

WAGNER NEWS



NEWSLETTER OF THE
RICHARD WAGNER SOCIETY
OF VICTORIA INC.

NOVEMBER 2014

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This year has been another successful, if somewhat quieter, year for the Society with a series of events, quarterly newsletters and an active website. This is all due to the members of our voluntary committee who commit their ideas, time and expertise consistently and take on additional responsibility when required and I would like to thank them all on my own and on your behalf.

For the year in review, February saw our first meeting and the opportunity to meet Simone Young who shared her musical experiences and her passion for Wagner. Thanks go to Ruth and Tom O'Dea for the venue and to Lindsay Thorrington for being MC for the evening.

A 'Ring Wrap' was held in March to recall and celebrate the *Ring* in Melbourne. Presentations by Aubrey Schrader, Richard Reed, Vonne Greenberg and Liz Oley were followed by comments from the audience. There was much vigorous discussion and information that was passed on to Opera Australia.

In May Warwick Fyfe, guest speaker at our Wagner Birthday lunch at the RACV, prompted much 'food for thought' with his theme of attitudes to culture, European culture and current popular culture.

Deborah Humble, with Raymond Lawrence, piano and Jennifer Brasch viola, entertained a large audience in June at MLC with a recital of songs by German composers.

Thanks again to our MC Lindsay Thorrington.

I was in Graz for the International Wagner Conference at this time and attended the Delegates Meeting which elected a new president and board to serve for five years. Within the business of the meeting a successful motion required that a proposal for proxy voting "be presented to the board by December 2014". The reviewed and legally vetted bylaw on proxy voting is to be voted on at the RWVI Congress in Dessau in May 2015 which I will attend. I have renewed confidence in the Verband for within the new governing body there is a greater emphasis on internationalism and the concerns of the distant societies.

In August, Federation Hall, Southbank was the venue for the film *Wagner—A Genius in Exile*, a documentary about places linked to Wagner rather than his music. We own the DVD and members are able to borrow it by submitting a request to the secretary.

Lately the focus has been on 2015 and the Victorian Opera production of *The Flying Dutchman* in February. We are supporting Warwick Fyfe in the role of Daland and he has sent us a warm thank you. There is more Wagner in Sydney in June and our full program of events for 2015 will be determined by the new committee. There are opportunities for new people to join our committee, for two longstanding committee members retired in 2014.

Aubrey Schrader, founding president and one of the initiators of the Richard Wagner Society, has served on the committee since its inception. For 33 years Aubrey has guided and advised the Society through many changes, usually in a leadership role as a member of the executive. Our thanks are extended to Aubrey for an unparalleled level of service and commitment.

Stan O'Loughlin has retired after many years of service, including three terms as president, but he has not retired from his role as editor of the newsletter. Thank you Stan for your inspiration and work and we look forward to the continuation of these excellent newsletters, produced in collaboration with Dawn Volz, that have become a model for those of some other Wagner societies.

I am honoured to be undertaking a second term as president and I look forward to meeting many of you at events next year, starting perhaps with *The Flying Dutchman* presentation we are arranging in January. Watch for details in letters or emails and always remember our excellent website:

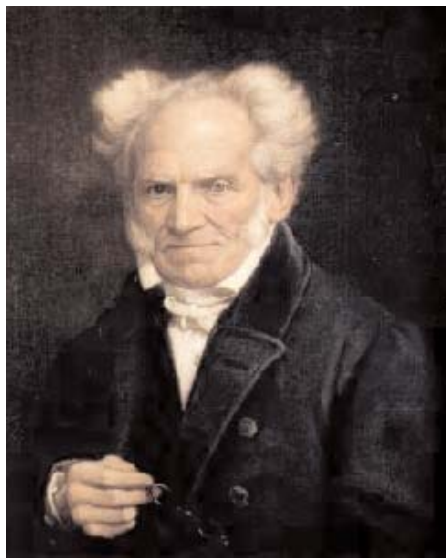
www.wagnermelb.org.au

—Shirley Breese
President



EDITORIAL COMMENT

A bit on Schopenhauer



As there is to be a Heath Lees talk on *Tristan* next year, and a book review on *Wagner and Schopenhauer* (above), a few comments on the philosopher may be helpful. For those wanting much more depth and detail, I refer you to *The World as Will and Representation* by Schopenhauer, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* and *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* and *Aspects of Wagner*, all by Bryan Magee.

