

# WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



Patron: Sir Donald McIntyre

## NEWSLETTER

### Siegfried Jerusalem visits New Zealand

*As Official Pianist for the Finals of the Lexus Song Quest and pianist for these Lexus recitals, Terence Dennis looks forward to working with one of the great Wagner singers of the modern era!*

Of very special note to Wagner lovers in this country is the impending visit by German tenor Siegfried Jerusalem, one of the greatest Wagner singers of the newer generation. He comes as international adjudicator for the Final of the 2009 Lexus Song Quest (formerly the Mobil Song Quest) in the Auckland Town Hall on 23 April.

By long-standing tradition the finals of these prestigious events have brought to New Zealand some of the world's most noted singers not only to adjudicate on the night, but also to coach the finalists and give masterclasses in the four main centres. The list has included, more recently, Dame Kiri te Kanawa, Sherrill Milnes, Grace Bumbry, Sarah Walker, Tom Krause, Anthony Rolfe Johnson and, at the last Lexus contest in 2007, another noted Wagner singer, soprano Elisabeth Connell. We all look forward to Siegfried Jerusalem's visit with much anticipation.

Siegfried Jerusalem was born in Oberhausen, Germany, and initially trained in Essen as a bassoonist. His transition to professional singer was made in spectacular fashion in 1975 when playing in the orchestra for a television version of Johann Strauss' operetta *Der Zigeunerbaron* (*The Gypsy Baron*): the scheduled tenor lead, Franco Bonisoli, was indisposed, and after only four years of singing tuition, Siegfried Jerusalem jumped in and a new European tenor star was born! This archival film was recently released on DVD through DGG, so fans of the tenor may now see this relative rarity (and *pace* Wagner enjoy many a good tune along the way!)

His stage debut as a tenor was in Stuttgart that same year, as First Prisoner in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and he was soon to be heard in small roles in many leading German opera houses. His appearances as a major Wagner tenor followed swiftly, from



*Siegfried Jerusalem as Lohengrin (photo Kranichphoto)*

the more lyrical role of *Lohengrin* (first heard in Zürich, then Berlin) to appearances in Bayreuth in 1977, when he sang Froh (*Das Rheingold*) in the second season of Chéreau's controversial Centenary *Ring*, and in that same Bayreuth Festival the small but crucial role of the Young Sailor in *Tristan und Isolde*. In 1978 he joined the Deutsche Oper Berlin, and in 1979 returned to Bayreuth for such major title roles as *Parsifal*, *Lohengrin* and Walther in *Meistersinger*.

Significantly, the year 1996 celebrated Siegfried Jerusalem's unbroken 20 years as lead tenor at Bayreuth. This was unique in the annals of the Festival. During this long period at Bayreuth he assumed progressively heavier roles: Siegmund in *Die Walküre* in 1983, Siegfried in *the Ring* in 1988 and *Tristan* in 1993. Fortunately much has been preserved on film, including the Froh in the Chéreau *Ring* (filmed in 1979), Loge and Siegfried in the grandiose Otto Schenck *Ring* at the Metropolitan, the Metropolitan *Parsifal* and, again from Bayreuth, Siegfried in the challenging and fascinating Kupfer *Ring*, Walther in *Die Meistersinger* (a beloved staging from Wolfgang Wagner) and the performances of *Tristan* alongside Waltraud Meyer that have achieved legendary status.

As well as such extensive and central Wagnerian prowess, Siegfried Jerusalem's repertoire ranged widely: he was acclaimed for his appearances in operas from Mozart, to Smetana (a superb *Bartered Bride* from Vienna opposite Lucia Popp has recently been given DVD release), to works of the twentieth century and, in lighter vein, key works of beloved Viennese operetta. He enjoyed the recital stage, and his recordings of Lieder of Strauss, Mahler (both with orchestra) and Schumann (with piano) are prized in the international catalogue.

In 1997 he received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, and his final Bayreuth appearance was in the 1999 Festival, bowing out in the grandest style, as *Tristan*. In 2000 he assumed a professorship at the new Hochschule für Musik in Nuremberg, and a year later he became its director.

Doubtless there are WSNZ members who witnessed Siegfried Jerusalem live on stage and have much to relish and recall. If I may be permitted my own recollections from Germany and Austria in the late seventies and early eighties, the early radiant splendour of his voice was a marvel of that time. Now we have a chance to witness his presence, not only at the 2009 Lexus Final, but also at the Lexus Recitals and Masterclasses held during the following week.

