



WAGNER
SOCIETY
nsw

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

ISSUE NO 46

173

JUNE 2024

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear friends,

I am writing this from Berlin, having just concluded the Herheim *Ring* (cycle 2) at the Deutsche Oper. It was great to see and catch up with many Australians there for the *Ring*. Whilst an Australian (Nicholas Carter) conducted, to great acclaim, the first cycle, we were looking forward to hearing fellow Aussie Derek Welton as the *Walküre* Wotan but, unfortunately, he was indisposed. Iain Paterson played all the Wotans – something I prefer, primarily because dramatically I like to see the character's arc performed by one artist. More on this production in the next Quarterly from me and Marie.

Whilst in Berlin I managed to catch up with a recent recipient of our sponsorship, conductor Edwin Spark, and heldentenor Paul McLeod, heard in the Masterclass conducted by Christina Henson Hayes. They are both in Germany to work and study. Edwin was on a break from the conducting workshop he is attending to see the *Ring*. I also caught up with my counterpart in the Berlin Society, Scott Curry, another Australian living in Berlin, who was also leading a group tour for Renaissance.

The RWVI (the International organisation of Wagner Societies) is having its Congress in Berlin, at the Deutsche Oper,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 >



Pianist Thomas Victor Johnson, pianist Katherine Day, soprano Valda Wilson and bass-baritone Eugene Raggio taking bows after their wonderful concert on the occasion of the Society's annual Richard Wagner birthday celebration on 19 May 2024. Photo by Sherly Susan

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

PHOTOS BY LIS BERGMANN AND MIKE DAY

SUNDAY 10 MARCH AT GOETHE INSTITUT - SIMON O'NEILL



Simon O'Neill



Simon O'Neill Leona Geeves and Simon O'Neill with Brangayne Wine



Glynis Johns and Helen Meddings

SUNDAY 19 MAY AT GOETHE INSTITUT - WAGNER BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AND CONCERT WITH SOPRANO VALDA WILSON AND BASS-BARITONE EUGENE RAGGIO, ACCOMPANIED BY KATHERINE DAY AND THOMAS VICTOR JOHNSON



Katherine Day and Valda Wilson



Valda Wilson and Eugene Raggio



Cutting the birthday cake



Thomas Victor Johnson, Katherine Day, Leona Geeves Valda Wilson, Eugene Raggio, with Brangayne wine.



FOR YOUR DIARY

2024

16 June – 9 July	3 <i>Ring Cycles</i> conducted by Anthony Negus	Longborough Opera
20, 21 June	WASO/Asher Fisch Selections from the <i>Ring</i>	Perth Concert Hall
28 Jul – 25 Aug	Bayreuth Festival with Simone Young AM conducting two <i>Ring Cycles</i>	Bayreuth
2 – 25 Aug	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i> with Stuart Skelton and Samuel Sakker	Glyndebourne
15, 17 Nov	SSO/Simone Young AM <i>Die Walküre</i> 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 16 June	12.00 Special Bloomsday Zoom. Alex Ross talks about Joyce and Wagner. Live zoom at Goethe Institut. 1.15pm AGM 2.00pm DVD Christian Thielemann <i>My Richard Strauss</i>	Zoom at Goethe Institut
Wed 26 June	12.00 noon Talk by Dr John Mastrogiovanni	Zoom
Sun 14 July	12.00pm DVD <i>Richard Strauss Gala from Dresden</i> 2.00pm Talk by baritone Simon Meadows	Goethe Institut
Sun 28 July	12.00pm DVD <i>The Ring without words – Lorin Maazel</i> 2.00pm Talk by Michael Scott-Mitchell and Nick Schlieper about the 2004 Adelaide <i>Ring</i>	Goethe Institut
Sun 18 Aug	12.00pm DVD <i>Lotte Lehmann masterclass</i> 2.00pm Talk by Antony Ernst on <i>Die Walküre</i>	Goethe Institut
Sun 29 Sept	12.30pm DVD <i>Richard Strauss and his Heroines</i> 2.00pm Talk by Dr. Geoffrey Seidel on Lola Montez	Goethe Institut
Sun 20 Oct	12.30pm DVD <i>Ring</i> highlights from Valencia – Zubin Mehta 2.00pm Talk by Robert Gay on Cosima Wagner	Goethe Institut
Sun 10 Nov	10.30am WSNSW Symposium on <i>Die Walküre</i>	Goethe Institut
Sun 1 Dec	2.00 pm Christmas concert and party	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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PRESIDENT'S REPORT continued

during the Cycle 3 performances. Alas, due to teaching commitments, I cannot attend, but we have representation and a proxy in the form of Shirley Breese (Immediate Past President of WS Victoria), who will be flying the flag for both NSW and Victoria. It is an election year for the RWVI so it will be interesting to see the makeup of the new Executive.

There are many nominations for the open positions and not all from Germany. It will be interesting to see if the new Executive starts to address the relevance of the RWVI vis-à-vis Bayreuth (ticketing in particular), as well as the challenge of maintaining clear communications with 100+ Societies around the world. We may feel a little remote in the southern hemisphere but our programme of events, amongst some of the other services we provide, are the envy of most. More about what transpired in the Berlin Congress in the next Quarterly.

I am sad to have missed our last event, the concert with Valda Wilson and Eugene Raggio, as well as the Opera Gala by SUSO under Luke Spicer, where we sponsored Laura Scandizzo (singing Isolde's Liebestod). Both concerts were excellent by all

accounts. That meant that I missed out on Barbara de Rome's magnificent Wagner's Birthday cake yet again – this time I was on the other side of the world so it really is my fault. The effort that goes into making these events possible is rewarded by wonderful afternoons of music, food, champagne and conversation. Thank you Leona for pushing through what was a difficult process to get the "show on the road".

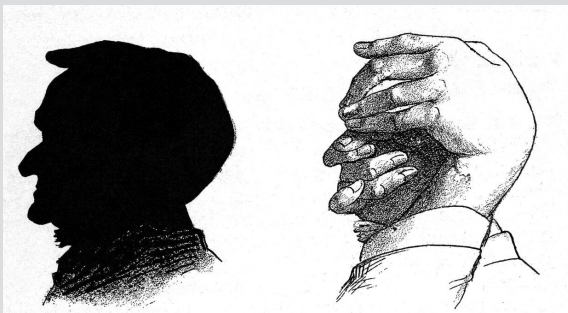
Inside you will see that we have a full programme ready for the rest of 2024, bar some additional events around the SSO's *Walküre* in November – we will be communicating those as soon as they are secure. Our next event is an oddity in that it is a backwards event, starting with the main guest (writer Alex Ross) via zoom on Bloomsday to discuss all things Joyce and Wagner (what an opportunity to do so AND on 16 June!), followed by our AGM and finishing with some Richard Strauss with Christian Thielemann on DVD – wonder if both Mr James Joyce and Mr Leopold Bloom would approve?

As I soak up the last couple of days in Berlin and reflect on what I've seen and heard (not just *The Ring*), it strikes me that Australia is becoming more insular, myopic and mean. The problems we face are great but not as complex, historically complex, as they are in the centre of Europe. You can see the clash of cultures, politics, interests and counter interests, everywhere in Berlin, but somehow all cultures and The Arts at every level, thrive. State support, that is the people's support, is not curtailed or withdrawn because of political reasons, but assumed to be the minimum required for a complex democratic society to exist. For example this last Saturday and Sunday, Wagnerians and football supporters (finals weekend here) shared the U-Bahns and S-Bahns talking to each other, sharing a first class public transport system to get to our respective venues. All taking part in what is core to our society, not one hand taking away to give to the other as is the normal case in Sydney (the recent announcement of the Parramatta Riverside renewal aside, although Parramatta Stadium got more money first). I'd like to think that our society might grow up a little and that our little venture (the WSNSW) will play its small role in helping stitch together the cultural ecosystem that sustains our lives.

Happy listening.

Esteban Insausti | President | Wagner Society in NSW Inc

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



Dear readers, apologies for the late delivery of the March issue – caused by an unforeseeable breakdown of the printing press.

Many WSNSW members attending the Brisbane *Ring* last December also went to Peter Bassett's fascinating series of *Ring* talks and seminars. Peter has kindly provided the texts of the talks, which I will publish in instalments over the next few issues. This issue introduces a series of articles about the history of the Bayreuth Festival, starting with Wagner's address at the laying of the Festspielhaus foundation stone in 1872. The September issue will have a focus on *Die Walküre*, in preparation for the SSO performances in November. The December issue will feature *Die Meistersinger*, in anticipation of Melbourne Opera's production in early 2025. Contributions from members will be greatly appreciated.

Many thanks to Dr Terence Watson for his enthusiastic review of the production of *Isolde and Tristan* at the Old Fitz Theatre in Sydney. Thanks also to Minnie Biggs for her regular, original and entertaining snippets. My gratitude, as always, to Leona for proofreading.

Mike Day | michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com

GENEROUS DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED SINCE DECEMBER 2023 FROM THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS:

Florian Hammerbacher | Anna-Lisa Klettenberg

WE WARMLY WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE MARCH 2024:

1292 Jason Catlett | 1293 Lynette Bosley
1294 Lynne Williams | 1295 Astrid Lodens

FUTURE WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 16 JUNE AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.00PM SPECIAL BLOOMSDAY
ZOOM ALEX ROSS TALKS ABOUT
JOYCE AND WAGNER



Alex Ross has been the music critic at The New Yorker since 1996. He writes about classical music, covering the field from the Metropolitan Opera to the contemporary avant-garde, and has also contributed essays on literature, history, the visual arts, film, and ecology. He spoke to WNSW on Zoom during the pandemic about his then recently published book *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*, an account of Wagner's vast cultural impact.



1.15PM ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING (RESCHEDULED
FROM 19 MAY)

2.00PM DVD CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN MY RICHARD STRAUSS

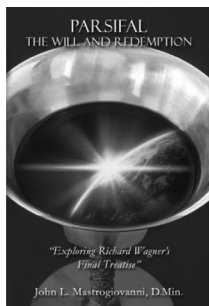
On the occasion of **Richard Strauss'** 150th birthday, conductor **Christian Thielemann** reflects in an intensive portrait about his personal relation to the composer. Most interesting for Thielemann of course is the conductor and composer Strauss. But also, the person, the director, the festival founder and careerist in times of National Socialism finds its place in this documentary. The DVD includes a lot of archival footage with Richard Strauss, rehearsals and concert excerpts of *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Ein Heldenleben*, *Four Last Songs* and more.

Christian Thielemann (born 1 April 1959) is currently chief conductor of the Staatskapelle Dresden, and the designated *Generalmusikdirektor* of the Berlin State Opera (*Staatsoper Unter den Linden*). (From Sept 2024)

Thielemann has been a regular conductor at the Bayreuth Festival, following his debut in 2000 with *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. With the decision in September 2008 of the Richard Wagner Festival Foundation to appoint Katharina Wagner and Eva Wagner-Pasquier to succeed Wolfgang Wagner as directors of the Bayreuth Festival, Thielemann was named musical advisor. In June 2015, the Bayreuth Festival formally announced the appointment of Thielemann as its music director. With his conducting of *Lohengrin* in 2018, Thielemann became the second conductor, after Felix Mottl, to conduct the ten canonical operas by Richard Wagner that are regularly performed at the Bayreuth Festival. Thielemann stood down from the Bayreuth Festival post in 2020.



WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE 12.00PM ZOOM WITH JOHN L MASTROGIOVANNI, D. MIN.



