

CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

MARCH 2025
176 ISSUE NO 49



Richard King
14.06.1943 ~ 22.01.2025



COMING SOCIETY EVENTS 2025

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

2025	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	LOCATION
Wed 12 Mar	5.00pm Talk by German tenor Mirko Roschkowski	Zoom
Sun 23 Mar	12.00pm DVD <i>Parsifal Act 1</i> 2.00pm Talk by Prof Colin Mackerras - 'Parsifal Reanalysed'	Goethe Institut
Sun 13 April	1.00pm ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2.00pm SSO violist Tobias Breider talks and presents violas made for Wagner	Goethe Institut
Wed 30 April	11.00am Richard King Memorial Service	Castlereagh Boutique Hotel
Wed 7 May	7.00pm TBC Margaret Plummer	Zoom
Sun 25 May	2.00pm Wagner's Birthday Concert	Goethe Institut
Sun 22 June	12.00pm DVD <i>Parsifal Act 2</i> 2.00pm Talk by Stephen Mould about his new book about Carlo Felice Cillario	Goethe Institut
Sun 20 Jul	12.00pm DVD <i>Parsifal Act 3</i> 2.00pm Talk by Prof Carole Cusack	Goethe Institut
Sun 17 Aug	12.00pm DVD H-J Syberberg's <i>Parsifal</i>	Goethe Institut
Sun 14 Sep	2.00pm WSNSW 45th Anniversary celebration concert	St Columba
Sun 12 Oct	2.00pm TBA	
Sat 15 Nov	10.00am - 4.00pm <i>Siegfried</i> Symposium	TBA
Sun 30 Nov	2.00pm Christmas concert	St Columba

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

1 - 17 May	Royal Opera <i>Die Walküre</i> Director Barrie Kosky	ROH London
17 May - 24 June	Glyndebourne <i>Parsifal</i> Conductor Robin Ticciati OBE	Glyndebourne
20 - 26 May and 4 - 9 June	Theater Basel two cycles of the <i>Ring</i> conducted by Jonathan Nott	Basel
28 May - 28 June	Two <i>Ring</i> Cycles at the Wiener Staatsoper conducted by Philippe Jordan	Basel
24 July - 26 Aug	Bayreuth Festival. Two <i>Ring</i> Cycles conducted by Simone Young AM 26, 27, 29, 31 July 15, 16, 18, 29 Aug	Bayreuth
13, 16 Nov	SSO/ Simone Young AM <i>Siegfried</i>	SOH

COMMITTEE 2024 - 2025

President:	Esteban Insausti 0412 282 070
Vice President 1:	Mike Day 0413 807 533
Vice President 2:	Marie Leech 0418 679 626
Treasurer:	Danny May 0414 444 100
Secretary:	Ross Whitelaw ross@karos.com.au 0416 253 161
Membership Secretary:	Julie Clarke jmc50wagner@gmail.com
Members:	Robert Mitchell robert.mitchell47@gmail.com
Quarterly Editor:	June Donsworth jmdonsworth22@gmail.com
Artists Liaison:	Mike Day michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com
e-news:	Leona Geeves lgo3415@gmail.com
Public Officer:	Lis Bergmann lisbergmann89@gmail.com
	Alasdair Beck 0414 357 441

Patron

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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

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DEAR FRIENDS,

Welcome to 2025. The year has started in a spectacular way with performances of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Melbourne and the SSO opening concerts with our Patron **Simone Young** AM conducting an outstanding Mahler 3 with **Noa Beinart** contributing with her phenomenal contralto. I calculated that I spent 620-640 minutes listening to live music in the week between 16 and 21 February. But music performed at such a high level that the long sits just did not register. Well maybe a little towards the end of Act 3 of the Meistersingers – thank you **Greg Hocking** and the team at Melbourne Opera for getting bright red cushions for those plastic seats at the Royal Exhibition Building. One can take shadowing Bayreuth a little too far. More on MO's *Meistersingers* in this and the next Quarterly. Special thanks to all those that made generous donations to the Meistersinger Syndicate championed by **Julie Clarke**. All that money has gone to support **Deborah Humble** and **Warwick Fyfe**. A great cause.

I should make mention of the new “opera” *Siegfried and Roy*: the unauthorised opera by **Constantine Costi** and **Luke Di Somma** that took the Sydney Festival by storm, which had, or made, two very clear Wagner references. Thus Wagner made an appearance in Sydney early in 2025. It is to be hoped that serious music and opera make a comeback in future Sydney Festivals. Experiencing opera and serious music in non-traditional venues (the lightship Carpentaria on the harbour for *Il Tabarro* and a pop up Las Vegas cabaret for S&R) attracts people that may not necessarily come to a concert hall or opera house and introduces them, in a unique and friendly manner, to the joys of the “classical music” world. Similarly, Melbourne Opera's inhabiting the UNESCO World Heritage Royal Exhibition Building as the setting for *Die Meistersinger*. I am all for these calculated experiments. To paraphrase the Master: Children be bold!

On a sad note we mourn the passing of **Herman Junker** in December 2024 and **HLM Richard King** in January this year. Herman was a long-time member and a great supporter of the Society's activities. Our thoughts and condolences to Renate and her family. Richard

King was a founding member of the WSNSW and our second President. His passing is significant for the Society in many ways. As you will read further on in the Quarterly and in subsequent issues, he has left an extremely generous bequest to the Society along with an exciting challenge. I hope that we can rise to Richard's challenge. There will be a memorial service for Richard King on Wednesday 30 April at 11.00am at Cellos Grand Room, Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, 169 Castlereagh St, Sydney. Our condolences to Richard's family.

You may have noticed that our website is looking a little different. After many years we have embarked on ‘modernising’ it. I think it is looking and working very smoothly. My deep thanks to **Lis Bergmann** and **Dr Ashish Nanda** for leading this project. And thanks to **Danny May** for assisting. We are still test driving certain aspects but I hope you will agree that it is a great resource of material for all.

Worth noting that we have switched to Humanitix for event bookings after many comments and feedback from you, our members. As I mentioned in previous letters, we like members to book ahead to avoid congestion at the front of house on event days but more importantly to provide an idea of numbers for catering, programme printing and other logistics. Please help us make events as smooth and enjoyable as possible.

Whilst on WSNSW events, we started January/February in a flurry of activity with 3 Zoom Talks (**Ben Woodward**, **Suzanne Chaundy** and **Dr John Mastrogiovanni**) and a talk by **Robert Gay**. Please read some great reviews inside. We'll take the pace down a little bit from March on. Unfortunately we've had a couple of cancellations but we are actively working on worthy replacements, so please keep the dates in your diaries.

Looking forward to meeting you at one of our events through 2025. We are off and running in what looks like a very good year for Wagner.

With best wishes. Happy listening.

ESTEBAN INSAUSTI

President Wagner Society in NSW Inc

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers, It was with great sadness that we learnt of the passing of **Richard King**, one of our founders. I first met Richard at his gallery in 1990 and he persuaded me to join the Wagner Society, a decision that changed and enriched my life. This issue includes an obituary and his vision of his wonderfully generous gift to enable the Society to mount concert performances of *Parsifal*, a work very close to Richard's heart. Future Quarterly articles will include a range of viewpoints about *Parsifal*; its meaning, history, music, singers and performance challenges. For the Sunday meetings we have scheduled a variety of DVDs with excerpts from some remarkable productions. Thanks to **Minnie Biggs** for her *Die Meistersinger* review and to **Peter Bassett** and **Dr Terence Watson** for their fascinating articles. My gratitude as always to **Leona Geeves** for proofreading.

MIKE DAY | michaeldayarchitect@gmail.com

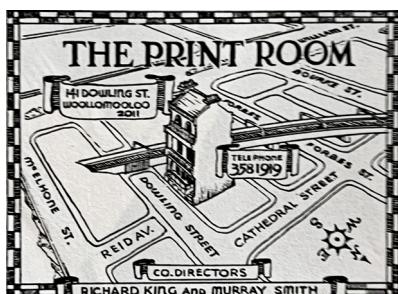


OBITUARY RICHARD JAMES KING

1943 – 2025



Richard King at WSNSW 40th Anniversary Celebrations



The Print Room flyer

Richard King passed away peacefully at home on 22 January 2025, surrounded by his loving family and friends, after a painful year-long battle with bone cancer. Richard lived a rich and vibrant life and was a much loved, and fun loving, founding member (No 15) and Honorary Life Member of the Wagner Society in New South Wales. Born in 1943 and raised in Lane Cove, Sydney, upon completion of high school Richard joined the Bank of NSW. After seven years there he worked as an accountant for the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) in Sydney. This job provided a great opportunity to travel worldwide, seeing wonderful art and theatre and listening to inspiring music, especially at Bayreuth.

Richard's love of the arts led to the opening, with partner **Murray Smith**, of his own picture framing business in Surry Hills. They moved to The Print Room, in Woolloomooloo, which specialised initially in original works on paper, including prints, and then dealt in fine art photographs.

Max Dupain was among several eminent photographers represented by Richard. He also authored and published several books on various Australian artists, including **Sydney Long** and **Hall Thorpe**. The Print Room was used from 1981 as the venue for early meetings and events held by the newly formed Wagner Society. Richard, **Dr Leonard Hansen**, and a group of Sydney Wagner lovers formed the society in 1980 during the Bayreuth Festival. **Sir Charles Mackerras** became the first Patron and was very active helping Richard (the first vice president) organising speakers and events.

In 1991 Richard started King Pick Farm at Sussex Inlet, with his friend **John Pick**. They produced cut native flowers for export and local sale. They flourished for nine years but the bush fires of 2001/2 made

Richard re-evaluate his life, prompting his move to Hobart, where he lived the remainder of his life, writing and keeping busy as an archivist and looking after his beloved dogs, first Miss Nikki, followed by Mister Bailey. His last book was *Synchronicity and Dreaming – Guidance for our Lives*. Gumquest, Exile Bay, 2017. In this work Richard shows "how observing our inner selves and synchronistic events can guide our biography and provide a philosophical foundation for our lives."

Richard was a deeply spiritual man and he had a particular love for Wagner's *Parsifal*, which he considered the most profound of all Wagner's music-dramas. He was also a huge admirer of Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

In his will, Richard has very generously named WSNSW as a beneficiary. The society is to receive the proceeds of the sale of his house and art collection. His wish is for this money to be used to mount concert performances of *Parsifal* and *Fidelio*.

He desired that, as far as possible, performers are to be Australian, preferably from NSW. Before his passing Richard had already gifted the society a substantial sum to kick off the project, which is being used for professional advisers and scholarships for emerging singers and musicians, in preparation for performances. Negotiations are advanced for the appointment of the conductor, principals and understudies. Depending on the availability of the main players and venues, we hope that the performances can take place in 2026. Following is Richard's communication with the Society setting out his wishes.

Mike Day
Vice President WSNSW
1 February 2025



A copy of the Book Plate from an original lino-cut designed by **Frank Marjason** & presented to **Wolfgang Wagner** [photo, Newsletter No. 37]



25 August 1989: L-R President **Richard King** with Vice-President **Dr Leonard Hansen** who presented **Wolfgang Wagner** on behalf of the Wagner Society in NSW with a special gift on the occasion of his 70th birthday which he would be celebrating on 30 August. The gift was a hand crafted lino-cut of Wolfgang's personal ex libris book plate. This was witnessed by a small contingent of Society members [photo, Richard King]

CONCERT PERFORMANCES OF RICHARD WAGNER'S MUSIC DRAMA PARSIFAL

When Dr. Leonard Hansen and I discussed the creation of possibly the first ever Wagner Society in Australia's history in June of 1980 at my Gallery, The Print Room in Sydney, we envisaged a group of people who would come together and encourage the performance of the Master's works. The performances created by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and later the Australian Opera were very rare indeed. I had joined the English Wagner Society when visiting UK in 1966. I applied every year for a ticket to Bayreuth without success and was only able to go there in 1977 with the help of Lufthansa in Sydney. They also obtained the tickets for Leonard, his first pilgrimage there being July/August 1980. Olga at Lufthansa had directed Leonard to meet me as she knew how enthusiastic about Wagner I was... ! Synchronicity at work in our lives... !

It seemed to me one of the greatest obstacles to a performance was the desire to "update" and reinterpret the works by a minority of directors and make them relevant to the "modern" mind....!! This was very short sighted as the current tradition of Wagnerian stagings in Australia was rare and it seemed to me the egos of these people were directed only towards their peers, internationally. Having experienced these bizarre performances all over the world I can safely say I attended many a "concert version" keeping my eyes closed and enjoying the glorious journey in my mind. I confronted a couple of these openly "Wagner Hating" directors over the years, telling one to even write his own operas if he hated the Master so much.

My proposal is for our Wagner Society to create an annual concert performance of *Parsifal* and later even perhaps the bi-annual concert performance of *Fidelio* by Beethoven, one of Wagner's most admired composers. *Fidelio* is a beacon for the freedom of mankind.

Esteban and Michael's thoughts as to the venues are excellent ideas to encourage patronage from Sydney's population living in the western areas. Also the use of the talented singers and musicians/ orchestras domiciled nearby. Also giving the people residing there exposure to the finest possible music and enhance their lives accordingly. I know hearing classical music for the first time when I was about ten years old was a revelation, even though I was met with much antagonism by my parents - I was told to turn off that dreadful noise on the radio!

