

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



Patron: Sir Donald McIntyre

NEWSLETTER

Parsifal programme preparations

The announcement in July that the 2006 New Zealand International Arts Festival will be producing a semi-staged performance of *Parsifal* is wonderful news. But it has also meant a rethink of our 2005 WSNZ programmes, so be prepared for some changes.

Auckland will show a recently released production of *Parsifal* from Baden Baden (directed by Nikolaus Lehnhoff and conducted by Kent Nagano), on Sunday 11 September at 4pm at the Music Theatre, School of Music, 6 Symonds Street. During the 75-minute first interval there will be, for those who have booked, a buffet dinner at the Copthorne Hotel or BYO at the Music Theatre. Tea and coffee will be available during both intervals. Please note the following message from Liz.

"Members who have booked for Parsifal will find their tickets enclosed with this newsletter. If you haven't booked and want to come along on the day you're more than welcome to do so, but remember to BYO so that you can last the distance!"

For further information about this event please phone Liz on 528-1184 or email: handelees@xtra.co.nz

On 16 October in **Wellington** Les Holborow has added *Parsifal* to his talk on the philosophy underlying *Tristan* and for the final meeting of the year there is a change of date and programme. The new date is Sunday 4 December when Heath Lees will accompany Margaret Medlyn



Warren Ellsworth (*Parsifal*) and Sir Donald McIntyre (*Gurnemanz*) in Welsh National Opera's production of *Parsifal* (photo Clive Barda)

in recital. Margaret will sing the role of Kundry at next year's *Parsifal*. The venue is Massey University Theatrette and the time, 4pm.

Christchurch had planned to show a DVD of *Tristan & Isolde* at its September meeting but this has been changed to a screening of Tony Palmer's documentary on *Parsifal* 'The Search for the Holy Grail'. Please note this meeting will be held in The Ilam Room, Centre for Continuing Education, Canterbury University.

John Pattinson will present 'The Importance of Being Erda' on Friday 4 November in Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury.

At some stage prior to the Festival production, Christchurch will hold a full screening of *Parsifal* but as at the time of writing this is still in the planning stage.

On the subject of planning, next year's *Parsifal* presents our Society with an opportunity to raise its profile. You will recall that the 1990 production of *Meistersinger* became the catalyst in the foundation of this Society. *Parsifal* now offers the membership a chance to work together as a National group, something that, apart from our overseas sojourns, is difficult due to geography!

At present the idea is to hold a seminar along the lines of the very successful 'Day with the Wagner Society' that was organized by the Wagner Society of South Australia during the 2004 Ring. What's more it seems quite likely that some members of that sibling society will be joining us in Wellington for the performance(s). Watch this space!

Finally we had to include this. In a review of this year's Bayreuth Festival production of *Parsifal* Andante's critic, Larry L. Lash wrote: ".....steals the show with his brilliantly-sung, wildly physical, peripatetic *Klingsor*."

Who?

John Wegner of course!

2005 Programme

Auckland

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

Sunday 11 September 4.00pm

Complete 'Parsifal' with dinner during the intervals.

Sunday 27 November 7.30 pm

Presentation by Heath Lees:-

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

Wellington

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

Sunday 16 October 7pm

Presentation by Les Holborow: 'Is there a Consistent Philosophy Underlying Tristan and Parsifal?'

Sunday 4 December 4pm

Margaret Medlyn in recital with Heath Lees

Christchurch

Friday 23 September 7.30pm

DVD presentation: 'Parsifal' The Search for the Grail. Venue- Ilam Room, Centre for Continuing Education, Canterbury University

Friday 4 November 7.30pm

Presentation by John Pattinson: 'The Importance of Being Erda.' Venue- Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Sunday 4 December 6.00pm

Christmas Barbecue

Venue- Tony and Janet Ward's, Shands Road

Parsifal Resource Guide

With the International Arts Festival production of *Parsifal* now only six months away here is a list of resources for those who want to begin their preparation early.

DVDs

DVDs offer so much more than videos, better picture and sound quality plus the facility to turn subtitles on and off!

Here are the two contenders - American or European, take your pick. The Nikolaus Lehnhoff production is to be shown to Auckland members on 11 September.



For those who like their Wagner traditional. A straight forward production with good singers. Metropolitan Opera production. Conducted by James Levine and directed by Otto Schenk with :

Amfortas	Bernd Weikl
Gurnemanz	Kurt Moll
Parsifal	Siegfried Jerusalem
Klingsor	Franz Mazura
Kundry	Waltraud Meier
Deutsche Grammophon DVD 073 032-9 (2 DVDs)	



A very intelligent 'European' production, both musically and dramatically. The set comes with a documentary, 'Parsifal's Progress', which includes analysis of the opera and production along with interviews with the director and singers.