John Mastrogiovanni was first introduced to Wagner's Ring Cycle at the age of five by his father. By the age of nine he was opening the piano scores to the operas and outlining all the leitmotifs with their numerous variations. He went on to play French horn for a decade throughout his junior high school years and beyond. In 1995, he joined the Wagner Society of Southern California and in 2010 he became its chairman. John lectures on Wagner in different venues including societies, clubs, colleges and even the Bayreuth Festival. He has authored eight books, one of which is on the subject of Wagner's *Parsifal*. John has a master's degree and doctorate in theological

studies and ministry. He has also been an ordained minister for past 41 years with a ministry based in Southern California, which reaches throughout the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Europe and South Africa.

In *Parsifal: The Will and Redemption*, Dr. Mastrogiovanni utilises Wagner's own concepts from his letters and prose works to help define the meaning of this amazing Sacred Stage Drama. As a recent lecturer in Bayreuth said, "If you love Wagner's Ring and feel ready to enter his last opera *Parsifal* - this is the book to accompany you."

SUNDAY 14 JULY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.00PM DVD RICHARD STRAUSS GALA

Christine Goerke, Anja Harteros, Camilla Nylund, (sopranos), Staatskapelle Dresden, Christian Thielemann



This exceptional programme of highlights from Richard Strauss's works *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Feuersnot*, *Salome*, *Elektra*, *Die ägyptische Helena*, *Arabella*, *Die schweigsame Frau* and *Daphne* was dedicated to Richard Strauss's 150th birthday in Dresden. The reputation as THE Strauss-Orchestra« of the Staatskapelle Dresden results from the special

relation to Richard Strauss and his works, which started 130 years ago, performing many world premieres of Richard Strauss's operas and orchestral works.

2.00PM TALK SIMON MEADOWS



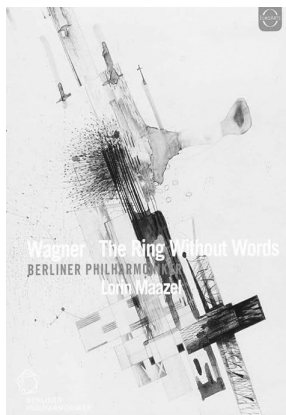
Award-winning Australian baritone **Simon Meadows** enjoys a busy opera and concert career throughout Europe, Asia and Australasia. His many roles for Opera Australia have included Telramund (*Lohengrin*), The Count (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Yamadori (*Madama Butterfly*), The Gaoler (*Tosca*) and The Lieutenant in Kate Miller-Heidke's *The Rabbits*. In late 2023, he sang Fasolt in the Simone Young/SSO *Das Rheingold*. In early 2024, he sang Michele (*Il tabarro*) and later this year he has the title role in Gianni Schicchi for Opera Australia.

Previously for Victorian Opera, he sang Priam in Simon Bruckard's *Cassandra*, Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol*, Orest's Tutor in *Elektra*, First Nazarene in *Salome* and Jimmy in Stuart Greenbaum's *The Parrot Factory*. For Melbourne Opera, Simon has performed the title roles in *Macbeth* and *The Barber of Seville*, Alberich in *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried*, Faninal in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Escamillo in *Carmen*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* and many others.

SUNDAY 28 JULY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.00PM DVD THE RING WITHOUT WORDS

Lorin Maazel/Berlin Philharmoniker



A unique synthesis of orchestral music from Wagner's *Ring* cycle. Arranged by **Lorin Maazel**, the work was designed to be free flowing (no breaks) and chronological, beginning with the first note of *Rheingold* and finishing with the last chord of *Götterdämmerung*. All the music is Wagner's, and even the transitional material is drawn from the original

scores. To convey the breadth and scope of the entire work, Maazel also excerpted material from each opera in proportion to the whole cycle. The result is a 75-minute symphonic journey through Wagner's four great operas. With its huge orchestras, sprawling mythological plot, and intense musical drama, the *Ring* changed the world of music. Orchestrally, they are probably the most complex operas in history, and only the most intrepid of orchestras are up to the challenge. One of the world's greatest ensembles, the Berlin Philharmonic, has built an unparalleled reputation in the music of Wagner and his contemporaries. This synthesis by conductor Lorin Maazel includes all the standard *Ring* orchestral excerpts such as *Ride of the Valkyries* and *Siegfried's Rhine Journey*, as well as most of the leitmotifs known to exist in the score. The result is a unique and innovative symphonic suite (played without interruption) performed by one of the world's most esteemed orchestras.

2.00PM TALK MICHAEL SCOTT-MITCHELL AND NICK SCHLIEPER REMEMBER THE ADELAIDE RING – 20 YEARS ON



Michael Scott-Mitchell



Nick Schlieper



Adelaide *Die Walküre*
Act III Sc I

Michael Scott-Mitchell has established himself as a formidable force within the arts in Australia as well as internationally, designing a raft of highly acclaimed productions and events across a broad spectrum of theatrical and architectural genres: drama, opera, musicals, dance, Olympic and National Ceremonies, restaurants, hotels, exhibitions, film and television. He is also a highly regarded educator, holding significant teaching and academic positions. His collaboration with **Elke Neidhardt** (director), **Nick Schlieper** (lighting and associate set designer) and **Steven Curtis** (costumes) on the 2004 Adelaide *Ring* received worldwide acclaim and continues to be held in high regard as one of the landmark productions of Wagner's epic work. A monumental design challenge requiring more than 20 set models; the process spanned

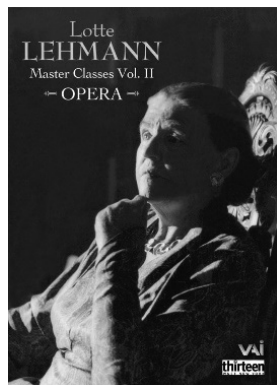
4 years and was a huge undertaking. The production received 11 Helpmann Awards in 2005, an unprecedented number for any production to date, with Michael being awarded Best Scenic Design.

Nick Schlieper has designed for all of the major performing arts companies in Australia and works regularly in Europe and the USA. He is one of Australia's most highly awarded designers having received six Sydney Critics Awards (two for set design and 4 for lighting design), six Melbourne Green Room Awards and 5 Helpmann Awards. He has lit many productions for Opera Australia and was lighting and associate set designer

for the first Australian production of The Ring Cycle in Adelaide. He has designed the lighting for over 100 shows at the Sydney Theatre Company. His international work includes productions for the Salzburg Festival, the Hamburg State Opera, the Bavarian State Opera and Royal Shakespeare Company, plus work for musical theatre on Broadway.

SUNDAY 18 AUGUST AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.00PM DVD LOTTE LEHMANN MASTERCLASS



From the time of her debut in 1910 to her farewell recital in 1951, **Lotte Lehmann** (1888-1976) was recognised as a supreme singing actress and recitalist. After her retirement from the stage, Lehmann began teaching master classes in interpretation at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California. Filmed in July 1961, the legendary soprano guides students through arias

and scenes from *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Lohengrin*, *Der Freischütz*, and *Fidelio*. It includes Lehmann's invaluable demonstration/performance of the Marschallin's Monologue from *Der Rosenkavalier*. The class is followed by a rare 21-minute interview in which Lehmann discusses her life and career (CBC, 1963), including her associations with Bruno Walter, Richard Strauss, Giacomo Puccini, and others.

2.00PM TALK BY ANTONY ERNST ON *DIE WALKÜRE*



Dr Antony Ernst is a director, dramaturg, lecturer and arts administrator who has worked with companies and universities in Australia, New Zealand, Europe and America. He started as a dramaturg with Opera Australia, has worked as a house director in Dresden, Düsseldorf and Rome, has

completed a doctorate and directed Opera Australia's production of *Salome* in 2003. More recently, Antony was Manager of Artistic Planning for the Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra in France, and since 2017 has been Director of the Royal Danish Orchestra in Copenhagen. Antony is a very popular guest lecturer on opera and is a music tour leader in Australia and overseas. He has spoken to WSNSW on several occasions over the past decade

COMMITTEE 2023 - 2024

President.....	Esteban Insausti.....	0412 282 070
Vice President 1.....	Mike Day.....	0413 807 533
Vice President 2.....	Marie Leech.....	0418 679 626
Treasurer.....	Danny May.....	0414 444 100 contact@wagner.org.au
Secretary.....	Ross Whitelaw.....	rosswhitelaw35@gmail.com
Membership Secretary.....	Julie Clarke.....	jmc50wagner@gmail.com
Members.....	Nick Dorsch.....	0419 751 694
	Robert Mitchell	
	Margaret Whealy	
	June Donsworth	
Quarterly Editor.....	Mike Day.....	michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com
Artists Liaison.....	Leona Geeves.....	lg03415@gmail.com
Webmaster.....	Lis Bergmann.....	lisbergmann89@gmail.com
Public Officer.....	Alasdair Beck.....	0414 357 441

REPORTS ON RECENT WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 11 FEBRUARY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.30PM DVD ERICH LEINSDORF IN REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

Parsifal: Prelude Act I; Act I Scene II Interlude; Prelude Act III, Interludes from Act III

Members enjoyed this fascinating glimpse of a master conductor encouraging and inspiring his musicians

2.00PM TALK SIMON O'NEILL ONZM TALKED, PLAYED AND SANG FOR US | Report by Minnie Biggs



Arriving from New Zealand, in shorts and a black jacket, Simon went straight to warm up the piano, and his voice which could be heard down at Edgecliff. He had lots to say and sing about Gurrelieder which, though seldom performed, he knows by heart. He is one of only two who sing it, the other being our Stuart Skelton, with whom he often exchanges costumes for their roles.

He went on about his Siegmunds, his favourite character (until he refers to other favourites), sung about a hundred times, and Tristans, of which a singer has only a limited number in him. (His cv covers two closely typed

pages). On to the varying acoustics in different halls: sing the first bars ahead of the orchestra so they come out together from the Met's wide stage and huge orchestra pit, into the four thousand seat hall. There are two hot spots on the stage at La Scala which are usually pre-empted by the soprano. At Bayreuth he is singing with the orchestra underneath. About his preference for productions, he falls in love with each one, at least the orchestra and the conductor, all that really matter. Polite and kindly he is, a Barenboim kid together with Simone, from a South Island regular family, played rugby when young.

He loves Wagner Societies as the W.S. of Northern California gave him a first scholarship. Let's hear it for Wagner Societies!

SUNDAY 19 MAY AT GOETHE INSTITUT

2.00PM CONCERT WITH SOPRANO VALDA WILSON AND BASS-BARITONE EUGENE RAGGIO, ACCOMPANIED BY KATHERINE DAY AND THOMAS VICTOR JOHNSON

This was a marvellous concert; the result of tireless organisation by our Artists Liaison, Leona Geeves; we experienced superb performances by exceptionally talented singers (previously sponsored by WSNSW); and wonderfully expressive accompaniment by sensitive pianists. The capacity audience was captivated by Valda's witty explanation of the conflicting emotions expressed by the Marschallin in her Act I monologue in *Der Rosenkavalier*. The audience was even more delighted by her actual personification of the role. Many in the audience were in tears during the heart-breaking father

and daughter scene that ends Act III of *Die Walküre*. This was the first time Valda has sung Brünnhilde in public; she has a wonderfully clear and powerful voice and was totally believable as the wilful young maiden. Extraordinary to hear her in Wagner and two weeks later in Purcell, in Pinchgut's *Dido and Aeneas*. She reminded us that Jessye Norman had also performed both roles. Valda and Eugene are excellent actors, with terrific personal chemistry between them, and they used the Goethe Institut space to great effect. Eugene has a very strong stage presence and was a convincingly anguished



Eugene with new WSNSW banner



Singing Happy Birthday dear Richard



Barbara de Rome's cake

Amfortas in his opening aria. Katherine provided a charming and beautifully played Brahms interlude and Thomas completed the *Die Walküre* Act with some truly magical fire music. Thomas has been a WSNSW supported artist, and has just returned from coaching and playing at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin.

