

PRESIDENT'S REPORT for the AGM 2017

1. Society Functions since AGM 2016

1.1. The following functions were set in train by the 2015–16 Committee and implemented by the current Committee in 2017.

Date	Function	Topic/Performance	Speaker/Host	Attendees
24 Nov	Open cover rehearsal	recital/performance	Opera Australia	21
1 Dec	Open cover rehearsal	recital/performance	Opera Australia	22
10 Dec	Open cover rehearsal	recital/performance	Opera Australia	20
21 Nov	Pre-Rheingold reception	Welcome to cycle 1	RWS Victoria	38 + 41*
30 Nov	Pre-Rheingold reception	Welcome to cycle 2	RWS Victoria	26 + 57*
9 Dec	Pre-Rheingold reception	Welcome to cycle 3	RWS Victoria	19 + 41*

* **Pre-Rheingold receptions.** Visitors came from interstate and international Richard Wagner Societies, including New Zealand, Singapore, London, San Francisco, Chicago and Toronto. Also, Stefan Vinke (Siegfried), Bradley Daley (Siegmund), Liane Keegan (Erda), Professor Heath Lees, Opera Australia's past CEO and philanthropy team kindly attended and mixed freely with the guests.

Pre-performance talks. Our Society hosted a 12-day season at the Melbourne Recital Centre: "Exploring the *Ring* with Heath Lees". On the morning of each opera, Heath explored its music on the piano, revealing how Wagner transforms and combines his musical themes into a consistent musical and dramatic whole. (We also glimpsed Wagner's dependence upon certain predecessors, and the dependence of certain successors upon him.) The talks were a musical and intellectual success, but attendances at the 2016 Ring season were down on 2013, and our Society's revenue from the talks decreased accordingly. Throughout the season, volunteers managed a Society table in the foyer, and they signed up 24 members, with others soon to follow upon reflection.

1.2 The following functions were held by our Society in 2017.

Date	Function	Topic/Performance	Speaker/Host	Attendees
19 Feb	Regular meeting	"Ring Reflections" <i>open forum</i>	Janice Carpenter, member	65
21 May	Birthday lunch (Rylands of Hawthorn)	"Happy Birthday" <i>musical performance</i>	Gerry Connolly, comedian performer	55
2 Jul	Regular meeting	"Wagner in Italy" <i>illustrated talk</i>	Dr Geoffrey Seidel, WS South Australia	38
24 Aug	Regular meeting	"Intro to Melbourne Opera's Lohengrin" musical presentation	Dr David Kram (conductor) Helena Dix (Elsa)	92
8 Sep	Youth initiative* (Mentone Grammar)	"Wagner & Tolkien: The Ring & the Rings" <i>musical performance</i>	Prof. Heath Lees	80
8 Oct	Regular meeting	"Thomas Quinlan and the 'All Red' Ring: Melbourne 1913" <i>illustrated talk</i>	Prof. Kerry Murphy, Melbourne University	64

* **Youth initiative.** At last year's AGM, member Noel Whale raised the issue "What is the Committee's strategy for recruiting younger members to the Society?" Committee members Kate Kimpton and Gavin Cornish rose to the challenge and mounted an initiative by Heath Lees to entice young people to Wagner through Tolkien. Heath tackled the thorny, but demonstrably false, claim that Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* was not influenced by Wagner.

2. Individual Members

Many members individually volunteered to perform in the 2016 *Ring*, during which they personified various things from the river Rhine, through the race of Nibelungs, to inclusive humanity. By all accounts the 18 or more *Ring* "vollies" thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

In March/April I presented my 2-hour talk on "Wagner and Visual Art" to the four Wagner Societies of New Zealand, and in July to the Wagner Society of Western Australia, thus completing a fraternal lecture tour of all eight Australasian Wagner Societies.

3. Promoting the music of Richard Wagner in Australia

3a. **Melbourne Opera, *Lohengrin*.** The Committee (under Society Rules as manager of the Society's funds) voted \$15,000 toward the role of Elsa, played by Helena Dix, in Melbourne Opera's staging of *Lohengrin* at the Regent Theatre and Robert Blackwood Hall in August. Its rationale is as follows:

Melbourne Opera is a poorly funded local opera company that has recently embarked on staging the works of Richard Wagner in Melbourne, following its successful *Tannhäuser* of last year. The artists supported by our Society have been young local sopranos playing key Wagnerian roles.

[Note. The Committee holds several champions of Melbourne Opera's Wagnerian initiatives. Committee member Miki Oikawa (formerly Miki Brotzler), who is an assistant director at Melbourne Opera, dutifully abstains from any Society matters that in any way concern Melbourne Opera.]