Schopenhauer took the ideas of Emmanuel Kant, and corrected and completed the works of Kant, leaving a single Kantian-Schopenhauerian philosophy, rather than two separate ones. Schopenhauer believed Kant was right to divide total reality into the phenomenal (i.e. what we perceive as reality) and the noumenal (that which cannot be perceived or understood). Kant believed there was a causal relationship between the

known and the unknown. Schopenhauer thought that the phenomenal and noumenal worlds were the same reality, part of which was understood, and part of which was indescribable and amorphous. He called the latter 'the Will', which is responsible for all desires, instincts and unconscious behaviours.

He thought that as long as we are given up to the throngs of desire with its constant hopes and fears, we can never obtain lasting happiness or peace. Basically he divided reality into the conscious and the unconscious.

Western philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Spinoza, Leibniz, Fichte, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche developed a Western view of the mind which foreshadowed Freud's theories. In short, the unconscious was not discovered by Freud.

As physical objects in space and time, our human bodies are manifestations of the undifferentiated one that is noumenal, or unconscious. This is the basis of Schopenhauer's morality. It is only in the world of phenomena that we appear to be separate individuals. In the ultimate ground of our being, i.e. the noumenal, we are one and undifferentiated. This to Schopenhauer explains compassion, or the ability of human beings to identify with others and be able to feel for one another and share suffering and joy (cf. Carl Jung's collective unconscious).

Schopenhauer believed that one could get some release from the practical phenomenal world of suffering and desire through the arts, in particular music, which he felt was non-representational and could allow us to see into the heart of things, if only momentarily. He also wrote in his metaphysics of sexual love that the fullest expression of the individual personality was in a loving sexual relationship. Here the barriers of selfhood

can be transcended and the individual loses a sense of self and experiences the oneness with another person in the sexual act. This idea comes into play in *Tristan and Isolde*.

He also studied Eastern philosophy and Buddhism in particular, and Wagner was influenced by him to follow suit. Schopenhauer believed that the ultimate and only way to 'Nirvana', or complete peace, was denial of the will to live. For this he is regarded as the supreme pessimist.

Many scholars believe that Schopenhauer had a profound influence on Wagner's thinking and dramatic and musical development. There is no doubt he did have an influence, but some (see book review on page 6) think the influence has been overdone and others think nearly everything after and including the *Ring* is Schopenhauerian.

One has to remember that Wagner was obsessed with renunciation and redemption, and love and death, long before he read Schopenhauer. He had arrived at the idea of the primacy of music over drama in Act I of *Walküre*, and it well may be that Wagner had developed the very ideas that are attributed to Schopenhauer before he read him, and that his reading of Schopenhauer triggered a 'great minds think alike' reaction.

—Stan O'Loughlin



Members' contributions are very important for the continuation of Wagner News. All ideas, opinions and impressions of Wagner's works, articles and books are of great value, and will be included in the newsletter if possible.

WAGNER DAYS IN BUDAPEST—JUNE 2015

Budapest Wagner Days have just concluded and already many people have booked for 2015. There is information online at: <https://www.mupa.hu/en/events/wagner-in-budapest/wagner-in-budapest-2015>

The 2015 Wagner Days Festival will include: *The Ring of the Nibelung*, performed in four days, and *The Flying Dutchman*.

The dates are: *Das Rheingold*: June 11, 2015; *Die Walküre*: June 12, 2015; *Siegfried*: June 13, 2015 and *Götterdämmerung*: June 14, 2015. *The Flying Dutchman* will

be performed on June 20, 22 and 24, 2015.

When I attended the Verband Conference in Graz and the Wagner Days in Budapest this year I met the president of the Budapest Wagner Society. Through this contact, members of the RWS may be included in a Wagner allocation of tickets he has arranged.

If you are interested please contact me: breeseshirley.s@gmail.com for details about contacting the Budapest Wagner Society.