My vision is to lay the foundation for the financial backing for an annual performance, augmented by tax deductible donations by members and friends. Hopefully also legacies and government subsidies to encourage the fine arts to be performed in the areas of the greatest populations. I intend to direct financial assets from my estate towards the cause. I am heartened by our President's, Vice President's and Committee's enthusiastic response to the proposal. I understand that several singers, scholarship winners and regional orchestras have already offered their services. Hopefully the Conservatorium of Music will come on board. So many budding musicians would get exposure earlier in their careers as well.

The *Ring Cycle* and *Parsifal* are vital to help mankind get through the age of materialism and lack of spirituality. No doubt Wagner's contribution to our journey through these realms was preordained, rising above organized religion and dogma. Mankind's goal is freedom of will where no harm is allowed to others.

Thank you,

Richard King
Hobart, June 2024



Photo by Max Dupain 1991



Vice President Mike Day, HLM Richard King, President Esteban Insausti, Hobart, 8 June 2024

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THE LATE RICHARD KING

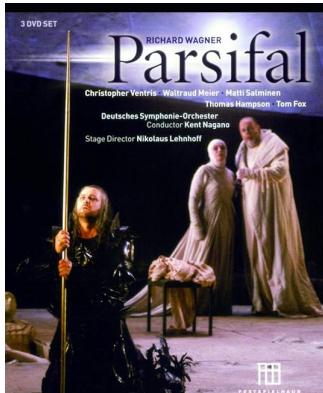
**Wednesday 30 April, 11.00am at Cellos Grand Room, Castlereagh Boutique Hotel,
169 Castlereagh St, Sydney**

The family of the late Richard King is inviting members and friends who were unable to attend the funeral in Hobart on 31 January to come along and share memories of a remarkable man. The hotel is a beautifully restored heritage listed building built, and still managed, by the Masonic Club of NSW. WSNSW supported singer, **Ellen McNeil**, accompanied by **Bradley Gilchrist**, will be performing.

FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 23 MARCH AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

12.00PM DVD BADEN-BADEN 2004 PARSIFAL ACT 1 96 MINUTES



Festspielchor, Baden-Baden, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchestra Berlin.

Conductor: Kent Nagano,
stage director: Nikolaus Lehnhoff,
set designer: Raimund Bauer

Parsifal: Christopher Ventris,
Kundry: Waltraud Meier,
Gurnemanz: Matti Salminen,
Amfortas: Thomas Hampson,
Klingsor: Tom Fox,
Tituriel: Bjarni Thor Kristinsson

Since it was created for the ENO at the London Coliseum in 1999, **Nikolaus Lehnhoff's** staging of Wagner's final opera has been seen across Europe and the US. This performance is from Baden-Baden in 2004. It is interesting to compare this controversial staging with the Met's ultra-traditional staging in 1994, just 5 years earlier. (Met Opera Act II will be shown on 22 June). The visual landscape this *Parsifal* inhabits is purged of all Christian references. The text, of course, remains stuffed with them: redemption, holy blood, guilt, sin and suffering. But the power of ritual that is depicted on stage, and which sustains this raggle-taggle crowd of grail knights in dusty fatigues, is blissfully much less specific. Lehnhoff subverts the ending, too: *Parsifal* does not assume leadership of the knights, as Wagner indicates, but instead leaves them to it, walking away with Kundry along the railway line that leads into a dark, uncertain future, an endgame without an end. *Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/feb/17/parsifal-eno-review>

While all the principals sing impressively in this recording, it is conductor **Kent Nagano** who is the hero here. His generally brisk tempos, unerring sense for drama and his ability to point up crucial orchestral detail impart a feeling of urgency, of tension, of passion to the proceedings. The more ponderous approaches are less effective for me. This opera is long and ponderous enough, and though there is much depth to plumb, the tempos, to me, must move along. Some may prefer Karajan or even Knappertsbusch, but I'll take Nagano and this brilliantly colourful production - one of the finest of any opera on DVD. If you love Wagner, you'll want this splendid recording. Highest recommendations! <http://www.classical.net/music/recs/reviews/b/bbc00915dvd.php>

Ed note: This DVD will be the first of three to be screened this year, each featuring a different act of a different *Parsifal* production, highlighting some of the greatest conductors, orchestras, singers, directors and designers of the past decades. I chose this version because of the tempi, sound quality, the clarity of the story-telling, and the impassioned performance of **Thomas Hampson**, as Amfortas.

2.00PM TALK BY PROFESSOR EMERITUS COLIN MACKERRAS AO FAHA – 'PARSIFAL REANALYSED'



Professor **Colin Mackerras** AO FAHA is Vice-President of the Wagner Society in Queensland. He is a specialist on Chinese history, musical theatre and ethnic minorities, as well as Australia-China relations and Western images of China, and has published widely on all those subjects. He has written or edited over 40 books and authored nearly 200 scholarly papers about China.

Born in Sydney in 1939, he has visited China nearly 70 times. He worked at Griffith University from 1974 to 2004 and has been a professor Emeritus at the University since retirement. Colin is twin brother of **Malcolm Mackerras**, a psephologist, and brother of the WSNSW's first patron (1983 – 2010) conductor Sir **Charles Mackerras** (1925- 2010). His elder brother **Alastair Mackerras** (1925 – 2010) was the distinguished Head-Master of Sydney Grammar School 1969 -89.

DURCH MITLEID WISSEND - 'ENLIGHTENED THROUGH COMPASSION' PETER BASSETT ON PARSIFAL



Amalie Materna as Kundry, Emil Scaria as Gurnemanz, Hermann Winkelmann as Parsifal at the premiere in Bayreuth, 1882



René Pape as Gurnemanz, Jonas Kaufmann as Parsifal, Katarina Dalayman as Kundry at the Met, New York, 2013

in **Wolfram von Eschenbach's** early thirteenth century romance *Parzival* (as the name was originally spelt). The immediate result was a 'Romantic Opera in Three Acts' about Lohengrin, Parzival's son. Wagner was unsure if, or how, he could use other aspects of Wolfram's poem and,

Durch Mitleid wissend -
'Enlightened through compassion' was the motto/theme of *Parsifal* almost from its conception. This Stage Dedication Festival Play, as Richard Wagner called it, is his most subtle and many-layered work and the product of a lifetime's reading and reflection.

Where to begin? Actually, there were two beginnings. The first occurred in 1845 when the composer was taking a rest cure at the spa at Marienbad in Bohemia and immersed himself

some years later, he briefly considered introducing the character Parzival into the third act of *Tristan und Isolde*.

The second beginning for *Parsifal* occurred on a spring day in 1857. The exiled Wagner and his first wife **Minna** had moved to the estate of **Otto and Mathilde Wesendonck** on the outskirts of Zürich. Wagner associated the tranquil scene of reawakened nature with the world's 'new beginning' achieved through Christ's sacrifice on the cross on Good Friday. His mind went back to Wolfram's poem with its references to Good Friday, and the juxtaposition of these ideas provided the spark that ignited his imagination.

In the earliest legends, the Grail was neither a chalice nor the cup of the Last Supper. Those associations came later. In Chrétien de Troyes's poem of about 1180, the Grail was a serving bowl; in Wolfram's version it was a magic stone fallen from heaven. Even before the Grail was given its Christian gloss by poets like Robert de Boron in the twelfth century, it was described as possessing miraculous powers, including the ability to provide all kinds of food and drink and to extend the lives of those who gazed upon it. What we see in the Grail Temple in Scene Two of *Parsifal* is not a service of Holy Communion but an adaptation of these medieval legends.

There were other important influences too. The philosophy of **Arthur Schopenhauer** and the teachings and legends of Indian religions loomed larger during the creation of *Parsifal*, as they did with *Tristan und Isolde* and much of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Schopenhauer described compassion as the source of morality, renunciation as the only authentic act of free will, and our world of phenomena as illusory. These ideas had much in common with the ancient religions of

India which Schopenhauer admired and to which Wagner was drawn after the mid-1850s.

In May 1856 Wagner drafted a sketch for a music drama to be called *Die Sieger* (*The Victors*) which dealt with an event in the legendary life of the Buddha, one of whose titles is *Jina* (*The Victor*). His victory was over human passions. *Die Sieger* was never developed beyond a sketch but some of its ideas ended up in *Parsifal*: The torment of unsatisfiable desire (Amfortas's wound that never heals), redemption flowing from compassion (the 'innocent fool's' awakening to Amfortas's plight), and the implications of withholding compassion (Kundry's interminable reincarnations after she had laughed at the crucified Christ).

To these we can add the ephemeral 'magic garden' of an oriental Paradise, attempts to obstruct Parsifal's path to enlightenment (the temptations of Klingsor's Flower Maidens), and the need to show compassion towards all living creatures (the incident of the shooting of the swan). The blending of occidental and oriental legends and teachings is an extraordinary idea, but Wagner saw no conflict at all. He identified many common elements in Christian and Buddhist thought, and saw a role for art in revealing truths that may have become obscured by formalised religion.

These many strands endow *Parsifal* with dense layers of meaning and a symbolism that is distinct from that of *Lohengrin*. But its central theme, once identified, is straightforward: Human salvation is to be found not in the satisfaction of selfish desires but in compassion. The 'innocent fool' Parsifal is made wise by his willingness to share the sufferings of others and, in the process, he brings a new type of order to the community of the Grail.

Peter Bassett

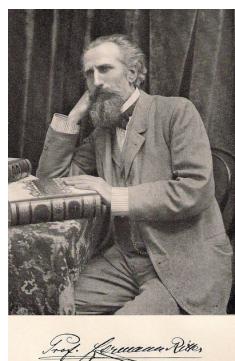
SUNDAY 13 APRIL AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

1.00PM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Note: only currently paid-up members are eligible to vote

2.00PM TALK AND PRESENTATION BY VIOLIST TOBIAS BREIDER

Before his appointment as Principal Violist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 2011 **Tobias Breider** has held Principal Viola positions in prestigious German orchestras like the Rhine Opera Düsseldorf, the Hamburg State Opera (under **Simone Young**) and the Konzerthausorchester Berlin. As a guest Principal he frequently performed with other European top orchestras such as the Gewandhausorchester



Hermann Ritter

Leipzig and the Radio Orchestras of Vienna, Berlin and Cologne. In chamber music he regularly collaborates with many of Australia's finest artists and ensembles such as the Australia Ensemble, Selby and Friends, Wilma & Friends, the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra and the Australia Octet. Tobias is founding member of the String Trio EX PATRIA (together with his SSO colleagues,

Concertmaster **Andrew Haveron** and Principal cellist **Umberto Clerici**) and last year joined the Brisbane based Ensemble Q. Internationally he has been invited to Festivals in the USA, Germany, Austria, the UK and South Africa.

Tobias' presentation will feature **Hermann Ritter's** oversized viola alta. In February 1876, Ritter met Wagner in Haus Wahnfried in Bayreuth, where Ritter presented his new viola alta, playing the song *Lied an den Abendstern* from *Tannhäuser*. Wagner, pointing towards Ritter's viola alta, said: "The right alto instrument!" Wagner had always been on the lookout for new instrumental colours, especially in the mid register. He immediately hired Ritter as solo violist for the Bayreuth's Festival Orchestra and commissioned several of his instruments for the premiere of *Götterdämmerung*. Two of these historically significant violas live with Tobias - No 12 made in 1876, and No 132 (!) from 1891, they are named Fasolt & Fafner. Tobias is in the process of collecting more data and opinions about these sonorous sounding violas, **Richard Strauss'** being one of them.



Tobias Breider

WEDNESDAY 7 MAY ON ZOOM

7.00 PM (TBC) FROM VIENNA MARGARET PLUMMER



Georg Zeppenfeld as Gurnemanz and Margaret Plummer as a Squire in *Parsifal*, Bayreuth 2024

WSNSW supported Mezzo **Margaret Plummer** will talk to us about her experience singing in *Parsifal* at Bayreuth. She sang the roles of Flower-maiden and Squire in 2024 and will repeat them again this year. We last heard her as Siegrune in the Simone Young's *Die Walküre* in November and as Prince Charming in OA's *Cinderella* in January/February. Margaret is based in Vienna and was due to sing Adelaide in Strauss' *Arabella* in April at the Wiener Staatsoper

BAYREUTH 2026

The Bayreuth Festival has dropped four productions from its 150th anniversary season in 2026 because of budget cuts. The decision is due to its employees' public-service sector labour contracts and an inability to increase revenue. The festival said it is 55% self-financed. It had planned to present all 10 of Wagner's mature works plus the festival debut of *Rienzi*, his rarely performed third opera. The festival will limit its 2026 schedule to *Rienzi* along with *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which inaugurated the festival in 1876; Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal*, which premiered at the house in 1882; and *Der fliegende Holländer*, Wagner's fourth opera and considered the first of his mature works.

SUNDAY 25 MAY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

2.00PM WAGNER'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION WITH RECITAL BY WSNSW SUPPORTED ARTISTS LIVIA BRASH AND EUGENE RAGGIO (TO BE CONFIRMED)

Come and join us for an afternoon of song, cake and bubbles



WAGNER SOCIETY YOUTUBE CHANNEL

We encourage members to visit our YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/wagnersocietynsw>
In addition to including many fascinating early recordings and illustrations there are clips from earlier and recent Wagner Society concerts and talks.

