

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

SEPTEMBER 2024
174 ISSUE NO 47



WAGNER
SOCIETY
nsw



Brünnhilde sleeps 1980
Anselm Kiefer, born 1945

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

THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW INC

Registered Office:
75 Birtley Towers, Birtley Place
Elizabeth Bay NSW 2011
Print Post Approved PP100005174

COMING SOCIETY EVENTS 2024

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

2024	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	LOCATION
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
Sat 16 Nov	4 – 6pm WSNSW reception for other Wagner Societies	Royal Yacht Squadron, Kirribilli
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 per Member | \$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)

FOR YOUR DIARY

15, 17 Nov	SSO/Simone Young AM <i>Die Walküre</i> in concert	SOH
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2025

9 Feb – Mar 2	Regent Opera London Two <i>Ring</i> Cycles	London
End Feb	Melbourne Opera <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	Melbourne
1 – 17 May	Royal Opera <i>Die Walküre</i>	ROH London
17 May – 24 June	Glyndebourne <i>Parsifal</i> Conductor Robin Ticci di	Glyndebourne

VERY GENEROUS DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED SINCE JUNE 2024

FROM THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS: Richard Bloor, Barbara Brady, Richard King

COMMITTEE 2023 - 2024

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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
Ms Lis Bergmann
Ms Margaret Whealy

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DEAR FRIENDS,

The end of the year is fast approaching and we have Die Walküre to look forward to in November. I hope, that apart from attending the two performances by the SSO, you will also come to the various events we have organised around them. Details, as we know them at the time of printing, can be found inside. Given the lack of Wagner this year, compared to 2023, we are keen to generate the camaraderie we all experienced at Bendigo and Brisbane. We are expecting our friends from the Wagner Societies around Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, to visit Sydney for the occasion and look forward to catching up with them over the course of that week.

One of the rewarding aspects of the work the WSNSW carries out is hearing from artists who have received assistance from us (all). In particular when professional breakthroughs occur and success finally arrives. This Quarterly has a number of such reports from Margaret Plummer, singing at Bayreuth, Samuel Sakker's debut at Glyndebourne singing alongside fellow Aussie Stuart Skelton in *Tristan und Isolde*, plus Bronwyn Douglass, Amanda Windred and Menila Moineaux. These artists are the reasons why we continue our donation drive to maintain the support of our emerging artists.

By now you have all heard the wonderful news that Simone Young AM, our Patron, led the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra through two cycles of the *Ring*. The reports have been consistently glowing. I hope that she is invited back to conduct more at the Festival. Bayreuth making amends on the equal opportunity front this year by having three great conductors in Oksana Lyniv (returning to *Der fliegende Holländer*), Nathalie Stutzmann (also returning to *Tannhäuser*) and Simone Young (debut conducting the *Ring*) lead the productions. Although the Festival itself has been led by women (Cosima, Winifred, Eva and Katharina) as effectively if not more so than the men (Richard, Siegfried, Wieland and Wolfgang).

The sad news of the death of Steve Davislim has hit hard. A close collaborator of Simone Young, he will be missed. Our condolences to his family and friends.

Honorary Life Members

This year we were pleased to award Honorary Life Membership status to two Committee members who have made an outstanding contribution to the operation of the Society, especially during the Covid lockdowns in 2020-21. Our new HLMs are Margaret Whealy (1149), immediate past Treasurer, and Lis Bergmann (1209), former membership secretary and now webmaster. Through their efforts the Society managed to stay financially sound and retain its membership base.

Whilst we decided that the Society needed to financially assist certain projects and artists during those dark times, at the expense of our bottom line, we nevertheless managed to remain solvent and retain our services to the membership. Email and zoom became indispensable tools to maintain connection and communications and a dialogue with members. It was also a time to "down tools" but not for Lis who started to amass, catalogue and consolidate our archive of information and events as well as keep us up to date with enormous E-News full of links and stories and information. Of course this could not be sustained after we resumed "normal" operations. I for one miss those bumper E-News. All this coincided with the start of my Presidency, so I have much to thank both of these individuals for making my job a lot easier. After years of duty at the front desk at our events, often missing the DVD and the start of talks, both Margaret and Lis have earned a rest, our thanks and this accolade.

That is almost it for 2024 – the next Quarterly will go out in December and look forward to what is coming up in 2025. Just heard that the SSO and Simone Young will continue their *Ring* project with *Siegfried* at the end of the year as well as a Bruckner 7 (continuing Simone's cycle of his symphonies).

So this is an early but opportune moment to express my thanks to you for making this year a very successful one for the WSNSW. Wishing you a happy end of the year and hope to see you at the remaining events.

With best wishes. Happy listening.

ESTEBAN INSAUSTI

President Wagner Society in NSW Inc

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers, I hope you like the updated, reformatted, full colour look of the Quarterly. Many thanks to Michael Ritchie at MKR Productions for his initiative and hard work on the redesign. This issue includes some encouraging updates from our supported artists. Many thanks to Leona for keeping up to date with the many singers working overseas. This issue also has articles about *Die Walküre*, in preparation for the SSO performances in November. I remind readers that the December 2021 Quarterly was entirely devoted to the Valkyries. Thanks to June Donsworth for her report from Copenhagen. It's always lovely to hear from members about performances they have attended overseas. My gratitude as always to Leona for proofreading.

MIKE DAY

michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com



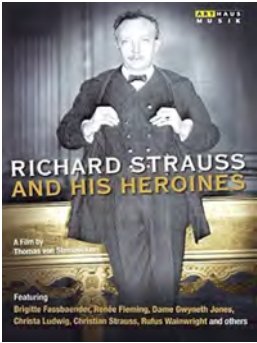
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FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 29 SEPTEMBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.30PM DVD RICHARD STRAUSS AND HIS HEROINES



The film *Richard Strauss and his Heroines* explores Strauss' relationship to women. The primary focus lies on his attachment to Pauline, his wife of more than 55 years. Strauss experienced the most varied of epochs in German history; from the Empire to Nazi dictatorship and the post-war period. How did the image of women change in this time and what influence did it have on Strauss' work? And above all: how did Strauss achieve the expression of the finest feminine feelings in his music? Exploring these questions we meet Strauss' last surviving

grandchild who has first-hand experience with the married life of his grandparents. Interviews with the great Strauss singers **Brigitte Fassbaender, Renée Fleming, Dame Gwyneth Jones** and **Christa Ludwig** who report on their famous Strauss roles, **Rufus Wainwright**, conductor **Franz Welser-Möst** and other Strauss experts lead us through the film. *Richard Strauss and his Heroines* is the first filmed documentation about the unforgettable heroines created by Strauss and how they affected his life and his marriage.

2.00PM TALK DR. GEOFFREY SEIDEL - 'LOLA MONTEZ - FROM SPAIN TO SYDNEY VIA SAXONY'

In April 2023, as part of the MO Bendigo *Ring Cycle* festivities, the President of the Richard Wagner Society in South Australia **Dr Geoffrey Seidel** gave a very entertaining and popular talk: **Lola Montez: The Wagner and Bendigo Connections**. WSNSW has invited Geoffrey to come to Sydney to elaborate on the subject.

What makes the perfect opera? Disguises, love, adultery, deception, beauty, Kings, composers, intrigue and of course- death. The Lola Montez story has all of these and more, and she inspired an Australian Musical of the same name. What's more there is a strong Australian connection as she danced for the miners in Australia during the goldrush and played to packed houses in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. She was in fact an imposter and her life is full of incident. Among

many love affairs she was paramour to Franz Liszt and conducted a scandalous relationship with King Ludwig 1 of Bavaria, by which she unwittingly played a major role in the life of Richard Wagner.

EDITOR'S NOTE – The June 2023 Quarterly included several articles about Lola Montez and Wagner.



Lola Montez (1818-1861). Marie Dolores Eliza Rosanna Gilbert. Irish Dancer And Adventuress. Cartoon, 1851, Showing Lola Montez Leaving Europe For American Sped By The Bitter Tears Of Kings And Emperors

SUNDAY 20 OCTOBER AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

2.00PM TALK

ROBERT GAY ON COSIMA WAGNER

Robert Gay has significant expertise as a music history educator and tour leader, having designed and led more than 100 tours to the great musical cities of Western and Central Europe and North America. Known for his popular music history courses, which have been offered at the University of Sydney's Centre for Continuing Education for more than 30 years, Robert's musical expertise extends from the Baroque period through to the great composers of the modern era. Robert trained as a lyric baritone in London and Munich, and he was also President of the Sydney Schubert Society for many years. He has been a guest lecturer for the Australian Decorative and Fine Arts Society (ACNC), and is regularly invited to present talks on opera and music history to organisations such as the Wagner Society in NSW.

Francesca Gaetana Cosima Wagner (née Liszt; 24 December 1837 – 1 April 1930) was the daughter of the Hungarian composer and pianist **Franz Liszt** and Franco-German romantic author **Marie d'Agoutt**. She became the second wife of **Richard Wagner**, and with him founded the Bayreuth Festival as a showcase for his stage works; after his death she devoted the rest of her life to the promotion of his music and philosophy. Commentators have recognised Cosima as the principal inspiration for Wagner's later works, particularly *Parsifal*.



Cosima Wagner - caricature published in 'Der Floh', Vienna, 26 July 1891. 'Das Weihe - Bühnenfestspiel in Bayreuth/' 'The Ordination - Stage Festival in Bayreuth'. Caption: 'Just come in, honourable public, artistic spectacle as you have never before seen. Come in, come in! Children under ten years old and soldiers beneath sergeant major pay half the price'. Spectacle refers to ballets which charged high prices in 1891.

12.30PM DVD

THE VALENCIA RING
- HIGHLIGHTS

Zubin Mehta and the Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana, Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia, Valencia 2007-9. Production by **La Fura dels Baus**. Cast includes: **Juha Uusitalo** (Wotan), **Jennifer Wilson** (Brünnhilde), **Lance Ryan** (Siegfried), **Matti Salminen** (Hagen).



La Fura dels Baus is a Catalan theatre group founded in 1979 in Barcelona working with contemporary theatre and opera, as well as major events such as the opening ceremony for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games. In opera, La Fura dels Baus stagings are renowned primarily for their abstract stylistic settings, where acrobats and 3D computer animations play a major role. The main idea behind Fura del Baus staging of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is to show "the degradation of nature by technological man". Director **Carlus Padrissa** meticulously followed all of Wagner's original stage directions with "greater freedom and adapting it to our own aesthetics" while at the same time "going back to the spirit of Wagner, to the original mysticism and symbolism".

SUNDAY 10 NOV 10.30AM – 4.00PM AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

WSNSW SYMPOSIUM ON *DIE WALKÜRE*

We continue the symposia mounted around the SSO and Simone Young's *Ring*. This year the focus is on *Die Walküre*. As with the *Das Rheingold* symposium last year, we will offer a kaleidoscopic view of the work by inviting

papers from different disciplines. So far we have confirmed participation from Associate Professor Stephen Mould, Dr Antony Ernst and Professor Thea Brejzek. Further details to be confirmed in e-news.