—Shirley Brees

Wagner and the Helpmann Awards

Members of last year's Melbourne *Ring* production scored very favourably at the Helpmann Awards, with the following winners:



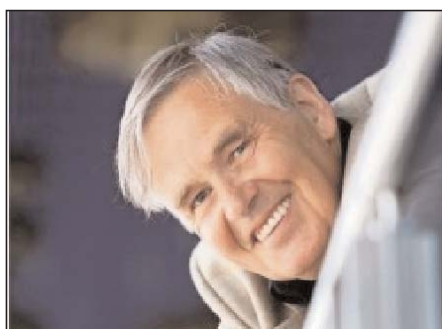
JACQUELINE DARK: Best female singer in a supporting role, Melbourne Ring.



NEIL ARMFIELD: Best director, Melbourne Ring.



WARWICK FYFFE: Best male singer in a supporting role, Melbourne Ring. (Currently singing Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, in NZ). Warwick's website: www.ozfalstaff.com. Warwick now has a Facebook fan page, so members could help raise his profile prior to his tour of Europe next year. <https://www.facebook.com/warwickfyfebaritone>



TERJE STENSVOLD: Best male singer in a leading role, Melbourne Ring. Terje sang the Dutchman very successfully, in a production by the Norwegian Opera in mid 2014. It has been reported that this was to be his 'swan song'.



BEST OPERA: Melbourne Ring

WASHINGTON RING CAST

Washington National Opera (WNO) recently announced complete casting for its first full presentation of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. Three cycles will be presented from April 30 to May 22, 2016 and will be directed by artistic director Francesca Zambello and conducted by WNO Music Director Philippe Auguin.

Contribution packages with priority seating for the *Ring* are on sale now. For more information, go to WNO's *Ring* website.

The complete casting announcement follows the principal casting announcement this spring. WNO's *Ring* cycles feature two Brünnhildes: acclaimed British soprano Catherine Foster, who will make her US debut in Cycles I and II, and internationally renowned Swedish soprano Nina Stemme who makes her WNO debut in Cycle III. American heldentenor Daniel Brenna takes on the role in the US for the first time. American bass-baritone Alan Held, an experienced Wagnerian who has appeared in more than 20 WNO productions, returns to his celebrated portrayal of Wotan.

Newly announced casting highlights include the return of American mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Bishop as Fricka and American baritone Gordon Hawkins as Alberich; the WNO debut of American mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton, the 2013 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World winner, as Second Norn and Waltraute; veteran Wagnerians American bass Eric Halfvarson as Hagen and Christopher Ventris as Siegmund; rising US stars soprano Meagan Miller as Sieglinde, soprano Melody Moore as Freia and Ortlinde, bass-baritone Ryan McKinny as Donner and Gunther, and contralto Lindsay Ammann as Erda, Schwert-leite, and First Norn; and the Wagnerian debuts of two Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists, American soprano Jacqueline Echols as Woglinde and the Forest Bird and American bass Solomon Howard as Fafner.

See more at: <http://www.the-wagnerian.com/2014/10/washington-national-opera-announces.html#sthash.faQbtR5t.dpuf>

THE RWVI (VERBAND) CONGRESS, GRAZ, AUSTRIA



(L-R): Terry (New York), Andrea (London) and Verband Board, Hannelore (Leipzig), Dale (Scotland) (Chair), Shirley, Jacques (Vice-President Verband Board). Hannelore proposed our successful motion that progressed proxy voting.

I attended the Verband Congress in Graz on 30 May 2014 and participated in the Delegates Meeting. Our Society had nominated Andrea Robertson for a position on the board and I am pleased to advise that she was elected. Her report is included at right, for it is an excellent summary of the meeting.

I have renewed confidence in the Verband, for within the new governing body there is a greater emphasis on internationalism and the concerns of the distant societies.

President Thomas Krakow welcomed the members of the new board, thanked the outgoing board for their work and proceeded to the important business of adding proxy voting to the bylaws of RWVI.

The 2013 Congress had approved proxy voting but the old board chose not to act on this.

Hannelore Wilfert, delegate from the RWV Leipzig, introduced the following motion: "We, RW associations of London, Leipzig, Melbourne and Scotland now direct the RWVI Board to constitute an independent committee to develop a proposal for proxy voting to be presented to the Board by December 2014."

The motion was accepted by the majority. This means the board reviews the proposal in January 2015 and forwards it for legal review. The reviewed and legally vetted bylaw on proxy voting is to be voted on at the annual RWVI Congress in 2015. The photo above shows the delegates involved with the successful motion.

