

Das Rheingold, directed and conducted by Herbert von Karajan, designed by Gunther Schneider-Siemssen, Salzburg, 1968.

To find out more about the Wagner Society in NSW Inc please go to:

www.wagner.org.au

DAS RHEINGOLD SYMPOSIUM
A Wagner Society in NSW Inc Event

1030am Sunday 12 November, 2023

Goethe Institut

90 Ocean Street (corner of Jersey Road), Woollahra



1980 - 2023

PROGRAMME



10.00am – 10.30am Registration and coffee

10.30pm – 10.40pm Welcome and Introduction

10.40am – 11.10am

SUZANNE CHAUNDY

Das Rheingold – Beginning with the End

11.15am – 11.45am

ESTEBAN INSAUSTI

Symbols and trends in landmark productions
of *Das Rheingold* 1951-2023

11.45am - 11.55am **Short break**

11.55am – 12.25pm

COLIN PIPER

When 18 anvils are barely enough

12.30pm – 1.00pm

ROBERT MACFARLANE

#mimetoo: portraying 'cancelled' characters
in Wagner

1.00pm – 1.45pm **Lunch/Refreshments**

1.45pm – 2.15pm

DAVID LARKIN

Symphonic drama: Revisiting the
innovations of *Das Rheingold*

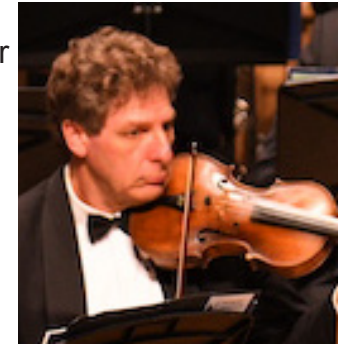
2.20pm – 2.50pm

Round table discussion led by **GRAEME GEE**

2.55pm– 4.00pm **Drinks and close**

GRAEME GEE, moderator

Although his professional qualifications and career are in Finance and Accounting, Graeme has been steeped in music since high school; indeed his association with the current Society President dates back to that very same ABC Youth Concert Committee over forty years ago. Apart from concert and opera attendance, his practical exposure to live art music consists largely of four decades playing violin across Sydney, chiefly with the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra based in Sydney's north. In this privileged position he has been fortunate to play with almost the entire spectrum of musicians who have passed through or lived in Sydney over that time: from Stuart Challender, Wilfred Lehmann, Donald Hazelwood, Myer Fredman, Richard Gill, Henryk Pisarek, Wanda Wilkomirska (and even one of today's presenters), to musicians at the very cusp of their careers. Indeed, by way of the orchestra's long-running Concerto Competition he has been fortunate to perform with outstanding young (or formally young!) musicians such as Richard Tognetti, Amy Dickson, Alexander Gavrylyuk, Emily Sun, Grace Clifford, Jonathan Ramsay amongst many others who now enjoy solo or orchestral careers around the world.



The latest iteration of *Das Rheingold* from the ROH. The blasted World Ash Tree takes centre stage together with Erda. Directed by Barrie Kosky and designed by Rufus Didwiszus, this production premiered in September 2023.





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WHEN 18 ANVILS ARE BARELY ENOUGH

The *Ring of the Nibelungen* as we know is a monumental work employing what are certainly large orchestral forces. I have been asked on several occasions “is there is a huge percussion section involved?” The answer is no. Richard Wagner was very sparing in his use of the percussion section but that said, the requirement for the eighteen anvils in *Das Rheingold* is unique in musical literature as far as I am aware. I hope to throw some light on what it is like to experience this remarkable music from the back of the Orchestra or deep in the bowels of the pit, and, how Richard Wagner wrote sparingly but so brilliantly for “our section”.



