



NEWSLETTER OF THE RICHARD WAGNER SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

November 2005. Vol 2, No 3.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT



It is a pleasure for me to review highlights of interest to the Society during the last three months. And we have had some very special events!

First was the concert performance of Tristan & Isolde held in Brisbane on July 30th. This I thought was a real triumph and not just for the quality of the singers. We did expect great things from Lisa Gasteen and John Treleven in the title roles and we were not disappointed. The support cast was equally well chosen and Richard Mills directed superbly. The surprise was the Australian Youth Orchestra that played a key role in the performance with enthusiasm, stamina and above all brilliance in support of the singers. The orchestra clearly had made the most of its three solid weeks of rehearsal time.

The 3rd Act Cor Anglais solo was particularly moving and Kirsten Townsend was given a special ovation by the sell out audience. In fact the whole performance was given a 20-minute standing ovation. Richard Mills will give a repeat performance in the Perth Festival next year. It is worth adding that the Mills' opera Batavia that we have had the privilege of attending in Melbourne (and in Perth) will be performed next year in Sydney.

The highlight of the Societies recent activities was clearly the visit of Heath Lees, Professor of Music in Auckland and Founder of the NZ Wagner Society. He entertained us for 2 hours non stop with what could best be explained as a multi-media presentation - with film, video, piano illustrations and some very thoughtful comments on the Wagner Leitmotiv. He did mention that a concert performance of Parsifal with Sir Donald McIntyre would be held at the Wellington Festival in March next year.

With regard to the approachability and clarity of the Lees presentation I did regret that we did not do more to attract music students to the occasion. I accept some blame for not following through and not encouraging this more. We need our Society to have the stimulus of student participation in our activities and I would appreciate any member's suggestions as to how we should foster this.

Finally, I was reading about Mendelssohn's acquaintance with the Master and that Wagner, as Kappellmeister in Dresden, had referred to the performance of the choral work St.Paul as a masterpiece. Wagner did conduct other works by Mendelssohn and he was clearly aware of the latter composer's use of the "Dresden Amen". I am not sure how much speculation is involved in the link between the "mermaid music" from the Mendelssohn overture "Fair Melusine" and the Rhine music in Das Rheingold ? Could any of our eminent Wagner scholars help me out here?



Ken Muirden

(PRESIDENT)
November 2005



Members of the Wagner Society at the 'Tristan and Isolde' concert in Brisbane: Lesley and Ken Muirden (President), Louise and Stan O'Loughlin, Virginia Ellis and Bob Garlick



[Another Adelaide Ring view](#)

The Richard Wagner Society, Inc. Copyright © 2007 All rights reserved.



**NEWSLETTER OF THE RICHARD WAGNER
SOCIETY OF VICTORIA**

November 2005. Vol 2, No 3.

Another view of the Adelaide Ring production



Most of the written reviews of last year's Adelaide Ring that I have seen have been very positive, particularly with regard to the staging and direction of Elke Neidhardt. One report that is at variance with this consensus and which members may not have seen, appeared in the March issue of Quadrant by Claudio Veliz (an economic historian by profession), an article entitled "Moustached Ring".

He likens many of her innovations to those more appropriate for a Gilbert & Sullivan production - trivialising ham-handed undergraduate humour, with unnecessary and probably outrageously expensive special effects. These include: Thor wielding a small cricket bat instead of a hammer, Fricka attired as something between Dame Edna and Mrs. Thatcher, Siegfried/Gunther k.o.ing Brunhilda, Guttrune with a leg brace, Notung in a pond instead of a tree, the Wunderbar, and last but not least, the "game" in Act 3 of *Gotterdammerung* consisting of "prisoners" wearing hoods depicting inmates of the infamous Abu Graib prison in Bagdad. The last is apparently intended to make a cheap postmodernist politically correct statement of disapproval of Messrs. Bush, Howard and Blair. I thought this detail to be odd at the time, and it has not received much (any?) notice from commentators, but Veliz's article indicates that it is part of the collective directors' agenda.

Most of these changes are at variance with Wagner's libretto and his dramatic intentions. We have been denied a picture of his *Gesamtkunstwerk* in this production. Many of the "jokes" could be interpreted as being at Wagner's expense, rather than being in sympathy with his directions. Veliz also suggests that the ideas for this direction stem from the DDR (the former "German Democratic Republic"), notably the Bolshevik stage director Vsevolod Meyerhold who influenced Gotz Friedrich, whose Covent Garden production was "centralised" by a "single mighty piston". This may be drawing a long bow, but we can recognise the piston.

