

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

Patron: Sir Donald McIntyre



NEWS LETTER

PARSIFAL THROUGH THE EYES OF KUNDRY

As a prelude to the NZSO's semi-staged *Parsifal* being presented in Wellington next March, the WSNZ has put together a fascinating recital-presentation by soprano Margaret Medlyn and pianist Heath Lees, to be called *Parsifal Through the Eyes of Kundry*. It will be held in the Massey Museum Theatre in Buckle Street (the normal WSNZ Wellington venue) at 4pm on Sunday 4 December.

In the March performance, Margaret Medlyn will be singing the part of Kundry, the only featured female role in the opera, and one of the most enigmatic characters Richard Wagner ever conceived. In 2001, Margaret sang the role in Adelaide's *Parsifal*, and the critics gave her an ecstatic reception — as did the audiences, overwhelmed by her exciting dramatic presence and stunning vocal quality.

In a programme specially devised for the occasion, Margaret and Heath will unveil a gallery of "Wagner's Women", and will focus their presentation on the way women appeared in Wagner's life and work as part-angel, part-muse, part-soulmate, and part-demon. Wagner's *Parsifal* is about a society that has become decayed and listless; Kundry acts first as a symbol of everyone's illness, but later as a beacon of hope for renewal and greater fullness of living.

The performers will mix a little of Wagner's own life with some of his female creations, and Margaret will begin with Senta, the symbol of hope for the *Flying Dutchman*.

Also on the programme will be the muse-like figure of Mathilde Wesendonck, whose beauty and love of art attracted Wagner in



Margaret Medlyn as Kundry at the close of the Adelaide "Parsifal" in 2001

a whole variety of ways, and whose words became the basis for the Wesendonck-Lieder, a "sketch", said Wagner, for *Tristan*.

Isolde seems to be the only one of Wagner's "heroines" who is granted a sense of Understanding, and her famous Monologue from Act 1 and her Liebestod from Act 3, (a "revelation" Wagner called it) will also be sung during the programme.

And what of *Parsifal* itself? In addition to a range of video footage of excerpts and documentary clips of and about the opera, Margaret and Heath will perform substantial excerpts from Act 2 of the work, where Kundry lurks at the centre of the drama,

trying to seduce Parsifal on a physical level, yet also providing him with his way of spiritual escape.

Tickets for this event are available in advance: Members \$15; Non-members \$25.

Wellington members will find booking forms enclosed. Tickets can be bought from the Wellington Secretary George Risk at (04)-476-6394. Make sure you book to secure a place, and bring your friends!

Note: It is now confirmed that the same programme will be performed in 2006 for the Wagner Societies in Christchurch and Auckland. See details on back page.

END-OF-YEAR PROGRAMMES

AUCKLAND

In the Music Theatre, School of Music, 6 Symonds Street.

Sunday, 27 November, 7.30 pm..... Heath Lees: 'Wagner's *Ring* and the Life-Cycle of an Audience' followed by a video feature on the making of the Adelaide *Ring*.

WELLINGTON

In the Massey University Theatre, Buckle Street.

Sunday, 4 December, 4pm..... Margaret Medlyn/Heath Lees "*Parsifal* Through the Eyes of Kundry".

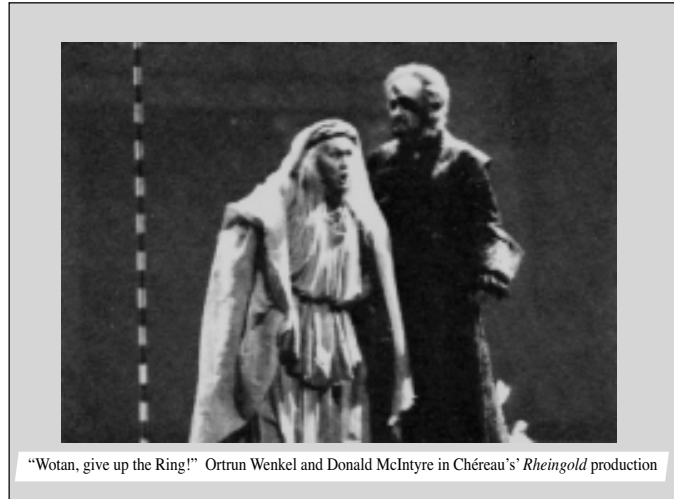
CHRISTCHURCH In Lecture Theatre A6, Arts Lecture Theatre Block (across from School of Music entrance).