—Shirley Breese

REPORT ON THE DELEGATES MEETING AT THE RWVI CONGRESS

The annual general meeting of the Richard Wagner Verband International took place, as always, within the framework of the annual Congress. This meeting was particularly significant, as the five-yearly elections for the president and board of the RWVI were scheduled.

In addition to the regular agenda items, comprising the introduction of new Wagner Society chairs/presidents, the annual report of the outgoing RWVI president, internet statistics, treasurer's report and accounts, auditors' report and annual report of the Stipendien-stiftung (Bayreuth Bursary programme), there were a couple of other noteworthy items in addition to the elections.

Firstly, the outgoing board was happy to report that the International Wagner Singing Competition, held every three years, had now found a home for October 2015 in Karlsruhe, thanks to the generous sponsorship of the city and the state of Baden-Württemberg. Furthermore, an offer was on the table for the competition to be held in Karlsruhe on an ongoing basis, but the AGM voted to accept gratefully—for the time being—the 2015 offer.

The meeting then moved on to the elections, which were a long and relatively complicated affair. In addition to the president, the meeting was asked to vote for two German vice-presidents, two non-German vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, four German ordinary members of the board and four non-German ones. The presidential

election proved to be somewhat contentious.

There were two candidates, the president of the Hungarian Richard Wagner Society, András Bajai, and the president of the Leipzig Wagner Society, Thomas Krakow. Heated discussion took place after the candidates presented themselves to the meeting and the atmosphere became noticeably tense for a while. However, in the end, the votes spoke conclusively for the German candidate, Thomas Krakow.

The rest of the election process proceeded slowly and relatively smoothly thereafter. Some candidates were elected unopposed, while others were in competition. One candidate for the German ordinary board members withdrew, resulting in the board being one member short until the AGM next year. Each candidate gave a short speech, and voting was carried out anonymously on slips of paper.

The new board can be seen on the RWVI website: www.richard-wagner-verband.de under Contact.

It may be worth mentioning here that I stood as a non-German ordinary member and was duly elected (there was more competition in my group than in any other). There has not been a native English speaker, nor a British member of the board, for a good many years, and I intend to work hard to represent Wagner Societies throughout the English-speaking world. I will be reporting regularly on the activities of the RWVI.

—Andrea Buchanan



The winner, Anna Patrys, with Richard Bonynge.



(L-R) Finalists with Richard Bonynge: Diane Kalinowski (USA), Lucinda-Mirikata Deacon (Australia), Anna Patrys (Poland), Richard Bonynge, Justine Viani (Britain/Australia), Tracy Cox (USA)

Inaugural Elizabeth Connell Prize for dramatic sopranos

On a beautiful Sydney spring evening at the Verbrugghen Hall, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the Joan Sutherland/Richard Bonynge Foundation hosted their annual Bel Canto award as well as the inaugural international Elizabeth Connell Prize for aspiring spinto/dramatic sopranos. This is Australia's first international singing competition.

The audience was privileged to hear 22 arias from the 11 finalists in the two competitions, each accompanied sympathetically by David Harper.

The judges' criteria for the Elizabeth Connell Prize are for singers to be under 35 years of age, to have reached a particular technical standard, to show artistry, musicality, an interesting vocal colour, communication skills and the potential for a career in the heavier soprano repertoire.

The first prize of \$20,000, and the winner's opportunity to have an audition at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London, are designed to ensure a young dramatic soprano can be given the opportunity to showcase her potential.

In February, applications were sent out around the world. Fifty young singers from 17 countries submitted a DVD with five arias, at least one of which had to be by Wagner, Verdi or Strauss.

From this preliminary round, 30 singers were invited to sing at the semi-finals, which were held at Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera and La Scala. This resulted in five finalists— from USA (2), Australia/England (2) and Poland (1).

Preliminary finals were held at Sydney's Shore Grammar School on the preceding Thursday, so that two of the judges who had not previously heard the singers could make their initial judgements.

It was a fairytale result, with the thrill of the Polish singer Anna Patrys (aged 33) being the winner. She said she has not been able to afford a teacher or pianist for five years. Moreover, she has changed from mezzo soprano ensemble chamber work to solo dramatic soprano roles, so that she can expose her 'voice, soul and emotions'.

