



WSNZ STEAMS

AHEAD

With almost the first quarter of 2012 behind us the WSNZ programme is now well and truly up-and-running. Over the next couple of months the programme continues with a huge variety of events that range from DVDs to presentations about musical language, women and trains!!

Dunedin gets the ball rolling later this month when members will have a chance to see an opera that was very influential to the young Richard Wagner, Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. Look out for the Watchman declaring a curfew in Act Three – a scene that anticipates *Die Meistersinger*. And here's one for the next cocktail party. Did you know that a military slow march based on the prelude to *Les Huguenots* is played every year during the ceremony of Trooping the Colour in London?

In May our southernmost branch will screen Harry Kupfer's Bayreuth production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* as part of the Wagner birthday celebrations.

On 1 April, and in preparation for the NZSO concert performances in July, Heath Lees will present *Die Walküre & the coming of age of Wagner's musical language* to Wellington. A fortnight later Heath will be in Auckland to present his highly enjoyable and detailed talk, *Women in Wagner's Life and Art*.

Rounding out our programme over the next couple of months is John Drummond who will steam up from Dunedin to Christchurch to present *Wagner: Transition & Railway Trains* in which he discusses the coincidence of Wagner's development at a time when he made important railway journeys.

“THAT'S A FINE MESS.....”

After scoring an own goal with its shameful treatment of Wagner Societies and Bayreuth tickets, German Culture has once again had to pick the ball out of the back of the net.

As part of celebrations marking Berlin's Deutsche Oper 100th

CASTORF RING

In a recent edition of the newsletter we reported that Berlin theatre director Frank Castorf has been confirmed to direct the bicentenary *Ring* in 2013. Commenting on his appointment the writer for the blog *Intermezzo* (<http://intermezzo.typepad.com>) wrote “*Castorf is either an interesting choice or a desperate one. A radical deconstructionist, some regard him as an iconoclastic genius, others as a spent force. Having spent his whole life in the theatre, he only turned to opera five years ago. Typically, his Meistersinger was cut down, chopped up, and performed - in a theatre - by actors and locals rather than trained opera singers.*”

It appears though that Castorf initially hesitated to accept a job where he wouldn't be allowed to tinker with the script, as is his usual practice. But conductor Kirill Petrenko and the two Wagner sisters stood firm. So a clause has been included in Castorf's contract for directing Bayreuth's 2013 *Ring Cycle* - Wagner's words and music remain intact.

In a recent interview in *Die Welt* he describes the story as “*a journey towards the gold of our times - oil*” which will start “*some time after the Second World War*”. East and West will be brought together on a revolving stage, which has already been designed by Aleksandar Denic. One set will be Berlin Alexanderplatz, representing postmodern socialism. As the stage turns, Wall Street will appear. Castorf isn't aiming for clear conclusions, and admits he doesn't know yet exactly where he's going, but he says he's having fun finding out.

Watch this space!

anniversary the Director, Christoph Seufferle, planned a production of *Rienzi*. The premiere was slated for 20 April until it was pointed out that this date happened to be Hitler's birthday. *Die Welt* remarked: “*Hitler's opera staged in Goebbels' opera house during its anniversary year on the Führer's birthday: bad idea.*”

WAGNER WEB WATCH

WE KNOW BETTER....

To some the emotion emanating from the score of *Tristan & Isolde* is almost too much. To others, it appears, there is room for improvement!

Author of the excellent book *The Rest is Noise*, New York Times critic Alex Ross writes an enormously interesting and entertaining web blog named after his best seller - www.therestisnoise.com. He recently reported on a story that appeared in the Los Angeles Times in which David Ng explored two current films that employ Wagner in their soundtracks: David Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method* and Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*. In the former film Lang Lang is featured playing the *Siegfried Idyll* while *Melancholia* features music from *Tristan*. Alex Ross poses the question “*What did von Trier and his collaborators think they were doing when they carpeted their movie with swatches of Tristan?*” Kristian Eidnes Andersen, the sound designer, explains to Ng that he retouched the *Tristan* prelude to “*get more into the emotions.*” As Stephen Sondheim might say, “*Wow.*”

MELBOURNE

& OTHER RINGS

Michael Sinclair has been working very hard on our behalf arranging access to tickets and accommodation for the *Melbourne Ring* in Nov/Dec 2013. Once he has gathered together all the information on the various packages that will be available we will let you know. This should be sometime next month.