Friday, 4 November 7.30pm..... John Pattinson: 'The Importance of Being Erda'.

Sunday, 4 December 6 pm..... Christmas Barbecue. Venue — Tony and Jonet Ward's, 949 Shands Road.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERDA

True Statement or Wilde Theory?



"Wotan, give up the Ring!" Ortrun Wenkel and Donald McIntyre in Chéreau's *Rheingold* production

In just one flick of the wrist, John Pattinson has turned Oscar Wilde's most famous title into a lecture-heading that's sure to attract all Christchurch members to Friday's meeting, (4th November). Perhaps the Christchurch *Press* might think of reviewing the occasion under the heading "Garden-City Meets Earth-Mother".

When you think about it, the parallels between Wilde's play and Wagner's music-drama are many. There's Wotan the god, who slips out of Valhalla every so often dressed as a Wanderer and goes down to Earth for a Good Time. Wilde's creation, Jack Worthing, a young country squire and God of all he surveys at home, calls himself Ernest at times, and ventures occasionally into the city for his own idea of Fun.

You could also be forgiven for thinking of Siegmund and Sieglinde as being similar to Jack and Gwendolen, star-crossed lovers with mistaken identities (Gwendolen really wants to marry a man called Ernest, because it sounds so solid and worthy — a name that's worthier even, than Worthing). When at the end, Gwendolen recognises that Jack

is really Ernest, well, it's just like Sieglinde recognising Siegmund, and as you know, all Hell breaks loose.

And what of Erda? Well perhaps John Pattinson has got Wilde's most famous Victorian Lady in mind, the formidable Aunt Augusta, or Lady Bracknell. Like Augusta with Jack, Erda tries unsuccessfully in *Das Rheingold* to keep Wotan on the straight and narrow. In *Siegfried*, up she comes again, ready to give Wotan a piece of her mind over how he's played ducks and drakes with his various women and children, and really needs a respectable family now. Again, it's like Augusta: "I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over."

Another thing of course is that Aunt Augusta is a symbol of all that the Victorians were "earnest" about. She values the way things "look" rather than the way they are, and Wilde's job as a dramatist is to give her a certain respect, yet point to another way, a

newer, younger and perhaps better way, of looking at life. Erda is like that too. She herself helps Wotan to come to the realisation that there is virtually nothing he can do, but that he must leave the situation — and the world — to a re-birth and the possibility of renewal with other players on Life's stage. It was a hard lesson for Wotan to learn, but during Erda's "earnest" advice, Wotan becomes convinced, and decides to step aside, and let What Will Be take place.

It's a funny thing, but in the Adelaide *Ring* a year ago, there was something really satisfying about that final touch in *Götterdämmerung* when Erda re-appeared at the last moment, and planted a new tree to symbolise re-birth. Aunt Augusta's a bit like that in Wilde's play too. You know she's not a front-line player in the story, yet she's such a strong influence that you can't forget her. And at the end, when you're "earnestly" reflecting on the events you know that it's people like her who really keep things going. But let's leave it to John to tell the story of Erda's real importance which, in Wagner's scheme of things, is fundamental.

BAYREUTH 2005

WELLINGTON MEMBER LES HOLBOROW BRINGS BACK HIS IMPRESSIONS FROM THE THEATRE ON THE HILL THIS YEAR.



Having seen the magnificent *Ring* in Adelaide in November last year, Patricia and I welcomed the opportunity to hear five of Wagner's other operas in one of the quinquennial non-*Ring* years.

The selection was attractive — the controversial Schlingensiefel production of *Parsifal* was followed by the relatively early opera *Tannhäuser* done more conventionally, then a new twentieth century *Tristan and Isolde*, a new take on the *Flying Dutchman* and the final performance of the Keith Warner production of *Lohengrin* which we had seen in its first year in 2000.

Overall, a fascinating five nights, spread over six days.

The award for outstanding orchestral playing clearly went to the Boulez-conducted *Parsifal*. Pierre Boulez is now 82 and this may have been his last appearance at Bayreuth (He is apparently not conducting *Parsifal* there next year.) He did his best to deflect some of the rapturous applause he received to the much less popular director Christoph Schlingensiefel, who was roundly booed by a section of the audience for his world-religions-inspired

production – though he can hardly have expected the Bayreuth audience to accept the transmutation of the Grail scene into an African-style fertility celebration. The use of images ranging from seals listening to music to a decayed rabbit being deconstructed by maggots certainly ensured that the production had none of the longeurs (“long half- hours”) of the traditional ponderous interpretations. The athletic John Wegner gave Klingsor an almost frenetic energy. He related at a dinner organized during the cycle how the flying fox and the reversed ascent of a long ladder were his solutions to the producer’s demand that he move from one place to another at an almost impossible speed.