At the curtain call Leona thanked the artists and presented them with our customary gift of Brangayne wine. Leona reminded members and guests of the support that the WSNSW gives to young artists and encouraged members to continue to donate.

The concert was followed by bubbles and cake to celebrate Wagner's birthday. The cake was made by Barbara de Rome and was up to her usual delicious standard. Members generously provided an array of tasty sandwiches

and cakes. This event was the first time we have displayed the new WSNSW banner – very generously supplied by member Dr Lourdes St George. The design shows one of the 'heroes' used in the Adelaide *Ring*, purchased at the auction of the props after the production was over.

Programme

- **R Wagner:** *Wehrvolles Erbe* (Amfortas) from Act I of *Parsifal* Eugene Raggio accompanied by Katherine Day
- **R Strauss:** *Da geht er hin* (Marschallin's monologue) from Act I of *Der Rosenkavalier* Valda Wilson accompanied by Katherine Day
- **J Brahms:** *Waltzes 1 – 4, Op 39* Katherine Day
- **R Wagner:** *War es so schmäählich* and *Leb wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind!* from Act III of *Die Walküre* Valda Wilson and Eugene Raggio accompanied by Thomas Victor Johnson.

WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH AT 7.00PM ON ZOOM

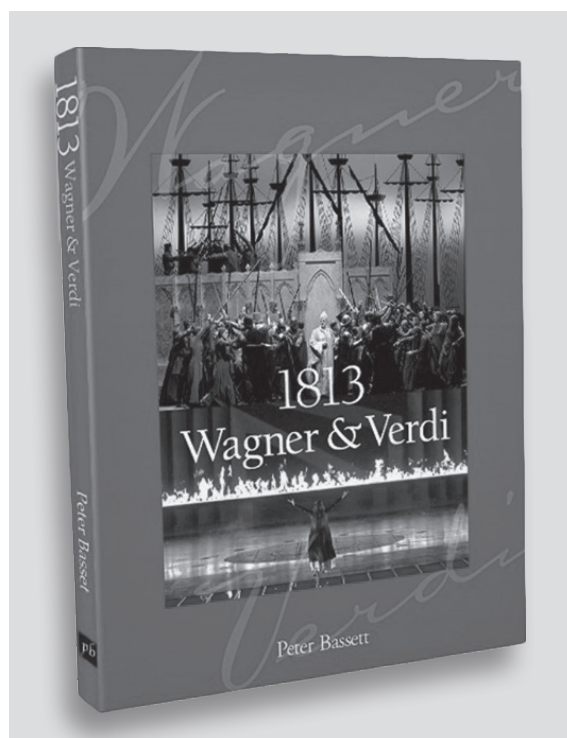
BROADCASTER CHRISTOPHER COOK TALKED ABOUT "WAGNER IN BRITAIN"

In response to a wide range of questions put by WSNSW secretary **Ross Whitelaw**, veteran BBC broadcaster and Wagner specialist **Christopher Cook** gave us a fascinating summary of the history of Wagner performances in Britain; from Wagner conducting concerts in the Royal Albert Hall in 1877, trying to raise money for Bayreuth, to the Pappano/Kosky *Das Rheingold* in 2023.

Sharing the 1877 concerts with Wagner, was the great conductor **Hans Richter**, who was critical in the promotion of Wagner's work in England. (See separate article in this issue). Another great champion of Wagner in Britain was **Sir Thomas Beecham**, who gave many memorable performances in the 1930's with the best

international singers; very popular with English audiences.

In 1954 **Leslie Hurry** designed the first post-war Ring – very influenced by the New Bayreuth innovations of Wieland Wagner in his 1951 *Parsifal*. Christopher highlighted the importance of the Colin Davis/Goetz Friedrich *Ring* at Covent Garden in the 70's. This was the first British staged 'Concept' production, with an excellent balance between the humanity of the characters and a great sense of theatrical spectacle. He also praised the ENO Goodall *Ring* and other productions since then and pointed out the interesting links between Knappertsbusch in Bayreuth and Reginald Goodall and Anthony Negus in London and Longborough. Christopher thought the recent ROH *Das Rheingold* was very true to Wagner's ideas and is optimistic that the full Kosky Cycle will set the standards for future Rings in UK.



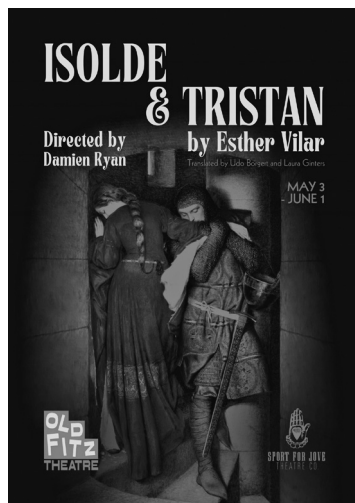
Peter Bassett's study of these two great figures of the nineteenth century is richly illustrated in full colour with art works drawn from opera houses, museums and private collections. It features insightful commentaries and magnificent photographs of locations associated with the composers and their works. An award-winning publication of 225 pages.

For other publications by Peter Bassett, see: www.peterbassett.com.au

SPECIAL PRICE - \$50 including postage to anywhere within Australia. Order by emailing pgbassett@outlook.com

DR TERENCE WATSON'S REVIEW OF *ISOLDE & TRISTAN*

Isolde and Tristan - Sport for Jove Theatre, at the Old Fitzroy Theatre, 22 September 2023



Cast: Isolde - **Emma Wright**; Tristan - **Tom Wilson**; King Marke - **Sean O'Shea**; Soprano: **Octavia Barron Martin**; Pianist: **Justin Leong**.

Creative Team: Director: **Damien Ryan**; Design: **Tom Bannerman**; Lighting: **Sophie Pekbilimli**; Costume Designer: **Bernadette Ryan**. Translators: **Udo Borgert & Laura Ginters** (from the original German). A word of appreciation to the translators for the wonderfully idiomatic, witty, and direct text for the actors and the audience.

Most readers of this wonderful Quarterly will hold Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in high regard as one of the peaks of Western Art for its powerful music and moving story of love overcoming all odds,

and for its biographical connections with Wagner's frustrated desire for Mathilde Wesendonck. His artwork distils many of the aesthetic, religious, and psychological preoccupations of contemporaneous writers and the broader German cultural life into a tautly constructed three act drama culminating in the ultimate transcendental meta-climax that takes us outside the world of the artwork into Wagner's fantasy world of *Gefühl*—unending sensuous Feeling, beyond Consciousness—“*unbewußt—höchste Lust,*”—“unaware/unconscious—in highest bliss.”

The production of German-Argentinian dramatist **Esther Vilar's** *Isolde and Tristan* by Sport for Jove is a dynamic 100 minutes on a tiny stage representing the deck of the ship Tristan is helming to take Isolde to her future husband King Marke of Cornwall. The shiny black stage, with hints of seafaring in a mast, a tiller, and a rope ladder, slowly receded into a background for an exploration of the inner worlds of the characters. The Sport for Jove multi-awarded company, founded in 2009, is a wonderfully innovative, provocative group that has presented many adventurous, powerful dramatic experiences around Sydney, including gardens, small halls and theatres, and in festivals (<https://www.sportforjove.com.au/about>). The play was apparently premiered in Sydney in 1997 in which Damien Ryan played in the defunct Lookout theatre in Woollahra. He knows the play inside-out! Only 55 audience members can fit into the theatre, making it suitably intimate for such a story about our supposed innermost desires and needs.

Vilar's play aspires to re-imagine Wagner's narrative from many contemporary perspectives. One of these is to strip away almost all the transcendental imaginings and plant the action firmly on the deck of the ship, as it pitches, yaws, and rolls on the ocean. However, by the end of the play, the ship has become a metaphor, like those familiar from popular culture and science: a spacecraft alone in interstellar space, a submarine deep in the ocean, or our earth circling one of

billions of suns in an infinite universe. Vilar reinforces this impression by having Marke taken to the ship by longboat, as he is in Wagner's artwork. However, he decides to take a scenic nuptial cruise (to Cornwall or London is unclear). The ship is struck by storms, then becalmed, and then lost because the stars are obscured. The characters and their actions thus become symbolic of human beings trying to find love and meaning in that universe. While the stage stays still, the actors throw themselves across and onto the stage to represent the storm-struck ship, as well as being thrown, pushed, pulled onto the deck by another character. Each of the characters at some point threatens the others. This was a very physical production, unlike most productions of *Tristan und Isolde* in which the characters rarely move far or energetically.

Vilar's main strategy for what is often called “decentring” in modern literary critical theory and some philosophy is to make Isolde the main actor, and Tristan and Marke as reactors to her various moods, stratagems, and desires. Isolde as the focus gives Vilar the chance to make telling points about the inequality and iniquity of the control to which she is subjected by the two men in different ways. Since they have all the physical, social, and political power between them, Isolde must play the cards she holds—a beautiful body, the men's desire for her, and her great intelligence and objectivity about them. One of the striking illustrations of the power plays is when Marke orders Tristan, as captain of the ship, anachronistically, to marry him to Isolde. Tristan, through gritted teeth, asks Marke if he takes Isolde for his wife and Marke agrees; then Tristan begins to ask Isolde if she likewise takes Marke, but Marke brusquely interrupts, pointing out that she is now his chattel, and she now has no right to agree or not.

A tall, willowy, striking Emma Wright grabbed the role with both hands. With an entrancingly lyrical Irish accent, she displayed the character's full-bodied presence, intelligence, belief in her own status, sense of irony and humour, capacity to take and use power, and her right to the satisfaction of her emotional life on her own terms. In contrast, Tristan is a hunky young man, good with a sword and a tiller, and an impressive, physically expressive stage presence. But he is out of his depths with this woman, who enjoys controlling him like a marionette, according to her mood and desires, so that he cannot resist his own growing desire for her. Marke is even easier for Isolde to play. Vilar portrays him as a vain, vacuous older man with an unwarranted sense of his own importance,

potency, and power, who happily succumbs to the delusion that Isolde really desires him for himself, rather than for her own ends.

The ends to which Isolde is working take us deeper into the complications that motivate Vilar's reimagining of Wagner's artwork. The first end is to take revenge on the killer of her betrothed Morald. The second end emerges slowly in the form of her desire to avenge Ireland's ignominious defeat and subjection to foreign control by marrying Marke, killing him, becoming queen, and restoring Ireland's freedom. The first end is familiar to us from Wagner's artwork, but there the desire for revenge is quenched by the love potion that releases their desire for each other; for Vilar the end is different. The second end is Vilar's way of introducing one of her main contemporary concerns by means of deliberate historical anachronisms.

Isolde and Marke make many remarks about the ways in which Cornwall has subjected the people of Ireland and the country to coercion, despoliation, and despair—essentially slavery. Vilar reinforces these anachronistic-seeming references by having the three characters refer to Marke as King of Cornwall, of England, and of Britain, and to long years of colonisation. By this means, Vilar expands Wagner's story, decentres it from a Romance, into a world of contentious, bitter relations for which Tristan and his army's conquest for King Marke stands as the Ur-crime against Ireland. In Wagner's transcendentalising of the narrative—taking it out of any real world context, we might be left to ponder that Wagner's King Marke is left to deal off-stage with the politico-social and personal consequences of the mess created by Tristan's and Isolde's death-pact. Vilar's Marke also leaves such a mess, but through different means.

