

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

Patron: Sir Donald McIntyre



NEWSLETTER

Tannhäuser

‘Wagner’s most voluptuous opera opens with the lyric poet Tannhäuser lost in lust with Venus, the pagan goddess of passion. Our hero appears to be living the ultimate male fantasy. Venus’s charms prove incapable of eternal enchantment, however, when Tannhäuser chooses earthly freedom over the slavery of erotic entrapment.

The musical gifts that won Tannhäuser the heart of a goddess also conquer the heart of the beatific Elisabeth, a nobleman’s innocent daughter. When he shocks the town with his bold song affirming love’s sensual delights and discloses his dalliance with Venus, he’s condemned and banished. Only the fatal love of his faithful Elisabeth can redeem him.’

Los Angeles Opera web site

On 26 October, 62 members of the Wagner Society of New Zealand will travel to Sydney to attend a performance of *Tannhäuser*.

Leaving from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch on Friday morning, members will be met by buses at Sydney Airport before checking into the Radisson Hotel & Suites, 72 Liverpool Street, Darling Harbour. For those in need of some retail therapy the shops will be at your disposal for the rest of the day.

If shopping is not your thing, but culture is, then you’ll find that the Museum of Contemporary Art is presenting three exhibitions, *Primavera 07* featuring work by artists under the age of 35; *Julie Rrap: Body Double*; and *Cross Currents: Focus on Contemporary Australian Art*. The Art Gallery of New South Wales is featuring a number of shows including the *Dobell Prize for Drawing 2007*, a retrospective exhibition of the *figurative sculpture of Bertram Mackennal (1863-1931)* and *One Sun One Moon*, an exhibition celebrating the complex heritage of Aboriginal art.

Maybe you just want to chill out! In which case I’d recommend a short stroll to Darling Harbour and a visit to the Chinese Garden.

**‘Two irresistible impulses—
the lure of carnal pleasure
and the yearning for spiritual
redemption—battle for one
man’s soul.’**

San Francisco Opera publicity

On Friday evening some members will be attending Australian Opera’s production of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Gondoliers*.

It’s unlikely that we will wake on Saturday morning to the strains of the *Pilgrims Chorus* but at 10am we will be given the next best thing by way of Heath Lees’ talk *Tannhäuser in Perspective*, a comprehensive survey of the story, ideas and music. The talk will take place at the hotel and end at around midday.

With the performance of *Tannhäuser* starting at 7pm you might like to consider having a good lunch and a light snack at 5.00pm as this will give you plenty of time to dress and get ready for the bus to take you to the Opera House without feeling rushed.

After the performance we will no doubt return to the hotel for a nightcap and natter before retiring to the strains of the *Pilgrims Chorus* going through our heads.

Sunday will present the retail therapists with another opportunity to test their

credit limits, while those who have already exceeded them or the ones who are not interested in the shops may like to go for a wander around a beautiful city. Darling Harbour, Circular Quay, The Rocks (where you will find the Sunday Market) and the Gardens are all worth visiting before we all meet up at the hotel in the afternoon to begin the journey home.

**Saturday 27 October 2007 at 7pm
Sydney Opera House**

Elisabeth	Janice Watson
Hermann Landgraf	Daniel Sumegi
Tannhäuser	Richard Berkeley-Steele
Wolfram von Eshinbach	Jonathan Summers
Walther von der Vogelweide	Andrew Brunson
Biterolf	Richard Anderson
Heinrich der Schreiber	Christopher Dawes
Reinmar von Zweter	Barry Ryan
Venus	Bernadette Cullen

Opera Australia Chorus	
Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra	
Conductor	Richard Hickox
Director	Elke Neidhardt
Set Designer	Michael Scott-Mitchell
Costume Designer	Sue Field
Lighting Designer	Nick Schlieper
Choreographer	Michael Campbell

2007 PROGRAMME

Auckland

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

Sunday, 9 September 7.30pm

Tannhäuser: Acts 2 & 3

Sunday, 2 December 7.30 pm

Special Event for Christmas

Wellington

Venue: Massey University Theatre, Buckle St

Sunday, 30 September 4.00 pm

Heath Lees: ‘Wagner, *Tannhäuser*, the French, and Mallarmé’ – A Guided Tour Around a New Book

Christchurch

Venue: A6 lecture theatre, Canterbury University.

