

At Fafner's lair, Act 2, *Siegfried*, Bayreuth 1951, directed and designed by Wieland Wagner.

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1980-2025



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SIMONE YOUNG AM

SIEGFRIED SYMPOSIUM

A Wagner Society in NSW Inc Event

**PETER BASSETT
LIVIA BRASH
CAROLE CUSACK
DAVID LARKIN
DANIEL LINTON-FRANCE**

**10.30am Saturday 15 November, 2025
Goethe Institut
90 Ocean Street (corner of Jersey Road), Woollahra**





Wagner Society in NSW Inc.
established 1980

1980-2025

PROGRAMME

10.00am – 10.30am Registration and coffee

10.30am – 10.35am Welcome and Introduction

ESTEBAN INSAUSTI

10.35am – 11.20am

LIVIA BRASH

From Barricade to Bayreuth: the Political Evolution of *Siegfried*

11.20am – 12.05pm

DANIEL LINTON-FRANCE*

From the Practice Room to the Performance - observations from working on the *Ring* in Bayreuth

12.05pm - 12.30pm **Lunch break**

12.30pm – 1.15pm

CAROLE CUSACK

Siegfried the Failed Hero, Brünnhilde the Redeemer of the World

1.15pm – 2.00pm

PETER BASSETT

***Siegfried* and the Power of Nature**

2.00pm – 2.15pm **Refreshments**

2.15pm – 3.00pm

DAVID LARKIN

The hero's (changing) journey: Wagner's stylistic evolution in *Siegfried*

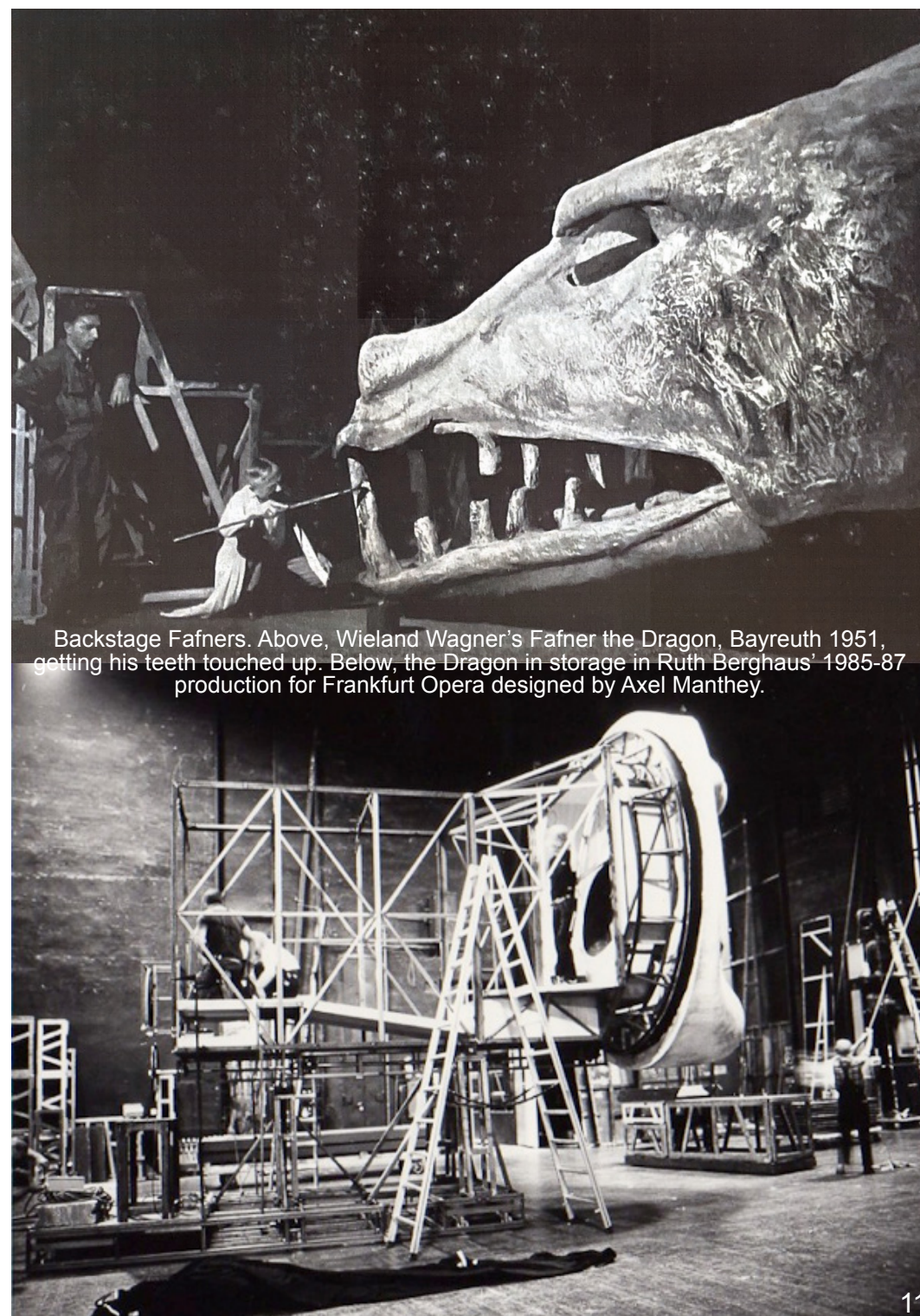
3.00pm – 3.05pm

Closing remarks and thanks

3.05pm– 4.30pm

DRINKS

* Daniel Linton-France appears with the permission of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.



Backstage Fafners. Above, Wieland Wagner's Fafner the Dragon, Bayreuth 1951, getting his teeth touched up. Below, the Dragon in storage in Ruth Berghaus' 1985-87 production for Frankfurt Opera designed by Axel Manthey.



DANIEL LINTON-FRANCE

The versatile conductor & pianist Daniel Linton-France from Sydney, Australia completed his studies at the University of Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria, where he studied Piano with Prof. Christoph Lieske & conducting with Dennis Russell Davies & Jorge Rotter. Before taking up engagements as a conductor, coach & head of musical studies at the Nordharzer Städtebundtheater, the Staatstheater Braunschweig in Germany & more recently at the Landestheater Linz in Austria he was invited to work as a musical assistant at the Tyrol