While Wagner's King Marke is, for many people, the most sympathetic character in the artwork (along with Brangäne and Kurwenal), Vilar's Marke can be read as her comment on the world's primarily male political leaders. Vilar introduces Marke just over half way through the play, and he is on stage for much of the second half. Building on the characterisation she has developed for him, she suggests he is a symbol for all the deluded, venal, incompetent, brutal, greedy, lying, and stupid men who have come to dominate large portions of the world's people. Given the way in which O'Shea creates his shambolic version of King Marke, I guess he has taken some inspiration from a recent British PM.

In Vilar's take on Wagner's artwork, the ending is ambiguous, as Isolde's motivation has been throughout. One of Isolde's strategies is very familiar, and dangerous—to let the men get so drunk that they are disinhibited and physically compromised, and then spring her trap, but she also seems to drink quite a bit. A lot of Irish whiskey seems to be drunk during this production (though the level in the bottle hardly changes!). They are all drunk when Marke staggers onto the deck and finds the lovers *in flagrante delicto* and initially condemns Tristan to death, but then relents, but too late.

Isolde is equivocal about her feelings for Tristan, especially in her decision to spike her and Tristan's last drinks with the

poison she has carried in her locket. In her final words she first laughs at Tristan, proclaiming her successful revenge for Morald's death, then cries, distraught, that she loves him. They die, as Wagner's characters do, Isolde on top of Tristan. To reinforce her point about the randomness of the control of power in a contingent world, Vilar's Marke dies as well, from causes that are not evident: perhaps a broken heart, perhaps alcoholic poisoning, perhaps a heart attack. The play ends with a slow fading of the light on the tableau of the three bodies, accompanied by Leong playing the final bars of the *Verklärung* (transfiguration) (commonly called *Liebestod*), but there is no transfiguration here.

The juxtaposition of played and sung excerpts from the artwork, a feature of the original production, against Vilar's decentred narrative increased the complexity of the experience, especially for those of us in the audience who are familiar with Wagner's version. At appropriate moments, the piano reduction alone, or with the vocal part, combined with the characters' reactions to each other, gave me goosebumps and brought tears to my eyes. In a less well-directed production, these moments could have been reduced to schmaltz. Here, though, the musical elements were mostly off-stage and in a dark corner so that they did not detract from the drama.

I hope that this production can be revived sometime soon for those Wagnerians, and others, who could not fit into the small Old Fitzroy Theatre, so they can enjoy this remarkably clever, well directed and acted (and played and sung) take on Wagner's take on a German take on a French Romance based on a Celtic story originating sometime in the 12th century.

As a footnote, Vilar achieved some fame in 1971 with her book *Der Dressierte Mann* (The Manipulated Man) in which she claimed, according to a New York Times interview with her by Judith Weinraub:

“...men are slaves to women, working all their lives to support women, while women choose a life of domestic idleness, working either intermittently or not at all.”

“A married woman always has the choice to work or not. Men never do,” said Miss Vilar, who is convinced that most women can complete their essential housework in two hours each morning.

“Women always work with a net under them; they can let themselves fall. Women work for luxuries, like lace curtains and wall-to-wall carpeting. Men work because it's their responsibility to support a family.”

(www.nytimes.com/1972/06/13/archives/she-says-its-the-men-who-are-enslaved.html).

Unlike many “thesis” plays I've seen over the years, I did not find these sentiments dictating the form or content of the play, though, in retrospect, the play could be read as a dramatisation of the sentiments. The important criterion, though, for me, is that the play persuaded me that the characters and situations rang true, and its decentring of Wagner's artwork added to my understanding of it.

A RING WITHOUT BOUNDARIES PART 1

The text of Peter Bassett's talk in the first Brisbane *Ring* Symposium on 2nd December 2023

A Ring without boundaries seems an appropriate way to describe Opera Australia's Brisbane production, which is a *Ring* for the modern world. The whole idea of an absence of boundaries comes from Wagner himself, who wrote: "Whereas the Greek work of art expressed the spirit of a splendid nation, the work of art of the future is intended to express the spirit of free people irrespective of all national boundaries. The national element in it must be no more than an ornament, an added individual charm, and not a confining boundary."

Most people are drawn to Wagner's works through his music, and rightly so. Ironically though, the music is so complete in itself, so vivid and expressive in conveying the drama, that this must present the ultimate challenge for a stage director. What to show? How much to add? As director Chen Shi-Zheng has put it: "Wagner should be allowed to speak for himself".

And what *did* Wagner say for himself? In 1871, when he was working on the score of *Götterdämmerung*, he delivered a lecture to the Royal Academy of Arts in Berlin entitled *The Destiny of Opera*. It was a final attempt to persuade his contemporaries to his view of opera's future. He admitted that it had been hard going, and he likened the experience to being a lonely wanderer soliloquising to a chorus of croaking frogs in the theatre critics' swamp!

At the core of his argument was the conviction, already put into practice, that an operatic score should be liberated from the tyranny of arbitrary musical patterns, that it should derive its coherence from its relationship to the drama, and that it should observe only such formal requirements as evolved spontaneously from within itself. If these principles strike us today as not especially revolutionary it's because we are heirs to Wagner's legacy. He had made himself the master of everything to do with the creation of an opera, and in this, as in so many things, he was a phenomenon. How many composers today write their own libretti? Hardly any. And yet, his mature operas exhibit a unique degree of integration because every aspect of them is a product of the same creative impulse and the same creative mind. As Nietzsche observed, it is only "the rarest of powers" that can exercise control over two worlds as disparate as poetry and music. Wagner argued for a new type of poetic text that took account of the particular attributes and constraints of the German language – so different from the Italian. From such a text, he said, would emerge a dramatic, declamatory vocal line, often unlyrical and un-vocal to the point where the human voice was treated almost as an instrument of the orchestra.

Wagner's insistence that formal musical structures should evolve spontaneously from within a work, and not be imposed upon it, was exemplified by *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* when the *Ring* was still far from finished. This allowed him to demonstrate to post-*Tristan* sceptics, like Hanslick, his mastery of musical forms such as the chorale, the fugally-



Peter Bassett and *Ring* Director/Designer Chen Shi-Zheng

inspired toccata, and the quintet. He was making the point that his new music was far from formless – it just followed a course that was unfamiliar. *Die Meistersinger* is a 'masterwork' in which the composer demonstrates the rules that guide his art. It even follows the structure of a traditional 'master-song' as explained by Hans Sachs to Walther von Stolzing in Act III.

The conductor Philippe Auguin has said: "Wagner's 11 major works are 11 different worlds. There are 11 different Wagners". Although the composer didn't complete the score of *Die Meistersinger* until 1867, he had drafted its earliest scenario in 1845, just a few months after *Tannhäuser*. And how different was the Wagner of 1845 from the composer of 1867! In 1845, his aim had been solely to balance the aristocratic world of the Minnesingers of the 12th and 13th centuries with the down-to-earth bourgeois Mastersingers of the 15th and 16th centuries. *Tannhäuser*, which he labelled a 'grand romantic opera in three acts', was undeniably operatic, and it demonstrates *exactly* what Wagner was distancing himself from in his later works, including the *Ring*. A good example of the 'operatic' *Tannhäuser* is the rapturous duet between Elisabeth and Tannhäuser after the latter has returned to the stately Wartburg from the indulgent realm of the Venusberg. They sing a rhyming text which translates as:

We praise the hour of greeting,
We praise the power of love,
That looks upon our meeting
With blessings from above.
At last the spell is broken;
New life is given to me.
To love I have awoken,
And love has set me free!

This is romantic opera, pure and simple. It is not music drama.

While it is true that Wagner didn't coin the term 'Music Drama', he did distinguish between his later works and what he considered to be the 'debased' category of 'opera'. Indeed, in his 1851 *Communication To My Friends* he wrote: "I shall write no more operas, but as I don't care to invent any arbitrary name for these works, I'll simply call them dramas, since that at least indicates the standpoint from which they're to be understood." Elsewhere he used the term "musical drama". So, we can say that the *Ring* is truly without the boundaries of old-fashioned romantic opera. In respect of the technicalities of singing, Wagner coached his performers in declamation, intonation, phrasing, and dynamics, and urged the greatest clarity in presenting a character's emotions.

A good example of the dramatic eloquence and flexibility of the *Ring* is to be found in the Nibelheim scene of *Das Rheingold*. 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 down through a fissure in the rock to the subterranean caverns where Alberich has enslaved the rest of his people. There is a physical descent with a downward rush and sulphurous chromaticism, and also a psychological journey. The motives driving the orchestral sound are those of Alberich forswearing the love of woman, the gold, and the ring, the spurning of Alberich by the Rhinemaidens (the latter theme transforming itself into the hellish and unforgettable hammering of anvils) and, pervading everything, the sinister harmonies of the ring. Into a world of bountiful nature has come the lust for power, with which love can never coexist. We are plunged into moral darkness as Alberich sets about enslaving his people - even his own brother.

This is a striking manifestation of Wagner's theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the fusion of text, music, scene, and action in the service of the drama. All of the considerable dramatic detail: the contest of wits between Loge and Alberich, Alberich's plan to rule the world, Loge's taunting of Alberich, the latter's use of the Tarnhelm to transform himself into a serpent and a toad, and then his capture, are ingeniously arranged as a nine-part rondo in which a recurrent musical refrain - a rondo theme if you like - alternates with four contrasting episodes. As elsewhere in the *Ring*, the apparently free form of the work belies its carefully organised structure. Listen, for example, to Wotan's angry response to Alberich's threat to conquer the gods. "Get lost, mischievous fool!", says Wotan. "What did he say?" asks Alberich. Loge urges Wotan to keep his cool, and then he continues to flatter the Nibelung, until the latter is tricked and captured. How remarkable the *Ring* is, and how different it is from anything that went before.

Music was never an end in itself for the mature Wagner. In his treatise *Opera and Drama*, he argued that the error into which opera had fallen was that music, the *means* of expression, had become merely the *end*, while the *true* end, which is drama, had become merely the *means*. This was undoubtedly so for many other opera composers who cannibalised their own works in order to meet deadlines and to make the most of tunes that had been well-received. Speed was of the essence, as Rossini learned at a young age. As an 18-year-old, he was summoned

to Venice to finish an opera abandoned by another composer. It was called *The Marriage Contract*, and Rossini completed it in just a few days. The contract of the title was between someone called Tobia Mill and a Canadian called Mr Slook. Slook had been promised the hand in marriage of Mill's daughter, Fanny. Not surprisingly, Fanny Mill was reluctant to become Fanny Slook, and so she married somebody else. The end!

Rossini became notorious for recycling. For instance, he used the same aria for a Spanish nobleman in one opera, the King of Persia in another and the Emperor of Rome in a third. The famous overture to *The Barber of Seville* was written for an opera set in the Syrian desert - *Aureliano in Palmira* - and then re-used for another one set in Elizabethan England, before ending up in 18th century Spain. Donizetti did it too, recycling his music in half a dozen operas including *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Anna Bolena*. He was the "fast food" man of music, composing more than seventy operas in thirty-years, finishing one of his finest in eleven days, and a second in six weeks. And then there was Offenbach, a native of Cologne who rose to fame in the Second French Empire of Napoleon III. Offenbach's opera *Die Rheinmädchen* - 'The Rhine Nixies' or, if you like, 'The Rhinemaidens' - featured music that came from his ballet *Le Papillon*, and music used later as the Barcarolle in *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

The re-hashing of music from one opera to another was not something that interested Wagner. He insisted that music had to be true to dramatic situations and characters, and when, in *Die Meistersinger*, Eva sympathises with Hans Sachs for letting her choose Walther von Stolzing instead of him, Sachs replies: "My child, I know a sad tale of Tristan and Isolde. Hans Sachs was wise and wanted none of King Marke's type of happiness." And suddenly the music shifts to another planet - that of *Tristan und Isolde* - before returning to the sunny world of *Die Meistersinger*. There is no way that these two worlds could ever be confused.