Friday, 14 September 7.30pm

Heath Lees: ‘Wagner, *Tannhäuser*, the French, and Mallarmé’ – A Guided Tour Around a New Book & a look ahead to the Sydney performance

Sunday, 14 October 5.00pm

Venue: To be confirmed

Tannhäuser on DVD

A catered meal between Acts 1 & 2.

Sunday, 4 December 6.00pm

Venue: Sid Kennedy’s home,

70 Perry St, Papanui

Christmas Barbecue

An Important Message for Members Going to Sydney

Tannhäuser in Sydney is not too far away now and all those members who are going to the performance will no doubt be looking forward very much to a weekend of Wagner activities.

Invoices have been sent out by email and you should have received them by now. If you don't have an email address the invoice will have been sent by post. If for any reason you are going away during September please let Liz know, because all the invoices need to be paid before we can issue the tickets. You will receive the tickets for the *Tannhäuser* (and *The Gondoliers* if you've booked for this) at the same time as the travel packet, about 30 days before departure. This packet will include a detailed itinerary. Liz will be in touch with you beforehand to let you know when all this is being sent out.

She will also be attending Wagner Society meetings in Christchurch and Wellington as well as Auckland during September, so it will be a good chance to catch up and clear up any queries about the trip.

News From

The World Of Wagner

Michael Sinclair follows up on his report in the last newsletter about Katharina Wagner's new production of *Meistersinger* at Bayreuth and brings news from Seattle and Adelaide.

We reported in our last newsletter of the much-anticipated premiere at the Bayreuth Festival of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, directed by the composer's great-granddaughter Katharina Wagner. As seems to be the case with most new productions at Bayreuth, this new *Meistersinger* caused a great deal of controversy. At the end of the performance Katharina was roundly booed, in a manner that had not been heard at Bayreuth since the debut of Patrice Chéreau's *Ring* in 1976.

Nevertheless, the critics were mixed in their reviews of this avant-garde production, with widely differing opinions as to its merit. Larry L. Lash in *Variety* felt that it was, 'a wildly inventive, entertaining and thought provoking reinterpretation of *Die Meistersinger*,' whereas Hugh Canning in the *Sunday Times* lamented that, 'dramatically it had all the sophistication of a drunken and druggy fancy-dress party for kids.'

Suffice to say that the controversy was not good news for Katharina in her attempt to succeed her father, Wolfgang, as Festival leader. The Richard Wagner Foundation will meet later this year to discuss the succession, but indications are that Katharina does not have majority support. There are also reports



Seattle Stars for 2009 Ring

From the top Janice Baird, Greer Grimsley (middle left), Stig Fogh Andersen and Stuart Skelton

that Wolfgang Wagner did not attend a recent meeting of the Foundation, who, in his absence, found fit to criticise him, something that hitherto would have been unheard of. The rift between the family and those that will secure the Festival's future appears to be growing, suggesting that this soap opera still has a long way to run.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic in the Pacific Northwest, Seattle Opera is finalising plans for the 2009 revival of their very successful *Ring*. Three cycles of Stephen Wadsworth's naturalistic production will be staged between 9 and 30 August 2009. The company has announced that almost 60% of the roles will be taken by new singers in an effort to keep the production fresh and vibrant, and this includes a recasting of three of the major roles – Brünnhilde, Siegfried and Siegmund. Jane Eaglen, who has been a stalwart in Seattle for many years, is no longer the favoured Brünnhilde and she will be replaced by American soprano Janice Baird. Stig Fogh Andersen will sing Siegfried and Stuart Skelton will be Siegmund. Artists who are returning include Greer Grimsley as Wotan, Margaret Jane Wray as Sieglinde, Stephanie Blythe as Fricka and Richard Paul Fink as Alberich. Tickets will go on sale in late 2008. If previous *Rings* are anything to go by they will be snapped up very quickly.