WAGNER SOCIETY E-NEWS

Our regular Wagner Society e-news are emailed to members at the addresses they have provided. Occasionally some members do not appear to have received these emails. This could be because their email address has changed, or emails have been going into their spam or junk mail, or for some other reason. If you feel this applies to you, please let the Membership Secretary know by mailing contact@wagner.org.au and we will work to resolve this issue.

REPORTS ON RECENT WAGNER

SUNDAY 1 DECEMBER 2024 AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

2.00PM RECITAL BY SOPRANO AMANDA WINDRED, MEZZO-SOPRANO CELESTE HAWORTH AND COLLABORATIVE PIANIST YERIM LEE, FOLLOWED BY WSNSW CHRISTMAS PARTY



Celeste, Amanda and Yerim

This was a wonderful ending to a very eventful and satisfying year for the Society. Many thanks to Leona for organising the wonderful WSNSW supported singers and for finding Yerim at the last moment when the planned accompanist withdrew. A big thank you to the many members who brought delicious festive fare.

RICHARD WAGNER (1813 -1883)
Höre mit Sinn (Waltraute's Narrative) from Act 1 *Götterdämmerung*
Celeste Haworth

RICHARD WAGNER (1813 -1883)
Einsam in trüben Tagen (Elsa's Dream) from Act 1 *Lohengrin*
Amanda Windred

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833 -1897)
Von ewiger Liebe Op.43 No.1
Celeste Haworth

RICHARD WAGNER (1813 -1883)
Dich, teure Halle from Act 2 *Tannhäuser*
Amanda Windred

RICHARD WAGNER (1813 -1883)
First Norn Prologue Scene (with cuts) from Act 1 *Götterdämmerung*
Celeste Haworth

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770 -1827)
Abscheulicher from Act 1 *Fidelio*
Amanda Windred

RICHARD WAGNER (1813 -1883)
Weiche, Wotan, weiche (Erda's Warning) from Scene 4 *Das Rheingold*
Celeste Haworth

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864 -1948)
Ruhe, meine Seele Op.27 No.1
Morgen! Op.27 No.4
Amanda Windred

Programme



Yerim and Ross drawing the raffle



Bill Brookes with raffle prize



Yerim, Celeste and Amanda with Brangayne wine gifts

FRIDAY 20 DECEMBER AT THE CHRIS O'BRIEN LIGHTHOUSE

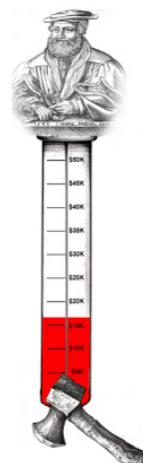
4.00PM DR SARAH PENICKA-SMITH CONDUCTED HANDEL'S *MESSIAH*



This was a wonderful start to the Christmas Holidays – Handel's glorious music echoed around the cavernous foyers of the hospital, with a 'pop-up' group of amateur singers (many from the Philharmonia choir) and musicians singing and playing their hearts out, after meeting for the first time a couple of hours prior to the performance. They were under the inspiring and sensitive direction of WSNSW member, conductor Dr **Sarah Penicka-Smith**. Several WSNSW members attended and the chorus was joined by members **Mel Penicka-Smith**, **Leona Geeves** and **Jenny Edwards**

WSNSW MO SPONSORSHIP

WSNSW members and friends generously responded to our appeal to raise money to assist MO by sponsoring NSW stars **Warwick Fyfe** (Hans Sachs) and **Deborah Humble** (Magdalena). A total of \$23,150 was raised from 26 donors - Syndicate members: **Irena Kowalski**, **Minnie Biggs**, **Garry Richards**, **Jenny Edwards**, **Rae Cottle**, **Julie Clarke**, **Agnes Brejzek**, **Esteban Insausti**, **Barbara Brady**, **Helen Meddings**, **Mitzi Saunders**, **Robert Mitchel**, **Michael Chesterman**, **Janet Nash**, **Kevin Powel**, **Rosalind Baker**, **Claire Brauer**, **John Barrer**, **Josephine Key**, **Ross Whitelaw**, **Pam McGaw**, **Richard Bloor**, **Richard Gastineau-Hills**, **Bill Brooks** & **Alasdair Beck**, **BR Johnson**, **Kris Neil**



SOCIETY EVENTS

SUNDAY 19 JANUARY ON ZOOM

7.00PM FROM LONDON BEN WOODWARD, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF REGENTS OPERA, TALKED WITH ROSS WHITELAW ABOUT THE SLIMMED DOWN *RING*

Ben Woodward is founder and Artistic Director of Regents Opera in London, who are about to undertake a complete *Ring Cycle* - quite the feat for a "fringe" opera company, with no government funding.

Regents Opera was founded - as Fulham Opera - in 2011, with a performance of *Das Rheingold* fully staged in a small 120-seat church, with piano accompaniment, provided by Woodward. After this was a huge success, the company moved forward to giving a pair of complete *Ring Cycles* in 2014, with piano, adding just a flute and a horn for the latter two operas. That company has, over the past decade, by way of various productions of Verdi, Strauss, other Wagner (*Holländer* and *Die Meistersinger*), now come full circle to give fringe opera productions of the *Ring* once again, though this time, in an arrangement for 22 instruments (single wind, 3 horns playing 2 parts, trumpet, bass trombone and 12 strings plus organ), which will be fully staged on a 3m x 10m thrust stage in the boxing arena in York Hall in London's east end. The Irish director **Caroline Staunton**, of the Staatsoper Berlin, will direct, with Woodward conducting. They are good mates - sharing their love of opera, rugby and drinking.

Ben Woodward was inspired to become a conductor at age ten, was an organ scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge, then the Guildhall

School of Music in London, and has worked at the Staatsoper Hannover, and Landestheater Flensburg and the ROH. He now lives in Berlin with his wife **Catharine**, who, having just sung Gerhilde at Bayreuth (and will be doing so again this year), in this *Ring Cycle* will sing Brünnhilde.

When asked about his approach to conducting, Ben stressed the importance of the text; what are the characters saying - what is their intent? He sings along - saying that when he sings he discovers the right speed. He sees the conductor as a conduit between stage and pit - acting as one to make the performance as exciting as possible. The zoom was recorded and will be available on our site in due course. WSNSW president Esteban Insausti and secretary **Ross Whitelaw** have very generously donated money towards Regent Opera's ongoing productions, as part of WSNSW's initiative to build up world-wide links between the various Wagner Societies and small unsubsidised opera groups.

Former WSNSW Committee member, **Kay Collins**, recently sent Leona this note from London: "Hi Leona, I saw the *Götterdämmerung* dress rehearsals they did at the start and invited the Wagner Society. It was so different and fantastic. I am going to *Die Walküre* on Tuesday next week. Can't wait it's so good!" Kay Collins



WEDNESDAY 29 JANUARY 2025 ON ZOOM FROM MELBOURNE

7.00PM SUSANNE CHAUDY TALKED WITH ESTEBAN INSAUSTI ABOUT MO'S *DIE MEISTERSINGER*

Distinguished opera director **Susanne Chaundy** has spoken to the Society on several occasions. Recently, she spoke to us on Zoom from Melbourne in conversation with President **Esteban Insausti** about MO's new production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in February. A recording of the conversation will be available to members in due course.

Suzanne was in the final two weeks of rehearsals and managed to snatch some time to tell us how well she thought it was going. Her vision is to 'stage an event' in a purpose built 'light and airy' structure (loosely inspired by **Shakespeare's** Globe Theatre in London), in the heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building at Carlton Gardens, Melbourne. She cited the many bureaucratic

and financial obstacles that needed to be navigated and it was a 'miracle' that they have managed to stage this monumental work. Over 250 people were involved; including singers, musicians, admin and crew, all done without any government help. She emphasised that the work is a comedy and said all the artists have wholeheartedly thrown themselves into their roles. Her aim was to tell the story as a simple human comedy, with no need to judge, comment on, or change Wagner's work. She said that the riot at the end of Act II was quite challenging, with around 100 performers on stage creating comedic chaos. Suzanne was full of praise for the older more experienced singers and the way they were generously mentoring the less experienced cast members.



GENEROUS DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED SINCE DECEMBER 2024 FROM THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS:

Diana-Rose Orr, Richard Mason & Camron Dyer, Barbara Brady, Ross Whitelaw (For Regents Opera) and Esteban Insausti (For Regents Opera)

WE WARMLY WELCOME NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED SINCE DECEMBER 2024:

1301 Robert Green | 1302 Caterina Pangallo & Jurgen Lawrenz | 1303 Bradley Gilchrist

DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG

AT THE ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING, CARLTON GARDENS, MELBOURNE

16, 18, 20, 22 February 2025

Praise be to all of us. Together, our journey was as much a pleasure as a pilgrimage.Anthony Negus conducted a vivid and persuasive account of the score, as swift flowing as the River Pegnitz, but also with swirling depths and unexpected eddies when required. The result was beauteous playing from the Melbourne Opera Orchestra (offstage instruments included), with some gloriously fulgent lower strings and excellent horns. Clearly, the benefits of a long rehearsal period ensured that this was no first-night-nervous performance, but something that sprang fully formed from the first chords of the prelude.

Michael Smith
ABR Arts,
17 February

Many WSNSW members made the pilgrimage to Melbourne and were not disappointed. This was a very joyful production, full of energy, laughter and camaraderie. The best moment for me was at the very end, on the last note, when Sachs and Beckmesser exchanged a gesture of what I interpreted as 'artistic solidarity' - despite Beckmesser's foolishness he was still, after all, a respected Master of his craft and, as Town Clerk, an essential member of the community. But, more than this, it was a wonderful performer, **Warwick Fyfe**, acknowledging another wonderful performer, **Christopher Hillier**, and their shared experience in bringing to life Wagner's magnificent vision of an artistic community. It seems to me that Melbourne Opera is just that. Mike Day

In the June Quarterly we will include a detailed review of the performance by our eminent Wagner historian **Dr Terence Watson**. Here are extracts from some of the very glowing press reviews plus some welcome comments from WSNSW member **Minnie Biggs**.

Tim Byrne in the Age 18 February

..Musically, the production is close to flawless. The building's acoustics are surprisingly effective, the singers soaring over the orchestra with confidence. **Anthony Negus** conducts with great suppleness and control, and the musicians bring fluidity and texture to the score. **Warwick Fyfe** is a powerhouse, pensive in repose and searingly authoritative in action. **Lee Abrahmsen** and **Deborah Humble** are vivid and funny, and **Christopher Hillier** triumphs as the Malvolio-like villain. *Meistersinger* mightn't be a great entry point to opera – it's too long, and the story is slightly recondite – but it's full of sublime music. **Suzanne Chaundy**'s lightness of touch, the building's awesome scale and the world-class performances in and out of the pit make it an aficionado's dream.

Michael Smith in ABR Arts 17 February

....*Meistersinger* is full of life and boundless energy; it is celebratory, passionate, engrossing, exuberant, and, above all, joyously funny. There were many, many things I treasured about this performance, but what I especially valued was how the circuit of what occurred on stage and in the pit was completed by the audience – by the sound of laughter (nifty surtitles ensured everyone got the jokes) and (yes) joy. Here, we had the rare example of two distinct communities, divided by five centuries and thousands of kilometres, combining as one: the good people and burghers of Nuremberg, celebrating all that is good in life and song; and the worthy people of Melbourne. Praise be to all of us. Together, our journey was as much a pleasure as a pilgrimage.**Anthony Negus** conducted a vivid and persuasive account of the score, as swift flowing as the River Pegnitz, but also with swirling depths and unexpected eddies when required.

The result was beauteous playing from the Melbourne Opera Orchestra (offstage instruments included), with some gloriously fulgent lower strings and excellent horns. Clearly, the benefits of a long rehearsal period ensured that this was no first-night-nervous performance, but something that sprang fully formed from the first chords of the prelude. A special word, too, for Negus's conducting of the Act III prelude, which was numinous.The cast, which could not be faulted, was dominated by **Warwick Fyfe's** Hans Sachs (his role début) and **Christopher Hillier's** Beckmesser: cobbler and town clerk at their most crafty and vexatious, but also vocally strong and persuasive, as befits two of the more venerable master singers. Fyfe, who never tired, was the ideal Sachs, his creative poetic soul always sensed from a more rough-shod exterior. Were he an actual pair of shoes, they would be sturdy walkers



rather than patent leather. Fyfe lent strength and dignity to his role, most of all in his *Flieder* and *Wahn* monologues, but also brought a touch of welcome vulnerability in his two lyrical encounters with Eva.

Simon Parris in Man in chair 17 February

Sandra Bowdler in Bachtrack 18 February

This is an opera which demands a very large cast of principals and comprimarios and space hardly permits them all to be mentioned. It can be observed however that there were no weak links. Leading the pack was baritone **Warwick Fyfe**, previously Wotan and a long standing stalwart on the Australian operatic scene. He brought to the role of Hans Sachs what appears to be an easy and natural authority, as well as a well-produced, accurate and smooth vocal sound. **Lee Abrahmsen**, so impressive as Sieglinde, was equally wonderful as Eva, unleashing torrents of gleaming soprano sound. Why is she not better known to Australian audiences? Even in the largest ensembles she soared over the rest, and acted convincingly, with warm interactions with both Walther and Sachs. The former was well sung by tenor **James Egglestone**, with firm Heldentenor tone, every inch a noble knight. The versatile **Robert Macfarlane**, previously a highly successful Mime, returned as David, the eternal apprentice, bending his usually attractive unforced tenor into comic tones as required. Rounding out the principals was **Deborah**

Humble's Magdalena, providing her enveloping warm mezzo to the role. The Act 3 quintet made time stand even stiller. **Christopher Hillier** was a most entertaining Beckmesser. Clad in checkered breeches with an unflattering Prince Valiant wig over a red pussycat bow, while being truly awful he engendered just a smidgen of sympathy *à la* Malvolio and, like Macfarlane, managed to make his usually pleasant baritone a butt of the comedy. Props also to **Steven Gallop's** resonant Pogner, **Henry Choo's** bright tenor as Vogelgesang, **Michael Lampard's** authoritative Kothner and **Henry Shaw's** cavernous Nightwatchman, not to mention all the other masters, apprentices and guild members. It is also worth observing that, apart from Negus, all the cast, creatives and crew were drawn from the local Australian talent pool. Other larger companies should take note.

<https://bachtrack.com/review-meistersinger-chaundy-negus-melbourne-opera-february-2025>



Robert MacFarlane (David) and Deborah Humble (Magdalena)

Simon Parris in Man in chair 17 February

....Serving as both a reflection and a celebration of the elevating power and beauty of music, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* gently mocks the restrictive rigours of bureaucracy whilst championing the value of the arts in upholding tradition and scaffolding community. With judicious focus, director **Suzanne Chaundy** crafts the comedy with the lightest of touch, simply allowing the inherent humour of the characters and action to speak for itself. Storytelling is crisp, clear, and engaging. As with the best comedy, the action is played as though it is of high importance to the serious characters. The soaring arches and central dome of Royal Exhibition Building prove a stunning backdrop for opera, and designer **Andrew Bailey** has deliberately complemented the existing colour palette with his scenic design. Even with large settings on the stage, the grand space still provides a view of singers coming and going from the performance area, much like the effect of an outdoor Shakespeare production. Having presented much of Wagner's repertoire, including their unforgettable *Bendigo Ring Cycle*, Melbourne Opera now boasts a core of richly experienced singers of Wagner. Not only is it impressive to see all roles in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* taken by Australian singers, but to have a set of principal and featured singers so evenly matched in quality is a real thrill. Act one, in particular, spotlights numerous soloists, each as strong, exact, and characterful as the last. Act two draws the focus in more tightly, with revered Wagnerian expert **Warwick Fyfe** sharing a direct bond with audience as Hans Sachs reflects on Walther's initial attempt at song in the *Flieder* monologue, "Was duftet doch der *Flieder*." Fyfe's meticulously calibrated, neatly understated performance of the epic role of Sachs continues across acts two and three, his rich vocal expression deftly balancing Sachs' curmudgeonly temperament with an underlying heart of gold. By the time the ensemble sings a tribute to the noble cobbler Sachs, the same sentiment could very well be applied to the galvanising and stirring work of Fyfe himself.

It can be observed however that there were no weak links. Leading the pack was baritone Warwick Fyfe, previously Wotan and a long standing stalwart on the Australian operatic scene. He brought to the role of Hans Sachs what appears to be an easy and natural authority, as well as a well-produced, accurate and smooth vocal sound. Lee Abrahmsen, so impressive as Sieglinde, was equally wonderful as Eva, unleashing torrents of gleaming soprano sound. Why is she not better known to Australian audiences? Even in the largest ensembles she soared over the rest, and acted convincingly, with warm interactions with both Walther and Sachs.

Sandra Bowdler
Bachtrack,
18 February



Warwick Fyfe (Hans Sachs) and Christopher Hillier (Sixtus Beckmesser)



ANTHONY NEGUS

25 YEARS AT LONGBOROUGH

Longborough Festival

Opera is celebrating the 25th anniversary of **Anthony Negus** as its Music Director in 2025 by announcing the launch of the Longborough Wagner Club. Negus will be the Club's Founder President, and its distinguished ambassadors include Stephen Fry, Sir John Tomlinson, Susan Bullock CBE and Alan Rusbridger. In a statement, Negus said, "I am thrilled with the launch of the Longborough Wagner Club, in recognition of the Festival's longstanding commitment to the interpretation of the composer's rich oeuvre and in celebration of 25 years of my time as Music Director."

For 25 years, Negus has been central to Longborough's success, shaping its musical vision and establishing the festival's distinguished reputation within the Wagnerian tradition, often celebrated as the "English Bayreuth." The club will launch at Longborough Wagner Club, a philanthropic circle to support Longborough's ambitious and long-standing tradition of presenting the works of and inspired by Richard Wagner. The Club will also help cement Longborough's reputation as the birthplace and training ground for future generations of British Wagnerians, and secure an ongoing place for Wagner's work within the festival programme. In 2026, Negus will celebrate his 80th birthday with Longborough by conducting a revival of Longborough's acclaimed 2015 production of "Tristan und Isolde," directed by Carmen Jakobi and in 2027, he will conduct Wagner's "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg."

Lee Abrahmsen works beautifully with richly experienced mezzo-soprano **Deborah Humble**, who elevates the supporting role of Eva's nurse / companion Magdalena with her pristine vocals and sweetly coquettish stage presence. The Melbourne Opera Chorus sings out with rich harmonies and glorious power, beginning the opera from afar at vespers and later palpably raising the performance energy in the final scene of the opera.

<https://simonparrismaninchair.com/2025/02/17/melbourne-opera-die-meistersinger-von-nurnberg-review/>

Patricia Mauder in Limelight 17 February

The little company that could presents opera's longest work in a vast space that proves surprisingly perfect.

With her usual clear storytelling style, **Susanne Chaundy** leaves it to the audience to make what they will of this heritage work's now problematic sexism and German nationalist ending. She and the cast do well to tease out every possible scrap of humour in this absurdly drawn out tale of a singing competition. Ultimately it's just an excuse to enjoy a lot of memorable music for 4.5 hours (plus two long intervals).The acoustics prove to be excellent, with the Melbourne Opera Orchestra never sounding better. Under the baton of Englishman **Anthony Negus**, they produce a rich, deliciously textured

sound, including strings that are at times lush, at others delicately shimmering. Brass and woodwinds are also splendid.The Melbourne Opera Chorus look good and sound even better, especially when delivering a production highlight in Act III. Approaching the stage from behind, walking the length of the opposite wing with colourful guild banners, they gather to sing with exciting force and unity. Everyone is dressed in German Renaissance middle-class style, which designer **Karine Larché** interprets with a light palette throughout and abundance of floral headdresses for Act III. Her designs underline this production's sincere, uncomplicated approach. The set easily switches between suggestions of a church, town square and cobbler's workshop, as different panels are attached here and there to a two-level timber frame. **Philip Lethlean's** lighting design brings focus to the action in the vast building, but without trying to hide the grand architecture revealed by sunlight then dramatic artificial light. Melbourne Opera's gamble to present the world's longest opera in one of the country's largest spaces pays off handsomely. One hopes that's literally the case, because this heritage structure's monumental design and divine murals would be even better suited to *The Ring Cycle's* gods and demi-gods.

<https://limelight-arts.com.au/reviews/die-meistersinger-von-nurnberg-melbourne-opera/>

MINNIE BIGGS ON DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG, MELBOURNE OPERA FEB 16

The rave reviews are pouring in, heads were reeling, smiles were broad and the clapping loud and strong. A triumph it was for all. Perhaps not quite enough has been said about the set up in the venue, and the venue, the historical Royal Exhibition Building. While there has been history of musical performances, since Dame Nellie Melba, it is doubtful there has been a production quite like this one. Director **Suzanne Chaundy** is far more than a director. She and her team had to weave through the myriad rules and permissions to establish an event in a World Heritage Building. In 2025. OHS. On the physical level - a vast empty space - there was created a stage, small under the great dome, and more impressively, a bank of seating on metal, what are they called, tiers, high rises! Vast is the operative word around this event. Two banks of bars for coffee, wine, eats - all specially installed. Chairs and tables. One is overwhelmed just arriving and walking through and around.

Before 3 pm, the sunlight pouring in, so much to look at, up and in the distance and to either side. The architecture, the paintings. Out of sight a created dressing room, back stage business. No real backstage. In fact the 'back stage' featured the arrival of the Meisters on St John's Day trouping dancing in from the distant actual front of the building.

Charming as the costumes and simple easily moveable sets were, and marvellous the voices of every singer, and excellent the orchestra under the beloved and admired **Anthony Negus**,

I could not help but be distracted. Even as the colours of the costumes and sets echo beautifully the colours of the paintings and architecture, there was still this vast space and light all around. It had not occurred to me how effective and beneficial a darkened hall is for music. Focus. Concentration. Distraction is an enemy.

One of the keys to the opera is Nuremberg itself. A town made up of people with roles, jobs that interacted with everyone - the shoemaker made shoes for the whole town, the baker baked bread...and all or so many of them Meisters or hoping to join. A tight community that works, inspiring (in these days). Somehow lost for me, in the vastness of the building.

Warwick Fyfe as Hans Sachs exceeded all expectations, with his superb voice and nuanced performance, the very soul of the world's most famous cobbler, **Lee Abrahmsen** divine as Eva, **Christopher Hillier** outrageously funny as Beckmesser, **Deborah Humble** fetching and beautiful as Magdalena, all the rest of the cast in finest form, it was a performance for the ages.

Others thought the space worked well, so my distraction is just an opinion, longing to see it in a proper theatre. As we await the next production from the innovative accomplished cherished Melbourne Opera.

SUNDAY 2 FEBRUARY AT THE GOETHE INSTITUT

2.00PM TALK BY ROBERT GAY ON COSIMA WAGNER: GUARDING THE LEGACY: COSIMA IN BAYREUTH 1883-1906
(ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR 20 OCTOBER 2024)

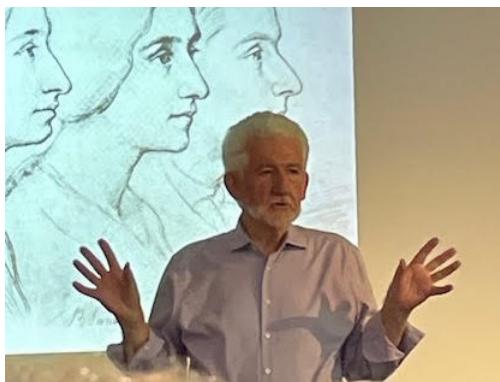


Robert Gay has been a favourite guest at WSNSW meetings for many years, with his entertaining and knowledgeable talks about various opera subjects. This talk was a walk through the history of, and the contributions to, the Bayreuth Festival under the control of the formidable **Cosima Liszt/von Bülow/Wagner**. After showing some domestic archival photos of the Liszt and von Bülow families, Robert spoke for nearly two hours referring to a detailed timeline handout sheet. Members generally know that Cosima carried on with

the Festival after Wagner's death but many of us were probably unaware of the forcefulness of Cosima's personality and her manipulations in order to achieve her aims. She made her very famous father Franz Liszt attend the Festival in 1888 so she could use his fame to give legitimacy to her endeavours, but wouldn't allow him to stay at *Wahnfried*. When he died early in the Festival she refused to allow him the last rites. (Liszt was a Catholic Abbé but Cosima was a Protestant convert; she didn't approve of his behaviour and resented that she had been born out of wedlock). Robert explained very clearly how, on Wagner's death, (he died without a will), Cosima used her knowledge of German Law to have Siegfried (who was 13 years old when his father died), declared the sole heir, despite the fact that Wagner and Cosima had had two daughters before the birth of Siegfried. (Cosima had previously borne two daughters to Hans von Bülow). By doing this she could keep control of the Festival until Siegfried was much older. A fascinating talk about a formidable woman.



Suzan Penny and Marg Whealy



Robert Gay with sketch of Cosima, Blandine and Daniel Liszt



Esteban Insausti and HLM Barbara Brady who was celebrating her 90th Birthday



Jenny Ferns and Renate Junker

WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY ON ZOOM

12.00PM FROM LA DR JOHN MASTROGIOVANNI CONTINUED HIS PARSIFAL TALK

On Wednesday, 12th February last, we were again fortunate to have **Dr John Mastrogiovanni**, President of the Wagner Society of Southern California and renowned *Parsifal* scholar, give us an hour of his time via Zoom to discuss Acts 2 and 3 of *Parsifal*. Anyone who took in his talk last year on Act 1 wouldn't want to miss this. Unfortunately numbers were relatively small, due no doubt to having to programme the talk for noon our time due to the time zone difference between here and California. John did a short recap of his previous talk, reminding us that *Parsifal* is perhaps the fifth opera in Warner's *Ring Cycle*, opening on the same note upon which *Götterdämmerung* closes. Siegfried's chord structure is resolved in the music of *Parsifal*. Siegfried has been reincarnated into Parsifal, Brunnhilde into Kundry – "the one who knows". After all, Kundry enters on a horse, transformed by the *Götterdämmerung* fire. Venturing into Act 2, Klingsor, the

creation of Titurel, is a mirror image of him. While Montsalvat is all religiosity, not faith, Klingsor's garden has neither, mocking both religion and spirituality. Kundry has the will to live, to love and to redeem. Ultimately, the base nature of mankind is defeated by compassion and Klingsor dies. When Act 3 commences, Titurel is also dead, reinforcing the mirror image idea referred to earlier. Parsifal appears, a personification of the masculine part of the Grail. Kundry is the personification of the feminine part. The message here is that the masculine and the feline parts of human nature makes us whole. There is the famous kiss between Parsifal and Kundry in Act 2 but there is a second kiss in Act 3 when Parsifal kisses Kundry's hair as she washes his feet – the kiss of redemption. John emphasised the importance of the original stage directions of Wagner, especially in Act 3 with regard to the Spear and the Grail. They are meant to together symbolise the wholeness within us.