On the subject of *Rings*: overleaf you will find a comprehensive, rather than complete, list of *Ring Cycles* and *Ring* operas to be performed, outside New Zealand, from April 2012 to August 2013. With details of the 2012-13 seasons still to be ‘officially’ announced we present you with productions that have been made public. In future newsletters we will not only publish a list of the other Wagner operas to be performed over the next two years but also update you with any changes and/or additions to this list.

April 2012

BERLIN - Staatsoper	<i>Die Walküre</i>	1
COTTBUS	<i>Siegfried</i>	29
DARMSTADT	<i>The Ring</i>	5, 6, 8, 9
DÜSSELDORF	<i>Die Walküre</i>	1
ESSEN	<i>Siegfried</i>	7
FREIBURG	<i>The Ring</i>	2, 3, 5, 7
HALLE	<i>Siegfried</i>	28
MUNICH	<i>Die Walküre</i>	24
NEWYORK - The Met	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	4
	<i>The Ring</i>	7, 13, 21, 24; 26, 28, 30, 3 May
PARIS - Bavarian SO at Th. Champs-Élysées	<i>Die Walküre</i>	24#
RIGA	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	29
VILNIUS	<i>Die Walküre</i>	20

May 2012

BERLIN - Berlin Philharmonic	<i>Die Walküre</i>	20#, 23#, 27#
Deutsche Oper	<i>Die Walküre</i>	25, 28
COTTBUS	<i>Siegfried</i>	20
DESSAU	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	12, 20
DETMOLD	<i>The Ring</i>	12, 13, 17, 20
FREIBURG	<i>The Ring</i>	25, 26, 28, 30
HALLE	<i>Siegfried</i>	1
HANNOVER	<i>Die Walküre</i>	12, 28
	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	26
MUNICH	<i>Siegfried</i>	27, 31
NEWYORK - The Met	<i>The Ring</i>	3; 5, 7, 9, 12
SOFIA	<i>Siegfried</i>	22, 25, 27, 30

June 2012

BIRMINGHAM - Opera North at Symphony Hall	<i>Die Walküre</i>	30#
BUDAPEST	<i>The Ring</i>	12, 13, 15, 17
COTTBUS	<i>Siegfried</i>	16
DESSAU	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	3, 30
ESSEN	<i>The Ring</i>	26, 28, 30, 1 July
FRANKFURT	<i>The Ring</i>	2, 7, 10, 17; 22, 24, 28, 1 July
GATESHEAD - Opera North at The Sage	<i>Die Walküre</i>	23
HANNOVER	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	26
	<i>The Ring</i>	14, 17, 21, 24
LEEDS - Opera North at Leeds Town Hall	<i>Die Walküre</i>	16#, 20#, 27#.
MUNICH	<i>Siegfried</i>	3
RIGA	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	10, 17
SOFIA	<i>Siegfried</i>	1, 3

July 2012

LONGBOROUGH	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	19, 22, 24
MUNICH	<i>The Ring</i>	3, 4, 6, 8; 10, 11, 13, 15
SALFORD QUAYS - Opera North at The Lowry	<i>Die Walküre</i>	14#

September 2012

ENSCHEDÉ	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	30	
LEEDS - Opera North at The Lowry	<i>Die Walküre</i>	16#, 20#, 27#	
LONDON	Royal Opera	<i>The Ring</i>	24, 26, 29, 1 Oct

CODE:

– CONCERT PERFORMANCE
[NAD] – NO ACTUAL DATES
[NOD] – NO OTHER DATES

Ring OPERAS IN PERFORMANCE APRIL 2012 - AUGUST 2013



The Met: *Götterdämmerung*
Photo: Ken Howard



Munich: *Rheingold*
Photo: Wilfried Hösl



Seattle: *Siegfried*
Photo: Chris Bennion



Covent Garden: *Walküre*
Photo: Clive Barda



Berlin: *Walküre*
Photo: Monika Rittershaus

October 2012

BERLIN - Staatsoper	<i>Siegfried</i>	[NAD]
ENSCHEDÉ	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	3, 6, 9, 13, 16
LONDON - Royal Opera	<i>The Ring</i>	2, 4, 7, 9; 16, 18, 21, 24; 26, 28, 31, 2 Nov
LUDWIGSHAFEN	<i>Siegfried</i>	26, 28
MILAN	<i>Siegfried</i>	23, 27, 31