Nearer home a recent report in the *Adelaide Advertiser* detailed the diminishing likelihood of the State Opera of South Australia reviving its ground breaking *Ring cycle*. It had



Die Meistersinger, Bayreuth 2007

photos: Enrico Nawrath 2007

originally been hoped that the production would be revived in 2008, but delays in confirming funding have now pushed this out to 2011 at the very earliest. The revival depends on State and Federal funding and with elections looming in Australia this year it seems that funding of the Arts is very low on the politicians' agenda. Arts administrators in South Australia are still hopeful of a reprise, as are local Wagner enthusiasts, but sadly the odds are getting slimmer.

New members

A very warm welcome is extended to:
 Michael Ashdown Wellington
 May Anne Cain Christchurch
 Richard & Rosemary Greager ... Wellington
 Derrick Knight..... Kawerau
 Helen Milne Wellington

NZ Opera Society events

Auckland Branch

DVD screenings, 7.30pm, Raye Freeman Theatre, EGGS, Silver Road

13 September *Don Giovanni*, Mozart

10 October *Werther*, Massenet

14 November *Les Paladins*, Rameau

Phone: 09-625-7225

Wellington Branch

DVD screenings, 6.30pm, National Library Auditorium, Aitkin Street

27 September *Turandot*, Puccini

1 November *La Belle Hélène*, Offenbach

Phone: 04-385-1997



Régine Crespin (Elsa) and Rita Gorr (Ortrud)
in *Lohengrin*, Covent Garden, 1963

Au Revoir

In July the deaths were announced of two great singers, one very much associated with Wagner the other not.

In early July the French soprano Régine Crespin died at the age of 80. As Anthony Tommasini wrote in the New York Times, Crespin was 'one of the most important vocal artists to emerge from France in the decades after World War two.'

Régine Crespin was widely admired for the elegance, warmth and subtlety of her singing, especially in the French and German operatic repertoires. Early on, the natural carrying power of her voice seemed to point to a career as a dramatic soprano. Indeed, she made her 1950 debut at the regional company in Mulhouse, France, singing Elsa in *Lohengrin*.

For the next six years she sang at the Paris Opera but it was in the Regional houses, with roles such as Sieglinde and Tosca, that she launched her career.

She auditioned for Wieland Wagner at Bayreuth singing in French as she had not sung her Wagner roles in German. Nevertheless she was engaged as Kundry (*Parsifal*) for the 1958 Festival.

As her international career grew she made regular appearances in the world's major houses. In the 1960s she made some classic recordings, among them the Marschallin in Georg Solti's *Der Rosenkavalier* and Sieglinde (*Die Walküre*) in Solti's recording of the complete *Ring Cycle*.

She also sang the role of Brünnhilde (*Walküre*) in Herbert von Karajan's recording of the *Ring*.

In 1967 she sang Sieglinde to Birgit Nilsson's Brünnhilde at the Met, with Herbert von Karajan conducting a production that he also directed. Reviewing that performance for The Times of London, the critic Conrad L. Osborne wrote that 'Nilsson and Crespin spurring each other on make for the sort of thing one remembers with a chill for years.'



Beverly Sills

A singer not associated with Wagner is Beverly Sills, who also died in July at the age of 78. Sills was a Brooklyn born coloratura soprano who, according to the New York Times, was more popular with the American public than any other opera singer since Enrico Caruso. She was acknowledged, along with Maria Callas and Joan Sutherland, as an exponent of the bel canto Italian repertory. She had huge success in her portrayals of tragic leading roles such as *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Anna Bolena*, *I Puritani*, *Traviata* and Massenet's *Manon*. So where, you might ask, does Richard Wagner come in? Well back in 1953 Beverly Sills made her debut with the San Francisco Opera company. During that season she sang Helen of Troy in Boito's *Mefistofele* and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. On 13 October she was a last minute replacement as the Valkyie Gerhilde in a performance of *Die Walküre* conducted by Georg Solti. History records that during the performance Sills horned helmet fell off and clattered into the footlights. When she went to retrieve it the audience gave out a cheer!