#### **Final of the 2009 Lexus Song Quest:**

Auckland Town Hall, 7.30pm 23 April  
Six Finalists, with Terence Dennis, pianist, and the NZSO, Michael Lloyd, conductor  
*This will be broadcast live over Radio NZ Concert*

#### **Lexus Winners Recitals and Masterclasses:**

Auckland *Masterclass* 25 April  
Christchurch *Masterclass & Recital* 26 April  
Dunedin *Masterclass & Recital* 28 April  
Wellington *Masterclass & Recital* 30 April  
*Recitals commence at 7.30pm:*

see Lexus NZ Song Quest website for details

#### **Wagner Society Dunedin Branch:**

Sunday 5 April 2pm: Terence Dennis presents  
A Profile of Siegfried Jerusalem (see page 3 for details)

Earlier this year we received news that the late Roa Morrissey had left the Society a very generous bequest in her will. The size of the bequest will allow the Society to mount some interesting projects in the future that will further the cause of Wagner appreciation in New Zealand. In these two articles, Heath Lees explains the reasoning behind the Wagner Foundation and why it will administer the bequest.

To begin, Bob O' Hara, who knew Roa and her husband Senior Sergeant Ted Morrissey when he was a young constable at Taranaki Street in the late 1950's, pays tribute.

Recently the Wagner Society benefitted by a significant bequest from the estate of the late Roa Morrissey and it is fitting that members be more fully informed about Roa's interests and involvement. Roa's father William Calwell, was the Police officer in charge of the Otira Police district for many years and she had several uncles who were also serving Policemen. In 1943 Roa followed her father's footsteps and trained to become a policewoman after she had qualified and worked as a school dental nurse.



## Roa Morrissey

She had a long and colourful career in the Police and met Ted Morrissey while working in Auckland. They were married in Otaki in 1947.

In those days Police women were not encouraged to marry serving policemen. Roa and Sergeant Ted Morrissey found themselves separated by departmental transfer on more than one occasion. There was an element of pettiness in one of these transfers where Roa

was sent to Greymouth while her husband Ted remained at Christchurch. Prime Minister Sidney Holland became aware of their separation and used his influence to get Roa transferred back to be united with her husband.

Roa was the first Christchurch Police woman to be awarded the Police Long Service and Good Conduct medal and, in 1978, not long before her retirement, was awarded her second clasp and stars to this award. After retirement from the Police, Roa and her husband moved to Auckland to live and, following her husband's death, she moved into a retirement village in Sandringham.

She was interviewed at some length by Valerie Redshaw, author of the book *Tact and Tenacity* (a history of N.Z. women in policing) published in 2006.

A bright, vivacious woman, who had a lifetime interest in music and the performing arts, Roa greatly valued her membership of the Wagner Society and seldom missed a meeting. She travelled to Adelaide with the Society to see both performances of *the Ring Cycle* and also to Sydney for *Die Meistersinger*.

The Wagner Society is deeply indebted to Roa for her generous bequest.

## Wagner New Zealand Foundation

### The Story So Far . . .

The Wagner New Zealand Foundation was established as a parallel "wing" of the Wagner Society of New Zealand, in 2005. Its primary purpose is to receive and manage all the charitable donations that WSNZ members make, usually with their annual "subs" but also in the form of special endowments or bequests. After considerable paperwork and application, the Foundation was eventually granted charitable status, which means, most importantly, that all the income it receives is free of income tax.

Receiving and encouraging contributions is only one part though. The Foundation is also in the business of spending agreed amounts on activities that fall within its remit of developing as many initiatives as possible to promote the performance and greater appreciation of Wagner's music within New Zealand, and to help strengthen Wagnerian links between New Zealand and other countries.

There is the closest co-operation between the WSNZ and the Foundation, whose officers are all members of the WSNZ, and are always keen to implement any recommendation that the WSNZ committee makes to it. The WSNZ is the Trustee of the Foundation, and the WSNZ committee has to give the final seal of approval to any awards or projects proposed by the Foundation.

Foundation officers are Peter Rowe (Chair, and WSNZ Honorary Solicitor), Sir Michael Hardie Boyes (WSNZ member and a former Governor-General of NZ), Heather Simpson (WSNZ member and retired District Court Judge), and Professor Heath Lees (WSNZ President Emeritus).