Festspielhaus Baden-Baden production conducted by Kent Nagano and directed by Nikolaus Lehnhoff

Parsifal	Christoher Ventris
Kundry	Waltraud Meier
Gurnemanz	Matti Salminen
Amfortas	Thomas Hampson
Klingsor	Tom Fox
Opus Arte DVD 0A0915 D (3 DVDs)	

CDs

There are two recommendations for recordings of Parsifal:



Conductor	Herbert von Karajan
Orchestra	Berlin Philharmonic
Gurnemanz	Kurt Moll
Parsifal	Peter Hoffman
Amfortas	Jose van Dam
Klingsor	Siegmund Nimsgern
Kundry	Dunja Vejzovic
DG 413 347-2 (4)	

The Penguin Guide awards this CD a rosette (very special) and marks it as a key recording. *"Communion, musical and spiritual, is what this intensely beautiful Karajan set provides."*



Conductor	Daniel Barenboim
Orchestra	Berlin State Opera
Gurnemanz	Matthais Hölle
Parsifal	Siegfried Jerusalem
Amfortas	Jose van Dam
Klingsor	Gunter von Kannen
Kundry	Waltraud Meier
Telarc 9031 74448-2 (4)	

"With Siegfried Jerusalem as a superb Parsifal, one of the finest ever, both characterful and mellifluous, Daniel Barenboim's is a dedicated version with an excellent cast." The Penguin Guide

If you want a recording featuring Sir Donald McIntyre you can choose between two:



Conductor	Pierre Boulez
1970 Bayreuth Festival Orchestra	
Parsifal	James King
Amfortas	Thomas Stewart
Kundry	Gwyneth Jones
Gurnemanz	Franz Crass
Klingsor	Donald McIntyre
DG (ADD) 435 718-2 (3)	

"Boulez's approach, with the line beautifully controlled, conveys a dramatic urgency rarely found in this opera..." The Penguin Guide



Conductor	Reginald Goodall
Orchestra	Welsh National Opera
Parsifal:	Warren Ellsworth
Kundry:	Waltraud Meier
Gurnemanz:	Donald McIntyre
Amfortas:	Phillip Joll
Klingsor:	Nicholas Folwell
CD: EMI CDS7 4912-8	

"An ideal recording for anyone who wants to study the music with the score in front of them." Monsalvat (Parsifal Home page)



Books

Where does one start? Typing *Parsifal* into Amazon brings up 152 entries some of which are associated with Wagner! On the assumption that those who wish to study the opera will want 'general' reading here are a few suggestions.

Wagner's Parsifal The Journey of a Soul - Peter Bassett (*Wakefield Press*)

This book was written to accompany the 2001 Adelaide production of *Parsifal*. It covers the synopsis, gives good background information, includes a libretto and offers further reading.

English National Opera Guide No 34 - Parsifal (*John Calder*)

The ENO guides offer a wealth of information including a translated libretto that includes references to leitmotifs, which are printed out in a thematic guide.

Cambridge Opera Handbook - Parsifal - Lucy Beckett (*Cambridge*)

No translation in this guide but some very interesting chapters on the sources, text and synopsis, the music, stage history and a proposed interpretation.

If you are looking for information with a bit of humour mixed in you should read:

The Good Opera Guide - Denis Forman (*Phoenix Giant*)

"The one where a simple-minded teenager by shooting a swan gets involved with a religious sect whose king is permanently wounded and whose official messenger is a convertible woman, sometimes witch sometimes houri." Well! that's the introduction!

Wagner without fear – William Berger (*Vintage Books*)

The book's subtitle sums up this book. "Learning to love – and even enjoy – opera's most demanding genius" Another irreverent look at Wagner but will give you all the essential information without pretence.

Wagner and his Operas – The New Grove Composers Series (*Macmillan*)

Edited by Stanley Sadie, this book will give you a short authoritative read on *Parsifal* with a few musical illustrations.

Finally (to bring us full circle) another publication that was published in conjunction with the 2001 Adelaide production.

The Enigma of Parsifal – Edited by Brian Coghlan & Ralph Middenway (*The Richard Wagner Society of South Australia*)

This is a collection of wide ranging essays on all subjects on and around *Parsifal*. From Rick Curnow's 'The problem with Sex in Parsifal' to Heath Lees' 'Participating in Parsifal: a Hitch-Hikers Guide to its expanding Universe' it presents the reader with a wealth of information to aid their understanding. It also comes with a CD featuring the leitmotifs in the opera.

Only 50 copies of this most enlightening book are available but at \$AUD20.00 each (inc postage and packing) it is very good value. Write to:-

Marian Frost,
Secretary Wagner Soc of Sth Australia,
PO Box 307,
North Adelaide SA 5006,
Australia

including your name, address and credit card details or enclose a AUD bank draft made payable to the Richard Wagner Society of South Australia.

