

WAGNER
SOCIETY
nsw

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE 50th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

ISSUE NO 43

170

SEPTEMBER 2023



Sydney Opera House 1969 by Sir William Dobell

THE SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Society are to promote the music of Richard Wagner and his contemporaries, to explore a wider understanding of their work, and to support Wagnerian productions in Australia and emerging Wagnerian performers from NSW

PHOTOS OF RECENT EVENTS

SUN 18 JUNE AT GOETHE INSTITUT



Noel Staunton

WED 12 JULY AT ST COLUMBA



Maestro Simone Young AM

SUN 20 AUG AT GOETHE INSTITUT



Tahu Matheson

SUNDAY 30 JULY AT ST COLUMBA



Katherine Day and Chris Curcuruto



Kori Miller

22 JUNE POST COMMITTEE MEETING MEAL AT MALABAR



L to R: President **Esteban Insausti**, Treasurer **Margaret Whealy**, Artists' Liaison **Leona Geeves**, Vice President **Mike Day**, Vice President **Marie Leech**, Webmaster **Lis Bergmann**

FOR YOUR DIARY

2023

11 – 29 September	Royal Opera Das Rheingold . Conducted by Sir Anthony Pappano . Directed by Barrie Kosky	ROH, London
14 & 15 October	Villains & Valkyries Sing-a-long . Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and Chorus with Wagner excerpts conducted by Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith	The Concourse, Chatswood
16, 18 Nov	SSO Das Rheingold in concert. Conducted by Simone Young AM	Sydney Opera House
1 – 23 Dec	OA Ring Cycle	Brisbane

COMING SOCIETY EVENTS 2023

STARTING TIMES AND VENUE MAY VARY - PLEASE CHECK ONLINE FOR DETAILS | WEDNESDAY ZOOMS TO BE ADVISED

DATE	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	LOCATION
17 September	12.30pm DVD <i>SOH opening Gala concert</i> Sir Charles Mackerras, Birgit Nilsson, SSO 2.00pm Talk by Dr Terence Watson about Wagner's childhood and adolescence	Goethe Institut
22 October	12.30pm DVD <i>The Edge of the Possible</i> 2.00pm Talk by Mike Day <i>A Tale of Three Houses – Paris, Bayreuth and Sydney.</i>	Goethe Institut
12 November	10.00.am – 5.00pm Das Rheingold WSNSW Symposium	Goethe Institut
26 November	2.00pm Christmas party and recital by Adrian Tamburini	Ampico Towers, Newtown

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)

WE WARMLY WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE JUNE 2023:

Jean Eagar 1277, Jean Callaghan 1278, Louise Allison 1279, Robert & Leigh Smallwood 1280, Prof. Peter McNeil 1281, Dr Geoffrey Crawford 1282. We welcome back returning member Janet Tomi 1214

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
Mrs Barbara Brady

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear friends,

We are fast approaching another intense time of Wagner performances in November and December. The Brisbane *Ring* will round off what has been a spectacular year for Wagner in Australia. I am not alone in hoping that companies around our continent get the message that Wagner is good box office and that we are blessed with local singers and artists who can do him justice. So more please.

Opera in this country is very much alive and well. Whilst we may debate the logic of some of the overall programming and the merits or otherwise of individual productions, we can all agree, I hope, on a few things. There needs to be much more funding and focus from our governments on opera and music. Actually more funding and focus on The Arts in general would be welcomed. And that in Australia we have a very deep pool of talent to draw from on stage and production – it would be nice to keep them here and employed. But can we be more spoiled? In a short space of time since that wonderful double of *Tannhäuser* and *Satyagraha* (by Philip Glass) in Melbourne, we enjoyed the rare *La Gioconda* with a cast headed by Jonas Kaufmann, Jessica Pratt singing in *Tales of Hoffmann* plus *Mad Scenes*, and if you could travel to Melbourne (as I did in July) see two premieres: George Dreyfus' *Gilt Edged Kid* and Ernst Krenek's *Der Diktator*. Pinchgut Opera and Sydney Chamber Opera will present their latest productions from September.

The range in genres and scale is quite varied. There could be more, more often, especially if you are not in Melbourne or Sydney, but it isn't a drought either. More collaboration would also be welcomed I also think that Artistic Directors should trust their audience a little more with new works and challenging repertoire (hint, hint Jo Davies). Commercial realities will mean that a *Miss Saigon* or yet another *Madame Butterfly* will be on the programme but please balance this with something that will really challenge the audience.

On another topic altogether, I was rummaging through my library the other day and came across two *Wagner in Australia* volumes (Volume 1 No.1 from 1988 on *Meistersinger* and Volume 2 No.1 from 1991 on *Lohengrin*). I was wondering if any of you had copies of other papers or publications. It would be good to have these as a ready resource on our expanding webpage sometime soon. Please contact me if you have any more lying around. We can arrange to have any new material found scanned.

Two other matters. First, we would like to compile a set of your impressions, thoughts, reviews, notes, photos, on the Bendigo *Ring*. Don't know what will do with this material but at the very least we would have a consolidated snapshot of what we experienced in Bendigo. The second matter regards Brisbane. Thank you everyone who responded to the call for who is attending and when. I have grouped everyone into their respective cycles and will soon send a group email to test this as a means of quick communications for events, drinks, meetings and the like during the three cycles in December.

I hope that you can all join us in person for the last events in 2023 before *Das Rheingold* in Sydney and the *Ring* in Brisbane. We are looking at the events programme for 2024, so this is your opportunity to tell us what you would like to see, hear and experience. We try to provide a variety of experiences but there is always something we haven't thought of or a particular topic which you have been wanting to hear about. So please let us know. Write me an email.

Until the next live event.

Happy listening.

Esteban Insausti

President

Wagner Society in NSW Inc



NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This issue celebrates the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Sydney Opera House. I hope you enjoy articles about personalities and performances rather than about the building. For members interested in the conception, construction and completion of the building I recommend a visit to an excellent exhibition at the Museum of Sydney. Plus, I will be talking about the building on 22 October, following a documentary about Utzon. Many thanks to contributors and to Leona for proof-reading.

Mike Day

michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com

DONATIONS TO HELP THE SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES

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

GENEROUS DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED SINCE JUNE 2023 FROM THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS: Richard King

FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 17 SEPTEMBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.30PM DVD SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE GALA OPENING CONCERT

Filmed live in concert on 29 September 1973 with **Birgit Nilsson** and **Charles Mackerras** with the SSO performing excerpts from *Götterdämmerung* – Siegfried’s Rhine Journey, Siegfried’s Funeral march, Brünnhilde’s Immolation Scene.



2.00PM TALK BY DR TERENCE WATSON

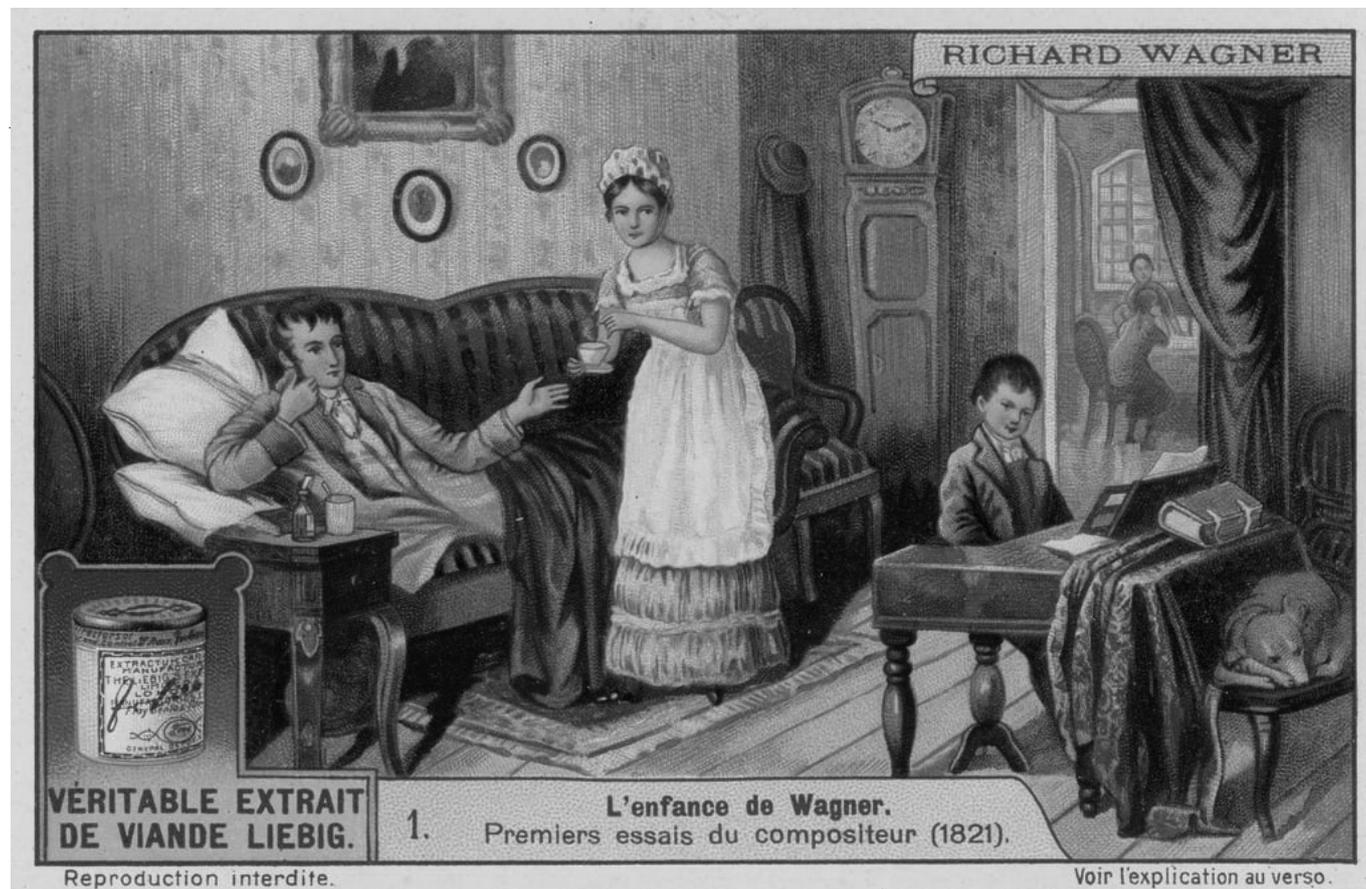
WAGNER’S CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE—1813-1830

If “The Child is Father of the Man,” as Wordsworth asserted, and, perhaps, “Mother of the Artist” (me), what does Wagner’s first 18 years or so tell us about his later views on ART, society, politics, economics, and the importance of big houses and good clothes?

Dr Terence Watson will offer twelve episodes from Wagner’s life in Leipzig and Dresden to identify those family and historical factors that shaped his world view and then his artworks, and to try to answer some questions. What kind of education did he receive, and did it make much difference to his subsequent life? What kind of boy was he? What social “class” did Wagner and his family belong to and what effect did this have on his later life? How did he become so interested in the world of theatre? What did he do at Leipzig University, and why did he so desperately want to enter its halls? Did he fall in love and have sex during his adolescence? Where did Wagner pick up his habit of having “salons” in the many places he lived in during his later life? Who

influenced him the most during these formative years? What conclusions about Wagner the Man and the Artist can we draw from any answers to these questions?