Artistic integrity was what Wagner was about, and this meant that the composer was god, which didn't go down well with some singers. Gone were the days when headstrong singers would count the bars of music allocated to them and either demand extra ones or just insert additional music themselves, sometimes from entirely different operas. Rossini remarked that he didn't mind some changes, "but to leave not a note of what I composed, even in the recitatives - well, that is unendurable."

In Wagner's works there were no opportunities for applause or encores, and no curtain calls until the end. The cast members of the first *Ring* were almost in revolt because Wagner wouldn't let them step out of character and take curtain calls. Some were seething so much, they refused to attend the post-performance party, and Franz Betz, who had sung Wotan, threatened never to return to Bayreuth.

Wagner was ahead of his time and in advance of Freud in describing the psychological importance of raising the unconscious to consciousness. We find this over and over in the *Ring*, and especially in the treatment of the character of Wotan. In the crucial scene with Brünnhilde in act two of *Die*



Alberich (Warwick Fyfe) and Mime (Andreas Conrad) in the Brisbane Ring

Walküre, Wotan puts himself on the psychoanalyst's couch in a way that hardly seemed possible in *Das Rheingold*, even in those moments of self-doubt. At first, he hesitates, not wanting to lower his guard, too frightened to confront his inner self. Only when Brünnhilde convinces him that she really is his 'will' - his *alter ego* - does he let go, and everything comes pouring out. "With loathing, I can find only myself in all that I have created", he says. "I must forsake and murder the son whom I love and who trusts me. Away then with lordly splendour, divine pomp, and shameful boasting. Let everything that I've built fall apart. I desire only one thing: the end, the end!" Remarkably, the spirit of this amazing scene flows not from mythological sources but from the composer's intuitive understanding. The musical expression of Wotan's inner torment is truly gripping.



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Given the dramatic richness of Wagner's music, what more could a staged production contribute? Some say that it's all about the social role of the theatre - bringing people of different backgrounds together and drawing attention to contemporary issues. How very different opera was when it began in the ducal courts of northern Italy in the 16th century and then spread throughout Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. For decades – indeed centuries – opera was entertainment for the ruling classes, and even in Wagner's time, the Kings of Saxony, Bavaria and Prussia, the Habsburg and Napoleonic emperors, the Tsars of Russia, and various rulers of the Italian states, either built their own theatres or oversaw the management of existing ones. When he was Second Kapellmeister at the Saxon court in the 1840s, Wagner developed a *Plan for a National German Theatre for the Kingdom of Saxony* in which he advocated the removal of the theatre from the control of the court, the creation of a democratic association of dramatists and composers to elect the director and determine artistic policy, and the foundation of a theatre workshop to train young artists, producers and technicians. His proposals were treated with disdain, which only fed his revolutionary instincts. Later, he tried much the same thing at the Bavarian court of Ludwig II, but the committee that was charged with giving effect to his report met once or twice, scratched its collective head, and decided that his proposals were too expensive. So that was that. One of his motivations for building a festival theatre in Bayreuth (and not in Munich which the King wanted) was to establish a school for the training of singers and actors, and the development of other theatrical skills. Courses were to be spread over six years and students would be given opportunities to perform in his productions. He was determined to prepare up-and-coming singers, répétiteurs and conductors in a music school environment rather than rely on the *ad hoc* engagements in the traditional way. Alas, it didn't happen because the first Bayreuth Festival left an enormous deficit and there was no way he could mount a new Festival until 1882 when *Parsifal* had its premiere.

Using opera to dramatise contemporary issues sounds like a modern idea but, in fact, Wagner had done it 190 years ago when he embarked on *Das Liebesverbot* ('The Ban on Love') at the age of twenty-one. Motivating him at that time was his membership of the Young Germany Movement which rejected reactionary political systems and bourgeois morality in favour of political and sensual freedom. Artists were expected to portray contemporary realities rather than romantic fairy realms or classical fantasies.

Eventually though, Wagner moved away from the idea of the theatre as a vehicle for social and political change, and his new approach was truly revolutionary for its time. His operas acquired philosophical dimensions, auditoriums were darkened, orchestras concealed, patrons obliged to focus on the stage, and optical tricks played to wrap the spectator in a dream. A thousand people could be watching the same performance, but each did so from within a very personal sensory world. Opera was no longer about society but about the individual.

End of Part 1 To be continued in the September Quarterly

THE BAYREUTH FESTIVAL

FAMOUS VISITORS' THOUGHTS ABOUT THE BAYREUTH FESTIVAL

Extracts from *Visits to Valhalla: The Ecstasy and the Agony* by Carolyn Abbate

<https://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/26/arts/music-visits-to-valhalla-the-ecstasy-and-the-agony.html>

Edvard Grieg, the Norwegian composer, after attending a rehearsal of the first Bayreuth "Ring":

"I tell myself that, in spite of much to criticize - the inadequate characterization of the gods, the ceaseless modulations and wearying chromaticism of the harmonies, the end result of leaving the listener totally exhausted - this music drama is the creation of a true giant in the history of art, comparable in his innovation only to Michaelangelo. In music, there is nobody to approach Wagner." George Bernard Shaw, a most passionate Wagnerian, realized that Wagnerian longueurs might tax people of "ordinary imagination," but wrote scathingly of the bored philistines at the 1896 Bayreuth "Ring":

"*Die Walküre* is endured by the average man because it contains four scenes for which he would sit out a Scotch sermon, or even a House of Commons debate. These are the love duet in the first act, Brünnhilde's announcement of death in the second, the ride of the Valkyries and the 'fire-charm' in the third. For them the ordinary playgoer endures hours of Wotan, with Christopher Sly's prayer in his heart. 'Would 'twere over!' Now, I am one of those elect souls who are deeply moved by Wotan. I grant you that as a long-winded, one-eyed gentleman backing a certain champion in a fight and henpecked out of his fancy because his wife objects to the moral character of the champion, he is a dreary person indeed . . . but to one who has understood all its beauties, its lofty aspirations, its tragedy, there is nothing trivial, nothing tedious in *Die Walküre*."

Sir Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert and Sullivan), attending the same performance:

"Orchestra rough and ragged. Vocalists beneath contempt. Sometimes stage-management is good, but much is conventional and childish. Difficult to know how Wagner could have gotten up any enthusiasm or interest in such a lying, thieving, blackguardly set of low creatures as all the characters in his opera prove themselves to be."

Leo Delibes, the French composer, declared that he preferred those Wagnerian operas in which "there are girls, because, you know, girls are always amusing." Vincent d'Indy, a fellow French composer who saw the Munich performances of *Rheingold* and *Walküre* in 1869-70, thought the *Ring* was not opera, but a sung epic poem, and far better not staged at all, for the *Ring* admirably fulfills all the requirements of epic, and shows the tremendous weaknesses.

Camille Saint-Saens, another Frenchman, at the *Ring* in 1886, marvelled:

"People who were incapable of playing the easiest things on the piano and who did not know a word of German spent whole evenings working through the most difficult music in the world . . . Wagner, for them, had invented everything; no music existed at all before him and none could exist after . . . Wagnermania is an inexcusable stupidity, yet in the end Wangerphobia is a real sickness."

A "pilgrimage to Bayreuth" up until the early 20th century was not just homage to Wagner: it was difficult to find performances of the *Ring*, and impossible to hear *Parsifal*, outside Wagner's own theatre. So many people travelled.

Igor Stravinsky 1882 - 1971, in 1912, was one of these, and he suffered cramps and depression:

"The very atmosphere of the theatre, its design and its setting, seemed lugubrious. It was like a crematorium . . . the order to devote oneself to contemplation was given by a blast of trumpets. I sat humble and motionless, but at the end of a quarter of an hour I could not bear any more. My limbs were numb and I had to change my position. Crack! Now I had done it! My chair had made a noise which drew on me the furious scowls of hundreds of pairs of eyes. Once more I withdrew into myself, but I could think of only one thing, and that was the end of the act, which would put an end to my martyrdom."

HANS RICHTER 1843 - 1916 CONDUCTOR OF THE FIRST RING CYCLE AT BAYREUTH IN 1876



Eva, Isolde, Siegfried Wagner and Daniela and Blandine Von Bülow with Hans Richter

Hans Richter (János Richter), 1843 – 1916, was an Austrian–Hungarian orchestral and operatic conductor. Richter was born in Raab, Hungary. His mother was opera-singer Jozefa Csazenszky, who sang the role of Venus in the first production of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in Vienna (1857). He studied at the Conservatory of Vienna. He had a particular interest in the horn, and developed his conducting career at several different opera houses in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He became associated with Richard Wagner in the 1860s, when Wagner hired him for the job of preparing a fair copy manuscript of his latest opera, *Die Meistersinger*. After that Wagner recommended him to Hans von Bülow to be a chorus master at the Munich Court Opera (1867). The next year, Bülow made him his assistant conductor. Richter answered Wagner's request to put conducting aside and work on finishing the copying of the scores to the *Ring* operas. As trumpeter, he participated in the first performance of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*, and played in the foyer of Wagner's house in Tribschen as a surprise for Wagner's future wife. there. In 1876 he conducted the premiere performance of the entire *Ring* cycle to inaugurate the Bayreuth Festspielhaus.

Richter was first brought to England by Wagner in 1877 to conduct six operatic concerts in London. The impact made by Richter (then 32 years old) on the capital's orchestral players was enormous. They had never been rehearsed so thoroughly, nor with such discipline as that of a genuine musician rather than a showman; nothing was allowed to slip through as the fundamentals were revisited. Intonation was scrutinised, details brought out, tempi rationalised, notes corrected. His practical knowledge (he played every orchestral instrument) proved formidable and no weak player felt secure. He usually conducted rehearsals and performances of orchestral concerts and operas from memory. The living composers whose works he introduced to British audiences were the greats in whose company he could be found, Wagner, Brahms, Bruckner, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Glazunov, Stanford, Parry, and Elgar. For 20 years from 1879 he toured the length and breadth of Britain with his Richter Orchestra. <https://mahlerfoundation.org/mahler/contemporaries/hans-richter/>

THE BAYREUTH FESTIVAL THEATRE

Wagner's speech on the laying of the foundation stone of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus on 22 May 1872 (Wagner's 59th birthday)



Richard and Cosima Wagner. Photo taken in Vienna on 9th May 1872 by Fritz Luckhardt (1843-1894)

'My friends and valued patrons'

Through you I am today placed in a position surely never before occupied by any artist. You believe in my promise to establish a special theatre for the Germans and you are giving me the means to set that theatre before you in the clearest possible outlines. For the present this purpose is to be served by the temporary theatre for which we are today laying the foundation stone. When we meet again in this place, you will be greeted by a building in whose

characteristic qualities you will immediately read the history of the idea that it embodies. You will see an outer shell constructed from the very simplest of materials, which at best will remind you of those timber structures that are knocked together in German towns and cities for gatherings of singers and similar cooperative events and pulled down again as soon as the festival is over. But as soon as you enter the building, it will become increasingly clear to you which of its features are intended to last. Here too you will initially find only the simplest of materials and a total absence of ornament; you may perhaps be surprised to find not even the few ornaments with which the wooden halls already familiar to you are so attractively decked out.

Conversely, you will find in the proportions and arrangement of the auditorium and its seating the expression of an idea which, once you have grasped it, will immediately place you in a new and different relation to the stage spectacle that you are to see, a relation quite distinct from the one you had previously known when visiting other theatres. If this impression is pure and perfect, then the mysterious entry of the music will prepare you for the unveiling and clear presentation of onstage images that will seem to rise up before you from an ideal world of dreams and reveal to you the whole reality of a noble art's most meaningful illusion. Here, finally, nothing will speak to you any longer in mere hints and in a provisional form: so far as it lies within the artistic powers of the present day, you will be offered only the most perfect staging and acting.