Festival. As a performing artist & assistant he has worked at various festivals including the "Bayreuth Festival" (*Der Ring des Nibelungen* with conductors Kirill Petrenko in 2015 & Simone Young in 2024). As a pianist he is a much sought after chamber music partner & vocal accompanist performing on a regular basis. In cooperation with the Brucknerhaus Linz, he has recorded songs & piano works by Anton Bruckner & his contemporaries for the Austrian recording label Gramola. To round off his musical versatility he has composed & performed many of his own works including pieces for solo instruments, chamber music, music theatre pieces & choral works. Daniel will join the Sydney Symphony Orchestra as Assistant Conductor for the performances of *Siegfried* in November 2025, assisting Chief Conductor Simone Young AM.



FROM THE PRACTICE ROOM TO THE PERFORMANCE - OBSERVATIONS FROM WORKING ON THE RING IN BAYREUTH

Daniel will speak mainly about his experience assisting both Kirill Petrenko in 2015 & Simone Young AM in 2024 on the *Ring* at the Bayreuth Festival. He will give an insight into the rehearsal process on the Green Hill from the spaces used to prepare to moving into the famous pit at the Festspielhaus with its unique acoustic, logistic and architectural problems.

He is currently assisting SSO Chief Conductor Simone Young AM with the preparations for the concert performances of *Siegfried*. With one performance done by the time of the symposium, we hope to hear from Daniel what it is like to work with Simone Young & the SSO in the Concert Hall of the iconic Sydney Opera House. What are the pleasures and joys, and perhaps the unexpected.

***Daniel Linton-France is proudly sponsored by the Wagner Society in NSW Inc.**

WSNSW PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

This is our third symposium in the four-year journey with Simone Young and the SSO, this year focusing on *Siegfried*. The 'second day' of the *Ring* is in many ways the most difficult because of its musical demands, and also the easiest to follow due to its clear lineal narrative. There is no doubt that in the hands of Maestro Young and her spectacular cast, the work will be perfectly expressed and articulated, even without any scenery.