SATURDAY 16 NOV

4.00 – 6.00PM AT THE
ROYAL YACHT

SQUADRON, KIRRIBILLI

COCKTAIL RECEPTION FOR VISITING
INTERSTATE AND INTERNATIONAL
WAGNER SOCIETY MEMBERS



SUNDAY 1 DECEMBER AT 2.00PM

AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT
CHRISTMAS CONCERT AND PARTY

Details to be confirmed in e-news



REPORTS ON RECENT WAGNER SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 16 JUNE AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

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

WSNSW President Esteban Insausti had a very relaxed but erudite Zoom conversation with famed author Alex Ross. Members will remember Alex talking to us during Covid about his wonderful book *Wagnerism*. The conversation is available on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-mA8HN9pYY&feature=youtu.be>



Alex Ross writing about Joyce's Ulysses:

At the end of the third chapter, "Proteus," Stephen Dedalus is gazing out into Dublin Bay, watching a three-master sail past. He is, as always, chasing the endless swirl of his thoughts. He has a kind of premonition of an alien creature about to enter his world: "He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss." As Timothy Martin points out, in his book *Joyce and Wagner*, these lines fuse the old Irish poem "My Grief on the Sea" with the libretto of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, whose title character arrives in a ghost ship with "blood red" sails. I'd add another detail; in Wagner, the

Dutchman's crew comes ashore "silently and without further sound." Compare the final words of the chapter: "silently moving, a silent ship." Joyce even preserves the redundancy of Wagner's stage direction. Joyce owned the score of *The Flying Dutchman* and also had a copy of Wagner's essay "Judaism in Music." His own attitudes toward Jewishness were not without their ambiguities and complexities, but he would have had pure contempt for Wagner's racism. The Wagnerian Dedalus is made to see the limits of his archly aestheticized view of the world. "Full fathom five thy father lies," he says to himself. As the ship goes by, there is a sea-change, and his phantom father becomes the face of Bloom. <https://www.therestisnoise.com/2004/06/wagnerjoyce.html>



Treasurer Danny May presenting the Financial report

1.15PM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting, postponed from 19 May, was chaired by President Esteban Insausti. The minutes of the 2023 AGM were accepted and the 2023 President's Annual Report and 2023 Financial Report were presented. These were accepted by the financial members present. The continuing committee members were confirmed. Margaret Whealy and Lis Bergmann were given Honorary Life Membership for their dedicated services to the Society over many years. The minutes will be available on the website in due course.

After the formal AGM Esteban announced the appointment of retired Treasurer **Margaret Whealy** and retired Membership Secretary and current e-news editor **Lis Bergmann** as Honorary Life Members. Esteban thanked them both for their years of dedication to the Society and the meeting expressed their approval by acclamation.



2.00PM DVD CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN MY RICHARD STRAUSS

Members enjoyed this excellent documentary, which included some remarkable footage of Strauss conducting.

The German conductor, author of *My Life with Wagner*, has written another about Richard Strauss. It's out in German next month and he has been talking about it at Salzburg, where he's conducting *Capriccio*.

Of the composer's last opera, premiered in Munich in October 1942, Thielemann says: 'Fundamentally, the work is the greatest criticism of the regime imaginable. By setting something totally different against the circumstances and thereby ignoring them, he makes a statement. His silence says everything, basically.'

2023 FINANCIAL REPORT

THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW INC BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 December 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Term Deposit		45,000.00	-
Westpac Cheque Account		17,951.48	4,139.85
Westpac Cash Reserve		8,200.94	52,693.70
Cash at Bank		71,152.42	56,833.55
Total Current Assets		71,152.42	56,833.55
TOTAL ASSETS		71,152.42	56,833.55
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Membership revenue in advance		665.00	-
Total Current Liabilities		665.00	-
TOTAL LIABILITIES		665.00	-
NET ASSETS		\$70,487.32	\$56,833.55
MEMBERS EQUITY			
Retained Profits		70,487.32	56,833.55
TOTAL MEMBERS EQUITY		\$70,487.32	\$56,833.55

PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 December 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
INCOME			
Membership		12,875.00	13,815.00
Lectures and functions		19,933.54	18,318.26
Donations		13,485.00	1,558.33
Bayreuth Ticket Sales		2,846.87	27,633.10
Advertising Income		1,400.00	2,100.00
Pacific Opera Jane Mathews Sponsorship		3,000.00	3,510.00
Melbourne Opera Donations/Tuba		-	5,765.00
Interest Received		1,045.15	162.38
		54,585.56	72,862.07
Less: EXPENSES			
Bank Charges		251.89	183.12
Newsletter 7,392.13 7,206.23			
Function catering expenses		3,467.38	501.40
Function room hire		5,130.00	5,033.00
Payments to presenters		2,444.86	4,001.98
Bayreuth ticket expenses		2,646.87	26,881.80
Bayreuth Memberships		1,105.91	1,012.06
Sponsorships/Scholarships		13,100.00	15,604.52
Pacific Opera Jane Mathews Sponsorship		3,300.00	5,450.00
Melbourne Opera/Tubas		-	15,000.00
Other operating expenses		2,092.65	2,001.83
		40,931.69	82,875.94
Operating Profit		13,653.87	(10,013.87)
Total Available for Distribution		\$13,653.87	(\$10,013.87)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR AGM 2024

Welcome to the 44th Annual General Meeting of the Wagner Society in NSW Inc. Back in our spiritual home, the Goethe Institut, for the first time in quite a few years. The date for this AGM had to be pushed back from the traditional time coinciding with Richard Wagner's birthday because many of the Executive were travelling overseas (chasing *Ring* cycles and other attractions in Berlin, Zurich, Vienna, etc etc.).

I will now comment and summarise aspects of our Society's activities for the year 2023.

MEMBERSHIP

Our membership currently reached 248 members at the end of 2023. 24 members remained unfinancial. There were 17 new members (including 5 joint memberships), or a total of 22, through 2023. This is closer to our normal size which is a good sign that we are getting back to the pre-Covid normal.

FINANCIALS

We continue to hold a reasonable balance and I'll let Danny May our Treasurer say more about that when he presents his report.

SUPPORT AND DONATIONS

The Society raised \$16,500 in donations through 2023. We are extremely thankful for the generosity of the membership. That money allowed the Society to support emerging artists and continue to feed the cultural ecosystem. We continued our association with Pacific Opera, funding one of their Scholarships which was awarded to Olivia Swain (currently in the UK, studying and performing). We also assisted Jessica Harper, Katrina Waters, Celeste Haworth, Menila Moineaux, Elise Morton and Claudia



Congratulations to WSNSW New Honorary Life Members Margaret Whealy and Lis Bergmann

Osborne. In 2023 all this support amounted to \$15,000. We reap the rewards, often many years into the future, when some of these recipients break through into a career in opera (hopefully involving Wagner).

EVENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

In 2023 we organised 12 events as well as hosting drinks at the intervals at both the Bendigo and Brisbane Rings. We held our first symposium aligning with the SSO's concert *Ring* conducted by our Patron Simone Young AM. Four papers (by Suzanne Chaundy, Colin Piper, David Larkin and Esteban Insausti) were presented followed by a round table discussion led by Graeme Gee. The focus of the events through 2023 was the *Ring*, with an unprecedented two productions in Australia. The Melbourne Opera team of creatives gave us an insight into their production with director Suzanne Chaundy and designer Andrew Bailey giving a talk in January followed by conductor Anthony Negus, Carmen Jakobi and Robert Macfarlane talking music in February. We hosted talks by Peter Bassett, Noel Staunton, Tahu Matheson, Terence Watson and Mike Day. We were serenaded by Ellen McNeil, Olivia Swain, Chris Curcuruto, Kori Miller, Adrian Tamburini and Katherine Day. The mix and quality of the events continues to be very high.

There were no zoom events (except for the hybrid ones with Melbourne Opera) as the calendar was replete with Wagner performances together with their respective schedule of lectures and the like. And as we were expecting to catch up with friends from outside Sydney and NSW at all the Wagner opportunities throughout the year we paused our zoom programme. It was very gratifying to reconnect with members from Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, New Zealand, Singapore and beyond through the year. This is what being part of a Wagner Society is really about.

BAYREUTH AND WAGNER PERFORMANCES

2023 was an unprecedented year for Wagner productions and performances in Australia. Two *Ring* productions, in Bendigo and Brisbane, a *Tannhäuser* in Melbourne (with a Satyagraha by Philip Glass in the same week if you were keen) and then *Das Rheingold* in concert in Sydney under Simone Young. This will probably never be repeated. Some of our members did travel to Bayreuth but with so much at home, travel beyond our shores was a real commitment to the Wagner cause, or overcommitment perhaps. Sydney stages, however, continue to be Wagner free. Will this ever change?

THE COMMITTEE

I would like to thank the Committee for your wonderful work and support through 2023. This year sees the retirement from the Committee of Margaret Whealy and Nick Dorsch. I would like to thank them for their commitment and service to the Society. They



President Esteban Insausti presenting his report

were on the Committee long before I joined but it has been a pleasure working alongside them for the last 6 years. Please join me in thanking them.

There will be openings to join the Committee in future. There are challenging projects coming up in 2024-25 and we will be looking for members with particular skills to join and contribute towards the success of these projects. Watch this space.

Alasdair Beck continues as our Public Officer. Leona Geeves continues to organise our artists to both perform for us and also to submit proposals for our sponsorship. Lis Bergmann, whilst no longer on the Committee, continues to administer our website, YouTube channel and the E-News. We are very grateful for their combined contribution to the success of the Society. May it continue.

Even though this report looks backwards to last year, it underpins a very exciting future for the rest of 2024 and beyond.

With that I conclude my report and commend it to the membership.

ESTEBAN INSAUSTI

President
Wagner Society in NSW Inc
16 June 2024

WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE 12.00PM

ZOOM WITH JOHN L MASTROGIOVANNI, D. MIN.

“One might say that where Religion becomes artificial, it is reserved for Art to save the Spirit of religion by recognising the figurative values of the mythic symbols which the former would have us believe in their literal sense, and revealing their deep and hidden truth through an ideal presentation. ... But Religion has sunk into an artificial life, when she finds herself compelled to keep on adding to the edifice of the dogmatic symbols, and thus conceals the one divinely True in her beneath an ever-growing heap of incredibilities commended to belief. Feeling this she has always sought the aid of Art...”

**WAGNER IN
RELIGION AND ART P.213**

Dr John Mastrogiovanni, President of the Wagner Society of Southern California spoke to members about his book, “Parsifal The Will and Redemption”, a “must read” for those of us who want to know more about this opera. John is a regular visitor to Bayreuth and was a great friend of our late President, Jane Mathews. He hosts the Southern California Society’s gala dinner after the third cycle *Das Rheingold* and never fails to tell one of his anecdotes about that friendship.

A brief overview of the workings of his Society was of interest – similar size to ours if one counts their unfinancial members. John became President in 2010 but admits to hearing his first meaningful Wagner music at 5 years of age. He is currently authoring another book, with the working title “Brünnhilde – Redeeming the Redeemer” so watch out for that.

One of John’s basic theories is that everything concerning Wagner’s works is connected in the composer’s mind. Beginning with *Lohengrin*, through the *Ring* cycle of operas and culminating in *Parsifal*, Wagner exhibits his understanding of what constitutes a complete human being, using the mystic crossovers of the philosophies of the various religions he studied. Elsa is transfigured into Brünnhilde who is transfigured into Kundry

as reincarnations and through this journey the progression of humanity from paganism to monotheism is explored. Musically, John pointed out that the final note of the Redemption leitmotif in *Götterdämmerung* is an A flat and that it is no accident that the prelude to *Parsifal* is also an A flat. *Parsifal*, the fifth opera of the *Ring*? Played as a chord, the last bars of *Götterdämmerung* are resolved by the opening bars of *Parsifal*. The prelude is meant to be a meditative interlude between the catastrophe and the resolution brought about by the eternal cycle of reincarnation so evident in the protagonists of *Parsifal*.

By stipulating that *Parsifal* was only to be performed in the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, Wagner wanted the audience to take the trip to his Montsalvat – Bayreuth to experience the transformation for themselves. Unfortunately, time got away from us and only the first Act was dealt with in detail. All who participated are eager for another session to delve into the depths of the remaining Acts. Despite the time difficulties (the zoom commenced at noon), please join your fellow Society members next time and be sure to have a look at the Society’s website where the lecture has been published with the kind permission of John.

ROSS WHITELAW

SUNDAY 14 JULY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.00PM DVD RICHARD STRAUSS GALA

This was a feast of remarkable playing by the Dresden Staatskapelle under **Christian Theilmann** and singing by three sopranos at the height of their powers. **Christine Goerke** was riveting in scenes from Elektra and Salome.

2.00PM TALK SIMON MEADOWS



President Esteban Insausti with Simon Meadows



WSNSW Member Pauline Holgerson with Simon Meadows

Prompted by WSNSW President **Esteban Insausti**, our guest, rising star baritone **Simon Meadows**, spoke about his recent experiences singing roles from the German and Italian repertoire, and his hopes for the future.

