

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT:

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 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 *Gotterdammerung* 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.



John Wegner starring as John Wegner

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