Veliz likens this production to a painting by Marcel Duchamp in which he added a moustache and goatee to a reproduction of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. He clearly has a point. It is to be hoped that future productions of the Ring in the Bayreuth by the Torrens (or elsewhere) will make a more serious attempt to realise Wagner's dramatic vision. Innovative variations are the soul of theatre, and the director's challenge is to do this without compromising the impact of the work.

Peter G. Baines

October 2005

P.S. The 2004 Adelaide 'Ring' won 10 awards from 11 nominations for the Helpmann awards, including:

- Best Opera.,
- Best Director: Elke Neidhardt
- Best male performer: John Wegner
- Best female performer: Lisa Gasteen
- Best musical direction: Asher Fisch

--editor.

[Presidents report](#)



[Editor's report](#)

The Richard Wagner Society, Inc. Copyright © 2007 All rights reserved.



**NEWSLETTER OF THE RICHARD WAGNER
SOCIETY OF VICTORIA**

November 2005. Vol 2, No 3.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



As the New Zealand is going to present two semi-staged performances of 'Parsifal', on 17th and 19th March 2006, everyone needs to brush up on Grail knowledge. Especially with the current interest in the subject stimulated by Dan Brown's, 'da Vinci Code'.

Grail legends originate in primitive nature rituals denoting death represented by Winter and rebirth by Spring. Later, Celtic legends associated the Winter, or devastation of the land, with the death or sickness, or impotence of a leader or deity. eg, the Fisher King. The use of certain objects with sexual connotations, eg spear, or cup, led to a cure of the afflicted one, and the land was restored to health and prosperity.

These legends were incorporated into Indo-European folk tales, and they developed Christian connotations. The earliest was Chretien de Troyes late 12th century tale; 'Percival, or the Story of the Grail. Chretien's grail was a dish or plate. The author died before it's completion. Robert de Boron's 'Percival' and 'Joseph d'Arithamie' written in the early 13th century added Christian elements, describing the grail as being the cup that Christ drank out of at the last supper, and later was used to collect his blood. The spear of Longinus, the Roman soldier who wounded Christ's side was included here.

There were other French legends around this time; 'L'Estoire del Saint Graal', and 'Queste del Saint Graal', which included some of the Arthurian material.

Wolfram von Eschenbach's middle high German 'Parzival' took up where Chretien left off. It is a vast 16 book epic, coupling the history of Parzival and Gawan. This was Wagner's major source, which he first read in Marienbad whilst convalescing in 1845. Here the 'Grail Idea' was incubated, and then first took form in "Lohengrin". Parzival was going to make an appearance in the last act of "Tristan", visiting the dying Tristan, but this idea was soon dropped. Wagner wrote the first draft of "Parzival"(as he spelt it then) in 1857, and even though this draft disappeared, it very closely resembled the final version 20 years later. It is interesting to note that this appeared shortly after Wagner read, and was overwhelmed with the writings of Schopenhauer, and was related to him writing a draft for a Buddhist drama, "die Sieger"(the victors).

Wolfram's grail was a stone; the grail bearers were women, and the grail kingdom was a highly sensual society. Wagner modified, and compressed Wolfram's epic to fit in with his ideas of 'Mitleid' or compassion, and his other Schopenhauerean and Buddhist renunciation themes. Hence the Christian, and rather puritanical symbolism, and Wagner's grail became a chalice, and the spear took on much greater significance.

Later grail legends, eg, Mallory's "Morte d'Arthur", and Tennyson's "Idylls of a King" followed the Arthurian stories, and the Quester knights Galahad, and Lancelot became the central characters.

The Grail remains a mystery, and ownership has been attributed to the Knights Templar around the Languedoc area of southern France; Glastonbury, and Avalon, in West England; and Rosslyn Chapel, in Scotland.

More recently, the authors of "Holy Blood, Holy Grail" suggest that Jesus may not have died on the cross, but married Mary Magdalene, and sired a 'sang real' (San Graal), or royal bloodline, and from this the 'da Vinci Code' sees the grail as a set of secret missing documents pertaining to Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and their descendants, and this book has turned Rosslyn chapel, near Edinburgh, and a couple of small towns in the Languedoc area of France into tourist attractions. Reportedly, Wagner visited Rennes le Chateau, and was seen poking around there prior to composing "Parsifal".

All food for thought!!

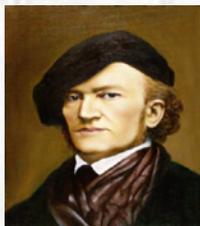
STAN O'LOUGHLIN

[View of the Adelaide Ring](#)



[Local Wagner events](#)

The Richard Wagner Society, Inc. Copyright © 2007 All rights reserved.



NEWSLETTER OF THE RICHARD WAGNER SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

November 2005. Vol 2, No 3.