Simon was currently performing for Opera Australia, to glowing reviews, as the titular *Gianni Schicchi* and also Michele in *Il Tabarro*. He had performed Michele earlier this year in the innovative production staged on a boat in Darling Harbour for the Sydney Festival. When asked about the differences between singing Italian language roles and heavier Wagner roles, Simon referenced his critically acclaimed performances as Alberich in the Bendigo *Ring*, where he was guided by Wagner’s love of Bellini and the importance of creating ‘beautiful lines’. In this production Simon was playing against **Warwick Fyfe’s** powerful Wotan. Simon acknowledged that Warwick had been a great source of encouragement for him to start down the Wagnerian path. Simon was also very generous in his praise of fellow Australian singers, notably **Brad Cooper**, **Antoinette Halloran** and **Adrian Tamburini**. He believes that Australia has many highly talented singers and hopes that the new Opera Australia regime will use them more and import fewer overseas performers.

One of the highlights of his career was singing Telramund opposite Jonas Kaufmann in *Lohengrin* in Melbourne in 2023. He likened the role to Verdi’s Macbeth. Simon considers himself a very flexible performer and knows he needs to be patient for the big roles to come along. At age 52, Simon thinks ‘the best is yet to come’. In the meantime he has been busy with concert performances; including Froh for the SSO/Simone Young *Das Rheingold* last November, and a range of interesting new work, including the premiere of *Eucalyptus* in Melbourne. He is currently starting to look at Wotan and Beckmesser and other roles he hopes to sing include Amfortas and Kurwenal.

Simon shared some of his experiences over the past few years singing in China in works by Puccini and Mozart. He said the facilities were extraordinarily good. All performances were sold out and the audiences were very enthusiastic. He did, however, find the audiences use of mobile phone cameras somewhat off-putting. He thinks there are many opportunities for Australian performers in China.

This was a very enjoyable afternoon, with some stimulating questions and comments from the audience. We look forward to seeing Simon in performance in the not too distant future.

SIMONE YOUNG AM AT BAYREUTH 2024

Our Patron, **Simone Young** AM, made her Bayreuth Festival debut on 28 August, the first Australian and the first woman to conduct the *Ring* there. There was loud cheering, stomping and even a standing ovation for her musical interpretation of the great Nibelung saga.

Joel Maddalano in *Plateau Magazine* enthused **Simone Young's** triumph on the podium has been achieved thanks to some readings where the refinement in the use of *leitmotif*, the nuances achieved in a continuous crescendo, a theatrical



nerve on the surface, with lively dynamics, contrasts, colours and a strong dramatic character, where the development of the stage action has always had another main protagonist in the pit. What's more, with Young, the absolute protagonism of the orchestra has been rescued again, a fact that had not occurred since Thielemann's direction of the Ring cycles from 2006 to 2010. Once again, with Simone Young, the Ring shines in the key moments of the operas: the majestic ascension to Walhalla at the end of *Das Rheingold*, the preludes to each act of the operas, magnificent in *Die Walküre*, the murmurings in Siegfried's forest or his navigation along the Rhine, the love duets between Siegmund and Sieglinde or Siegfried and Brünnhilde, the funeral march or the apocalyptic ending of *Götterdämmerung*, but without relying on that very theatrical silence before the exciting final chord, which Young here perhaps dismissed as predictable. The response of the Bayreuther Festspiele Orchestra could not have been more beautiful, fluid and contrasting. The solo moments of the brass, clarinets, bassoons, English horn, bass clarinet, horns and tubas shone like never before, with chamber sounds that contrasted with an orchestral sound of golden finishes and poetic filigree. The understanding between musicians and podium bore fruit with a full sound, full of colours, chromaticism and well-defined harmonies, always at the service of the drama. An orchestral success that unleashed the best ovations in each appearance of Young at the end of the operas.

SIMONE YOUNG ON WAGNER

"There is something about the tension that he creates and maintains over long spans and then releases and then the tension picks up again. He creates enormous arcs of structure. What he created are masterpieces that can be interpreted by successive generations of directors and conductors and singers that address important key things about humanity."

SUNDAY 28 JULY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.00PM DVD *THE RING WITHOUT WORDS*

This was a beautifully filmed and recorded concert by the Berlin Philharmoniker with Lorin Maazel conducting his arrangement of a synthesis of orchestral pieces from the *Ring*

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

This was a very pleasant, relaxed and informative presentation by two masters of their craft revisiting the production process that resulted in, arguably, Australia's best *Ring* – the 2004 Adelaide *Ring*, directed by **Elke Neidhardt**, with sets by **Michael Scott-Mitchell** and lighting by **Nick Schlieper**. Each is an internationally recognised leader in their fields, who have often worked together over the past 30 years on a wide variety of opera, theatre and large scale public events.

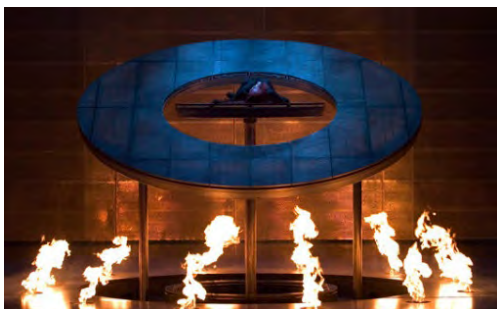
They revealed the magnitude of the task of preparing the first fully staged Ring in

Australia since 1913. with its many political, financial and technical challenges. Particularly impressive was the effort, research and experimentation carried out by large teams of largely volunteer scientists and craftsman to achieve wonderful magical effects which reinforced the genius of Wagner's vision. The use of real fire and large volumes of running water was groundbreaking. Michael painted a picture of wonderful harmony between the production team, conductor and cast – all dedicated to achieving the best possible result. (On a limited budget!).

Michael and Nick illustrated their talk with many photos of the design and construction process. Particularly impressive were photos of the model sets. These were nearly identical to photos taken of the finished production on stage. This marvellous model cost \$230k and was disgracefully thrown some years later – an act of cultural vandalism. The sets were also destroyed as there wasn't the political will to revise the production, as originally envisaged. On a more positive note Nick revealed that the long anticipated book about the production will hopefully not be delayed too much longer.



Michael Scott-Mitchell and Nick Schlieper with Brangayne wine gifts



Brünnhilde's rock *Die Walküre* Act 3

The afternoon ended with audience questions and an interesting discussion of the use of flat LED screens, replacing traditional three-dimensional solid scenery. Michael thought that audiences will soon tire of them as they don't allow the full range of special effects and materials needed for a total immersive experience for performers and audience.

SUNDAY 18 AUGUST AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.00PM DVD LOTTE LEHMANN MASTERCLASS

This was a delightful insight into the acting techniques of one of the greatest singing actresses and recitalists of the first half of the 20th century, as she conducted a masterclass for a new generation of young singers.



Dr Antony Ernst



Lynn Williams, Esteban Insausti, Chris Ford



David Whitehouse, Leona Geeves, Antony Ernst, Robert Mitchell

2.00PM TALK BY DR ANTONY ERNST ON LOVE, LAW AND POWER IN *DIE WALKÜRE*

A near capacity crowd of members and guests gave **Dr Antony Ernst** an enthusiastic reception; it has been five years since his last talk to the Society. We are all very happy that Antony has returned home to Australia and will be actively engaged in future events, starting with the WSNSW *Die Walküre* Symposium on 10 November.

Antony's talk had all his trademarks; love and understanding of Wagner's music and ideas, plus deep scholarship and knowledge of German culture and history, all presented in a seemingly off-the-cuff and spontaneous manner. What could have been rather dry topic – the difference between old Germanic laws with their oral tradition, new German laws and the Napoleonic Civil Code – was fascinating when applied to each of the three acts of *Die Walküre*. Antony's thesis is that, in this work, Wagner, with his revolutionary background, is exploring the change in Germany from autocratic monarchy to human rights-based popular society.

Antony explained that *Das Rheingold*, in effect, explores the Civil Code with its tenets of Persons, Property, Acquisition of property and Civil Procedure. At the same time, the counterpoint to justice - compassion - is ruined by Alberich's curse on love which turns everything on its head – in the *Ring* actions done for love turn out badly. Wotan is seen as the embodiment of old German law, where the Law is whatever the person with authority says, demanding unquestioning obedience, without any room for compassion or emotion. Antony pointed out that in Germany there was no formal legal civil code until 1906.

The 1876 audience would have been shocked with Act 1 of *Die Walküre*, when the old order is overturned – the rules of hospitality,



Near capacity - members and guests

faithfulness to marriage vows and the taboo against incest are broken by Siegmund and Sieglinde. Natural laws, civilised laws and cultural laws – all broken. In Act 2, audiences would side with Fricka, who understands the rules that form the basis of society, and argues forcefully that Wotan must rectify the situation and ensure Siegmund's death. Brünnhilde is called by Wotan to help – she also represents the old Germanic laws but changes completely when Siegmund refuses to accept her ritualistic Annunciation of Death because of his deep human love for Sieglinde. In Act 3 Brünnhilde is outraged by the injustice of the old laws, whereas Wotan is obsessed by her disobedience. Brünnhilde understands that Wotan's *Will* (which is what he feels and really wants) is at odds with his *Word* (which is what he tells her to do). She is expelled from society because she has broken Germanic law – Wotan's word. Wotan's dilemma is that although he is an all-powerful ruler/god, he is also bound by rules and treaties and not totally free to act as he wants, unlike a traditional autocratic king. Antony ended his fascinating talk with ideas about Loge, who is the only character who uses the chromatic scale, and the symbolism of fire – the power of life – the life force that will destroy the old gods.

A wonderful afternoon enjoyed by all present.



Jill Sykes, Jacqui Sykes, Leona Geeves, Minnie Binns



Afternoon tea

OUR MEMBERS ABROAD

WSNSW MEMBERS AT THE LONGBOROUGH RING, JUNE 2024



June and Helen with Maestro Anthony Negus



Jano Nash, Helen Meddings, June Donsworth, Bradley Daley, (Siegfried), Glynis Johns and Mitzi Saunders



John Studdert, Deborah Humble, Julie Clarke, Bruce Caldwell, Terry Clarke



Bradley Daley as Siegfried

Extract from Bachtrack review of *Siegfried* at Longborough

"...**Bradley Daley's** Siegfried... had all the notes, singing strongly and clearly right until the end, for all the role's cruel demands, not least Wagner's unkindness in pairing him up with a soprano who comes in fresh-voiced for only the last forty minutes of the evening. Here, Longborough regular **Lee Bisset** made a compelling Brünnhilde, her tone bright and communication vivid.

...But finally, we return to **Anthony Negus** and his gifted orchestra. Each of the three acts unfolded in a seamless arc, with equal definition given to the music's forward momentum and its creation of atmosphere, and with the players recessed under the stage the balance with the singers – who are helped by their close proximity to the audience."

Norman Lebrecht on *Die Walküre* at Longborough 2024

Die Walküre stands at the pinnacle of Romantic musical drama. Barely has the curtain opened when Wagner unleashes orchestral writing that sweeps everything away in its path. Storm, incest, divine wrath, irrepressible passion: everything is there to announce the tortuous destiny of the heroes. Through a composition in which every instrument contributes to the tragedy, Wagner begins the story proper, illuminating words and scenes with his famous leitmotifs that run beneath the singers, pass into their voices, transform and resurface as the plot develops. It is not surprising that *Die Walküre* is widely regarded as the most popular and the most moving of Wagner's works. Likened to a Bayreuth in the English countryside, Longborough Festival staged a new production following the socially-distanced concert performance of *Die Walküre* in 2021. This new production is seen for the first time as part of Longborough's 2024 Ring cycle. It is directed by Amy Lane, Artistic Director of Copenhagen Opera Festival, and conducted by Anthony Negus, Longborough's Music Director and eminent Wagnerian.

<https://slippedisc.com/2024/08/operavision-6/>



ESTEBAN AND AGNES AT THE RING IN DEUTSCHE OPER BERLIN WITH FRIENDS OF WSNSW MEMBERS, **BERNT VON OHLEN** AND **TOM NICHOL**



MARIE AT *TANNHÄUSER* IN FRANKFURT WITH THE MOTHER OF **CHRISTINA NILSSEN**, THE WONDERFUL SOPRANO SINGING THE ROLE OF ELISABETH.