November 2012

AMSTERDAM	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30
BERLIN - Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	2#
	<i>Die Walküre</i>	24#
LUDWIGSHAFEN	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	30
MILAN	<i>Siegfried</i>	4, 18, 22

December 2012

LUDWIGSHAFEN	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	2
MILAN	<i>Siegfried</i>	7 [NOD]

January 2013

MUNICH	<i>Siegfried</i>	[NAD]
PARIS	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	29

February 2013

FRANKFURT	<i>The Ring</i>	[NAD]
GENEVA	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	[NAD]
HALLE	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	23
PARIS	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	1, 7, 10
	<i>Die Walküre</i>	28

March 2013

BERLIN - Staatsoper	<i>The Ring</i>	22, [NOD]
Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra	<i>Siegfried</i>	1#
	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	15#
HALLE	<i>The Ring</i>	3, 5, 7, 9,
PARIS	<i>Die Walküre</i>	3, 6, 10
	<i>Siegfried</i>	21, 29

April 2013

AMSTERDAM	<i>Die Walküre</i>	20, 24, 28 April
NEWYORK - The Met	<i>The Ring</i>	6, 13, 20, 23; 25, 26, 29, 2 May

BERLIN - Staatsoper	<i>The Ring</i>	[NAD].
PARIS	<i>Siegfried</i>	7, 11

May 2013

NEWYORK	The Met	<i>The Ring</i>	4, 6, 8, 11
AMSTERDAM	<i>Die Walküre</i>	1, 5, 9, 12	
MILAN	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	18 [NOD]	
PARIS	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	21	
SOFIA	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	[NAD]	

June 2013

MILAN	<i>The Ring</i>	17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29
PARIS	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	7, 12, 16
	<i>The Ring</i>	18, 19, 23, 26

July 2013

MUNICH	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	13
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August 2013

SEATTLE	<i>The Ring</i>	4, 5, 7, 9; 12, 13, 15, 17; 20, 21, 23, 25
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Additional 2013 Ring Productions

AMSTERDAM, BADEN-BADEN, BAYREUTH,
COTTBUS, ENSCHEDÉ [All NAD]
MELBOURNE - 3 cycles November/December

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2012 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 15 April 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St

Women in Wagner's Life and Art:

Heath Lees examines Wagner's operatic and real-life women.

Sunday, 20 May 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St

Annual General Meeting - followed by Christopher Brodrick's **The View from the Stage Part 2**.

Sunday, 8 July 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St

A Retrospective of Deborah Voigt:

Michael Sinclair looks at the life and career of dramatic soprano Deborah Voigt in anticipation of her appearance with the APO.

Thursday, 12 July 7.30pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall

Deborah Voigt in New Zealand: APO concert that includes Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* and the *Prelude & Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde* with Voigt as soloist.

Saturday 28 July 4.00pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall

Die Walküre: Concert performance:

Simon O'Neill, Edith Haller, Christine Goerke, John Wegner, Jonathan Lemalu & Margaret Medlyn with the NZSO conducted by Pietari Inkinen.

Sunday, 2 September 5.00pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St

Lohengrin – DVD Screening:

Production from the Bavarian State Opera with Jonas Kaufmann and Anja Harteros.

NB This meeting will begin at 5.00pm

Sunday 9 December 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St

Wagner's Early Operas: Terence Dennis presents *Die Feen* (The Fairies) and *Das Liebesverbot* (The Ban on Love) – plus Christmas festivities!

2012/13 MEMBERSHIP

Included with this newsletter, or separately if you receive the newsletter via email, is an application form for 2012/13 membership. We sincerely hope that you will want to rejoin the Society and enjoy the programmes and trips that we offer.

Why not invite someone you know to join up as well!

Christchurch

Friday 20 April 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Wagner: Transition & Railway Trains

Otago University's Professor John Drummond discusses the coincidence of Wagner's development at a time when he made important railway journeys.

Friday 18 May 7.30pm

Venue: TBA

Our annual **Pot Luck dinner** to celebrate RW's 199th birthday (May 22).

Wednesday 25 July 5.00pm

Venue: CBS Canterbury Arena

Die Walküre: Concert performance

Simon O'Neill, Edith Haller, Christine Goerke, John Wegner, Jonathan Lemalu & Margaret Medlyn with the NZSO conducted by Pietari Inkinen.

Friday 10 August 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

On Singing Wagner: Senior Lecturer

in Voice at Otago University Judy Bellingham with John Pattinson, piano.

