



## MEMORIES

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

**Barbara Brady**