And they continued to cheer for the rest of her brilliant career!

Tannhäuser DVD review

Michael Sinclair gives his thoughts on a performance of Tannhäuser on DVD

While many of the society members are preparing to go to Sydney in October to see Opera Australia's production of *Tannhäuser*, I thought it would be interesting to review a readily available version on DVD. The Zurich Opera production chosen is a fairly new recording dating from 2003, and is available to borrow from City Libraries or can be purchased from the usual outlets.

The Zurich Opera is a company that is renowned for its musical and artistic standards and in many ways this performance upholds those traditions. The production was directed by Jens-Daniel Herzog, with a solid cast including Peter Seiffert (Tannhäuser), Solveig Kringelborn (Elisabeth), Isabelle Kabatu

(Venus) and Roman Trekel (Wolfram). Franz Welser-Möst conducts.

The production is quasi-modern, but there is little here that is likely to offend anyone. The Venusberg scene is tame compared with other productions, with little sense of eroticism. However Herzog has worked hard with the singers to create meaningful interpretations and this definitely pays off. Seiffert is an impassioned Tannhäuser, Kringelborn an appealing Elisabeth and Trekel a moving Wolfram.

Welser-Möst's interpretation of the score can best be described as serious. While the emotions are kept in check he is still able to bring out the spiritual side of the score and get into the psyche of each of the characters. He draws delicate, refined playing from the orchestra, while building to the climaxes with precision and passion. There is nothing vulgar here!

However, there is a big drawback with this DVD, and it comes in the form of the quirky nature of the direction for video. The TV director has made a number of odd choices in the way this production has been filmed, which greatly distract from the enjoyment of it.

Firstly, many of the characters are seen backstage during the preludes and also during the acts themselves. Thus, for example, we see Seiffert and Kabatu embracing backstage while the Venusberg music wells up in the orchestra. By seeing the singers as themselves it seems to me that we are less drawn into the work itself.

The TV director also uses extreme close-ups of the singers, particularly of Tannhäuser, even when another character is singing. Fortunately Seiffert is a fine singer-actor and is able to cope with the intense scrutiny that the TV director inflicts on him, but the technique is over used and the overall result is that we never really get a good impression of what this production actually looked liked on stage.

My overall feeling, therefore, is that the direction for video has spoilt an otherwise interesting and well-sung performance. It certainly raises the question as to how stage performances are best filmed for release on DVD.





In the last two issues of the newsletter Chris Brodrick looked at using the world wide web to research Wagner at the Movies. This month he looks at the video sharing web site YouTube.

In October last year the internet giant Google announced that it had reached a deal to acquire YouTube for US\$1.65 billion of Google stock. Not bad for a company founded only 20 months earlier in February 2005. So what is YouTube? It's a video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips. So what has this to do with Richard Wagner? Well amongst all the video bloggers (people who talk to camera about ...nothing!) and the clips from films, television programmes, and video taken on phones, there are also clips posted by Wagnerians!!!

In the course of two hours one afternoon I managed to find some really fascinating material that, if you feel computer savy, is well worth looking at.

Here are a few examples:-

Dame Joan Sutherland, like her colleague Beverly Sills, was not known for singing Wagner, apart from the Woodbird on Georg Solti's recording of the *Ring*, but want to hear her sing Sieglinde?

[Joan Sutherland](#)

How about the Ride of the Valkyries played on eight pianos! Yes that's one for each warrior maiden! Led by the maestro of the Met James Levine!!

[Ride of the Valkyries on 8 pianos](#)

Along with these 'novelty' items there are a large number of historical clips:-

Kirsten Flagstad singing the Valkyrie battle cry from *Walkure* Act 2 introduced by Bob Hope:

[Flagstad and Bob Hope](#)

Or Falgstad and Melchior singing the love duet from *Götterdämmerung* Act 1. This clip may not include moving pictures but what voices:

[Flagstad and Melchior](#)

Other historical clips are Furtwangler conducting a 1942 performance of the *Meistersinger* Overture in the presence of Goebels:

[Furtwangler 1942](#)

Birgit Nilsson recording the Immolation Scene from *Götterdämmerung* for the Solti *Ring*

[Nilsson Immolation scene](#)

Birgit Nilsson in a performance of *Tristan* Act 1 singing Isolde's curse:

[Nilsson: Isolde's curse](#)

And that, as they say, is only the tip of the iceberg as there are plenty more and others being added all the time.