Thus, my plan, which transfers what I have called the most enduring part of our building to the most perfect execution of that part of it which is aimed at creating a sense of sublime illusion. If I am to trust myself to ensure that the intended artistic achievement turns out a complete success, then I take heart from a hope that stems from despair itself. I trust in the German spirit, and I hope that it may be revealed to us in those areas of our lives in which it has languished in the most pitifully distorted form, not least in the life of our public art. In this, I trust above all in the spirit of German music because I know how willingly and

brightly it burns in our musicians as soon as a German master wakens it within them. I trust in dramatic actors and singers because I have learnt that they can be transfigured and awoken to a new life as soon as a German master leads them back from the idle pursuit of a harmful pastime to the true observance of so vital a calling. I trust in our artists, and I may proclaim this aloud on a day on which, at my simple friendly bidding, so select a band has foregathered here from the most disparate corners of our fatherland; when, forgetful of themselves and delighting in the work of art, they perform our great Beethoven's wonderful symphony for you today as a festive greeting, we all may surely tell ourselves that the work we intend to start today will be no deceptive mirage, even if we artists can vouch only for the truth of the idea we are to realize with it.

But to whom should I turn in order to ensure that this ideal achievement acquires a lasting solidity and that the stage receives its monumental protective casing?

Our undertaking has often been described of late as the establishment of a 'National Theatre of Bayreuth'. I am not justified in accepting this title. Where is the 'nation' that might build this theatre? When the French National Assembly recently debated the question of state support for the major Paris theatres, the speakers all argued with some passion that they should demand the continuation of and, indeed, an increase in these subsidies because they owed it not merely to France but to Europe too to maintain these theatres, Europe having grown used to receiving from them the laws of its own intellectual culture. Can we imagine the embarrassment and bewilderment that a German parliament would feel if it had to deal with a similar question? Its discussions would perhaps end in the comforting conclusion that our theatres require no state support since the French National Assembly is already providing for their needs too. At best our theatre would be treated as the German Reich was treated by our various regional parliaments only a few years ago, namely, as a chimera.

While the plan for a true German theatre was developing before my mind's eye, I was none the less obliged to admit that I would be abandoned from both within and without, were I to present this plan to the nation. But many people are no doubt convinced that although one man may not be believed, many such people may be: it should ultimately be possible to float a gigantic limited company that would invite an architect to build a magnificent theatre somewhere or other and that we could boldly call it a German National Theatre in the belief that a German national art of the theatre would emerge of its own accord. The whole world now firmly believes in perpetual progress, a progress, moreover, that in our own day is extremely rapid, even though we have no clear idea of where exactly we are going, still less what is meant by this term, whereas those who have really brought something new into the world have never been asked about their attitude towards their progressive surroundings, which have presented them only with obstacles and opposition. On a festive day like the present one we prefer not to think of the undisguised complaints at all this or of the deep despair of our greatest minds whose work reveals the only true kind of progress; but perhaps you will allow the man whom you honour today with so signal a distinction to express his heartfelt joy that the particular thought of a single individual has been understood and embraced in his lifetime by so large a number of friends as your gathering here and now attests.

I had only you, the friends of my own particular art and of my very own labours and work, as sympathizers of my plans: I could approach you only by asking you to help me in my work: my only wish is to present this work in a pure and undistorted way to those men and women who have taken a serious interest in my art in spite of the fact that it has hitherto been presented to them in a way that is still impure and distorted - it is a wish that I have been able to convey to you without presumption. Only in this almost personal relation to you, my patrons and friends, may I recognize the ground on which we shall lay the stone that is to bear the whole edifice of our noblest German hopes, an edifice that still soars up so boldly before our mind's eye. Though it now be but a temporary structure, it will be so only in the sense in which all outward forms of the German character have been provisional for centuries. But it is in the nature of the German spirit to build from within: God Almighty verily lives within that spirit before building a temple to His own glory. And this temple will proclaim the inner spirit to the outer eye just as that spirit belongs to itself in its amplest individuality. And so I shall describe this stone as the talisman whose power shall reveal to you the hidden secrets of that spirit. May it now bear the scaffolding that we need for that illusion through which you are to look into life's truest mirror. But even now it is firmly and truly laid in order that it may bear the proud edifice as soon as the German nation demands to enter into possession of it with you in its own honour. And so let

it be consecrated by your love, your blessings and by the profound gratitude that I bear you, all those of you who have wished me well, granting me your patronage, your gifts and your assistance! May it be consecrated by the spirit that inspired you to heed my call, the spirit that filled you with the courage to trust in me entirely, in spite of all mockery, and that was able to speak to you through me because it dared hope that it might recognize itself within your hearts: the German spirit that shouts its youthful morning greeting to you across the centuries.'



Foundation Stone Concert program

WAGNER'S LATER REFLECTIONS ON HIS FOUNDATION STONE SPEECH:

Within the capsule that was to be buried inside the foundation stone we placed not only a solemn greeting from the illustrious defender of my best endeavours and several other relevant documents but also some lines that I myself had composed:

Oh, may the secret buried here
Rest undisturbed for many a year:
For while it lies beneath this stone
The world shall hear its clarion tone.

I scarcely think it necessary to recall the events of those wonderful celebrations whose sense and significance I believe I adequately described in the preceding speech. With it I ushered in an undertaking that can endure the contempt and calumny of those to whom its underlying thought is bound to remain incomprehensible, as is only to be expected of the majority of people who nowadays frequent life's marketplace, pointlessly struggling to find some means of eking out their ephemeral existences in art and literature. Difficult though our undertaking may well prove, my friends and I will merely see in this the same difficulties that have weighed for many a long year and, indeed, for centuries on the healthy development of a culture genuinely unique to the Germans.

To explain the plan of the festival theatre now being built in Bayreuth, I believe that I cannot do better than begin with the need I felt first, namely, that of rendering invisible the technical hearth of the music: the orchestra. For this one constraint led step by step to the total redesigning of the auditorium of our neo-European theatre.

Those of my readers who are familiar with some of my earlier writings will already know my thoughts on the concealment of the orchestra, and I hope that even if they had not already felt this for themselves, a subsequent visit to the opera will have convinced them of the rightness of my feeling that the constant and, indeed, insistent sight of the technical apparatus needed to produce the sound constitutes a most tiresome distraction. In my essay on Beethoven, I was able to explain how at thrilling performances of ideal works of music we may ultimately cease to notice this reprehensible evil as a result of the force with which

all our senses are retuned, resulting, as it were, in a kind of neutralization of our sense of sight. With a stage performance, by contrast, it is a question of attuning our sense of sight to precisely apprehending an image, which can be done only by distracting it completely and by preventing it from noticing any reality than lies in between, such reality including the technical apparatus needed to produce the image in the first place.

Without actually being covered, the orchestra was therefore to be sunk so deep that the audience would look right over it and see the stage unimpeded; this in turn meant that the seating must consist in gradually ascending rows whose ultimate height would be determined only by the need for a clear view of the stage picture. As a result, our whole system of tiers of boxes was ruled out: inasmuch as the first of these boxes are located on the side walls, it would have been impossible to prevent their occupants from looking straight down into the orchestra pit. In terms of their positioning, our rows of seats thus assumed the character of a classical amphitheatre, although there could of course be no question of actually executing the traditional form of an amphitheatre that would have projected so far on either side as to produce, or even exceed, a full half-circle, for the object of which the audience needs a clear overview is no longer the Greek chorus in the classical orchestra, which was largely surrounded by the amphitheatre, but the Greek skene, which was presented to Greek audiences merely in the form of a projecting surface but which in our own particular case was to be used in all its depth.

We were thus strictly bound by the laws of perspective, according to which the rows of seats might widen as they rose up but must always face the stage. As for the stage, it was the proscenium that influenced the whole of the rest of the design: the actual frame of the stage picture necessarily became the starting point for this arrangement. My demand that the orchestra be made invisible proved an inspiration to the famous architect whom I was initially privileged to consult on this matter, encouraging this man of genius to find a use for the empty space that arose in this way between the proscenium and the rows of seats in the auditorium: we called it the 'mystic abyss' because its function was to separate reality from ideality, and the architect closed it off at



Bayreuth Orchestra pit

the front with a second, wider proscenium. Thanks to the relation between this second proscenium and the narrower one behind it, he was immediately able to promise the most wonderful illusion that makes the actual events onstage appear to be further away, persuading the spectator to think that the action is very remote, while allowing him to observe that action with the clarity of actual proximity. In turn this gives rise to a second illusion, allowing the figures onstage to appear to be of larger, superhuman size.

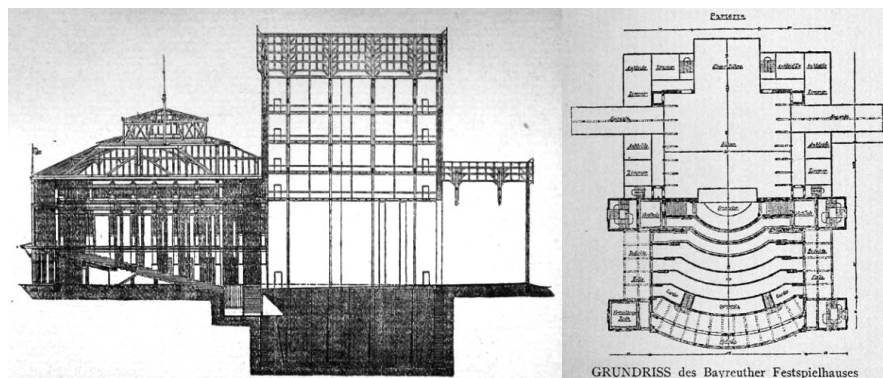
The success of this arrangement should alone be sufficient to give an idea of the incomparable impact of the audience's new relation to the stage picture. Having taken his seat, the spectator now find himself in a veritable theatron, in other words, in a space that exists for no other purpose than for looking, and looking, moreover, in the direction in which his seat points him. Between him and the picture that he is to look at, nothing is plainly discernible except for a sense of distance held, as it were, in a state of suspension due to the architectural relationship between the two proscenias, the stage picture appearing in consequence to be located in the unapproachable world of dreams, while the music, rising up spectrally from the 'mystic abyss' and as such resembling the vapours ascending from Gaia's sacred primeval womb beneath the Pythia's tripod, transports him to that inspired state of clairvoyance in which the stage picture that he sees before him becomes the truest reflection of life itself.

A difficulty arose in respect of the importance to be given to the side walls in the auditorium: unbroken by any boxes, they presented a flat expanse that could not be brought into any meaningful relationship with the rising rows of seats. The famous architect who was initially entrusted with the task of building the theatre along monumental lines found a solution to the problem by using all the resources of architectural ornament

in the noblest Renaissance style, causing the bare surfaces to disappear and turning them into a fascinating feast for the eyes. For our temporary festival theatre in Bayreuth, we were forced to renounce all thought of similar decorations, which have no meaning unless the material itself is noble and precious, once again raising the question of what we should do with these side walls, which were so out of keeping with the actual auditorium. A glance at the first of the plans included in the appendix shows us an oblong narrowing towards the stage and forming the actual space for the audience. It is bounded by two side walls that run in straight lines towards the proscenium - an arrangement made unavoidable by the building as such - and that produce an unsightly wedge-shaped area, which could in fact have been conveniently used for steps giving access to the seats. In order to render as innocuous as possible the surface that was opened up in this way on either side of the proscenium and that ruined the overall impression, my present adviser had with his customary inventiveness already hit on the idea of adding a third proscenium, even wider and further forward than the other two. Much taken by the excellence of this idea, we soon went a stage further and found that, to do full justice to the idea of an auditorium narrowing in true perspective towards the stage, we should have to extend the process to the whole interior; adding proscenium after proscenium until they culminated in the gallery that crowns the whole design, thereby enclosing the audience itself within this proscenic perspective, no matter where they may be sitting. For this we devised a series of columns that mirrored the first proscenium and that grew further apart the further they rose, delimiting the rows of seats and deceiving us as to the straight lines of the side walls behind them. Between them, finally, the necessary stairs and entrances were effectively concealed. With this we ultimately settled all our internal arrangements, as indicated in the accompanying plans.