OBITUARIES

DR SUSAN KELLY

23.9.1939 - 26.8. 2024



We note with sadness the passing of Sue Kelly, a WSNSW foundation member (No4), the first vice president, a generous donor and an active committee member for many years.

We will publish tributes in the December Quarterly

STEVE DAVISLIM

1967 - 2024



The world of opera is in deep mourning following the tragic news of the passing of **Steve Davislim**, the distinguished Australian operatic tenor, who died on August 11, 2024, at the age of 57. Born in 1967 in Malaysia, with roots in both Irish and Chinese heritage, Davislim was based in Vienna, Austria, and spent over three decades gracing the stages of the world's most prestigious opera houses and collaborating with leading orchestras and conductors. For Opera Australia he sang David in *Die Meistersinger* in Sydney in 2003. In 2023 he sang Idomeneo for Victoria Opera/OA and sang the role of Loge in **Simone Young's** *Das Rheingold* at SOH in November 2023. **Peter McCallum** wrote in SMH ".... captivatingly suave bloom and mellifluousness melodic shaping of Steve Davislim's voice as the mercurial Loge. His performance is a gem of fluid vocal characterisation". Simone paid tribute to Steve "..... Steve was an artist I first recorded with in 1995 in Melbourne. He's the only artist I've ever made a recording with as a pianist – we recorded Benjamin Britten's *Folk Songs* together – and I conducted Steve in *Eugene Onegin* and *Die Meistersinger* for Opera Australia. He worked with me in Hamburg. He was working with me again in Berlin in April and May this year where he suddenly become very ill. Steve was one of those colleagues that you were always happy to see. It's all been rather shocking for all of us."

Steve is survived by his wife, two children and brother tenor Garrie Davislim, who is in the ensemble at Münster and sang in the production of *Carmen* mentioned by Menila Moineaux. The Wagner Society in NSW sends them our sympathy.

Stuart Skelton expressed his sorrow, "How utterly devastating. Incredibly sad news indeed. Condolences to his family."

EDO DE WAART RETIRES

Dutch conductor Edo de Waart, aged eighty-two, has announced his retirement from conducting, due to ill health. De Waart became Chief Conductor and Artistic Adviser of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1993, and served in the post until 2003. While in Sydney, De Waart made no secret of his dislike of the acoustics of the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall, the orchestra's home, saying, "if there is no clear intention to do something to improve the hall, then we really seriously have to look at another venue"

REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL RICHARD WAGNER CONGRESS, BERLIN, 28 MAY TO 3 JUNE 2024

BY SHIRLEY BREESE (IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT OF THE RICHARD WAGNER SOCIETY VICTORIA)

In a fortunate coincidence that the Richard-Wagner-Verband International e. V. (The Richard Wagner Society International) Congress for 2024 was to be held at the time I would be in Berlin as part of a 6 week overseas trip. Having previously attended RWVI Congresses in Prague, Dessau and Venice it was arranged for me to become the Delegate for The RWS Victoria and carry a Proxy for WSNSW at the Berlin Delegates Meeting (AGM).

I was able to participate in all Congress events because, as part of my own planning, I already had my tickets for the Congress linked events. I attended the Deutsche Oper *Ring*, with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles and directed by Stefan Herheim. I also attended performances of Bruckner's 6th Symphony and a premiere of a horn concerto by Jörg Widmann, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle. As usual the Delegates Meeting on Thursday May 30 was a long day as there was much to discuss from the planned agenda, a proposed change to the constitution and the election of a new Board. The meeting was held in a rehearsal room of the Deutsche Oper Berlin and proceedings were mostly in German with simultaneous translations in English and French. The meeting was chaired by the current President, Rainer Fineske. Details of the meeting, members of the new Board and some photos can be found on the RWVI Website https://www.richard-wagner.org/rwvi/en/news/news-committee/?collection_id=4213 but in essence two Golden Ws for service to Wagner Societies were presented, previous minutes were passed, Auditor Report approved, Constitution changed to have 11 Board Members instead of 15, a new Board to serve for the next 5 years was elected and Honorary Membership of the RWVI was granted to Prof. Katharina Wagner, Bayreuth Festival Director.

On Saturday 1 June I attended a Symposium, unfortunately only in German, held in cooperation with the Deutsche Oper Berlin. It began with a lecture by Dr. Sabine Sonntag on the topic of "Wagner and Puccini" to mark the 100th anniversary of his death and was followed by a lecture by Prof. Dr. Nike Wagner on the Bayreuth Festival. A Reception in the Opera House Foyer for all the RWVI participants followed the Symposium.

I enjoyed participating in the Berlin Congress because it gave me a chance to meet many friends from previous Congresses and to meet the new Board who are keen to get working for all the RWVI Member Societies around the world.

JUNE DONSWORTH'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE PERFORMANCE OF *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE* AT COPENHAGEN OPERA HOUSE ON 2ND JUNE 2024

This performance was attended by Queen Margrethe II. The audience stood when she arrived, and when the singers came out to applause at the finale, each singer would turn to the Queen and bow to her first before facing the audience. She is obviously held in great respect by the Danish people.

ACT 1. The set is a slightly sloping stage divided into two; behind a half height barrier are the sailors and amongst them, milling about, are Tristan, Melot and Kurwenal. In front of the barrier is Isolde's shipboard living quarters, with a lounge to upper left, and to the right a bench and a cabinet (containing the potions). Isolde is wearing a long blue dress/cloak and Brangäne a similar dark blue dress/cloak. Isolde looks youngish and has long blonde hair. Elisabet Strid has a beautiful voice, and she acts and shows intense emotion very impressively. Her recounting of her grief over her fiancé's death and her encounter with Tantris and then her discovery that he was actually Tristan who had killed Morold was particularly effective, as was her expression of fury towards Tristan and her desire for revenge. Bryan Register (Tristan) is a big bloke with curly hair, wearing a navy kilt, a navy scarf around his neck, belts, sword, pants tucked into boots. (He resembled a koala). He has quite a light Heldentenor voice— his presence lacks charisma and he was somewhat passive in his acting compared to Isolde's gripping acting and singing.

ACT 2. The set is the slightly sloping stage again, with about 10 scattered cherry blossom trees in flower and their fallen petals all over the stage. A brazier stands in the upper right. Isolde is sitting on a pale wood bench and wearing a long pale pink flowing gown. Both Strid and Register sang well, Isolde particularly. They began their love song lying on their backs, then sitting up hugging each other, then wound themselves around a cherry tree trunk. The cherry trees provided a useful intermediary between them whilst singing of their love rapture.

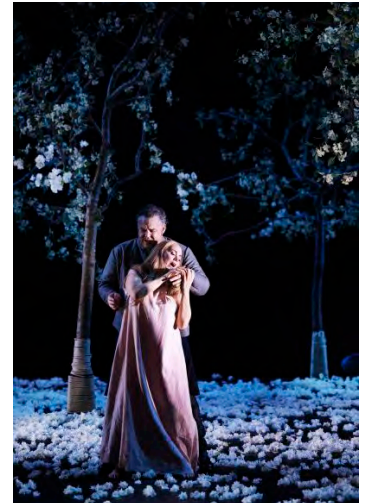
Singing the role of King Marke, Kyungil Ko, had a beautiful voice, but lacked gravitas, and in some way failed to express the terrible anguish of being betrayed by his much-loved nephew Tristan.

Hanne Fischer (Brangäne) acted the loyal servant with loving concern for Isolde, with a beautiful mellow light mezzo voice.

ACT 3. The set's bare except for a large pile of black rocks in the middle of the stage. Kurwenal is lying on his back up against the rock, his boots facing the audience. Tristan is to his left, lying on a slanted barouche. The connection between the 2 of them, and the tenderness shown by Kurwenal towards Tristan was extraordinarily moving. The bank of lights which had been overhead in ACT 1 is now vertically placed behind the pile of rocks. When Isolde arrives, there is a very moving scene sung by Isolde and Tristan. Tristan dies. When King Marke, Melot and Brangäne arrive, the struggle between Melot and Kurwenal occurs, both dying. The drama of all this and the singing was all of high quality. Strid (Isolde) sings the *Liebestod*. This is truly a transformation, sung by Isolde, because as she sings, the vertical bank of lights becomes brighter and brighter until she is transformed from Life to Death by vanishing into the void, while the audience is blinded by the dazzling lights. A magnificent finale to an enthralling *Tristan und Isolde*. Superb music played magnificently.

Note: the part of Tristan was advertised to be sung by Simon O'Neill but it was not to be. Those members of the WSNSW present were truly disappointed. Simon had been extraordinarily generous with his time and sung excerpts from Wagner operas at our recent event starring him at the Goethe Institut.

The Royal Danish Opera house was designed by architects Henning Larsen, completed 2005. Approached by ferry, the Opera House juts out over the water - all stunningly gold/orange. In the foyer, suspended balconies and stairways provide viewpoints and multi-level public spaces, all dominated by the shiny ochre coloured inner shell of the concert hall - it is warm and light-filled, and on upper decks there are great views of the city and beyond. In the auditorium the balconies are semicircular and beautifully lit with pinpoint points of light.



Elisabet Strid & Bryan Register

Conductor **Paolo Carignani** Italian; has conducted in all the major European music theatres, opera and symphonic.

Director **Sofia Adrian Jupither** Swedish stage director

Set designer **Erlend Birkeland**

Costumes **Maria Geber**

Tristan **Bryan Register** American Heldentenor - has sung Siegmund at Baden-Baden, Copenhagen and Singapore, Lohengrin at La Monnaie, Hong Kong and Savonlinna, Eric in Pittsburgh, Tristan in Mexico.

Isolde **Elisabet Strid** Swedish soprano, recognized for Wagnerian roles including Venus in *Tannhäuser*, Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*, Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*. Upcoming performances are Senta in Tokyo and Valencia, and Brünnhilde at Royal Opera House directed by Barrie Kosky.

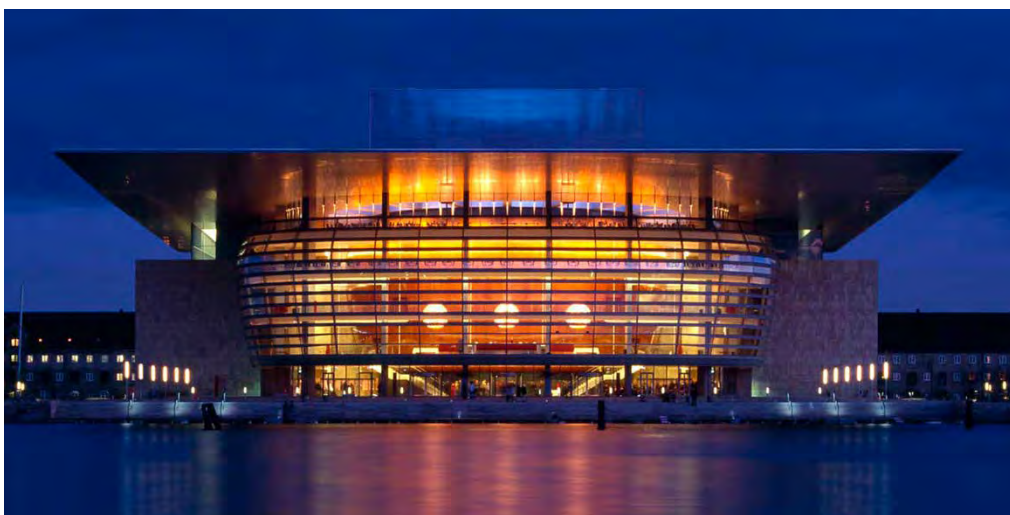
King Marke **Kyungil Ko Bass** from Korea, soloist with the Royal Danish Opera House

Kurwenal **Jens Søndergaard** Danish baritone. Future roles include Gunther at NY opera, Iago and Kothner with DKT.

Melot **Niels Jørgen Riis** Danish tenor

Brangäne **Hanne Fischer** Danish mezzo-soprano. Long term member of the Royal Theatre and guest artist at Berlin State Opera, Hamburg State Opera, Theatre Bonn.

With the Royal Danish Orchestra and the Royal Danish Opera Chorus.



Copenhagen Opera House

ANSELM KIEFER AND THE RING

www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6162296

'I like to treat inanimate things such as stones as if they were living things, and to treat vivid, living people as if they were stones, I like this too.'