Terence is a long standing member of WSNWSW. He edited the Wagner Quarterly for many years, and regularly contributes reviews of Wagner productions. His academic background is in literary criticism with theses on Charles Dickens and Eugene O’Neill, which, he believes gives him some qualifications in delving into author’s lives and the artworks they produced. He has also spent the last ten years exploring Wagner’s life, speculative essays, and artworks with the aim of placing him as firmly as possible into the world into which he was born, so as to determine more accurately those aspects in which he can be genuinely considered a “genius” and those in which he was a child of his time. In this project, Terence is focusing on Wagner’s views about religion, philosophy, history, politics, science, morality, and, of course, ART.



SATURDAY 14 OCTOBER 7.00PM, SUNDAY 15 OCTOBER 2.00PM AT THE CONCOURSE CONCERT HALL, 409 VICTORIA AVE, CHATSWOOD, 2067

WILLOUGHBY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: VILLAINS & VALKYRIES

From the iconic tour-de-force *Ride of the Valkyries* to the chilling ghost story of *The Flying Dutchman*, experience Richard Wagner and his world in this breathtaking choral extravaganza. Led by WSNSW member, Associate Conductor **Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith**, Willoughby Symphony Orchestra joins forces with Willoughby Symphony Choir in a program of Wagner's most formidable heroes and villains. Hear selections from Wagner's awe-inspiring operas, including highlights from his monumental *Ring* cycle, *Tannhäuser* and much more in an unforgettable concert that will have you on the edge of your seat from start to finish. Plus, award-winning Chilean-born

composer and pianist **Daniel Rojas** teams up with acclaimed Korean pianist **Yerim Lee** to premiere a passionate new work for piano four-hands and orchestra, *Romanza y Danza de los Muertos*. In the spirit of *El Día de Los Muertos* (The Day of the Dead) and inspired by the Wagnerian themes of this program, this swoon-worthy new work imagines the continued romance of tragically star-crossed lovers, from *Romeo and Juliet* to the *Flying Dutchman* and *Senta*, finally free to be expressed beyond both earthly and supernatural realms. <https://www.visitchatwood.com.au/Events/Willoughby-Symphony-Orchestra-Villains-Valkyries-WSO>

BARRIE KOSKY'S ROYAL OPERA DAS RHEINGOLD 2023



The Royal Opera opens its 2023/24 season on 11 September with **Sir Antonio Pappano** partnering with Australian director **Barrie Kosky** for the first time to conduct a bold new imagining of *Das Rheingold*, with an outstanding cast including: **Christopher Maltman**, WOTAN; **Christopher Purves**, ALBERICH; **Sean Panikkar**, LOGE; **Marina Prudenskaya**, FRICKA;(Australian) **Kiandra Howarth**, FREIA; **Wiebke Lehmkuhl**, ERDA.

The Live recording will be shown in Sydney cinemas on 14,15 & 18 October

In an interview on Bachtrack, **David Karlin** asked **Barrie Kosky** about how he approaches a new work;

DK You're also interested in ideas, in getting in some way to the meaning that's inherent or can be discovered in the piece. When you approach a new work, how and when do those ideas take shape?

BK In different ways – it depends on the piece. When I first started directing, 25 years ago, I thought you had to sit down with a designer, work out everything in a model box and present it; then, a rehearsal period was about trying to make sure that everything fitted in with your model box idea. How wrong I was! That's taught in a lot of drama schools, but thank goodness, I realised very early on that it's nonsense, the opposite of what actually happens. Everything happens in the rehearsal room. Everything.

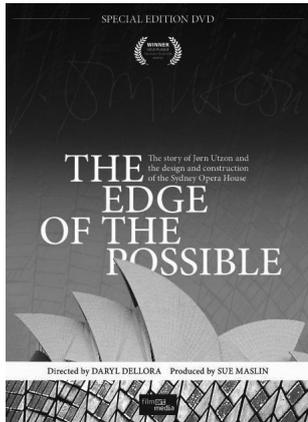
Even if I've listened to a piece 20 times, I have a ritual that we'll follow: in the next two months, I will meet with my design team and we will all sit in the one room and we'll listen together to the music, right through, because the start point and the end point is always the music. Even though I talk about drama and even though I talk about text and design and performance, the starting point and ending point for inspiration and for what I want to achieve on stage is the music.

Then, we will radically and scientifically enter into a study of that music, breaking it down. People think that the first thing is "Where should it be set? Are you doing modern? Are you doing historical? These are not the questions I ask – that all comes way down the road. The first questions have to be "What is this music? What's it trying to convey? What is the emotional landscape of the piece?". And then, from that, come little bits of ideas. What emerges after a few months or a year, is a space: all my designs are spaces, where anything can happen. I rarely get my designers to design me a space where it's very defined and clear, because I just need that space to start work. And really, once we've worked that space, which is usually a year before the rehearsals, I forget about the production, I don't do any more work on it.

This letting go and leaving is very important, because there begins the marination process in your head, things are sort of percolating, marinating, and bubbling. Then, after you've gone away, you test your own idea. Sometimes I will make radical changes just before I'm about to rehearse, thinking "that was a stupid idea, a year ago". Day 1 of the rehearsal process is not a testing to see whether my idea was brilliant, which is a disastrous way of creating theatre, the process becomes about literally and very pragmatically saying to a group of singers "OK, so what shall we do with this scene"? I don't work out entrances, exits, interpretations, I don't talk about what the character should be, I keep my costume designs very flexible and very non-specific, because I don't want the costume to tell the audience exactly what the character is. Everything is then worked out in rehearsals, which is why I need long rehearsal times and why I need good people. <https://bachtrack.com/interview-barrie-kosky-part-1-directing-ensemble-november-2018>.

SUNDAY 22 OCTOBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.30PM DVD *THE EDGE OF THE POSSIBLE*



Danish architect, Jørn Utzon, was awarded the first prize in a competition to design an Opera House for Sydney in 1957, he flew to Australia to begin work on the construction of the greatest building Australia has ever seen and, indeed, one of the finest achievements of modern architecture. Utzon was forced from the project in 1966 and never returned to Australia. What defeated him in the end was politics. His triumph came with the 2007 World Heritage Listing of the building “as a work of human creative genius” and one of the 20th century’s greatest buildings. This film charts the dramatic course of the creation of a masterpiece and includes a rare interview with Jørn Utzon as he reflects on his role in the compelling story of the conception and construction of the Sydney Opera House.

“I LIKE TO BE ON THE EDGE OF THE POSSIBLE”
JØRN UTZON

“This rare insight into the mind of the man who gave us our most famous building was made possible by the determination of two Australian filmmakers who run an independent outfit called Film Art Doco...The resulting film is a fascinating examination of the design of the Opera House as well as the politics of the time.”

Critical Response

“This excellent documentary...illuminating stuff”

The Australian

“The Edge of the Possible is something you should try not to miss...This film by Daryl Dellora and Sue Maslin provides many fine images of Bennelong Point. The coup is the long interview with Utzon...Of chief interest here are the detailed models of (Utzon’s never realised) interiors...They have not been seen on television before and are breathtaking.”

The Sydney Morning Herald

2.00PM TALK *A TALE OF THREE HOUSES – PARIS, BAYREUTH AND SYDNEY.*
ILLUSTRATED TALK BY MIKE DAY



This illustrated talk will compare the background, conception, construction and subsequent development of three of the most important performance spaces in the world. There are many fascinating parallels and differences between the buildings. The Paris and Sydney designs were chosen in competition (about 100 years apart). Both took 14 years to complete and cost many times the original estimated cost. Neither architect was present at the opening. Paris was conceived as an imperial status symbol. It’s a wonderful building to visit but has poor audience sight lines and paradoxically now showcases ballet rather than opera. Bayreuth was planned as, and remains, a temple for the worship of (Wagner’s) Art. It has the best sight lines and acoustics in the world. And the most uncomfortable seats. Sydney was to be an egalitarian ‘Peoples’ House’. It is a very successful performing arts centre on the most spectacular site but unfortunately is a very flawed space for large scale opera, as there is limited wing space and the orchestra pit is too small.

Mike Day is Vice President of WSNSW and the editor of the Quarterly. He has been practising as a registered architect for over 50 years and obtained a Masters of Illumination from the University of Sydney in 2004. He taught architectural lighting design and theatre design at UTS Architecture 2003 – 2020. He was a founding designer for Sydney’s Vivid Light Festival in 2009. He has worked as a set designer in several countries, including designing a *Don Giovanni* with Sir Roger Norrington in London in 1972. He decided to become an architect after his father showed him Utzon’s winning entry for the SOH competition in 1956. Around the same time, he was infected with the Wagner virus when a friend’s mother played him the finale of *Die Walküre* Act I on an old 78rpm record. He first visited Bayreuth in 1970 and has attended 3 festivals since then. He considers himself very fortunate to have seen some wonderful Wagner performances in the 70’s with Sir Colin Davis, Karl Boehm, Sir Georg Solti and Sir Reginald Goodall.

SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

10.00AM – 4.00PM *DAS RHEINGOLD* SYMPOSIUM

The Symposium is to take place on the Sunday before the two SSO performances (Thursday 16 November and Saturday 18 November).

The symposium will focus on *Das Rheingold*, the preliminary evening of the Ring. It is not meant to be an introduction to the work, in fact it should be assumed that those attending know the work. Rather the individual papers will provide a unique view of *Das Rheingold* and provoke or challenge the audience's imagination before they attend the concert performance by the SSO under our Patron, Simone Young AM.

THE SPEAKERS SO FAR:

Colin Piper (musician)

Robert MacFarlane (singer/performer)

Dr David Larkin (academic)

Suzanne Chaundy (director)

A designer TBA [*Esteban Insausti (architect on scenography) as back up just in case*]

SYMPOSIUM STRUCTURE:

1000 – 1030	Registration and coffee
1030 – 1040	Welcome and Introduction
1040 – 1110	Paper #1 (30 minutes: 20 minute paper + 10 minutes of questions/discussion)
1115 – 1145	Paper #2
1145 – 1155	Short break
1155 – 1225	Paper #3
1230 – 1300	Paper #4
1300 – 1345	Lunch/Refreshments
1345 – 1415	Paper #5
1420 – 1450	Round table discussion
1455 – 1600	Drinks

SUNDAY 26 NOVEMBER AT AMPICO TOWERS, NEWTOWN



2.00 CHRISTMAS PARTY AND RECITAL BY BASS-BARITONE ADRIAN TAMBURINI

Adrian Tamburini received support from WSNSW in 2022. His operatic debut was in 1997 and ever since he has had a varied career as an operatic soloist (Opera Australia, West Australian Opera, Melbourne Opera, Pinchgut), a concert performer (Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Zelman Symphony Orchestra, Sydney University Graduate Choir), educator, musical director and producer with his company, Pure Harmony Music & Events. His work, both on and off the stage, has been nominated for many awards and his performances have received critical acclaim.

Programme to be confirmed.