As we were building a merely temporary theatre and therefore had to bear in mind only the functionality of its interior furnishings and fittings in keeping with its underlying idea, it was bound to be a source of relief that the outward form of the theatre, reflecting its internal functionality in a spirit of architectural beauty, did not fall within our remit. Nor, indeed, could it do so if the project was to go ahead at all. Even if we had had at our disposal a more precious material than our estimates allowed and had been able to erect a monumental building of ostentatious ornamentation, we should have shied away from our task and been obliged to look round for help, which we would certainly not have found so quickly. This, then, was the newest, the most unusual and, not having been attempted before, the most difficult problem for the architect of the present (or the future?) to solve.

The limited resources at our disposal compelled us to use only what was purely functional and necessary to achieve our objective: but our aim and objective lay solely in the relationship



Otto Bruckwald original section and plan 1872

between the auditorium and a stage of the largest dimensions necessary for installing the most perfect scenery. Such a stage needs to be three times the height seen by the audience, since the complex sets placed upon it have to be lowered beneath the stage as well as raised above it. As a result, the stage, unlike the auditorium, needs to rise to twice its height above the actual stalls. If it is merely this functional need that is taken into account, the result is a conglomerate of two buildings of the most disparate shape and size. In order to conceal, as far as possible, the disparity between them, most architects working on our newer theatres have been concerned to

raise the auditorium to a significant degree, while adding empty spaces above it that are intended to be used as scenery-painting workshops or as administrative offices but which on account of their extreme inconvenience are seldom used at all. In this, architects have been helped by the tiers of boxes randomly rising inside the auditorium and reaching excessive heights, the topmost tiers even rising well beyond the height of the stage as they were meant only for the poorer classes on whom architects thought nothing of inflicting the inconvenience of a hazy bird's-eye view of events taking place in the stalls far beneath them. But these tiers have been banished from our own theatre, where no architectural need can persuade us to gaze upwards over vast walls, as is the case in Christian cathedrals.

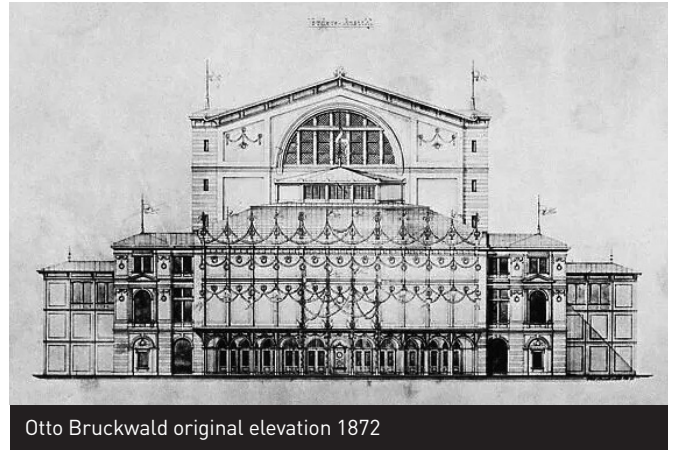
The opera houses of the past were constructed on the principle of an unbroken roof-ridge, which meant that they assumed the form of elongated boxes, a primitive example of which may be found in the Royal Opera House in Berlin. Here the architect had to worry about only a single façade, that of the main entrance, at the narrow end of a building whose longer sides tended to be tucked away between the houses of a street, thus removing them completely from view.

I believe that in acting so disingenuously and in responding to the dictates of sheer need, our task of building an outwardly artless temporary theatre placed on an open, elevated site has also brought us closer to a clearer statement of the problem that is actually involved here. This problem now lies before us, naked and well defined, and it shows us, in the most tangible manner possible, what we should understand by a theatre building that is also to express externally the purpose for which it is designed, a purpose which, far from being vulgarly commonplace, is altogether ideal. The main section of this building contains the infinitely complex technical machinery needed to stage performances of the greatest possible perfection, whereas its entrance is no more than a kind of covered courtyard whose function is simply to accommodate those persons for whom the performance onstage is about to be acted out.

To us it seems as if this simple aim, which we were obliged to express in our own building with the greatest possible clarity, uninfluenced by buildings such as palaces, museums and churches that are designed for quite different ends, has been encapsulated and expressed in the most uncomplicated manner; presenting the genius of German architecture with a challenge that is not unworthy of it and which may indeed be the only task that it is uniquely placed to solve. But if it be thought that because of the inevitable grand façade the main purpose of the theatre must be concealed by wings for balls, concerts and the like, we shall no doubt for ever remain in thrall to the unoriginal ornaments that are usual in these cases; our sculptors and carvers will continue to draw their inspiration from Renaissance motifs with their rapid, unintelligible figures and ornaments - and ultimately everything will end up just as it is in present-day opera houses, whence the question that is even now the one that is put to me most frequently: do I really need a special theatre of my own?

But those who have rightly understood me will be bound to realize that even architecture might acquire a new significance thanks to the spirit of music on the basis of which I planned my work of art and the place of its performance and that the myth of a city built by Amphion's lyre has not yet lost its meaning. On the strength of the foregoing observations, we may end by examining exactly what it is that the German character needs if we wish to take it in the direction of an original development unfettered by foreign motives that are misunderstood or falsely applied.

Many an intelligent observer has been struck by the fact that recent tremendous successes in the field of German politics have been utterly incapable of diverting the Germans' sense and taste from a foolish need to imitate foreign ways and have failed to



Otto Bruckwald original elevation 1872

fuel a desire to cultivate those qualities still left to us in order to produce a culture peculiar to us Germans. It is only with much effort and difficulty that our great German statesman resists the pretensions of the Catholic spirit in the province of the Church, while its French counterpart's presumptuous attempts to influence and determine our taste and those of our customs that are affected by that taste continue to be universally ignored. If it occurs to a harlot in Paris to give her hat an eccentric form, this is enough to persuade all German women to do the same; or if a lucky speculator makes a million overnight on the stock exchange, he will immediately have a villa built in the St Germain style, a style for which the architect already has the required façade in readiness. In the light of these observations, we shall no doubt think that things are going too well for the Germans and that only some great disaster or other may persuade us to return to the simplicity that uniquely becomes us and that will become intelligible to us only when we recognize our genuine inner need.

Although we have done little more than hint at an idea that says much about a nation's broader concerns, we may none the less be permitted to apply it to the field of an ideal need in the context of our present considerations. What characterized our plan for the above theatre was that in order to meet an altogether ideal need we had to discard, one by one, all the traditional arrangements of its interior and dismiss them as inappropriate and, hence, as unusable, replacing them with a new arrangement for which we were unable to use any of the traditional ornaments either on the inside or the outside, with the result that for now we have to present our building to the world in the naïve simplicity of a makeshift structure. Relying on the inventive power of need in general and on the ideal need of a beautiful requirement in particular, we hope that thanks to the incentive provided by our problem, we may have encouraged others to devise a German style of architecture that would certainly not prove itself unworthy by being applied to a building devoted to German art and in particular to that art in its most popular national manifestation as drama, a style, finally, that would in this way be seen to be unique and visibly different from other architectural styles. We have plenty of time to develop a monumental architectural style of ornament that can rival that of the Renaissance or Rococo in terms of its wealth and variety: nothing needs to be rushed as we almost certainly have the mature leisure to wait until the 'Reich' decides to take an interest in our work. For now, then, our temporary building, which will no doubt only very gradually acquire a sense of monumentality, may tower up as an admonition to the German world, bidding that world ponder on what has already become clear to those whose interest, efforts and self-sacrifice it must thank for having been built at all.

May it stand there on the delightful hill outside Bayreuth.

http://bayreuther-festspiele.de/documents/_the_bayreuth_festival_theatre_341.html

NEWS FROM SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

SAMANTHA CRAWFORD WRITES IN HER NEWSLETTER - 30 MAY 2024



Hello friends,

I am writing to you from Birmingham as I rehearse a challenging new role with Birmingham Opera Company. My character, Regan, is described as 'the boss,' so I feel some type casting may have gone on!

Putting this newsletter together has been a test of my editing skills as the past few months have been filled with a broader palate

of roles. Not just the ones on stage. Roles of producing new works, becoming a Trustee of the AMF, mentoring young artists and speaking publicly about business and The Arts, cultural renewal in The Arts, faith and personal grief in my career. I've (mostly) enjoyed the stretching process to encompass these challenges and been very grateful for time with my family in Canada over Easter. The vastness of The Rockies helped me search for balanced perspective in the busy rhythms of life.

News:

July - Debut as Regan in Tippett's opera *New Year*, directed by Keith Warner for Birmingham Opera Company. Music Director Alpesh Chauhan will conduct the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. *New Year* tells the intertwining stories of Somewhere Today and Nowhere Tomorrow. Its world premiere took place in Houston, Texas in 1989, followed by a run of performances in Glyndebourne, UK in 1990. It hasn't been seen live since, not anywhere.

June - Concert for West Green House Opera. On 16th June I'll be performing 'A Pocket full of Stars,' a concert of arias from *Tosca*, *Pique Dame* and *La Forza del destino*, alongside some favourite musical theatre numbers, accompanied by pianist Gavin Roberts.

April - I am delighted to have been appointed as a new Trustee for the Australian Music Foundation, along with Prof.

Kate Paterson, Head of Vocal Studies at The Royal Academy of Music. I look forward to working with Chairman, Yvonne Kenny AMF and the Board of Trustees. I hope to support young artists as the AMF supported me during my studies at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

My album *dream.risk.sing: elevating women's voices* has been awarded Editor's Choice from Presto Music. 'This witty, poignant and candid recital of songs centring on female experiences has to be one of the most arresting recording-debuts I've heard all year: Crawford's big, bright voice packs a tremendous punch, with diction always crystal-clear and plenty of bite when required (which is often).'

- Katherine Cooper, Presto Music

March - Speaker on cultural renewal in the Performing Arts at The Everything Conference and interviewed for the Magnify Podcast on faith and grief. Listen here.

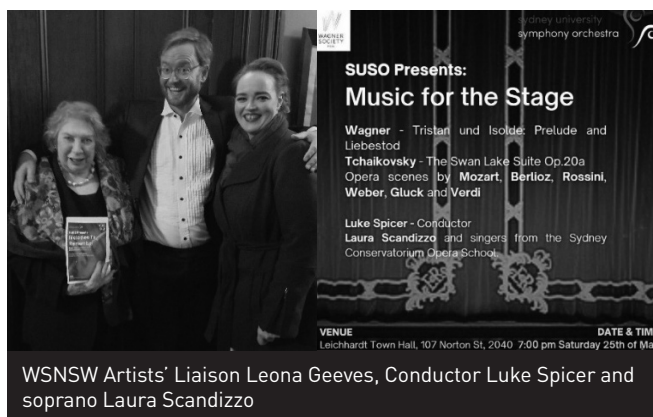
Hope to see you at a performance soon!

With love,

Samantha

LAURA SCANDIZZO

The Society sponsored soprano **Laura Scandizzo** for her performance of Isolde's *Liebestod* at this concert of opera and ballet music excerpts staged by Sydney University Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Luke Spicer, on 25 May. We congratulate Laura on her wonderful singing.