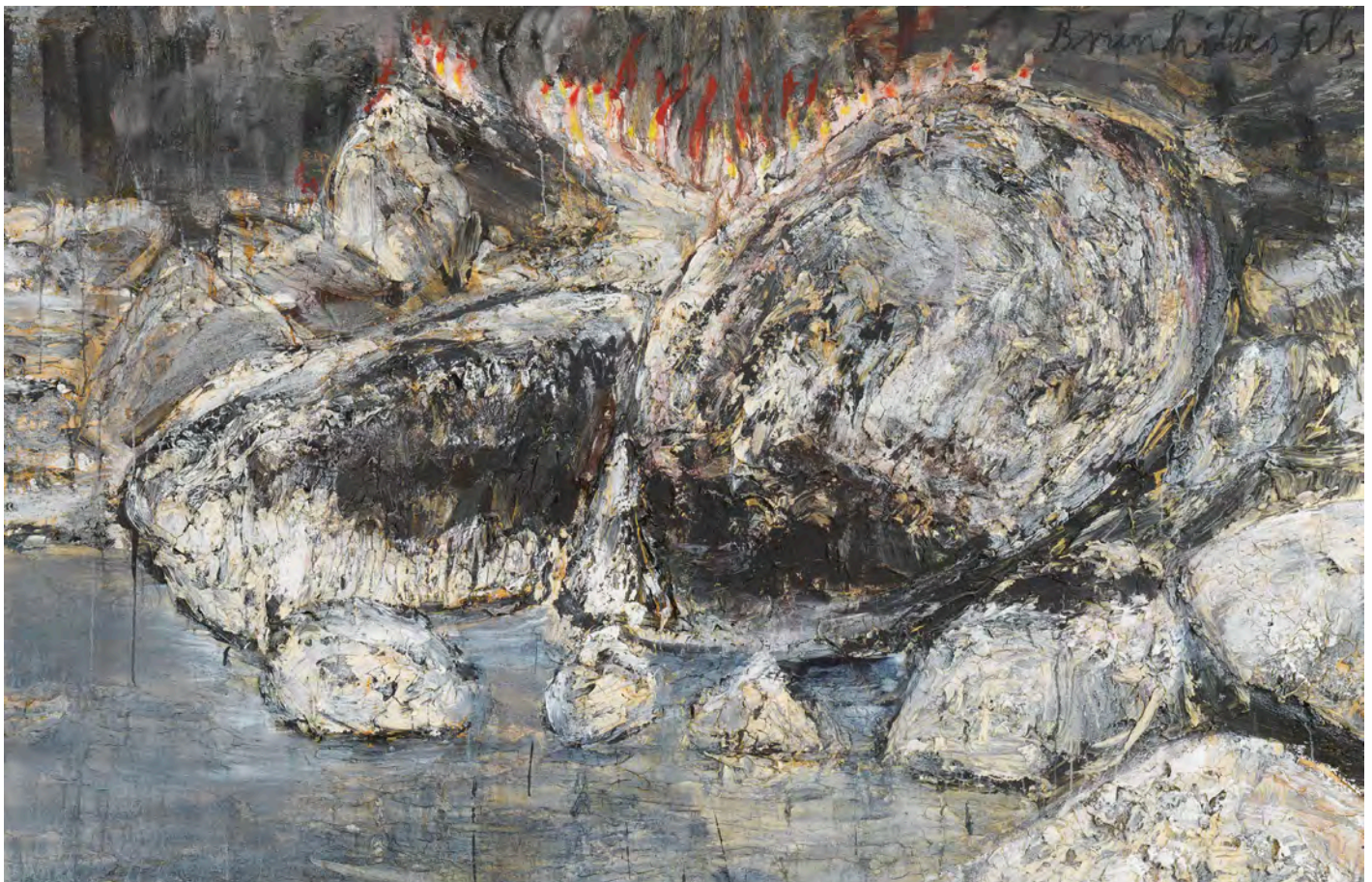
ANSELM KIEFER

German artist **Anselm Kiefer**, born 1945, is one of the most important contemporary German painters, and his art often draws on Germanic myth. In the image *Brünnhilde sleeps* on the front cover of this Quarterly he portrays the dormant Brünnhilde as French actress Catherine Deneuve in François Truffaut's film *Mississippi Mermaid*, using a photograph he snapped in a movie house in 1969. In the film, Deneuve plays a deceitful mail-order bride who comes to the island of Réunion to marry a plantation owner, played by Jean-Paul Belmondo. Aside from the parallels of love and betrayal in both the *Ring Cycle* and Truffaut's film, Kiefer thought the choice of Deneuve for Brünnhilde both ironic and amusing: she was for him "the contrary of Brünnhilde. Very slim, very French, very cool, very sexy," hinting that no man would go through fire to obtain Wagner's corpulent, armored Valkyrie.

Brünnhildes Fels (Brünnhilde's Rock), is an evocative depiction of a terrestrial mythology. Overwhelming much of the large canvas is a close detailing of a rocky outcrop; each boulder is made up of a thick swirl of textured grey and brown. The almost encrusted, impasto paint resembles the sediment it depicts, and this heavy application is characteristic of Kiefer's work. In the centre of the canvas's upper edge a small crest, a single line of orange flames crowns the tops of these rocks. The painting's subject comes from *The Ring of the Nibelung*, a motif Kiefer has repeatedly reinterpreted. In this presentation of the Norse myth, the Valkyrie Brünnhilde is imprisoned in a ring of fames and sentenced

to an infinite sleep after she defies Odin. After an arduous journey, Siegfried, the hero of *The Ring cycle*, defies the magical flames and awakens Brünnhilde. Throughout his career, Kiefer has repeatedly invoked Brünnhilde: works from this extensive series are held in several international collections.

Much of Kiefer's practice is concerned with reconciling German identity in the aftermath of World War II, and he is particularly fascinated by the way signs and stories were co-opted, abused and swallowed up by history. The author Karl Ove Knausgård wrote that through his art, Kiefer '[seeks] to grasp the timeless, and install it here amongst us' (K. Ove Knausgård, 'Tåndaeadei!' *Anselm Kiefer: Transition from Cool to Warm*). Doing so, the rocks of *Brünnhildes Fels* are suggestive not only of Siegfried's odyssey, but also wartime rubble, itself a nightmarish landscape. Kiefer's practice is often described as alchemical, owing in part to the artist's fascination with the transcendence of materials as a creative process. This is reflected in the ways he folds meaning into a painting's ecology, into the conception of land which is so essential to the German psyche, but also through his ability to make historical knowledge profoundly resonant and communal. The alchemist's role is not to transform rock into gold, but rather to 'become an intermediary through which the actions of cosmic forces manifest themselves' (D. Arasse, *Anselm Kiefer*). Entwined within *Brünnhildes Fels* are whole histories and temporalities, layers of meaning which permeate each brushstroke and gesture.

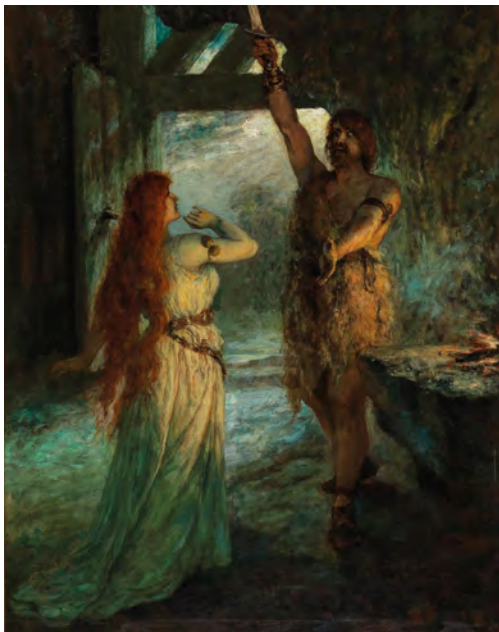


Anselm Kiefer *Brünnhildes Fels (Brünnhilde's Rock)* 2007

DIE WALKÜRE

Die Walküre – A Tug at the Heart by Richard Rothschild

www.lyricopera.org/lyric-lately/die-walkure-a-tug-at-the-heart



Ferdinand Leeke Sieglinde and Siegmund 1916

Call it the great exception.

Die Walküre, the second opera of Richard Wagner's mammoth *Ring of the Nibelung* cycle long has reigned as the most popular of the tetralogy and ranks among the favorites of the composer's entire oeuvre. Wagner is challenging to many operagoers, but even those devoted to more compact, more obviously tuneful Italian and French standard-repertoire works often make room for *Die Walküre*.

Why? Because in *Die Walküre*, particularly its closing pages, Wagner showcased his better self, and composed music for the ages.

The opera introduces audiences to Brünnhilde, the Ring's central character and the opera's namesake. *Die Walküre* features a rapturous love scene in Act One, one of most famous tunes in all music, "The Ride of the Valkyries," plus a finale that, when it comes to heartrending beauty and eloquence, has few equals in opera.

And considering that between the end of *Das Rheingold* and the opening of *Die Walküre* the god Wotan has sired at least eleven children (none with his wife, Fricka), there are noticeable biographical elements to the work, particularly Wagner's less-than-faithful relationship with his wife.

When Wagner composed *Die Walküre* between June 1854 and March 1856, his marriage to Minna Planer was disintegrating. Minna often criticized Wagner's wandering eye, most notably his relationship with Mathilde Wesendonck, the wife of a wealthy silk merchant who was a patron of Wagner's.

By the time *Die Walküre* had its world premiere in Munich on June 26, 1870 – featuring the real-life husband and wife duo of Henrich Vogel and Therese Vogel as Siegmund and Sieglinde – Minna had died. Wagner was about

to marry Cosima von Bülow, with whom he already had produced three children. Cosima was the daughter of Franz Liszt and the wife of maestro Hans von Bülow, who had conducted the world premieres of *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger*.

But *Die Walküre's* appeal extends well beyond memorable music and an interesting back story. It takes patience to mine *Die Walküre's* treasures, musically and dramatically. Much of the opera is foreboding and confrontational. The music, often in minor keys, bespeaks strife, debate and anger. Yet audiences for nearly a century and a half have been more than willing to wait for the opera's grand payoffs.

Why?

Because these are characters we care about, particularly Siegmund, Sieglinde and Brünnhilde. Even Wotan, who came across as a bossy wheeler-dealer for much of *Das Rheingold*, the opening opera in the cycle, draws our sympathies by the time the curtain falls. David Pountney, who directed the *Ring* for Lyric Opera of Chicago, sees elements of Ibsen, surely in advocacy of women's rights and identity, spotlighted in his play *A Doll's House*.

Das Rheingold, despite its fast-moving action and musical glories, doesn't register on the same personal level as *Die Walküre*. Drama and power politics abound but other than Alberich's grubby pursuit of the Rhinemaidens and the giant Fasolt's high school-like crush on the goddess Freia, *Das Rheingold* provides little space for love or humanity.

Die Walküre more than fills the gap, starting with the romance between the Volsung twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde in the opening act. Act One is a gem of a mini-opera. It is the shortest act in the *Ring*, lasting a bit more than an hour, with only three characters— all who are gone by early in Act Three. Symphony

"The act hits overdrive when Siegmund pulls Wotan's sword Nothing out of the ash tree and the orchestra explodes in triumphal light with the themes of the sword and the Volsungs, culminating in one of Wagner's most rapturous love duets."

Richard Rothschild of Oak Park has written about opera for more than 30 years, including during a 21-year stint at the Chicago Tribune. One of the first operas he attended was Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* at the original Metropolitan Opera House in New York.



Warwick Fyfe as Wotan and Antoinette Halloran as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* in the MO Ring



orchestras around the world perform concert versions of Act One, and the 1935 Act One recording with Lauritz Melchior as Siegmund, Lotte Lehmann as Sieglinde, and Emmanuel List as Hunding, with Bruno Walter conducting the Vienna Philharmonic, is considered one of the greatest operatic performances ever put on disc.