The Internet

If you're an internet junkie or simply want to explore *Parsifal* a bit more, do go to <http://home.c2i.net/monsalvat/indexie5.htm>. This site is dedicated to *Parsifal* and from the small amount I've seen it would appear to be a treasure trove of *Parsifal* information. With a little bit of delving you'll find that Leonardo Da Vinci is not the only artist embroiled in grail conspiracy. To check out all the articles double click on the score on the right hand side of the home page. Also at the bottom of a page (other than the home page) the black chalice will lead you to a table of contents.

Happy researching!

New Members

A big welcome to

Alan Platt *Blenheim*
Sidney Smith..... *Auckland*

On the Subject of Books

Startling new light on the Wagner clan

Lindis Taylor reviews a new book on Winifred Wagner

Wagnerians have another important book to work through. An Austrian historian, Brigitte Hamann, published *Winifred Wagner, oder Hitlers Bayreuth* in 2003. It has now been translated, and somewhat shortened, into English.

One of the most famous scandals in musical literature is the unfortunate fact that Hitler loved Wagner's music, and that Wagner's wife Cosima, who outlived him by a half century,



did not share his radical political and religious ideas and was a German nationalist and anti-Semite. Their son Siegfried followed, and he married a young English woman, Winifred, raised by adoptive parents in Berlin who were on the far-right. They instilled those views in the girl who rather fell in love with Hitler, who became 'Uncle Wolf' to the family of four children and was a regular presence at the Wagner festivals in Bayreuth in the 1920s and 30s.

The author began her researches with the common view that Winifred was the only real Nazi in the family. But she dramatically revised that view as a result of gaining access to previously un-examined and unknown letters held by a wide variety of people; although significantly, she was refused access to significant private documents still in the possession of one of Winifred's granddaughters.

Furthermore, Wieland's (Winifred's and Siegfried's eldest son) four children will not let anyone see Winifred's letters to him (Wieland).

In brief, this book paints a hair-raising picture of the right-wing extremist, anti-Semitic and nationalist climate that pervaded

the Wagner clan in Bayreuth in the first decades of the 20th century. They were fanatically for German involvement in World War I, wholly opposed to democratic government and hence to the Weimar Republic, enthusiasts for the then widespread idea of eugenics – selective breeding – that lay behind Nazi racist beliefs, and filled with enthusiasm at the prospect that Hitler was the man destined to bring about a third German Reich.

The scene depicted is a good deal more awful than even the reasonably well-informed Wagnerite would have believed till now. The book's insights into the Wagner clan and into the extremely ugly political scene in late 19th and early 20th century Germany are detailed and revelatory, and their lessons for today still very disturbing.

Winifred now emerges as a rather more attractive and interesting figure in many ways, in spite of subscribing to nasty political ideas. The author notes that, though Winifred was in love with Hitler, it did not stop her from earning Hitler's displeasure by courageously seeking to rescue persecuted individuals, and that as a result he ceased visiting Bayreuth after 1940.

Hamann demonstrates that it was Wieland who had the closest relationship to Hitler and was the 'head Nazi' in Bayreuth, that his brother Wolfgang, who still directs the Bayreuth Festival, was politically non-committal, and that Winifred took on herself the collective guilt of the family for its Nazi ties so that her sons would come through the de-Nazification process and be able to resume control of the festival when it reopened, as it did in 1951.

The book is an enthralling and appalling account, through the examination of a singular and important family and their associates, of the political climate in Germany (and admittedly of large elements in most European countries) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In answer to criticism that she and others (for example, in *Der Untergang* – *The Downfall* the film about Hitler's last days currently screening) are depicting Hitler in a more human shape, Hamann says: "To [portray Hitler as 'evil itself'] is to fail to understand his astonishing rise from nothing to mass-evangelist and the undeniable fascination for him felt by many Germans".

You will also find a review of Hamann's book in the July Gramophone and an interview with her in the July Opera magazine.

The English version, **Winifred Wagner: A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth** is published by Granta Books, England and obtainable from them on the internet at a discount price.

Thoughts of Abroad from Home

Chris Brodick looks back at a recent trip to London...

The dreadful events in London during July when terrorists attacked London's transport system will require English National Opera to re-think the ending of *Twilight of the Gods*, assuming that they manage to find the money to produce it! You will recall that in a previous newsletter, I questioned the reasoning behind making Brunnhilde a suicide bomber and suggested that the idea ran against Wagner message of the triumph of love. Well after the events of 7 and 21 July ENO have a problem. To mount the production unchanged will not only seriously alienate their audience but see the company run foul of the Labour Government's proposed anti terrorist legislation. Under the new laws it will be a criminal offence to "justify or glorify terrorism" as well as to "incite terror acts"!