COMMITTEE 2023 - 2024

President.....	Esteban Insausti.....	0412 282 070
Vice President 1.....	Mike Day.....	0413 807 533
Vice President 2.....	Marie Leech.....	0418 679 626
Treasurer.....	Danny May.....	0414 444 100
Secretary.....	Ross Whitelaw.....	rosswhitelaw35@gmail.com
Membership Secretary.....	Julie Clarke	
Members.....	Nick Dorsch.....	0419 751 694
	Robert Mitchell	
	Margaret Whealy	
	June Donsworth	
Quarterly Editor.....	Mike Day.....	michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com
Artists Liaison.....	Leona Geeves.....	lg03415@gmail.com
Webmaster.....	Lis Bergmann.....	lisbergmann89@gmail.com
Public Officer.....	Alasdair Beck.....	0414 357 441



MEMORIES

A letter from Barbara Brady after being made an Honorary Life Member of WSNSW

In 1987 a group of my friends were talking about visiting Bayreuth for the Wagner Ring Cycle, and I was delegated to find out how to go about this. By the time I learned that the best way was to join the Wagner Society in NSW, the friends had lost interest and it was my husband Ian and I who joined the Society and were successful in receiving tickets – not only for the Ring but for a fifth opera which turned out to be *Der fliegende Holländer*. I admit that I don't remember much of that first Ring, but what has stuck in my mind is the vision of the Dutchman and Senta floating above the stage upside-down. It was in Bayreuth that we met members of the Wagner Society and subsequently attended as many meetings as we could. I was a member of the Committee for five years and newsletter editor before Terence Watson.

My first contribution to an understanding of Wagner's music was through a radio program I devised called "Wagner and Friends"; the "friends" being associates of Wagner whose operas he partly drew on for inspiration. I was working at radio-station 2MBSFM (now Fine Music) as a librarian – selecting recordings for the music library, and also as a programmer – in 2008 I devised this 12-program series. As I recall, each program ran for one and a half hours and broadcast over 6 months. My part was to devise the program, select and time the music, and write the explanatory scripts. I was never a presenter. To give you an idea, the first programme consisted of (1) The prelude to Act 3 of *Lohengrin*, (2) The Overture to *Die Feen*, (3) a song from Beethoven's *Leonora*, (4) a song from Webers' *Der Freischütz*, (5) Wagner's *Symphony in C*, and (6) Two French songs by Wagner. The series went down so well (several listeners either phoning the station or writing extravagant praise for the program) that 2MBS repeated it 5 years later (2013) for the Wagner bicentenary. The presenter both times was Gwynn Roberts. Because the Wagner Society made a generous donation of \$1200 to 2MBS for each of the two 12-program series, it was acknowledged as sponsor during each broadcast.

The time came when Ian and I visited Leipzig in 2013 in order to see Wagner's first three operas – *Das Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot*, and *Rienzi* – and because *Das Liebesverbot* was presented only as a concert performance, we returned in 2016 to see all three again, this time with *Das Liebesverbot* fully staged. Other

members of the Wagner Society, including Pauline and Terence, were also there in one or both of those years. It was then that I felt inspired to make a special study of Wagner's first three operas – partly because they were never produced in Bayreuth, and because I had enjoyed them in Leipzig. As you would know, Wagner himself rejected these three from Bayreuth, largely because they were written by him as experiments at composing opera, borrowing from French, German, and Italian styles (whereupon he presumably decided that the Wagner style was all he needed).



That brings me to my second contribution to spreading the word about Wagner. Having prepared power-point presentations on each of the first three operas, I was invited to present these to two Opera study groups: Opera Lunedi and Northside Opera Study Group, in 2016. A power-point presentation involves choosing the music and selecting how much to play; then it is necessary to choose illustrations from available filmed performances – both still and moving – which involves viewing numerous films of performances, and extracting appropriate sections from them. Then a suitable script must be written to explain to the viewers what they are seeing. I still have pages of notes from each of these three operas guiding me through the sections I am presenting (and indicating to me where to move on to the next part of the story). These presentations were particularly well received by the societies who invited me because their members were not dedicated to Wagner and what I had to show them was new to them. Later, I did present to the Wagner Society my first in the series, entitled *Wagner and the Fairies*.

Of course my love of Wagner has never been confined to the three operas I chose to promote. I have been able to travel to Europe on holiday more or less every second year, and there visited cities which always contained opera houses; for example, Berlin, which has three. In Berlin we stayed at the same hotel as Stuart Skelton, who was playing *Der Steuermann* in the *Der fliegende Holländer*. When Ian and I went to Leipzig we had the moving experience of first seeing/hearing Anna Netrebko as Elsa in *Lohengrin* in Dresden. I shouldn't think we would ever hear her like again. This was her first, and so far only, Wagner opera as she was recently reported as cancelling a proposed new *Lohengrin*.

Rather than relate any more about Wagner that I have experienced, I will finish on a more light-hearted note. When I was recently given the great honour of being granted honorary life membership of the Wagner Society, my first thought was "Could it have had something to do with the Christmas cakes I used to bake and decorate for the society's Christmas raffle every year?". Happily, that task is now undertaken by another Barbara.

Barbara Brady



REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS

SUNDAY 18 JUNE AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.30PM DVD FROZEN MUSIC – THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE, IT’S MORE THAN JUST OPERA (1984, 53 MINS)

Members loved this funny, charming and nostalgic documentary about the vivid and varied creative life of the SOH during its 10th Anniversary year. With **Joan Sutherland, Robert Helpmann, Janet Baker, Cleo Laine, Luciano Pavarotti** and others.

2.00PM A CONVERSATION WITH NOEL STAUNTON

Our president, **Esteban Insausti**, highly recommended that the society invite **Noel Staunton**, to talk to us about his long relationship with Wagner productions over many years. Noel didn’t disappoint. Prompted by Esteban, Noel started with his experiences working as a technician on the legendary Goodall *Ring* at the ENO in the early 70’s. This production was a triumph, musically and technically, (and sung in English). After this, Noel worked on the ENO **Mark Elder** *Ring*, which was beset by many problems and abandoned after only mounting *Die Walküre*. Noel observed that mounting a *Ring* has many challenges not faced by other operas. The *Ring* is very complicated, needing extra resources, time, space and money.

Noel was a key player in the realisation of the 2003 Adelaide *Ring*, where he was called in as a trouble-shooter when the production was having difficulties. He successfully raised the extra money necessary, rationalised the sets, and sorted out the technical and regulatory problems of using large volumes of water (Fairy Liquid made it look more ‘watery’), and huge amounts of gas for Brünnhilde’s fire. Noel had worked with designer **Michael Scott-Mitchell** on the 2000 Olympic cauldron, so was familiar with fire and water. (He

obviously also knows about air as he was also responsible for blowing up 800 balloons for each *Siegfried* performance). He also worked with fire and water for the wonderful **Neil Armfield** *Tristan und Isolde* in the SOH Concert Hall in

1992. Noel was critical of the SOH orchestra pit, which is too small for the orchestra needed for the *Ring*, but did observe that many overseas companies are staging smaller and more intimate productions with some success

Noel completed his conversation with Esteban with thoughts about how much he loves Wagner’s music and what a privileged career he has had working with wonderful singers and designers



SUNDAY 30 JULY, 2.00PM AT ST COLUMBA

“AN AFTERNOON OF SONGS, SCENES, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN”

RECITAL BY BASS-BARITONE **CHRIS CURCURUTO** AND SOPRANO **KORI MILLER**
ACCOMPANIED BY **KATHERINE DAY**

A (disappointingly) small but enthusiastic group of members and friends were treated to a wonderful concert of familiar favourites and hidden treasures. Chris is a very engaging performer and an excellent actor - his powerful and passionate impersonations of Wotan and Alberich were contrasted with his mischievous and witty Figaro and Gianni Schicchi. His mournful approach to Hugo Wolf’s Michelangelo Lieder was heartbreaking. I was not familiar with this song cycle – it is marvellously melancholy music based on texts by Michaelangelo (see below). The most dramatic performance was Chris and Kori in a scene from Floyd’s *Susannah*. This was spine-tingling acting and singing, with Kori matching Chris’s intensity and commitment. Kori also displayed her brilliant voice and technique in showstoppers by Previn, Puccini and Mozart. Katherine was an exemplary accompanist and showed off her virtuoso technique in Liszt’s Au lac de Wallenstadt. This was a very satisfying afternoon followed by the usual delicious afternoon tea, generously provided by members.

PROGRAMME

- Wagner** Abendlich strahlt der Sonne Auge (*Das Rheingold*)
- Previn** I want magic (*A Streetcar Named Desire*)
- Mozart** Se vuol ballare (*Le Nozze di Figaro*)
Porgi Amor (*Le Nozze di Figaro*)
- Puccini** Donde lieta (*La Boheme*)
Si corre dal notaio (*Gianni Schicchi*)
- Wolf** *Michelangelo Lieder*
- Floyd** Ain’t it a pretty night (*Susannah*)
I’m a lonely man, Susannah + Hear me,
oh Lord (*Susannah*)
- Liszt** Au lac de Wallenstadt from *Années de pèlerinage*
S.160 No 2
- Wagner** Bin ich nun frei (*Das Rheingold*)
- Strauss** Wie schön ist doch die Music (*Die schweigsame Frau*)

HUGO WOLF



Hugo Philipp Jacob Wolf (13 March 1860 – 22 February 1903) was an Austrian composer of Slovene origin, particularly noted for his art songs, or *Lieder*. He brought to this form a concentrated expressive intensity which was unique in late Romantic music, somewhat related to that of the Second Viennese School in concision but diverging greatly in technique. Though he had several bursts of extraordinary productivity, particularly in 1888 and 1889, depression frequently interrupted his creative periods, and his last composition was written in 1898, before he suffered a mental collapse caused by syphilis. Wolf's greatest musical influence was Richard Wagner, who, in an encounter after Wolf first came to the Vienna Conservatory, encouraged the young composer to persist in composing and to attempt larger-scale works, cementing Wolf's desire to emulate his musical idol. His antipathy to Johannes Brahms was fuelled equally by his devotion to Wagner's musical radicalism and his loathing of Brahms' musical "conservatism".

Michelangelo Lieder Song Cycle by Hugo Wolf

Text by **Walter Heinrich Robert-Tornow** (1852 - 1895), Translated into English by **Knut W. Bardea** Based on text in Italian by **Michelangelo Buonarroti** (1475 - 1564)

Composed in the spring of 1897, these were the last songs Wolf completed; later that year, a massive mental breakdown signalled his descent into syphilitic insanity. He lingered until 1903, dying at 42. Inevitably, the "Michelangelo-Lieder" have been perused for hints of Wolf's incipient madness. The second of the songs, the stark, fatalistic "Alles endet, was entstehet", almost irresistibly seems to foreshadow Wolf's crisis. (Wolf regarded the song as "the best I have yet knocked off." Previous songs had been similarly judged. Wolf lived his life in superlatives, everything either apex or nadir.) Matthew Guerrieri Boston Globe Correspondent,

Wohl denk ich oft an mein vergangnes Leben

Wohl denk'ich oft an mein vergang'nes Leben,
Wie es vor meiner Liebe für dich war;
Kein Mensch hat damals acht auf mich gegeben,
Ein jeder Tag verloren für mich war;
Ich dachte wohl, ganz dem Gesang zu leben,
Auch mich zu flüchten aus der Menschen Schar.
Genannt in Lob und Tadel bin ich heute,
Und, daß ich da bin, wissen alle Leute!

It is quite often that I think of my past life,
The way it was before my love for you;
Then no one had paid any attention to me,
Each and every day was lost to me;
I thought that I would dedicate my life to song,
As well as flee from human throng.
Today my name is raised in praise and criticism,
And that I exist, - that is known by all.

Alles endet, was entstehet

Alles endet, was entstehet.
Alles, alles rings vergehet,
Denn die Zeit flieht, und die Sonne
Sieht, daß alles rings vergehet,
Denken, Reden, Schmerz, und Wonne;
Und die wir zu Enkeln hatten
Schwanden wie bei Tag die Schatten,
Wie ein Dunst im Windeshauch.
Menschen waren wir ja auch,
Froh und traurig, so wie ihr,
Und nun sind wir leblos hier,
Sind nur Erde, wie ihr sehet.
Alles endet, was entstehet.
Alles, alles rings vergehet.

