



Season's Greetings



WAGNER
SOCIETY
nsw

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 44

171

DECEMBER 2023

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear friends,

One more Ring to go to complete the 2023 Wagnerfest in Australia. Will future programmers and producers present so much Wagner in Australia in a calendar year ever again? Somehow, I think we will all be travelling overseas for our Wagner fix in 2024. Except, of course, for the SSO's *Die Walküre* late in the year.

Since our last Quarterly we've had a variety of super interesting live events to finish the year. Two of our stalwarts, Dr Terence Watson and Mike Day, presented talks on specialised topics which gave us all a great insight. Whilst not an official WSNSW event, the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra under WSNSW

member Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith, gave a concert titled "Villains and Valkyries" based on an idea by Leona Geeves. It was a lot of fun and hopefully planted the Wagner-bug on many a first timer in the audience. We held our first SSO-Simone Young Ring symposium focussing on *Das Rheingold*, with great success. We'll do the second in late 2024. And as I write this, we just enjoyed our last event for 2023 at Ampico Towers (thank you Robert Mitchell for hosting) with a beautiful concert by Adrian Tamburini and Katherine Day, followed by much food, drink, chatter and raffle prizes. Many thanks to SSO, Bach Akademie, Philharmonia and Willoughby Symphony for donating tickets to 2024 performances.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 >



Curtain call at Simone Young/SSO *Das Rheingold* 18.11.2023

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

DR TERENCE WATSON'S TALK SUNDAY 17 SEPTEMBER AT GOETHE INSTITUT



Dr Terence Watson



Julie Clarke, June Donsworth



Lynette Longfoot, David Hurwood



Achim Leistner, Lyndall Foldvary-Khouri, Janice Roberts, Tim Green

DAS RHEINGOLD SYMPOSIUM SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER AT GOETHE INSTITUT



Suzanne Chaundy, Esteban Insausti, Miki Oikawa



Vicki Watson, Dr Lourdes St George



Colin Piper, Janelle Berents



Minnie Biggs, Mike Day, Ursula & Martin Armstrong

CHRISTMAS PARTY & CONCERT SUNDAY 26 NOVEMBER AT AMPICO TOWERS



Katherine Day



Part of the enthusiastic audience



Adrian Tamburini and Robert Mitchell



Afternoon tea

FOR YOUR DIARY

2024

| | | |
|------------------|--|--------------------|
| 25 Feb – 8 March | Parsifal conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles at Deutsche Oper | Berlin |
| 18 Mar – 1 Apr | 2 Ring Cycles under Philippe Jordan at Staatsoper Unter den Linden | Berlin |
| 11 May – 2 June | 3 Ring Cycles at Deutsche Oper. Directed by Stefan Herheim , conducted by Australian Nicholas Carter (1) and Sir Donald Runnicles (2, 3) | Berlin |
| 16 June – 9 July | 3 Ring Cycles conducted by Anthony Negus | Longborough |
| 20, 21 June | WASO/Asher Fisch Selections from the Ring | Perth Concert Hall |
| 25 Jul – 27 Aug | Bayreuth Festival | Bayreuth |
| 2 – 25 Aug | Tristan und Isolde with Stuart Skelton and Samuel Sakker | Glyndebourne |
| 15, 17 Nov | SSO/Simone Young Die Walküre in concert | SOH |

COMING SOCIETY EVENTS 2024

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 |
|--------------|--|-----------------|
| Sun 11 Feb | 12.30pm DVD <i>SOH opening Gala concert</i> 2.00pm Talk by mezzo-soprano Deborah Humble PS. Since sending copy to the printer we have been informed that the wonderful Warwick Fyfe will be joining Deborah for the talk | Goethe Institut |
| Wed 21 Feb | 7.00pm German soprano Alexandra Steiner | Zoom |
| Sun 10 March | 12.30pm DVD Weber's <i>Euryanthe</i> Act 1 TBC 2.00 Helden-tenor Simon O'Neill | Goethe Institut |
| Wed 20 March | 7.00pm Broadcaster Christopher Cooke | Zoom |
| Sun 21 April | 12.30pm DVD Weber's <i>Euryanthe</i> Acts 2 & 3 | |
| Sun 19 May | 2.00pm Concert and Wagner's birthday | Goethe Institut |
| Sun 14 July | 12.30pm DVD TBC 2.00 Baritone Simon Meadows TBC | Goethe Institut |
| Sun 10 Nov | 10.30am WSNSW Symposium on <i>Die Walküre</i> | Goethe Institut |

Advice about changes to the Program will be emailed in our e-news to people who have given their email addresses to the Society's Membership Secretary; the latest updates will also be available on the Society's website: www.wagner.org.au.

Admission to each event will be \$25 a Member, and \$35 each non-Member, \$10 (Full-time students); Seminar/Concert \$40 (m), \$50 (n-m), \$20 (fts).
For Zoom events members will be requested to register; admission is \$10.

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

Patron:

Ms Simone Young AM

Honorary Life Members:

Mr Richard King

Professor Michael Ewans

Mr Horst Hoffman

Mr Roger Cruickshank

Dr Terence Watson

Dr Dennis Mather

Ms Leona Geeves

Mrs Barbara Brady

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

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|--|------|
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| <i>DAS RHEINGOLD</i> WITH SIMONE YOUNG AND SSO | P.13 |
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| <i>DAS RHEINGOLD</i> : A GLORIOUS DESCENT INTO NIBELHEIM WITH THE 'AUTHENTIC' WAGNER | P.16 |
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT (continued)

The Committee is busy planning the full event calendar for 2024 which we will finalise in the new year as guest confirmations come in. But we have a number of events already lined up. And we are bringing back our Wednesday Zoom series with speakers from overseas. I can reveal that many of our favourites will be back in 2024: Robert Gay, Peter Bassett, Christopher Cook and Erica Miner, as well as some renowned names. We'll update through the E-News before the March Quarterly. I reiterate my invitation for you to let us know what topics you would like to see and hear presented. So do write me an email or let one of our Committee know.

Some sad news with the passing of our Immediate Past President Colleen Chesterman. Our condolences to Michael and the family. There was a very happy, it is the only word to describe it, memorial at Belvoir St Theatre which was very well attended. A foundation member of the Society, Margaret Suthers aged 99, passed away in October. And we lost Jacqui Dark and Stephen Gould from our stages, both great Wagnerians. Some of us had the pleasure of hearing Stephen in *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring* at Bayreuth last year.

Before I extend best wishes to you all for the end of 2023, I would like to mention our recurring programme supporting NSW artist as well as Wagner productions across Australia. You have all seen and heard what our local talent can do from Bendigo and Sydney to Brisbane. It is an honour, and a pleasure, to say that the WSNSW, through your donations, attendance, and continued membership, has been able to assist a number of future stars. In order to maintain this programme, we need your help. So please consider a donation.

That's it for 2023. Thank you to everyone for making it a very successful year for the WSNSW. Wishing you a happy end of the year and hope to see you in 2024 for more Wagner and Wagner related events.

With best wishes. Happy listening.

Esteban Insausti

President, Wagner Society in NSW Inc



**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

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers, this bumper Christmas issue focuses on *Das Rheingold*. In Sydney, we have just heard our Patron Simone Young's superb concert performances with the SSO, and reports are back from London about the new ROH Antonio Pappano/Barrie Kosky production. By the time this issue reaches members, many would have seen the new OA *Ring* in Brisbane. The March Quarterly will include reports on the performances and I encourage members to send me their impressions. Many members saw the MO *Ring* in Bendigo early this year, so it's been a wonderful feast for Aussie water-babies – four different *Rheingolds* in 10 months! In line with the society's objectives, in this issue I am also including the first part of an exploration of the composers who influenced Wagner and those whom he influenced. The second part will be in March. My gratitude as always to Leona for proofreading (and liaising with our supported artists).



I wish you all Happy Holidays

Mike Day

michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com

ERRATA

In the September issue on page 23 there is a reference to Eugene Goossens's conviction. This is incorrect as he was never actually charged. Also, in the caption to the photo, Patrick Laurence is described as Principal whereas in fact he is a member of the Bass section. I apologise and thank Patrick for pointing this out. Ed.

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 SEPT 2023 FROM THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS: A Brejzek, R Ives, Mike Day

WE WARMLY WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE JUNE 2023:

Mr P Lindwall and Ms J Frederikson 1283, Jennifer and Lionel King 1284, Bruce Allen and Denise Warner 1285, Mr J Phillips 1286

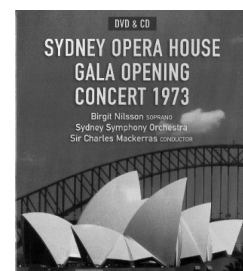
FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 11 FEBRUARY 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.

This was planned for 17 September but couldn’t be shown due to equipment malfunction.



2.00PM TALK DEBORAH HUMBLE TALKS ABOUT HER BRISBANE RING EXPERIENCE

2023 was a good year for Hunter Valley based international star mezzo-soprano **Deborah Humble**; starting in March with triumphs as Erda and Waltraute in the MO Bendigo *Ring*, and finishing in December with Fricka and Waltraute in the OA Brisbane *Ring*. In 2022 she stunned Melbourne audiences with her Klytemnestra in Richard Strauss’s *Elektra* and in March 2024 Deborah will sing Waltraute in Schoenberg’s *Gurrelieder* with Simone Young and the SSO at SOH. Reviews: “Deborah Humble revealed herself to be an artist at the height of her dramatic and vocal powers. Hard it is to imagine a more impassioned account of this scene. This was grand singing and acting that shook the house...fortunate are we to have heard Humble in this role.” MO, Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung*, Ulumbarra Theatre, Jim Pritchard, Seen and Heard International, April 2023

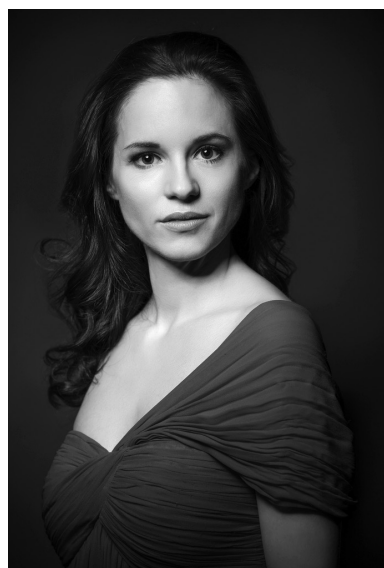


“Deborah Humble is renowned as a compelling actress with an exciting depth of tone. Dressed in a splendid flowing blue gown, she crossed the front of the stage and issued her warning with all the focused authority of an earth goddess”. MO, Ulumbarra Theatre, *Das Rheingold*, Heather Leviston, Classic Melbourne, March 2023

We look forward to hearing Deborah talking informally about her preparation and performances.

WEDNESDAY 21 FEBRUARY AT 7.00PM ON ZOOM

ALEXANDRA STEINER TALKS TO US FROM GERMANY



The German soprano **Alexandra Steiner** was born in Augsburg. She studied at the music academies in Stuttgart and Würzburg and at the Wales International Academy of Voice. She received further important input from numerous master classes, including with Brigitte Fassbaender, Anna Reynolds, Kiri Te Kanawa and Richard Bonyng. The young singer’s early roles include Olympia in *Les contes d’Hoffmann*, Gretel in *Hänsel und Gretel* and Norina in *Don Pasquale*, Pamina in *The Magic Flute* and Marzelline in *Fidelio*. Wagnerian roles include a flower maiden in *Parsifal*, Woglinde in *Das Rheingold* and, most recently, the Woodbird in *Siegfried* at Bayreuth in 2022 and 2023. In addition to her opera work, the soprano also has a busy concert career. She worked with conductors such as Christopher Hogwood, Peter Dijkstra, Sebastian Tewinkel and Michael Hofstetter. Her extensive concert repertoire includes works by Pergolesi, Bach, Handel, Mozart, Brahms and Mahler.



SUNDAY 10 MARCH AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.30PM DVD ACT 1 OF EURYANTHE - A "HEROIC-ROMANTIC OPERA" BY CARL MARIA VON WEBER



Jacquelyn Wagner
(Euryanthe)
Theresa Kronthaler
(Eglantine)
Norman Reinhardt
(Adolar)
Andrew Foster-Williams
(Lysart)
Stefan Cerny
(King Louis VI)

Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, Arnold Schoenberg Chor, conducted by Constantin Trinks

“Aiming at psychological truth, never sinking to melodrama or allowing the tension to drop—and, in his searching, mid-20th-century staging, ultimately making sense of a piece often dismissed as impossible—Loy takes the opera seriously...Jacquelyn Wagner is a thrilling exponent of the title role, her fluent lyric soprano fresh and full of feeling, her level of engagement stirring in what is overall a performance of extraordinary quality” Opera Magazine August 2020.

For more information please see page 19 article about Weber.

2.00PM TALK ACCLAIMED HELDEN-TENOR SIMON O'NEILL TALKS TO US

Simon O'Neill was born and grew up on New Zealand's South Island. The son of a teacher and a farmer, O'Neill loved music (as well as sports), and he played piano, organ, and brass instruments. He joined the choir in high school, partly because most of the members were girls. He toured around the world singing, which he loved.

