidance, but the highlight for me was her critical knowledge about the nuances of singing Puccini as well as reinforcing the importance of maintaining true dramatic moments in performance. I am very much looking forward to continuing collaborating with the Society in future concerts and events.

Ellen McNeil https://youtu.be/5GSxNba_vo0

EMAIL FROM LIVIA BRASH

18 MAY 2022

Dear Wagner Society of NSW,

It with great joy that I share the news that I have been cast in my first Wagner opera, as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*!

With the Society's generous sponsorship, I was able to take part in the course "Dramatic Voices in Action" from Dramatic Voices Berlin in 2021. This course not only was very enlightening, it also opened some professional doors. Fortunately, I am able to continue my relationship with Dramatic Voices Berlin with their production of *Die Walküre*.

Here is a brief excerpt from the website, explaining the program:

"World-renowned faculty will guide participating artists in musical coachings, language coachings, character analysis & role preparation, coachings, preparing for auditions in the German theatre system, public masterclasses, professional development sessions, individual career sessions and more.

Artists will have the opportunity to work on, prepare and record a role in a film version of Wagner's *Die Walküre*. The film will be released after the completion of the program. Artists will also have the opportunity to perform in live-streamed online performances of excerpts from *Die Walküre* " and other operatic repertoire." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjJ5HHXyjBc>

Best wishes,

Livia Brash

Editor's note: As a postscript to Livia Brash's news of her role as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*, our new member, **Paul McLeod** also has news. Although Paul is not supported financially by the Society, he sang in our recent masterclass, and we are happy to help him and his career. On audition he won the role of Siegmund in the same Dramatic Voices Berlin program, playing opposite Livia. The opera will be filmed, which is very exciting.

EMAIL FROM NATHAN BRYON

20 MAY 2022

Dear Wagner Society of NSW,

I write to you with an exciting update on my journey, to let you know I have accepted a position in the two year Artist Diploma programme at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, commencing in August 2022.

The WSNSW-supported study and networking trip to the U.S in 2019 laid the foundations for a very successful round of post graduate auditions over the last six months. These auditions were held via Zoom and included multiple rounds of written applications, meetings with faculty at various schools and consultation lessons. I felt very prepared for the requirements of these applications thanks to my team at Melba Opera Trust, including our artistic advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley, and my teacher Glenn Winslade, and I'm pleased to say I was offered places in all the programmes I applied to.

The course at SFCM opens to three singers bi-annually, and involves performances of operatic roles, stage combat, languages, and caters specifically to the needs of the individual artist. SFCM produces four fully staged operas per year, and has very close industry relationships with the San Francisco Opera and other companies, so I'm really looking forward to immersing myself in this artistic atmosphere.

Thank you to the Wagner Society of NSW for all you do to support young singers, I look forward to singing for you again soon enough! (**Editor's note:** Nathan will in fact be singing for us on 31 July).