Everything ends which comes to be.
Everything everywhere passes away,
for time moves on, and the
Sun sees that everything around passes away,
Thinking, speaking, pain, and joy;
And those who had been our grand children
Have vanished as shadows flee the day,
As a breath of wind dispels the mist.
Yes, we once were people too,
Glad and sad, just like you,
And now we are here lifeless,
Are but earth, as you can see.
Everything ends which comes to be.
Everything everywhere passes away.

Fühlt meine Seele das ersehnte Licht

Fühlt meine Seele das ersehnte Licht
Von Gott, der sie erschuf? Ist es der Strahl
Von and'rer Schönheit aus dem Jammertal,
Der in mein Herz Erinnerung weckend bricht?
Ist es ein Klang, ein Traumgesicht?
Das Aug'und Herz mir füllt mit einem Mal
In unbegreiflich glüh'ader Qual,
Die mich zu Tränen bringt? Ich weiß es nicht.
Was ich ersehne, fühle, was mich lenkt,
Ist nicht in mir: sag' mir, wie ich's erwerbe?
Mir zeigt es wohl nur eines And'ren Huld;
Darein bin ich, seit ich dich sah, versenkt.
Mich treibt ein Ja und Nein, ein Süß und Herbe
- Daran sind, Herrin, deine Augen Schuld.

Is my soul feeling the longed for light
Of God who created it? Is it the gleam
Of a different beauty from the valley of misery,
reflecting in my heart and evoking memory?
Is it a sound, a dream vision,
That suddenly fills my eye and heart
In incomprehensibly burning pain,
That brings me to tears? I do not know.
What I long for, the sense of what directs me,
Is not within me: Tell me how do I acquire it?
To me it reveals only another's grace and love;
I have been their captive since I first saw you.
I am driven by a yes and a no, a sweet and a bitter -
That, mistress, is the doing of your eyes.



Esteban Insausti and Simone Young AM

**WEDNESDAY 12 JULY
7.00 – 9.00 PM AT ST COLUMBA**

**RECEPTION FOR OUR PATRON MAESTRO
SIMONE YOUNG AM**

It was with great pleasure that the Society hosted a reception for our Patron, Simone Young AM at St Columba Uniting Church, Woollahra on Wednesday, 12th July last. The event was very well attended by members and guests and after some introductory drinks, our President, Esteban conducted an informal interview which was wide ranging and informative. Not needing much prompting, our guest covered topics of interest such as her upcoming plans for at least a concert Ring, promising an impressive line-up of singers. It was interesting to hear her perspective on the staging of concert performances which allow the audience to concentrate on the musical aspects of the work while enabling the singers more license to bring their characters to life vocally rather than physically. Opera goers may not necessarily agree completely as this takes away the other aspects of the art form – costume, set design, lighting etc. but given past interactions with Opera Australia to which she briefly alluded, this may not be surprising. The informal gathering afterwards gave many members the opportunity of meeting our guest and asking further questions. **Ross Whitelaw**



Jacquie Sykes, Minnie Biggs, Jill Sykes

**MAESTRO SIMONE YOUNG AM
SPEAKS TO THE WAGNER SOCIETY**

Funny,
smart,
talkative,
knowledgeable,
human,
real,

friend,
traveller,
approachable,
simpatico,
laughter.
inspiring,

linguist,
mother,
joker,
trailblazer,
world class conductor.

OURS!

Minnie Biggs



Simone Young AM, Robert Mitchell



Rhonda Dalton, Marco Belgiorno-Zegna, Barbara de Rome



Members and friends

SUNDAY 20 AUGUST AT GOETHE INSTITUT



12.00PM DVD *MAGIC FIRE – THE RICHARD WAGNER STORY*

Members enjoyed this lavish 1955 Hollywood movie. The soundtrack was outstanding - over an hour of Wagner's music, sensitively adapted by Erich Korngold. Some liberties were taken with the details and timelines of some of the events but, generally, the movie told the extraordinary story of Wagner's tumultuous life, and the important roles that three women played in it, in a very entertaining and intelligent way.

2.00PM TALK BY TAHU MATHESON: *WAGNER'S MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT*

OA Head of Music

Tahu Matheson

treated members to a deep and meaningful analysis of Wagner's musical progress; from youthful pastiche to mature works of startling inventiveness. Tahu played many musical excerpts demonstrating how particular themes, like the sword and gold



motives, were developed during the course of the Ring, giving the listener, (and the characters), knowledge of what had happened in the past or what was to happen in the future. Samples from *The Flying Dutchman* showed how the seeds of future material were to emerge in the later mature music dramas. Tahu demonstrated how the Tristan Chord goes through many iterations during the course of the opera and talked about Schopenhauer's profound influence on Wagner and his approach to music. Altogether, an excellent afternoon.

SIMONE YOUNG'S RECOMMENDED RING RECORDING



When asked about her favourite *Ring* recordings, Simone recommended the 1948/49 recording conducted by **Rudolf Moralt**.

This was the first complete *Ring* recorded after WWII, with an excellent cast still under the older Wagner tradition: you can hear every single word of the text. It features some of the greatest voices of its time, with a conductor of the old school, in a town just a few years after the disastrous war. Rudolf Moralt was contracted at the Vienna State Opera in 1940, during the Nazi regime, so the performance is a historical document of an era (luckily) past and gone. He recorded *Das Rheingold*, which doesn't have an intermission, complete, and the other three operas one act at a time. This means that the singers are a lot fresher than they would be if they were doing complete performances in a theatre. When it comes to the end of *Götterdämmerung*, when the soprano can sound exhausted, this can be a real asset.

Rudolf Moralt was born in Munich in 1902 and died in Vienna in 1958. He was a nephew of Richard Strauss.

He studied at the Munich University and at the Vienna Music Academy. He made his debut as répétiteur at the Vienna State Opera in 1919 under Bruno Walter and Hans Knappertsbusch. He was the Vienna State Opera's chief conductor from 1940 until 1958.

THOUGHTS ON THE BRISBANE RING

by Peter Bassett

The new production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* planned for Brisbane in December this year is hugely exciting. There is still nothing quite like the *Ring*! Wagner described it as a 'festival drama for three days and a preliminary evening', and everything we associate with the word 'festival' applies. Spread over a week or so, it can be savoured by audiences without distraction, while ancillary events such as the symposia and pre-performance talks that I shall be presenting, broaden and enrich the experience.

The *Ring* draws us into its story of ambition, lust, sacrifice, love, generosity, fear, and deceit; the embrace and beauty of nature and, above all, wisdom, and the promise of a better world. During the past quarter of a century, I have witnessed the *Ring* phenomenon all over the world. Like all great works of art, it speaks of universal and timeless human experiences, and so, productions can remain true to the drama's inner workings even when being viewed through the eyes of different cultures and in different times. The *Ring* in Brisbane promises to resonate with the culture in which it is being performed, just as the original Bayreuth production resonated with its time and circumstances in 1876.

It will be great to have French conductor **Philippe Auguin** with us in December. He has conducted more than a dozen *Ring* productions around the world, and I have attended two of them – the first in 2005 in Beijing, when he took the Nuremberg State Theatre's production to China, and the second in 2016 for Washington National Opera of which he was also music director. At various times he was musical assistant to both **Herbert von Karajan** and **Georg Solti**.

Chen Shi-Zheng is the director and production designer of the Brisbane *Ring*, a production that will use giant LED video screens, and so, visually, all things will be possible. Chen Shi-Zheng was born in China in 1963 and lost both of his parents during the cultural revolution. He developed a deep knowledge of Chinese opera and emigrated to the USA in 1987. As well as staging traditional Chinese works, he has directed many western operas in the United States and Europe, including *Eugene Onegin*, *Nixon in China*, *La traviata*, *The Coronation of Poppea*, *Orfeo*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *The Flying*

Dutchman, *Così fan tutte* – and *Turandot* for Opera Australia's 'Opera on the Harbour' in 2016.

He has been quoted as saying: "Wagner productions, in recent history, are always trying to relate the story of the *Ring* to current western society. But this story is fantasy, a myth. So, what I want to do is take the myth as a platform to dive into, and re-imagine it in the 21st Century, in Australia, in this very landscape. The references also relate to where I come from. What we are trying to avoid is using the familiar methods of European cultural reference. We are trying to get away from that." He has assigned a different 'season' to each of the operas, starting with *Das Rheingold* in spring (with the Rhinemaidens frolicking around the Great Barrier Reef), and ending with the winter of *Götterdämmerung*. He will be careful to not impose too much visual baggage on the music because Wagner should be allowed to speak for himself. He compares his task to that of a Chinese painter - knowing where to provide detail, and what to leave to the imagination. "You have to leave enough for people to imagine, but you also want to provide a framework for people to enter into that world. When I listen to Wagner's music, I respond in my mind. I hope people will have a similar kind of journey, but I don't want to dictate every second of what people think."

Consider how he approached Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* for the Spoleto Festival in 2017. Prominent among Chinese mythological figures is the Moon Goddess. She had been a woman who had drunk a draught of immortality out of love for her husband, but this action had separated her from him. She then flew upwards to the heavens and chose the moon as her place to live. Her sad husband was left to worship her from afar – which, when you think about it, is not unlike the fate of Onegin. In his production, Chen Shi-Zheng set Tatiana's 'Letter Scene' against a backdrop of a Russian birch forest, through which the moon could be seen passing slowly across the sky as Tatiana wrote passionately of her love. Onegin, after receiving the letter, callously rejected Tatiana's expressions of love, only to regret this deeply when it was too late. This handling of the Spoleto production strikes me as a simple but beautiful evocation of Chinese aesthetics and visual simplicity, which augurs well for the Brisbane *Ring*.

RIP RENATA SCOTTO (24 FEBRUARY 1934 – 16 AUGUST 2023)

Renata Scotto was an Italian soprano, opera director, and voice teacher. Recognised for her sense of style, her musicality, and as a remarkable singer-actress, Scotto is considered to have been one of the preeminent opera singers of her generation. For more than 40 years, she performed in some 45 roles, first in Italy, then as a leading soprano of the Metropolitan Opera. She is remembered especially for the title roles of Verdi's *La traviata*, performed for her stage debut in Milan in 1952, and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, which was her first role at the Met and her last there in 1987, but also for bel canto works such as Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. She appeared in the first telecast from the Met in 1977, as Mimi in Puccini's *La bohème*, alongside **Luciano Pavarotti** and conducted by **James Levine**. She later expanded her repertoire by roles such as the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss, Kundry in Wagner's *Parsifal* (Schwerin, 1995), Elle in Poulenc's *La voix humaine*, and Madame Flora in Menotti's *The Medium*. As opera director she worked for the Met, the Arena di Verona, and other leading opera houses.

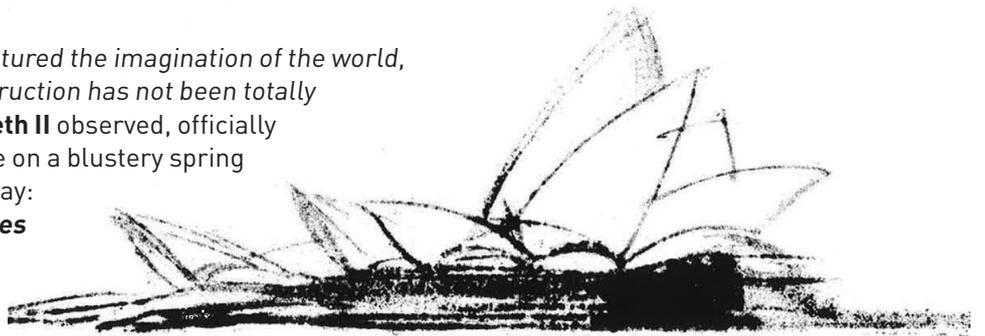
In a radio interview in 1988 she had this to say about Wagner;

"Verdi, for me, is the greatest opera composer, the same as Wagner. I don't do Wagner so I don't know much of his music even though I love it. I'm crazy about it, but I need to sing it in order to know it, so I cannot".



THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE 50th ANNIVERSARY

“The Sydney Opera House has captured the imagination of the world, though I understand that its construction has not been totally without problems,” **Queen Elizabeth II** observed, officially opening **Jørn Utzon’s** masterpiece on a blustery spring day. But as the Queen went on to say: **“The human spirit must sometimes take wings or sails, and create something that is not just utilitarian or commonplace.”**



Utzon’s vision 1967

THE FIRST OPERA PERFORMANCE - WAR AND PEACE NOTES FROM THE OPERA AUSTRALIA ARCHIVES

Choosing the perfect opera

Our team had been waiting for well over a decade to move into the Sydney Opera House, and finding the right piece for opening night was a fraught task. The expectation was that we’d perform one of the most popular works in the canon, but our musical director at the time, **Edward ‘Ted’ Downes**, had another idea. Six years earlier, Downes had conducted a concert performance of Prokofiev’s operatic adaptation of **Leo Tolstoy’s** epic novel, *War and Peace*, in Leeds, before conducting the British premiere performance in 1972 at Sadlers Wells. The opera follows five aristocratic Russian families living through the French invasion of Russia across 13 scenes; the first seven are set during peace time and the last six during war. Downes’ choice seemed to fit the bill: it was an Australian premiere, its surprise factor attracted plenty of international attention and, crucially, it featured plenty of roles, allowing many of the company’s treasured singers to take part in the historic first performance.

The creative team

Multiple high profile directors were approached for the project, which eventually fell to American actor and director **Sam Wanamaker**, who Downes had previously collaborated with at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Wanamaker is known for his many film roles, but became a pivotal figure in British theatre, key to the recreation of Shakespeare’s Globe in London.

Opening night

Wanamaker assembled an enormous cast for the event: the chorus increased in size from 36 to 50, and there were 41 principal singers, including **Eilene Hannan** as Natasha, **Tom McDonnell** as Andrei and **Raymond Myers** as Napoleon. At the time, this was the biggest cast we’d brought together for a production. Some singers in the company, including **John Shaw** and **Neil Warren-Smith**, were part of our first-ever tour, back in 1956. The production was filmed by the BBC and broadcast around the world (although in truth, the performance seen in the UK was not the opening night but the final rehearsal in front of the cast’s family and friends; this was so that the performance could be screened on the official “opening night” in the UK).



Opening night

What the critics said

While the exterior of the Sydney Opera House had already been praised as an architectural marvel, there was plenty of consternation about whether the theatres would provide an equally spectacular experience. There was particular concern that the Opera Theatre would be too small to stage grand opera (a theatre for opera was originally to be built in the largest shell of the Opera House, but it was moved to the smaller shell when original architect Jørn Utzon left the project). The critical consensus was that *War and Peace* showed that, with a little bit of ingenuity, the theatre could be a fabulous venue for grand opera. They also all complimented the strength of the ensemble as a whole, but reserved special praise for company veteran Neil Warren-Smith, who delivered a towering performance as Kutuzov. **David Gyger** wrote in the Daily Telegraph: “It was hard not to be captivated by this *War and Peace*: **Tom Lingwood’s** designs, Sam Wanamaker’s production, Edward Downes’ conducting somehow managed to combine into a unity strangely evocative of the epic stature of the novel.” Leading composer and music critic **David Ahern** declared: “It was the Australian Opera which won the war at the Opera House on Friday night.” <https://features.opera.org.au/war-and-peace-first-night-at-sydney-opera-house/index.html>

THE OPENING CONCERTS

Excerpt from a review by **Vincent Plush**, of the ABC Live Broadcast on 27.09.1973.
<https://aso.gov.au/titles/music/sydney-opera-house-opening/notes/>

The month leading up to the concert was an historic time for Sydney. In the middle of a transport strike, a petrol strike, a mail strike, a series of rolling power strikes and a garbage collection strike came the opening events of the Sydney Opera House. Construction delays and shifting dates had made it impossible to secure planned appearances by **Dame Joan Sutherland** or **Leonard Bernstein** and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, but, finally, on 17 December 1972, all seemed to be in readiness. **Sir Bernard Heinze** conducted a 'test concert' for the site workers (and music critics) and plans for the official opening proceeded full steam ahead. The Gala Opening Concert, with **Birgit Nilsson**, **Charles Mackerras** and the SSO took place on 27 September. In early October the Cleveland Orchestra led by **Lorin Maazel** played four concerts over a week. One of their soloists was

Birgit Nilsson, who had featured in the opening concert the previous week. On 20 October, the Sydney Opera House was formally opened by **Queen Elizabeth II**, a moment in history that was threatened by more strikes, visits by **Imelda Marcos** and a bevy of heads-of-state and Hollywood types, even the prospect of a terrorist attack by the PLO. The Queen attended performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the Concert Hall and Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, also conducted by Mackerras. In the intervening years, the reservations about the appropriateness of opening with the music of Wagner disappeared and Sydney now has a building that is the living embodiment of its people and place, recognised the world over. On 28 June 2007 the Sydney Opera House became the youngest structure to be admitted to UNESCO's World Heritage List..

EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY – A FIRST-NIGHT PERFORMER REMEMBERS

Extracts from Hugh Robertson's essay on the SSO website 4 May 2023
<https://www.sydneysymphony.com/backstage-news/the-view-from-the-stage>

The opening night on September 29, 1973 was one of the biggest nights in Australia's cultural life. The concert represents both the rich history at the Opera House, but also its vital present and exciting future. One man who spans that entire period is **Ron Prussing**, the SSO's Principal Trombone, who was on stage at the opening concert. As a young boy in Sydney in the 1960s, and an aspiring musician, Prussing was fascinated by the tumultuous process to actually build the Opera House, from delays to cost blowouts to Utzon's departure from Australia. But all the while, he could sense that something big was happening. "I was very young," recalls Prussing, "But I just had this incredible sense that something of an occasion was going to happen, something very significant. And you know, it turned out looking not exactly like the design that Utzon submitted, so there was this this real air of mystery about it." Prussing performed with the Sydney Symphony frequently throughout the late 60s and early 70s, and remembers vividly the feeling in the Orchestra during the build-up to the Opera House opening. "The orchestra was in good form [in 1973]," he says. "But there was an anticipation that this was maybe going to lead us into a new, somewhat uncharted era. We weren't quite sure what was going to happen." "You've got to pay a lot of respect to the players of the time of the move from the Town Hall into the Opera House. They moved into a new building, new surroundings, a lot more focus on them worldwide than had been in the Town Hall. I've said to many people in recent times that I believe the Orchestra stands on the shoulders of giants." When the big night finally arrived, that sense

of occasion and moment only grew. "The opening night concert was a spectacular event," says Prussing with a smile. "Everybody was keen to move into their new home. And of course, we had Australia's pre-eminent conductor of the day in **Charles Mackerras**. He came back from Europe, and we had **Birgit Nilsson** singing Wagner that night. She was such an incredible soprano, the quintessential Wagnerian soprano of the day, and she just brought the house down." "I was so privileged to be part of that that night," he continues. "I was so young and naïve; I was just revelling in this music. I just remember enjoying the spectacular nature of that incredible music. And it was music that I ultimately fell on very quickly, fell in love with."

Having performed in the Sydney Opera House since Day One, Prussing is perhaps better qualified than anyone to speak about the difference between the old Concert Hall and the new, following its re-opening in July 2022 – another important milestone shared by the Opera House and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. "I think the sound is spectacular," Prussing says enthusiastically. "I have both played in it, obviously, and I try and get to a lot of concerts when I'm rostered off. I enjoy listening to it, and I have had seats right up the back and it's as clear as clear can be – they are almost some of the best seats, now." "The balance is so much better, the strings, the bass end of the orchestra has just improved exponentially, and I think the blend of the orchestra is better because we can hear everybody, and we're getting used to the hall. It's a wonderful hall to play in."

THE RECORDING OF THE OPENING PERFORMANCES

ABC Classic (CD and DVD) 076 3048 reviewed by **Gordon Kerry** July 28 2019 on Music Trust E-Zine <https://musictrust.com.au/loudmouth/sydney-opera-house-gala-opening-concert-1973/>

“A valuable document of an important moment in our cultural history.”

The late **Stephen Hall** liked to tell the story of how, as the opening of the Sydney Opera House drew near, he was summoned to the presence of the then Premier of NSW, the unlamented **Robert** ‘Run the bastards over’ **Askin**, who – not known for mincing words – wanted to know why the new theatre was to be inaugurated with performances of what he described as ‘a fuckin’ communist opera’. I suppose, in its way, it’s a fair enough question: Prokofiev’s opera, while hardly Marxist agit-prop, was not a repertoire standard, nor would it necessarily be a crowd pleaser (**Dame Edna Everage** would later claim to have once slept with then-Prime Minister **Gough Whitlam**: ‘it was at the Sydney Opera House, during Act II of *War and Peace*.’) And of course it wasn’t Australian. **Peter Sculthorpe** had been commissioned to compose a work that started out as an opera called *Cook* but ended up a choral ballet called *Rites of Passage*, delivered, uncharacteristically, too late for the opening season; commissioned chamber operas by **James Penberthy** and **Larry Sitsky** were performed in the new Opera Theatre but – as we were reminded forty-something years later by the composer’s much-publicised intervention at a recent Melbourne performance of *Rigoletto* – **George Dreyfus’s** *The Gilt-Edged Kid* was not. Editor’s note: our President was fortunate to attend a performance in Melbourne on the occasion of George Dreyfus’ 95th birthday (22 July 2023). Produced by Opera it was a fitting tribute to a composer who has been fighting to have his work performed.

War and Peace had been chosen partly for novelty value, but, in a nicely democratic gesture, largely because it has a large cast of principals, thus allowing many of the hard-working members of the Australian Opera their moment on the new stage. It was emphatically not a vehicle for some international star diva, and in any case the obvious candidate for that role, **Joan Sutherland**, was otherwise engaged until the House’s second season in 1974.

The star diva who did appear was **Birgit Nilsson**, singing with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in her famously comfortable shoes and an all-Wagner program conducted by **Charles Mackerras** to open the Concert Hall. (Sutherland and Nilsson apparently enjoyed a less than collegial relationship, so it’s probably just as well they weren’t both engaged for the opening season.) This was the Gala Opening – not to be confused with the Royal Gala at which Her Majesty cut a ribbon, or cracked a bottle of Great Western, or something, and dutifully sat through an inevitable performance of Beethoven’s Ninth – and ABC Classic has recently released the audio of the concert on CD, with a DVD of the second half, which was devoted to bleeding chunks of *Götterdämmerung*.

There are of course several ironies at work here: had **Jörn Utzon’s** plans for the building been realised we might have been able to see Wagner’s operas staged, and his orchestra comfortably accommodated, in the larger hall of the Opera House, rather than in productions that have had to adapt to the,



Charles Mackerras and SSO 29.09.1973

shall we say, challenges of the smaller theatre; and a cynic might be wryly amused to hear a soprano describe the utter destruction of a great monument to vainglory whose unexpectedly high building cost sets in motion a string of tragic events.

