

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



Patron: Sir Donald McIntyre

NEWSLETTER

World Wide Wagner

The amazing thing about the internet is the wealth of information that can be gathered. So when a suggestion was made that the newsletter alert members to up-coming performances of Richard Wagner's work one immediately turned to the world wide web. Information on performance dates and where can be found on www.operabase.com which, in addition, contains a very good sort facility to narrow down your search. For instance you will find that between 11 March and 31 December 2005 there will be no fewer than 346 performances of 118 productions of Wagner operas, way less than Verdi (808 perfs of 189) and Mozart (819/191) but still a staggering number.

So if you want the Ring in 2005, take your pick from Berlin, Chicago, Vienna, Prague, Chemnitz (Germany), Manaus (Brazil), Nürnberg, Mannheim, Erl (Austria) and Seattle. Cities such as London, New Orleans, Rome, Stuttgart, Mexico City and Bangkok are doing parts of the tetralogy. If Tristan is more your cup of tea or should that be 'love potion' then how about a trip to Hanover, Paris, Basel, Frankfurt, Bayreuth or St Petersburg? Parsifal will receive 49 performances of 15 productions including Budapest, Kiel, Helsinki, Los Angeles or, for true devotees, Venice the city in which the Master died!

There are simply too many performances to list here, but if anyone has trouble in getting the information they want please email me on cbrodrick@xtra.co.nz and I'll see what I can do!

What about a steamy Ring?

Werner Herzog's 1982 film *Fizcarraldo* told the story of the title character's passion for building an opera house in the middle of the Amazon jungle that would be worthy of the great Caruso. To fund the idea he planned to open a shipping route in a tributary of the Amazon River, where he could achieve

a monopoly in rubber trading. To do this though it was necessary to haul a large boat over a mountain!

Whether Fizcarraldo is fact or fiction, an opera house does exist 1,600km up the River Amazon at the jungle port of Manaus. Construction began on the Teatro Amazonas in 1882 at the height of the rubber boom when the Brazilian monopoly on rubber made Manaus one of the richest cities on earth. The remote jungle town, which even today is only accessible by water or air, had street lights and trams before most of Europe. So wealthy were its citizens



Teatro Amazonas, Manaus

that they would give vintage wine to their horses and send their shirts to be laundered in Lisbon and Paris.

No expense was spared to make Teatro Amazonas the grandest opera house in the world. Everything was brought from Europe: wrought iron staircases from England, crystal chandeliers from France, classical busts and marble from Italy. The wood is Brazilian, but it was sent to Europe to be polished and carved. The building is crowned by a golden cupola, inlaid with 36,000 ceramic tiles imported from Europe.

Legend has it that Caruso was engaged to sing at the opening on 31 December 1896, but was unable to come ashore due to an outbreak of yellow fever. Records show that both Pavlova and Patti performed there during the city's heyday.

But by 1910, rubber seeds smuggled out to Kew by an Englishman called Henry Wickham, then planted in Malaysia in vast plantations, had destroyed Brazil's monopoly. The city was literally plunged into darkness with no money to import coal for the generators.

The rubber barons went back to Europe and for years the theatre sat rotting in the tropical heat. Sporadic attempts to renovate and reopen it came to nothing.

Until eight years ago, there had been no opera in Teatro Amazonas for almost 90 years. But with a new governor of Amazonas who decided that his city should have a top-quality professional orchestra, choir and corps de ballet, the theatre was given a new lease on life.

In 1990 the theatre was ceremoniously re-opened with a lavish José Carreras gala, paving the way for the establishment in 1997 of an annual Amazonas Opera Festival with acclaimed international and Brazilian artists performing works by both local and world-renowned composers.

In May this year the theatre will present two cycles of the Ring, the first time Brazil has attempted the tetralogy! Remember too that Brazil and Wagner have a strong link. Emperor Dom Pedro II expressed an interest in commissioning Wagner to write an Italianate opera and he also attended the first Ring in Bayreuth in 1876, describing his occupation as 'Emperor' in the hotel register.

From the small amount of information available about the production it seems that there will be a link between the destruction of the world and the exploitation of the rain forest. For those who like their Wagner 'hot' Far Horizons (www.farhorizons.com.au) are arranging a tour ex Australia.

This issue acknowledgements:- BBC, Sunday Telegraph, Guardian, Agence France-Presse, theoperacritic.com and operabase.com

Road to the Ring

New Zealand's answer to JRR Tolkien, Christchurch member Dr Vincent Orange, has been giving some thought to completing the Ring.