Siegmund is the *Ring's* man of constant sorrow and his Volsung motif indicates a proud warrior who has had to fight for everything. Once he meets Sieglinde, he senses that his life could be about to change. Yes, there's that little matter about the two being brother and sister. Most audiences, however, are willing to cut the Volsung kids a bit of slack. Their relationship doesn't have the "ick" factor of brother-sister lovers Jamie and Cersei Lannister in *Game of Thrones*.

Carolyn Abate and Roger Parker, authors of the authoritative *A History of Opera*, suggest Siegmund and Sieglinde "jolted Wagner to a higher plane in his thinking about motifs in the dark, those intricate musical transformations that depict the twins' increasing passion." The authors note the Volsungs' realization that they are related seems "to ignite them further."

The act hits overdrive when Siegmund pulls Wotan's sword Nothing out of the ash tree and the orchestra explodes in triumphal light with the themes of the sword and the Volsungs, culminating in one of Wagner's most rapturous love duets. Too bad *Die Walküre* doesn't end

with the happy pair escaping into the night. Even an illegal marriage seems preferable for Sieglinde than staying with that boorish bully Hunding.

Act Two, the second longest of the cycle (after Act One of *Götterdämmerung*), challenges singers and listeners. It returns to the musical and dramatic darkness that pervaded the start of the opera with a different set of relationships. Wotan and his favourite daughter Brünnhilde, who open the act in high spirits, will be in bitter conflict when the curtain closes. Wotan's ability to control events – even in his own family – is shattered, starting with his wife Fricka, the goddess of the hearth and matrimony.

A strict constructionist when it comes to matrimonial matters, Fricka demands that Wotan disavow the immoral Volsung union. Audiences often view Fricka as a righteous spoilsport, but Valhalla law is on her side. Her music ends with a noble reference to her "rights, sublime and glorious," showing Fricka, too, is an immortal, and Wotan's equal.

As Wotan's plans disintegrate, for the first time in the opera we hear the music of Alberich's curse – *Die Walküre* is the only opera in the cycle where we never physically see the ring. The confident and sometimes arrogant god of *Das Rheingold* is losing his mojo. In front of Brünnhilde, Wotan delivers a lengthy narration, described by music critic Alex Ross as "the most spectacular psychological tailspin in the history of opera." The quiet, contained music accurately portrays Wotan's utter dejection as he realizes the fates of the ring, the gods and, certainly, the Volsungs are out of his hands.

For the rest of the *Ring* cycle, this is a humbled god.

Brünnhilde, who comes off as spirited but somewhat one-dimensional through the opening of Act Two, undergoes her own transformation in the "Todesverkündigung," the announcement of death to Siegmund, who no longer enjoys the Valkyrie's protection. It is a scene of majesty and foreboding. The music starts at a stately pace with the Valhalla theme, but it increases in tempo and agitation when Siegmund tells Brünnhilde that he will not accompany her to the joys of the afterlife once he learns his "sister-bride" Sieglinde will not be at his side.

Brünnhilde, who has never witnessed such romantic passion and humanity, has a profound change of heart and agrees to fight at Siegmund's side, culminating a powerful scene that, ultimately, results in Wotan's favourite daughter forfeiting her rights to be a Valkyrie. But if Brünnhilde has lost Wotan's support, she has become a more sympathetic – dare we say human – character.

Before getting into the crux of Act Three, a quick word about "The Ride of the Valkyries" that opens the act, perhaps the most famous music Wagner ever composed. It is accessible enough to serve as a ditty for Elmer Fudd as he pursues Bugs Bunny, but it also possesses the martial quality to accompany a battle scene in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. As Wagner unleashes the full power of his large orchestra, audiences can picture winged horses soaring over mountaintops, ridden by a very different kind of woman.

To mid-19th century sensibilities, the presentation of women as confident and athletic as the brash Valkyries would have been radical. Females didn't behave this way. Fricka dismisses the brood as "good-for-nothing wenches." Yet the Valkyries are the predecessors not only of a superhero like Wonder Woman, but the worldclass female athletes who win Olympic and NCAA championships. Perhaps their music has become a bit of a cliché but the Valkyries' attitude was more than a century ahead of its time.

Wotan is never angrier than when he confronts Brünnhilde in Act Three. She is his favourite daughter, the only Valkyrie to whom he would confide his innermost thoughts, the one he allowed to "serve me mead at my table" and who protects his back in battle. Now she has betrayed him. But because of their special relationship, the humiliated Brünnhilde senses her father still regards her dearly. Once she persuades "war-father" to surround her with flames so that "only a fearless noble hero will find me," the ultimate glories of *Die Walküre* are released.

Had Wagner not written another opera, he would be remembered for Wotan's farewell, music of tremendous emotion that accompanies this most conflicted of fathers who must say goodbye to his beloved daughter. The swelling music leaves the strife behind and begins to incorporate elements of Valhalla, the Valkyries, the sleep motif, the coming of Siegfried in the next opera and, eventually, Loge's magic fire theme, called by some wags the "heat motif."

Long gone are the pyrotechnics of the Siegmund-Sieglinde love duet, replaced by music of profound tenderness. Any father who has seen a daughter leave home, be it for college, work or marriage, knows the emotion that accompanies such partings.

"On a happier man may your eyes shine," sings Wotan as music from the strings and horns sends Brünnhilde into a magical sleep. No doubt, Wotan is diminished from the master of the universe he sought to portray at the start of *Die Walküre*. Yet he is a far nobler character. Through unexpected and tortuous paths, Wotan, now a sympathetic father, has earned our respect and admiration, and his farewell brings a glorious benediction to this most beloved of *Ring* operas.

THE VALKYRIES: WARRIOR WOMEN OF ASGARD

By The Viking Dragon Jun 23, 2023 | <https://thevikingdragon.com>

Norse mythology is rich in fascinating figures and enigmatic spirits, though few have enjoyed such a lively legacy as the Valkyries. Imagined as beautiful warrior women, riding gallantly through a battlefield, or watching from above on flying horses, these intermediaries between the gods and mortals continue to inspire storytellers a thousand years after the Viking Age.

Given the vivid imagery and drama of the Valkyries' legend, it's no surprise they continue to pop up in pop culture today. If you're a fan of the Marvel comics, Xena: Warrior Princess or the God of War series, you'll be familiar with the modern depictions of Valkyries (usually blonde, slender and armed with a smattering of girl power). But like most modern interpretations of Norse mythology, that's not entirely true to the Viking Age legend, which itself evolved from different pre-Viking ideas.

The word 'Valkyrie' comes from the Old Norse for 'Chooser of the Slain.' This refers to the Valkyries' crucial role in choosing which fallen warriors were worthy of a place in Valhalla and carrying their soul from the mortal realm to Odin's halls in Asgard. In some stories, they can pre-determine which warriors will survive and which will fall on the battlefield, or even decide the outcome of battles before they have begun. It was believed that the Valkyries were able to see the true courage and honour in a man's heart, making them able to choose those who had both exceptional skills in combat and the moral code of a virtuous warrior.

Given their role in deciding the fate of fallen warriors, to see a Valkyrie was an omen of war and bloodshed. They were said to ride fearlessly into battle on horseback, their magnificent armour shining in the sun. Some legends even tell of Valkyries riding wolves or boars, or flying above the battlefield to observe the scene below. In some instances, they're said to have wings or wear winged helmets and fly among a flock of swans or ravens. Just as the on-screen Valkyries that we see today are a departure from the Viking-age myth, the Valkyries that the Vikings believed in were quite different from their pre-Viking ancestors. It's thought that the Valkyries' legend evolved from an older Germanic idea of female war spirits, who gathered at battlefields and decided the fates of the warriors.

These were not the virtuous caretakers of slain fighters who captivated men with their beauty and carried them off to a wondrous afterlife. The pre-Viking Valkyries were dark entities with powerful, malicious magic which were seen as harbingers of bloodshed and misery. Our clearest depiction of these fearsome early Valkyries comes from *Darraðarljóð*, a poem in the *Njal Saga*. Here we find a description of twelve mystical women sitting beside the battlefield of Clontarf, weaving the fates of warriors on a loom made from intestines and weighted by severed heads.

Before the concept of Valhalla took hold in Norse mythology, the Valkyries' choices for who would live and die were seen as capricious

and unpredictable. With no moral code or promise of eternal glory to guide them, it seemed to warriors that their fate would be decided on a whim by an unknowable, unworldly being. As the idea of an afterlife for brave warriors was popularised in Viking folklore, the perception of the Valkyries changed. No longer agents of chaos, they had a specific task to choose the bravest and more honourable of fighters, shifting their image to become virtuous and noble.

It's also likely that the Valkyries' image was influenced by stories of Shieldmaidens: Viking women who fought in battle alongside male warriors. This may have spurred the Valkyries' evolution from observers of war to active participants. The Valkyries are usually depicted as wearing armour and carrying spears, and are seen as a crucial force in Odin's Ragnarök army. Some stories even tell of Valkyries fighting alongside their favoured warriors on Earth, influencing the outcome of battles not by magic but through force.

Just like the word Viking, 'Valkyrie' is a job description, not a race or a species. There are many instances in old Norse stories in which mortal women are chosen to become immortal Valkyries, though the hiring criteria that Odin uses to select these women are shrouded in mystery. It's mainly believed that Valkyries were chosen along similar lines to warriors in Valhalla: they had to be fearless, skilled in combat, honourable and unwavering in their devotion to the God of War. There's also some evidence that Valkyries may have been mainly chosen from Odin's pool of Priestesses in Midgard. Once a woman is chosen, she undergoes a transformation from mortal flesh to celestial being, intrinsically linked to the divine realm. Her heritage on Earth is left behind as she embraces a new role in Valhalla. In many tales of women becoming Valkyries, they're even given a new name once they arrive in Odin's halls.

However glorious or glamorous it might seem, life in Asgard came with a code of conduct which, if broken, could have a Valkyrie relegated back to the mortal realm. The most famous example of this happening is in the story of Brynhild, a renowned Valkyrie who was stripped of her immortal status after letting the wrong king die in battle. Not only was she turned back into a mortal woman, but she was placed into a deep sleep in a ring of fire until a hero came to rescue her.

Marriage, too, could relegate a Valkyrie back to the human realm. There are several stories in Norse mythology of Valkyries having to give up their place in Valhalla when they marry a mortal man. There's also evidence that marriage could be used as a punishment for a Valkyrie who strayed from Odin's service. In fact, in the story of Brynhild, Odin directly tells his former servant that she will live out her days in a mortal marriage, never again to fight victoriously in battle.



Viking Shieldmaidens

"The word 'Valkyrie' comes from the Old Norse for 'Chooser of the Slain.' This refers to the Valkyries' crucial role in choosing which fallen warriors were worthy of a place in Valhalla and carrying their soul from the mortal realm to Odin's halls in Asgard."

NEWS FROM ARTISTS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

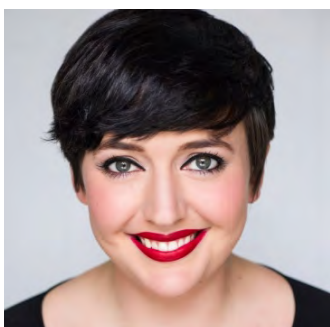
AMANDA WINDRED



The most recent recipient of financial support from WSNSW is soprano **Amanda Windred**. This will allow her to travel to Germany to further her studies in Berlin. Notable roles include Vava in *Melbourne, Cheremushki* (2023), Marcellina in *The Marriage of Figaro* (2024), and the title role in *Elektra* at the Dramatic Voices Berlin program (2024). She debuted internationally in 2022 as Nella in *Gianni Schicchi* at the Berlin Opernfest and graced the Miami Music Festival stage in 2016 as Mrs. Grose in *Turn of the Screw*. In 2023, she also performed as the principal artist for *The Sea* by Forest Collective. Amanda's cover artist roles include Anna in *Maria Stuarda* (Melbourne Opera, 2023) and Turandot (Opera Australia, 2015), showcasing her adaptability and vocal depth.

As a 2023-2024 Richard Divallo Emerging Artist with Melbourne Opera, Amanda has gained recognition for her talent and dedication. Her journey began at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, earning diplomas in 2011 and 2012, and a Master's from QLD Conservatorium of Music, Griffith University, in 2013. She furthered her skills at the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School (2012-2013) and the Miami Music Festival (2016), and in 2022, at the Berlin Opera Academy. Amanda was most recently seen in Sydney in October 2023 as a soloist in *Villains and Valkyries* with the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, conducted by WSNSW member, Dr Sarah Penicka-Smith.

