

TEILENZEIT: REPORT - SHARE - LISTEN: MEMBERS DISCUSS RECENT WAGNER PERFORMANCES by Barbara deRome and Roger Cruickshank - May 24

For this meeting we had invited our members to talk about recent Wagner performances they had seen. This had been a regular annual event in the days when the Society played a direct role in obtaining Bayreuth tickets for members. Members were invited on their return from Bayreuth, to talk about their experience including comments on the singers, production etc. This time, the brief was to talk about any Wagner performance and we were lucky to have six volunteers sharing their ideas on a wide range of operas around the world. They were supported by slides which illustrated each production. Roger Cruickshank was the Master of Ceremonies.

Marie Leech spoke about two very recent performances of *Tristan und Isolde* at Covent Garden and the Vienna Staatsoper. Both had stellar casts, including in the title roles, Nina Stemme and Stephen Gould in London and Peter Seiffert and Irene Theorin in Vienna. Marie referred to the deluge of criticism which Christof Loy received for his 'incomprehensible and outrageous' Covent Garden production when it was first staged several years ago. Loy's vision was to create two worlds, one private and one public. The internal world of Tristan and Isolde was shown in a minimalist way as a stage with a large curtain at the back which only opened to show an ornate external world whenever this intruded upon the lovers. The production is now generally viewed much more positively and Marie thought it very beautiful.

Terence Watson reviewed the latest Metropolitan Opera production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (we saw the cinema version) and the Melbourne production of *Der fliegende Holländer*. He focused on singers who 'owned' their roles. Terence was full of praise for Michael Voë's total 'inhabitation' of the role of Hans Sachs but thought that Eva, Annette Dasch, portrayed her innocence by looking like a wide eyed rabbit most of the time. Johan Botha as Walther, was a solid and unconvincing romantic presence, particularly when Beckmesser. Martin Johannes Kränzle, was so engaging. In *Holländer*, Terence singled out Warwick Fyfe as Daland and Bradley Daley, Erik, for embodying their roles so convincingly.

Bill Brooks took us back to two pivotal productions of *Tannhäuser*, staged by Opera Australia in 1973 and 1998. The 1973 production featured Elizabeth Connell as Venus and Pekka Nuotio as Tannhäuser and Glenys Fowles (Shepherd)



Speaker Esteban Insausti, Vice President Leona Geeves, Tim Green and Ms Brejzek

and Neil Warren Smith (Landgraf). Bill illustrated the influence of contemporary culture in the production design. The musical *Hair* was hugely popular at the time and Bill drew our attention to the Cleo Lane style 'Afro' hairstyle worn by Venus and the projections of naked flesh during the Venusberg scene, which were reminiscent of the time.

Elke Neidhardt was remembered fondly as the brilliant director of the 1998 production. Bernadette Cullen was Venus and Horst Hoffman played Tannhäuser. Bill described the imaginative dressing of the pilgrims as people going on a Cooks Tour and Wolfram, dressed as Schubert. A young Jeffrey Black delivered a very moving performance as Wolfram. Maria Pollicina demonstrated real feeling in her portrayal of Elisabeth.

Heinz Kestermann talked about a 2014 production of *Lohengrin* at Zurich Opernhaus. It was conducted by Simone Young with Klaus Florian Vogt as Lohengrin and Elza van der Heever as Elsa. It was a minimalist production with only tables and chairs. The only swan was an ornament on the table. This did not detract from a powerful experience which was largely due to the very fine singing by Vogt. We heard a recording of Vogt singing "In Fernem Land" and it is clear that he is a singer to look out for. Heinz commended the Opernhaus to us for its excellent productions and opera program.

Esteban Insausti focused on the design elements of two productions of The Ring Cycle. These were the Armfield,

Melbourne Ring 2013 and the Götz Friedrich, Deutsche Oper, Ring 2014. He maintained that directors need to commit to presenting a world to the audience and individual, separate ideas are not good enough—there must be a whole work approach. He felt that it was apparent in the Melbourne Ring that the director and designer were at loggerheads, hence no clear vision was realised.

Esteban demonstrated how common it is for directors to borrow ideas from each other with a clever selection of almost identical staged scenes from different productions of the same opera. For example, he showed the uncanny similarities between the Vaudeville girls in the *Rheingold* in Melbourne and the Barrie Kosky Hanover Ring 2009. Another example was the painted mask of Fafner in *Siegfried* (Melbourne) and something similar in the Ruth Berghaus Frankfurt Ring 1985.

Shane Simpson described his first visit to Bayreuth last year and his disappointment and frustration at the productions, during which he booed a performance for the first time in his life, and he and his wife walked out of *Tannhäuser* at the second interval. The Ring Director, Frank Castorf's vision saw the gold replaced by oil while *Das Rheingold* was set in a petrol station, *Die Walküre* was set on an oil rig while *Götterdämmerung* took place at the New York Stock Exchange. "Incoherence" and "bombast" were some of the

words he used. There was general disappointment with the singers but in particular, Johan Botha and Lance Ryan. Shane thought there was a general lack of direction in the production with the occasional moment of beauty but, overall, it lacked passion and emotion. Shane noted that the director did not take a bow at the end. He commented that, while there was a German language lecture on the day of each performance, none was offered to the many English speakers. Non-German speaking visitors to Bayreuth are still offered a poorer experience than that for the native speaker.

Members were then invited to participate in discussion. Some members, who had attended the same productions as the speakers, had very different experiences and this generated lively discussion. However, it must be remembered that we were seeking the individual experience of each speaker and as such, each was valid. This is what makes the world of opera so fascinating.