At the University of Otago, O'Neill was a baritone,

but his voice developed into a heldentenor. In his mid-20's, he was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study at Manhattan School of Music and then Juilliard. Since debuting at London's Royal Opera in 2005 and New York's Metropolitan Opera in 2006, O'Neill has been acclaimed as one of the world's great singers in the German Romantic repertoire. As well as all the major Wagner roles he has won rave reviews singing Mahler and Schoenberg. His favourite role is Mao Tse-tung in John Adams's *Nixon in China*. Simon recently sang Froh in the SSO/Simone Young *Das Rheingold* and he will join them again in March 2024 to play the role of Waldemar in Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*



Simon O'Neill as Froh 16 Nov 2023

COMMITTEE 2023 - 2024

| | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
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REPORTS ON RECENT WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 17 SEPTEMBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

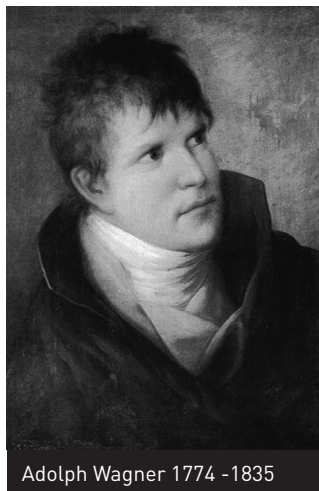
12.30PM DVD SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE GALA OPENING CONCERT

Unfortunately, this was unable to be shown because of technical problems. It will be shown on 11 February

2.00PM TALK BY DR TERENCE WATSON: WAGNER'S CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE



Ludwig Geyer 1779 -1821



Adolph Wagner 1774 -1835

'A Precocious Brat/Spoilt Child' was how our guest speaker **Dr Terence Watson** started off his fascinating talk about Wagner's first 17 years. He was quoting from 'Wagner as I Knew Him' written by Wagner's childhood friend **Ferdinand Praeger** (1815 -1891). Terence then proceeded through 11 'Episodes' detailing many aspects of Wagner's life from his birth in 1813 in the Brühl (Jewish Quarter) in Leipzig until the 1830 student uprising in the same city. In the intervening years Wagner and his family lived in at least 17 different dwellings – moving between Leipzig, Dresden and Prague, depending on where his singing/acting family members were performing. His beloved step-father **Ludwig Geyer** (1779-1821) was a playwright and singer/actor and of Wagner's seven siblings four were performers and singers, despite their mother's exhortation to stay away from the theatre! Another great influence was his uncle **Adolph Wagner** (1774 – 1835), who was a playwright and friend of **Friedrich von Schiller** (1759-1805), the great German playwright and poet. Thanks to uncle Adolph, Wagner developed a love of reading, especially Greek

history, but was a very poor scholar – often being reprimanded by his teachers for poor concentration and application – his was too busy with his own grand imaginative projects. He was writing plays and music at age 13.

Terence made it clear that young Richard's devoted parents petted and spoil him partly because of his bright powers of observation and lively personality but also because he was a sickly child, suffering all his life from the skin disease erysipelas, which could explain his love of silks and satins. As well as giving insights into Wagner's musical education, Terence drew attention to Wagner's love of gambling, which included using his mother's pension payment to indulge his habit!

Terence used many quotes from Wagner's autobiography, *Mein Leben*, which make clear Wagner's attraction to the world of theatre and particularly the look and feel of the fabrics of the costumes. In adolescence he was especially drawn to admire older and stronger students, partly because of their elegant clothes. As soon as he was able, he enthusiastically joined the Saxon Club - a University of Leipzig Burschenschaft. These student Fraternity groups contributed to the unification of Germany and promoted nationalism and Christian conduct, with a strong emphasis on Honour (which became a major theme in Wagner's music dramas). One of the activities that was practiced was fencing – Wagner was attracted to the flattering and functional clothing as well as the daring athleticism and bravado.

This was a very interesting and amusing presentation based on deep scholarship and love of Wagner's works and those who attended gave Terence (who has been a stalwart of WSNSW for many years) a very warm reception.

Wagner's Childhood & Youth – Episode 9

- **Love, Sex, and Eroticism**
- Everything connected with the theater was **mysterious, an attraction amounting to intoxication**, and while I tried with playmates to imitate performances of *Freischütz*, and devoted myself with great zeal to the production of costumes and masks through grotesque painting, **it was the more delicate costumes of my sisters, on which I often observed my family working, that exerted a more subtly arousing effect on my fantasy; the very touch of these objects could provoke me up to a yearning, violent heartbeat.**



Burschenschaften fencing Mensur, Tübingen 1822

SATURDAY 14 OCTOBER 7.00PM AT THE CONCOURSE CONCERT HALL, CHATSWOOD
WILLOUGHBY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA & CHOIR: VILLAINS & VALKYRIES



Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith takes a bow with the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and Chorus

Inspired by an idea put forward by WSNSW Artists' Liaison **Leona Geeves**, and sponsored by our Society, WSNSW member **Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith**, Associate Conductor of the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, put together this exciting concert. It featured the Orchestra and Choir in excerpts from Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Die Feen*, *Die Walküre* and *Tannhäuser*. Sarah has a delightful, energetic stage presence, even donning a blonde wig and horned helmet for *the Ride of the Valkyries*, much appreciated by the enthusiastic audience. The choir included Leona and WSNSW member **Lyndall Foldvary-Khouri** as guest choristers. The choir joined baritone **Simon Lobelson** in a passionate finale of Act I of Puccini's *Tosca*.

WSNSW sponsored soprano **Ellen McNeil** performed *Rosswisse* and also featured was mezzo-soprano **Ashlee Woodgate** singing *Helmwige*. Ashlee sang at our masterclass with **Christina Henson-Hayes** last year. Christina was in the audience, along with our favourite Wagnerian singer **Warwick Fyfe** and wife Ruth. **Amanda Windred** performed cameos of Mary (*Flying Dutchman*), Siegrune and Waltraute. Amanda sang in our *Swords and Winter Storms* concert ten years ago, and is a Richard Divall emerging artist with Melbourne Opera.

Other works were by Weber, Peggy Glanville-Hicks and **Dr Daniel Rojas**. Accompanied by Korean virtuoso **Yerim Lee**, Daniel played the world premiere of his composition *Romanza y Danza de los Muertos*, for piano four hands and orchestra. This very dramatic and rhythmic work was commissioned by the WSO and was inspired by Wagner's and Shakespeare's doomed lovers, whom Daniel imagined meeting up after their tragic deaths and dancing together until the end of time.

AN EMAIL FROM Dr SARAH PENICKA-SMITH

Dear Leona and the Wagner Society committee,

A note to say wow, what a concert!! Huge thanks to you all for the individual enthusiasm you brought to it, and to the Wagner Society of NSW for supporting the Willoughby Symphony in such a stellar way. Leona, I so enjoyed working with you to hatch this madcap scheme so much. Your knowledge and your keenness to support emerging artists are both tremendous. The orchestra members I spoke to loved the repertoire, the singers adored the chance to be involved with the orchestra doing something so big, the choir really rose to the challenge, and I met so many audience members who had a fabulous time, from the little kids who had never been to a concert before and who dressed up, to the twenty-somethings I met in the pub after who said they knew nothing about opera or Wagner but loved it all, to the Wagner Society members who were back listening to Willoughby for the first time in twenty years - just a wonderful crowd. I think we made people very happy.

Thanks again,

Sarah. 24 October 2023



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.

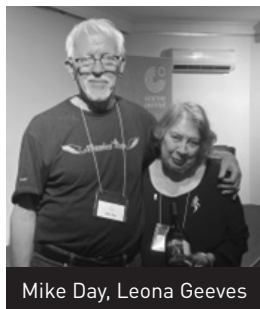
SUNDAY 22 OCTOBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.30PM DVD *THE EDGE OF THE POSSIBLE*

Members enjoyed this sensitive exploration of the conception and construction of the Sydney Opera House

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

ILLUSTRATED TALK BY MIKE DAY



Mike Day, Leona Geeves

Editor's note: As the presenter of this talk I can't really, in all modesty, give a review of it (although it goes without saying that it was sensational). Selected slides will be available on the Society's website. In short - my talk compared the social background, clients, architects and builders involved with the conception, construction and subsequent development of three of

the most important performance spaces in the world. I used the Vitruvian principles of *Firmness, Commodity & Delight* to consider if all three buildings are masterpieces.

YES they are! Here are three representative quotations: from the talk

Charles Garnier on his approach to the design of the Paris Opera: 'I want to inspire an excited audience which observes and knows itself observed'.

Richard Wagner, reflecting after the first Bayreuth Festival:

'I did not believe you would do it', said the Emperor. But who did not share this disbelief? ...If I ask myself seriously who has made this possible for me, that on the hill near Bayreuth there is erected a completely executed large theatre-building, according to my specifications, which must be imitated by the whole modern theatre-world, with the best musically-dramatic forces gathering around me in order to voluntarily undertake an unprecedented new, difficult, and exhausting artistic task, and to accomplish it with pleasure to their own astonishment, I can first of all only point to these effective artists ...'

Eero Saarinen on why Utzon's design was chosen:

'What is great architecture and what isn't great architecture? It's not only how well it works and so forth, it's a quality beyond that. It's how much does it inspire man, and I think this building will really have these qualifications. That's why we feel convinced that this building can be one of the great buildings of the world.'

SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

10.00AM – 4.00PM *DAS RHEINGOLD* SYMPOSIUM

As a lead up to performances by the SSO conducted by Simone Young AM of *Das Rheingold*, the WSNSW presented a half day of four papers followed by a roundtable discussion interspersed with lunch and drinks. We hope to follow this up in November 2024 in conjunction with the SSO's *Die Walküre*. At the conclusion of the full cycle in 2026 we will publish all the papers.

Paper 1 *Das Rheingold – Beginning with the End* was presented by **Suzanne Chaundy**, stage director for Melbourne Opera, including the recent Bendigo *Ring*.

Suzanne gave us some fascinating insights about the concept and creation of the MO Ring and the process of working with the whole creative team. They started with thinking about the final scene of *Götterdämmerung* (even though at the time they weren't sure that it would be produced), and how all the previous scenes in all four music-dramas would build up to this. She emphasised the importance of thorough research into the history of the original myths, Wagner's interpretation of them, and landmark production of the work. She quoted from Deryck Cooke's book *I Saw the World End* which sets out his rules for a correct approach to staging opera. She was critical of many recent productions where directors impose too many of their own subjective ideas at the expense of Wagner's intentions. In the discussion which followed,



Dr David Larkin, Suzanne Chaundy, Graeme Gee, Esteban Insausti, Colin Piper

Esteban made the point that, in Germany in particular, which sees many different productions each year, and has a very informed Wagner going population, it is legitimate to try out many different approaches to the works:

Deryck Cooke's rules

- Every single intention which Wagner avowed in creating the work must be taken into full account, and the interpretation must either absorb it, or else give good reason for rejecting it.
- The overt meaning of each element in the drama must be accepted as it is, and not explained away, or made to mean something else.
- The degree of emphasis placed by Wagner on each element of the drama must be faithfully reflected by the interpretation, with nothing exaggerated, or minimalised or omitted.
- The interpretation should be such that it merely clears the way for an unhindered reaction to the work in the theatre and leaves it to speak for itself there: it should not be putting ideas into the [audience's] head which [they] can't possibly relate to [their] experience of the work in performance.

Paper 2 Symbols and trends in landmark productions of Das Rheingold 1951-2023 was given by **Esteban Insausti**, architect and current President of the WSNWSW.

Esteban treated us to a preview of a book he is working on about landmark *Ring* productions worldwide over the past 75 years (see below). He observed that it was about 75 years from the first performance of *Das Rheingold* until the groundbreaking production by Wieland Wagner in 1951 and another 72 years until the ROH Kosky production. He quoted Wieland who said that directors should seek out inner meaning but not treat the libretto as sacrosanct.

Esteban talked to a comparative chart showing how *Das Rheingold* scenes were treated in 6 different Bayreuth productions from 1951 - 2022

Esteban's talk was followed by lunch, a chance to discuss ideas with fellow attendees, stretch one's legs and enjoy the sunshine on the balcony. It was good to see that the President of the Richard Wagner Society in Victoria, **Miki Oikawa**, was there.

Paper 3 When 18 anvils are barely enough was given by **Colin Piper** OAM, conductor and long-time member of the SSO percussion section and SYNERGY. Colin actually played at the opening Wagner concert at the SOH in 1973. He is coming out of retirement in 2024 to fulfill a lifelong ambition – to play in Schoenberg's monumental *Gurrelieder*, with **Simone Young** and the SSO, with **Deborah Humble** and **Warwick Fyfe**.

Das Rheingold's Anvils

In *Das Rheingold*, as Wotan and Loge descend into Nibelheim, (and later back up from Nibelheim) where the enslaved Nibelungs are hard at work smithing the titular gold, beating out the dotted rhythm of the Nibelung theme. Wagner wanted to represent this sound as accurately as possible - the score calls for 18 anvils—nine small, six medium, and three large—tuned to 3 octaves of F. Wagner originally called for real anvils; modern productions use metal hammers on heavy pieces of scrap metal to create this effect. The Victoria Symphony, used I-beams and manhole covers, and the Halle Symphony used steel plates and I-beams. Brake drums have been used for the same effect, but, though loud and metallic, it is a poor substitute for an anvil sound. Actual anvils create a high pitched «ping» sound, while brake drums produce a lower pitched «clank». Alternatives sometimes used are spare counterweights from a stage's fly system. They are nice and thick and gave a high ping sound.