Richard Bonynge told the audience that judging singing competitions is often a trial, but the discovery of Anna's beautiful voice was thrilling. Her final aria 'Mild und leise' from *Tristan und Isolde* left the audience in wonderment and excitement at what may lie ahead for this true spinto soprano.

The English/Australian Justine Viani (aged 32) won the second prize of \$5,000 donated by The Wagner Society Of NSW. Currently based in Cardiff, Justine told me she was thrilled to enter the competition as it is the only one of its kind in the world.

Another singer we should keep a lookout for is Tracy Cox (28) from Texas, USA. She was a finalist in the 2013 Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions. The *Washington Post* has described her voice as opulent, dramatic and expressive, with a golden sheen that is nothing short of breathtaking.

Elizabeth Connell, a South African-born soprano, sang in Prokofiev's *War*

and *Peace* in 1973 at the opening of the Sydney Opera House and had a long association with Opera Australia. Her plans to retire to this country were not realised because of her unexpected death in 2012. She made a legacy that was to be used specifically in financial support of young dramatic sopranos and for the prize to be open to all nations.

A message from her sister and brothers was read out at the final. They congratulated each of the finalists, recognising their dedication and their sacrifices.

At the end of the competition, one could not help but share the excitement that we were hearing voices that may soar to international stardom in the operas cherished by Wagner Society members.

—Susan Cumming



‘Wagner and Schopenhauer: A Closer Look’

Milton E. Brener

Milton Brener was born in New Orleans where he practised as a trial lawyer for 33 years. He moved to New York and retired aged 61 years. He did a Masters in Anthropology and authored 11 books.

This book is very well written and easy to read. It is thoroughly documented and researched. Brener has an intimate knowledge of the major writings of Arthur Schopenhauer and the texts of the mature Wagner operas.

Generally, he believes that the documented influence of Schopenhauer on Wagner’s works has been overdone, and he goes to some lengths, with supportive writings, to quash some of the generally accepted views, particularly those of Bryan Magee.

Magee is a noted British philosopher, politician, broadcaster, poet and author, and is best known as a populist and teacher of philosophy. He has written an excellent book on Schopenhauer’s philosophy and another on Wagner’s (*The Tristan Chord*). Magee is the leading expert on the philosopher.

Whilst I agree that Magee attributes too much Schopenhauer in Wagner, Brener is very ‘picky’ and incisive, and brings in arguments that are based on his excellent knowledge of Wagner’s texts and Schopenhauer’s writings. However, I feel he fails to appreciate the big broad picture that Wagner brings to his works, both dramatically and musically.

For example, Brener analyses *Tristan and Isolde* as the most Schopenhauerian of Wagner’s works in Acts 1 and 2. He tells of the lovers’ desire and yearning for each other in the realm of night, or the unconscious, where they want to meld into each other and become one.

Then he suggests that Act 3, the bright day of reality and illusion is a Freudian idea, because Tristan recounts his childhood and past in much the same way as seen in

psychoanalytical talk-therapy. He makes the case that Tristan, in fact, does not want to die, but wants Isolde to save him.

Freud was not born when Wagner wrote *Tristan and Isolde* and, as I stated in the editorial on page 2, Freud did not invent the unconscious, but developed his ideas from Schopenhauer and other philosophers. I think this is an example of Brener’s narrow thinking.

To me, *Tristan and Isolde* is a continuous musical poem, starting with the famous ‘Tristan chord’ of two dissonances, one of which is resolved, while the other is prolonged, and so on through the whole opera, until resolution is achieved on the last chord. Without words, this achieves desire, yearning, and a longing for ‘death’/‘transfiguration’/melding of two into one. The whole work is like a sexual act ending in orgasm/resolution.

I think Brener attempted to dissect the opera into parts rather than seeing it as a whole. To me, the whole has a Schopenhaurian feel, but more so a Wagner feel. It is not all pure Schopenhauer. There are other influences, such as Mathilde Wessendonck, and Wagner’s musical development.

Brener does not think there is any Schopenhauer in the *Ring* or *Meistersinger*, but, yes, for two-thirds of *Tristan* and, yes, for *Parsifal*.

Brener has some interesting ideas on the *Ring*. While Magee thinks Wotan’s resignation and desire for the end is Schopenhauer, Brener disagrees, stating that there is no free will in the *Ring*, that everything was fated as a result of the initial crime Wotan committed by cutting the branch from the world ash tree. He says Wotan could not freely wish for annihilation.