WAGNER EVENTS

LOCAL WAGNER EVENTS



* ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CHRISTMAS PARTY:

This is to be held on Monday 28th November.,
at: The Soroptimist Society Hall, 383 Toorak Rd, Sth Yarra.

Time: 8-00 PM.

The meeting will be followed by drinks, and refreshments.

* PARSIFAL, a film by Hans Jurgen Syberberg:

Weds 30th November 2005 at 6-30 pm.

At: Cinema 2, ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image),
Federation Square. Melb.

This film features the voices of Yvonne Minton, as Kundry; and Rainer Goldberg, as Parsifal.

Admission is by Membership, procurable on the night for \$18-00(full) or \$15-00 (concession). This membership includes 3 other films over 4 consecutive weeks. It is recommended to get there approx 1 hour before screening starts.

Further Information: 86632583, or [web site](#)

OVERSEAS WAGNER EVENTS

* **PARSIFAL:** The New Zealand International Arts Festival, in partnership with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra will present two semi-staged performances of Wagner's 'Parsifal' during the 2006 Festival. The Festival runs from 24th Feb to 19th March. Parsifal is scheduled to play on 17th and 19th March, 2006. The cast is an all New Zealand affair.

CAST:	Gurnemanz	Sir Donald McIntyre
	Amfortas	Paul Whelan
	Parsifal	Simon O'Niell (recently understudied Placido Domingo in die Walkure at The Metropolitan,)
	Kundry	Margaret Medlyn(Adelaide 2001)
	Titural	Grant Dickson

Klingsor Martin Snell. (Steersman at 2005 Bayreuth Festival
Flying Dutchman)

Conductor : Anthony Negus and

Producer : Bernd Benthak

For those who are looking for some information on Parsifal there are a number of useful and interesting works to peruse;

Peter Basset Wagner's Parsifal; The Journey of a Soul

Lucy Beckett Parsifal

J Calder Parsifal, The ENO guide

And a very interesting [Parsifal Website](#) contains a vast amount of information on the subject.

* THE ORANGE COUNTY RING:

One solitary Ring cycle is being presented at the Orange County Arts Centre, on: October 6, 7, 9 and 11, 2006 by the Kirov Opera. This includes the entire Kirov Opera Company, it's orchestra and conductor, Gurgiev.

The Wagner Society of Southern California has access to tickets, which vary between \$1000-00 and \$1600-00 per person for the whole cycle.

Contact Sherwin Sloan, Chairman: 3332 Deronda Drive., Los Angeles, California 90068 USA. 323/467-4725, or fax: 323/467-8005.

OTHER RINGS:

Toronto	Canadian Opera 3 Cycles: Sept 9th -17th 2006., Sept 19th - 24th 2006. and Sept 27th - Oct 1st 2006.
Budapest:	January 6th, 8th, 11th and 14th 2006
Vienna	January 7th, 8th, 13th and 15th 2006
	2 Cycles:
Paris: Chatelet	March 30th, April 1st, 3rd and 6th and April 8th, 10th, 12th and 15th. 2006
	4 cycles;
Copenhagen:	April 25th, 26th, 28th, and 30th May 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th May 16th, 17th, 19th and 21st May 23rd, 24th, 26th and 28th, 2006.
Dresden	June 5th, 11th, 17th and 21st, 2006

OTHER OPERAS:

Lohengrin	Metropolitan Opera	April 17th, 20th, 24th, 29th and May 3rd and 6th, 2006
Parsifal	Metropolitan Opera	May 12th, 15th and 18th, 2006
Parsifal	Frankfurt; (with Stuart Skelton in title role)	April 23rd, 27th, 30th 2006

INTERNATIONAL RICHARD WAGNER CONGRESS;

Tallinn-Helsinki
Finland 24th - 27th May 2006

Congress Hotline: +49-(0)
251-730 83

[From the editor's desk](#)



[Whispering woodbird](#)

The opinions expressed herein are those held by the specified author and are not necessarily those of the Wagner Society.

The Richard Wagner Society, Inc. Copyright © 2007 All rights reserved.



NEWSLETTER OF THE RICHARD WAGNER SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

November 2005. Vol 2, No 3.

WHISPERING WOODBIRD



The 'Dream Ring' has been assembled by Richard Caniell of the Canadian based International recorded Music Society. It is an amalgam of Metropolitan Opera broadcasts of 1937 through 1940, with the concluding opera sourced from the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts of 1936 and 1951, a Covent Garden performance of 1937, and the Furtwangler/La Scala performance of 1950. Apparently it has been constructed such that the joins are hardly discernible, which is a work of art itself.

It includes Kirsten Flagstad as Brunnhilde, Lotte Lehmann as Sieglinde, Lauritz Melchior as Siegmund, and Siegfried, Friedrich Schorr as Wotan, and countless others. This is something to look forward to when it becomes generally available. Watch this space. I shall keep in touch with developments.

