



WAGNER
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CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD WAGNER

WAGNER QUARTERLY

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome to the second Quarterly for 2015.

As many of you will know, we held our Annual General Meeting early this year. This was because a number of the committee members (including myself) were to be overseas in late May, when the AGM is usually held in order to coincide with Wagner's birthday. The AGM ran very smoothly, and I was honoured again to be nominated as president. The one significant change on the Committee was the resignation of Peter Murray, and the appointment of Margaret Whealy. I would like to record my great thanks to Peter, who contributed a great deal to the Society in his several years on the Committee.

I am writing this letter in Vienna, where I am about to embark on my second Ring Cycle for this trip. Earlier this month I was in Dessau, in the old East Germany, for the annual Congress of the International Association of Wagner Societies (called the "Verband"), which coincided with a Ring Cycle there.

I mentioned the Verband in an earlier letter. Over recent years it has become an extremely German-centric organisation, and there appeared to be little benefit to overseas Wagner Societies from belonging to it. Indeed, most of the American Societies have ceased their membership. We, the NSW Society, did too, for a while, but we resumed our membership this year because it appeared that the organisation might be broadening its approach and providing some benefits to distant societies. However it became obvious in recent months that there were severe rifts within the governing board ("the Praesidium") of the Verband, with vitriolic emails being sent from both sides. Fortunately, at the Dessau Congress these issues appear to have been resolved, and the Verband now has a new President and Secretary. The President, Horst Eggers, is based at Bayreuth and enjoys extremely good relations with the Festival management. It now appears likely that Wagner



John Wegner starring as John Wegner

PRESIDENT'S REPORT *Continued page 3*

Patron:	Ms Simone Young AM
Honorary Life Members:	Mr Richard King
	Prof Michael Ewans
	Mr Horst Hoffman
	Mr John Wegner
	Mr Roger Cruickshank
	Dr Terence Watson



The 1998 Adelaide restaging of the Pierre Strosser Ring Cycle (Théâtre du Châtelet, conducted by Jeffrey Tate) with John Wegner as Wotan and Janis Martin as Brünnhilde



John Wegner in one of his famously physical performances as Jokanaan and Cheryl Barker in the title role of Salome in Opera Australia's 2012 production directed by Gale Edwards (Photo: Lisa Tomasetti)



John Wegner as Alberich in Elke Neidhardt's 2004 Ring Cycle in Adelaide



2004 Neidhardt's Adelaide Ring Cycle: Alberich (John Wegner) and Flosshilde (Zan McKendree-Wright)

Societies which belong to the Verband will again start to receive ticket allocations to the Bayreuth Festival.

The Ring in Dessau was an overall great success. I had never heard of any of the singers, or of the conductor, Antony Hermus. But without exception they all performed to an extremely high standard. In particular, Ulf Paulsen as Wotan and Lordanka Derilova as Brünnhilde were extraordinarily good. Paulsen also returned in *Götterdämmerung* as a superb Gunther. The orchestral sound was wonderful. As to the production, it was difficult in *Rheingold* to perceive any particular theme. All performers in that opera (including the Nibelungen, who were young children) were dressed entirely in white. The only piece of colour was a red handkerchief in Loge's jacket pocket. In *Der Walküre* the picture started to emerge of a film background, with Wotan as the director, manipulating the actors. Things started to go seriously amiss at the end of Act II when Brünnhilde refused to follow the director's line. Nevertheless, the *Walküre* scene at the beginning of Act III was huge fun, with the girls helping themselves to drinks at a bright coloured bar - rather reminiscent of the "Wunderbar" in Elke Neidhardt's Adelaide Ring. At the very end of the opera they appeared to abandon the film line, and reverted to genuine acting, with an extremely moving farewell scene between Wotan and Brünnhilde. In *Siegfried* the film theme moved towards on-line virtual reality, but it still remained true to the story. Siegfried was played by Jürgen Müller, who not only had a lovely voice, but also looked the part - young and handsome. The final scenes between him and Brünnhilde were wonderful.

A few days later I had a completely different Wagner experience when I went to *Das Liebesverbot* at the Leipzig opera. This was the first time I had ever seen this rarely performed opera, written when Wagner was only 21. As with all his works, he also wrote the libretto. It was essentially a comic opera, and was similar in style to the Italian operas of the day, upon which Wagner later turned his back. Musically

it was exceptionally good, particularly given the age of the composer at the time. Also this was a wonderful production, which brought out the burlesque in the work. Those of us who saw it all agreed that had it been written by, say, Donizetti, it would have long been part of the established opera repertoire.