He uses this as an argument against Schopenhauer’s influence. But Schopenhauer did not believe in free will either, stating ‘...man can do what he wants, but he cannot will

what he wants’. He believed humans were under complete domination of the will, so Brener contradicts himself here. Therefore, there is Schopenhauer in the *Ring*, but maybe not Magee’s version.

Brener does agree that *Parsifal* is Schopenhauerian, but differs from Magee. Magee believes that Parsifal discovered compassion as a result of his sexual encounter with Kundry, and this led him to a compassionate empathy not only for Amfortas but for all mankind.

Brener felt that the path to salvation from the tragedies of the world lay in asceticism, i.e. rejection of sexual impulses along with other worldly pleasures. This is something that Schopenhauer stresses time and time again, and is also evident in the text.

Brener also explores Schopenhauer’s misogyny which he feels is evident in the portrayal of Kundry and the flower maidens. He explores Wagner’s prose sketch of the ‘Victors’, where the idea was put forward that women be included in the saintly Buddhist community. This was something Wagner explored in his last writing, ‘On the Eternal Feminine’. An idea totally at odds with the philosopher’s work ‘On Women’.

In summary, this is a good read with a lot of thought-provoking ideas.

Another article on the influence of Schopenhauer on Wagner is ‘How much Schopenhauer is there really in Wagner?’ by Alesandro Pinzani.

—Stan O’Loughlin



PARSIFAL 2016



In 2016 there will be a new production of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth which was to be directed by 'enfant terrible' Jonathan Meese who has a liking for Nazi symbolism. This production is to be conducted by Andris Nelsons.

Jonathan Meese has been a controversial figure from the moment he signed a contract with the Wagner sisters to direct 2016's *Parsifal*. Many others had reservations, given his unconventional thoughts on Wagner and his lack of experience with directing opera. Other commentators have cited what some have called his obsession with Nazi symbolism or indeed what was described as his pythonesque response during and following his selection as 2016's director.

However, it is none of these factors that seem to have led to him being unceremoniously booted from Bayreuth. Instead the festival's commercial director, Heinz-Dieter Sense, has said the reason is one of affordability.

As Sense said recently, "Substantial financing problems emerged from the very beginning with regard to the planned stage sets and costumes. The available budget would have been substantially overrun. And this is not acceptable."

A surprising statement given the costs of 2013's *Ring* cycle.

A rather 'irritated' Meese has responded to his ousting by saying, "Bayreuth has long ceased to be about art. It's now all about self-preservation, power and the struggle against declining relevance."

And of the Bayreuth management team? He talks of "intimidation" and "a culture of domination and obedience". He also says, "Artists fail at Bayreuth, because art has no home there."

"Meese has not failed Wagner," he says, but "Bayreuth has failed Meese". Indeed, it would seem the "2016 Meese Festival at Bayreuth" will not now take place. Perhaps we might have some Wagner instead?

As of writing, a new director has not been announced.

—From *The Wagnerian*



Tristan und Isolde

DAVID ROBERTSON CONDUCTS AN OPERA IN THE CONCERT HALL

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra 2015 Season has been announced: <http://blog.ssofellowship.com/2014/08/ssos-2015-season/>

The highlight of the season will be an 'opera in concert' version of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, featuring Australian heldentenor Stuart Skelton returning home to perform his first Tristan.

SPECIAL EVENT

Premier Partner: Credit Suisse
Saturday 20 June 2015, 6 pm
Monday 22 June 2015, 6 pm

WAGNER *Tristan und Isolde*
Sung in German with English surtitles. Performed with two intervals, including an hour-long dinner break

David Robertson, conductor
Christine Brewer, soprano (Isolde)
Stuart Skelton, tenor (Tristan)
Katarina Karnéus, mezzo-soprano (Brangäne)
Derek Welton, bass-baritone (Kurwenal)
Stephen Milling, bass (King Marke)
Sydney Philharmonia Choirs
S Katy Tucker visual enhancement

Chief conductor David Robertson continues his series of operas in the concert hall with Wagner's monumental *Tristan und Isolde*. Up there with *Romeo and Juliet*, this is one of the world's great tragic love stories—sublimated passion unleashed, trust and betrayal, and a love potion masquerading as poison. From the suspended tension of the first chords to the lovers' frenzied duet and Isolde's cataclysmic Liebestod (Love-Death), this is what opera on a grand scale is all about.

