

MARIE'S PILGRIMAGE

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

Dear all,

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

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

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

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

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

The local people seem to like the coffee shop and a number of locals out walking their dogs were enjoying coffee and the afternoon sun; and, as the school day ended, some children and families made their way through

Wahnfried on their way home. There is much of interest to see in the house and museum; but I don't like what has been done in Wahnfried, i.e. draping much of the place in white covers. It was so much more relatable in its old state. But I guess that's the trend towards 'authenticity' in museums.

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

Finally out into the beautiful Hofgarten.

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



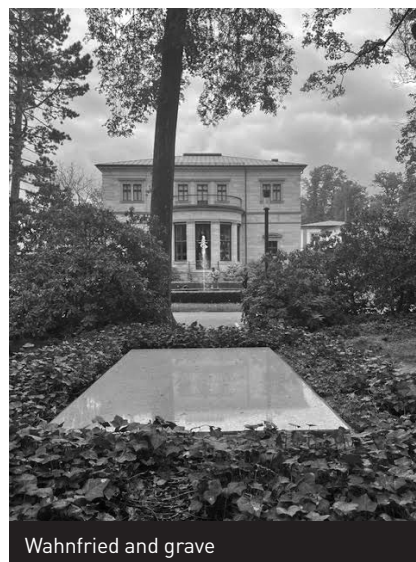
Marie at Bayreuth



The Goldener Anker



Margrave Opera House



Wahnfried and grave