This was emphasised by a brief excerpt from the Met's recent production featuring **Jonas Kaufmann**, which is well worth watching. *Parsifal* unites the Spear and the Grail to great dramatic and emotional effect. More than one of the participants in this Zoom shed a tear. All in all, I recommend the recording to those who didn't see it first up (and don't forget his Act 1 talk). You will have a new appreciation of *Parsifal* thanks to our guest speaker, John Mastrogiovanni. I also recommend his book on *Parsifal* for a deeper dive into this fascinating work.

Ross Whitelaw

RICHARD WAGNER AND THE ETERNAL FEMININE

THE TEXT OF PETER BASSETT'S TALK IN THE SECOND RING SYMPOSIUM ON 9TH DECEMBER 2023



Ary Schaeffer 1795 – 1858
The Seduction – Marguerite and Faust 1846

Faust became a model for many of Wagner's tragic characters who, as he put it, stared into the abyss of their very existence, and could change nothing. He contrasted this with "the blessed redemptrress, the glorious figure of Gretchen who is exalted by suffering". She became an inspiration for positive Wagnerian characters like Senta, Elisabeth, and, above all, Brünnhilde.

“...the eternal-feminine draws us on high.”

Those are the final words (in translation) of Goethe's *Faust*, a play regarded by many as one of the greatest works of German literature. Wagner quoted them at a banquet following the first performance of the *Ring* in 1876, associating Brünnhilde with 'the eternal feminine' and leaving no doubt that she was the ultimate heroine of the *Ring*.

As a sixteen-year-old, he had composed a set of songs - 'Seven Compositions on Goethe's *Faust*' - coinciding with the appearance of his sister, Rosalie, as Gretchen, in the first Leipzig production. Goethe was still alive at the time. The songs were light and rather experimental. But ten years later, things started to get serious, and he composed what we know today as his Faust Overture. Its opening section sounds a bit like the dragon Fafner emerging from his cave, or perhaps the tormented Dutchman, or the outcast Tannhäuser, or Wotan in his deepest despair. Clearly, the ground was being laid for things to come.

Faust became a model for many of Wagner's tragic characters who, as he put it, stared into the abyss of their very existence, and could change nothing. He contrasted this with "the blessed redemptress, the glorious figure of Gretchen who is exalted by suffering". She became an inspiration for positive Wagnerian characters like Senta, Elisabeth, and, above all, Brünnhilde.

Wagner never tired of comparing Faust and Gretchen in Goethe's play with the 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements of *The Flying Dutchman*. "The sombre glow that I feel burning here" says the Dutchman. "Should I, wretched one, call it love? Ah no! It is the longing for salvation; might it come to me through such an angel!" And Senta replies: "That for which you yearn, salvation. Would that you could achieve it, poor man, through me." The Dutchman's hope for salvation and Senta's determination to be its instrument are conveyed in the wondrously beautiful duet in Act II.

There is a notorious letter written by Wagner to **Mathilde Wesendonck** in Zürich in April 1858, which his wife **Minna** intercepted and, assuming it was a love letter, caused a scene. This letter, entitled 'Morning confession' is an apology by Wagner for his tactless remarks the night before, when a visitor to the Wesendonck household spoke admiringly of the character of Faust. Wagner wrote: "Having to listen to people saying time after time that Faust was the most significant human type ever created by a poet, made me very angry. Faust's despair rests initially either upon his knowledge of the world, in which case he is to be pitied, or else he is simply a student with fanciful ideas who has yet to experience the real world, in which case he is cripplingly immature. It would have been better if he had learned all that there was to learn, and learned it, moreover, at the first wonderful opportunity, through Gretchen's love. I can

regard Faust only as a missed opportunity; and the opportunity that has been missed is nothing less than the unique chance of salvation and redemption."

The Faust-like negativity that distinguishes many Wagnerian characters is just one side of the story. On the other side is the redeeming quality of a woman's love with its roots in the idea of the *ewige weibliche* ('The eternal feminine'). In an essay of 1903, **Thomas Mann** concluded that: "The ending of Faust and what the violins sing in the final moments of *Götterdämmerung* is the same thing, and it is the truth. The eternal feminine draws us on high".

The eternal feminine plays a vital role in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and her name is 'Eva' after the first woman in the Bible. Both Hans Sachs and Walther von Stolzing are drawn to Eva, but Sachs stands aside for the younger man who, in his prize song on the meadow on St John's Day, leaves no doubt that she is the one who is drawing him on high -

*“Behold in blessed dream of love,
The most beautiful woman:
Eva in paradise!”*

And, in Goethe's *Faust*, what does the *chorus mysticus* declare at the end of that play?

*“All things corruptible
Are but a parable;
Earth's insufficiency
Here finds fulfilment;
Here the ineffable
Wins life through love;
Eternal womanhood
Leads us above.”*

In the *Ring*, Wotan's dreams change as the drama unfolds. In *Das Rheingold* we witness his dependence on Loge, demi-god of fire, a cunning trickster and the Wagnerian equivalent of Mephistopheles. But his first appeal to the eternal feminine comes with his pursuit of Erda. Towards the end of *Das Rheingold*, she rises from the ground and tells Wotan to yield the ring and escape the curse that would bring about his destruction. When he asks her who she is, she replies that she knows how all things were, are and will be. She is the everlasting world's primeval woman. She had borne three daughters, the Norns, but now the greatest danger brings her personally to him. He should heed this: all that exists will end. A dark day dawns for the gods. Wotan must shun the ring. But before he can learn more, she vanishes. The antithesis of creation is destruction, and so the nature motif in the orchestra is turned upside down as Erda warns of the end of the gods.

Wagner took the name 'Erda' (the old High German word for 'earth') from Jacob Grimm, who based his speculations on roman sources. But, in a way, Erda is Wagner's own creation. Still, as a character in *Das Rheingold* and, later, in *Siegfried*, Erda plays an important role, and her sudden, unexpected appearance in the ring's preliminary evening, is great theatre. We learn from Wotan in *Die Walküre*, that he

pursued Erda deep in the earth and overpowered her, and she bore Brünnhilde. With Brünnhilde and her eight Valkyrie sisters, he hoped to gather fallen heroes to defend the gods. But if the ring passed again into the hands of Alberich, the Nibelung would turn the heroes against Wotan, and Valhalla would fall.

Wotan dreams of one who could do what he could not; one for whom he longed but could never find, one who, by defying him, would be most dear to him. That saviour of the gods, he eventually decides, is the unborn Siegfried and, in Act III of *Siegfried*, the Wanderer (Wotan) tells Erda: "In rage and loathing I gave to the spiteful Nibelung the world. Now to a glorious Volsung I bequeath my inheritance". It never occurs to him, or to anyone else for that matter, that the person on whom the future really depends, is not Siegfried but Brünnhilde.

Of all the Faust-like characters who are victims of their circumstances, Wotan is the most complicated. But for him, salvation at the hands of Brünnhilde comes too late. Wagner described Wotan as: "The sum of the intelligence of the present". He exploits his half-mortal son, Siegmund and then, faced with a crisis of his own making, sacrifices him. When his favourite daughter Brünnhilde displays the compassion that he has suppressed in himself, he sacrifices her too. Time and again, power and love are shown to be incompatible - the ways of the world versus the ways of the heart.

The feeling of compassion that overwhelms Brünnhilde when confronted with Siegmund's love for Sieglinde marks her first step towards humanity and mortality. Stripped of her godhead, she'll be awakened to new life by Siegfried in the third drama of the Ring. The old world of the gods will be of no consequence to either Siegfried or Brünnhilde, and they too foretell its end.

Lovelessness is at the heart of all that goes wrong in the Ring. Whether deliberately chosen, as in the case of Alberich, or the product of circumstance as in the case of Wotan and Fricka, lovelessness carries the seeds of destruction. The corollary is that an act of love - especially love to the point of self-sacrifice - carries the seeds of life. Brünnhilde will carry the grace of compassionate love furthest in the Ring, but she encounters it first in Siegmund who rejects a blissful afterlife from which Sieglinde would be excluded. For Siegmund, his 'eternal feminine' is, unquestionably, Sieglinde.

The philosopher **Ludwig Feuerbach** postulated that the 'glorious necessity of love' should take precedence over the law. This became Wagner's motto in his early sketches for the ring, and he never entirely abandoned it. He once told **Franz Liszt**: "The state of lovelessness is the state of suffering for the human race ... we recognize the glorious necessity of love ... and so, in this way we acquire a strength of which natural man had no inkling, and this strength will one day lay the foundations for a state on earth where no one need yearn for the other world, for they will be happy - to live and to love. For where is the man who yearns to escape from life when he is in love?"

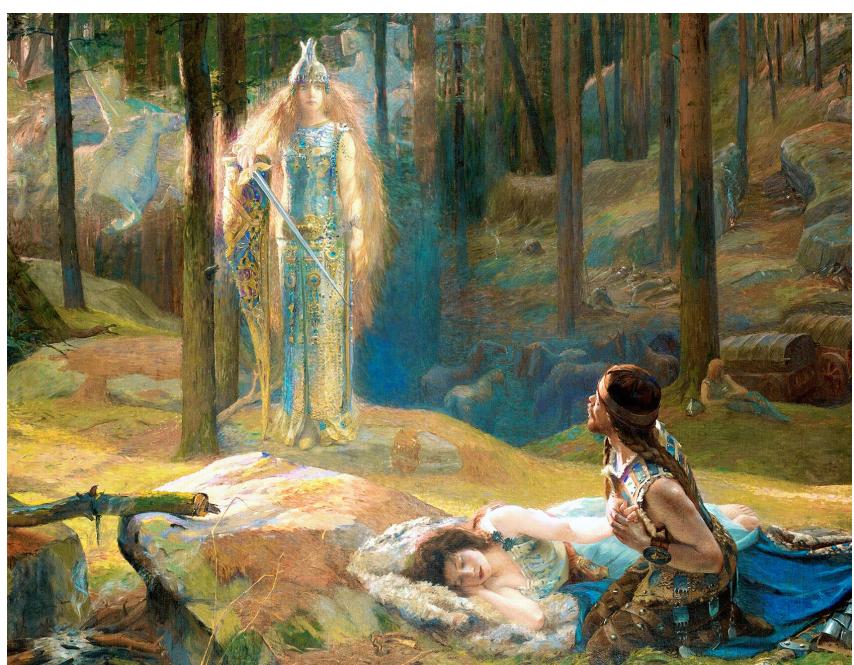
Wotan had originally decided to give victory to Siegmund in his confrontation with Hunding but changed his mind at the insistence of his wife Fricka. Fricka's view was that the law was more important than love, and that by defending the law she could save the gods. In reality though, she was hastening their end, and Wotan was left in the depths of despair. Fricka was definitely not his 'eternal feminine'.

Wotan had instructed Brünnhilde to give victory to Siegmund, but after his grilling by Fricka (and to Brünnhilde's disbelief) he told his daughter to end Siegmund's life and give victory to Hunding. From this point onwards, Wotan's whole demeanour expresses an ever-increasing uneasy, profound dejection. But, for Brünnhilde, it is Siegmund's devotion to his eternal feminine, Sieglinde, that convinces her to disobey her father. Faced with the punishment that her father metes out, Brünnhilde urges him to protect her sleeping figure with a wall of fire so that only a fearless hero will awaken her. Eventually, Wotan's true nature shines through - albeit too late - and he agrees to do as she asks. Faust too, when he tries to rescue Gretchen from prison for killing her child, realises the extent to which he was responsible for destroying her life, and he wishes he had never been born. Wotan, I suspect, feels the same way.

As Faust had treated Gretchen callously, so Wotan had ignored his daughter's feelings and abandoned his own beliefs. She was probably the last person he would have turned to for advice, and yet, in reality, she was the one who could have helped him the most. When, in the closing scene of *Die Walküre*, Wotan takes one last, sorrowful look at the sleeping Brünnhilde before disappearing through the flames, he is no more than a departed spirit and can only let things happen as they will - which is why he becomes the Wanderer. In the next drama, after passing through the circle of fire, Siegfried awakens Brünnhilde with a kiss. He and the now mortal Brünnhilde care nothing for the fate of the world or the gods but declare their love for each other in terms of the utmost rapture. As the curtain falls, we are left wondering - will love really triumph after all?