We're thrilled to bring Stuart Skelton home to sing his first Tristan, with Christine Brewer as Isolde at the head of a top-flight cast. And S Katy Tucker, who brought the sea into the concert hall for *The Flying Dutchman* in 2012, returns to provide a visual interpretation of this powerful drama.





Bayreuth Ring

Long considered the embodiment of German high culture, Bayreuth's opera festival is becoming more notorious for its scandals than its music.

When the chancellor, Angela Merkel, paid her annual visit with her husband Joachim Sauer, for a performance of Wagner's *Siegfried*, she must have felt safe in the knowledge that her presence in the audience would be unlikely to overshadow events on the stage.

Director Frank Castorf's radically deconstructed production of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* was met with boos and jeers when it premiered at Bayreuth last year, culminating in a 15-minute standoff between director and audience. And this year's shows received a similarly vicious response.

Lance Ryan, the Canadian opera singer who plays Siegfried, told Germany's news agency dpa: "I have never come across an audience with so much hatred, so much anger, such a thirst for revenge. They take everything personally. It makes you a little bit scared, and it's really quite terrifying."

Castorf, an experimental east German director drafted in after film directors Lars von Trier and Wim Wenders declined invitations, has updated the four operas that constitute Wagner's *Ring* cycle from the familiar world of Norse mythology to an alternative version of the present where, in *Siegfried*, the third of the four operas, Mount Rushmore displays not the heads of US presidents but those of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong.

Siegfried finishes off the dragon Fafner not with a blow from his sword but with a burst from his Kalashnikov, while Wotan, king of the gods, is a pimp who receives oral sex from Erda, the earth goddess. In one scene, giant plastic crocodiles crawl across the stage and eat one of the singers.

Berliner Zeitung's reviewer wrote that the performance was perfectly bearable as long as one kept one's eyes closed.

Merkel's office refused to comment on whether she had enjoyed the show, though given the notoriety of last year's production, she would certainly have known what to expect.

Castorf, who again came face-to-face with the audience during his only curtain call on Friday, has made no secret of his frustration with the festival management over the past year. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, he complained that the festival's finances had shrunken to "caricature levels", that his key singer had been deliberately axed for the second run of the show, and that the "fear, caution and willing obedience" in Bayreuth reminded him of the theatre scene in the former East Germany. In passing, he even mentioned that he and his lawyer, the left-wing politician Gregor Gysi, were considering suing the festival.



The 2014 Bayreuth festival opened with *Tannhäuser*. Apparently there was a technical malfunction that required the audience to step out for 40 minutes. Again the director, Sebastian Baumgartner, was booed loudly, but the conductor, Axel Kober, and soloists were applauded. The production has been withdrawn after four years rather than the usual five. For the first time in memory there were tickets available on the opening day.



Katharina Wagner, who has had her contract as Bayreuth Festival director extended until 2020, is directing a new *Tristan and Isolde* in 2015 with Christian Thielemann conducting, Eva Maria Westbroek as Isolde, and Stephen Gould as Tristan. Eva Wagner-Pasquier leaves in 2015, but hopes to remain as a consultant.

A new production of *Die Meistersinger* will be directed by our own Barrie Kosky, a non-German, for the first time in several years, and also an experienced Wagner director. The conductor will be Philippe Jordan.



It has been announced that one half of all available tickets to the 2015 Bayreuth Festival will be sold online beginning February 1, 2015. <http://ticket.btfs.de>

Also, to order tickets via the Kartenburo, complete an order form and mail to: Bayreuth Festspiel. Kartenburo, Postfach 10 02 62, 95402, Bayreuth, or through the internet as above.

The Editor at Klingsor's Bar in Ravello (Amalfi, Italy) outside the Palace Ruffalo where Wagner got the idea of Klingsor's magic garden.



—Stan O'Loughlin

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Matthew Nicholson
John Elliott and Christopher Glasscock
Stuart Brown and Lisa Banks
Pamela Fumell

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Note that there are three vacancies on the committee. Any interested member should contact president Shirley Breese. New blood and new ideas will be most welcome.