COLIN PIPER has enjoyed a career as a Percussionist and Conductor. He was a member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra for 45 years and has had wide experience conducting Youth, Community and Professional Orchestras. From 1992 he regularly conducted the Sydney Symphony Orchestra as part of its Education Programme, in Schools Concerts, Babies Proms, Education Kits recordings and the very successful Playerlink Programmes in regional NSW. In 1974 Colin was a founding member of the

internationally renowned Percussion ensemble SYNERGY and served for 15 years as its Board Chairman. He was a member of the National Score Reading Panel, set up as a result of Nathan Waks’ 1992 Review of A.B.C. Music Policy, and was a member of the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts Music Committee in 1993-94 and was a staff elected member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra Board from 1996 till 2002. He is Patron of The Lane Cove Youth Orchestra. Colin was awarded an OAM in the 2022 Australia Day Honours for his services to Music.

WSNSW PRESIDENT’S WELCOME

Welcome to the WSNSW’s symposium focusing on *Das Rheingold*. This is the first in what will be a series of symposia over the next four years paralleling Simone Young’s and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra’s *Ring* project.

It has been over twenty years since the *Ring* was performed in concert form in Sydney. The last cycle was led by Edo de Waart, who was Chief Conductor at the time. It is not surprising that Simone Young AO, the WSNSW Patron and current SSO Chief Conductor and a highly regarded Wagnerian internationally, has embarked on such a project so early in her tenure. For Wagnerians, and in particular the WSNSW, it is a special occasion to hear a great conductor, with a hand picked cast and an orchestra in top form, play this music in the reborn Concert Hall. I wonder if we will see the *Ring* staged with such forces at some point in the future? It is now possible.

The reason for the WSNSW to convene these symposia is to support our Patron’s project in kind. The intention is to provide a wide ranging polemic on each part of the tetralogy prior to the concert performances, hopefully giving the listeners some background, insight or different viewpoints, as the *Ring* unfolds over the next four SSO seasons.

Das Rheingold is the “preliminary evening” of the tetralogy. Played without a break, taking us from the bottom of the Rhine, to the mountain tops and then to the subterranean cavern that is Nibelheim, before the gods enter their new abode, Valhalla, over a rainbow bridge. It is a challenge for the creatives as much as the performers. This two and a half hours has to establish the artistic bar for any *Ring* project. In order to discuss all this we have assembled a diverse group of speakers from different disciplines: a musician, a singer, a director, an academic and musicologist, as well as a student of scenography. A group worthy of exploring the ultimate *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Hope you enjoy the day!

Esteban Insausti

President

Wagner Society in NSW Inc

Illustration sources

- (1) Opening image of *Das Rheingold*, Melbourne Opera 2021.
- (2) Opening image of Patrice Chéreau’s 1976 production of *Das Rheingold*, Bayreuth.
- (3) Autograph manuscript by Richard Wagner with musical notation from his opera *Das Rheingold*, Zurich, 16 January, 1854.
- (4) Arthur Rackham illustration of *Das Rheingold*, Alberich and Mime.
- (5) Photograph of Hans Wild (Decca/Solti VPO 1958 *Das Rheingold* recording). Photo also appears on James Blad’s “Percussion instruments and their History” (Faber & Faber London).



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DAS RHEINGOLD – BEGINNING WITH THE END.

What goes into preparing *Das Rheingold* – the “preliminary evening” of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*? How does a director approach striking the tone to set up the entire *Ring cycle* in an opera which must also work as a piece of ‘stand-alone’ theatre. Drawing on her personal experience, Suzanne will discuss her reading of the text and music in *Das Rheingold*, investigating instinctual versus intellectual interpretation and how this informed her design concept, rehearsal process and performance interpretation of the characters and events in *Das Rheingold*.