Friday 26 October 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

The View from the Stage - Part 3 (1924

-1944) Chris Brodrick continues his series on the Bayreuth Festival visitors.

Sunday 25 November 6.00pm

Venue: TBA

Christmas Barbecue

Wellington

Sunday 1 April 4.00pm

Venue: Adam Concert Room, School of Music, Kelburn Campus

Die Walküre & the coming of age of

Wagner's musical language: Heath Lees kicks off the 2012 Wellington programme

Sunday 17 June (Time to be confirmed)

Venue: TBC

Tristan & Isolde: Joint presentation with the Opera Society

Sunday 22 July 3.00pm

Venue: Michael Fowler Centre

Die Walküre: Concert performance

Simon O'Neill, Edith Haller, Christine Goerke, John Wegner, Jonathan Lemalu & Margaret Medlyn with the NZSO conducted by Pietari Inkinen.

NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:
Martyn & Shona Spencer *Wellington*
Marcia Dwyer *Auckland*

FAREWELL

Lloyd Morrison *Wellington*

Dunedin

Sunday, 25 March 2.00pm

Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago

Meyerbeer Les Huguenots – DVD

Screening: a presentation drawn from two filmed versions, 'updated' from the Deutsche Oper, Berlin and 'traditional' from the Australian Opera (Joan Sutherland's Farewell Gala performance). See why the opera was celebrated as "La nuit des sept étoiles" (The Night of the Seven Stars), and what impressed the dramatic ideals of the young Wagner.

Sunday, 20 May 1.00pm

Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum

Der Fliegende Holländer – DVD

Screening: Harry Kupfer's staging at Bayreuth (filmed 1985). One of the most acclaimed Wagner productions of the post-war period.

Sunday, 30 September 2.00pm

Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago

The View from the Stage Part 2:

Christopher Brodrick (WSNZ President) looks at those who attended the Bayreuth Festival between 1882 (the second Festival) and the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914.

Sunday, 4 November 2.00pm

Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago

Women in Wagner's Life and Art:

Some of Wagner's most intriguing operatic characters are women – often appearing as part-angel, part-demon – Elisabeth, Venus, Kundry . . . Heath Lees investigates.

Sunday, 2 December 12.00 noon

Venue: Carrington College, 57 Heriot Row, (Turn right at top of Pitt Street)

Christmas Luncheon: followed by the famous documentary *The Golden Ring* which offers insights into the Decca recording of *Götterdämmerung*, made in Vienna in the early 1960s.

ELIZABETH CONNELL 1947 - 2012

Wagnerian soprano Elizabeth Connell has died aged 65. Auckland members will recall her APO *Elektra* in 2010 for which William Dart wrote *Elizabeth Connell...was the maniacal Elektra to the last twitch and shriek. When blood needed to curdle, Connell could hit top notes with the sureness of a laser and she had the brilliance to match. She will be missed.*

In the last report on the Hamburg Ring John Davidson shares his thoughts on Götterdämmerung.

It was going to be make or break with *Götterdämmerung*, and I'm pleased to say that Young, the singers and Guth delivered! Dalayman was back to top form as Brünnhilde and was magnificent throughout. The other stand-out was Sir John Tomlinson as Hagen. His once noble voice is admittedly now a bit frayed round the edges and he showed slightly worrying vibrato tendencies at first, especially in his top range, so that I wondered how he would cope with the summoning of the vassals. But his voice simply seemed to improve the longer he sang. A superb performance vocally, and he was deliciously evil in character. Franz lasted the distance well as Siegfried and produced some of his best singing. The Gunther and Guttrune of Markus Brück and Anna Gabler were weaker, but adequate. The orchestral playing was fine if occasionally too loud but not as noticeably so as in *Siegfried*. Dalayman could soar over anything and retain her wonderfully rich tone.

The set in general worked extremely well in my view, involving three levels of a stage that could rise and fall and also the main central revolving stage that showed four separate partitions with two levels that could be adapted as required. For the first act, the curtain opened to reveal the previously dilapidated institution ward transformed into a most comfortable two-room flat, clearly the result of some expert renovation! Siegfried was asleep with his head on the kitchen table, and Brünnhilde was asleep in the bedroom next door. The excellent Norns began their scene in the upper level, but descended during it to move menacingly round the sleeping figures. Siegfried woke up and made breakfast and got beers from the fridge (it was going a bit far to have him preparing food for his journey as a response to Brünnhilde's declaration of love!)