Anvils have appeared in numerous composers' works with notable examples besides Wagner being **Verdi's Anvil Chorus** from *Il Trovatore*, **Walton's Belshazzar's Feast** and **Copland's** third symphony. There have also been many instances of composers utilising anvils for film scores, including **John Williams'** soundtrack for *Star Wars: A New Hope*. Famously for percussionists, **Varese** utilised a pair of anvils for his mammoth percussion ensemble piece *Ionisation* which is regarded as one of the greatest and most important works for percussion.

In the Met's documentary, "Wagner's Dream" there is a shot of the orchestra playing the anvils. As part of their production of *The Ring*, the Met offered this section as a downloadable ringtone. Hummm. Perhaps it was the original Ring-tone? <https://music.stackexchange.com/users/64294/tom-hayes>

(An **anvil** is a metalworking tool consisting of a large block of metal (usually forged or cast steel), with a flattened top surface, upon which another object is struck (or «worked»). Anvils are as massive as practical, because the higher their inertia, the more efficiently they cause the energy of striking tools to be transferred to the work piece. In most cases the anvil is used as a forging tool. Before the advent of modern welding technology, it was the primary tool of metal workers.)

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

Adolphe Appia
Greek theatre
Mythic

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

Primitivism
Greek theatre
Norse mythology

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

George Bernard Shaw
Post modern
Political

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

Hi Tech
Stress on *Personenregie*
Highway of history

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

Post dramatic
Use of multi media
Post Marxist

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

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

Scene 1
At the bottom of the Rhine
Rocks and water
Rheingold



Scene 2
An open space on the mountain tops
The realm of the gods
Valhalla



Scene 3
A subterranean cavern
Nibelheim
Transformation into Dragon and frog



Scene 4
An open space on the mountain tops
The realm of the gods
Valhalla
Rainbow Bridge



Colin described how he first experienced the *Ring* through headphones with the famous Decca/Solti 1958 recording (still the GOAT). He showed a photos of the original Vienna Philharmonic percussion section, with all 18 anvils placed as specified by Wagner. Colin also showed various alternatives for anvils that have been used more recently, the most common being lengths of railway track. These will be used in the Brisbane *Ring*.

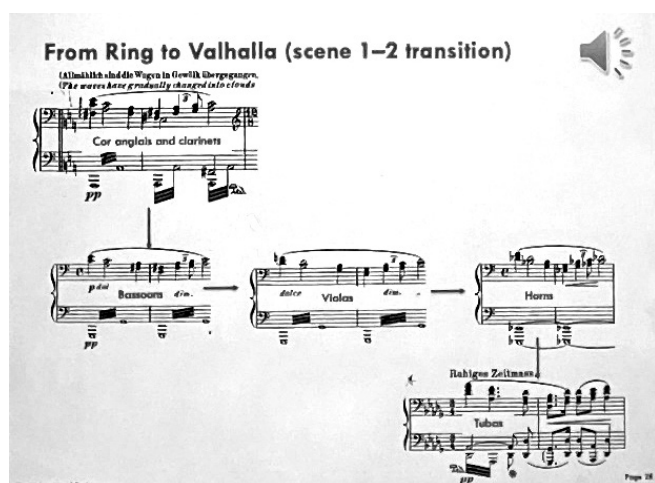
He explained how Western classical music was introduced to percussion instruments via Turkish music which used a small bass drum, cymbals and triangles plus a Turkish ‘crescent’ (which Rossini liked). Wagner used a small percussion section in his works, as compared to Berlioz who needed a vast array of percussion instruments. Colin observed that most percussion players can play all the instruments in the section – “Jack of all trades, master of none” Members greatly enjoyed his talk which was both informative and entertaining with some very witty anecdotes.

Paper 4 Symphonic Drama – revisiting the innovations of Das Rheingold was presented by **Dr David Larkin**, lecturer at the Sydney Conservatorium.

David started by talking about Wagner following on from Beethoven with the union between voices and instruments in

the service of the music-drama. In the five year gap between *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold*, Wagner developed a much richer and symphonic musical language. David explained, in great depth, with very clear slides and brief musical excerpts, how Wagner built up the narrative and musical development in *Das Rheingold* through the use of a great deal of repetition.

The talks were followed by a round-table Q&A session moderated by violinist and Sydney music-scene stalwart, **Graeme Gee**, who asked the speakers thoughtful questions about the future of opera direction and performance. Suzanne reflected on the difficulty of making relevant and personally satisfying art when there is so much pressure on artists to make a marketable product. She acknowledged the amazing potential of new technologies but said that the bottom line should be basic human storytelling. Questions were invited from the audience. An interesting one was about who wrote the surtitles for the MO Ring. Susan admitted that she did in the interests of clarity and consistency. She also made the exciting announcement that MO’s big project for 2025 will be *Die Meistersinger*. The afternoon ended with everyone joining the speakers for drinks and delicious cakes. All agreed that it was a very successful afternoon.



The Descent to Nibelheim

One of the most exciting passages in *Das Rheingold* is that known as the descent to Nibelheim. Determined to obtain the ring and the golden hoard (and wriggle out of his commitment to give Freia to the giants) Wotan decides to go with Loge, god of fire and trickery, down through a fissure in the rock to the subterranean caverns where Alberich has enslaved the rest of his race. It is not just a physical journey, although that seems real enough with its downward rush and sulphurous chromaticism; there is a psychological journey too. The motifs that drive the orchestral sound are those associated with Alberich forswearing love, the gold and the ring, the spurning of Alberich by the Rhinedaughters (the latter theme transforming itself into the hellish and unforgettable hammering of anvils) and, pervading everything, the sinister harmonies of the ring. Wagner’s orchestration is nowhere more varied and brilliant than in this scene in Nibelheim, nor his vocal line more lively. It is a striking manifestation of his theories of Gesamtkunstwerk, the fusion of text, music, scene, and action in the service of the drama. Extract from Peter Basset’s e-book guide to the Brisbane *Ring*

SUNDAY 26 NOVEMBER AT AMPICO TOWERS

2.00 CHRISTMAS PARTY AND RECITAL BY BASS-BARITONE ADRIAN TAMBURINI ACCOMPANIED BY KATHERINE DAY

This afternoon was a splendid way to end the Society’s busy year of events. Robert Mitchell graciously welcomed us to his elegant salon and two artists at the peak of their powers entertained us for an hour with a delightful selection of mainly romantic music. Notable were three rarely performed Liszt settings of sonnets by Petrarch sung with wonderful passion by Adrian with very sympathetic support from Katherine. Two other rarities were songs for Bass by Richard Strauss which suited Adrian’s deeply sonorous voice. This was followed by a feast of Christmassy snacks and wines. The afternoon ended with a raffle which offered some excellent prizes – an original work by Elizabeth Gordon-Werner, concert tickets, fine wines, DVD’s, CD’s and books.

- RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883)**
Mögst du mein Kind from *Der fliegende Holländer*
Adrian Tamburini
- FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)**
Tre sonetti di Petrarca
Adrian Tamburini
- FRANÇOIS COUPERIN (1668-1733)**
Les Barricades Misterieuses
Katherine Day
- RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883)**
O Du, mein holder Abendstern from *Tannhäuser*
Adrian Tamburini
- RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)**
Zwei Gesänge Op.51
Das Thal
Der Einsame
Adrian Tamburini
- RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)**
Wie schön ist doch die Musik from *Die schweigsame Frau*
Adrian Tamburini

SIMONE YOUNG'S *DAS RHEINGOLD* NOVEMBER 16, 2023 AN EXPERIENCE

by Minnie Biggs

The concert hall was full. The lights went down. The hall was dark. Black. Wait. Then a note, and a chord, and another and another and the famous four minutes...and some lights came on blue, green, slowly, different parts of the house. Dawn. The Rhine. We were there for the beginning of the world. And we felt it.

There unfolded a performance like no other. Orchestra and singers and the conductor who brought it together. We heard singers we never heard of but Simone had. She knew them well and handpicked them. We heard music we never heard before, instruments and sections for the first time, yet never standing out. All part of a superb whole.

We listened to the orchestra tell the story as we have so often been told it does. We have had many glimpses of the orchestra telling the story but never as completely as this

evening. The singers told the rest and our imaginations gave us setting and backgrounds that perfectly suited. No distractions. No alternative visions.

Only our own. An inner Gesamtkunstwerk. Our vision of the Rhine and the water and the gold and then our view of Valhalla just built by the strapping giants, and our descent underground to the world of the Nibelungs, insight to their world, their clanging work. And on. Our imaginations soaring with the music, the story. The voices.

Then there were moments of pause, silence, just moments, divine.

When the end came, the beginning of the end of the great work, the entire hall, everyone, stood on their feet and clapped and shouted. Fitting tribute for a masterpiece.

EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS FOR SALE BY ELIZABETH GORDON-WERNER ON 22 OCTOBER

Artist **Elizabeth Gordon-Werner** made a very generous offer to donate all proceeds from the sale of her Wagner related artworks towards our support for young artists. The beautiful works were hung at the Goethe Institut for the 22 October meeting.

Elizabeth writes about the background to her art practice and the work:

I was asked recently to explain the inspiration behind the 'Wagner Inspired' etchings that are currently being sold to fund young Wagnerian singers, so I thought I would write something about my Wagnerian journey for this newsletter and explain the etchings at the same time.

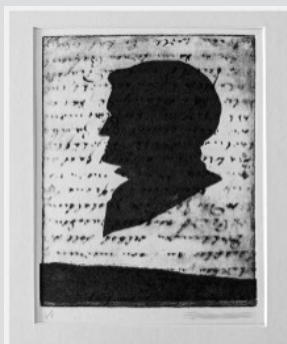
My fascination with Wagner's music began twenty years ago when I saw Elke Neidhardt's production of the *Ring Cycle* in Adelaide. I had attended a series of lectures before the performances which turned out to be pivotal as they helped me understand how to listen to this music. From then on, I went to as many Wagner productions in Australia as I could and eventually made it to Bayreuth.

In 2006 I left my Sydney job and registered as a mature age art student, firstly at the Otago Art School in Dunedin where I studied full time for two years, then at the University of Hamburg, Germany.

In the Dunedin Art School print workshop, I made etchings of Wagner's profile. The script in these etchings is Richard Wagner's last letter to his patron King Ludwig of Bavaria. who loved Wagner's music and provided him with valuable financial support. The music is from Wagner's scores. Most of these etchings are unique, available as only a single copy.

Then I made a series of Ring Cycle etchings. They show the Rainbow Bridge, Brünnhilde on her horse Grane, or Wotan through gaps in a curtain of letters formed from excerpts of Wagner's librettos. Wotan is surrounded by his chastising words to Brünnhilde, "Wohl taugte dir nicht die tör'ge Maid" from *Die Walküre* Act III Scene 3. Brünnhilde gallops through her words to Siegmund, "Nur Todgeweihten taugt mein Anblick" from *Die Walküre*, Act 2 Sc. 3 or through Wotan's farewell words "Der Augen leuchtendes Paar", from *Die Walküre*, Act 3 Sc. 3. The Rainbow Bridge can be seen through words "Fliegt heim, Ihr Raben!" from the libretto of *Die Götterdämmerung* Act III, Sc. 3

In 2011 I worked in the print workshop at the University of Hamburg Art school. Simone Young was Artistic Director of the Hamburg State Opera and Australian soprano Miriam Gordon-Stewart was singing there. I had met Miriam at a NSW Wagner Society meeting and had arranged to paint her portrait so I saw as many of her performances as I could while I was there. Simone Young conducting. The new Hamburg Philharmonie was under construction and the horizon was full of cranes so when I made etchings of Simone Young conducting, the cranes edged themselves into



the work as well. I felt as if she was conducting the whole cityscape. In between operas I wandered along the Alster Lake looking at the swans, and they too appeared in my etchings.

In 2014 Mike Day asked me to exhibit during the Melbourne Ring Cycle in collaboration with one of his lighting students. I created the *Grane Saves the World* series for the Melbourne Ring. Wagner's music is many layered and so are these images, showing the galloping horse Grane with Brünnhilde, Wotan, Wagner's librettos or music.

All of these works are for sale in support of young Wagnerian singers. Payment can be made directly to the Wagner Society of NSW or to me via PayPal and I will pass it on.

See the work at my website: <http://artsmitten.com>

PRESS REVIEWS OF *DAS RHEINGOLD* WITH SIMONE YOUNG AND SSO

Jansson J. Antmann in **Limelight ★★★★★**

Not surprisingly, a palpable sense of anticipation filled the air in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House last night, but would the expectations of those assembled be met? The standing ovation at the end of the non-stop, two-and-a-half-hour concert suggests they were. For this writer, brought up on the *Rings* of Solti, Karajan and Boulez (and later Barenboim), the SSO's performance of *Das Rheingold* under Young fulfils the dream of a lifetime: namely, to witness a live performance that rivals those of the aforementioned maestros. Under Young, the SSO's *Ring Cycle* is off to an exceptional start. Whether it will match (or exceed) its iconic predecessors remains to be seen, but given last night's performance of *Das Rheingold*, it certainly promises to.



Noa Beinart as Erda

Peter McCallum in **SMH ★★★★★**

The SSO under Young brought forth a wealth of glories. To the burnished brilliance of the brass and warmth of the horns is added the tactile textural complexity of the Wagner tubas, while the woodwind coloured both dark and brilliant moments and the strings energised with swirling figuration. Young paced the work with an experienced dramatic understanding. It was at the entry of Noa Beinart, statuesque and premonitory, as the earth goddess Erda in the climactic turning point of the fourth and final scene, that the full triumph of casting became complete. The contradictory motivations, the variegated grain of vocal types and the subtle hues and blazing brilliance of the orchestral score all paused, while Wolfgang Koch as the one-eyed, all-powerful god Wotan learnt that things weren't going to go quite as he had planned.