For the adventurous amongst you go to www.youtube.com and type 'Richard Wagner opera' into the search box and browse the clips. For those who don't feel confident I'll set up the links on our web site (www.wagnersociety.org.nz.) Go to the web site, click on newsletters and open the Sept 07 issue. You will see the web addresses on this page now have descriptive names and are in blue. Click on the blue text and you will be taken directly to the clip

If anyone comes across a clip that they would like to share please email me (cbrodrick@xtra.co.nz) the web address (highlight it in the browser, copy it and then paste into the email) and I'll add to the collection on our web site.

Even if the internet is not your thing you simply have to have a look at this last clip. I guarantee you will love it! Go to:

[Die Walküre Act 1\(end\)](#)

This clip has been taken from a BBC broadcast of a live concert performance of *Die Walküre* at the 2005 London Proms. Waltraud Meier and Placido Domingo sing the last 6 minutes of Act 1, a performance that is so hot that I suggest that you turn on the air conditioning or sit by the open fridge. Be careful you don't get blown out of your chair by the roar at the end!

Absolutely stunning!

Surround Sound Ring

As the disappointing news over the future of the Adelaide Ring reaches us, Ode Records of Auckland have announced that the live recordings by Melba of *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* that were taken from the 2004 Adelaide performances are now available in New Zealand.

These recordings of the *Ring* are the first to be released in SACD 5.1 surround sound and are being hailed "as ground-breaking as Georg Solti's 1959-1966 Decca recording". Reviewing *Die Walküre* Classic FM Magazine (UK) wrote

"This is thrilling. Besides the vivid stage atmosphere generated by singers on a high ... a performance offering really fine musical credentials...The natural sounding recorded balance allows the different orchestral sections to blend beautifully

If your local music store only sells Britney or Justin Timberlake tell them to order your copy through Ode Records:-

PO Box 56-450,
Dominion Rd, Auckland
or phone 09 630 1177

Shorts:

• Heath Lees continues his book launch tour with talks to Christchurch on 14 September and Wellington 30 September.

• On Friday 7 September at 6.30pm in the Michael Fowler Centre, Wellington, the NZSO will present an all Wagner concert conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin with soloist Margaret Medlyn. Peter Bassett will present a pre-concert talk at 5:45pm

• On 4 October, Simon O'Neill will step on to the Royal Opera House Covent Garden stage in the role of Siegmund in the first of three performance of *Die Walküre*. For performances on 19 & 28 October he will cover Placido Domingo who has recently agreed to be patron of, Christchurch, based Southern Opera.

• Three new DVD releases from the Bayreuth Festival. *Götterdämmerung* in a production by Alfred Kirchner and conducted by James Levine. Wolfgang Wagner's production of *Parsifal* conducted by Horst Stein and the highly acclaimed Jean-Pierre Ponnelle production of *Tristan & Isolde* with René Kollo and Joanna Meier as the doomed lovers. The performance is conducted by Daniel Barenboim.

• The novelist AN Wilson's new book *Winnie and Wolf* has been chosen for the long list of finalists for this year's Man Booker prize. *Winnie and Wolf* is the story of the extraordinary relationship between Winifred Wagner and Adolf Hitler that took place during the years 1925-40, as seen through the eyes of the secretary at the Wagner house in Bayreuth.

• Jonathan Carr's book *The Wagner Clan*, which will be released on 6 September, also looks at the Winifred/Hitler relationship. He also underlines the decisive roles played in Bayreuth over decades by two British-born members of the clan, Houston Stewart Chamberlain (Wagner's son-in-law) and Winifred Wagner, both of them fervent admirers of Adolf Hitler.