3b. **Opera Australia, *Parsifal*.** The Committee voted \$10,000 toward Opera Australia's concert version of *Parsifal* at the Sydney Opera House in August. Its rationale is as follows:

1. To transcend Melbourne-centric parochialism in pursuing our Society's aim of the "promotion of the music of Richard Wagner in Australia". In a similar spirit, the Sydney-based Wagner Society of NSW supported Opera Australia's *Ring* in Melbourne. The Committee fully appreciates this production of *Parsifal* as a singular event, but it is equally conscious that Opera Australia will continually *stage* its major Richard Wagner operas in Melbourne (necessarily so for a variety of reasons) and, so committed, recognizes the need to maintain established relations with Australia's major professional repertory opera company.
2. Opera Australia is collaborating with, promoting and supporting our Society's pre-production presentations by Professor Heath Lees for its forthcoming *Meistersinger* season in Melbourne (in November 2018). Details will be announced in due course, but suffice to say that our Society and Opera Australia are negotiating a mutually beneficial collaboration for its 2018 *Meistersinger*, and by implication for future Melbourne-based stagings of the works of Richard Wagner at the highest production level.
3. Opera Australia commits to providing our Society with reciprocal member benefits, in association with the Melbourne 2018 *Meistersinger*, similar to those Opera Australia provided to our members for its 2013 and 2016 Melbourne *Ring*.

The Committee therefore sees its support for *Parsifal* as instrumental in continuing an established working relationship between Opera Australia and the one Richard Wagner Society that happens to be domiciled in the city where Opera Australia chooses exclusively to stage the works of Richard Wagner.

3c. **Melbourne Opera, *Tristan*.** The Committee for the rationale already outlined in 3a (above) voted \$15,000 toward the role of Isolde, played by Lee Abrahmsen, in Melbourne Opera's staging of *Tristan* at the Palais Theatre in February.

4. Priorities

With an unprecedented growth in Wagnerian productions from opera companies as diverse as Opera Australia, Victorian Opera and Melbourne Opera, the Committee finds itself having to balance two competing priorities:

1. Financial support for the productions of the small needy, but ambitious, local opera companies.
2. Financial support for our large semi-national opera company, Opera Australia, on the grounds that its singers, orchestra, conductor and staging conform to the highest standards appropriate to realizing Richard Wagner's intentions.

Currently the Committee does its best to reconcile both.

4. Membership

Membership is now at an all-time high — over 250 memberships, amounting to about 350, counting partner memberships— with a new membership application arriving yesterday and another arriving today. This is a healthy sign of growth for our Society.

Sadly, with an aging society we lose members, and our Society passes on its condolences to the families of the late Ila Vanrenan, Barbara Niven and Rees McCarthy.

On another front, Colin Pyman, who is midway through an extended circumnavigation of Australia by four-wheel drive, has resigned from the Committee, and Ruth O’Dea will join the Committee until elections can be held next AGM. Ruth, as most know, is a tireless worker on behalf of the Society, crucially involved in running our website, distributing mail, and helping her husband Tom with Society finances, and Ruth does bake a wonderful Christmas cake. Tom was totally innocent of, and excluded from, Ruth’s appointment.

5. Bayreuth Ticketing

As a benefit of our Society’s membership of The Richard Wagner Verband International—the International Association of Wagner Societies—members of our Society may now specify their seating area/price preferences when requesting tickets to the Bayreuth Festival, though they must do so through our Society, by filing out the [binding] application form that Tom distributed to everyone. This is a monumental improvement! We now await to see how this year’s ticket allocation pans out in practice.

6. Next Year’s Richard Wagner Productions

(1) Melbourne Opera’s staging of *Tristan und Isolde* in February at the Palais Theatre, with our Society’s supported artist Lee Abrahmsen as Isolde.

(2) Western Australian Symphony Orchestra’s concert *Tristan und Isolde* in August, under Asher Fisch, with Stuart Skelton (our supported artist for Opera Australia’s 2013 Melbourne *Ring*, and now world-reigning Tristan), Eva-Marie Westbroek (Isolde) and Kwangchun Youn (Marke).

(3) Opera Australia’s staging of the Royal Opera House production of *Die Meistersinger* at the Arts Centre in November, with Stefan Vinke (Siegfried of Bayreuth and Opera Australia’s Melbourne 2013 and 2016 *Ring*) as Walther, and Warwick Fyfe (a member of our Society) as Beckmesser. Our Society is supporting the roles of Eva (Natalie Aroyan) and mastersinger Hermann Ortel (Michael Honeyman, who recently played Roger in Szymanowski’s *King Roger*).

(4) Our Society will be holding a season of four *Meistersinger* pre-performance talks with Heath Lees at the piano. The talks will be held, appropriately, in the Lutheran Church, St John’s Southgate, that is immediately behind Hamer Hall.

Happy Wagnering

Trevor

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