As you know, Wagner's masterpiece, The Ring of the Nibelungs, is not nearly long enough. Even the most infatuated conductor can hardly spin it out beyond a mere fifteen hours. Thus it ends, all too soon, leaving us unsatisfied. However, we must be thankful for small mercies, and at least something survives of what the great composer wished us to hear.

Unlike other artists Wagner wrote the story of the Ring backwards. Starting with Siegfried's Death, he progressed naturally to Young Siegfried, and then, of course, to an account of that unique hero's parents, Siegmund and Sieglinde, before ending, logically enough, with The Theft of the Ring, which eventually brought those parents together. At that point, the Master had another flash of inspiration. He decided to write the music for this story forwards. But one more opera was needed to complete the story.

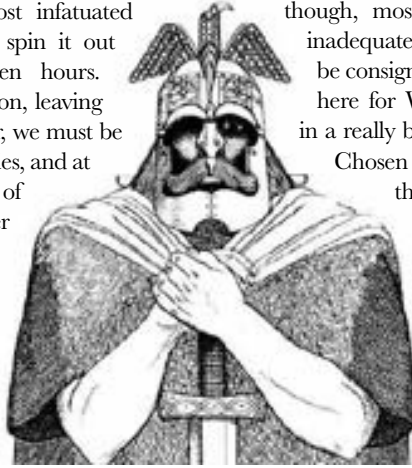
Let me tell you what I have dreamed, under the influence, about the missing Ring opera.

Wotan's story actually begins in the, as yet, unwritten opera, Die Weltesche: The World Ash Tree. His grandfather, Buri, was a primordial being shaped from a block of ice licked by the primordial cow, Audhumia, at the beginning of time. His father was Bor and his mother the giantess Bestla. With his brothers, Vili and Ve, he killed the frost giant, Ymir, and used Ymir's body to make all the different realms of the world, as well as the sea and the sky. The brothers also created the first human beings, Ask and Embla.

Scope here for a good roosting start to the opera: lots of vigorous dawn-of-time music; then a splendid battle bit where Ymir is destroyed; then some varieties of creation all the way from the people of Alaska to those of the Chatham Islands; finally, the tender emergence of Ask and Embla, suitably clad in very little and evidently interested in each other's construction.

Wotan, then, is the ruler of Heaven and Earth, also god of war, wisdom and poetry. All the other gods are younger and more handsome, sometimes even physically stronger. He, however, has the brains - plus greater cunning and ruthlessness, although he can be ever so nice when they agree with him and do exactly what he wants.

As for humankind, Wotan decided the fate of all warriors. Some he selected to join his permanent army, served and serviced by beautiful women, who were so internally fired by their role in life that they too wore very little, even outside in winter. Sadly, though, most humans were found inadequate and must, regretfully, be consigned to Hell for ever. Cue here for Wotan to strut his stuff in a really big solo, ending with the Chosen heading for Heaven, the Unchosen for Hell, all exulting or screaming over a mighty uproar from the orchestra



Wotan was also called the Raven God. He had a throne in a watchtower in the eternal realm of Asgard, from which he could see everything that happened in the nine worlds of the Universe, and nothing whatever escaped his gaze. Two ravens perched on either shoulder, Huginn (Thought) and Muninn (Memory). These ravens flew out each day to gather news, returning at evening to whisper it into his ear. From time to time, Wotan travelled around all these worlds himself, assuming such shapes as a bird, a serpent, a fish or a wolf. But usually he appeared to humans in the guise of an elderly chap with a long grey beard. The horse he rode was the fastest in the world, on account of having eight legs.

One can hear the music now: the grandeur of Wotan in Asgard; the malice of the ravens, the representations of Wotan as various fauna and finally as the Old Man, terrifying everyone in sight, then capering off stage on his wonder horse. Those warriors whom he selected were recruited by a group of his rather strident horsey daughters called Valkyries, who brought them to Valhalla, Wotan's banqueting hall in Asgard. There they ate and drank, revelled, practised fighting and waited for Ragnarok. This was to be the last battle, at the end of time, when they would fight beside Wotan against all the forces of evil, a battle which would end with everyone dead.

Great opening here for some of the Valkyrie riding music. It will be hours before we hear it again in all its noisy splendour. That will lead directly into the forthcoming final test, Ragnarok, a show-stopper: long, exhilarating, thunderous - and neatly interspersed with quietly sad bits about the end of all things. The end, in the short term, of Act I.