Since it was set up, the Foundation has made two awards, one to Margaret Medlyn for specific Wagner-study projects, and one to The Wagner Journal when this was first launched two years ago.

Until now, the Foundation has been concentrating on building up funds and developing publicity and various avenues of donation. Now, thanks to the generous bequest of Roa Morrissey, the Foundation will be able to play a larger part in the furtherance of Wagner activities in New Zealand, and there will be some exciting news from time to time, when projects and ideas are duly supported, and then come to fruition.

Possible projects include the establishment of a scholarship fund for emerging Wagnerian singers or other professionals, the funding of a distinguished Wagner speaker to "tour" the WSNZ centres, the research and publication of material relating to a history of Wagner performance in New Zealand . . . and so on. If any WSNZ member has a suggestion to make, they should contact Heath Lees (email:handelees@xtra.co.nz) who will welcome all ideas, and forward them to the Foundation committee in due course.

## NZSO gets Passionate

The NZSO is including Henk de Vlieger's arrangement of music from *Tristan & Isolde* in its March and April concerts. "*The almost one-hour long symphonic work 'Tristan & Isolde. An Orchestral Passion' connects central passages of the opera, and thereby traces the action of the plot in three acts*" is how the Linn Record web site describes the work.

The NZSO is offering Wagner Society members who say the magic words, "Wagner Discount" when booking their seats, a 15% discount off full ticket prices (service fees apply)

**Wellington** Fri 20 Mar 6.30pm M F Centre  
**Auckland** Fri 27 Mar 6.30pm Town Hall  
**Christchurch** Tues 31 Mar 6.30pm Town Hall  
**Dunedin** Wed 1 Apr 6.30pm Town Hall

## A Busy Month

This month, as we have already seen, we welcome Siegfried Jerusalem to NZ but we also have Heath Lees presenting *The music of the Ring* in Auckland (Sun 19 April at 7.30pm). In Christchurch (Fri 3 April at 7.30pm) Chris Brodrick will look from the stage out into the audience to find out who exactly went to the first performance of the *Ring* in 1876 and in Wellington (Sun 26 April 4.00pm) Michael Sinclair presents *Wagner on the World Wide Web*.

For full details see programme opposite

# WSNZ 2009 Programme details

## Auckland

**Sunday, 19 April 7.30pm**

**Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street**

Heath Lees presents: *The music of the Ring* – How the music changed and why

**Sunday, 24 May 7.30pm**

**Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street**

**AGM** followed by *A Tribute to Wolfgang Wagner* – Wagner's birthday celebrations

**Sunday, 12 July 7.30pm**

**Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street**

Michael Sinclair presents: *The Story of the Ring* – How the text evolved and what it really means

**Sunday, 6 September 7.30pm**

**Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street**

Elric Hooper presents: *From Maestro to Myth* – The evolution of Wagner production

**Sunday, 6 December 7.30pm**

**Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds Street**

*Wagner Pot Pourri* - A Christmas celebration. An evening of requests, roundups, selections and surprises

*Auckland entrance fee of \$5.00 per person, per meeting except for the AGM which is free and the 6 September meeting where the fee will be \$10.00 per person.*

## Wellington

**Sunday, 26 April 4.00pm**

**Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace**  
Michael Sinclair presents: *Wagner on the World Wide Web*

**Monday, 15 June 7.00pm**

**Venue: Paramount Theatre, Courtney Place**

DVD screening of *The Flying Dutchman* (in association with NZ Opera Soc.)

**September/October**

Proposed talk by Peter Walls on *Siegfried* with performance of the *Siegfried Idyll*

**October**

Proposed illustrated talk on *The Flying Dutchman*

## Christchurch

**Friday, 3 April 7.30pm**

**Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury**

Chris Brodrick presents: *The View from the Stage*. A look at the 1876 Bayreuth audience

**Friday, 22 May 7.30pm**

**Gloria & Garth Streat's home, 20 Pentre Terrace, Cashmere**

Pot Luck meal for Richard Wagner's birthday plus DVD *The Wagner Clan*

**Friday, 14 August 7.30pm**

**Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury**

Terence Dennis presents: *Wagner in Paris* - Exploring Wagner's periods of crisis and ultimate inspiration in the City of Love