One assumes that the ABC’s choice of Wagner for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra was not unrelated to the AO’s choice of *War and Peace*: it enabled a lot of musicians to participate in the event (and it is gratifying in the DVD to see how many players remained stalwarts of music in Sydney for years afterwards). It would be churlish to dwell on the performance’s few shortcomings: it is, after all a live performance (the famed Sydney coughers are there to prove it) in a new hall (and one which, as we know, had its own few shortcomings) to which both players and recording crews were yet to become fully accustomed. Naturally enough, too, the black-and-white video stock hasn’t always aged well, with some moments of overly high contrast and flaring.

The *Meistersinger* prelude takes a while to breathe life into its opening tutti, one could do with a little more metrical elasticity in the Prelude to *Tristan*, and there are one two moments of imprecise intonation and balance throughout. But in general the orchestra rises to the challenge set by Mackerras’s interpretation, and one of the many pleasures of the DVD is watching him at work. While it was nearly a decade since Nilsson had made her epochal *Götterdämmerung* recording with **Solti**, the voice still has that titanium edge whether in the joyful greeting of the Wartburg in *Tannhäuser’s* ‘Dich, teure Halle!’, Isolde’s Liebestod, in which Nilsson proves she can float beautifully soft notes, or on the cataclysm of the ‘Immolation scene’. Needless to say, the crowd goes wild. I would have.

It’s a valuable document of an important moment in our cultural history, and also a record of how we thought about such things at that particular time. I suspect that such programming wouldn’t be permitted under analogous conditions today; rightly so, there would I suspect be an obligation to include a commissioned Australian work. But it’s always easy, and dangerous, to apply contemporary standards of judgement to the past. An all-Wagner concert on that occasion was, in part, a way of staking a claim to membership of an international artistic community, and a projection, if you like, of Western culture and values.

THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

Yvonne Frindle 06 Apr 2023, <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/classical-music/under-sails-lso>

Picture this: The musicians of the London Symphony Orchestra arrive at the Sydney Opera House – suits and ties to a man. The occasion seems formal. But the news camera has panned past the raw scaffolding of the shells, and in the foreground a worker is laying shimmering white tiles in their signature chevron pattern. It's 1966. Australia has just switched to decimal currency, and the LSO's concerts here have been advertised in dollars and in pounds. (The best seats were \$4.55 or £2/5/6.) Not only is the Sydney Opera House unfinished, but it has reached a tumultuous point in its construction history, with the resignation in March of architect **Jørn Utzon**. On that first Australian tour, the LSO's Sydney concerts take place in the Sydney Town Hall. But even so, the orchestra's connection to the Sydney Opera House is already being forged. The Cleveland Orchestra will be the first international orchestra to give a concert in the newly opened Sydney Opera House in 1973, but the LSO is the first to play there, even before the building is complete.

“Terrible” acoustics

Framed by exposed masonry and concrete, with their principal conductor **István Kertész** at the podium, the LSO performs Schubert's Ninth Symphony for a small audience of workers and guests. There's no audio on the old newsreel, so we can't hear the result, but the reports aren't exactly encouraging. “Bad acoustics in new theatre” reads the headline; the acoustics of the unfinished theatre were “terrible”, said Kertész. But this was hardly surprising, and he wisely added that he would withhold a definite opinion until the building was finished. Meanwhile, the building “could become one of the ‘seven wonders of the world’”, and the LSO's manager at the time, **Ernest Fleischmann**, described the Opera House as Australia's “cultural ‘coming of age’”.

The Goossens connection

Strictly speaking, the LSO–Sydney Opera House connection had begun years earlier. It was one of the LSO's longstanding conductors, **Eugene Goossens**, who – as chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and director of the Conservatorium – had been a tireless advocate for the building of an opera house in Sydney, confident that Australia could take its place on the world stage with a truly first-class venue for music, opera, ballet and theatre. In 1950, Goossens issued an ultimatum to the NSW Government: “Either we start a Sydney Opera House now – or I leave.” As it happened, construction



LSO at the SOH 1966

didn't begin until 1959, by which time Goossens, forced out by scandal, had returned to London where he'd begun a series of recordings with the LSO, including the landmark Australian work *Corroboree*, by **John Antill**.

What to do with the main hall?

The reports don't say exactly where in the Sydney Opera House the LSO played in 1966, but at that point one of the most significant decisions was still to be made: the ABC's claiming of the “main hall” as the principal venue for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Today we take it for granted that a visiting orchestra will perform in the Concert Hall, and it's noteworthy when opera, dance or a play like *Amadeus* is produced in that space.

It wasn't conceived that way, however, and in December 1966, another LSO connection flew in to Sydney to advise on the subject. **Ernest Bean** had managed the rebuilding of London's Royal Festival Hall as a permanent home for the LSO, working with talented young architect **Leslie Martin**. (In another link, Martin had been one of the judges for the Sydney Opera House design competition.) Now the NSW premier, **Robert Askin**, wanted Bean to investigate whether the main hall should be retained as a theatre for opera and ballet, as originally planned, or be adapted for concerts, as the ABC wanted.

(Editor's note: **Paul Robeson** was the first person to perform at Sydney Opera House. In 1960, he climbed the scaffolding and sang *Ol' Man River* to the construction workers as they ate lunch.)



SIR CHARLES MACKERRAS

Born in 1925 of Australian parents in America, **Sir Charles Mackerras** studied in Sydney and Prague and made his debut as an opera conductor at Sadler's Wells. He was First Conductor of the Hamburg Opera (1966–69) and Musical Director of both Sadler's Wells (later English National Opera) (1970–77), and of Welsh National Opera (1987–92), where his notable Janáček productions, amongst many others, were acclaimed. From 1976–79 Sir Charles was Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Sir Charles was Conductor Laureate of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra, Conductor Emeritus of the Welsh National Opera and Principal Guest Conductor Emeritus of the San Francisco Opera. A specialist in Czech repertory, Sir Charles was Principal Guest Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra from 1997 – 2003, following his life-long association with both the Orchestra and many aspects of Czech musical life. He was an enthusiastic supporter of WSNSW, being its Patron from 1981 until 2010.

LORIN MAAZEL'S THOUGHTS ON THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE, OCTOBER 1973

What is it like to conduct in the new \$140-million Sydney Opera House? An obvious person to ask is **Lorin Maazel**, who led his Cleveland Orchestra in four concerts there during the recent inaugural week. His reply to the query began cautiously. "Acoustically it is not unsatisfactory," he said. "I think that is a fairly accurate description. It is, to a certain extent, a concert hall in the round. There are people in back and in front of the orchestra. One would expect such a hall not to be satisfactory, and in fact I expected much worse. But the players in the orchestra could hear one another, and there was enough reverberation to produce a fairly elegant sound. At least it did function to a quite satisfactory degree and it will attract major performers. It is spectacular and has great architectural splendour, even though it was built from the outside in. And they have managed to resolve some of the pivotal problems rather successfully."

Maazel performed in the large Concert Hall but had a chance to observe rehearsals by the Australian Opera in the smaller auditorium. His first comment on it was that the orchestra pit for the opera accommodates only 60 people, some of whom have to watch the conductor through closed-circuit TV. "I was told," he said, "that several very successful performances were given. In any event, the place works. Any new building has problems, but the people who were thrown into it said 'We've got to have this and that.' They got it and they made it work. My only objection to the Sydney Opera House is the same for any of the new halls, from Göteborg to Perth: the same kind of expertise that is applied to something like Skylab is not applied to them."

Maazel had no comment on the lack of parking space near the building, a principal source of criticism, except to admire the fact that it was a builders' union that successfully objected to the destruction of some rare trees to make way for a closer parking lot. "The stairs," he said, "are a problem. There are an enormous number to climb and there are not enough elevators to compensate. This makes it hard for elderly people

or anyone who has difficulty walking. But it is so easy to sound negative. As an over-all accomplishment, the structure is quite staggering. It is a lesson to us—a country with a much greater population and much greater wealth." <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/21/archives/sydneys-opera-staggering-moderns-and-macdowell-sydneys-opera-house.html>

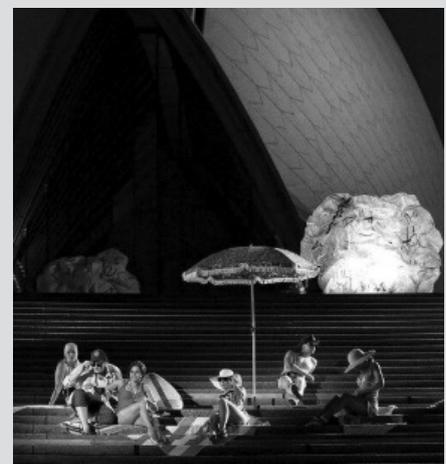
THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE DECADE OF RENEWAL

The Sydney Opera House has been renewed for future generations of artists, audiences and visitors in a complex, far-reaching period of transformation that touched all corners of this iconic building. Generously funded by the NSW Government, our decade of renewal, worth almost \$300 million, has been an opportunity to retune a masterpiece of the 20th century into a stage for the 21st. The goal was clear: to open up to more of the community and to live up to the promise of the building itself. Since work began at our 40th anniversary in 2013, we have improved access, amenity and safety, strengthened capacity and dramatically enhanced our performance spaces. This has been our largest series of capital works in five decades, ranging from the removal of vehicles on the Forecourt to the new Centre for Creativity to the upgraded Joan Sutherland Theatre and Concert Hall. Along the way, we have deepened our connection with the community, driving engagement and welcoming a variety of audiences with greater digital investment and First Nations storytelling, plus an expanded schedule of contemporary music, talks and ideas, and children's programming. COVID-19 struck at a critical time, causing delays across the construction industry, further complicating an already complicated project. But we pressed on, harmonising technological innovations with the features that make the World Heritage-listed institution so unique. It's been a triumph of human creativity and collaboration – much like the Opera House itself.