MARGARET PLUMMER



Margaret Plummer wrote to Leona Geeves on 24 August:

As I write this I am almost at the end of my second Summer at the Bayreuther Festspiele singing zweite Knappe and Blumenmädchen in *Parsifal*. The whole experience has been monumental. To have the chance to sing on this incredible stage, to hear the unmatched acoustic of the theatre and to watch the best Wagnerian voices of the moment up close as they bring Wagner's beautiful music to life is a real gift. The festival takes the entire summer for the singers as we begin rehearsing in early June. Last summer, since *Parsifal* was the new production, and I was doing the Kinderoper of *Parsifal* as well, I was extremely busy, I have noticed I have much more time for hiking this summer! The Kinderoper of *Parsifal* was a wonderful experience, bringing the music to young audiences was extremely rewarding. (Though a telling of *Parsifal* without the

mention of religion or sex was somewhat different!). Back in 2022 I was lucky enough to receive funds from The Wagner Society in NSW to undertake a week long intensive workshop on German Hosenrollen at Stimme, Leib und Seele just outside of Salzburg. The week was incredible, I had daily sessions with Daniela Sindram (a remarkable German mezzo soprano who specialized in German repertoire), Mandy Demetriou (a movement coach from the Royal Opera House who helped us develop our masculine body language) and Jendrik Springer (a pianist from Bayreuth Festspiele and Wiener Staatsoper whose knowledge of German repertoire is unmatched). I will be using Mandy's insights in my upcoming role debut at Opera Australia as Prince Charming in Massenet's *Cendrillon*. Thank you Wagner Society for the ways in which you support both emerging and established artists like myself to continue our musical journeys into the richness that is Wagner.

Editor's note: Margaret will be singing Siegrune in the **Simone Young** / SSO *Die Walküre* in November, along with **Stuart Skelton** as Siegmund and **Deborah Humble** as Waltraute.



Margaret Plummer (3rd from left) at *Parsifal* curtain call

BRONWYN DOUGLASS REPORTS ON HER STUDY TOUR IN ALBANIA, GERMANY AND UK, MARCH – MAY 2024

In March, I set out on a study tour of Europe, generously supported by the Wagner Society in NSW and the Johnson Bequest. After covering the role of Sieglinde in Opera Australia's *Ring Cycle* in Brisbane and having the chance to study privately with **Lise Lindstrom** (Brünnhilde), I was extremely passionate about continuing my development as a solo artist and finding ways to pursue my career as a principal. I originally planned to leave for Europe in late March. However, I was thrilled to be invited to perform as a semi-finalist in the 20th International Festival of Opera Singers Marie-Kraja Competition in Tirana, Albania, from 22-29 March. I applied for this competition with recordings of "Dich, teure Halle" from *Tannhäuser* and "Ritorna Vincitor" from *Aida*. I was attracted to this competition for several reasons:

- As a semi-finalist, I would have at least two opportunities to sing for the highly distinguished international jury, including Tobias Hasan, Director of Staatsoper unter den Linden of Berlin, Christoph Seufferle, Director of Deutsche Oper of Berlin, Cecilia Gasdia, General Manager and Artistic Director of Arena di Verona Foundation, Zana Çela, President and Founder of the International Opera Festival "Marie Kraja", Alessandro Ariosi, President of "Ariosi Artists Management", Karen Stone, President of "Opera Europa", Julia Lagahuzère, Director General of "Opera for Peace" and John Allison, Editor of the Opera Magazine, London.
- The performances would be with an orchestra conducted by Martin André and aired live on National Albanian Television, meaning I would have high-quality recordings.
- The competition would cover my expenses including return flights to London, accommodation, ground transport and meals.
- Starting my trip with a performance under pressure would be a perfect way to highlight what I wanted to work on in my European coaching sessions.

The competition required us to arrive in Albania a week early to rehearse with the orchestra and to do stock footage

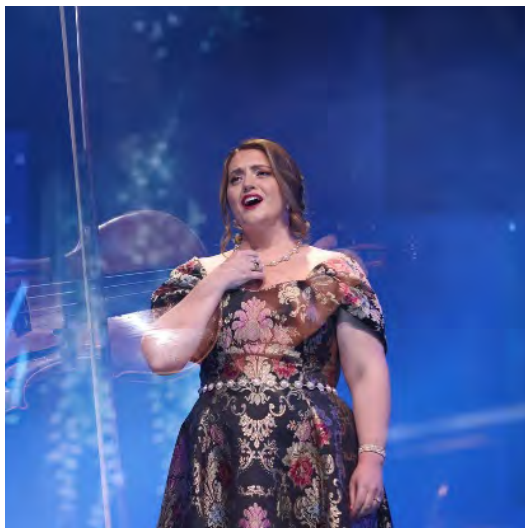


Lise Lindstrom with Bronwyn Douglass

for television production. I did not realise how intense the week would be, but I got the challenge I was looking for. I was not only able to identify areas for improvement, but I was already able to make some improvements in the first week before the competition. I was very happy with how I performed in the two nights of the semi-finals. I was delighted to progress to the finals of the aria and the song competition, mainly because the standard of the competition was so high. The second night of the semi-finals and the finals of the competition were aired on National Albanian Television, which means that I have high-quality recordings of my two arias from the competition, as well as the performance of "Somewhere over the Rainbow" in duet with a fellow competitor on the first night and famous Albanian Pop Star Venera Lumani on the finals night. Although I didn't take home an award, I was very encouraged by the feedback I received from the highly distinguished panel and my fellow competitors. I made friends with many of my fellow singers and have enjoyed keeping in contact with them. One friend, Valentina Còro, is from Venice and regularly covers dramatic roles at La Fenice including her recently covering Lise Davidsen as Leonora in *Fidelio*. I have loved keeping in contact with her, especially because we are working on similar repertoire and can share ideas and experiences. I left Albania feeling extremely encouraged and inspired, with many ideas of what I could work on during my time in Europe.

After my time in Albania, I headed straight to Dresden. The primary purpose of my going to Dresden was to work with Lise Lindstrom, whom I had the pleasure of coaching with in Brisbane during the Opera Australia Season. I was also very excited to work with Jobst Schneiderat from the Semperoper, whom Johannes Fritzsich recommended to me during *Idomeneo* in Sydney, and to have the chance to see so many excellent operatic productions while I was there. My trip began with the viewing of *Die Zauberflöte* conducted by Johannes Fritzsich on the first night and *Elektra*, starring Lise Lindstrom, on the second. It was wonderful to start my trip with a bang and continue adding to the ideas I wanted to work on during my studies.

I was extremely keen to work with Lise again. After watching her on stage and working with her in rehearsals for the *Ring* and *Turandot* for Opera Australia, I identified many things that Lise does technically that I believed would be valuable to me as a performer. She is open



"I was extremely keen to work with Lise again. After watching her on stage and working with her in rehearsals for the *Ring* and *Turandot* for Opera Australia, I identified many things that Lise does technically that I believed would be valuable to me as a performer."

and shares her experiences, creating a wonderfully supportive learning environment. Working together in the studio was incredibly successful, providing a wealth of ideas, insights, and technical advancements. Coaching-wise, I was delighted to have the chance to work with Jobst Schneiderat. We did some excellent work on my Wagnerian repertoire, and I gained a lot of valuable insights from Jobst, who, as well as Semperoper Dresden, worked with Thielemann and at Bayreuth for over 20 years. Thanks to Lise's generosity, I was able to see Strauss' *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. I was extremely keen to see this opera, but tickets were prohibitively expensive because it was Thielemann's last night as chief conductor of the Staatskapelle Dresden. I am so glad that I didn't miss it! It was an incredible production with a heart-wrenching score.

It was a quasi-50s production, but I feel it was very relatable to a modern audience. The basic story is that the Empress (Die Kaiserin) cannot have children. She travels to the underworld with the aid of her maid (a sorceress) to purchase another woman's (Die Färberin's) ability to have children. The Färberin then goes through a vast journey and a multitude of emotions. She is initially keen on the

idea of not having to birth children to her slob of a husband and revels in all the riches and pleasures that are being offered to her. But after the begging of a chorus of unborn children (an absolutely chilling moment), she realises the future that she is giving up if she gives up her unborn children. It was the most intense and visceral piece I have ever seen, and I was deeply moved.

I was fortunate to spend much of my time in Dresden with Lise, who is, as well as a wonderful teacher, an incredibly generous and kind mentor. Apart from working together in the studio, she also took me out to discuss the ins and outs of the career and to meet some of her colleagues from the production. Thanks to an introduction from Lise, I had the chance to have some fascinating discussions with mezzo-soprano Doris Soffel, who

STUART SKELTON

Stuart garnered glowing reviews for his recent Tristan at Glyndebourne

OperaWire wrote ".....his voice soared magnificently, showing the fine, polished straight tones so typical of true heldentenors. His second act interactions with Isolde, and his anguished introspection in the final act were particularly commendable, especially the latter where he showed fine, dramatic skills which confirm his authority as an accomplished actor as well as a solid voice..."



Stuart Skelton at Glyndebourne

was playing Klytämnestra in *Elektra*. At 76, Doris is still a regular performer at the top opera houses in Germany, including (this year alone) Semperoper Dresden, Deutsche Oper Berlin, and the Bayerische Staatsoper. Having had such an incredible career, I appreciated her insights into planning one's career and repertoire.

After Dresden, I headed to Berlin. My aim in Berlin was to do as much coaching as possible. The coaching was fantastic and so varied. There is great value in working with a selection of coaches, as everyone has their specialties, preferences, techniques and ideas. This leaves you with more ideas and colours and generally grows your ability to be versatile and flexible as a performer. Recurring themes in my coaching were consistency of line, use of German consonants whilst staying on the breath, and use of phrasing. I particularly enjoyed working with John Parr at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, who had a very particular way of working on the consistency of sound production, which has been very useful to me. In addition to coaching and viewing performances, I had the chance to catch up with many friends and fellow singers in Berlin. My friend Siobhan Stagg was kind enough to take me to a *Liederabend* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, an evening of song mixed with poetry presented by the artist. It was a beautifully curated program combining Russian and German *Lieder* about the experiences of life/childhood with poetry, focused on all the hilarities of mistakes that the author's child makes because he is trilingual. It was a charming combination and a beautiful example of the successful mixing of classical and contemporary art.

Whilst in Berlin I stayed with my long-time friends and fellow Wagner Society in NSW supported artists Rebecca MacCallion and Bradley Kunda. After such a successful and encouraging time in Berlin I am passionate about continuing my work here. So much so that my husband and I will be relocating to Berlin in June 2025, where we look forward to being next door neighbours with Rebecca and Bradley.

It was my birthday while I was in Germany, so I decided it would be an excellent chance to visit some friends in Wiesbaden and coach with Christina Domnick and Sharon Kempton. Sharon Kempton is an operatic soloist and performance coach with whom I have worked by distance since COVID-19. She was the inaugural winner of the German-Australian Opera Grant, a yearly competition that gives the winner a year contract to work at the Hessische Staatstheater Wiesbaden. I was the runner-up for this competition in 2019 and have had several friends awarded it since. Sharon and my friend, mezzo-soprano Fleur Brockway, with whom I did the Melba Opera Trust Program, could not have been more welcoming. They took me on a tour of the opera house and allowed me to sing on the stage. It is a stunning theatre with a rich history.

I was pleased to have the chance to work with Christina Domnick while I was in Wiesbaden. I had heard she was an excellent coach, but I was extremely impressed with the amount of detail and clarity that she gave in her directions. She has a very particular way of working with the German language, and I feel that her work will be very useful to me as an

English speaker singing in German. The clarity of her instructions means that they are very reproducible and something that I will be using.