Covent Garden has also embarked on a *Ring Cycle* directed by Keith Warner. In July they assembled a stellar cast of Bryn Terfel, Placido Domingo, Waltraud Meier and Lisa Gasteen. But despite some glorious singing all is not happy with the production! In what was potentially a highlight of an opera going lifetime we are given a glimpse of the Holy Grail (sorry mixed operatic metaphors!) only to have the door closed, so to speak, by an inane production littered with confusing symbolism and basic dramatic mistakes. For instance why when you have such a tight drama as in *Die Walküre* Act 1, do you make the stage steeply racked and cluttered making all movement difficult, particularly when you have two great actor singers in Waltraud Meier and Placido Domingo? Despite the hurdles both singers were magnificent but, having seen Meier in Berlin singing the same role, I know it could have been so much better. And why confuse the audience by having the sword in Act 1 appear in three different places?

In Act 2 Warner showed us he had absolutely no idea about the psychology of singers. If he did he wouldn't have asked Brunnhilde to descend a vertical ladder (6-7metres est.) at the start of the act and almost immediately expect her to sing her Hojotoho!

The third example is probably the most criminal of all! Bryn Terfel is such an expressive and intelligent singer and his 'farewell' at the end of Act 3 was unbearably moving. All that was needed was for Wotan to make a stately exit and let Wagner's music play out the final moments of the opera. Oh no that's far too easy and doesn't let the audience know this is 'A Keith Warner Production'.



"One doesn't wish to be morbid, but the tenor (Domingo) is now 64. And the way he's singing, he can't have more than another 30 years of Wagner in him."

Richard Morrison – The Times

So what are we left with? As Brunnhilde is revealed asleep on the rock, with fire all around her and the glorious music rising from the pit, the back walls of the set reveal all the Valkyries hanging like bats, slowly flapping their wings in time to the music!



'It's enough to drive you up the wall!' (photo Clive Barada)

Of course London is full of famous people but it is always surprising when you do bump into the rich and famous. It was in North London, Kenwood to be exact, that we struck celebrity gold and what's more it was Wagner who was the catalyst! It was a Friday morning and we were at the national Trust House having a look around the art collection: Gainsboroughs, Constables and a wonderful Rembrandt self-portrait! In the Orangery we watched a group of Tibetan monks working on a sand painting. Sand paintings are intricate designs of coloured sand that the monks spend days producing. So there we were absorbing the patient way the monks delivered the sand from fine funnels to the art-work, when in walked Sir Paul McCartney with his daughter Beatrice in his arms and his wife Heather Mills at his side. Immediately interest moved from the monks to McCartney! Elbows were nudged into ribs as we all faced forward while looking sideways. When the McCartneys left the room to continue

their visit through the house, the volume suddenly increased as all present (except the monks) were heard to whisper, "That was Paul McCartney!" After a short time we continued our visit through the house and some ten minutes later, as we approached the library, we once again came into the presence of 'A BEATLE'. Once again trying not to let on that we had any idea that we knew who he was, we proceeded around the room. All of a sudden Heather Mills spoke. "So you're a lover of Wagner" she said pointing to the black tee shirt proudly proclaiming the 2004 Adelaide Ring. "Oh yes" was the tongue-tied reply. "I was brought up on Wagner," she said "I was taken to Bayreuth at the age of 9 and sat through all the productions." "That's something I still have to do," he replied as Sir Paul hovered, trying to make out with whom his wife had got herself into conversation. And then with a smile she was gone!

It goes to show that Wagner touches such a wide range of people and encompasses all walks, including the ex-model and wife of one of the 20th centuries greatest and most influential musicians. It would be interesting to look back in 140 years time to see the influence that Paul McCartney and John Lennon have had in the history of music and how that compares with the influence of Richard Wagner.

Snippets

- The 2004 Adelaide *Ring* won 10 awards from 11 nominations in the recent Helpmann Awards, including best opera, best direction (Elke Neidhardt), best male performer (John Wegner), best female performer (Lisa Gasteen) and best musical direction (Asher Fisch).

- The Australian publication Opera Opera reported in its August edition that the State Opera of South Australia is considering the possibility of reviving last year's production of the *Ring* in either 2008 or 2009.

- The new EMI recording of *Tristan & Isolde* with Placido Domingo and Nina Stemme in the title roles was released on 1 August with a New Zealand connection. Singing the role of Melot is our own Jarred Holt who won the 2000 Mobil Song Quest. He is currently living in London where he is a member of Covent Garden's Young Artists Programme.

- Another DVD version of *Die Walküre* is to be released on 12 September. This latest addition to a fast growing number of *Rings* is the Kupfer/Barenboim production from Bayreuth with Sir John Tomilson and Anne Evans.