From the SOH website

THE EIGHTH WONDER

By 1995, the extraordinary tale of the Sydney Opera House's construction had become an opera in itself: Australian Opera's production of *The Eighth Wonder*, written by composer **Alan John** and librettist **Dennis Watkins**. It was premiered at the Sydney Opera House on 14 October 1995 in the presence of the composer and librettist. The opera was broadcast on television by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on the Friday evening following the world premiere performance. **Michael Billington**, in *The Guardian* (1995) was enthusiastic: "exhilarating...Not since John Adams's *Nixon in China* have I seen a modern opera that connected so directly with its audience." It was revived by the same company (by this time known as Opera Australia) again at the Sydney Opera House in 2000. Lyndon Terracini, artistic director of Opera Australia, announced that the work would be performed as part of the 2016 season at the Sydney Opera House, retitled as *Sydney Opera House: The Opera*. This new adaptation was performed outdoors on the steps of the Opera House, with the audience wearing headphones to hear the singers and orchestra with clarity. In 2020, spurred by composer **Stephen Rae's** desire to listen to the opera and finding it unavailable, a project commenced to promote the opera through a comprehensive website dedicated to the opera. The website was launched in March 2021. <http://theeighthwondertheopera.com/>



A performance of *The Eighth Wonder* on the Opera House steps, 2016

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE WAGNER PERFORMANCES SINCE OPENING

- 2019 **The Ring** and **Meistersinger** excerpts recital Bryn Terfel
Gareth Jones Orchestra Victoria
- 2018 **The Ring** excerpts concert Donald Runnicles SSO
- 2017 **Parsifal** concert Pinchas Steinberg OA Orchestra
- 2015 **Tristan und Isolde** concert David Robertson SSO
- 2014 **The Ring without words** (arr. Leinsdorf) concert Max
McBride SYO
- 2013 **The Flying Dutchman** concert David Robertson SSO
- 2013 **Wesendonck Lieder** concert Lisa Gasten Simone
Young SSO
- 2013 **Wagner's Ring Adventure** (arr. Henk de Vlieger) concert
Mark Wigglesworth SSO
- 2012 Excerpts from **Tannhäuser, Tristan und Isolde, Die
Walküre** Sir Andrew Davis MSO
- 2012 Excerpts from **Die Meistersinger, Tannhäuser, Tristan
und Isolde, Götterdämmerung** concert
Simone Young Christine Brewer SSO
(A recreation of the 1973 opening concert)
- 2007 **Tannhäuser** OA Richard Hickcox
(40th anniversary Elizabethan Trust Orchestra)
- 2006 **Wagner's Ring Adventure** (arr. Henk de Vlieger)
concert Edo de Waart SSO
- 2004 **The Flying Dutchman** OA George Alexander Albrecht
- 2003 **Die Walküre Act III, Siegfried Idyll** concert
Edo de Waart SSO
- 2001 **Lohengrin** OA Sebastian Weigle
- 2001 Wagner Spectacular excerpts concert OA Simone Young
- 2000 **Götterdämmerung** concert Edo de Waart SSO
- 1999 **Siegfried** concert Edo de Waart SSO
- 1998 **Tannhäuser** OA Richard Hickcox dir Elke Neidhardt
- 1997 **Die Walküre** concert Edo de Waart SSO
- 1996 **The Flying Dutchman** OA dir Barrie Kosky
- 1995 **Das Rheingold** concert Edo de Waart SSO
- 1990 **Tristan und Isolde** AO Stuart Challender SSO dir
Neil Armfield (staged in the concert hall)
- 1989 **Die Walküre** AO Stuart Challender
- 1988 **Die Meistersinger** AO Sir Charles Mackerra
(German Government bicentennial gift)
- 1987 **Lohengrin** AO Stuart Challender
- 1985 **Die Walküre** AO Stuart Challender
- 1984 **Das Rheingold** AO Carlo Felice Cillario
- 1983 **Die Walküre** AO Carlo Felice Cillario
- 1982 **Tristan und Isolde** concert Sir Charles Mackerras SSO
- 1981 **Götterdämmerung** concert Sir Charles Mackerras SSO
- 1979 **Das Rheingold** concert AO Mark Elder
- 1978 **Die Meistersinger** AO Mark Elder
(Scottish Opera production)
- 1977 **Parsifal** concert Carlo Felice Cillario SSO
- 1977 **The Flying Dutchman** AO Carlo Felice Cillario
- 1973/4 **Tannhäuser AO** Charles McKerras
- 1973 Excerpts from **Die Meistersinger, Tannhäuser, Tristan
und Isolde, Götterdämmerung**
Opening concert Charles Mackerras Birgit Nilsson SSO

In the past 50 years, there have only been 13 seasons when a Wagner opera was fully performed in the Opera Theatre. Many of them were excellent productions with marvellous (mostly Australian) singers but they were sometimes musically compromised by the less than ideal orchestra pit, which can't accommodate a full strength Wagner orchestra. In the Concert Hall there have been some wonderful performances of Wagner's mature works and several concerts which included excerpts.

DAME JOAN SUTHERLAND AND THE SOH

In 1974, Australia's greatest opera star, **Joan Sutherland**, performed for the first time in the theatre that would be named for her. The Australian Opera's production of Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffman* was the first of many times La Stupenda would tread the boards of the Opera House's stages. Her performances included *Lakmé*, *Norma* and *The Merry Widow* in the 1970s, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Otello*, *La Traviata* and *Die Fledermaus* in the 80s. Dame Joan farewelled the Opera House in 1990 with a performance of *Les Huguenots*. She received a rapturous reception, with green and gold streamers thrown by the audience covering the stage. In 2012, the Sydney Opera House renamed its Opera Theatre the Joan Sutherland Theatre in memory of one of Australia's greatest opera singers.

Dame Joan's comments on SOH

'In June 1951, before I left for England, **Eugene Goossens** gave me the opportunity to appear onstage in six performances as the heroine of his opera *Judith*,' recalled Joan Sutherland. 'He conducted this Australian premiere and was most kind and helpful. I wanted desperately to do well and he had such faith in my ability. (A few years later) he said it was "high time Australia took steps to keep her talent at home. If we had a fine national opera house with performances the year round and adequate financial rewards for our singers, they would think twice before leaving the country." He never let up on his dream of an opera house for Sydney, and although the realisation of that dream leaves much to be desired vis-à-vis practicality as a workable theatre, without him and those around him of like mind, the Sydney Opera House would not exist – nor would Opera Australia.'



Joan Sutherland as the Woodbird, 1954

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY - SIR EUGENE GOOSSENS

Sir Eugene Goossens was a towering figure in international music circles. He was born into a remarkably populous musical family in London on 26 May 1893. His father was a Belgian-born violinist and conductor and his mother was a singer. His paternal grandfather was also a violinist and conductor, and his mother's father was an operatic basso. And Goossens' siblings had notable musical careers: Sidonie and Marie as harpists, Leon as an oboist, and Adolphe on the horn.

In 1907 Goossens' youthful proficiency on the violin was rewarded with a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London, where he developed his talents as a composer and conductor. In 1917 he conducted for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and the Carl Rosa Opera Company at Covent Garden. In 1921 Goossens formed his own orchestra to give concerts of contemporary music in London – including the first British concert performance of **Stravinsky's** *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

In 1923 Goossens was appointed conductor of the Eastman Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra in New York State. In America he was also able to conduct the great orchestras of Philadelphia, Boston, New York and San Francisco. From 1931 to 1946 he was conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony, vigorously programming new music alongside established classics. In 1942 he requested patriotic fanfares from several prominent composers as 'stirring and significant contributions to the war effort'. Among the 18 received was **Aaron Copland's** monumental *Fanfare for the Common Man*.

If his engagement to tour Australia in 1946 was something of a coup for the ABC, his acceptance of **Charles Moses'** remunerative offer was even more exciting. Goossens returned to Sydney in July 1947 and announced that he intended to make the Sydney Symphony 'one of the six best orchestras in the world.' He speedily sacked unsatisfactory players and promoted or recruited younger ones. The results were immediate: the orchestra responded to his skill, musicianship and enthusiasm, and the public packed his concerts. Goossens introduced many major works which had previously been ignored or regarded as too challenging. Thanks to him, Australians were introduced to **Richard Strauss'** *Rosenkavalier Suite*, *Alpine Symphony*, *Symphonia Domestica* and concert performances of *Elektra* and *Salome*, **Mahler's** *Song of the Earth* and Symphonies 1, 7 and 8, **Bruckner's** Symphony 1 and **Liszt's** *Faust Symphony*. There were many more. Goossens also championed local composers, introducing, among many others, **John Antill's** *Corroboree* in 1946 and **Margaret Sutherland's** *Haunted Hills*.

Goossens cut a similar swathe at the conservatorium. He raised standards, upgraded staff, and conducted the senior orchestra himself. He taught the diploma classes in harmony, counterpoint and composition; **Richard Bonynges**, **Geoffrey Parsons** and **Malcolm Williamson** were among his students. Another of his ambitious coups was the production of two fully staged operas a year featuring conservatorium pupils. These were especially welcome in a city that was otherwise starved



Sir Eugene Goossens 1947

for regular opera productions. The brilliant young designer **William Constable** was responsible for most of the décor. It was the success of these performances, and the less than satisfactory conservatorium hall in which they were presented, that prompted Goossens to announce, as early as 1947, that Sydney needed 'an opera house'. What he really wanted was a building that could not only stage opera, but also provide an adequate venue for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, which performed in the acoustically lamentable Sydney Town Hall. On 6 October 1948 Goossens controversially suggested that the opera house could replace the old tram sheds on Bennelong Point. In 1952, weary of Goossens' persistence, Charles Moses reluctantly arranged a meeting with the new premier, **J.J. Cahill**. It took a lot of persuasion, but eventually Cahill agreed that an opera house would be desirable, but he was not convinced of the suitability of the prominent harbour site. He appointed Goossens to a four-man advisory committee. In the end, of course, the Bennelong site was accepted. In September 1955, a competition to design the building was announced. During this period Goossens mounted two Wagner productions at the Conservatorium; *Die Meistersinger* in 1951 (with future SSO luminaries **Donald Hazelwood**, **Neville Amadio** and **Sidonie Goossens** in the orchestra), and *The Flying Dutchman* in 1953.

At the Sydney Town Hall on 22 November 1954 Goossens conducted the Sydney Symphony, two choirs, an organ and soloists in the world premiere of his epic oratorio *The Apocalypse*. His services to music were recognised with a

knighthood on 9 June 1955. A mere nine months later came another apocalypse. On 9 March 1956 he flew into Sydney after completing a round of international conducting engagements. A customs search revealed he was carrying about 1000 'indecent photographs, films and books' – material apparently connected with his interest in Pantheism and his friendship with the notorious 'witch of Kings Cross', **Rosaleen Norton**. The resulting conviction cost Goossens his career and his health. He returned to Britain in May 1956, but concert bookings were sparse. **Richard Bonyng** found him 'absolutely destroyed. It was tragic.' Eugene Goossens died on 13 June 1962.

Thankfully, Australians have ceased to snigger at the mention of Goossens' name, and the positive aspects of the decade he spent here are being acknowledged. And as it did with the debacle over the Opera House's architect, Jørn Utzon, the public seems to want to atone for past hurts. Soon after the Opera House opened in 1973 a striking portrait of Goossens by Archibald Prize winner **Henry Hanke** was hung in the library. In 1991 the ABC named the main concert venue in its new Ultimo Centre after Goossens, in recognition of his prodigious contribution to music in Australia. Frank Van Straten, 2007 <https://liveperformance.com.au/hof-profile/eugene-goossens-1893-1962/>

THE GOOSSENS BUST

by Esteban Insausti

The much anticipated return of the London Symphony Orchestra under **Sir Simon Rattle** provided some fine evenings in the new sounding Concert Hall in May. But for me it also provided some serendipitous connections with the past, present and future. Whilst waiting for friends near the bust of Goossens (a traditional meeting point) two very tall gentlemen, obviously from the LSO, came out and started taking photos of themselves with Sir Eugene. Intrigued, given my connection to that bust (more on this in a moment), I approached and asked "what?" It turned out that the Principal of the Bass section, **Patrick Laurence**, is a relation of the great conductor. We engaged in conversation, me telling the story of how the bust got there in the first place. I also told Patrick that a week before this concert/meeting, **Peter Myers**, a great Australian architect who had worked in Utzon's studio on the SOH, passed away. I was working with Peter Myers and a select group of architects on a book of provocations for the 50th birthday of the SOH – a project that continues but has taken a different tone as a result of Peter's passing. So all this was very raw, very connected, very strange and wonderful at the same time.