Paul Selar in **Australian Arts Review**

In concert version, Young could not have presided over a better dramatized performance - There was always a clear sense that Young's reach extended to every minuscule detail well beyond her meticulously crafted musical interpretation, including a reach to every musician's heart. That was the beauty of seeing *Das Rheingold* in concert and a chance to marvel at the intricate workings of something like a Swiss watch with an orchestra so perfectly aligned. Young's incisive conducting with neatly judged tempi and fresh, bristling textures supported the soloists splendidly.

Carol Wimmer in **Stage Whispers**

Any performances of Wagner's work – especially *The Ring Cycle* – attracts artists from all over the world. To see and hear fourteen internationally acclaimed artists together on the stage of the Concert Hall in concert is a special privilege. To have them, Young, the SSO and Wagner is a once in a lifetime event for many those who filled the Concert Hall to sit in awe for two hours, spellbound by the music, the voices and the atmosphere of mystic myth that Wagner created.

FURTWÄNGLER ON WAGNER IN CONCERT

"I was startled by the work's power. On records, where there are no problems of staging to solve, one begins to sense how splendid the musical construction and the constant inspiration in this unique work really are. Even though we must admit that records in general are a poor substitute for the communal experience of a concert, at least in Wagner's case, such a recording as this has its advantages. It serves the music as well as any stage performance." (**Wilhelm Furtwängler** after recording his monumental *Tristan* recording in 1952 with **Kirsten Flagstad** and Ludwig Suthaus)

These words support his wife's contention that at the end of his life Furtwängler had reached a point where he felt Wagner's operas were best heard in concert form.

"He thought that when Wagner's music was detached from stage action it was easier to grasp the significance, the individuality, and the meaning of musical ideas, though he knew in this he was contradicting Wagner himself. The greater the musical inspiration, Furtwängler felt, the less it is possible to convey its essence through complicating and distracting stage actions".

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.

PRESS REVIEWS OF THE NEW ROH *DAS RHEINGOLD*, DIRECTED BY BARRIE KOSKY

The press reviews for this new production were generally very positive and WSNSW members who saw the live broadcast thought that musically it was excellent and the staging full of original ideas. The environmental disaster aspects certainly were powerful and the presence of Erda throughout was well conceived. The biggest criticism was of the curtain being lowered between the scenes, which slowed down the flow and dampened the energy, despite the exciting playing of the orchestra. At the WSNSW Symposium on 12 November, Suzanne Chaundy, who was in the audience at ROH, thought this was a major miscalculation, along with the absence of water or fire – such major elements in the myth. She was, however, full of praise for the clear storytelling; she had been praised for achieving this in her Bendigo *Ring*. For an excellent review, by Curtis Rogers, which explains Kosky's reason for closing the curtain and spotlighting the gold proscenium arch, see the website classicalsource.com

Andrew Clements in **The Guardian** 12 September 2023

What Kosky's *Rheingold* offers is an uncluttered presentation of the narrative, blessedly free of philosophical theorising, but with a message that is clear from the start. The charred, fallen remains of the world ash tree, which binds the universe together in Wagner's mythology, dominates the stage in **Rufus Didwizus's** set, and before even the famous, unfathomably deep pedal E flat has been sounded in the orchestra to conjure that operatic world into existence, the extremely old, extremely frail figure of Erda, the earth goddess, is seen dragging herself across the stage, as if trying to comprehend what has happened to the world for which she had cared for so long. With the figure of earth goddess Erda present throughout, the message – of the despoliation of the natural world – is clear. There's no weak link in a uniformly strong cast, and in the pit Pappano has the measure of Wagner's grandeur and intimacy.

David Karlin in **Bachtrack**, 12 September

The programme for The Royal Opera's new *Rheingold* makes much of Wagner's admiration for Greek drama, but it's an older myth that inspires Barrie Kosky, reminding one of his Australian roots: the Aboriginal Dreamtime. We see the story unfold as it is dreamed – or reminisced? – by the Earth Mother Erda. Kosky conjures excellent character acting from his whole cast to match their excellent Wagnerian singing.

Richard Fairman in **The Financial Times** 12 September
Where this *Rheingold* scores is in its tenacious grip on the drama. The characters are constantly alive, the words are impressively clear and the policy of choosing singers who are either new, or relatively new, to the *Ring* has paid dividends in the freshness of their performances. The biggest compliment that can be paid to this *Rheingold* is that the time — all 140 minutes of it, no interval — seems to shoot by. Everybody involved has worked hard to achieve that. It is worth seeing.



Christopher Maltman as Wotan & Sean Panikka as Loge

Alex Ross in the **New Yorker** 2 October

The production has no shortage of uncanny, psychically unsettling images...with decisive, cohesive direction by Barrie Kosky.

Note: At the **International Opera Awards** in Warsaw on 9 November Barrie Kosky won the Best Director award and Sir Anthony Pappano the Best Conductor Award

Timings for *Das Rheingold*

- 2.17 Tietjen, Bayreuth 1934
- 2.21 Siegfried Wagner, Bayreuth 1896
- 2.20 Antonio Pappano ROH 2023
- 2.36 Furtwängler, Bayreuth 1936
- 2.36 Young Sydney 2023
- 2.42 Knappertsbusch, Bayreuth 1951

"If you weren't all such tedious fellows, *Das Rheingold* would be over within 2 hours."

(Richard Wagner)

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.

ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW OF THE ROH LIVE BROADCAST

by Minnie Biggs (A Quickie on a Biggie) Or A Few Words About a Big Production

Some production!

Kosky and Pappano speak with clarity about how they work together, every detail with attention. what they want to achieve, and they do that. They achieve what they intended. The singers are actors, the words and the actions are in tune, well expressed. The music, well, I did not really get the music except that it did not actually sound /feel very Wagnerian. It was hard to listen with so much else happening. And I was distracted by the close ups of the orchestra players during the musical intervals. Normally I love watching the musicians, but their faces and instruments were not where I wanted to concentrate at those moments.

The beautiful opening notes, those chords, are usually played in darkness as we wait for it all to begin. But the curtain is up and there is the stage with a draped broken tree and Erda, naked Erda, walking across the stage. While that divine music plays.

The much discussed naked Erda who wanders through the whole opera does not actually sing her role when the time comes. And she certainly did not have the body of a

Wagnerian singer. An old wrinkled woman, not exactly my idea of the mother of the earth unless we consider all the children she bore and the resulting sagging of her body. She actually seemed to sing along with the Rhine maidens at the beginning which was odd. And dressed and acting as a maid at the picnic? Erda with sunglasses on perched on the gold making contraption in the Nibelheim? The Tarnhelm did not produce very a convincing wurm or toad.

The picnic in view of Valhalla was cute and appropriate , the squishy golden, actually green, apples effectively squeezed, but later the rainbow bridge was just a sprinkling of glittery confetti.

While the story is vividly told, acted and sung, there was rather too much acting for me. Busy busy, never a pause. I also wondered at the similarity of Alberich and Wotan, both big bald men. In suits. Alberich with an exposed prick, why? Wotan sang strongly but never persuaded me he was a God. The God.

While I enjoyed, I was never moved, never transported. (Bring on other opinions!)

WAGNER'S DAS RHEINGOLD PRELUDE: CURRENTS IN E-FLAT MAJOR

Das Rheingold begins as a distant, barely-audible rumble in the dark, murky depths of the orchestra. Entering one by one in cool, overlapping sonic currents, eight horns announce the *Ring's* expansive, rising "nature" motive. It's a gradual, primal awakening- 136 bars and over four minutes of pure, unending E-flat major. We're forced to confront the power and majesty of the basic, fundamental elements of sound and harmony. Rapidly-rising torrents of raw energy surge through the string section. The river is eternal.

When *Das Rheingold* was premiered in 1869, Wagner's gradually developing evocation of floating underwater must have shocked audiences. At moments, the music seems as "contemporary" as the atmospheric soundscapes of **John Luther Adams** (compare it with pieces like *Become*

Ocean and Dark Waves). It isn't far from the gradually-developing minimalism we hear in the Prelude to **Philip Glass'** 1983 opera, *Akhenaten*. Timothy Judd <https://thelistenersclub.com/2019/01/02/wagners-das-rheingold-prelude-currents-in-e-flat-major/>

Music critic **Barry Millington:**

The simple, protracted E-flat chords that open the tetralogy do more than depict the depths of the Rhine: they also suggest the birth of the world, the act of creation itself.

Editor's note: E-Flat Major is also the oldest sound in the universe as picked up on our biggest telescopes. Wagner was a genius to instinctively know this.



DAS RHEINGOLD: A GLORIOUS DESCENT INTO NIBELHEIM WITH THE 'AUTHENTIC' WAGNER

Excerpt from a review by Wouter de Moor in Wagner – Heavy Metal Blog 22.01.21

Seeking their inspiration at the source, **Kent Nagano** and **Concerto Köln** bring, with a 19th century instrumentation, *Das Rheingold* to life in a most vividly, dramatic and enthralling performance.

So, it started as a joke. The Concerto Köln, which is well versed in Baroque music, asked conductor Kent Nagano if they would be willing to try their hand at a historically informed performance of Richard Wagner. The joke landed, one thing led to another, the baroque orchestra expanded from 40 to about 90 musicians, a full Wagner orchestra, and they set to work on the first of four Ring operas: *Das Rheingold*. After attending the eve of this Ring cycle, at a Saturday matinee, it can be said that the ambition, the effort and the study into an authentic Wagner have led to a very impressive result. The doubts about what exactly this 'authentic Wagner' should entail become irrelevant when you hear what Nagano has managed to achieve with the Cologne orchestra and a fantastic cast. The Wagnerian, who is only too happy to be lapping up yet another version of the master's musical dramas, listens to it with wonder and admiration. If this *Rheingold* is any indication of what is to come, he can look forward to a new, phenomenal version of Wagner's *Ring*. A *Ring* that will be much more than a curiosity, or just another addition to the Wagner catalogue, and a *Ring* that can measure up to the best that Wagner performance practice has produced so far. Nagano himself is confident enough about it: "I am sure that after this we will never play and sing Wagner as before."

As part of the complete *Ring*, it generally has to settle for a place at the back of the pecking order when it comes to favourite *Ring* operas. As a stand-alone opera, it is not as popular as *Die Walküre*. But that *Das Rheingold* - that stepping stone to the rest of the *Ring* world, the introduction to the web of leitmotifs with which Wagner weaves his epic tapestry about the death of Siegfried and the downfall of the world of the gods - is an opera that can stand on its own two feet, is something Nagano proves with Concerto Köln in the most convincing way. It does *Das Rheingold* a service, it does historical music practice a service and above all, it does the phenomenon of live performance a service. *Das Rheingold* in the Concertgebouw was an ode to the stage, to the audience that comes together to experience live music. It was, after two years, a welcome back to a complete Wagner opera in the Netherlands.

Das Rheingold was a new start for Wagner in every respect. After the Italian-lyrical *Lohengrin*, a musical point of arrival, he had to look for new musical means to do justice to the story of the twilight of the gods. With *Das Rheingold*, he built the foundations that were to underpin the rest of the *Ring*. *Das Rheingold* is special. Wagner wrote the libretti for his *Ring* cycle from back to front and composed the music from



Kent Nagano

front to end. *Das Rheingold* is the *Ring* opera of which Wagner was the last to write the libretto and the first to compose the music. It is music that tells of a loveless world that has fallen into decay even before the first chord sounds. Decay that has been started by the pre-*Rheingold* actions of Wotan, who chopped off a branch of the world's ash to make his spear in which he would carve the laws by which he would subjugate giants, Nibelungen and people. Laws that will eventually bind him as well. Wotan gets a first, grim impression of the negative consequences of his lust for power at the end of *Das Rheingold* when he witnesses the fratricide of Fasolt, who is beaten to death by Fafner for that cursed Ring. He will eventually pay for his choice for power with his own love when, in *Die Walküre*, he is forced to withdraw his protection from Siegmund and subsequently deprives his favourite daughter Brünnhilde of her divinity.

R. goes to the piano, plays the mournful theme 'Rheingold, Rheingold' [...] And as he is lying in bed, he says, "I feel loving toward them, these subservient creatures of the deep, with all their yearning."

12 Feb 1883: Last entry of Cosima Wagner's diary

How does that sound? Wagner on period instruments? The answer can be answered in the affirmative. The brass sounds drier, more articulate and more defined. The strings sing with honeyed tones, highlighting concertante moments in the score of *Das Rheingold* with their warm-blooded character. The 19th century orchestra brings both nature to life - the Rhine in the prelude is less a homogeneous stream, more a water surface in which ripples can be seen - and the machinery of Nibelheim, in which the flute plays the role of a small wheel in need of a drop of oil. The Wagner orchestra, that entity that can give voice to everything in life, in its 19th century incarnation magnifies contrasts but does so by organically connecting everything in Wagner's sound world. Nothing exists without the other: grandeur and finesse, power and vulnerability (at

times, the instruments sound like imperfect predecessors of their contemporary offspring, then it is as if Wagner is not only battling with the opera conventions of his time, but also with the limitations of the instruments at his disposal). It is a tapestry of sound that you can zoom in on at any time to discover something new in it. The period instruments shed new light on the wonder of Wagner's orchestration.