(Interval)Act II next month!!

Snippets

Fairy Rings?

In a rare coincidence, two small German opera houses, Kaiserslautern and Würzburg, unveiled new stagings of Wagner's first completed opera, Die Feen (The Fairies) during February. The Würzburg production marked the theatre's 200-year jubilee and was staged with the financial support of the city's Richard Wagner Association, which with more than 2,600 members is one of the biggest of its kind in the world.

Wagner composed his romantic opera Die Feen while he was chorus director in Würzburg, but the work was never fully staged in the composer's lifetime, and did not receive its world premiere until five years after his death.

Musically, Die Feen is influenced by composers such as Carl Maria von Weber and Heinrich Marschner, but it also contains elements and motifs that will be developed by Wagner in his mature works, such as Tannhäuser or Lohengrin.

Rings true!

In the last issue of the newsletter we mentioned three new DVDs, including a Meistersinger from the Metropolitan Opera, New York. Anyone who wants a straight forward, moving, well sung and truly lovely production, then this is for you. The cast is led by a wonderfully sympathetic James Morris as Sachs. Thomas Allen's Beckmesser is superbly acted as well as sung. Katita Mattila is a ravishing Eva and Ben Heppner a solid, in more ways than one, Walter. There is nothing 'deconstructionalist' about the production. It is very much in the traditional manner and just wait until the Prize Song scene. I would swear there are at least 150 chorus on stage. What an effect!

Phone Rings!

When baritone Bryn Terfel lost his voice hours before the curtain was due to go up on Das Rheingold, The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden was involved in a frantic dash to find a replacement to sing Wotan. Who did they call? Only 'our' very own Sir Donald McIntyre who was tracked down at Gatwick Airport as he got off a flight from Hamburg. Being unfamiliar with Keith Warner's production he stood in the orchestra pit to supply Terfel's "voice" while Terfel mimed the role on-stage.

Sir Donald, 70, told BBC Wales: "I'd just landed and my telephone rang. I saw it was my agent. He said 'would you like to sing a performance at Covent Garden tonight?' They had been searching for people all day. I don't think I've given a performance from an orchestra pit before!"

At three score and ten it's a gutsy effort but then we are talking about a consummate professional!

Society News

2005 off to a great start

Auckland's first meeting of the year coincided with the Chinese Lantern Festival which was held in Albert Park, just a street away from the University, so there were some difficulties with parking! Nevertheless 54 attended the meeting (slightly less than normal but a good number in view of the competition in the park). The meeting covered the first part of the 'Life of Wagner' DVD with Richard Burton playing Richard Wagner and the general feeling was that it was a very successful meeting. The second part of the DVD will be shown on 24 April.

In Wellington they had a good turnout for Les Holborrow's presentation of highlights from Tristan und Isolde. Meanwhile Christchurch kicked off the year with a record attendance and a wonderfully entertaining address with singing from our guest speaker Chris Doig.

New Members

A big welcome to these new members:-

Michael & Uta Griffin, *Wellington*

Zefanja & Lesley Potgieter, *Christchurch*

Hugh Morgans, *Lower Hutt*

Alan & Cath Roberts, *Wellington*

Carol & Geoffery Reed, *Waikanae Beach*

Tim & Sheryl Bishop, *Napier*

Cyndi Foreman, *Christchurch*

Murray Loversidge, *Christchurch*

Joan Green, *Christchurch*

Drs Annemarie & Karl-Heinz Lehmann,
Northland

Helen stands down

The start of the year has seen a change in the Wellington Committee where Helen Chambers has stepped down as chairman and been replaced by Les Holborrow. Heath Lees, on behalf of the Society, said "I'd like to thank Helen for being prepared to take over in Wellington at a difficult time of change-over and a number of problems of venue and profile. Now, we have a healthy membership, regular meetings, a lot of conviviality (thanks again to Helen) and an established image in the musical horizon of Wellington. We'll look forward to having Helen continue to help the society in a less formal way, and offer our warmest thanks for the energy and direction she has shown at a time of change in her own professional life."

Subscription renewals flood in

Through the 2004/05 financial year, which is presently drawing to a close, the number of subscribing members has grown to over 350. In February we sent out the subscription renewal invoices for 2005/06. Immediately, a flood of renewal forms and cheques began arriving at Ponsonby Rd. (Perhaps more akin to a tsunami!) Now, in mid-March, almost two-thirds of our members have renewed.