**Friday, 18 September 7.30pm**

**Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury**

Chris Brodrick presents: *Wagner & the Visual Arts*. A repeat presentation from 2006

**Friday, 9 October 7.30pm**

**Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury**

John Pattinson presents: *The Black Sheep of the Family* – An introduction to *Rienzi*

**Sunday, 29 November 6.00pm**

**Venue: Jonet & Tony Ward's home 949 Shands Road, Christchurch**  
Christmas BBQ

## Dunedin

**Sunday, 5 April 2.00pm**

**Venue: Music School Lecture Theatre, Sale-Black House, University of Otago**

DVD viewing of Siegfried Jerusalem featuring some of his famed Heldentenor roles at Bayreuth

**Tuesday, 28 April 7.30pm**

**Venue: Glenroy Auditorium**

Lexus Song Contest Recital-Masterclass. First three placegetters accompanied by Terence Dennis, with Siegfried Jerusalem

**Sunday, 24 May 2.00pm**

**Venue: Music School Lecture Theatre, Sale-Black House, University of Otago**

Terence Dennis presents: *Wagner in Paris* - Exploring Wagner's periods of crisis and ultimate inspiration in the City of Love

**Sunday, 12 July 2.00pm**

**Venue: University of Otago (Venue TBC)**

Chris Ackerley presents: *Wagner and Literature*. 'Chantant dans la coupole' – the voices of *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal* in TS Eliot's *The Wasteland*

## Dunedin...cont

**Sunday, 27 September 2.00pm**

**Venue: Dunedin Public Art Gallery**

Chris Brodrick presents: *Wagner and the Visual Arts* - A look at some of the artists who were influenced by the Master of Bayreuth. (In conjunction with Friends of the Art Gallery)

**Sunday, 8 November 2.00pm**

**Venue: Music School Lecture Theatre, Sale-Black House, University of Otago**  
*Ludwig* - Luchino Visconti.

A DVD screening of the film based on the life of Wagner's benefactor, King Ludwig II of Bavaria.

**Sunday, 6 December 2.00pm**

**Venue: Music School Lecture Theatre, Sale-Black House, University of Otago**

Complete viewing of the famed Bayreuth production of *Lohengrin*, and our end-of-year Christmas function

## Terence Dennis

Terence Dennis has been honoured by an invitation from the European Piano Teachers Association to present a lecture recital on Wagner's Piano Works (in connection with his recent CD) at the World Piano Congress in Serbia in May.

In addition all the copies of his Wagner-Liszt CD that were for sale at Bayreuth last year were snapped up and one copy now plays in Wagner's Villa at Tribschen on Lake Lucerne, Switzerland.

## Ring for sale

If anyone is interested in the complete Solti *Der Ring des Nibelungen* on CD, for a bargain \$100, they should contact Bruce Martin at [bruzel@kinect.co.nz](mailto:bruzel@kinect.co.nz) or Ph. 03 357 2929

## Come to the Seattle Ring!

Due to a last minute cancellation there is now space available on our trip to Seattle to see *the Ring*. The trip departs on 16 August and includes 7 nights in Seattle. If you are interested please urgently contact: Michael Sinclair on 021 444 673 or [msinclair@xtra.co.nz](mailto:msinclair@xtra.co.nz)

## New member

A big Wagnerian welcome to:  
Ursula Stockinger..... Dunedin

## Farewell

Sadly we report the death of Auckland member Lilsen Millar.

# Wagner at Seattle Opera

With over 20 Society members travelling to Seattle in August to see the Ring we take the opportunity to look at Seattle Opera's long love affair with Wagner.

Why are the works of Richard Wagner so important to Seattle Opera? The answer is both historical and practical. In the early 1970s, the founder of the company, Glynn Ross, who loved the operas of the German composer, realized that in the United States over the previous twenty years there had been less Wagner performed and that the mammoth work of the composer, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, was receiving far fewer performances than it had since its introduction to the United States in the 1880s. At that time, only one major company, the Metropolitan Opera, had part of a *Ring* production, and because of complicated problems, the final opera of the cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, had not yet been completed. San Francisco and Chicago, both of which companies had produced *the Ring* in the past, seemed to have no plans now for producing the cycle, and no other opera company in America was contemplating its production. Due to the apparent dislike of Wagner by the Metropolitan's General Manager, Rudolf Bing, who was about to retire, the company had produced far few Wagner operas than in the past, and this was at a time when one of the greatest Wagnerian sopranos of the twentieth century, Birgit Nilsson, was at the height of her personal popularity and critical acclaim.