But even more striking than the sound of 19th century instruments is the treatment of the text. Here, the emphasis is on audibility and the Sprechgesang is sometimes reduced to speech. As if Wagner had anticipated **Kurt Weill**; as if **Arnold Schoenberg** had taken his Sprechstimme for *Pierrot Lunaire* directly from Wagner. It is an approach that will undoubtedly divide opinions, but the expressive result is completely self-evident.

With a concert performance of *Das Rheingold*, we had to rely on text, singing and music. It made, in this very vivid performance, with all the subtext that Wagner puts into the libretto and with its strongly imaginative music, a listening experience that felt like a full-blown production. This concert performance was a theatrical experience that provided a reassuringly non-coercive answer to the age-old question of "what images to add to Wagner's music dramas?" It was perhaps even better this way; the hall and stage of the Concertgebouw as a stage image, as a host for our own imagination. For what production concept would have done justice to what orchestra and singers presented to us here? That part of the Wagner theatre, the staging, was still in its infancy at the time of the master's death, and since the end of the 19th century, the questions that the Wagner drama posed to its theatre-makers have perhaps provided more unsatisfactory than satisfactory answers. It was as if Wagner had foreseen this, so explicitly and elaborately did he stuff his libretti full of descriptions of the action. As if he did not dare to rely on the directions of a theatre maker. It makes the music dramas of the Sorcerer of Bayreuth, more than any other composer, suitable for audio-only experiences.

As a conductor, Kent Nagano has dealt with Wagner before. Solid readings of, for example, *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal* in Baden-Baden (with stagings by Nikolaus Lehnhoff) that betrayed craftsmanship but did not immediately stand out. What he does here can, certainly in that light, be considered nothing less than a revelation. A swift and inspired reading, with maximum attention to dynamics. Speeding up where possible (the descent to Nibelheim is a roller coaster) and slowing down where it suits best (Erda's warning to Wotan, a beautiful role by **Gerhild Romberger**, sung gracefully and with empathy). Everything with maximum dramatic impact. With his choice of tempi that serve the story and not the clock (as it should), Nagano clocks this *Rheingold* at less than 2 hours and 15 minutes, certainly one of the fastest performances in the Wagner performance practice, but still nowhere near what Wagner himself, no doubt exaggerating to make a point, once suggested for the ideal length of *Das Rheingold*.

The word 'authentic' is often misused, associated with a visit to a museum, in order to impose a fixed, solidified idea of

how a composer's work should sound. The good thing about the merits of a performance, and ultimately the only thing that counts, is the result that is experienced. And that result completely pushes aside any questions about the authentic validity of this performance of Concerto Köln and Kent Nagano's first *Ring* opera. (And let us not forget that where the authentic Wagner is concerned, it was Wagner himself who placed, for the theatre he built for the premiere of his *Ring*, the orchestra under the stage - so much for this 'authentic performance' with singers in front of the orchestra on the stage).

This performance of *Das Rheingold* is a feat with only winners: the orchestra and conductor and the singers. Without exception does the cast claim a leading role. (Australian) **Derek Walton** is a wonderful Wotan, the supreme god who in his vexation for power lets things run their course, relies on Loge when it comes to paying for the construction of Valhalla, and repeatedly allows himself to be caught in youthful overconfidence. Loge, in turn, is a fine role by **Thomas Mohr** who gives the fire god a nice air of mockery and detachment. The fire god, in the service of the gods, who first foresees the end of the world of the gods. As Fasolt, **Tijl Faveyts** is the giant with a small heart. His love for Freia betrays not only lust, but also a longing for a domestic, conjugal life. **Christoph Seidl**'s Fafner is robust, a giant with a powerful voice, menacing and invasive, fitting for a man who beats his brother to death out of greed. **Stefanie Irányi** as Fricka is the woman for whom Wotan, as he himself states, sacrificed his eye. Irányi sings Fricka, who in *Die Walküre* is often portrayed as an evil genius, with a sensuous combination of warmth, strength and concern. The rainbow bridge over which the gods enter Valhalla and with which the conclusion of *Das Rheingold* is initiated, finds, through a powerful performance by **Johannes Kammler** as Donner, together with the magnetising sounds from the orchestra, its dream interpretation - a tantalising image, a building extracted from the mind that is like the most beautiful staging.

But the biggest winner was the audience. The loveless world of *Das Rheingold* led to tears of joy from those who were so lucky to have been there. *Das Rheingold*, in which love is sacrificed to power, brought the unspeakable joy of being able to attend a Wagner opera live again. It was, with all the contradictions that make Wagner's world of sound so irresistible, depicting the human condition so mercilessly and hypnotically, wonderful. In my enthusiasm about this, let me avoid any pretence of trying to reach a more or less objective opinion about this performance. Let it be clear that the mind that has been invigorated by this *Rheingold* and will continue to soar for a while in the days to come, does so in subjective exaltation. It was beautiful, it was meaningful, it was more than just a *Vorabend* of a trilogy that is actually a tetralogy. It was the best theatrical experience I could wish for in these harsh times. Nagano will now devote himself to *Die Walküre* with Concerto Köln. Hopefully, it will not be too long before they return. They will be received with open arms, and open ears.

<https://www.wagner-heavy-metal.com/blog/das-rheingold-a-glorious-descent-into-nibelheim-with-the-authentic-wagner>

THE COMPOSERS WHO INFLUENCED WAGNER OR WERE INFLUENCED BY HIM. PART 1

Wagner's early musical education and influences

In late 1820, Wagner received some piano instruction from his Latin teacher but he struggled to play a proper scale at the keyboard and preferred playing theatre overtures by ear. At the age of nine he was hugely impressed by the Gothic elements of **Carl Maria von Weber's** opera *Der Freischütz*, which he saw Weber conduct. At this period Wagner entertained ambitions as a playwright. His first creative effort, listed in the *Wagner-Werk-Verzeichnis* (the standard listing of Wagner's works) as WWV 1, was a tragedy called *Leubald*. Begun when he was in school in 1826, the play was strongly influenced by Shakespeare and Goethe. Wagner was determined to set it to music and persuaded his family to allow him music lessons.

Wagner's first lessons in harmony were taken during 1828–1831 with Christian Gottlieb Müller. In January 1828 he first heard **Beethoven's** 7th Symphony and then, in March, the same composer's 9th Symphony (both at the Gewandhaus). Beethoven became a major inspiration, and Wagner wrote a piano transcription of the 9th Symphony. He was also greatly impressed by a performance of Mozart's *Requiem*. Wagner's early piano sonatas and his first attempts at orchestral overtures date from this period.

Wagner's early operas were generally conventional and show the influence of Weber and **Meyerbeer**, who became his mentor. The tone poems of **Franz Liszt**, Wagner's friend and father-in-law undoubtedly influenced explorations of chromaticism. Wagner's later musical style introduced new ideas in harmony, melodic process (*Leitmotif*) and operatic structure. Notably from *Tristan und Isolde* onwards, he explored the limits of the traditional tonal system, which gave keys and chords their identity, pointing the way to atonality in the 20th century. Some music historians date the beginning of modern classical music to the first notes of *Tristan*, which include the so-called Tristan chord.

Wagner's influence on other composers

Wagner inspired great devotion. For a long period, many composers were inclined to align themselves with or against Wagner's music. **Anton Bruckner** and **Hugo Wolf** were greatly indebted to him, as were **César Franck**, **Henri Duparc**, **Ernest Chausson**, **Jules Massenet**, **Richard Strauss**, **Alexander von Zemlinsky**, **Hans Pfitzner** and many others. **Gustav Mahler** was devoted to Wagner and his music; aged 15, he sought him out on his 1875 visit to Vienna, became a renowned Wagner conductor, and his compositions were seen by the American musicologist **Richard Taruskin** as extending Wagner's "maximalization" of "the temporal and the sonorous" in music to the world of the symphony. The harmonic revolutions of **Claude Debussy** and **Arnold**

Schoenberg (both of whose *oeuvres* contain examples of tonal and atonal modernism) have often been traced back to *Tristan* and *Parsifal*. The Italian form of operatic realism known as *verismo* owed much to the Wagnerian concept of musical form.

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-musicapp-medieval-modern/chapter/richard-wagner/>

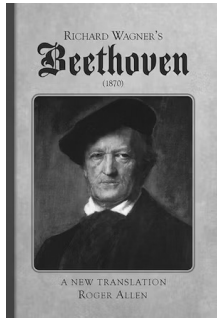
Apart from Wagner, who are the other candidates for the position of most influential composer in history?

Excerpt from article by David Leigh on quora.com

Beethoven is the obvious choice. Maybe **Berlioz** (first uses of true program music), or **Monteverdi** (development of monody, and functional development of early opera)? Certainly not **Bach**, whose music wasn't even known in his own time, or **Mozart**, **Handel**, **Haydn**, all of whom were masters of their own periods, but none of whom innovated on close to the scale of Wagner. **Beethoven** had a huge impact on the first half of the 19th century, equal, perhaps, to Wagner's influence in the 2nd half. That said, Wagner's influence on the 20th century is so incredibly manifest as to dwarf Beethoven's. So much of Beethoven's influence was in the areas of form, sonata development, motivic treatment, etc. All of these things are significant in the 20th century, but none even close to the harmonic and textural palate of Wagner. **Berlioz** was a truly great composer, but one who (for political as well as musical reasons) stirred up far less in the musical landscape of the 19th century. And, again, beyond the 19th century his influence pales in comparison. Without **Monteverdi** there could not have been a huge amount of important music, but it's also music that existed before the concept of a musical canon was really established and it's difficult to ascertain just how much significance it had on the development of music even 50 years later. Certainly, Handel owes a debt of gratitude to Monteverdi, but exactly how much, it's hard to say. And as far as fame beyond their home countries go, obviously Wagner wins this by a mile.

Throughout his life Wagner was more comfortable in extolling the merits of deceased composers than of those still living. One could speculate as to the reasons for this reticence on Wagner's part: perhaps the inner concentration necessary for his own development led him, after a certain point, to reject external stimuli, or perhaps the embittered struggle for recognition drained whatever resources of altruism he may once have possessed. Certainly Wagner's overwhelming arrogance must be taken into account. His attitude toward most music of his own time is one of profound ambivalence, at best. Any expression of admiration was almost always qualified, and his opinions would shift radically over time, often to the point of complete reversal. Thomas S. Grey in *The Wagner Compendium*. Ed Barry Millington 1992

Wagner and Beethoven



Wagner's book-length essay on Beethoven, written to celebrate the centenary of Beethoven's birth in 1870, is really about Wagner himself rather than Beethoven. It is generally regarded as the principal aesthetic statement of the composer's later years, representing a reassessment of the ideas of the earlier Zürich writings, especially *Oper und Drama*, in the light of the experience

gained through the composition of *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and the greater part of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It contains Wagner's most complete exegesis of his understanding of Schopenhauer's philosophy and its perceived influence on the compositional practice of his later works. The essay also influenced the young Nietzsche. It is an essential text in the teaching of not only Wagnerian thought but also late nineteenth-century musical aesthetics in general.

"Beethoven's last symphony represents the redemption of music from out of its own particular element into the domain of communal art. It is the human gospel of the art of the future. No further progress is possible beyond this work [i.e. in the realm of instrumental music], for its immediate and necessary consequence is none other than the perfected artwork of the future, the communal drama, to which Beethoven has forged the artistic key". Wagner (GS III, 96).

Carl Maria Friedrich Ernst von Weber



Carl Weber (1786 – 1826) was a German composer, conductor, pianist, guitarist and critic, and was one of the first significant composers of the Romantic school. Arguably, after **Beethoven**, Weber was the most influential composer in Wagner's development. Wagner, who pronounced the funeral oration when

Weber's body was returned from London to Germany eighteen years after his death, was not only an admirer but a prime beneficiary of Weber's pioneering efforts; the debt *Lohengrin* owes to *Euryanthe* being too obvious to need emphasis.

(Ed: Wagner composed a eulogy "*An Webers Grabe*" WWV 72 for the reburial. The piece for male choir a cappella was premiered on 16 December 1844 in Dresden. For this occasion Wagner also composed Funeral Music for Winds and Drums after Themes from "*Euryanthe*" of Weber, WWV 73).

It comes as no surprise that Weber's greatest achievements were as an opera composer. His father and mother belonged to a travelling theatrical troupe, which meant that young Carl grew up in the theatre. By the age of 17, he had written several pieces of theatre music and had gained an appointment as music director to the provincial German city of Breslau. Weber immediately set about transforming the opera there – retiring older singers, demanding increased rehearsal time, and expanding the repertoire. Weber was poisoned as thanks for all of this hard work – he drank a glass of engraving acid doctored to look like wine. During his recuperation, the Breslau philistines who did not want

to retire, rehearse, or learn new music, dismantled Weber's innovations, so the composer resigned in protest.

Weber arrived in Dresden in 1817 and went to work building an ensemble to create, under royal patronage, an official German-language opera company. His efforts met with only partial success and brought him into conflict with the long-established Italian-opera tradition in the Saxon capital. But it was in Dresden that he befriended the playwright **Johann Friedrich Kind**, who would provide the libretto for Weber's most influential work, *Der Freischütz* (The Free [i.e., "magical"] Shooter), which premiered in Berlin in 1821 and, four years later, in New York City—in English. In many ways *Der Freischütz* marked the coming-of-age of German Romantic opera. The social and moral issues woven into the fabric of its folktale plot, along with the elements of the bizarre and fantastic that enliven the drama, mark it as the product of a new artistic age. Weber gave voice to the feelings of the German people.