Finally I would like to remind our members of the several important causes which we, as a Society, have been supporting....providing opportunities for talented young musicians to advance their careers in the German (and specifically Wagner-related) operatic fields. We can only continue this work with the support of you, our members. So I urge you, as the financial year is coming to an end, to seriously consider making a tax-free donation in order to ensure that your Society can continue this good work.

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS:

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Dyer's Raven's Reporting**

COMMITTEE 2014 - 2015

President	Jane Mathews	9360 9822
Vice President	Leona Geeves	9957 4189
Vice President	Colleen Chesterman	9360 4962
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Secretary	Mike Day	0413 807 533
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FOR YOUR DIARY

2015

Meeting on Monday 15 June Concert Details: Wellington Fri 12 June 6.30pm; Christchurch Wed 17 June 7.00pm; Auckland Fri 19 June 7.00pm	For Members able and willing to cross the ditch, the Christchurch branch of NZ Wagner Society will host an informal meeting featuring Simon O'Neill and Christine Goerke, soloists in the NZSO Wagner Gala Concert being conducted by Pietari Inkinen in the Hornbrook Arena on Wednesday 17 June. Details of the three concerts at www.nzso.co.nz/concerts/concert/wagner-gala/	NB venue and time for the meeting to be confirmed
20 & 22 June	WONDERFUL NEWS - Sydney Symphony is building on the success of its previous operas in concert to perform <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> . David Robertson will conduct Christine Brewer as Isolde, Stuart Skelton as Tristan, Katarina Karnéus as Brangäne, Derek Welton as Kurwenal, and Stephen Milling as King Marke, with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs and S Katy Tucker's visual enhancement. Echoes of Bayreuth with two intervals including an hour-long dinner break!	Sydney Opera House @ 8pm
November 25, 27 & 29	Sydney Symphony with Edo de Waart: Prelude to Act 1 <i>Lohengrin</i> .	Sydney Opera House @ 8pm

COMING EVENTS 2015 - STARTING TIMES MAY VARY

PLEASE CHECK THE SCHEDULE FOR DETAILS.

DATE	Some events may be subject to change and further detail in the next newsletter	TIME & LOCATION
14 June	Dr David Larkin: Exploring <i>Tristan and Isolde</i> . A workshop focusing on this great work that is being performed in concert form at the Sydney Opera House. (NB: EARLY STARTING TIME). NO DVD PRESENTATION	Goethe Institut 12.30PM
21 June	A social occasion with members from interstate Wagner Societies to celebrate the performances of <i>Tristan and Isolde</i> and exchange information (NB: LATER START TIME 3PM). NO DVD PRESENTATION	Goethe Institut 3PM
July TBC	Sir David McVicar , opera and theatre director will respond to audience questions on his experiences directing Wagner. 12:30 DVD - <i>Lohengrin</i> Act 1 Kaufmann, Harteros, Bayerische Staatsoper/ Nagano	Goethe Institut Time TBC
9 August	Presentation by an Australian artist assisted by the Society - details TBC. DVD - TBA	Venue and Time TBC
13 September	Andrew Ford , composer, writer and broadcaster: Composers today - Wagner's legacy 12:30. DVD - <i>Lohengrin</i> Act 2 Kaufmann, Harteros, Bayerische Staatsoper/ Nagano	Goethe Institut 2PM
11 October	Neil Armfield , theatre, film and opera director: The Melbourne Ring: Looking back . DVD - <i>Lohengrin</i> Act 3 Kaufmann, Harteros, Bayerische Staatsoper/ Nagano	Goethe Institut 2PM
8 or 22 November TBC	Xmas concert and party NO DVD PRESENTATION	Venue to be confirmed 2PM

Advice about changes to the Program will be emailed to people who have given their email addresses to the Society's Webmaster; the latest updates will also be available on the Society's webpage: www.wagner.org.au.
Admission to each event will be \$20 a Member, and \$25 per non-Member, unless otherwise indicated.

Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)

JOHN WEGNER - HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP OF WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW by Leona Geeves and Terence Watson

At its 7 April 2015 meeting, the Committee of the Wagner Society in NSW was very pleased to accept the proposal by Vice President Leona Geeves to offer John Wegner an honorary life membership of the Society for his achievements in the world of opera and the enjoyment he has given so many opera lovers. The Committee was delighted when John Wegner accepted the offer.

John Wegner is one of Australia's leading operatic baritones, revered by audiences and artists for his ability to deliver exciting, unforgettable stage performances, particularly in Wagner and Strauss roles.