Siegfried is the turning point in the story of the *Ring* as well as in the compositional thinking of Richard Wagner. The scoring of *Siegfried* stopped at the end of Act 2 in 1857 and did not resume until 1869. In that period Wagner produced both *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. During that time he also remained (largely) in exile (Zurich, Venice, Paris and Luzern), met King Ludwig II (1864), oversaw the 'special premieres' of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* in Munich, as well as started the relationship with Cosima von Bülow (ending in marriage on 25 August, 1870, almost at the same time as German unification, proclaimed in the Hall of Mirrors at the palace of Versailles on 18 January, 1871). As several speakers will discuss during this symposium, Wagner changed in every aspect during this period.

It is perhaps in that spirit of change, of upheaval but also resolution and conclusion, that *Siegfried* can be seen as an agent of chaos (a proto-Trump?), the breaker of rules and conventions but also the bringer of familial domesticity, of normality - something that has been missing for his entire life. The convoluted plottings, intrigues and brutal punishments of the previous two music dramas give way by the end of Act III of *Siegfried* to a world of (almost) human love and redemption. A happy ending? Unless you fill that scene with hungry crocodiles eating Woodbirds. Perfect segue to the End of the World (next year). All that in four and half hours of extraordinary music.

On behalf of the WSNSW I thank all the speakers for giving their time and sharing their ideas with us.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank the **Sydney Symphony Orchestra** for generously allowing **Daniel Linton-France** to participate in the symposium as well as longtime member **Mitzi Saunders** (683) for a generous donation which has allowed the WSNSW the scope and comfort to plan this symposium and the next.

Bravi tutti!

Hope you enjoy the day.

Esteban Insausti
President
Wagner Society in NSW Inc
15 November 2025



PETER BASSETT

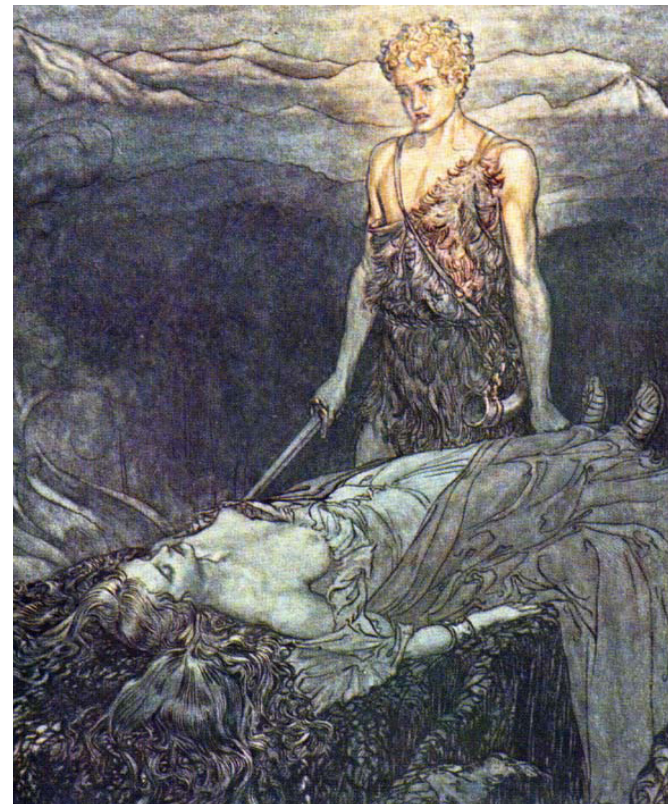
Peter Bassett was Dramaturg and Artistic Administrator for the 2004 Adelaide Ring and was closely involved with other productions of the Ring, Parsifal, Der fliegende Holländer and Tristan und Isolde, notably as lecturer and writer.

His PhD was on the Adelaide Wagner Decade. He contributes to international opera programs and journals, has published books on Wagner's works, and has recorded a CD set on the Ring for Decca. He has led 40 international opera tours for Renaissance Tours and has been President of the Wagner Society in Queensland for seven years. For two decades Peter served in the Australian Diplomatic Service.



WAGNER'S SIEGFRIED AND THE POWER OF NATURE

Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* is about a transition from an old, mythological view of humanity to an awakening of love and compassion, an awareness of the power of nature, and a path to a new beginning. The opera *Siegfried* reveals Richard Wagner's love of nature and the place of human beings in it. It is difficult to think of any composer or dramatist who has been more actively concerned with nature and the animal world than Wagner. He was strongly opposed to hunting as a sport and espoused the cause of vegetarianism. But from an early age, the concept of compassion shaped Wagner's thoughts and, for him, it was directly related to the relationship between the human and animal worlds. In a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck he emphasised that fellow-suffering was central to his art as much as to his philosophy of life.