His next opera composed in Dresden was his "Grand Heroic-Romantic Opera" *Euryanthe*, which had its premiere in Vienna in 1823. The work's improbable story (which includes such devices as a poison ring and visitors from the spirit world) and brutal length (over four hours) made it a subject of derision, and it would be another 20 years before Europe would embrace both of these traits in Wagner's operas. For *Euryanthe*'s story, Weber and his librettist Helmina von Chézy had turned to the epics of the Middle Ages, foreshadowing Wagner's preference for such subjects on the grounds of their Germanness.

(Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* was based on the same original legend). Weber crafted *Euryanthe*'s overture from thematic material that recurs later in the opera. Many of the motives are associated with specific characters or situations, a technique that Wagner would develop later in his own operas. Weber's richly hued writing for the orchestra, notable for its almost unprecedentedly adventurous use of woodwind and brass, would have a profound effect on **Berlioz**, **Mendelssohn**, **Wagner**, **Richard Strauss**, indeed, on the whole lineage of 19th- and 20th-century composers concerned with colour. <https://www.laphil.com/musicdb/pieces/2633/overture-euryanthe>

Editor's note: WSNSW will be showing a DVD of *Euryanthe* at a series of future meetings.

Wagner and Meyerbeer: From protégé to adversary



Meyerbeer had known Wagner since 1837. The two had first been acquainted when Wagner wrote to him from Königsberg introducing himself as a struggling young composer requesting his assistance. At the time, Wagner had already composed two operas, *Die Feen* [The Fairies] and *Das Liebesverbot* [The Love Ban], the latter based

on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, but neither of his works had generated any significant success. Wagner asked Meyerbeer to help stage his operas once he moved to Paris in October 1839 and even asked him to lend him money. Meyerbeer not only introduced Wagner to the Paris Opera, but also introduced his third opera, *Rienzi*, to the Dresden Court Opera. The introduction contributed to Wagner's first success as he was appointed Royal Saxon Court Conductor

in 1843, giving him financial security. Meyerbeer also helped facilitate the performance of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, which was premiered in Berlin in 1844 and even hosted a dinner for the composer.

Meyerbeer, however, expressed concern over Wagner turning on him. Wagner had already begun turning on Meyerbeer in his private correspondence during the 1850s. Wagner used Meyerbeer's Jewishness as a weapon against him, including in his infamous essay entitled "Jewry in Music". Although Meyerbeer was not mentioned by name, he was clearly targeted in it, along with **Mendelssohn**. Wagner accused Jews of 'commercialising art,' whereas he pursued it for its pure forms. In 1851, Wagner began attacking Meyerbeer publicly in his work "Opera and Drama."

Wagner also believed that his opera *Tannhäuser* (1861) had failed in Paris because Meyerbeer had conspired against him. Wagner even accused Meyerbeer of having used his wealth to bribe and mobilise critics against him. Wagner's campaign against Meyerbeer was also taken up by his followers. The anti-Meyerbeer campaign has had a lasting impact and his works were not performed in the United States. Wagner's vitriolic campaign has cast a long shadow over Meyerbeer's work. This, along with rising German nationalism during the second half of the nineteenth century, accelerated Wagner's popularity but came at the detriment of Meyerbeer's own legacy.

Furthermore, Wagner's assault on Meyerbeer can be understood within the context of rising anti-Semitism in Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century, which would ultimately culminate in the Holocaust. During the Nazi era, from 1933-1945, Meyerbeer's music was banned altogether while Wagner's was celebrated. Because of Wagner's pervasive anti-Semitism and the Nazis adopting his music for their own propaganda purposes, Wagner's music remains banned from public performances in Israel until this day. Meyerbeer, ironically, is hardly performed in Israel either. Meyerbeer, however, never publicly responded to Wagner's accusations. He also insisted that his personal papers and diaries were never to be published. It was only in the 1950s that one of Meyerbeer's decedents, Hans Richter, who was the son of Meyerbeer's daughter Cornelia, opened the composer's private archive to scholars but he did not personally publish anything. Richter did so because he considered it to be in the public interest especially after what had happened during World War II.

<https://manandculture.com/2022/01/meyerbeers-operatic-claim-and-friendship-and-rivalry>

Wagner and Liszt



Wagner and Liszt at Bayreuth, 1882. Engraving after painting by Georg Papperitz (1846 – 1918)

When **Franz Liszt** (1811 – 1886) met **Richard Wagner** in Paris for the first time in the spring 1840, they had little admiration for each other. Wagner, two years younger than Liszt, was neither successful nor financially secure. In fact, Wagner was actively looking for financial support from Liszt, asking him to become the publisher of his works. Liszt settled in Weimar in 1848, and he eventually staged several great Wagner festivals attracting national attention. In the event, Wagner participated in the failed Dresden Uprising and had to flee with a price on his head. He made his way to Liszt who sheltered him, arranged a loan of money and a forged passport to get Wagner out of Germany. For the next ten years Liszt supported Wagner in Swiss exile with money, gifts, and personal visits. Although Wagner was fulsome in his praise of Liszt, the relationship ran into trouble because of Wagner's constant demand for money. Even more damaging was the fact that **Liszt's** daughter **Cosima** left her husband **Hans von Bülow** to live with Wagner. Liszt personally travelled to Lucerne to confront Wagner with the result that they did not speak to each other for five years. And Liszt would never forgive his daughter for marrying Wagner in 1870, and for turning Protestant shortly thereafter.

"If I had to write a book on Wagner, I would happily use as an epigraph this remark by Victor Hugo on Shakespeare: 'I admire everything' - 'I admire like a fool.' The only reservations I have do not involve the flawlessness of Wagner's genius, but rather the public's intellectual capacities." Franz Liszt.

End of Part 1 - to be continued in March 2024 Quarterly

Giacomo Meyerbeer 1791 – 1864

Born of a wealthy Jewish family, Meyerbeer studied composition in Berlin and later at Darmstadt, where he formed a friendship with **C. M. von Weber**. His early German operas, produced at Munich, Stuttgart, and Vienna, were failures, and after a journey to Paris and London he settled in 1816 in Italy, where he produced five operas in the style of **Rossini**. The best of these was *Il crociato in Egitto* (Venice, 1824), given the following year in London and Paris. His first French opera, written in association with Eugène Scribe, was *Robert le Diable* (Paris, 1831), produced on an extremely lavish scale and calculated to appeal to the current romantic taste for medievalism, the supernatural,

and the macabre. Its success was immediate, establishing this work as the model of French grand opera. *Les Huguenots* was similarly successful in 1836. In 1842 Meyerbeer temporarily returned to Berlin, where he wrote a German Singpiel, *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien* (1844), in which **Jenny Lind** took the principal part. His third romantic opera on a libretto of Scribe, *Le Prophète*, was given in Paris in 1849. He then turned to a lighter style and produced two works in the tradition of the opéra comique, *L'Etoile du nord* (1854) and *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* (1859). His last opera, *L'Africaine*, was in rehearsal at the time of his death.

IN MEMORIAM

Dr COLLEEN CHESTERMAN 03.08.1941 – 14.10.2023

Member No 649 | Past President and Honorary Life Member of WSNSW

We note with great sadness the passing of **Colleen Chesterman**. The Society sends deep condolences to her devoted husband Michael and their children and grandchildren.

Colleen joined the Society in 1994 and enthusiastically fulfilled the roles of Secretary (2011 - 2013), Vice President (2013 – 2017) and President (2017 - 2020). Colleen felt gratified that she played a major role in inviting numerous speakers to give presentations of particular interest to the Society. These included the great bass Sir John Tomlinson CBE, conductors Simone Young, David Robertson, Asher Fisch and Anthony Negus, directors David McVicar and Neil Armfield, and scholar Peter Bassett.. She was tireless in raising money and awareness for opera productions; notably WASO's *Tristan* in 2018 and many early productions by Pinchgut Opera. She was designated a Pinchgut Heroine in recognition of this important work in helping the fledgling opera company to survive its early years.



Colleen was very active in student drama in the early sixties at Sydney University, where she obtained an Honours Arts degree. This was followed by a Master's in Sociology from Warwick University in the UK and a Doctorate in Creative Arts from UTS. She and Michael were passionate theatre and music lovers; donating generously to the Sydney Youth Orchestra and supporting the Stables and Belvoir St Theatres. Colleen prepared classical music programs for 2MBS Fine Music 102.5 radio over a period of nine years, including 'At the Opera'. She taught in schools and

universities and worked in publishing and research. For ten years ran her own consultancy firm, specialising in evaluation, policy development, strategic planning and management for government, arts and community services organisations. In 1997 she became National Director of ATN WEXDEV, an executive development program for senior women in 5 major Australian universities. In 2007 Colleen was honoured to give the valedictory address to graduating UTS students.

MARGARET SUTHERS

Members mourn the loss of **Margaret Suthers** on 22 October, aged 99. Margaret and Bill (who passed away 6 years ago), were foundation members of the Wagner Society (Members 14 and 15). Bill worked with Dr Leonard Hansen and Margaret was an editor of the first Newsletters. Her passion for music took her from solo recitals to conducting choirs; from teaching the students music to teaching the teachers; and later, to bringing music into primary schools across the lower North Shore. According to their daughter, her parents 'enjoyed chasing Ring Cycles around the world'.

JACQUELINE DARK 1968 – 3.10.2023

The operatic world was saddened to hear of the passing of mezzo-soprano **Jacqueline Dark**, aged only 55. WSNSW members had been looking forward to seeing her as Wellgunde in the SSO *Das Rheingold* in November. She was born in Ballarat and completed a physics degree. She went on to teach in the field for about a decade before making the move to singing. She graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts and began an extensive singing career appearing at some of Australia's most prestigious opera companies including Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, and Pinchgut Opera. She also appeared with the Wiener Staatsoper and Opera Hong Kong as well as many of Australia's leading orchestras and choirs. She was also a



well-known musical theatre and cabaret performer. Jacqui was an outstanding Fricka in the 2013 OA Melbourne *Ring*, for which she received a Helpmann Award. In an interview in 1913 with Ben Neutze from Daily Review Jacqui had this to say about singing in the OA *Ring*: 'Singing with this huge orchestra is the most extraordinary, life-changing experience. These musicians are incredible, and I remember sitting in

the first sitzprobe for *Das Rheingold* and welling up with tears as I heard the first note. There's something utterly visceral about this music that grabs you by the throat and tosses you about until you come out the other end completely wrung out but thoroughly satisfied. The feeling of singing on stage with

that wall of sound underneath you, carrying you along like a huge wave on the ocean, is indescribably fabulous.’

‘I’m lucky in that part of what I love about singing is living the role as I sing it, and I find it almost impossible to not get emotionally involved with whatever I’m performing. Fricka comes on with a kind of suppressed rage and builds to fury during the course of that fabulous second scene. I find her

really easy to play, as she is utterly real – a scorned wife who has reached the end of her patience with a husband who keeps cheating on her and embarrassing her. It’s so easy to imagine how the shame and hurt have built up in her until she reaches the point where it all just pours out in an unstoppable stream. I find the scene incredibly real and human and very easy and cathartic to play.’

STEPHEN GOULD 24.01.1962 – 19.09.2023

Obituary from the Bayreuth Festival website



It is with deepest sadness and bewilderment that we have to announce the death of our friend and colleague, **Stephen Gould**. With him, the Bayreuth Festival and the entire opera world lose an outstanding singer, performer, educator, friend and esteemed colleague. He first appeared at the Bayreuth Festival in 2004 and sang nearly 100 performances until 2022.

Among his glittering roles at Bayreuth were the title roles in *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser* and *Siegfried*, Stephen Gould has rightly been described as

a “long-distance runner”. He started out as a baritone and musical singer who, after some 3000 performances of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical *The Phantom of the Opera*, became one of the most sought-after heroic tenors.

His remarkable stamina, irrepressible curiosity and the highest professionalism, also in his dealings with colleagues, distinguished him. By his own admission, Wagner was pure meditation for him, a mantra. We thank Stephen Gould for the many unforgettable evenings at the Bayreuth Festival, which he gave us with his unique voice and his grandiose stage presence. We will miss him immensely, part of the Festival family he will remain forever. Farewell Stephen!

<https://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/en/festspiele/news/2023/on-the-death-of-stephen-gould/>



HELENA CARR

SEPTEMBER 1946 – 25 OCTOBER 2023

Members were saddened and shocked to learn of **Helena Carr’s** sudden death in Vienna and offer condolences to her devoted husband Bob Carr (NSW Premier and Arts Minister 1995 – 2005). They became members of the society in 2011 and were often seen at classical music concerts and operas, including *Ring Cycles* at Bayreuth and San Francisco.

A CHRISTMAS CRACKER JOKE??

THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG: A MASTERFUL TETRALOGY

The Ring of the Nibelung (1869–76). Wagner’s monumental tetralogy is made up of four operas: Die Feen (The Fairies), Doktor Faust (1841), Gtterdmmerng (1851), and Parsifal (1882), and includes a fifth opera, Siegfried (1876), as well as a preface. It is the feen of the Feen. Feen was an opera written by Robert Frost in 1835 and first performed in Munich in 1842. Brunnhilde and Sieglinde are the focus of the rivalry between the fairy maidens in this melodramatic work by Weber. Faust is a Faustian. Doktor Faust, a one-act opera, was first performed in Vienna in 1846 and was written in 1841. The story is told in comic form and centered on the sale of the soul of the doctor Mephistopheles to the devil, with music by Moliere. What does Gtterdmmerng (br>) mean? The first performance of Gtterdmmerng in Dresden, Germany, took place in 1876. Beethoven created this work as a grandiose work, in the style of Beethoven, with the hero Siegfried destroying the gods in the process. For more information, please visit the Persian language section. The Parsifal opera was first performed in Dresden in 1891, and it is a four-act opera from 1882. The Quest of the Holy Grail is a mystical work in the style of medieval poets, and it is about finding the Holy Grail. Siegfried, a **German man**, became famous after a series of high-speed crashes. Siegfried was a one-act opera written in 1876 and first performed in 1883 at the Deutsche Grammophon in Germany. Siegfried’s quest for the Balmung is the subject of this comic, which is inspired by the medieval minstrels. <https://tomsonhighway.com/rettas-of-carl-maria-von-weber-and-johann-strauss-ii-the-life-and-works-of-richard-wagner/>



Editor’s Note: **FAKE NEWS!!!!** I find this hilarious but also worrying, as Artificial Intelligence insinuates itself into our lives. It is taken from a normally well written blog about popular culture. [Dolly Parton seems to be Tomson Highway’s main interest]. The article was about Johan Strauss II and this paragraph appeared in the middle of it. I haven’t made any corrections. Surely it must be written by a dodgy ChatGPT AI Ap? What do my readers think?

NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

UPDATE FROM BASS-BARITONE CHRIS CURCURUTO

Dear members,

I believe my last update to you all was in 2022, when I was halfway through my Doctorate at the University of North Texas. I write to you now at the conclusion of the entire degree. In April this year I sat my comprehensive qualifying exams, two full days of written exams on all manner of subjects pertaining to vocal performance generally, and specific exams on my related fields (opera performance, opera direction, and vocal pedagogy). Following the written examinations, I was also required to submit to an oral examination by my degree committee; Dr. Stephen Austin (my voice teacher, and vocal pedagogy professor), Dr. Jeffrey Snider (highly respected Verdi baritone, and vocal literature professor), and Prof. Jonathan Eaton (British opera director, and director of the opera program at UNT). The oral examination felt like an interview wherein my committee asked a number of questions based on their areas of expertise which included subjects that I have studied but also extended beyond into conversation about the opera industry at large and my plans for professional development and progression. I am pleased to report that I passed, confidently, giving me the designation of Doctoral candidate meaning that I have completed all requirements for the doctoral degree, with the exception of my dissertation. Before I fill you in on my progress in that department, let me take a step backward and fill members in on the most important event last year.

In the summer of 2022, I was invited to both perform and direct at the Olomouc Baroque Festival in the Czech Republic with singers from the UNT Opera program and an ensemble from the UNT Baroque Orchestra under the direction of Maestro Paul Leenhouts, a seasoned academic and internationally-renowned recorder player, conductor, and early music expert. We were to perform a double-bill of rare Melani works, the opera *Europa* and oratorio *Il fratricidio di Caino*. Unfortunately, COVID intervened, forcing us to cobble together excerpts with those singers and instrumentalists who were unaffected. Nonetheless, the performances were well-received and the trip proved particularly fruitful for me personally as I became engaged to my partner and fellow opera singer, soprano **Kori Miller**. I proposed in a restaurant in the Jindřišská Tower, a 16th century freestanding church bell tower and apparently the tallest in Prague. Following the proposal we were taken into the belfry to enjoy panoramic views of Prague at night, and the staff rang the bells to celebrate. (WSNSW members were lucky to hear Kori and Chris at their concert at St Columba in July 2023. Ed.)

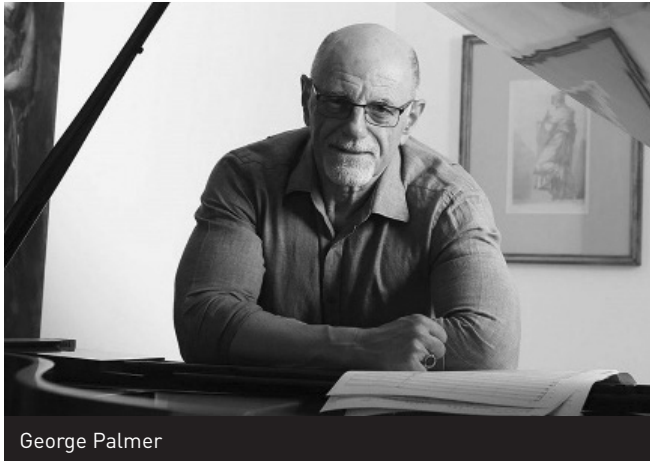
Moving forward in time, this brings us to the past (northern hemisphere) summer. As part of the dissertation process, students are required to submit a topic pre-proposal, then a proposal, then finally a dissertation document, in addition to presenting a lecture/recital. In the spring, I submitted a pre-proposal titled "Performance and Dramatic Staging Guide for *Letters from a Black Snake*"; a culturally significant work on a culturally significant subject." This cycle was written by



Kori Miller, Leona Geeves and Chris Curcuruto WSNSW concert at St Columba 30 July 2023

Australian composer and former Justice **George Palmer**, and is a work that I have been interested in performing for a number of years. Indeed, I had initially intended to perform the work in a double bill with Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* which was what inspired my research topic. Both of these cycles are so narratively driven that I got it into my head that I'd like to fully stage them as monodramas. For anyone not familiar with the cycles, George's piece takes text from Ned Kelly's own letters and sets them to music, creating a narrative arc from his early teen years to his execution, whereas the Mussorgsky concerns death visiting a number of unfortunate souls. For one of my vocal literature classes last year, George graciously agreed to a long-distance interview for a presentation on *Letters from a Black Snake*. During our discussion I learned that George had always conceived of the cycle as something of a monodrama and he wholeheartedly supported the idea of its staging. This sent me down the research rabbit hole.

In order to facilitate this research, I applied for, and was subsequently awarded, the Graduate Research Experience Abroad Travel Grant (GREAT Grant) from UNT. This grant provided funds allowing me to travel back to Australia this past July to perform dissertation research (and to perform a recital for your wonderful members!). Incidentally, this was also my first trip back to Australia since I had left for Texas five years prior! Initially, I viewed my research as being dramaturgical in nature. I wanted to get a better handle on the Ned Kelly story and I felt like the driving question in my mind was "was Ned Kelly a good guy or a bad guy?" I probably had the same superficial understanding of who Ned Kelly was as the next Australian son of immigrant parents, so the learning curve was fairly steep. All I knew was that George's cycle presented the story in a compelling and highly sympathetic way. My research activities in Australia included fairly extensive travel through Kelly country in regional Victoria, visiting as many landmarks, museums, libraries and the like as we could. I actually brought an entourage with me from the US, including my now fiancée, and two other friends who were also in the Czech Republic



George Palmer

with us the previous year. As we all learned more about the Kelly story, it was interesting seeing how legitimately involved they all became. In fact, one of my companions took to doing his own independent reading along the way and proved to be a serviceable tour guide on occasion!

During my previous interview with George I had learned that the cycle originated by commission from Ernst and Young to commemorate the opening of the first retrospective exhibition of artist Sidney Nolan's works since his death. Amongst Nolan's best known works are his Kelly paintings. I was able to make a day trip to Canberra to view the works at the National Gallery and also happened upon a couple by accident at the State Gallery in Sydney. I became very interested in the communication between the artistic and musical representation of the Kelly story and the historical narrative. This line of enquiry has proved useful and I have an idea for a fairly significant project as a result, but it also occurred to me that it is not only difficult, but potentially inappropriate to perform George's work without a foundational knowledge of its artistic and historical origins.

Of course, we expect any song, or indeed, opera, interpreter to do their due diligence, however in addition to being controversial, Kelly's history is complex and involves a confluence of Irish/English hostility, English/Australian colonial and convict history, and matters of Australian cultural identity. Whereas I have some degree of knowledge on these topics from my Australian education, how can an American, for example, approach this work if that education is lacking and would they necessarily even connect those dots? Ned Kelly is referred to as an Australian folk hero, yet in his own time and likely by his own definition, he was almost certainly an Irishman. The hostility between Kelly and the police had its roots in conflicts that happened well before Kelly was born and in far off countries that he never visited. Yes, Kelly is culturally significant in Australia, yet even many Australians may not have considered the above. Add to this complexity the composer's difficulty in not only distilling Kelly's extensive (and overwhelmingly powerful) manuscripts, but his whole life story into a five song cycle. Necessarily, there are missing pieces. So how do we, either as audience or interpreter, fill in the gaps?

I met with George to discuss the possibility of expanding his work to include more of the Kelly narrative. George is certainly open to the idea however, the songs to date all set Kelly's own words. The texts are all excerpted from various letters dictated by Kelly himself. Therefore, George wants to make sure that any additional material remains "verbatim" or, in Kelly's own words. There is work to be done here; storyboarding critical events in Kelly's life, pouring over his manuscripts to determine if he wrote about those events and if so, what, and then excerpting them in a way that cohesively communicates the story without creating a false narrative by omission, all before George sets his mind

to composing new numbers to fit into the existing cycle. This is also work that I am very interested in pursuing, but for now, I am focusing on the foundational research. My dissertation will be a companion to George's cycle; a comprehensive performance guide, walking interpreters, audiences, or interested persons through historical, cultural, and artistic aspects of the work and Kelly generally. I had my American colleagues in mind. If one of them decided to pick up this work (as they well should), what would they need to be able to sensitively perform it? My current working title is "What lies beneath (and between): the confluence of historical, cultural, and artistic context and their relevance in the Hon. Justice George Palmer's verbatim song cycle "*Letters from a Black Snake*"."

Just this week, my topic proposal was approved by the Graduate Performance Degree Committee meaning that I will now continue drafting my dissertation and before the end of the semester I anticipate completing it, and giving a lecture recital on the work which will involve performing the cycle. If a recording is made available, I will do my best to distribute it to anyone interested. Following the lecture recital, I will be required to "defend" my dissertation before my degree committee and once that is done, I will be Dr. Christopher Curcuruto. Wish me luck!

In the meantime, the last of my news... this fall, I was engaged as Director of Opera, Instructor of Vocal Pedagogy, and Applied Lesson Teacher in the capacity of Adjunct Assistant Professor of Voice at the University of Texas at Arlington. This is a sizable school with a good reputation. To date, I have loved my time there. I have been thrown in the deep end with limited oversight thus far but with the general instruction to make something of both the opera and vocal pedagogy programs. Regrettably, COVID took its toll, so I have been tasked with the rebuild. In recent years, the opera program has performed a single concert of opera scenes per year. This semester alone we are performing a double-bill of children's operas by Menotti, *The Boy Who Grew Too Fast*, and *Chip and his Dog*. They are charming little pieces albeit occasionally problematic - the first features a terrorist invading an elementary school with a machine gun which is difficult to overcome in the face of strict copyright restrictions. That said, the students, all undergraduates, are passionate and enthusiastic and the works are showing them in their best light. We have auditions for the spring semester opera (yet to be selected) coming up in a couple of weeks and already our numbers are surging. Apparently the students have been talking and opera now has a good reputation which is very gratifying.

I am currently in the swing of auditions and applications and am hoping to get back into performance soon. I was contacted for my availability last week for a possible Simone in *Gianni Schicchi* early in the new year which looks promising. Performance remains my number one passion and I look forward to getting back into the swing of it now that my studies are drawing to a close! You will be glad to hear that I am continuing to expand my Wagnerian repertoire. Alberich's curse is a mainstay in my package and I am now working on Amfortas. I had prepared one of his monologues for the Melchior competition however was unable to submit due to illness. Fortunately, the competition has a generous age limit so I will be able to submit next year. If only the German Australian Opera Grant followed suit! I have them in my sights...

Thank you all for your continued interest and support. I wouldn't be here if not for your trust in my viability as an artist and in what I have to offer. It was so heartening to perform for so many of you on my recent trip home and I look forward to doing so again in not so distant a future as last time.

Warm regards,

Christopher Curcuruto November 2023

BRIEF UPDATES ON OTHER SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

Performance life seems to have returned to normal, post Covid, and, as you can see from the brief news updates below, (gathered from singer's websites, or by enquiries by WSNSW Artists Liaison Leona Geeves), many of the exceptionally talented young singers sponsored by WSNSW over the past few years are now doing well, after a very difficult period. The pandemic lockdowns caused considerable disruption to performance scheduling and travel, resulting in financial hardship and emotional stress. Some singers have not yet been able to continue with an active singing career but generally they are productively involved with teaching and research projects. We will publish more detailed reports of selected singers in future Quarterlies. We thank WSNSW members for their generous donations over the past years and encourage everyone to continue the good work.

At the *Das Rheingold* Symposium on 12 November, Leona pointed out that some of the most successful Wagner singers working internationally today, including **Stuart Skelton**, **Deborah Humble** and **Warwick Fyfe**, got a start from WSNSW. A newer generation, in particular **Brad Cooper** and **Sam Sakker**, are also making international conquests. Well done generous supporting members!

Soprano, **Pamela Andrews**, has a contract with the OA chorus. She and soprano **Laura Scandizzo** (also in the extra chorus for OA), recently sang on 14 October for the Opera and Song Collective at the Mosman Art Gallery

Soprano, **Maia Andrews**, has been awarded a position in Opera Queensland's 2023 Young Artist Program.

Soprano, **Jessica Blunt**, completed her Master of Arts Performance (Voice) Royal Academy of Music and has returned from London and is singing with the West Australian Opera.