John was helped considerably by the Wagner Society in NSW in his early career and was very generous in coming to talk to Society members at many Sunday functions. He acknowledged this assistance in his recent interview at Opera Australia on the occasion of his award for operatic achievement. Unfortunately John's career was cut short by Parkinsons Disease, which he is treating like a new role.

Born in West Germany, John Wegner graduated as a baritone from the Victorian College of the Arts, but rapidly developed into the rare and much hunted operatic beast, a Heldentenor. From 1981-1992 he was a resident principal artist with Opera Australia, where he performed many leading roles including Escamillo (*Carmen*), Baron Ochs (*Der Rosenkavalier*) and the title role of *Boris Godunov*.

Over a career of more than thirty-years, John Wegner has sung to acclaim in opera houses across Europe and Australia. A resident principal artist with Opera Australia from 1981-1992, John then moved to Germany to study Helden baritone repertoire at Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe where he made his debut as Jokanaan in *Salome*.

He joined Deutsche Oper am Rhein in 2000, performing many major roles including Wotan/Wanderer, Escamillo, Prus, Scarpia, Boris Godunov and Holländer.

John has sung five roles over six seasons at Bayreuther Festspiele, commencing with Donner in *Das Rheingold*, followed by Biterolf in *Tannhäuser*, Telramund in *Lohengrin*, Kurwenal in *Tristan und Isolde* and Klingsor in *Parsifal*.

He has performed regularly in houses including Bern, Royal Danish Opera, La Monnaie, Prague, Leipzig, Komische Oper, La Scala Milan, Stuttgart, English National Opera, Vienna Staatsoper and London's Royal Opera House.

In Australia, he has received four Helpmann Awards, two Green Room Awards and an 'Opera Performer of the Year' MO Award for his work with Opera Australia and state companies. For Opera Australia, John has made an invaluable contribution to the success of many exciting creative endeavours, in recent years performing roles such

as Claggart in *Billy Budd*, Boris in *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Scarpia in *Tosca*, and Jokanaan in *Salome*. Many members would remember his moving and powerful account of Wotan/Wanderer in the 1998 restaging of the Pierre Strosser Ring Cycle (Théâtre du Châtelet conducted by Jeffrey Tate) for which he won one of the Helpmann Awards. Most of our members would certainly remember with great fondness his remarkable Alberich in Elke Neidhardt's much-loved 2004 Ring Cycle for the State Opera of South Australia, for which he won another of his Helpmann Awards.

John Wegner recorded an account of the farewell from Opera Australia on 29 March 2015 in which he said:

"Lyndon [Terracini—Artistic Director, Opera Australia] had a long list of things that happened in my career from which he could ask me questions. I did not have a watch on and I had so many stories to tell, that the session ended after one and a half hours instead of just one hour. The audience laughed quite a lot at my funny stories and we all nearly cried at other time." The comment on John's reminiscences from Kent McIntosh would probably sum up the feelings of many Wagnerians who were privileged to see John in full flight on stage:

"Such a wonderful voice, but as you say, backed up by such incredible stage presence and acting. The man was an incendiary performer in every way... almost hypnotic as he seared his way across stage, particularly in his stock 'dark' characters... and that all the more remarkable as he is one of the nicest men one could ever meet! Such a great afternoon today for one of the great legends of the Australian stage!"

Wagner Society in NSW member and previous committee member Paulo Montoya also remembered a singular talent and person: "Truly special artist and person. Every day watching him rehearse Jochanaan 2-3 years ago was awe inspiring. Wish I could've been there yesterday!"

Fortunately, John has recorded a significant discography for us to continue to enjoy his voice. You can see the details on his website at www.john-wegner.com/John_Wegner_Home_Page/Biog.html, which also contains his biography, and full repertoire with an astonishing list of performances around the world.

You can read John's impressively full biography at Opera Australia's website: https://opera.org.au/aboutus/our_artists/principal_artists/john_wegner.

You can also read John's full account of his farewell function at the Kathryn Morrison Management company's website: www.kathrynmorrisonmanagement.com/John-Wegner.html.