With the failure and departure of Wotan, Brünnhilde's focus is transferred to Siegfried who is still a curious mixture of child and man. His first reaction on wakening her is to call out to the mother he's never known. His feelings for his mother had dominated his thoughts for much of his life, and now these feelings are triggered again by the beautiful young woman before him. What does this mean? **Sigmund Freud** described the 'Oedipus Complex' in his interpretation of dreams, published in 1899, well after the Ring had been written, and after Wagner's death. The Oedipus Complex was concerned with feelings for a parent

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Gaston Bussière (1862 - 1928) *Brünnhilde confronts Siegmund and Sieglinde* 1894



Minna Planer by Alexander von Osterstedt 1835



Jessie Taylor née Lausso

There's no doubt that, by the end of the whole colossal drama, begun in 1848 and finished in 1874, it is Brünnhilde who is the 'eternal feminine'. Siegfried regarded her as such from the moment they met on that lofty peak in the clear pure air, at the start of their two new lives.

of the opposite sex and antagonism towards a parent of the same sex. Siegfried confuses Brünnhilde with his mother, and he kills Mime who had been in *loco parentis* for his father. But perhaps this is all becoming a bit silly for a mythological tale. Myths and religions are full of unusual relationships, including in the book of Genesis and in the religions of the ancient Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Norsemen and just about everyone else, often to explain natural phenomena.

Siegfried is now besotted with the person before him who will become, in every respect, his eternal feminine. Indeed, she is the only feminine human being that he's ever set eyes on. For the rest of his life, Brünnhilde will mean everything to Siegfried, and we need to put aside the calamitous impact of drugs and potions administered by the Gibichungs and, in particular, by Hagen in *Götterdämmerung*. In this story, potions symbolise the damage that third parties can do to otherwise loving relationships. And they'll cause enormous damage when Siegfried is made to forget his loved one, and the demoralised Brünnhilde, distressed beyond measure, joins in the plot to kill him. But it is hard to imagine all this when we listen to Siegfried's ecstatic feelings towards his eternal feminine – indeed, their feelings towards each other - high on Brünnhilde's rock during the prologue of *Götterdämmerung*.

In the Third Act of *Götterdämmerung*, during a hunting scene, an antidote is administered by Hagen, and Siegfried starts to remember how he first encountered Brünnhilde and joined her in a loving relationship. Gunther interprets this as the betrayal of a blood-brother, and Hagen now has the justification he needs to plunge his spear into Siegfried's back. With his dying breath, Siegfried declares: "Brünnhilde, my holy bride, awake! Open your eyes! Who put you back to sleep? Who forced you to this fearful slumber? Ah, to die is sweet. Brünnhilde offers me her welcome." And he dies. Eventually of course, Brünnhilde comes to understand how she and Siegfried had been manipulated by Hagen and the Gibichungs, and how Siegfried had remained true to her in all the ways that mattered. It was too late to save him, but, in the closing scene, she rises above the horrors that have engulfed them both, and declares: "Siegfried, Siegfried, look! Your wife joyfully greets you!"

There's no doubt that, by the end of the whole colossal drama, begun in 1848 and finished in 1874, it is Brünnhilde who is the 'eternal feminine'. Siegfried regarded her as such from the moment they met on that lofty peak in the clear pure air, at the start of their two new lives.

If the notion of the 'eternal feminine' played a key part in many of Wagner's dramas, it also played an important part in his own extraordinary life. And I'd like to look at five women who, he hoped, would indeed lead him on high. Three didn't, and two did. It all began when Richard was a brashly confident eighteen-year-old in Leipzig, infatuated with a Jewish girl named **Leah David**, daughter of a wealthy Polish family and a friend of his sister Luise. "Never before had I encountered a young girl so richly attired and so beautiful", he wrote. "Never before had I been spoken to with such oriental profusion of caressing politeness. Surprised and dazzled, I experienced for the first time the indescribable emotions of first love". The boy became a regular guest at musical evenings arranged by Leah's widowed father, and he

composed a Polonaise in D for piano - a measure of his fascination with his beloved's Polish origins and his sympathy for Polish refugees after an unsuccessful uprising against the Russians in 1831. This 'un-Wagnerian' Polonaise is a delight. But the relationship soured when a tactless remark about the pianism of another suitor (Leah's cousin) led to his undoing. Upset and embarrassed by what escalated into a display of bad manners, the beautiful Leah transferred her affections to her cousin, and the young Wagner was left mortified. Tact was never his strongest suit.

When he was just twenty-one, Wagner fell in love with a pretty actress, **Minna Planer**. In many respects, they were poles apart but they got married in 1836 in Königsberg. Things got off to a bad start when the pastor who was about to conduct the wedding opened the door to find the couple in the middle of a heated argument and on the point of departing in different directions. With a little persuading, they went ahead with the nuptials. But, soon afterwards, Minna absconded with one of her admirers, a wealthy merchant and theatre patron called Dietrich. Wagner set off to bring her back but was then faced with a second elopement by Minna! The marriage limped from one crisis to another. Minna rarely had faith in her husband's more ambitious ventures, and she could never understand why he wasn't content with being a conductor and composer of a more conventional kind. Their married life often involved flights from creditors in perilous circumstances. Richard remained convinced of his own destiny; Minna was just exasperated.

By 1848, revolution was in the air, and Wagner sympathised with the revolutionary movement in Dresden. He was actively involved in the violent uprisings of 1849, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. With the help of Franz Liszt, he escaped to Zürich. Exile and a warrant for treason; that was the ultimate humiliation for Minna. She nagged and scolded him until her health deteriorated. He was utterly miserable. He longed for a woman who shared his ideals and would encourage him to higher achievements. He yearned for someone who was genuinely a soul-mate and believed in him – a Senta to his Flying Dutchman.

In 1848 he had met, and was attracted to, a wealthy Anglo-Scots girl **Jessie Taylor** who, soon afterwards, entered into an unfortunate marriage with a Bordeaux wine-merchant **Eugène Laussot**. It was unfortunate because her new husband, Laussot, had been involved with her mother before transferring his affections to the daughter! The family's wealth might have had something to do with this! In 1850, while Richard was living with Minna in Zürich, he travelled to Bordeaux to see Jessie, and the upshot was that he and Jessie decided to elope together to the Ottoman Empire – to Greece or Turkey. Naively, Richard wrote to Minna to reveal his plans, saying, amongst other things: "If you had truly loved me, you would have recognized in sufferings a necessity to which one submits oneself for the sake of something higher." Well, that went down like a lead balloon, and Minna set off at once to Bordeaux to confront him. But when she arrived, she couldn't find him anywhere – because he was hiding from her! And so, frustrated and angry, she complained to Jessie's mother who, in turn, told Laussot who threatened to shoot Wagner if he came anywhere near his wife. So that was the end of an affair that might have led who knows where? If Jessie had indeed turned

out to be the 'eternal feminine' for whom he hankered, Wagner might have spent the rest of his life in the Ottoman empire, which is an interesting thought.

But he did find such a person in **Mathilde Wesendonck**. Mathilde and her wealthy silk-merchant husband Otto were patrons of the arts, and they were delighted to have such a well-known composer as their protégé. They built a palatial villa on the outskirts of Zürich and installed Richard and Minna in a cottage in the grounds, which Wagner called his 'refuge'. Each day, he'd walk across to the beautiful Mathilde to play his composition sketches for her. Other artists also came to the Villa Wesendonck but Wagner was the star. Minna soon felt hopelessly out of her depth. Mathilde, on the other hand, believed totally in Wagner's genius and provided the sympathetic spirit he craved. He fell in love with her and dedicated to her parts of *Die Walküre* on which he was working at the time. The score contains various jottings in Wagner's hand referring secretly to Mathilde. These jottings are sometimes associated with particular musical phrases and take the form of cryptic sets of initials: i.l.d.g. meaning in German 'I love you infinitely', and l.d.m.m? 'Do you love me Mathilde?'. Others, once deciphered, spelt out: 'Were it not for you, beloved'; 'You are my all!', and 'Beloved, why have you left me?'. The delirium of love had made him rather childlike, and he admitted as much to Mathilde, but it also provided the catalyst for some of his greatest love music. Throughout his life, Wagner seems to have needed the strong stimuli of relationships and sensory experiences in order to conjure up his imaginary world of the emotions.

While he was under this spell, he abandoned the score of *Siegfried* after Act II and threw himself into a subject that had been increasingly dominating his thoughts: *Tristan und Isolde*. It's highly unlikely that the 'affair,' if one can call it that, existed other than in Wagner's mind although he dedicated the first complete draft of *Tristan und Isolde* to Mathilde. To the end of her life, she insisted that nothing improper had transpired, and that Otto was aware of the connection and tolerated it as serving an artistic purpose. But, like Senta, she was her Dutchman's soulmate and inspired him as Minna could never do. There was no way that Mathilde would leave her husband and children for Wagner, and he, in turn, felt bound to his sick wife. The situation for all concerned had reached a crisis. Minna left for a health cure and Wagner went to Venice where he worked on the Second Act of *Tristan*. He and the Wesendoncks remained friends until his death in 1883, and they attended the first performance of the Ring in Bayreuth in 1876.

Mathilde wrote the text of the so-called *Wesendonck Lieder*, five songs for the female voice which Wagner set to a piano accompaniment. He orchestrated one of them, *Träume* ('Dreams') and had it played beneath her bedroom window on her birthday in 1857. It is a study for the wondrous Act II duet in *Tristan und Isolde* and encapsulates - as words alone could never do - his feelings for the eternally feminine Mathilde.

In the end though, there was one woman in Wagner's life who became both his 'eternal feminine' and his wife, and that was **Cosima**, daughter of Franz Liszt. Cosima had been born out of wedlock at Bellagio on Lake Como (hence her name) on 24th December 1837 to Franz

Liszt and the French countess **Marie d'Agoult**. In 1868, she wrote to her husband **Hans von Bülow**, confirming that their marriage was over and that, henceforth, she would be devoting her life to Richard Wagner. By then she had given birth to two daughters by Wagner (Isolde in 1865 and Eva in 1867). A third child, Siegfried, would be born to Cosima and Richard in 1869. Having made the monumental decision to devote the rest of her days to Wagner, Cosima began to write her diaries, which would extend to about a million words and occupy her for the next fourteen years.

In July 1870, Cosima and Bülow were divorced, and in August, she married Wagner in the Protestant church of St Matthew in Lucerne. A few months later, Richard planned a surprise for Cosima's birthday, to be celebrated as always on Christmas Day. In secret, he composed the exquisitely beautiful chamber work described in its dedication as: *Tribeschen Idyll with Fidi's birdsong and orange sunrise; a symphonic birthday greeting. Presented to his Cosima by her Richard*. The reference to the 'orange sunrise' was to Cosima's description of the sunlight falling on the orange wallpaper at the time of Siegfried's birth. Hans Richter had been given the task of secretly rehearsing a small ensemble from the Tonhalle Orchester Zürich, and Richter himself played the trumpet part.

On Christmas morning in 1873, Cosima again celebrated her birthday, this time in Bayreuth after the move there from Tribeschen the year before. On the morning of her birthday, she was enchanted by her children singing what became known as *Der Kinder-Katechismus* ('The Children's Catechism') composed by Richard. In this, the rose ('Rose') that blooms in May is rhymed with Kose (the caress) of Christmastide. Kose, of course, is a pun on Cosima.

If the rose of May has faded, it blossoms anew in the bosom of Christmas. Rose in May, cosy in May, dearest, loveliest, Cosima!

The orchestral epilogue, which Wagner added after completion of the score of *Götterdämmerung*, quotes the final "Glorification of Brünnhilde" motive. So, clearly, he was equating Cosima with Brünnhilde. Indeed, he once sang the final section to Cosima and said to her: "That's you".

Birthday celebrations were opportunities for Wagner to declare his love for Cosima, and the last opportunity occurred in December 1882 at the *Teatro la Fenice* in Venice, barely two months before his death. His plan was audacious - to conduct a performance of his symphony in C Major which he'd composed at the age of nineteen in 1832. By 24th December, when Liszt had joined the rest of the family, they all travelled to the *Teatro la Fenice* by gondolas. Cosima wrote in her diary: "I am touched to think that 50 years ago he performed this work for his mother; now for me". Perhaps Wagner, like Siegfried, was associating his 'beloved' with his mother. Far from evoking the tormented Dutchman or the outcast Tannhäuser or Wotan in his deepest despair, this happy music was the expression of a contented man embracing one 'eternal feminine' beyond all others - his wife Cosima.

Peter Bassett

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Mathilde Wesendonck



Cosima and Liszt 1860

WAGNER – HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE

Part Two by Terence Watson

My reservations about the conductor and orchestra evaporated when they began the 3rd in its original form, which I had not heard before. I have always wondered why some artists listen to the advice of lesser beings that their art is not very good and needs to be revised, which usually meant made more conventional. Such advice was given to Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky. Some of their revised works in their original form are far more interesting and exciting.

One of his most important visits was in 1861 to discuss that premiere with the management of the Imperial Opera, but after 77 rehearsals between 1862 and 1864, the premiere was abandoned. I have not been able to determine where he stayed on his earlier visits, but I suspect he did not stay in a hotel anything like those he frequented on his later visits, since our Richard was not one to save money by staying in a budget hotel. His later visits were spent in luxury hotels and apartments, such as:



Hotel Imperial circa 1873: [Photo: www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/vieil-hotel-imperial-a-luxury-collection-hotel-vienna/history]

Wagner and his family stayed here in 1875 as *Tannhäuser* was being rehearsed at the Vienna Court Opera. Richard Wagner resided in seven rooms. [[https://inmozartsfootsteps.com/richard-Wagner – tour company](https://inmozartsfootsteps.com/richard-Wagner-tour-company)] And later:



Hadikgasse 72. Wagner lived here in 1883 and 1884 while finishing *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Wagner met Brahms in this house.