Tannhäuser, though more conventional, also had some stunning effects – not least when Venusburg, complete with Venus, suddenly took off into the far distance like the proverbial flying saucer leaving the hero in possession of the stage.

The twentieth century *Tristan* introduced a new star in Nina Stemme as Isolde. She is Swedish and has a voice which effortlessly traverses the whole range of this demanding role despite her relatively slight physique. Kurwenal was performed as a man on literally his last legs and at his wits’ end, which met with a mixed reception. New Zealander Martin Snell fitted in well in the cameo role of the steersman and also as the fourth noble in *Lohengrin*. He has apparently been invited back for at least the next two years, so it will be doubly interesting to hear him as Klingsor in the Wellington *Parsifal* next March.

The *Flying Dutchman* production was described above as a “new take” on the opera, with the setting never leaving Senta’s home and the Dutchman having a striking physical resemblance to her father Daland. The sources of her obsession were further hinted at by having a younger version of herself wandering around the stage at crucial moments. Just when we thought we wouldn’t get a ship a large model descended from the ceiling only to be dismantled (deconstructed?) by the sailors.

Here, as in all of the operas, the chorus could only be described as magnificent – both vocally and in their ability to act out group roles.

The final performance of *Lohengrin* revealed a mature production which now ends with a beautiful tableau in which King Henry (not yet dead), Elsa, Gottfried and the dead swan which he brings on to the stage all have a role. The producer Keith Warner, whom we met on the train platform during one of our changes on the journey away from Bayreuth, commented on how rewarding it was to work on a production at Bayreuth over several years with enough time available to think through and implement significant changes so that a production could better realize his central vision.

He also asked about the cast for the *Parsifal* in Wellington and commented that he knew most of the singers. His summation was that you wouldn’t expect to get a better cast in most opera houses in Europe.

Les Holborow

Views of Wagner by Famous Artists and Others

For those members of the Society who may be travelling to Europe over the next few months, in particular around Geneva, here is something to add to your itinerary.

To coincide with a production of *Tannhäuser* at the Grand Théâtre de Geneva, the Musée Rath is presenting a major exhibition on the theme ‘Richard Wagner: Artistic Visions from Auguste Renoir to Anselm Kiefer’.

The exhibition is made up of 81 works by 56 artists, ranging in style from Impressionism, to Surrealism and Contemporary. Paintings by artists such as Beardsley, Dalí, Ernst, Gauguin, Kandinsky, Monet, Renoir, Tàpies and Van Gogh have been brought together

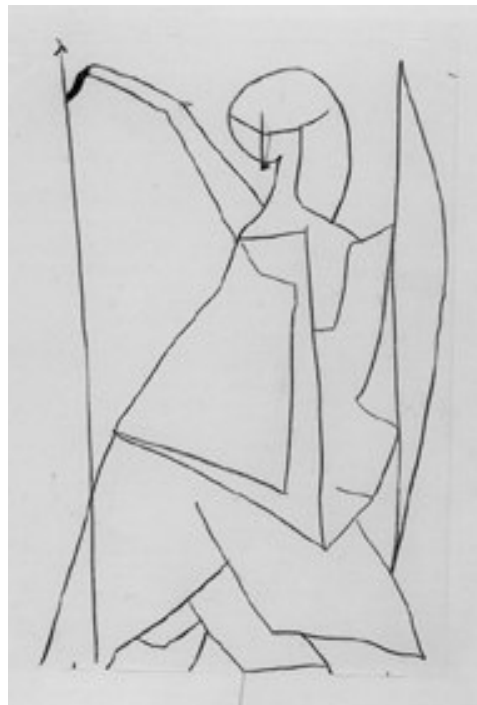
from all over the world to show the impact Wagner had on the visual arts.

In addition to the main collection there are sections that feature an introduction to Wagner’s work, a multimedia show and short film loops showing clips from Wagner-influenced films as diverse as Charlie Chaplin’s *Great Dictator*, Fritz Lang’s *Die Nibelungen: Siegfried*, Werner Herzog’s *Nosferatu* and Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*.

Entitled *Richard Wagner Visions D’Artistes*, the exhibition runs from 23 September 2005 to 29 January 2006, in the Musée Rath, Geneva.