SUZANNE CHAUNDY trained at NIDA as a director, Suzanne’s career spans opera, text-based theatre, events and outdoor spectacle. She has directed for Melbourne Opera, Lyric Opera, West Australian Opera, Opera Australia, Victorian State Opera, IMG, Red Stitch Actors Theatre, La Mama, Anthill Theatre, Melbourne Theatre Company, Sydney Festival, OzAsia and the Melbourne Festival. She is the director of the Richard Divall Emerging Artists Programme for Melbourne Opera. She directed signature productions for Australia’s internationally renowned outdoor performance troupe Strange Fruit (now Sway), productions presented at over 400 international festivals. Suzanne directed Melbourne Opera’s critically acclaimed *Ring cycle*, which was presented at the Ulumbarra Theatre Bendigo in 2023. This followed productions of *Das Rheingold* (Green Room Award – Best Production - Opera) in February 2021 and *Die Walküre* in February 2022 (Outstanding Direction – 2022 OperaChaser Awards, Best Ensemble – 2023 Green Room Awards). Also in 2022, she directed *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (Melbourne Opera/IOpera) and co-directed a site-specific production of *The Marriage of*

4 Figaro for the Richard Divall Programme.

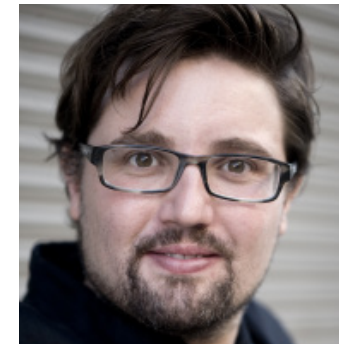


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#MIMETOO - A PERFORMERS’ PERSPECTIVE ON PORTRAYING ‘CANCELLED’ CHARACTERS

There are many characters in the operatic canon which are now problematic due to their inherent racism or cultural caricature. From the orientalist fetishism of *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*, to the crude depictions of those of Jewish descent in Wagner’s operas, these were possibly more appropriate at the time they were written and in no way would be possible in a contemporary work. Robert Macfarlane, who sang the part of Mime in the Melbourne opera *Ring cycle*, will discuss what it means as a performer in the 21st Century to portray caricatures that trouble our modern sensitivities.

ROBERT MACFARLANE studied at the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide and subsequently at the Hochschule für Musik, Leipzig ‘Felix Mendelssohn-Bartoldy’ with Prof. Dr. Jeanette Favaro-Reuter, as recipient of the prestigious Thomas Elder Overseas Scholarship. He undertook extensive study of the Baroque repertoire with tenor Howard Crook and has also studied and performed with world-renowned accompanist Malcolm Martineau. Robert Macfarlane was the winner of the Adelaide Critic’s Circle award for best individual performance in 2012 (Bach *St. John Passion*), a finalist in the Lortzing Competition in Germany in 2013, and winner of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Aria competition in 2009. Robert is also the winner of the Richard Wagner Society of Victoria’s 2020 Young Artist Award, which enabled him to travel to Bayreuth and attend the Bayreuth Festival in 2022. Robert continued his association with Melbourne Opera this year as he performed the role of Mime in both *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried* for the company.





SYMPHONIC DRAMA: REVISITING THE INNOVATIONS OF RHEINGOLD

The move from *Lohengrin* to *Rheingold* is usually classified as the biggest stylistic shift in Wagner's career. In the five-year gap between the two works, Wagner theorised intensively about the nature of opera, coming to far-reaching conclusions that affected virtually every aspect of his craft: subject matter, poetic metre, dramatic construction, handling of motif, harmonic language, instrumentation, etc. Drama was avowedly his primary focus from here on, but in tandem with this was a new interest in enriching his stage works with strategies drawn from instrumental music. In one famous passage from *Opera and Drama*, Wagner talked about giving his 'dramatic music ... the unity of a symphonic movement', whereby the strategies used in absolute music would be adapted to dramatic purposes. In this paper, I want to look at a few passages in *Das Rheingold* which showcase different aspects of Wagner's symphonic style. Purely orchestral passages like the Prelude and the interludes between the four scenes are obvious instances where the leitmotivic development follows a quasi-symphonic logic, even if the motifs themselves have direct dramatic justification. Further opportunities for orchestral illustration are provided by Alberich's transformations in Scene 3, and the storm and Rainbow-bridge music in scene 4. I will also examine several passages where the orchestra complements the voices



DAVID LARKIN is a Senior Lecturer in Musicology at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. His research has focussed on figures like Wagner, Liszt, and Richard Strauss, and has been published in the likes of *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss*, *19th-Century Music*, and *Music and the Moving Image*. Central issues for his research include musical influence, the discourse around progress, and programmatic composition. He is a frequent pre-concert presenter for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra

8 and Musica Viva, and is a concert and opera reviewer for Bachtrack.