The *Theater in der Josefstadt* was founded in 1788 and is the oldest theatre in Vienna still functioning. It is often referred to colloquially as simply *Die Josefstadt*. “Following remodelling and rebuilding in 1822 – celebrated by the performance of the overture *Die Weihe des Hauses* (‘Consecration of the House’) by Beethoven – opera was staged there including Meyerbeer and Wagner. From 1858 onwards the theatre gave up opera and instead concentrated on straight theatre and comedy.” [Source: Wikipedia]

The summer *Thalia-theater*, a wooden building with three galleries resting on iron pillars, opened on 15 August 1856 with the farce *Aus dem Wiener Leben* by Josef Böhm. The repertoire

consisted of farces and folk plays. But there were performances with athletes, trick riders, magicians, ‘Lilliputians’ and giants. [Source: Wikipedia]

The *Theater am Kärntnertor* or *Kärntnertortheater* no longer exists. In 1861, the Vienna Court Opera House (now the Vienna State Opera) was built on the adjoining grounds. It was completed in 1869, and in 1870, the former theatre was razed, making way for the apartment building that became the Hotel Sacher. As I was in Vienna at the end of summer, the *Thalia-theater* was closed, and with no *Kärntnertortheater* to attend, I was forced to attend a performance of *Salomé*, by one of Wagner’s successors, Richard Strauss – no relation to the Strauss Wagner heard conducting in 1832.

Two days later, I headed for Linz for the primary purpose of my visit. Thursday, 26 September night’s concert was the first of the full nearly 2 weeks of Brucker et al. This was Anima Eterna Brugge, under Pablo Heras-Casado, performing Wagner’s *Faust* Overture, then with a young soprano, Christiane Karg, singing his *Wesendonck Lieder*, and then Bruckner 3 in its original (*ursprünglich*) form. Karg had a very nice voice, but I wouldn’t put it in world storming class. The orchestra played the overture very intensely and fast. I don’t know if they were following Wagner’s tempi, or if Pablo was driving the pace a little too fast for the orchestra. The main interest in this overture is as a dress rehearsal for the overture to *The Flying Dutchman*. My reservations about the conductor and orchestra evaporated when they began the 3rd in its original form, which I had not heard before. I have always wondered why some artists listen to the advice of lesser beings that their art is not very good and needs to be revised, which usually meant made more conventional. Such advice was given to Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky. Some of their revised works in their original form are far more interesting and exciting. The first movement lasted nearly 40 minutes and is a powerhouse of counterpoint, harmonic complexity, melodic beauty, and already earth/ear-shattering tutti climaxes.

Because I had a 2 day break from Bruckner, I had booked a concert in Salzburg, a short train trip away. It was an 11.00 am concert in the *Grosses Festspielhaus*, where most of the performances during the Salzburg Festival around Easter take place. However, the price was significantly lower. When I booked the ticket, it was for, I thought, Schumann’s cello concerto and a strange piece by Arvo Pärt. I’m not a great fan, but decided against walking out. A very young and beautiful Julia Hagan played exceptionally well, with verve and delicacy, expressiveness, and attack for this quite long work. At the end, she asked for the first cellist to stand. This older man could have been her father, her teacher, or both. Anyhow, he was very chuffed, and would have been proud of her performance.

Then came Pärt’s *Psalm* a version of his variations on Psalm 113 “Praise ye the Lord, O ye servants of the Lord.” It featured a short phrase passed around first and second desks of the strings—very meditative and static. Then the conductor, Constantinos Carydis, of whom I’d never heard, held up his hands for a pause before, I thought, continuing with more Pärt. But, something odd was happening.

It turns out that my guardian fairy was compensating me for all the messed up train trips I had experienced because of the floods in early September in Lower Austria. I initially thought, maybe Pärt is extending his variations into Wagner's *Parsifal*, then, it seemed even odder, until I realised that, after the dramatic uplifted hands, he had launched into Bruckner's 7th symphony. I was shocked, delighted, overwhelmed to be plunged into something utterly unexpected, but very welcome. That will teach me to click on the **Lesen sie mehr** button for more information next time, but then I would have missed out on this unique experience. During the slow movement, which is largely a dirge for the recently dead Wagner, and which uses 4 Wagner tubas to great mournful effect, I began to cry (quietly), much to my own surprise. I think the combination of tiredness, unexpectedness, the conductor's superlative interpretation, and the precise and passionate playing by the Mozarteumorchester Salzburg just overwhelmed me. Carydis took a deeply considered approach to the work, bringing out the complex counterpoint very effectively – and clearly, in the exceptional acoustics of the hall, but also keeping the tribute to Wagner in balance, so that it didn't overbalance the work as a whole. In fact, at the end, I felt that Bruckner had absorbed Wagner and left him behind, as he progressed deeper into his own unique sound world. I staggered out into what was a beautiful day in Salzburg, reeling at the experience.

Back in Linz, and a few concerts later, I heard the original version of Bruckner's 7th. This is one of his most famous and loved in its revised and edited form, and rightly so, since it is still a powerful work. However, the original contains many moments of extraordinarily daring harmonic writing for its time, and some beautifully lyrical sections that were jettisoned, but much that was still familiar from the usual version. Le Cercle de l'Harmonie, was conducted by Jérémie Rhorer with verve, passion, and precision, though the same can't be said of his principal horn player, who regularly fluffed entries, of which there are many in this work. I think the SSO of recent years is much better in ensemble and consistency. I also think that, though Rhorer brought drive and edginess to much of the music, in the end I preferred the performance of the usual version of the work by the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg under Constantinos Carydis. Rhorer was more traditional in his sound and tempi, while Carydis was more daring in his tempi, his willingness to have the orchestra stop dead for long seconds before starting the next section, as well as getting much more edginess and shock value out of the tempi and volume changes. I feel lucky, though, in having been able to hear two impressive performances by two very different orchestras, under top notch young conductors in a week.

Because it was Bruckner's anniversary year, there were many exhibitions around Germany and Austria, and probably many other places. I was able to see three.

Vienna—Prunksaal—Imperial Library

This exhibition was presented in the Imperial Library—eat your heart out Mitchell and British Library. The library is vast—in size and scope, with every inch of the exhibition space, from floor level to the VERY high ceiling level, covered in very old books bound in calf skin etc. The Bruckner exhibition was quite exhaustive, with small displays about his birth (not in Linz, as I thought, but in a small village nearby), through the Wagner years, to his death in a little house in the *Belvedere-Schloss Garten*, which I visited on my return to Vienna on the way home. The relatively standard display cabinets contained

autograph scores of all his symphonies, personal diaries, letters to and from him, and many photographs of him in later life. There were listening points for hearing extracts from the symphonies referenced in the adjoining cabinet. Above each cabinet, there were also short descriptions, in German and English, of his life. I learned many things about Bruckner that I will follow up. There were many people on both occasions I visited, but perhaps most of them were there to gape in amazement at the rooms!



The exterior of the *Prunksaal* (State Hall) of the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* (Austrian National Library).



The interior of the *Prunksaal* with Bruckner presiding.

During the slow movement, which is largely a dirge for the recently dead Wagner, and which uses 4 Wagner tubas to great mournful effect, I began to cry (quietly), much to my own surprise. I think the combination of tiredness, unexpectedness, the conductor's superlative interpretation, and the precise and passionate playing by the Mozarteumorchester Salzburg just overwhelmed me.

Brucknerhaus Exhibition

This exhibition was a collection of artworks featuring Bruckner at various times in his life and in many styles. There was, of course, one of Bruckner and Wagner by Karin Weilguny "Wem Ehre Gebührt" ("To Whom Honor Is Due"). I guess the slightly ambiguous title is to draw attention to the question of to whom, of the two great composers, *Ehre* is due, and by whom. From Wagner's perspective, the answer was evident! From our contemporary perspective, the answer might be both, for good but different reasons.



Karin Weilguny "Wem Ehre Gebührt"

I've saved the most surprising Wagner encounter to last, though it happened in the Hotel Royal where I stayed during my first visit. I had walked through the hotel lobby a number of times before this object caught my eye. When I went over to inspect it, I was shocked that I had not paid attention before, but delighted that I now realised it was one of Wagner's pianos with a bust on it that I did not recognise and about which there was no information there.



Hotel Royal—the piano in the lobby is the one on which Wagner composed the music for *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* when living in Hadikgasse 72, see photo above. There was no sign that the cane-topped stool had borne Wagner's bottom. Apparently, the then owner of the piano gave it to the then manager of the hotel—I'm assuming this event is shown in the photograph above the keys but I couldn't read the scrawl

Nordico Museum, Linz

The third exhibition was in the city's art gallery and was promoted under the title "Hey, Toni"!!! Apparently, Toni was one of the nicknames to which the great composer answered. The main part was a generally biographical survey of his life and works, especially from the perspective of his time/s in Linz. It was, thus, similar to the much bigger one in the *Prunksaal* in Vienna. The first room was devoted to images of Bruckner, partly photographic, since he lived during the emergence of photography in the latter 19th century, and partly painted images, some straight portraits, others interpreting Bruckner through one lens or another. Some of the latter pointed forward to the third and fourth rooms in which various contemporary artists interpreted aspects of Bruckner's allegedly rather strange psychology, that is, he never married, he purportedly was attracted to, and proposed marriage to, women much younger than him, and that he might have been homosexual—all very predictable modes of investigating artists and their works. Most of the interpretations were presented in the form of extracts from graphic novels on one or other or many of the above aspects of his life and psychology. Mostly black and white, they were of marginal interest to me, since I'm very suspicious of psychoanalysing anyone from a distance!

Each of the exhibitions had one or another, or all, of the famous silhouettes of Bruckner and Wagner meeting.

I've saved the most surprising Wagner encounter to last, though it happened in the Hotel Royal where I stayed during my first visit. I had walked through the hotel lobby a number of times before this object caught my eye. When I went over to inspect it, I was shocked that I had not paid attention before, but delighted that I now realised it was one of Wagner's pianos with a bust on it that I did not recognise and about which there was no information there.

I was tempted to touch the keys and pretend to play, but I was thwarted by the heavy plastic barrier over the keys to prevent people like me from rubbing their grubby plebeian fingers on this valuable piece of Wagneriana.

On Christmas eve 1882, just before his death on 13 February 1883, "at a family celebration, he conducted a performance of his youthful Symphony in C major (1832) in the Teatro La Fenice. He wanted now, he said, to write some

one-movement symphonies, in which a melodic thread would be followed through without the use of contrasting subjects."

[Kurt von Westernhagen, (1980). "(Wilhelm) Richard Wagner" in *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. 20. 111.] This reported aspiration serves as a dramatic

contrast with the symphonies of Bruckner, which use multiple "contrasting subjects" in dazzling displays of contrapuntal mastery. Wagner had used counterpoint increasingly complexly and subtly from early in his compositional development. His reported interest in a single "melodic thread" seems to represent a turning away from polyphony and counterpoint.

His comment also contrasts dramatically with Bruckner's continuing exploration of those musical techniques, at the same time as he built on Wagner's use of the orchestra in his later artworks. I think there is an argument that Bruckner effectively took Wagner's innovations in compositional technique and blended them into his own more classically oriented approach to musical structure. It might be a little too strong to say that Bruckner took the evolution of the symphony away from Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Brahms and back towards Schubert and Beethoven, especially in his late string quartets, but then circled back towards Mahler through his incorporation of aspects of Wagner and Liszt. Where Wagner asserted his great originality on all occasions, downplaying any borrowing from his predecessors and contemporaries, Bruckner quietly absorbed a similarly wide range of influences, and transformed them into a powerful and distinctive musical language. While Wagner's pre-eminence in operatic creation was quickly recognised, Bruckner had to wait for a long time for comparable recognition. This year of his 200th anniversary, and the performance of many of his works in their *ursprünglich* form, has marked a major stage in his reception.

Terence Watson



All by Otto Böhler, (1914) from Dr. Otto Böhler's *Schattenbilder*, Vienna: Wilhelm Lechner

UPDATES ON SINGERS SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIETY

Members will see in the brief updates below that many of the wonderful artists that you have generously supported over the past few years are having very active and successful careers. Please continue your support.

Soprano **Maia Andrews**, wrote to us; Since my last update in 2020, my career has taken some exciting turns. One of my most significant performances in Germany before returning to Australia was singing the title role in **Grigori Frid's** *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank* at Theater Altenburg Gera. Portraying Anne was both a profound artistic challenge and a deeply moving experience—bringing her words to life on stage was an immense privilege and a reminder of music's power to preserve memory and humanity.

After moving back to Australia in 2021, I performed in the chorus with Opera Australia in productions such as *Madama Butterfly*, *La Traviata*, *Götterdämmerung* (as part of the *Ring Cycle* in Brisbane), and *Aida*. In 2022, I performed the role of Une Italienne in Pinchgut Opera's production of Charpentier's *Médée*, a great experience working with one of Australia's leading Baroque ensembles. In 2023, I joined Opera Queensland's Young Artist Program, performing in multiple gala concerts and covering Fiordiligi in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. In 2024, I received a scholarship from Opera Australia to study in Italy, working with esteemed teachers like **Barbara Frittoli** and **Gianluca Terranova**.

