

The Wagner Society

Registered Office: 141 Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo 2011
Telephone enquiries: 358 1919 (Bus. Hours)



Newsletter

No. 21. 1 DECEMBER, 1985.

Registered by Australia Post Publication No. NBH5028

PATRON: SIR CHARLES MacKERRAS
HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS:
WERNER BAER
RITA HUNTER
LEONIE RYSANEK
MICHAEL EWANS

INVITATION**CHRISTMAS COCKTAIL PARTY**

SUNDAY 15th DECEMBER
3.30 p.m. TO 7.00 p.m.

THE GOETHE INSTITUTE

Cnr. OCEAN ST & JERSEY RD
WOOLLAHRA

ALL MEMBERS AND A FRIEND WELCOME

A raffle will be held

- 1st Prize: Purchase voucher value \$40
The Record Collector, Bondi Junct.
2nd Prize: 'Biography of a Marriage'
by Geoffrey Skelton. R.R \$39.95

R.S.V.P. Tel 358.1919 Bus. Hours

COMMITTEE

President	:	Leonard Hansen	326.1793
			27.2969 (bus)
Vice President & Co-Editor	:	Richard King	358.1919
Secretary	:	Judy Ferfaglia	938.2030
Assistant Secretary	:	Michel Arnould	326.1793
Treasurer	:	Joseph Ferfaglia	938.2030
			646.1555 (bus)
Assistant Treasurer	:	Olive Coonan	387.6403
Co-Editor	:	Janet Wayland	33.4092 (bus)
			332.3929
			357.4806
Publicity Officer	:	Sue Kelly	331.1973
Librarian/ Archivist	:	Murray Smith	588.1111 (bus) Ext 2382
Liason	:	Pamela Dunsford	358.1919
			32.0851

* * * * *

If a red dot appears on the front page, your 1985-86 subscription, due on April 1, is overdue, and if not paid in 30 days your membership will lapse.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

With the first performance of the Victorian State Opera's new production of "LOHENGRIN" on the 20th November not only was a dream realised but also an example set.

The dream was that of Robert Salzer, treasurer of the Richard Wagner Society in Victoria, to sponsor a Wagnerian opera, and so restore the music of his beloved composer once more to the repertoire of his city's opera house. With the resources of his large construction company behind him he was able to confidently involve his local Wagner Society in to a committment of co-sponsorship. Such was the enthusiasm of the members for the project that the target of \$50,000 in donations was reached. Not bad for a group of little more than 200 members, indicating that they gave around \$250 each.

The actual theatrical performance cannot fail to impress, and there is a grand sound from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in the pit. Certainly on the first night there was the usual nervousness in the cast, and the odd technical hitch, but future audiences will see a very polished performance indeed, of international standard.

The success of this "LOHENGRIN" has ensured its restageing in Sydney in 1987, a fact of which you as contributors to and supporters of the original production can be very proud. The extent of our involvement with the future production - sung in German, with Horst Hoffmann and Leonie Rysanek - will depend on your enthusiasm and willingness to show support not just in good attendance, but by substantial donations.

Considering that the Australian Opera also has "DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NURNBERG" scheduled for its Bi-Centennial program in 1988, now is the time for us to plan for these projects - setting very definite goals in the fund-raising and promotional areas. Is there a member with skills in these activities to come forward and lead the society in a concerted campaign? The credibility of our Wagner Society will depend on how prominently it is seen to support these two operas.

During the next 12 months I will be away from Australia so am handing over my reigns of office to Vice-President Richard King; who will be acting president until the annual general meeting in May, when new elections for committee take place. It has been a very great pleasure to be your president for the past five years, a task made easier by the unstinting help of the committee and colunteers. My very sincere thanks go to all of these people. My reward has been to see the satisfaction and enjoyment of the work of the society expressed by so many members.

With the Season's Greetings

Leonard Hansen.

* * * * *

DONATIONS

RECEIVED DURING LAST QUARTER

Dr. Susan Kelly
Mr. M.T. Hiscock
Mrs. Barbara Bennett.

Donations to the Wagner Society are Tax-Deductible if they are paid to the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and accompanied by the form below.

Our gratitude is extended to the above members who we hope will accept this publication of thier names as our acknowledgement for their support.

To: The General Manager,
The Elizabethan Theatre Trust, P.O Box 137, Kings Cross, 2011

Donations to the Wagner Society are tax deductible if they are paid to the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and accompanied by the form below.

Dear Sir,
Please find enclosed a cheque for \$ representing my donation to The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. This donation is given unconditionally. However, it would be appreciated if, when considering your appropriations to the performing companies, preference in the allocation of this donation could be given to The Wagner Society.