WSNSW Artists' Liaison Leona Geeves, Conductor Luke Spicer and soprano Laura Scandizzo

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 mailing contact@wagner.org.au and we will work to resolve this issue.

WAGNER SOCIETY NEWSLETTERS AND QUARTERLIES ONLINE

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

MARIE'S PILGRIMAGE

An email received from our Vice President **Marie Leech** 9 May 2024

Dear all,

I'm here in Austria/Germany on a little Wagner pilgrimage. I saw *Lohengrin* in Vienna on Sunday – an unusual production, what's being called the 'thriller' interpretation, not wonderful; but with the most amazing music from the orchestra with Christian Thielemann at his best. I'm now in Nuremberg for the second stage of the pilgrimage, seeing *Parsifal* tomorrow evening. Then to Frankfurt for *Tannhäuser*; then Munich for *Tannhäuser*; Berlin for the Herheim *Ring*; and back to Vienna for *Meistersinger!* It is relatively easy to organise this sort of trip; and it might be possible for us in the Wagner Society to assist members to organise such trips; or indeed to organise a group ourselves.

I decided to take a day trip to Bayreuth today. There's a wonderful little rail trip from Nuremberg to Bayreuth, a great opportunity to sink into the lovely countryside. As many of you know, you can see the Festspielhaus on the Green Hill from Bayreuth station, what a joy! And a turn to the right and a short walk uphill takes you there. It is looking lovely at this time of year, lots of Spring flowers and greenery. There were a number of tourists wandering about, not a word of English to be heard, all more or less local folk. There were some renovations taking place. I wandered over to the offices of the Friends to see if any of the staff were around but nobody in sight.

I headed back up town which was busy but nothing like during the season. I've included a photo of the hotel where I stay, the Goldener Anker. The same family have been running it for 300 plus years! It was recommended to me by Marie Bashir. And I think they confuse me with her as they treat me like royalty when I stay there. However, I have mixed feelings about it as Hitler et al have been guests there... But it is indeed a wonderful place to stay. On one occasion when I was dining there, the wonderful Piotr Beczala was at the next table (he was taking on the role of Lohengrin in Bayreuth at that time).

From there, up around the corner and down the street to the left, along the way passing the location where Stefan Mickisch delivered his famous, always sold-out, introductory lectures during the Festspiele. His death in 2021 (with controversies surrounding him at that time) have created a break in that long tradition. On towards Wahnfried (my goodness, I almost wrote Nibelheim...). The house and

gardens look lovely in Springtime. We, of course, always see them in the heat of end of summer. There's something special about the place as flowers and green leaves are emerging. The place was pretty deserted. Again, no sign of any tourists.

The local people seem to like the coffee shop and a number of locals out walking their dogs were enjoying coffee and the afternoon sun; and, as the school day ended, some children and families made their way through Wahnfried on their way home. There is much of interest to see in the house and museum; but I don't like what has been done in Wahnfried, i.e. draping much of the place in white covers. It was so much more relatable in its old state. But I guess that's the trend towards 'authenticity' in museums.

Finally, out to wander around the back gardens and, of course, to spend time by Wagner's grave. There is a particular connection to his grave on this trip: those of us who saw the astounding, multi-layered Stefan Herheim *Parsifal* in Bayreuth in 2008 will recall that Wagner's grave featured strongly in the set and characters regularly came forward to rearrange some building bricks that were placed on it. I happened to meet Herheim some years later (during an interval of the final performance of the *Götz Friedrich Ring* in Berlin) and I told him I had seen his *Parsifal*. He smiled and said: 'And I see you are alive. You survived it!! I hope I will survive his *Ring* in a couple of weeks' time in Berlin on this trip...

Finally out into the beautiful Hofgarten.

Isn't it wonderful that we have Bayreuth, so closely linked to our great Maestro, in which to immerse ourselves.



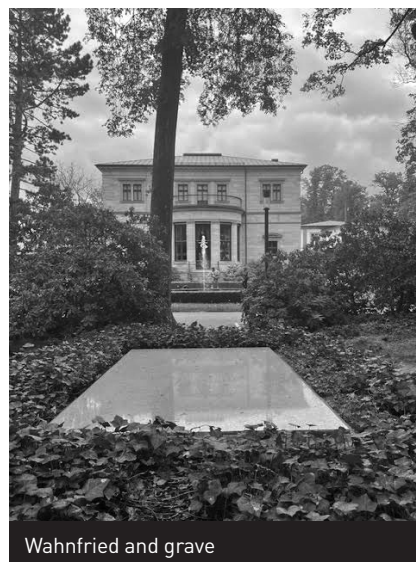
Marie at Bayreuth



The Goldener Anker



Margrave Opera House



Wahnfried and grave

IN MEMORIAM

SHIRLEY ROBERTSON



Shirley with fellow Wagnerite Robert Gibson

Shirley Robertson died early in April this year. Originally from Newcastle, she worked as a science teacher in Southern Sydney. She later worked for Reckitt & Colman, and afterwards Parke-Davis. Her great passion was

opera – all sorts and Wagner in particular. She was a fluent German speaker and kept up to speed at weekly classes at the WEA, and was a dab hand at Rätsel - German puzzles.

She took over the running of **Nancy Fletcher's** North-shore based, SYDNEY OPERA SOCIETY, where I helped her with sending out monthly emails and setting up the Face Book page. I later took over the running of the Society. She had discovered the lovely Willoughby Uniting Church, which we still use, and negotiated a then very acceptable hiring fee. She made the most delicious finger sandwiches, even bringing some to my mother's funeral. She found some like-minded friends at this group and travelled widely with them and her daughter, visiting opera performances, and national parks.

She joined the WSNSW (member 416) in 1987, and was a committee member of the Wagner Society from 1995 to 2001. After 10 years of preparing and serving our afternoon teas at each function (including the wonderful finger sandwiches), Shirley retired at the April 2004 meeting, and was a member until 2018.

She was a volunteer for many years at the Opera Centre making her delicious sandwiches and slices.

Like many local opera lovers, in the winter season of 1999, she had a volunteer extra role as one of the townsfolk in *Don Carlo*, which was conducted by our current Patron, **Simone Young AM**.

We shared a hotel room in Brisbane for *Parsifal* in 1995, and about 10 years later for another Wagner opera there. We have shared rooms in Melbourne hotels for more Wagner operas, as well as spending time together in Bayreuth.

She was a very caring person, with a nice turn of phrase and a delightful sense of humour. Her health suffered greatly in the last few years, but her two daughters, Jane and Helen and her grandchildren, were a great comfort. Eventually she moved to be near them.

At the final WSNSW function in 2002 - the annual end-of-year party – the Society honoured six members as "Friends of the Wagner Society in NSW". They include **Barbara Brady** (member number 380) (the maker of the cakes), **Sue Kelly** (4), **Janet Wayland** (10), **Clare Hennessy** (19), **Margaret Hennessy** (19A) and **Shirley Robertson** (416). Said the Editor of the Wagner Newsletter, "... We sometimes forget that our Society exists today through the hard work, commitment and loyalty of our "Friends", and the committee determined to formally acknowledge this by introducing these awards, which we hope to make annually."

I will miss her deeply.

Leona Geeves, 21 May 2024

PATRICIA BAILLIE

Members were sad to learn of the passing of **Patricia Baillie**. Patricia had a lively interest in music and showed all the symptoms of a committed Wagnerphile. She was a keen WSNSW member in the 90's, talking to the society about publishing music books and contributing reviews to the Quarterly. She founded Da Capo Music many years ago in a room inside the Cornstalk Bookshop on Glebe Point Road. It quickly became successful and expanded into the premises next door where it remained for sixteen years. Da Capo built up a reputation as the premier source of second-hand and rare out of print music books and sheet music in Australia.



In June of 2004, Patricia decided to broaden her horizons and handed the business over to her daughter, Meredith Baillie. Meredith brought new life to the shop and soon expanded her interests, opening a general second-hand bookshop, Sappho Books, Café & Wine. In July 2006 Da Capo Music moved in with its sister shop, Sappho Books, at 51 Glebe Point Road where it continues to provide the only source of second hand and out of print sheet music.

FROM LEONA GEEVES:

I am not sure how I met Patricia, but once I did and discovered her shop, Da Capo, which was in Glebe Point Road, I was hooked. Most of my Wagner collection came from her shop over the years. I often saw singers in there going through the sheet music, Warwick Fyfe and John Heuzenroeder were there at the same time once making musical discoveries.

She became well known as a music collection valuer and her collection of sheet music was legendary.

One day I went through it looking for music published by my grandfather, W J Deane and Son, who had published lots of World War 1 songs. I found some, including a piece originally published in the USA with his sticker over the publisher's name. Patricia carefully pointed out that my grandfather hadn't actually published that. I said that wasn't a problem, I was really buying it because it had a stamp on it saying it was sold by Pauline's Song Shop, 111 King Street Sydney. Pauline Deane, née Albert, was my grandmother and the separated wife of W J Deane. I have never seen any music since with that stamp.

Patricia introduced me to her friends, from Canberra and locally, and we used to have fun times with our picnic baskets on the steps of the opera house during the long Wagner intervals. We also had some fun times in Bayreuth, meeting up with two young Australian singers who were in the Bayreuth chorus.

When Meredith took over Da Capo, Patricia had a second career as a street photographer in the area where she was well known and well loved.

Patricia was generous in providing discounts for Wagner Society members. She will be sorely missed.

Leona Geeves, 29 May 2024

SIR ANDREW DAVIS (1944-2024)

One of the most beloved and highly esteemed conductors of his generation, **Sir Andrew Davis**, who has died aged 80 of leukaemia, was a familiar presence on the podium, not least through his countless appearances at the BBC Proms in his capacity as chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra (1989-2000). During the same period, he was also music director of Glyndebourne Opera (1988-2000) His debut at the latter had been in Strauss's *Capriccio* (1973) and he was to become a noted exponent of the composer's operas. After the BBCSO, Davis moved to Chicago, to become Music Director of the Lyric Opera, where he could finally fulfil Wagnerian ambitions with stagings of the *Ring* and *Parsifal*. At the Edinburgh Festival in 2019 he gave a searingly paced (and sung) *Götterdämmerung* which hinted at depths of expression and qualities hitherto underappreciated in his native land. His last major post took him to the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, where once more he galvanised the company, raised artistic standards and left a valuable legacy on record.





Renaissance Tours



Japan Music Tour

Tokyo
with Christopher Lawrence
15 – 25 November 2024 (11 days)

Music lovers are in for a treat as the international orchestral world conjures up a perfect storm of star appearances in Tokyo this November.

Out West Piano Festival

Bathurst, NSW
with Phillip Sametz
25 – 28 October 2024 (4 days)

In the company of music specialist Phillip Sametz, enjoy a weekend of sublime music performed by Australia's leading pianists at Blackdown Farm near Bathurst in country NSW.



Christmas in Germany

Berlin, Munich, Dresden and Leipzig
with Scott Curry
12 – 27 December 2024 (16 days)

With music expert Scott Curry, celebrate fine music and opera performances in historic concert halls and opera houses during Germany's Christmas season.

Tasmanian Chamber Music Festival

Hobart
with Christopher Lawrence
8 – 11 November 2024 (4 days)

Join music specialist Christopher Lawrence to indulge in fine chamber music concerts performed by leading Australian musicians in atmospheric venues in and around Hobart.

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

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

ADDRESS

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

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



Wagner conducting Beethoven's 9th Symphony in the Bayreuth Margrave Opera House for the laying of the foundation stone of the Festspielhaus, 22 May, 1872

ADDRESS FOR SUNDAY FUNCTIONS

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

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