This is very heartening for the committee, as it demonstrates the enthusiasm and loyalty our people feel for the Society, and it bodes well for the future. Thanks to all our loyal members.

George Risk (membership secretary)

AGM

Once again, Wagner's birthday is approaching and also the Society's AGM. Along with the reports it is also an opportunity to elect the office bearers for the forthcoming year. The positions to be filled are President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Liaison and PR Officer plus four Committee members. If you are interested in either putting forward your name or nominating someone else, please don't be shy. The main qualifications are enthusiasm for the work of our Society, a willingness to attend meetings regularly, and to help whenever possible. Nomination forms are available by contacting any current Committee member or from:-

lesley.kendall@aut.ac.nz



2005 Programme

Auckland

Venue- Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street, except where indicated.

Sunday, 24 April 7.30 pm

Part 2 'Life of Wagner'

Sunday, 22 May 7.30 pm

AGM and DVD of Waltraud Meier.

Venue- Auckland College of Education, Epsom Avenue, Epsom.

Sunday, 17 July 7.30 pm

Some new Wagner DVDs.

Sunday, 11 September (time to be advised)

A complete opera, with dinner during the intervals. Start time will probably be 4pm.

Sunday, 27 November 7.30 pm

Heath Lees 'Wagner's Ring and the Life-Cycle of an Audience.'

Wellington

Venue- Massey University Theatrette, Buckle St, except where indicated

Sunday, 22 May 4pm

Wagner's Birthday Meal, DVD on Waltraud Meier and excerpts from the Stuttgart Ring

Venue- at Rex Benson's house.

Sunday, 24 July 4pm

Heath Lees: 'Tristan and Isolde: Music's Love-Affair with Ideas.'

Sunday 25 September (time to be advised)

Les Holborrow: 'The Philosophers who influenced Wagner in his writing of Tristan and Isolde.'

Sunday, 27 November (time to be advised)

Christmas Party

Venue- (To be advised)

Christchurch

Venue- Ilam Room, Centre for Continuing Education, Canterbury University except where indicated

Friday, 8 April 7.30pm

DVD on the life of Waltraud Meier.

Friday, 20 May 7.30pm

Wagner's birthday mid-winter pot luck dinner and BYO.

Venue- Cynthia Hawes & Andy Buchanan's, 74 Hackthorne Road, Cashmere

Friday, 12 August 7.30pm

Heath Lees 'A Kaleidoscope of Tristans.' followed by Act I of the Met production.

Friday, 23 September 7.30pm

Act 2 & 3 of Tristan & Isolde

Friday, 4 November 7.30pm

Presentation by John Pattinson

Sunday, 4 December 6.00pm

Christmas Barbecue

Venue- Tony and Janet Ward's, Shands Road



New DVDs

Due out in the next few weeks two more Wagner DVDs. Following Das Rheingold, we see the release of Harry Kupfer's production of Die Walküre. Filmed in Barcelona it stars Falk Struckman (Wotan) and Deborah Polaski (Brünnhilde). Also to be released is Parsifal, in Nikolaus Lehnhoff's visionary staging. Christopher Ventris and Waltraud Meier lead an inspired cast from the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden. The DVD also includes a 60 min documentary, Parsifal's Progress, featuring interviews with Kent Nagano, Nikolaus Lehnhoff, Christopher Ventris, Waltraud Meier and many others.

A tale of two tickets

Man approaches the box office. "Can I have a ticket for this evening's performance?" "I'm very sorry sir but the performance is sold out." "Oh is that right? Tell me, if President Bush wanted to attend tonight's performance would he be found a seat?" "Oh yes sir! We'd find somewhere for him." "Well that's okay then, President Bush is not coming to tonight's performance so I'll have his seat!"

Here is a different story.

Tuesday 1 March not only marked the change of seasons in both hemispheres but also the opening of sales for the last part of Covent Garden's 2004/05 season. At opposite ends of the earth two Wagner devotees were doing all they could to book tickets for 'the' most sought after production of the year, Die Walküre with a cast including Bryn Terfel, Lisa Gasteen, Waltraud Meier and Placido Domingo.