SYMBOLS AND TRENDS IN LANDMARK PRODUCTIONS OF DAS RHEINGOLD 1951-2023

Wieland Wagner's 1951 Bayreuth production of the *Ring* broke away from the 'traditions' and scenographic detritus going back to its premiere in 1876. Relying on the theories of Adolphe Appia and taking cues from Classical Greek theatre, the *Neue Bayreuth* style that emerged that year established a new way of looking at the tetralogy. Since then directors and designers have approached the *Ring*, and *Rheingold* in particular, in different ways creating a polemic that continues to this day. This paper explores how some of the symbols in *Rheingold* have been interpreted across a number of productions.

ESTEBAN INSAUSTI is a Registered Architect with nearly 40 years of experience. A graduate of the University of Sydney, he has worked on a range of typologies including theatres, public buildings and large commercial mix use developments. He has a Master of Arts Degree in Theatre Studies from the UNSW, compensation for foolishly passing up the opportunity to study at NIDA when accepted for the Set Design course in 1983. Whist not a musician, music is central to his cultural activities. Esteban takes great pride in supporting and promoting the performance of music and opera, a pursuit that for him has its origins during his time on the ABC Youth Concerts Committee back in the 1970s. Esteban is the tenth and current President of the Wagner Society in NSW.



Suzanne Chaundy's participation is supported by Danny May.
Robert Macfarlane's participation is supported by Esteban Insausti.

1951-1958
 Bayreuth Festival
 Director:
Wieland Wagner
 Designer:
Wieland Wagner

Adolphe Appia
Greek theatre
Mythic

1965-1969
 Bayreuth Festival
 Director:
Wieland Wagner
 Designer:
Wieland Wagner

Primitivism
Greek theatre
Norse mythology

1976-1980
 Bayreuth Festival
 Director:
Patrice Chéreau
 Designer:
Richard Peduzzi

George Bernard Shaw
Post modern
Political

1988-1992
 Bayreuth Festival
 Director:
Harry Kupfer
 Designer:
Hans Schavernoch

Hi Tech
Stress on Personenregie
Highway of history

2013-2017
 Bayreuth Festival
 Director:
Frank Castorf
 Designer:
Aleksandar Denić

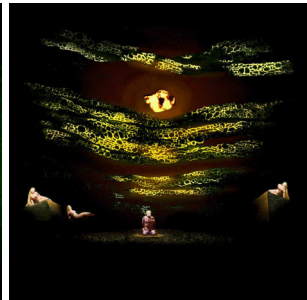
Post dramatic
Use of multi media
Post Marxist

2022-2026?
 Bayreuth Festival
 Director:
Valentin Schwarz
 Designer:
Andrea Cozzi

Post dramatic
Family (tv) melodrama
Very human but no magic

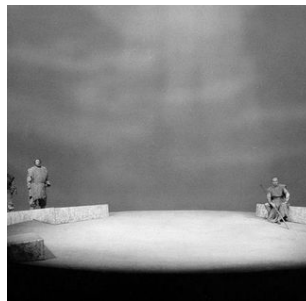
Scene 1
At the bottom of the Rhine

Rocks and water
Rheingold



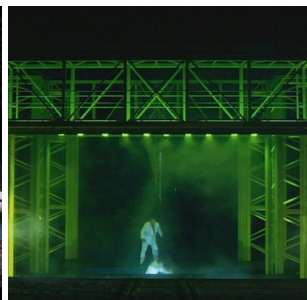
Scene 2
An open space on the mountain tops

The realm of the gods
Valhalla



Scene 3
A subterranean cavern

Nibelheim
Transformation into Dragon and frog



Scene 4
An open space on the mountain tops

The realm of the gods
Valhalla
Rainbow Bridge