The revolving stage then came into play revealing, as appropriate, different segments of the Gibichung hall (painted white and thus recalling the Hunding cottage set without, though, having the same emotionally deadening effect), the 'flat' again for the Waltraute and false Gunther scene, and a sort of hunting lodge for Siegfried's meeting with Hagen and his beer-drinking followers. After Siegfried was stabbed (with his own sword, not Hagen's spear), he staggered, as the stage revolved, into the next partition which turned out to be the 'flat' again. He sang to Brünnhilde here, sitting all alone and then fell forward dead with his head on the kitchen table so that he was in the position we'd first seen him at the opening in Act 1. The

stage then revolved further during the funeral music to bring us back to the Gibichung hall. The constant revolving did become distracting at times, especially when wandering figures or tableaux were involved. Thus the Wotan figure came to check on the dead Siegfried (and indeed was kept generally busy throughout). On one revolution the gods were shown on an upper level sitting motionless surrounded by piles of logs waiting for the final conflagration, as Waltraute had described the scene to Brünnhilde. On another revolution they seemed to be having their final party. On yet another Alberich was shown aloft contemplating a white box-like object which may possibly have been his model of the world as he would have constructed it if he or Hagen had been able to get control of the ring again. And so on. On the whole, these tableaux were quite ingenious, but probably a little overdone.

At the start of the first Gibichung hall scene, Gunther and Guttrune were discovered lolling on a white sofa dressed in matching navy jackets, blue shirts and white trousers, while Hagen, shabbily dressed in tweed, was keenly watching out with binoculars from the upper level. Siegfried was presented as highly incongruous, arriving in the same baggy brown shorts and brown shirt that he'd been wearing since he got out of bed in Mime's hut. He was spruced up, however, for the 'wedding'. Before Siegfried arrived, Guttrune changed into a sexy white dress, and there was an interesting touch. Siegfried was clearly infatuated with her at first sight and didn't drink the potion which she gave him, so that Brünnhilde's words to the effect that she had bewitched him took on new meaning. This, however, did rather make a nonsense of Brünnhilde's later eulogizing of the dead hero. He had simply dropped her instantly when the next female showed up!

When the Rhinedaughters met Siegfried, they were still in their pink nighties, but this time they were splashing about in a bit of water! There was one bad miscalculation at least from our point of view. Simone Young had mentioned at the seminar that *Götterdämmerung* was going to have something special for New Zealanders. Well, the summoned vassals sang magnificently, but did so while striking poses of a haka, while Hagen cavorted like a drunk satyr! The



The final scene. (photo: Monika Rittershaus)
'haka' wasn't especially co-ordinated and was simply ludicrous. In connection with this *Götterdämmerung* when it was first produced, before the Cycle as a whole was put together, the critic Klaus Billand, writing for Opera, and presumably having no knowledge of Maori culture wrote: 'The chorus acted with great commitment, but the choreography (foolish gestures) was too mannered!'

The ending was a real talking point. Although plenty of logs were piled up on the lower level as well, there was no actual fire. The red glow and smoke, however, were quite effective, even if Valhalla could not be seen going up in flames. When the curtain fell, Brünnhilde was in front of it, offering the ring to the Rhinedaughters who rose from beneath the stage level as they'd done in the hunting scene with Siegfried. Brünnhilde then slashed her wrists with Siegfried's sword and collapsed. But there was yet another surprise. The whole stage rose again to reveal the 'flat', with Siegfried now standing facing the back window with his bloodied back to the audience. Brünnhilde seemed to come alive, and moved towards him with outstretched arms. It looked as though it would be a reunion in the afterlife. But before she could reach him she crumbled to the ground, and he never moved from his position. Was this her dying fantasy? It was, in any case, extremely moving.

After *Siegfried*, I have to admit that I had almost been ready to 'abandon the cause' and say that I didn't need to see another *Ring*. After *Götterdämmerung*, my immediate response was that I wanted to see another *Ring* as soon as possible! This production overall had been a mixed experience, with some excellent ideas and some which misfired. There had also been some wonderful singing, but then again some mediocre singing, some fine orchestral playing, but also some playing that lacked the power to move. All in all, though, we ended up in positive territory, with a lasting memory of a thought-provoking and musically thrilling *Götterdämmerung*.

(Thank you John - Editor)