Spinto soprano, **Livia Brash**, is currently a member of Düsseldorf Lyric Opera. She recently made her Wagnerian debut as Sieglinde in Dramatic Voices Berlin's film of *Die Walküre*. She has been giving courses on aspects of singing, many at AIMS in Graz.

Mezzo-soprano, **Fleuranne Brockway**, has been a member of the ensemble at Staatstheater Wiesbaden since 2019. Her performances this season will include Second Lady in *The Magic Flute*, Meg Page in *Falstaff*, Sonjetka in *Lady Macbeth from Mtsensk* and Hänsel and Gretel. Fleuranne received the 2022 Bel Canto Award and in 2024 will be singing the roles of Wellgunde and Rosswisse in the Wiesbaden *Ring*.

Tenor, **Nathan Bryon**, is the recipient of the 2023 Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award. Currently studying an Artist Diploma at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Nathan will receive \$25,000 to support his development as his career continues to gain momentum. He is performing in a Christmas concert with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra this December alongside **Emily Edmonds** and **Matthew Reardon**, who have both sung for WSNSW, and Tessa Hayward.

Tenor, **Brad Cooper**, has been having a very busy time. On 10 December he was in Scotland with Scottish Opera, singing Apollo in a concert performance of Strauss's *Daphne*. Earlier in December he was in Inverness and Strathpeffer where he sang Siegfried in a concert of Act 3 of *Siegfried* for the Mahler Players. His Wotan was the legendary Sir John Tomlinson and the Strathpeffer performance was conducted by Anthony Negus, whom Brad will be joining at Longborough in June. In October

Brad played Aegisth in another Strauss masterpiece – *Elektra*, for Main-Franken theatre in Würzburg. In September he sang Siegmund in *Die Walküre* in concert at Theater Münster.

Soprano, **Samantha Crawford**, was a luncheon guest of The Executive Association Solent, in Chewton Glen on 20 October. The Association is an exclusive business luncheon club, with thriving affiliates in the UK and North America. She made her role debut as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* for Saffron Opera Group, London, last October.

Mezzo-soprano, **Emily Edmonds**, has returned to Sydney. She sang at the Pacific Opera's Chairman's dinner and performed in *Earth, Voice, Body* with the Sydney Chamber Orchestra in September and with the State Opera of South Australia, singing Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*

Soprano, **Eleanor Greenwood**, received very enthusiastic reviews for her debut as Elisabetta in Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* for Melbourne Opera in September. WSNSW congratulates her for being the winner of the 2023 Opera Awards (YMF award)

Soprano, **Jessica Harper**, gave a recital of works by Bach, Strauss, Liszt and Brahms with cellist **Joseph Eisinger** and pianist **Brad Gilchrist**, on 22 October at the Balmain Presbyterian Church

Tenor, **Kaine Hayward**, is a vocal instructor for professional and aspiring professional singers based in Berlin, Germany, where he is also a popular accompanist.

Mezzo-soprano, **Celeste Haworth**, is based in Sydney as a principal artist with Opera Australia. Celeste has been delighted to step into dramatic roles, covering the role of Erda in OA's Ring Cycle in Brisbane, whilst also performing the role of First Norn.

Thomas Victor Johnson is a vocal coach and pianist based in Sydney, where he is currently a solo répétiteur with Opera Australia. Between 2019 - 2023 he was on the music staff at Staatsoper Unter den Linden, where he also served as assistant chorus director during the 2021/2022 season. Thomas was the répétiteur for the Simone Young/SSO *Das Rheingold*.

Mezzo-soprano, **Margaret Plummer**, following 8 seasons at the Wiener Staatsoper, began her freelance career by performing Carmen at the Longborough Festival in England in the summer of 2022. In 2023 she made her Bayreuth debut as a Flower Maiden in *Parsifal* (a role she will repeat in 2024). She recently was Flosshilde in the SSO/Simone Young *Das Rheingold* following her performances as Auntie in *Peter Grimes* at La Scala, Milan.

Soprano, **Ellen McNeil**, tells us – 'It's been an exciting and varied last few months as a Young Artist with Pacific Opera (PO). From singing the role of Berta in PO's production of the *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and performing with the divine Jane Rutter for the Live at Lunch Concert "Vienna with Love". Last but far from least, I had the thoroughly enjoyable experience of being one of the Valkyries for Willoughby Symphony Orchestra's Villains and Valkyries Concert.'

Young indigenous soprano, **Sarah Prestwidge**, is very excited to be joining the National Opera Studio in UK, in The Diverse Voices Programme for 2023/24. She sang Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* for Opera in the Park, Woodbridge, England in October and was in the chorus for *Ruddigore* for Opera Holland Park, London, in August. In September she was in Melbourne as acting Artistic Director of Short Black Opera standing in for Deborah Cheetham Fraillon AO.

Bass-baritone, **Eugene Raggio**, is based in Sydney and is the Music Director of the Bondi Parish of St Annes Shrine and St Patricks Church. Our Artists Liaison, Leona Geeves, was instrumental in combining Eugene's talents with those of another of our sponsored artists, **Laura Scandizzo**, to the mix for last year's very successful Croatia house Opera Gala, held at the Sydney Conservatorium. This was such a hit with the Croatian community that it recently held another Opera Gala with our singers. Eugene also recently was a soloist singing Haydn's *Creation* with the Eastern Sydney Chamber Orchestra.

Lyric coloratura soprano, **Michelle Ryan**, is now based in Sydney. She was recently a soprano with SWR Vokalensemble in Stuttgart for the 2022/2023 season.

Heldentenor, **Sam Sakker**, continues to receive rave reviews for his Tristan in Wuppertal. He will sing Lohengrin in Oviedo in Spain in Jan-Feb 2024. In August he will sing Melot at Glyndebourne, when **Stuart Skelton** will be Tristan

Baritone, **Joshua Salter**, is based in Berlin, where he is teaching Voice.

Soprano, **Katrina Sheppard**, is based in London where she teaches and researches the use of emotion as a holistic teaching tool.

Soprano, **Olivia Swain**, will be performing the principal role of "Mother Spring" in the Royal Northern College of Music's December production of *The Snow Maiden* by Rimsky-Korsakov. Amongst many opera rehearsals, Olivia was selected to participate in a residency with Opera North as a Leverhulme Arts Scholar, at the Howard Opera Centre in Leeds. This consisted of many masterclasses and workshops with a professional artistic team from Opera North.

Bass-baritone, Ass. Prof. **Adrian Tamburini**, is the Head of Vocal Performance at the Australian Guild of Music. He received glowing reviews for his powerful performances as Fasolt, Hunding and Hagen in the MO Ring (2021, 22, 23). He recently sang at our Christmas party

Soprano, **Valda Wilson**, is based at the Saarländisches Staatstheater in Saarbrücken, Germany. Last season she made her role debuts as Micaëla (*Carmen*), and Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*). In 2024 she will sing Wellgunde (*Das Rheingold*) at Opéra Royal, Versailles. In May 2024 she will sing Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*) for Pinchgut Opera, Sydney

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EXCERPTS FROM AN EMAIL TO LEONA GEEVES FROM REBECCA MacCALLION



Hi Leona,

I hope you are well. Our lives have been a whirlwind this year. I am very busy with my speech pathology work. I am working as a clinical specialist and also as an international research project manager in the field of Childhood Apraxia of Speech. Never a dull moment! Of course I would love to be singing more. I would be happy to work in a chorus job here in Berlin, otherwise we would

only be interested in moving or travelling for soloist engagements. Happily we both work remotely so we are fairly flexible. Fingers crossed!

In March I jumped in at short notice to cover a soprano in *Ich hab die Nacht geträumt* at the Berliner Ensemble, which was a wonderful experience, and my German stage debut. Since then I have made it to the final round at The Staatsoper and Komische Oper for chorus positions. I am

embracing the full lyric repertoire and working with a new agent to find soloist opportunities outside of Berlin. I am also working with a wonderful teacher who is based in the US, Valerie Sorel. Next week I will be competing in the Vincero competition.

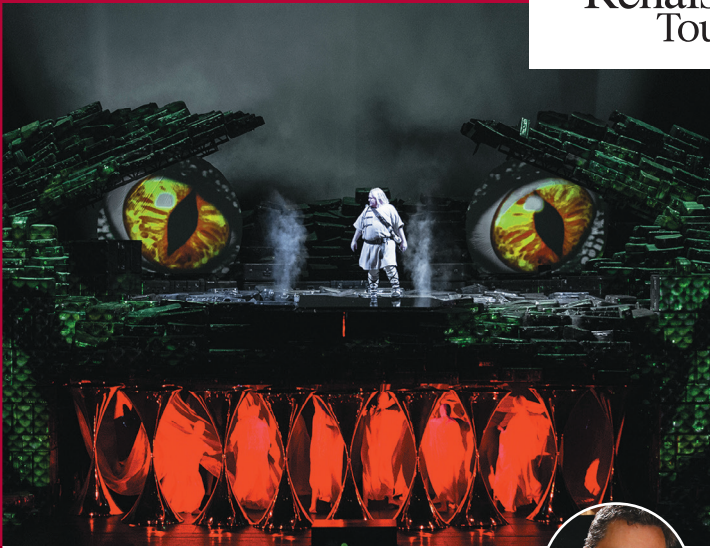
Bradley has been promoted to product owner of Muse Score, allowing him to use all of his many skills at once to reach millions of musicians around the world. He has also released two new compositions for solo piano, which are available on his YouTube channel. We have bought an apartment in Berlin and plan to stay for the long haul. It is much more affordable here, and interest rates are fixed for the life of the loan, so there aren't any surprises.

I hope all is going well for you. What a great year for Wagner in Oz!!

Much love,
Bec

(Rebecca and her husband Bradley Kunda performed for WSNSW in January 2022 at the Mosman Art Gallery)

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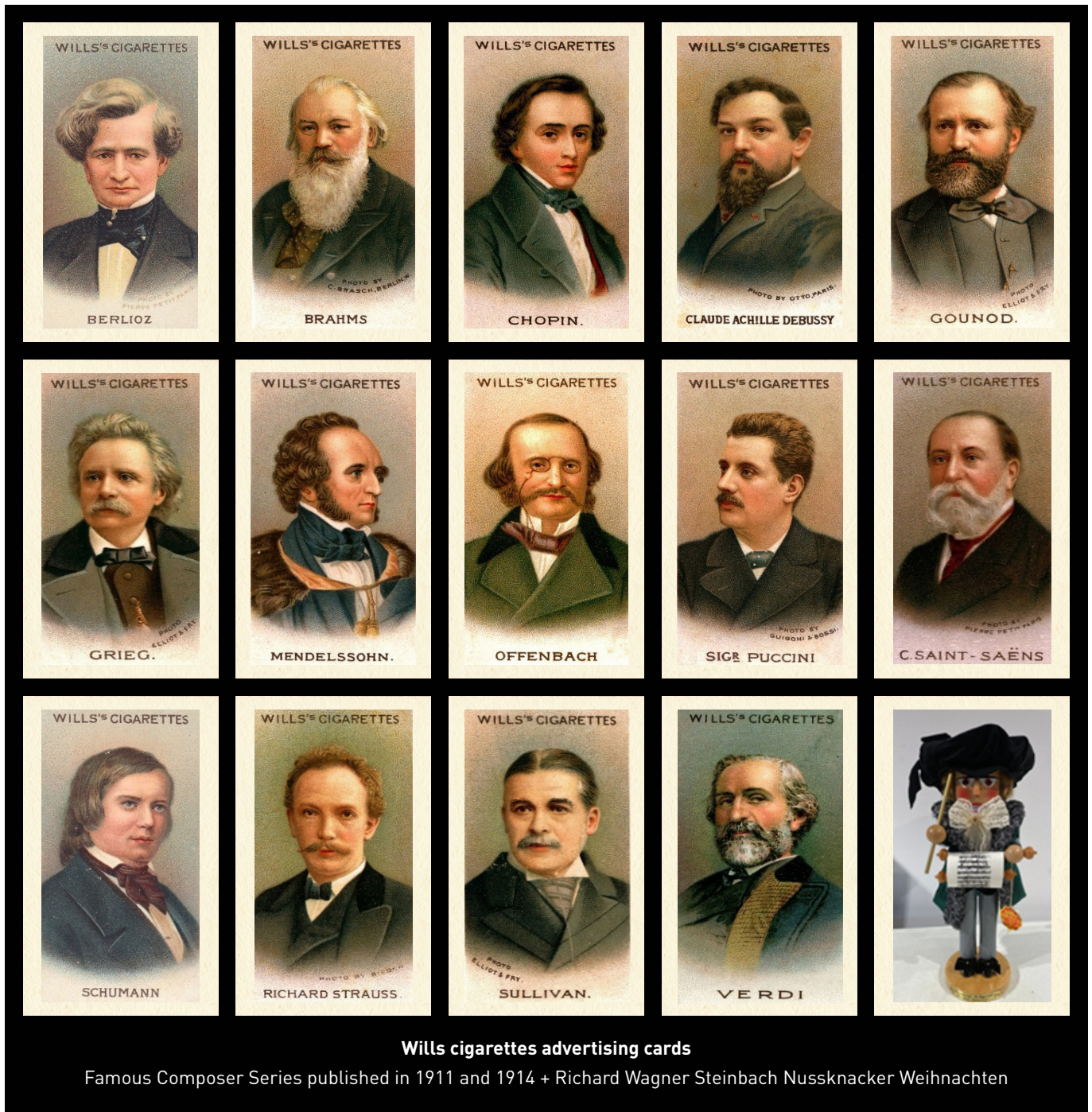
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