THE HERO'S (CHANGING) JOURNEY: WAGNER'S STYLISTIC EVOLUTION IN SIEGFRIED

Famously, Wagner broke off work on *Siegfried* in 1857 at the end of Act 2; when he resumed in 1869, he was in a very different place, both as man and artist. In the interim, he had written *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and these left discernible traces on his treatment of harmony and counterpoint thereafter. He had also relaxed many of his early strictures on operatic practices, such as the handling of duets and other ensembles. Although Act 3 builds on motifs from earlier in the cycle, there is a new complexity in how they are layered in the Prelude, while the scenes Wotan shares with Erda and Siegfried exemplify Wagner's expanded harmonic palette. Finally, the love scene between Siegfried and Brünnhilde, which G.B. Shaw famously called 'opera, and nothing but opera', may be revealing compared with the love duet in Act 1 of *Die Walküre* to show Wagner's changed procedures.



DAVID LARKIN

David Larkin is a Senior Lecturer in Musicology at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. For the past two decades he has researched and written on the music of Wagner, Liszt and Richard Strauss, with articles in leading academic journals on topics such as the use of the *Tristan* Prelude in Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia*. He is finishing a short biography of Richard Strauss, and is working on another book-length study of the idea of progress in nineteenth-century music. He has been active as a music reviewer for Bachtrack, and is a frequent pre-concert speaker at the Sydney Opera House.



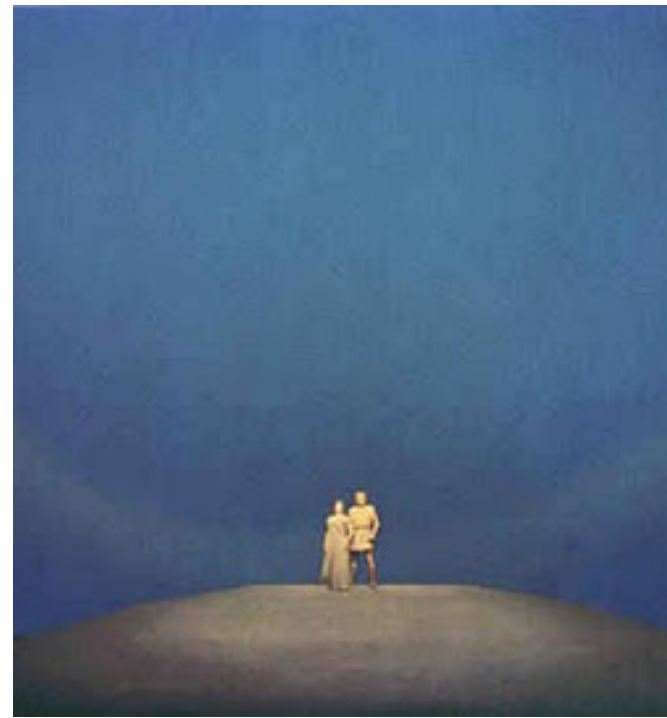
CAROLE CUSACK

Carole is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney. She trained as a medievalist & her doctorate was published as *Conversion Among the Germanic Peoples* (Cassell, 1998). She now researches primarily in contemporary religious trends & Western esotericism. Her books include (with Katharine Buljan) *Anime, Religion and Spirituality: Profane & Sacred Worlds in Contemporary Japan* (Equinox, 2015), *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction & Faith* (Ashgate, 2010), & *The Sacred Tree: Ancient & Medieval Manifestations* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). She edited (with John W. Morehead & Venetia Laura Delano Robertson) *The Sacred in Fantastic Fandom: Essays on the Intersection of Religion & Pop Culture* (McFarland, 2019) & (with M. Afzal Upal), *Handbook of Islamic Sects & Movements* (Brill, 2021). She edits the journals *Alternative Spirituality & Religion Review* (PDC, USA), *Literature & Aesthetics* (journal of the Sydney Society of Literature & Aesthetics), & *Journal of Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia* (Daejin University, South Korea).