With all this happening in other opera companies, Ross looked around him in Seattle and saw a terrain that to him that suggested the Alpine reaches of Bavaria with our lakes and evergreens. He also believed that the audience in Seattle, up to then exposed only either to touring Wagner productions or to two of the earlier Romantic operas by Ross's less-than-a-decade-old Seattle Opera, would take to *the Ring*. Ross had spent the summers of 1953 and 1954 working at the Bayreuth Festival. And, clever entrepreneur that he was, he perceived that since the Bayreuth staging revolution of 1950, created by the two grandsons of the composer, Wieland and Wolfgang Wagner, all productions of *the Ring* were eschewing the rocks and mountain scenes associated with Wagner's own *Ring* in 1876 as well as the stage directions in his librettos. Ross reasoned that if he could create a *Ring* evoking the memory of the past, many from all over the country and, conceivably, the world would come.

That year was so successful that Ross convinced the Seattle Opera Board that *the Ring* should be repeated, and the audiences



*The Seattle skyline and views from the Ring*  
*The Rhinemaidens swimming (top right) and Mime & Wotan play 20 questions - well three actually! (right)*  
*Seattle Ring photos ©Rozarii Lynch photo*

and press came from even farther away. Soon the annual summer cycles of *the Ring* (one in German, one in English) became a tradition and were repeated every year. In 1980, Ross presented a new production of *Tristan und Isolde*. In the summer of 1981, he presented a performance of that work between the two cycles of *the Ring*.

The repetition established Seattle Opera worldwide as a *Ring* center; it did more: it inculcated into the Seattle opera public a liking for Wagner's works and a familiarity with them that is probably still greater per capita than in any city outside Germany. Criticism of the 1975 cycle, after the first year, was fairly condescending and not generally favorable in some cases. By the early 1980s, the rocks were becoming fairly dilapidated, and the other elements of the presentation were not winning a lot of favor. Audiences, though faithful, were fewer, and there was a complaint, loudly heard in Seattle, that the money of the company was being siphoned off into *the Ring*.

Speight Jenkins was appointed general director of the company in 1983. A lawyer and by trade a journalist, Jenkins had previously worked as a music critic, a radio and TV commentator, and a speaker on opera. One characteristic might have increased his appeal to the Board's search committee: he was an ardent Wagnerian who believed in the future of the Seattle *Ring* and was eager to create a new *Ring* production for Seattle. *The Ring* was not the limit of his desire for Wagner at Seattle Opera. Shortly after his appointment, he said that he wanted to produce all ten of the standard canon of Wagner's works at Seattle Opera, and he proposed to begin in the first season he planned with *Tannhäuser*.

In the ensuing twenty-five years, Jenkins has done what he promised to do. In August of 2003, a new production of *Parsifal* completed the canon, enlarged as it has been by the creation of two complete Rings. Over these years, the company has enhanced its reputation for Wagner productions, productions created in a variety of styles and with many of the greatest singers of Wagner. The company is now held to the



highest possible standard by the world press. Audiences come to Wagner performances from all 50 states and as many as 20 foreign countries. The non-*Ring* operas as well as the *Ring* attract interested audiences, and local support for Wagner has grown exponentially over the years.

In the early days, only the German cycle of *the Ring* was well attended. Now, with all performances in German, the three cycles of the 2001 and 2005 *Ring* were completely sold out before the opening. Other summer productions of Wagner are always well attended and the company's International Wagner Competition, inaugurated in 2006 and held again in 2008, received an enthusiastic response from its audience.

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## The Flying Dutchman

It's a busy year travel-wise for the WSNZ as, in addition to the Seattle trip, we will have a group of 25 going to *The Flying Dutchman* in Adelaide.

The group, which is made up of members from all over the country, will leave New Zealand on 12 November, for the performance on 14 November which will feature 'our' Margaret Medlyn singing Senta. The party will return home on 15 November.

This trip will be a wonderful opportunity to catch up with our Australian cousins in the South Australian Wagner Society and members from the societies in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

## 2009/10 Membership

Included with this newsletter is an application form for 2009/10 membership. We sincerely hope that you will want to rejoin the Society and enjoy the programmes and trips that we offer.

Why not invite someone you know to join up as well!