The Guardian's Kieron Quirke arrived at the box office at 6am. *"The box office opened at 10. There were people queuing before me. I had no thermals, but cut a dash with pyjama bottoms under my jeans and a borrowed Cossack hat. I am no wimp, and have been called brave by dentists, but it really was stark-bollock freezing. Yet the hardy folk around me, warmed by the anticipation of great art, seemed unconcerned. In conditions that would have Ranulph Fiennes screaming for nanny, a retired civil servant chatted amiably about Poulenc. Next to him was a Scottish woman. Sure, her toughness was masked by a cheery smile and an interest in bel canto. But it became clear she was 5ft 4in of pure steel, impervious to physical discomfort.*

In short, ours was superman stamina of which Dick (Wagner), a Nietzsche fan, would have approved. Only mark our reward. Ten minutes before opening, with the queue snaking out of sight, a document was circulated. Of 5,000 full-view seats, under 500 would be available to our tired band. The rest had been bagsied in advance by Friends (people who pay the ROH a yearly subscription) and their friends. Having braved wind, ice and the wrath of bosses, we found ourselves picking up armchair opera-lovers' scraps. Many would have to accept a partial view of their musico-dramatic Grail, or return at some ungodly hour in the hope of day tickets."

Meanwhile at the other side of the world, he was prowling the Royal Opera web site awaiting the appointed hour (11pm NZ time). Having pre-filled all the necessary information on the registration page, he felt confident that he would be able to dive in, à la Hagen, and grab the tickets before everyone else. As the clock ticked closer to the hour the omens were not looking good. With each passing minute the web site got



Photo Clive Banda

Valkyries scrap over the last tickets



Photo Clive Banda

Bryn Terfel finds a way to keep warm

slower and s.l.o...w....e.....r until right on the hour it just about came to a grinding halt!

After trying to enter the booking page for half an hour, bed seemed a better proposition. Awaking at 2.30am to answer the call, another attempt was made but this time it was definitely 'Don't call us'. Internet booking had been suspended!! The pad back to bed was accompanied by the realisation that Die Walküre was not going to be a happening thing. At 6.00am as the light from the monitor once again lit the room the message was plain to see. Die Walküre had sold out!

Depression was alleviated by some good old retail therapy! If Walküre was out then Rigoletto and Otello (Ben Hepner and Rene Fleming) would have to be the substitute.

Back in London the Guardian journalist was making an interesting observation. *"Years after Wagner first crafted his tragic triptych on wealth, power and human will, it seems things haven't changed. The noble spirit of the Übermensch (Superhuman) still finishes a poor second to the corrupting power of gold. Of course, it should be admitted that some of us were less tiber than others. I got my ticket, but I'm running a temperature like Aida in a sweater."*

In New Zealand the temperature was also high, courtesy of a late summer and, after all the hours spent on the Royal Opera web site, it was felt that the experience and frustration could be useful to the IT people in charge of the internet site. An email was duly dispatched with a little plea at the end that if by chance.....

On Sunday 6 March an email arrived announcing that two tickets had been returned, set aside and if he'd care to embark on a little, correction, a large bit of retail therapy at the box office, they would be his! See ya there Kieron!

Christopher Brodrick.



Photo Clive Banda

Winter storms don't deter Katarina Dalayman (Sieglinde) & Jorma Silvasti (Siegmund) who prove that you don't feel the cold when you're in love!

Finale!

In January The New York Times ran a story under the heading Twilight of the CD Gods? A studio 'Tristan' may be the last ever. It reported that a landmark recording was taking place in EMI's famous Abbey Road Studio No 1 in London. A landmark not for the fact that Placido Domingo was recording the role of Tristan but that this may well be the last opera recorded on CD.

According to Peter Alward the retiring President of EMI Classics "the public listens with its eyes today" hence opera will only be released on DVD. But there is also another, economic, reason for this policy. An average opera costs \$US600,000 to record in the studio, while an average DVD deal with an opera house can be purchased for \$US200,000.

EMI has no specific plans for studio-recorded operas after Tristan.

So how does Placido feel about singing one of the most taxing roles in the repertoire? "He was cruel, Mr Wagner, in the length of his writing. In Tristan, by the time you finish the love duet, you could be having a baby, God help you. So I've always turned it (the role) down. I've had offers from Bayreuth and Vienna, and I was tempted because I do love the role... So I stay in the studio, where I can take it bit by bit."

And there is the heart of the problem! Under the recording companies' policy a Domingo will never record a Tristan because he will never perform it on stage. On the other hand a Pavarotti will perform a role and we will have to suffer 'watching' the production instead of 'listening' to his voice. Either way we miss out. And, one may ask, what is wrong with listening with one's ears?