I then toured nationally with Opera Australia, performing Mimi in *La Bohème* across 20 towns in NSW, Victoria, and Tasmania—an unforgettable experience. Currently, I'm preparing Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* for Opera Queensland's Brisbane Bel Canto Festival with conductor **Richard Mills**. I am also happy to be reprising Mimi with Opera Australia between July and September this year, touring Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia.

Soprano **Jessica Blunt** writes: In 2024, after completing my Master of Arts (Music Performance) at the Royal Academy of Music London, I spent time at '**Stimme, Leib und Seele**' in Salzburg, Austria. This is a series of short courses run for professionals by Europe-based Australian conductor **Jennifer Condon**. In Europe I also coached at the Vienna State Opera and began exploring coloratura repertoire, mostly Strauss and Mozart. I moved back to Australia in early 2023 and joined the Wesfarmers Arts Young Artist Program with West Australian Opera and in 2025 I returned to Austria for a study trip supported by WAO. Upcoming performances include: 'Adele' in *Die Fledermaus* with West Australian Symphony Orchestra conducted by **Asher Fisch**, soprano soloist in *Mahler 4* with Darwin Symphony and 'Inez' in *Il Trovatore* with WAO.

Soprano **Livia Brash** moved to Melbourne in 2024, having been based in Germany for five years, where she was a member of Düsseldorf Lyric Opera, appeared as Sieglinde in Dramatic Voices Berlin's film of *Die Walküre*. She is in the Richard

Divall Emerging Artists Program and last year performed La Zelatrice in *Suor Angelica* for the Melbourne Opera Puccini Gala and covered Helena Dix's Musetta in *La Bohème*. She also sang at *Carols in the Domain* as part of the Young Stars of Australian Opera. She performed at the Wagner Society Victoria's annual general meeting, and recently covered Lee Abrahmsen as Eva in Melbourne Opera's *Die Meistersinger*, also giving a presentation at the Meistersinger Symposium. This March, she'll be performing the title role in an open-air performance of *Rusalka*, and is in the final stages of confirming the rest of her operatic season— it's shaping up to be a busy year. She will be returning to a Puccini role and making a big Verdi debut. Beyond performing, she's currently running her first-ever singing course, drawing on the knowledge she gained overseas to bring back to her students, delivering insights that bridge the gaps often left untouched in traditional conservatory education.

Tenor **Nathan Bryon** has had some great recent successes: He was the recipient of the 2025 **German-Australian Opera Grant**, comprising a twelve-month employment contract (August 2025 - July 2026) at the renowned Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden, flights, one month's German tuition at the Goethe-Institut as well as prize money of \$5,000. Nathan is also the recipient of the 2024 Michael Byrne Vienna State Opera Award from the Opera Foundation for young Australians, and commenced the award at the **Wiener Staatsoper** in January 2025.

Soprano **Samantha Crawford**'s 2024 engagements included Regan in Tippett's opera *New Year*, with the Birmingham Opera Company, and the world premiere of a song cycle by Raymond Yiu. In February 2025 Samantha partnered with REUK for their new song programme; *Freedom Cries Out*, telling stories from real refugee accounts. In May 2025 she will be singing Strauss' *Vier letzte Lieder* with the City of Rochester Symphony Orchestra.

Mezzo-soprano **Emily Edmonds** recently performed, to great acclaim, the title role in the iconic Laurent Pelly staging of Massenet's *Cendrillon* for Opera Australia. She will sing Cherubino in a **David McVicar** production of *Le Nozze Di Figaro* in July, and will make her role debut as Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, all for Opera Australia.

Soprano **Eleanor Greenwood** has sung in a variety of roles over the past year including with the **Thüringen Philharmonie** in Eisenach and Frankfurt in January 2025 and concerts as a guest artist with **Opera Queensland** in December, November and: September 2024. She sang the role of Tosca in Hesse and Baden-Württemberg in June

Soprano **Jessica Harper** sent us this message: 'The last 15 months have held several career highlights for me, including performing my first *Vier letzte Lieder* with the University Symphony Orchestra Leuven, under the baton of esteemed conductor **Edmond Savenirs**. In the European summer I was fortunate enough to be the

Bayreuther Festspiele Stipendiatin with the Wagner Soc of VIC, which meant that I was one of around 200 young musicians and artistic administrators to be invited to the **Bayreuther Festspiele**. We were given tickets to *Tannhäuser*, *Siegfried* and *Parsifal* at the Festspielhaus, as well as participating in numerous networking activities and exploring the town of Bayreuth. As a young Wagnerian soprano it was hugely inspiring to experience the level of musicianship and architecture (those acoustics! I'm still not over it!) that one finds in the Bayreuth opera house. I was also fortunate enough to meet **Simone Young** and shake her hand at the conclusion of her conducting *Siegfried*, and have coffee with excellent Australian Mezzo Soprano **Margaret Plummer** when she had a day off from *Parsifal*. In January this year I commenced a full time chorus (soprano 2) contract at the Royal Opera House of Wallonia in Liège, Belgium. As steady income is becoming increasingly difficult to find at all echelons of the artistic ladder, I am grateful for the stability that comes with this job, and the opportunity to let my voice grow into heavier repertoire in its own time. In addition to my choral duties I will be covering the roles of Mathilde (*Guillaume Tell*) and Contessa (*Le Nozze di Figaro*). Thank you, as ever, for your support of artists in this difficult time. We must continue to enjoy music and remember our humanity, and the fact that there are Societies like you to support us as storytellers is a source of enormous comfort to me.'

Mezzo-soprano **Celeste Haworth** was most recently seen in OA's *Cinderella* at the Sydney Opera House. She sang for the Society at our Christmas concert last December.

Baritone **Daniel Ott** made his operatic debut with Opera Australia in 2024, in the role of Schaunard in *La Bohème*, performing across Australia during their National Tour. He then relocated to Manchester thanks to the generosity of the Waverley Fund, Leverhulme Arts Scholarship and **Wagner Society in NSW** and has continued studying at Royal Northern College of Music. Later this year he will join the chorus for Glyndebourne's Summer Festival, singing in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Parsifal*.

Young indigenous soprano **Sarah Prestwidge** has been furthering her artistic development as a participant in the National Opera Studio's Diverse Voices program. In 2024 she made her company debut with Victorian Opera Australia, performing the title role in *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* and singing Lisette/Yvette/Georgette in *La Rondine*. She also covered principal roles in the world premiere of Jonathan Dove's *Itch* with Opera Holland Park and performed Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* with a fringe company in Suffolk in the UK. She was a semi-finalist in the German Australian Opera Grant competition and also received both the Emerging Artist Award at the First Nations Arts and Culture Awards and an award from the International Opera Awards. Currently, Sarah is in rehearsals with Charles Court Opera in London, preparing

IN MEMORIUM

HERMAN JUNKER

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the passing, in early December 2024, of long-time member Herman Junker. Herman was a real gentleman and he and Renate were always great supporters of the Society's activities. For many years they provided delicious food after our events. We send our deepest condolences to Renate and her family.

OTTO SCHENK 1930 - 2025



Renowned director **Otto Schenk** has passed away. He was 94. Born in Vienna, Schenk studied acting at the Max Reinhardt Seminar and then commenced his career at the Theater in der Josefstadt and Wiener Volkstheater. He shifted into directing in 1953, his first projects taking place at the Burgtheater, Munich Kammerspiele, and Salzburg Festival. In 1957, he directed *Die Zauberflöte* at the Salzburg Landestheater, representing the first time he directed an opera. From there he would direct major productions at the Theater an der Wien in 1962 and Vienna State Opera in 1964. The Vienna State Opera would hire him as a permanent producer and would lead productions of *Rusalka*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Fidelio*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*, among many others. Schenk would direct opera productions throughout the world including at the Berlin State Opera, Royal Opera House, Bayerische Staatsoper, and Hamburg Staatsoper. At the Met Opera he debuted with *Tosca* but would be most remembered for his traditional take on Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Other notable Met Opera productions include *Elektra*, *Arabella*, *Rigoletto*, *Der Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Parsifal*.

to sing First Lady and Papagena in *The Magic Flute*, and later this year, she'll be performing Gilda in *Rigoletto* with another UK-based company.

Bass-baritone **Eugene Raggio** finished 2023 with a performance of Haydn's *Creation* with the Eastern Sydney Choir and Chamber Orchestra and appeared again with the 'Young Stars of Australian Opera' at 'Carols in the Domain'. 2024 saw him undertake the national tour of *La Bohème* with Opera Australia in the roles of Benoit and Alcindoro. Eugene also was a soloist with the Central Coast Chorale in their Mozart *Requiem* and debuted his first Elijah with the University of Sydney Graduate Choir. He undertook the demanding role of Scarpia with Co-Opera's SA/Vic tour of *Tosca*. WSNSW Members will recall Eugene's very moving performance as Wotan, when he performed the final scene of *Die Walküre* with Valda Wilson for our annual Wagner birthday concert in May. Eugene recently covered Warwick Fyfe's Hans Sachs for Melbourne Opera's *Die Meistersinger*.

Soprano **Laura Scandizzo**'s most recent performance was in February in **Kurt Weill's** double bill *Seven Deadly Sins* and *Mahagonny Songspiel* for Operantics at the Mosman Art Gallery. Last October she was a featured soloist in the Miriam Hyde Music and Poetry Celebratory concert. Laura has upcoming performances with **Gente, gente!**, including their next concert on March 8th, "In Tune With Her" - <https://livemusic.net.au/event/31764870-a/in-tune-with-her-a-community-building-concert>.

Heldentenor **Sam Sakker** continues his stellar career. He sent this update on 4 Feb: In the past year I made my Lohengrin debut at Opera Oviedo in Spain, performed more Tristans in Germany and at the gorgeous Teatro Massimo in Palermo, Sicily, as second cast to Nina Stemme and Michael Weinius. Recently I've just finished my debut season as Tannhäuser at Oper Graz in Austria to great aplomb. It was 10 shows so it's well and truly sung in! And right now I'm on a self-styled paternity leave after the birth of my little boy, Ralph (pronounced Rafe) in November. And of

course juggling role preparation for my Parsifal debut this April with Opera Stuttgart. Then it's *Wozzeck* in Antwerp as the Tambourmajor, some more Tannhäusers in Geneva, and a China tour of *Wozzeck*, which I'm looking forward to. Wishing all the very best to everybody at the Society. Sam

Baritone **Joshua Salter** is based in Berlin and recently sent us this update: Over the last 15 months I have been singing in the Extra Chorus at the Deutsche Oper (1.Bass) in *Tannhäuser*, **(Axel Kober) Parsifal**, **(Sir Donald Runcicles) Lohengrin**, **(James Conlon) Jordan**. Last year at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden I sang as a Guest in the Chorus in *Götterdämmerung*. **(Philippe Jordan)**. I also sang as a guest in the chorus at the Anhaltisches Theater Dessau in *Tristan und Isolde* **(Markus L. Frank)** and at Staatsoper Hannover in *Aida*. **(Leonardo Sini)**. Thanks again for your interest and amazing support over the years!

Soprano **Amanda Windred** had a busy 2024; she returned to the stage as Marcellina in MO's *Le Nozze di Figaro* in February and followed in May covering the role of Alisa in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, before embarking on a 10-week intensive German course with the Goethe Institute—a crucial step in refining her language skills for the repertoire she aspires to perform. In July and August Amanda saw a career-defining moment as she travelled to Berlin to take part in the Dramatic Voices Program, where she studied the title role in *Elektra* under the guidance of world-class coaches. This immersive experience reinforced her passion for dramatic soprano repertoire and provided invaluable insights into the complexities of Strauss's music. Returning to Australia, she made her role debut as La Badessa in MO's *Suor Angelica*. 2025 began on a high note, with her performance as Eisslinger Lehrbube in MO's *Die Meistersinger*. Looking ahead, Amanda is thrilled to be taking on the role of Helen in the Australian premiere of *Fat Pig*, a bold and contemporary work presented by Forest Collective and BK Opera. In the second half of 2025, her focus will be on expanding her knowledge of Wagnerian and Strauss repertoire, while actively preparing for the next stage of her career on the international stage.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to WSNSW Life Member **Leona Geeves** on being awarded Life Membership of the Sydney Opera Society



Sydney Opera Society
Certificate of Appreciation

Thank you Leona Geeves for Seven Years as President and Programmer of the Sydney Opera Society and for assisting Shirley Robertson during her Presidency. Thank you for your tireless contribution to the Society, for your enthusiasm of emerging opera singers and for the encouragement of Society members to appreciate and enjoy opera.

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Curtain call at Melbourne Opera's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* 16 February 2025

THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC ADDRESS

Please note our permanent address for all correspondence:

The Wagner Society in New South Wales Inc
PO Box 6111
Alexandria NSW 2015

Telephone:
0412 282 070 (Esteban Insausti, President)

Website:
www.wagner.org.au

Website enquiries:
contact@wagner.org.au

(All website addresses used in this Newsletter are reproduced in the PDF version of the Quarterly on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article –

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(unless otherwise advised in Coming Events)

Goethe Institut
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(corner of Jersey Road)

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