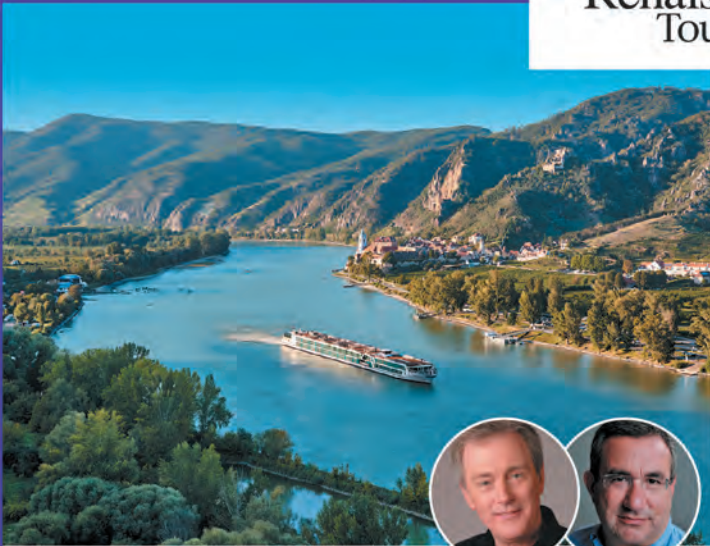
Very best wishes,

Nathan Bryon

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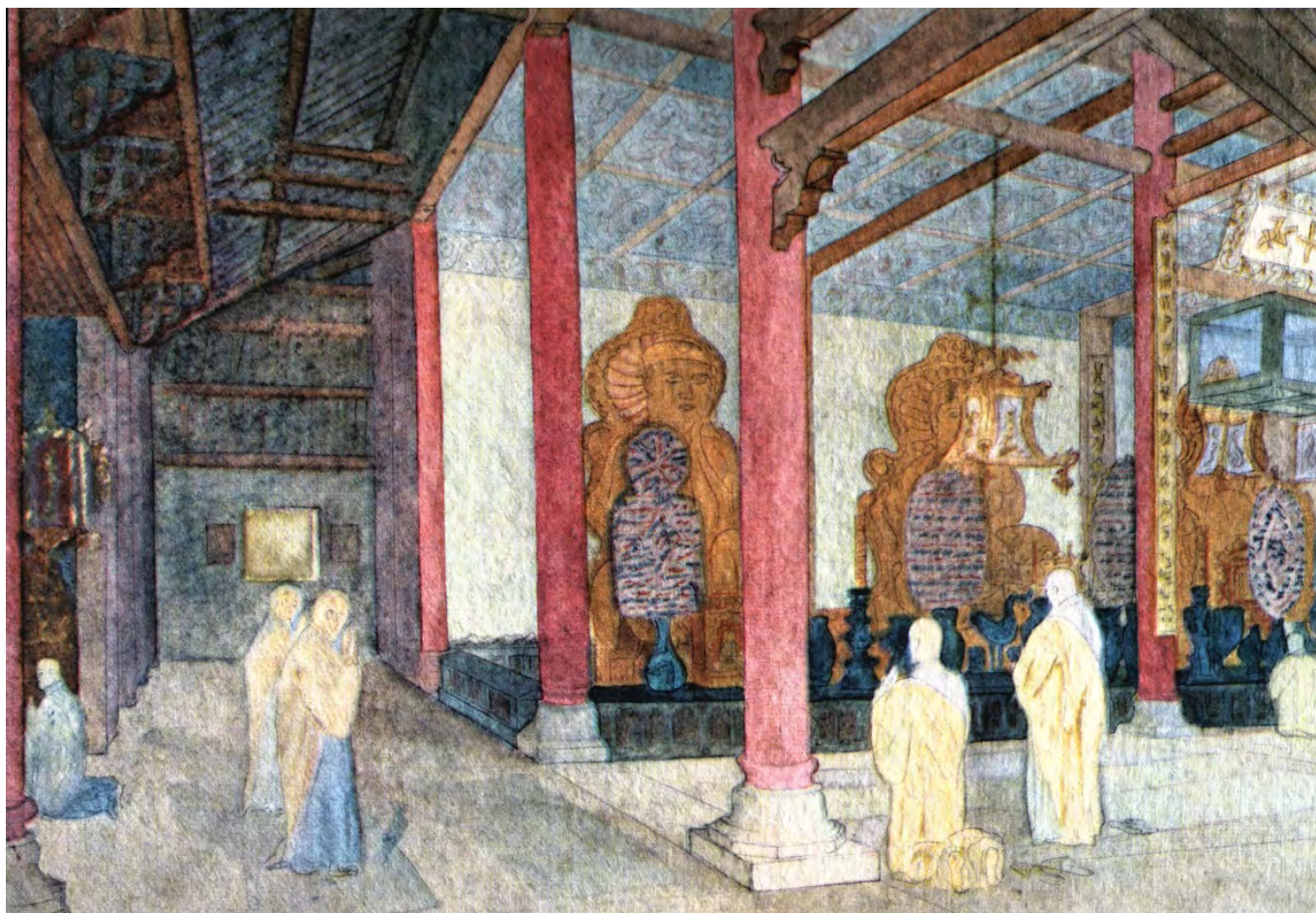
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A sketch from Siegfried Wagner's notebook on his trip to Asia
Image © Internationale Siegfried Wagner Gesellschaft/Schwules Museum

ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

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