It was back in 1981 when the ABC Youth Concert Committee was fishing for ideas to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ABC in 1982, that our liaison officer, a wise Austrian born gentleman named George Fleischer, suggested we commission a bust of Sir Eugene Goossens. We all thought it was a terrific idea, mainly because Goossens was still a controversial figure back then and also it would make amends to the list of casualties along the process to deliver the Sydney Opera House. A list which remains long and full of notables, not least the person who conceived the idea of a "House" on that location. We managed to secure the patronage of **Sir Charles Moses**, former General Manager of the ABC and one of the great personalities that generated most of what we enjoy culturally today. The Youth Concert Committee then embarked on amassing funds to pay for the commission, which was awarded to the sculptor **Peter**



Patrick Laurence (LSO Principal double bass) with his great uncle's bust. SOH May 2023

Latona. There followed a year of interesting meetings with those that contributed to the funds, most of whom personally knew Sir Eugene. My small role, as President of the Youth Concert Committee, was to introduce and invite our Patron, Sir Charles Moses, to present the bust to the ABC on our behalf after a performance of *The Apocalypse*.

So meeting Patrick Laurence brought back all those memories and associations. Including that some members of the Youth Concert Committee are Wagner Society members today (**Colin Piper, Dennis Mather, Keith Elvy**). The world is small, time is short and in the end we are all somehow connected by our associations, our pursuits, our passions. Music is a very special glue.

NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

UPDATE FROM JESSICA HARPER 2.08.2023

Since applying for funding a few exciting opportunities have come up. I will be heading to Vienna in a few weeks' time to perform in a concert for Mario Stoeckel (MACB agency), and will be singing Wagner's 'Dich teure Halle' (*Tannhäuser*) and Verdi's 'Tacea la notte placida' (*Il Trovatore*). Of course I will go a day early to fit in a coaching or two at the Staatsoper and Volksoper if I can wrangle it. I have also been invited to audition live in September (after successfully passing the video round) to sing Richard Strauss' *Vier Letzte Lieder* with orchestra. If I get this, I'll be performing in April 2024 with University Symphony Orchestra in Leuven in Belgium.

My most recent concert was with a fellow Pacific Opera alumnus Blake Parham in the town of Góra Kalwaria (a small Polish town near Warsaw where Joseph and I married during the pandemic). We were part of a concert connected to the 'Belle Epoch' Festival, with many beautiful vintage project cars shown off by their restorers, and many wonderful costumes on display. Blake and I performed duets from Lehár's *The Merry Widow*, and Verdi's *La Traviata*, while also singing some operetta favourites, including 'Meine Lippen, sie küssen so heiß' from *Giuditta*.

I am thankful to the Wagner Society of NSW for supporting my coaching for my current repertoire, as this opens up my time to study and research, as opposed to pulling beers or teaching English while waiting for my next audition. This has also given me the freedom to jump on opportunities like the concert in Vienna.

Jessica writes about preparing for a role

The process involved in preparing a role, aria or song is a dense one, painstakingly detailed and very enjoyable. The trouble with it is that you never really 'finish' a role, or a poem. There is always more to find, and the more you dig, the more tangents become available to you and the more you can read and research. As new life experiences come to you, you find new ideas to bring to your interpretations. The options are almost endless.

The process:

1. One should start with the text, the basis of it all. I have a lot of note books in my book shelf with varying titles. It won't come as a surprise to the reader that there are multiple notebooks for Germanic repertoire in particular, as this is what I've been doing the most in recent years, and where my deepest musical affinities lie.
2. I start by writing out the poem (not as it appears in a song, or libretto – rather the original text) in the original language, followed by a poetic translation in English. The same goes for the aria – I will write it out as it appears in the libretto, and not as it appears in the score (this comes later).



3. I then write it out again line for line with exact translation and IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet – this is one of the shortcuts singers use to make sure our pronunciation is as perfect as possible).
4. From here I will research the poet/lyricist and then the composer, making notes in my note books as I go, or recapping what I have already read and noted about them.
5. If this poem or work concerns a set moment in history (a war, a global event etc) I will also research the relevant things from there.
6. This all forms the basis for a character profile and 'acting beats' for the singer. This process comes from the books and pedagogical teachings of Constatine Stanislavski.
7. Once I have made a character profile (disseminating age, gender, social status, health, relationships and giving a back story with relevant facts from the libretto/ original text/ score introduction provided by the composer/ librettist) I will then be able to add to the motives/ acting beats for each word, phrase and musical gesture. Sometimes these change per note, sometimes they change per bar, or per phrase, depending on the text and what the composer has given me musically.

8. The singer writes out the text on one line, translation underneath, a layer of subtext under that and then they will find the 'acting beat' for that word or phrase. Notes about the dynamics, keys, tempi changes etc are also peppered in where relevant (so, always) on my own acting beats. Ink is still the most expensive liquid in the world, so we know that the composer did not expend it lightly.
9. Once this is all written in my note book, I transfer the short hand version to my score so it's easy to read when working with a coach and studying solo. The challenge then becomes remembering the minutiae, but keeping a spontaneous feel so that the story telling is as authentic as possible. This is the great dichotomy of being a performer. The preparation and study is absolutely gruelling, but it's our job to make it look completely new and visceral.

When I have the time to do this in order I am able to learn the music much quicker. Of course we all try to lean into whatever inspiration comes with each unique performance, but doing this text based work gives a really solid base line to work with, especially when I'm on stage dealing with whatever the voice gives me on the day of performance, and any of the other surprises that come with live music making.

Once this personal study has been completed I start with the music learning. In a perfect world I have the time to curate every vowel, consonant and note into perfect vocal placement, but in reality that is rarely possible. With more realistic time constraints in mind I am more likely to start with the hardest parts of a role or song, and make sure they are sung in as 'on the body' as possible. What singers mean by this is singing with the core muscles, diaphragm, and lats in their back when needed, and whatever other corporal shortcuts they have found work best for them, especially when negotiating the difficult passages in a song, aria or role.

From here I go to one of my coaches to collaborate and find more expressive vocal and dramatic colours (and inevitably be told what I've learned incorrectly, ha-ha!) Working with others is essential for singers, as we cannot hear what we are doing, even if we record all of our practice sessions. There's no recording technology available in the world that can capture everything that we do. Having a professional set of ears to listen at the piano, or in the rehearsal room is absolutely essential. This is where most singers 'level up' the most, and receive the most essential feedback. This work is particularly crucial before auditions, competitions and big performances.

SPECIAL ART OFFER

Artist Elizabeth Gordon Werner has proposed a very generous offer to members of WSNSW. She is proposing to donate all proceeds from the sale of her Wagner related artworks towards our support for young artists.

Elizabeth is an artist and biologist living near Sydney and working with diverse mediums across a range of subject matter, including portraiture. Music is an abiding inspiration. Paintings have been exhibited in Australia's Portia Geach Award for Portraiture, the Fishers Ghost Exhibition and the Gallipoli Association Exhibition in Sydney. Elizabeth has created many beautiful sketches of Wagner Society personalities and events over the past 15 years.

Works can be viewed at: <https://artsmitten.com/galleries/musicians/exhibition-wagner/>

Selected works for sale will be on display at the Goethe Institut on Sunday 22 October. An auction will also be held at the end of the meeting.

Paintings and etchings can be purchased unframed for easy transport. Many are also available framed Contact Elizabeth at art@artsmitten.com

Prices:

The etchings are 15 x 21 cm, suitable for standard sized 30x40cm frames.

Black and white etchings: A\$120 plus postage

Coloured etchings: \$190 plus postage

Add \$120 for framed etchings

Watercolours - poa



Bayreuth Festspielhaus Watercolour



Rainbow Bridge etching



Tristan - Nie erwachen! Watercolour

A TRIP TO BRANGAYNE OF ORANGE

by Ross Whitelaw

A recent business trip took me to the delightful city of Orange so I couldn't pass up the opportunity of visiting one of our Society's long-term sponsors – Brangayne of Orange wines. Situated at 837 Pinnacle Road on the slopes of the extinct volcano, Mount Canoblas, the Hoskins family have been farming here since the 1930s, first as orchardists and now, since 1994, under the hands of grandson David Hoskins as winemakers of the first order. The elevation of the vineyard means that it is sometimes covered in snow in winter months and benefits from mild summer temperatures – a stark contrast to my home hunting ground of the Hunter Valley. There was a warm welcome from David and his wife, especially when I identified myself as a member of the Wagner Society, which meant that our discussion was nearly as much about music as about wine.

The name “Brangayne” was given to the estate by David's grandmother, Winsome. The preparer of the love potion seemed like an apt name for the maker of these enchanting cool climate wines. A close look at the label, designed by Ian Kidd and Karin Seja of IKD Design Solutions of Adelaide and executed as an etching by Anelia Pavlova depicts Brangayne in the act of preparing the love potion while Isolde looks on.

Look closer and you will see Tristan staring at the moon in the background and the Master himself surveying it all from his portrait on the wall.

As a boutique winery making only 3000 cases annually, nine individual wines are made. I tasted them all in the old orchard cool store (now the cellar door adorned with photos of the vineyards under snow and numerous show awards) and walked away with six for my cellar. If you are in the vicinity of Orange, please make the effort to pay a visit (allow about an hour, call ahead) and you will be rewarded with a great wine tasting experience as well as informed and entertaining chat about you know who and his music.

Recently Brangayne of Orange shared the exciting news that it has been honoured with a 5-Star Winery rating in the 2024 Halliday Wine Companion results. This recognition highlights the commitment to excellence in winemaking and showcases the outstanding quality of the wines. The 2021 Pinot Noir and 2022 Riesling have both been awarded Gold Medals (95 points) and the 2022 Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio have received Silver Medals.



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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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.



Renaissance Tours



Christmas in Germany

Hamburg, Dresden, Leipzig & Berlin
with Scott Curry
14 – 28 December 2023 (15 days)

Celebrate fine opera and music in the historic opera houses and concert halls of Hamburg, Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin.



Opera Olé

Bilbao, Madrid and Barcelona
with Mairi Nicolson
20 May – 01 June 2024 (13 days)

Journey from Bilbao to Barcelona with opera aficionado Mairi Nicolson to uncover the best of opera, art and cuisine that Spain has to offer.



European Winter Music Tour

Vienna and Salzburg
with Andy Bromberger
21 January – 01 February 2024 (12 days)

Embark on a winter music sensation to delight in performances by acclaimed orchestras, ensembles and soloists in Vienna and Salzburg.



The Ring Cycle in Berlin

Berlin
with Scott Curry
20 – 27 May 2024 (8 days)

Witness veteran conductor Sir Donald Runnicles conduct Wagner's iconic *Ring* cycle at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, directed by Norwegian director Stefan Herheim.

Australia's finest collection of cultural and special interest tours.

For detailed information visit renaissancetours.com.au,
call 1300 727 095 or contact your travel agent.

ADDRESS

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence:
The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc | PO Box 6111 Alexandria NSW 2015
Telephone: 0412 282 070 (Esteban Insausti, President)
Website: www.wagner.org.au | Website enquiries: contact@wagner.org.au

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



Sydney Harbour from The Rocks Margaret Olley (1923 - 2011)

WAGNER SOCIETY E-NEWS

Our regular Wagner Society e-news are emailed to members at the addresses they have provided. Occasionally some members do not appear to have received these emails. This could be because their email address has changed, or emails have been going into their spam or junk mail, or for some other reason. If you feel this applies to you, please let the Membership Secretary know by filling out the Contact Us form on the website or by emailing webmaster@wagner.org.au and we will work to resolve this issue

WAGNER SOCIETY NEWSLETTERS AND QUARTERLIES ONLINE

The online library of Wagner Society Newsletters and Quarterlies is now complete. Every publication, from the first Newsletter dated February 1981 to the latest December 2020 Quarterly, is now on the Society's web page: wagner.org.au/society-newsletter. Please note that, as this web page is accessible only to members of the Society, members will need to log in.

ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

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

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154 Matcham Road, Matcham NSW 2250 | Ph: 0402 834 419 | Email: michael@mkrproductions.com.au