Henri Fantin-Latour *Immortalité* 1886



Paul Klee’s *Walküre*, 1940

From Russia With Love: New York Gets Ready for The Kirov *Ring*

Russia and the US are joining hands around the figure of Wagner, or at least around the staging of his largest work, *The Ring*.

Last month, the wires were buzzing with the news that The Lincoln Center Festival and the Metropolitan Opera will together present the Kirov Opera's *Ring* in July 2007.

There will be two cycles in the NY Met Opera House between 13 and 21 July, 2007. Valery Gergiev, artistic director of St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre, where the Kirov is based, will conduct.

The special emphasis on the Kirov's production, apart from the fact that it shows Wagner being welcomed back in Russia again, is its reliance on elements from

"Russian, Caucasian, and Scythian folk mythology."

Directed by Vladimir Mirzoev, the production was first seen in St. Petersburg in 2003. In a press statement



From the Kirov's *Götterdämmerung*
(photo: Natasha Razina)

made at the time, Gergiev said that one of his priorities at the Mariinsky

had been to re-introduce operatic repertoire that had not been performed under Soviet rule, including the work of Wagner. "We had a historical obligation to revive a tradition which was long interrupted by a culture of misinformation behind the Iron Curtain," he said. "In Ossetia, where I come from, our own folktales parallel the myths that inspired Wagner, so I knew we would be able to find a new visual approach to the *Ring* that is internationally understandable."



TRISTAN IN PERTH

The WSNZ is organising a trip to see Western Australian Opera's fully-staged production of *Tristan und Isolde* in November, 2006.



The event is a revival of Neil Armfield's acclaimed production for the Australian Opera, and the cast will include English soprano Susan Bullock and Canadian heldentenor Alan Woodrow. Both these singers have sung Wagner before in Perth, as Brünnhilde and Siegfried in the city's ambitious 2003 Festival concert production of *Götterdämmerung*.

Otherwise, the cast will be the same as the recent, much talked-about Brisbane concert performance, with Bernadette Cullen as Brangäne, David Wakeham as Kurwenal, Bruce Martin as King Mark and Barry Ryan as Melot.

With the help of Bruce Pearce, President of the Richard Wagner Society of WA, we have obtained 30 'A' Reserve tickets for the opening night on the 4th of November. As the 4th is a Saturday, it will be a perfect, long weekend away. (And don't forget that all those famous WA flowers will be out in early November.)

Definite prices haven't yet been finalised but we expect the overall cost to be in the region of NZ\$2250 share twin. This will cover airfares, 4 nights' accommodation, opera tickets, and entry to the *Tristan Day* on 5 November, when speakers, including Heath Lees, will be presenting various aspects to do with the opera.

If you are interested in going to Perth in 2006, contact Liz by phone; 09-528-1184 or email: handelees@xtra.co.nz and she will send you a booking form and the rest of the details as they come to hand.

BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 2006

Application for Bayreuth Festival tickets is being processed at present. If members would like their names to be placed on the list for possible tickets for the 2006 Festival, please contact Liz by phone at 09-528-1184, or email: handelees@xtra.co.nz

NEW MEMBERS:

A VERY WARM WELCOME TO:

Prof & Mrs J Bade Auckland
Ms A Ellis..... Auckland
Mr C Gambrill..... Auckland
Drs R & S Harvey Dunedin
Mr & Mrs J & E Hessel Auckland
Mr & Mrs S & J Hill Christchurch
Mr & Mrs R & J Tallon..... Tauranga
Ms D Smith..... Auckland

Margaret Medlyn in Christchurch and Auckland

Parsifal through the Eyes of Kundry, by Margaret Medlyn and Heath Lees, will be held in Christchurch on Friday, 17 February 2006, at 7.30pm, in the Music Centre (next to the Catholic Cathedral) in Barbadoes St.

The Auckland date is Sunday, 19 February, in the Music Theatre, School of Music, Symonds Street, again at 7.30pm.

In both centres, tickets for this special event will be \$15 (Members) and \$25 (Non-members).



NZ OPERA SOCIETY

Wellington Branch

November 24 at 7pm *Carmen* on DVD
December 1 at 7pm: Senior Vocal Students
from the NZ School of Music
Enquiries Ph. (04)-237-4176

Auckland Branch

November 18 at 7.30pm *The Magic Flute* on DVD
Duncan McGhie Theatre, ACE.
December 14 at 7pm *A Christmas Carol* (Philip Norman)
Opera Factory Studio Theatre, 7 Eden St., Newmarket.
Enquiries Ph. (09)-369-5946