IEGFRIED THE FAILED HERO, BRÜNNHILDE THE REDEEMER OF THE WORLD

In *Der Ring des Nibelungen* Richard Wagner dramatically imagined the twilight of the gods as the semi-divine hero, Siegfried, who is ignorant of religion, deities, & all conventions, forges his way in the world. For Wagner, Siegfried is the ‘man of the future’ & ‘the most perfect human being’. Yet modern audiences are often disappointed by Siegfried, perceiving him as boorish & immature, while his heroism is nothing more than a series of acts of violence, for example, causing the deaths of Mime & Fafner, & the fall of Wotan, while remaining ignorant of the value of the Ring, or the identity of the god. In this paper I argue that the free hero created by Wotan is actually Brünnhilde, who succeeds in breaking free from the realm of the gods, retains strength & focus after being ill-used in the human realm, & restores the Ring to the Rhine-daughters. The child of Wotan & Erda, she has divine wisdom, & despite being female & existing only to fulfil Wotan’s wishes, defies her destiny to outclass the putative heroism of Siegfried, & through sacrifice redeems the world.



FROM BARRICADE TO BAYREUTH: THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF SIEGFRIED

Composed in the wake of the failed 1848 revolutions, Wagner’s *Siegfried* reflects the composer’s shift from early radicalism to Romantic anti-capitalism. His political development was shaped not only by historical events but also by the social position he occupied: as a member of the German bourgeoisie, Wagner’s worldview was constrained by a class that initially yearned for revolution but recoiled when the working class threatened their own security. Unable to envision a solution that might dissolve their privileges, the bourgeoisie retreated into abstraction and introspection. Disillusioned by revolutionary defeat, Wagner embraced bourgeois philosophy, populist sentiment, and Pan-German nationalism, a turn that became inseparable from his virulent anti-Semitism. Siegfried exemplifies these dynamics, replacing concrete revolutionary engagement with mythic heroism and symbolic struggle, and exposing the contradictions of Wagner’s thought. The opera traces the trajectory from revolutionary hope to reactionary ideology, revealing how class, historical failure, and cultural introspection shaped both his politics and his art.



LIVIA BRASH

Described by Limelight as a “syrupy Wagnerian soprano you can listen to for days,” Livia Brash is the 2025 winner of the Sydney Eisteddfod Opera Scholarship, & runner-up in the Herald Sun Aria. In 2025, Livia was involved in eight operas: she covered Eva in *Die Meistersinger* (Melbourne Opera), made debuts as *Rusalka* (Boroondara Arts) & Abigail (Nabucco, The CoOperative), & performed as Rheinmaiden, Erda, Sieglinde, Brünnhilde, Woodbird, & Gutrune in the animated *Ring Cycle BrünnhAilde* (More Than Opera). She also returned to the roles of Musetta (*La Bohème*, Melbourne Opera & BK Opera) & Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*, Melbourne Opera), & will make her debut as Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*, BK Opera) later this month. Her concert work for this year included the world premiere of Kevin March’s *Song for Dark Days* (Lyric Opera of Melbourne) & Chloe Charody’s song cycle *Truth in the Cage* (Nightingale Performing Arts) at the Melbourne Recital Centre. Members of the WSNSW may also remember her presentation *Why Meistersinger?* from the *Meistersinger* Symposium in Melbourne earlier this year. During her time in Europe, Livia attended the prestigious Georg Solti Accademia in Italy, studying under Richard Bonyng AC CBE, with whom she prepared the title role in *Beatrice di Tenda* (Bellini) for her debut with the London City Philharmonic Orchestra. She received sponsorship from the WSNSW for Sieglinde in Dramatic Voices Berlin’s *Die Walküre*.

REAL DRAGONS

Patrice Chéreau director, Richard Peduzzi designs, Bayreuth 1976



Robert Lepage director, Carl Fillion designs, New York 2010



Chen Shi-Zheng director, Maruti Evans designs, Brisbane 2023



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JUST CLAWS

Götz Friedrich director, Josef Svoboda designs, London 1974-76



Elke Neidhardt director, Michael Scott-Mitchell, Adelaide 2004



Götz Friedrich director, Max Brückner designs, Helsinki 2004



FAFNER THE DRAGON FROM 1976 TO NOW

FACES AND EYES

Ruth Berghaus director Axel Manthey designs, Frankfurt 1985-87



Neil Armfield director, Robert Cousins designs, Melbourne 2013



Sven-Eric Bechtolf director, Rolf Glittenberg designs, Vienna 2011



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