There were rumours that the 2006 Bayreuth Ring Cycle would include a reworking of some of the previous Flimm Ring. According to the rumour, when Tankred Dorst took over after Lars von Trier withdrew, it would not be possible in the limited time available, to mount a completely new production. Some may be relieved that von Trier has gone, and hope that little of his input will be evident. After seeing 'Dogville' in which one of von Trier's arty-farty innovations was to do away with sets of houses, streets, etc, and replace them with chalk markings of same, it would be feasible that the same could occur on the stage at Bayreuth. Maybe Dorst, and bit of Flimm is a blessing.

Sadly, it seems that Lisa Gasteen is not singing Brunnhilde in this new Ring, the role going to Linda Watson who sang Ortrud in Lohengrin.

Stan O'Loughlin

[Wagner events](#)



[Tristan and Isolde](#)

The opinions expressed herein are those held by the specified author and are not necessarily those of the Wagner Society.

The Richard Wagner Society, Inc. Copyright © 2007 All rights reserved.



NEWSLETTER OF THE RICHARD WAGNER SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

November 2005. Vol 2, No 3.

Tristan und Isolde, Bayreuth 2005



A new production aims to try to put forward something new about a work.

The main comments relate to the music and the singing, but the actual staging often represents an alteration from the previous productions of the same work. Thus comments about this new production relate to the staging. This can be "Space". Bayreuth has a large stage, and frequently there is a lot on it. This was not so in this production, which became increasingly obvious as the production unfolded. The body of the stage is enclosed by a "horse shoe shaped cyclorama" in two layers on the top of which is a roof. This contains different lighting in each act, and the upper and lower segments of the enclosing wall vary in each act. There are doors at the back of this space.

Act 1 takes place in the lounge in an ocean cruise ship. Lounges, tables and many small chairs make up the scenery in which Isolde (Nina Stemme) and Brangäne (Petra Lang) find themselves. Considering all that has gone before in the drama in Ireland, the anger of Isolde is dramatically portrayed against the more conciliatory Brangäne. Together they were very dramatic, and Isolde illustrated her anguish with much chair throwing and kicking, making use of the props provided. This treatment of chairs seems to have become a somewhat regular dramatic event in Germany. Later, after the arrival of Tristan (Robert Dean Smith) we witnessed a great scene with Isolde which rounded up his previous adventures in Ireland. There seemed to be a lack of passion in what should be the climax of the act when the effects of the love potion, replacing the poison, took their effect.

The space in Act 2 was empty, except for two square stools together. The hall itself resembled a dance theatre which could have had seats around the edge where those waiting to be asked to dance sat, and hoped. This concept was added to by the dress of Isolde, bright coloured, knee-length and supplemented with white gloves, waiting, with Brangäne nearby. The outfit was reminiscent of the 50's or early 60's. The awaiting by Isolde, the lights extinguished and the meeting leading to the famed Love-Duet were enthusiastically presented. There was no physical intimacy. However, that would have been out of place in a hall used as a meeting place rather than one for consummation.

König Mark (Kwangchol Youn) gave a powerful, but sensitive performance. It was phrased with such emotion, asking for answers, but at the same time knowing that none could be given. This was a little masterpiece.

Tristan, mortally wounded and brought to Brittany by Kurwenal (Andreas Schmidt) lies on a modern hospital bed found in an intensive-care ward. It is the only bed in the space, and the lower wall is covered with plastic sheeting. There are tubes, drainage bottles and other medical equipment around the walls. The great Tristan monologues were a delight, full of hope and longing, His voice seemed to have aged while waiting for the merry tune indicating Isolde's arrival. Stumbling out of bed around the surrounding rails he fell, and died as Isolde arrives. Throughout the performance, Kurwenal has been portrayed as the older advisor and friend given the charge of looking after him. He was hurt at the end of Act 2, and was a constant minder in this

third act. Looking down on his dead master with sadness and respect, the sheets of the bed were straightened and with reverence brought up to cover the pillow. His life's work and duty to his master had been done. After Isolde's final notes she slides under these sheets.

The performance of Nina Stemme has grown in stature since her Glyndebourne performance, and Robert Dean Smith used his ringing tones to great advantage. They were a fine couple. The production of Christoph Marthaler and Anna Viebrock worked as a concept and focused attention on the singers. The orchestra under Eui Oue produced the fine sound that we enjoy from that orchestra, but somehow the tension and sensuality of the score was not as gripping as it could have been.

David Gale

[Whispering Woodbird](#)



The opinions expressed herein are those held by the specified author and are not necessarily those of the Wagner Society.

The Richard Wagner Society, Inc. Copyright © 2007 All rights reserved.