The afternoon finished with a toast for Richard Wagner's 102nd birthday and a cutting of the cake baked by Barbara de Rome.

Our thanks to the speakers: Marie Leech, Terence Watson, Bill Brooks, Heinz Kestermann, Esteban Insausti, Shane Simpson and MC, Roger Cruickshank

FOR SALE: RARE ARTHUR RACKHAM WAGNER VOLUMES AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE BY WAGNER SOCIETY IN NSW MEMBER

A member of the Society has very generously donated two volumes of Arthur Rackham's illustrated libretti of the four Ring operas: *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* in Volume 1, and *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* in Volume 2. These are limited editions. They are dated 1910, numbered 96 and signed by Rackham himself. The illustrations are extraordinarily vivid. Patricia Baillie, a highly experienced antiquarian book expert and a member of the Society, has examined the books and written the following comments:

"Two handsome vellum bound volumes, Arthur Rackham: Illustrations of The Ring Libretti. *Der Ring des Nibelungen – Ein Bühnenfestspiel für drei Tage und einen Vorabend, von Richard Wagner*. Two volumes. Contains libretti of: *Das Rheingold* & *Die Valkyrie* (vol. I) and *Siegfried* & *Götterdämmerung* (vol. II). Ruetten und Loenig, Frankfurt A/M. 1910-1911. Limited edition, signed by Arthur Rackham. This is no.96. 25 x 19cm, bound in original publisher's full vellum, gilt titles, t.e.g., others untrimmed. Gilt medallion with 'RW' to front cover.

"The renowned illustrator, Rackham, has given us here splendid illustrations of Wagner's heroic Ring

Cycle. There are 64 tipped-in, tissue guarded, colour plates. The set presents very well indeed. There are a few marks and some very light soiling to the vellum bindings and occasional light browning or foxing to some pages. Overall, a handsome copy, in excellent condition, of this rare set.

"Note on the set numbering: For the American and British editions, both also dated 1910 & 1911, some claim that the edition was 1100 or, some, 1150 copies, all signed by the artist. This set is numbered in Rackham's hand as no. 96, making it an early printing of the edition."

Patricia also made enquiries about any other similar volumes of the Rackham libretti. There are currently two sets on the internet market, although it is unlikely that they are as early as no.96. Both are selling for a little over \$A5,000. In the circumstances, we thought that we should make these two volumes available for purchase by our members for the starting price of \$4,000. Anyone who is interested in purchasing these unique volumes should contact Society President, Jane Mathews, by email at mathewsj@ozemail.com.au.

AUDIT REPORT TO MEMBERS

THE WAGNER SOCIETY IN NEW SOUTH WALES INCORPORATED

I have audited the accompanying financial statements of The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated, which comprises the Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2014 and the Income Statement for the twelve months ended 31 December 2014, prepared from the cashbook accounting records of The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated, in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards.

The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated Executive Committee is responsible for the preparation of the financial statements noted above and the information contained therein. I have conducted an audit of the financial statements in order to express an opinion on them to the members of The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated.

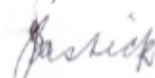
My audit has been performed in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards to provide reasonable assurance as to whether the statements are free of material misstatement. My procedures included examination, on a test basis, of evidence supporting the amounts and other disclosures in the statements, and the evaluation of accounting policies and significant accounting estimates. These procedures have been undertaken to form an opinion as to whether, in all material respects, the

financial statements are presented fairly in accordance with applicable Australian Accounting Standards so as to present a view which is consistent with my understanding of the financial position of The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated.

It was not practical to establish control over cash received for Membership Fees, Lectures and Functions, Donations and Other Fundraising Income prior to the initial entry into the accounting records. My audit therefore, was limited to the amounts recorded in the records.

Audit Opinion

Subject to the above, I report that in my opinion, the financial statements of The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated are properly drawn up so as to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of The Wagner Society in New South Wales Incorporated as at 31 December 2014 and its results as recorded in the accounting records for the year then ended.



Jan Bastick MIPA AGIA JB

Date: 27/2/2015

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT FOR THE 12 MONTHS ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2014

	2014	2013
INCOME		
Membership	18,768.00	17,180.00
Lectures and Functions	18,605.00	27,508.00
Donations	4,876.00	45,445.00
Interest	945.00	496.00
Bayreuth ticket sales	6,300.00	-
Other Fundraising Income	335.00	1,820.00
	<u>48,829.00</u>	<u>92,449.00</u>
EXPENDITURE		
Newsletter	10,718.00	7,864.00
Function Catering Expense	2,247.00	2,399.00
Function Room Hire	3,941.00	6,530.00
Payments to Presenters	3,844.00	8,085.00
Sponsorships	22,048.00	76,440.00
Bayreuth ticket expense	5,992.00	-
Other Operating Expenses	9,302.00	8,233.00
	<u>58,092.00</u>	<u>109,551.00</u>
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	<u>- 8,263.00</u>	<u>- 17,102.00</u>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2014

	2014	2013
CURRENT ASSETS		
Bank Accounts		
Working Account	1,964.00	3,233.00
Donation Account	34,703.00	41,770.00
	<u>36,667.00</u>	<u>45,003.00</u>
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Membership revenue in advance	2,571.00	2,644.00
	<u>2,571.00</u>	<u>2,644.00</u>
NET ASSETS	<u>34,096.00</u>	<u>42,359.00</u>
MEMBERS EQUITY		
Surplus brought forward	42,359.00	59,461.00
Surplus/ - Deficit 2014	- 8,263	- 17,102.00
TOTAL	<u>34,096.00</u>	<u>42,359.00</u>