Signature
Name
Address

WAGNERIAN FRUSTRATIONS IN LONDON

Although London offered live classical music in a quantity and variety that in my experience have been unequalled elsewhere, the five weeks between mid-September and mid-October would have proved quite frustrating for those dependent on Wagner for emotional well-being. Neither the English National Opera nor the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, had any of the master's works in their current repertoires (*The Mastersingers* and *Parsifal* by the ENO and *Der fliegende Holländer* by the ROH appear later in the season) and none of the numerous orchestral concerts contained more than the Overture to *Die Meistersinger* (the brass section of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra sounded constantly shrill and out-of-tune relative to the strings on 18 October, and I didn't attend the BBC Symphony Orchestra's performance four days previously).

A "new and spectacular audio-visual film presentation" of *The Rhinegold* was advertised for the second week of September. Modern technology, paintings, scenes from selected stage productions, photography and animated sequences had been combined to portray the opera in a manner impossible on stage, with the famous ENO/Goodall recording as the soundtrack. I reached London in time for the final screening, only to learn that all screenings after the first two or three had been cancelled by industrial action! Linda Esther Gray (an ABC artist for 1986) was scheduled to sing the *Wesendonck Lieder* for the Wagner Society. Illness forced her to withdraw and she was replaced by Pauline Tinsley, a soprano with extensive operatic credentials who was unknown to me but who, I have since discovered, was the subject of a long profile article in the 3/82 issue of *Opera*. Her recital was a disaster. Early English and Italian songs, the *Wesendonck Lieder* and arias by Massenet and Giordano were performed with not a single word of program notes, tests or verbal introduction the hall was nearly empty and much of the singing was unpleasantly loud. It was almost a demonstration of how NOT to present a song recital. The *Wesendonck Lieder* appeared again in a mostly-Wagner recital in the Purcell Room by Marie Hayward Segal, a dramatic British soprano with a somewhat unwieldy and over-powerful voice for the small venue. This recital had the novelty of eight early songs (*Soupir*, *Mignonne*, *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, *Dors mon enfant*, *Adieu de Marie Stuart*, *Der Tannenbaum*, *Melodram* and *Attenta*), some of which were quite dramatic and seemed worth the effort of performing. Again the presentation was unsatisfactory, with the only "audience aid" being a page of inadequate and poorly typed synopses of the various songs. I did not hear *Isolde's Liebestod* or *The Ride of the Valkyres* in an organ concert at the Royal Albert Hall, the latter in a "Grand Concert Arrangement plus special lighting, thunder and wind effects" performed on the RAH grand organ and an Allen Computerised Organ by three organists!

For the only Wagnerian performance I encountered worthy of the composer, I had to go to Southampton for the fourth of five Autumn performances of the Welsh National Opera's new *Twilight of the Gods*. With Anne Evans as Brunnhilde, Jeffrey Lawton as Siegfried, Kathryn Harries as Gutrunne and John Tranter as Hagen, the Cardiff premier was almost totally damned in a London newspaper review. By the time I saw the production, the "defects" had either been eliminated or they barely bothered me. The orchestra was superb, Kathryn Harries looked wonderful, most of the cast sang adequately (although the chorus lacked the power of the Bayreuth chorus seen on video last August) and a reasonable proportion of Andrew Porter's English text came over. Special praise must be given for the outstanding 62-page program booklet, full of interesting and informative articles (the cast list was a separate insert) and no advertisements, and costing only 80 pence (=£1.60).

Michael Edgeloe

In the next Newsletter Professor Ewans's most interesting talk on *Elektra* will be published. Meanwhile to those who saw that shattering performance we commend his programme notes.

REVIEW OF LOHENGRIN - VICTORIAN STATE OPERA

The opening night of Wagner's Lohengrin at the State Theatre in Melbourne on the 20th November 1985 was certainly well attended if not punctually by a well dressed audience of first nighters and dignitaries. Unfortunately ushers let some of the public in during the Opera's prelude and one person seated in the first row of the stalls was eminently disruptive as she searched up and down the row for her seat and caused Maestro Richard Divall to look back several times. A never-seen happening at any other Opera house! The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra with Maestro Richard Divall conducting set the mood of stillness and mystery with the prelude, and continued the next three acts with competence and control. The Lohengrin of Mr. Alberto Remedios was performed with his usual aplomb if not always vocally at his best. Karen Bureau in the difficult role of Elsa shows promise, with some rather lovely and strong singing in her upper register and hopefully once settled in the role less awkward with her stage movements. Nance Grant in the role of Ortrud was wonderfully malevolent but the sheer power of the vocal line of this role may be taxing for her fine voice. Noel Mangin was in control of his role as Henry the Fowler and Geoffrey Chard as Telramund was sometimes inaudible (vocal indisposition?). The rest of the cast and chorus worked well and exercised some fine ensemble singing. The sets and costumes and indeed stage directing seemed to me rather old fashioned and unimaginative and could do with some serious revisions. The most disappointing aspect of the whole work was its English narrative, the text is trite and does not enhance the singer, musical line and has convinced me personally that opera should always be sung in its original language. (Surtitles by all means). By the time our group tour sees the performance on 7th December, I am quite sure that most first night jitters and problems will have been ironed out and we will be able to settle down to enjoy a competent and professional performance.

Michel Arnould

-ooOoo-

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The following letter was received from Universal Travel, 646 Crown Street, Surry Hills, 2010. TEL (02) 698.8555.

We are grateful for their interest in the society.

Dear friends of Wagner-Music,

RE: Bayreuth Festival 25.7.86 - 28.8.86

As you may be well aware it is sometimes quite difficult to obtain tickets for the Wagner Festival, especially if you are living as far away as in Australia.

To help you in this matter we have now further specialised in organizing special events and common interest tours in Germany. Due to our good contacts with the German market our experienced German consultants can offer you a variety of flights on Lufthansa, Qantas and other reputable airlines to Germany as well as accommodation and entrance tickets to the festival.

We are one of the biggest Lufthansa agencies in Australia and therefore fully backed by major German operators connected with Lufthansa to help you even with special requirements.

For further information please contact Loni Wilson of Michael Horn on 698.8555.

Yours faithfully,

Michael Horn

Operations Manager.

Our member, Jean Whitehouse has sent us a copy of a review of West Berlin Opera's new "Ring". All completed within twelve months!

Not bad for an opera house that performs a mighty repertoire throughout ten and a half months of the year!!

A few of the extracts:

Quote "Das Rheingold - Sept 84 the destruction of the old order conceived by Wagner as the finale to "Die Gotterdammerung" had already taken place. The Gods had taken shelter in a spectacular "Time Tunnel" and were re-enacting the events that led to their downfall so as to learn from their mistakes etc."

Die Walkure almost caused a riot. The Valkyries arrived as warrior maidens done up in black leather uniforms - bumping and grinding the rhythms of the "Ride" and displaying an unnatural interest in the corpses of the heroes. Julia Varady's, Sieglinde got rave reviews.

Seigfried found approval for its ingenious solutions to problems, Fafner was a bulldozer with three grasping shovel arms and Erda's underground computer centre controlled the fate of earthlings. René Kollo, Horst Hiestermann as Siegfried, and Mime, bowled everyone over with extraordinary acting and singing.

Gotterdammerung had the audience on their toes from the opening scene with blind Norms groping for the rope of fate - the fifth century nouveau riche style of Gibichungs Hall with spectacular magnifying glass panel walls and modern costumes. The demolition scene was an atomic explosion!

Goetz Friedrich is the director - Peter Sykora designer and Jesus Lopez-Cobos musical director.

Catarina Liegendza gave a bright voiced, passionate portrayal of a vulnerable Brunnhilde. West Berlin's Ring was sold out for every performance.

Extracted from International Herald Tribune Oct 12, 1985.
James Helme Sutcliffe (critic)

The full review is available upon request.

-oo0oo-

THE RADICAL STRAUSS

Richard Toop.

The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould described Strauss as a composer with a conservative left hand and a radical right. From the technical point, even at his most innovative, even in Elektra, Strauss's bass lines, the roots of his harmony, are essentially conventional.

Some of his early piano works prompted Hans von Bulow to remark that the talent was not that of a genius but one which aimed largely to shock. There were opposing forces at work in Strauss's music.

The first formative influence to shape his outlook was his father Franz Strauss, a great horn virtuoso of his day, and perhaps because of the resolutely diatonic nature of the horn he became a musical arch-conservative. He also had a passion for ancient Greek culture which he instilled in Richard, even if it took Hugo von Hoffmannsthal to bring it to the surface.

Strauss started out with his father's conservative aesthetics but by the age of 15 signs of an adventurous nature were evident in a letter he wrote on "completion of the A min. Overture. "... it makes a hellish din...but I think it will be effective." and, "I must alter the Horn Variations and write them for human lungs and human lips, for they are almost unplayable as they are."

There seems to be a fascination for pushing things to the edge that points to the radical Strauss, but at this stage that fascination is virtuosity rather than innovation. The main pointer to the future Strauss lies in his fondness for fooling around with cadences - for colouring them with a couple of unexpected notes. By 1885, with the composition of the Burleske the games take on a malicious streak, a certain cold mockery.

It seems to me that the Burleske reeks of Oedipal rebellion, not only against the conservative tastes of Franz Strauss, but also against the temporary patronage of Brahms. One is conscious of deliberate shock tactics, of the destruction of style through excess. It's a work of almost vicious brilliance and irony, and though Strauss was to disavow it only a few years later, after his Wagnerian conversion, in many ways it offers a remarkable pointer to his future.

Soon a new influence is to come from Alexander von Ritter, married to a niece of Wagner and a vigorous supporter of Wagner and Liszt, against Brahms, Mendelssohn and Schumann - in short against every influence of his youth. With "Aus Italien", the first of his tone poems, Strauss abandons traditional titling such as Sonata, Symphony etc., for titles like Don Juan, Death and Transfiguration, Macbeth, thereby taking his new path towards Von Hausegger's school of "Music as expression", and with Don Juan breaks away from the shackles of form to espouse music as expression of sentiments.

Strauss, in a long conciliatory letter to von Bulow is anxious to demonstrate not so much the rightness, but rather the necessity of his path. "... it's better to follow one's true artistic conviction and have said something wrong up a blind alley, than something superfluous while keeping to the old, well-trodden road."

From Don Juan on, the radical die is cast. His meeting with Cosima Wagner in 1889 led to involvement with Bayreuth and inevitable, it would seem, to his first opera, Guntram in 1892. Wagnerian in style it was nevertheless a fiasco and Strauss didn't return to the form for 7 years, by which time he had taken as his wife the tempestuous, demanding singer, Pauline de Ahna, who soon became a substitute for the tyrannical Franz Strauss.

The most significant work of this new period, "Also Sprach Zarathustra", is a work of extremes, of polarities; of key, viz. the unresolved struggle between C maj.; & B maj.; of style, chromatic and diatonic, simple and complex. In the section "Science" the arcane pursuit of knowledge is conveyed not only through the scholarly rigour of a fugue but through a theme containing all 12 notes of the chromatic scale arranged into unrelated triads. How are these opposites resolved? Well, this is Strauss's 1897 legacy to the 20th Century: they aren't. The end of the work seeks resolution in 2 keys, and at the extremes of register.

His return to opera came inauspiciously with a complacent "Feuersnot" followed within a few years by that operatic masterpiece, Salome. And it's only Salome, perhaps, that calls into question Glenn Gould's remark. For in Salome the left hand too has become radical.

Hubert Parry once said of Schoenberg something like "it's not the loud passages I mind; it's when he's soft that he's so obscene". If I can transfer that comment into a sort of Praise of Decadence, then I would say the same of Salome. The eroticism in the final scene of Salome comes in a terrifying whisper - the shattering perversity of a virginal nymphet drooling over the severed head of John the Baptist - a Liebestod for vampires. Such an excess which penetrates the deep psychological layers represents a radicalism basic to the Schoenberg school, but never achieved by Strauss. Strauss is believed to have reached his 'radical peak' in Elektra, and then made a complete about-face in Der Rosenkavalier. Elektra certainly goes beyond Salome with its harsh dissonance and full frontal assault while the radicalism of Salome is sub-cutaneous gently tugging the ground from under one's feet.

The real radical base of Elektra is found in the music of Clytemnestra describing her dreams which seem to possess the haunted quality of an Austro-German empire ruled not by Kaiser Wilhelm, but by Sigmund Freud.

This article has been condensed with the kind permission of the author.

BAYREUTH FESTIVAL TICKETS

In a few weeks time some of you who have applied for tickets at the 1986 Bayreuth Festival will be receiving the exciting news that indeed some tickets have been allocated to you. The message is contained on a form, which serves as an invoice to be returned with the payment stipulated. A voucher for booking accommodation is also supplied.

If the tickets are just what you wanted, then all there is to do is obtain a bank draft for the required amount in Deutschmarks, post it off with the confirmation notice and sit back and wait for the tickets to arrive. Hold on to the accommodation voucher until you have notified us of the details of your tickets on the form below. We can then group you with other members if you so desire.

If for some reason you do not want your tickets, please fill in the form so that another member may take advantage of your lucky coup - at no cost to you, of course.

With your cooperation the travel to Bayreuth, accommodation there and attendance at the theatre should be more pleasant and more economical by being in the company of your society colleagues.

Members who miss out on a ticket allocation - i.e. no notification by mid-January - should also return the form if they would like to buy any unwanted tickets.

 NAME.....

ADDRESS.....Postcode.....

TELEPHONE:.....(home)(business)

Please cross out the lines that do not apply.

I have received the following tickets for Bayreuth 1986.

I would like to obtain the following tickets for Bayreuth 1986.

Opera	Date	How many received	Price GP	Seat Numbers	How many Wanted	Remarks
1. Rheingold						
2 Walkure						
3 Siegfried						
4 Gotter-dammerung						
5 Tannhauser						
6 Meister-singer						
7 Tristan & I.						

I will be using all of the above tickets.

I will not be using any of the above tickets and offer them for sale

I will not be using the part of my allocation circled above.

Accommodation and Travel

I would like to stay at the same hotel as other members

I am interested in a group travel arrangement

I will make my own travel and accommodation arrangements.