My final stop for the trip was London. When I first got to London unfortunately I was ill. However, I managed to recover quickly and still worked with Yvonne Kenny and Tony Legge. They were very fruitful sessions focusing on my Mozart repertoire. These sessions gave me an excellent grounding in working on my line and legato, which has now become one of my focuses with my personal development. Yvonne and I also did some postural work that was particularly valuable. Her wealth of knowledge as a performer with so much experience provided many jewels of wisdom. I am particularly looking forward to returning to work with Yvonne on some of my Strauss repertoire. I also had several sessions with a private tutor at Sprachraum London to continue my German studies once I had left Berlin. These sessions were perfectly timed, as I could continue practising my German without the everyday interaction I had experienced in the previous four weeks in Germany. I had previously been taking group classes for my German, but I sought a private tutor in London on the advice of Siobhan Stagg. She pointed out that it can be difficult for a singer who works a lot in a particular language to identify the gaps in their learning. We have experience in the language, and so often, we can make excellent guesses in a placing quiz for a language school, but a private tutor exposes the gaps in your learning. These sessions were incredibly valuable, and the tutor was very supportive in helping me find ways to continue my studies privately. I was glad that my trip ended in London, where I worked with Yvonne and Tony, whom I have worked with for several years. It was an excellent chance to tie together all of the ideas and techniques I had worked on during my trip and begin to collate them into a detailed plan for my private studies.

I enjoyed my studies in Europe immensely and have returned to Australia bursting with ideas and inspiration. I met all of my objectives and more. Thanks to the incredible coaching I received, I have identified the areas where I wish to improve and have mapped out my private studies and goals for the next year to ensure that I am making ideal technical and artistic development. The chance to work with many different coaches during my time in Europe meant that I could experience various opinions, tactics, tastes, and ideas relating to technique and presentation. This and the opportunity to watch so many incredible productions have been a huge inspiration. I have already seen the fruits of some of these advancements in my performance, and I look forward to continuing my work to be the best artist I can be. I sincerely thank the Wagner Society in NSW and the Johnson Bequest for this incredible opportunity and for helping me continue my journey to being the most engaging and refined performer I can be.

I am looking forward to my following upcoming events, including a finalist in the Herald Sun Aria competition to be held at the Melbourne Recital Centre on Saturday the 19th of October at 3 pm, where I will perform Verdi's "Tu che le vanità" from *Don Carlos* and Wagner's "Dich, teure Halle" from *Tannhäuser*. Then a performance with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs in the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall on Saturday the 26th of October at 2 pm, performing Beethoven's 9 and Ethel Smyth's *Mass in D*.

A REPORT FROM WSNSW SUPPORTED OPERA DIRECTOR MENILA MOINEAUX

Dear Wagner Society in NSW,

It feels like no time at all since I was last writing to you, and yet so much has happened in the past 18 months. I've been based in Germany for this time, where I'm currently working as a staff director in **Münster** amidst freelance projects, and will be for the year ahead.

I've been fortunate to meet and get to know some of your wonderful members, but for those whom I haven't yet, I hope to do so soon! I'm an early-career freelance opera director; I came to directing after my undergraduate studies at the **Sydney Conservatorium**, and in Sydney, I'm the founder and artistic director of **The Cooperative**, an opera company and social justice project. In 2022, I moved overseas to pursue my Masters in Opera Direction at the **Verona Accademia per l'Opera Italiana**, and during that year, I was also very fortunate to work on productions at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, the Macerata Opera Festival, the Teatro Regio di Parma – Festival Verdi, and in Sicily at the Luglio Musicale Trapanese, assisting and learning so much from wonderful directors including **Damiano Michieletto** and **Valentina Carrasco**. It was a truly wonderful experience, and a move I'm so glad I made. As the year came to an end, I was determined to stay in Europe and work further in the rich opera landscape there, and was curious to uncover and learn the German opera system, a truly unique model. As anyone working in opera knows, working in Germany is fairly inevitable – the sheer quantity of work being performed is unparalleled, and means that nearly everyone will end up there at some point. For a director aiming to work internationally, the ability to jump into this system and know how a German house functions is invaluable, and I decided that a *fest* contract in this system would offer wonderful insight and opportunity to experience the inner workings of an opera machine.

With the Society's generous support, I moved to Germany in February 2023, and spent two months in Berlin undertaking an intensive German course, while also travelling to interviews and trial rehearsals across many delightful corners of the country. I was also very fortunate to briefly spend some time in **Wiesbaden**, as my team and I had been selected as semi-finalists for the **2023 European Opera Directing Prize**. As this was the first international competition we'd entered, it was an immensely exciting and eye-opening opportunity for us, and has inspired us to pursue more of the wonderful opportunities on the European competition circuit, which includes several terrific possibilities for creative teams. Being able to spend this length of time in the country was remarkably enriching for my previously very limited German geographical knowledge, as well as for rapid acquisition of my equally limited language; in the process of interviewing for *fest* positions, I also visited Mannheim, Saarbrücken, Weimar, Kassel, Magdeburg, and of course Münster, and managed in between to bring my German to a B2 level (the interviews definitely became easier as my studies progressed!). With this two-month program drawing to a close, I prepared to fly back to Australia, to begin

rehearsals for my first production of the 2023-24 season, a *Pagliacci* in Sydney with The Cooperative ... but as luck and serendipity would have it, I received an email whilst in the airport, offering me my current job in Münster – to start ten days later!

With some quick rescheduling and much gracious understanding from my Australian colleagues, I decided to remain in Germany a month longer to start the job. Münster is a small but truly delightful city, with a large, vibrant theatre, and I was so excited by the possibility of working there even from the four-hour-visit I spent in town for the interview. In the ten days between that fortunately-timed email and the beginning of my contract, I was also delighted to be able to jump in (on the second day of the rehearsal process) and assist **Giulia Randazzo**, a wonderful colleague and friend from the Opera di Roma, on her semi-staging at the Konzerthaus Berlin of Donizetti's *Dalinda*, a 'world premiere' of a recently-discovered alternative version to *Lucrezia Borgia*. The morning after the *Dalinda* premiere, also a public holiday (and the day of a planned national train strike ...), I braved the FlixBus from Berlin to Münster, ready to begin work the following day.

My season in Münster began with Vorproben (preliminary rehearsals) for Bernstein's *MASS*, which would open the coming season in August 2023. This was my third encounter with this wonderful work, having performed it as an undergrad chorister during my time at the SCM, and much more recently, having worked on Michieletto's incredible production for the Opera di Roma as an intern assistant director during my Masters. To return to it in Münster truly felt special, and again quite serendipitous. Nonetheless, this production was quite a steep learning curve, as I settled in to not only a new country, language, and theatre, but also a new understanding of what my job entailed – which varies vastly between the *Deutschsprachiger Raum* and the rest of the world! In Germany, staff directors (or more precisely, assistant and revival directors) are

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responsible for coordinating every aspect of production (props, set, costumes, sound, video, lighting, etc.) in rehearsals, daily scheduling, and for the ongoing care and maintenance of productions after opening night (and this can be long after – a new production will typically reappear over 4-5 months following the premiere, and then be revived in following seasons), as well as, of course, the universal duties of looking after The Book, noting, jumping in to ‘walk’ for indisposed singers, running rehearsals without the director, communicating between the director and the house, and some occasional translating.

The challenge of working on multiple productions at the same time was a new and exciting one; while pre-production prep for coming shows is quite normal globally, actively rehearsing several productions in the space of a few days is a uniquely German experience. After the Bernstein came a fantastic and wild Schreker opera, *Der Schmied von Gent*; this was my first real encounter with Schreker, and such a delightful piece to explore. Parallel to *Schmied* rehearsals, I also had a revival production, a staged performance of Monteverdi madrigals and *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, to learn and bring onstage within three days, and, in the same week, an opera gala to do some scenic work on and premiere, as well as intermittent performances of MASS, each time with a cast change thanks to a lingering Covid outbreak.

It was certainly a trial by fire in the ways of the German system, but at the same time, absolutely thrilling.

After the Schreker came a revival of *Rigoletto*, again brought from rehearsal room to the stage in only a few days, followed by one of my absolute favourite production experiences to date, an insightful, fresh *Carmen* with a brilliant director, the formidable **Andrea Schwabach**. Andrea is a veteran of the German opera system with a wealth of knowledge and inspiration, and the energy she created in the room throughout rehearsals was a delightfully warm, creative one. Her perspective on an opera I’d always found somewhat problematic yet potentially powerful was wonderful to engage with, and I’m excited to revive this production again in the coming season. Unfolding across December and January, this production also felt like a turning point for my time in the house; a few months into the season, I finally felt like I really knew and could work very well with all my colleagues, onstage and off across the theatre’s numerous departments, and of course, Christmas in Germany, with all its exquisite, special little markets, and excitement in the air is a delightful time.

We then had a delightfully chaotic experience, which I’ve learned is somewhat more common in a post-Covid environment of quickly changing situations across Europe. A production of Rameau’s *Zoroastre* was next on the program, and our wonderful, and ever-courageous, director **Georg Schütky** jumped in to replace a colleague on three weeks’ notice; several days into rehearsals, our lead tenor became ill, and we had the challenge of finding an haute-contre with nerves of steel to learn and perform an incredibly difficult role in an incredibly rare opera, in four weeks. We did, and he did – quite wonderfully! Georg’s spontaneity, flexibility, and creativity throughout the adventure of this whole process was so delightful, and very inspiring to see in action as a young director.

Our season then concluded with an Offenbach operetta, *Doktor Ox*, an irreverent, clever piece, which I also have the joy of reviving in September. Although we’d finished rehearsals by early May, I decided that my season wasn’t quite over; a month earlier, I’d received a very exciting offer to jump in for a

production at the Salzburger Festspiele over Pfingsten (Pentecost), and was thrilled to do so. There we had ten days to bring a Mozart / Da Ponte Gala to life with a large team of truly wonderful international singers led creatively by director **Daive Livermore**, and this experience gave me a new appreciation and admiration for his work. Setting the evening in an airport where cancelled flights and stranded passengers devolve into ever-increasing chaos, it was also a tremendously fun production to work on, and I (or rather, my voice) even had a little cameo providing the pre-recorded flight announcements!

With my first German-speaking (or at times, Italian/French/English/and-a-who-knows-what-combination-of-all-the-above speaking) season at an end, I’m immensely grateful to the Wagner Society for your support, which was truly invaluable, enabling me to establish myself in Germany for those initial two months, pursue competition opportunities, and of course, all-importantly, learn a functional level of German before starting work here. The year ahead in Münster looks exciting; after a brief visit home to Australia in our summer break, I have two days to semi-stage this year’s opera gala, which opens in the theatre on the 24th of August, and then we begin rehearsals for our first new production, Humperdinck’s *Königskinder*. This will be followed by new productions of *La bohème*, a Spoliansky revue-cabaret-theatre piece *Wie werde ich reich und glücklich?*, Janáček’s *Přihody lišky Bystroušky (The Cunning Little Vixen)*, and Cavalli’s *Giasone*, and the aforementioned revivals of *Carmen* and *Doktor Ox*. Outside of Münster, and a little closer to home, things also look very exciting; we were fortunate to again be named recipients of Creative Australia funding with The Cooperative, and I’ll be returning to direct two productions, including our first-ever tour, in the middle of next year (I promise I’ll send through a more detailed update closer to the time!).

Thank you again for your immense help – it truly means a lot to a young artist, and I’m very grateful to the Wagner society for your support.

With gratitude, and the warmest of wishes,
Menila Moineaux

SAMUEL SAKKER

Also at Glyndebourne, fellow New South Welshman, **Sam Sakker**, fresh from singing Tristan in a new production from Wuppertal Opera, sang the smaller role of Melot. Sam was also Stuart Skelton’s understudy. Isolde’s understudy was Kiwi soprano **Kirstin Sharpin**, who sang Leonore in *Fidelio* for Melbourne Opera. **Joachim Lange** from Neue Muzikzeitung lavished praise on Sam’s Wuppertal Tristan:

“First and foremost is Samuel Sakker, approaching this role for the second time, he has now gained further in authority. Above all, in

the third act – ‘his’ act, with its feverish yearning fantasies – he is exemplary in every respect, from the clarity of his diction to the tirelessness and freshness of his outbursts and his attractively robust timbre. The Australian

singer really enriches the exclusive league of front-running tenors singing Tristan.”

In 2025 Sam makes his debut in the title role of *Parsifal* for Oper Stuttgart.



Sam Sakker as Tristan in Wuppertal

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