THE MELBOURNE RING CYCLE - IS AUSTRALIA'S SECOND HOMEGROWN RING CYCLE ABOUT TO BE REVIVED = A FIRST?

by The Editor

Your Editor has heard some rumours about a long-hoped for event for many Australian Wagnerians: the revival of an Australian Ring Cycle. After a worthy complete Cycle in 1998 (even though it was a re-staging of the Pierre Strosser Ring Cycle from the Théâtre du Châtelet, conducted by Jeffrey Tate), and a truly memorable Australian production by Elke Neidhardt and her great team in 2004, neither of which were revived, despite great enthusiasm and extraordinarily positive reviews of the Neidhardt Ring, Wagnerians leaving the Melbourne Ring Cycle in 2013 were justifiably apprehensive about the prospects that it would be revived in 2016, as foreshadowed by Opera Australia in its announcement of the 2013 production—let alone in 2019 (seen as perhaps far too in the future to be taken seriously!).

After a generally positive response to the 2013 Melbourne Ring (with most reservations directed at the lack of or understated direction of the work by Neil Armfield and his creative team), most attendees left the performances seriously considering whether or not to attend a revival, should there be one. Would there any point expending too much energy on considering the options (a possible Melbourne Ring in 2016 *versus* a large number of international performances) and making a decision to keep one's diary free for November-December 2016 on the off-chance that Opera Australia would commit to the revival—and so miss out on Wagner performances in other houses not yet announced and not to mention Stuart Skelton helping to open the 2016 Metropolitan Opera season in September by singing Tristan with Nina Stemme!

Nevertheless, your Editor has heard rumours that point to the 2016 revival of Opera Australia's Melbourne Ring Cycle slowly edging towards its official announcement. First, there were names—very important names: Wotan (American Bass-Baritone Greer Grimsley) and Brünnhilde (American soprano Lise Lindstrom)—and American Ring Cycle, by default?? To the delight (and relief, perhaps,) of most of the first audience and those contemplating attending any revival, Warwick Fyfe is mooted to reprise his twisted Alberich, Stefan Vinke his thrilling Siegfried: most of the other major roles will see them filled by familiar faces.

Then there was rumoured “confirmation” that Neil Armfield would return to direct to direct his production: would there be scope and/or interest in taking the Bayreuth route of director's taking the opportunity given by revivals to “tweak” their productions, sometimes in response to audience members' comments? Great joy will no doubt welcome the “confirmation” that Maestro Pietari Inkinen will return to conduct; let's hope that he is given an orchestra of at least comparable proficiency, commitment and enthusiasm as that assembled for the premiere.

A web search for information about Greer Grimsley and Lise Lindstrom quickly discovered their websites (<http://greergrimsley.com/?q=node/10> and <http://liselindstrom.com>) with photos (see the back page), biographies and repertoire. According to his website, Grimsley “recently sang

the eminent role for the Metropolitan Opera's Ring Cycle in Robert Lepage's landmark production in the spring of 2013, directly followed by Stephen Wadsworth's production for Seattle Opera, his 3rd complete Cycle for the company in the last decade.” His other roles include Jokanaan in *Salome*, the Dutchman, Telramund in *Lohengrin*, Kurwenal in *Tristan und Isolde*, Amfortas in *Parsifal*, and this year his début as Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Similarly, Lindstrom has many heavy roles in her repertoire ranging from Turandot to Senta to Elektra and Brünnhilde, and Venus in *Tannhäuser*. Australian audiences will be able to audition Lindstrom as Turandot for Opera Australia in Sydney in June and July 2015; however, for Grimsley, local audiences will have to wait (if rumours be true) until November 2016.

The rumours also suggest the Ring Cycle will again be performed in three rounds starting on Monday, 21 November and ending on Friday, 16 December (Beethoven's Birthday!), with a total of 5 lay days in each round. The prices, a little more expensive for 2016, range from around \$2100 to about \$1000.

Let's hope that the information is released soon so that we can check our bank balances and diaries to make sure that we can attend (again).

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE AN RESOLVED ENIGMA

to be held at the

Goethe Institut, 90 Ocean St,
Woollahra (cnr. Jersey Road)

Sunday June 14th, 12.30pm

DR. DAVID LARKIN (Sydney Conservatorium of Music)

12.30pm - **Part 1**

What's that chord? Tristan and the harmonies of desire

1.30pm - **Recital - Emilie Lemasson**, soprano

Christopher Curcuruto, baritone and **Bradley Gilchrist**,
accompanist

Richard Wagner

Im Treibhaus, Träume, Liebestod, Kurwenal selections

2.00pm - **Afternoon Tea**

2.30pm - **Part 2**

Wagner the Schopenhauerian: night, death, and the
place of music.

3.45pm - **Finish**

DAVID LARKIN

David is a lecturer in Musicology at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He is a specialist in German music of the nineteenth century. His research interests include program music, compositional influence, music aesthetics, and the reception of 'progressive' composers, with particular focus on Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss.