

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2016



Bob O'Hara as Uberto (La Serva Padrona.)

In this, the 22nd President's report to the Wagner Society of New Zealand, I would like, among all the thank yous, to focus some attention on two members. One has been with us from 1995 and after many years of service has recently stepped down from the committee. The other, who may not have been with us from the start, has nonetheless made a huge contribution.

Bob O'Hara has been a stalwart of the Society in Auckland where, with his love of Wagner, he not only provided plenty of enthusiasm but also ensured that high-quality wines were served at the Auckland events, in his famous XL5 wine glasses (the standard for international tasting).

Bob was born in Nelson in 1934 and was always very musical. He learnt the cornet before, at the age of fifteen, studying singing as a bass-baritone, with George Wilson. After his musical training Bob managed a successful part-time singing career alongside his full-time job in the Police force. In 1957, in his mid-twenties, Bob sang in a production of *Il Trovatore* alongside Anita Ritchie who, with her husband John, as Heath Lees wrote, "personally sowed the seeds of the Wagner Society of New Zealand way back in the 1970s." In 1965 Bob sang Curley in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma* and Uberto in 1990 in Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*.

As a member of the WSNZ Bob has participated in a number of the Society's

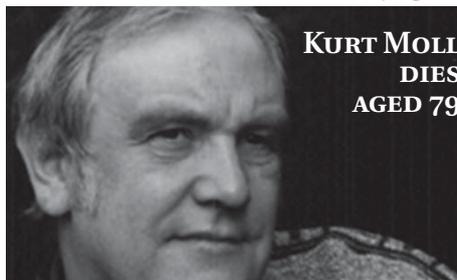


Michael Sinclair

opera trips including both Adelaide *Rings*, the 2013 Melbourne *Ring* and he has plans to attend the San Francisco *Ring* next year.

Bob and other WSNZ members' ability to attend these overseas productions is enabled by the wonderful work of Michael Sinclair, as the organising force behind our overseas trips. These tours require significant advanced planning, which makes Michael's knowledge of future productions invaluable and, coupled with his willingness to manage these trips on behalf of the Society, is greatly appreciated by us all. In addition, Michael oversees our website, contributes to the newsletter, was the Society secretary for a number of years, and one of the Auckland meeting organisers. As the Society enters its mid twenties it is right that we acknowledge those who are willing to undertake the hard work. Therefore on behalf of all the membership, I'd like to thank both Bob and Michael for everything that they have given to the WSNZ and, in

(Cont. page 2)



**KURT MOLL
DIES
AGED 79**

AGM - 21 MAY 2017

FORMAL NOTICE

The Wagner Society of New Zealand AGM is to be held on Sunday 21 May 2017 in St Heliers Community Centre, 100 St Heliers Bay Road, Auckland at 7.00pm.

So far, Committee and Office-Bearer nominations have been received as follows:

President..... Chris Brodrick
Vice President..... Ken Tomkins
Secretary Peter Rowe
Treasurer Jeanette Miller
PR/Liaison Gloria Streat
Committee. John Davidson, Lesley Kendall, Juliet Rowe

If you wish to make a nomination:
Phone: Peter at 09-520 4690 or
Email: info@wagnersociety.org.nz.
to be sent a form. Nominations can also be made from the floor at the meeting.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Included with this newsletter is a 2017-18 membership renewal form. Needless to say we sincerely hope you will be continuing your membership of the Society because, without members we don't have a Society.

Remember also, we continually need new members as sadly none of us is getting any younger. If you know of anyone who would be interested in joining us please do encourage them. We do, after all, offer wide-ranging programmes in all four of the main centres of New Zealand. Programmes that, in their sheer diversity, must be the envy of many other societies.

As you complete your application please also consider a donation to the charitable arm of the Society, the Wagner Foundation.

Kurt Moll's forty-five year career took him to the most important opera houses and concert stages in the world where he sang a wide range of roles that included Hermann in *Tannhäuser*, King Marke in *Tristan* and his signature Wagnerian role, Gurnemanz in *Parsifal*.

recognition of that service, to honour them both with Life memberships.

During the year the Society rejoined the International Association of Wagner Societies (Verband) and, as a result, we received an unexpected quantity of tickets to the 2017 Bayreuth Festival. After an initial concern that we would struggle to fill the allocation, the tickets were taken up very quickly and we will have nine members present at this year's Festival, our biggest presence for some years.

As the newsletter is the principal means by which we can keep in touch, I'd like to thank all those who made contributions. Even though we only publish four editions a year the task is made considerably easier by having reliable contributors.

The task of keeping the Society functioning on a day to day basis has been masterfully handled by our Secretary, Peter Rowe, and our Treasurer, Jeanette Miller. Our thanks to both for their hard work. We also need to thank Peter for the use of the telephone conference call facilities of Minter Ellison that enable the National Committee to carry out the Society business. The members of that Committee are: Ken Tomkins, Vice President; Jeanette Miller, Treasurer; Juliet Rowe, Minute Secretary; Peter Rowe, Secretary; along with John Davidson, Gloria Streat, Lesley Kendall and Bob O'Hara (to the middle of the year). All of them deserve our utmost gratitude as without their commitment, the Society would not survive.

John Hambling continues as our honorary Auditor and, once again, our grateful thanks go to him for keeping an eye on the books.

The National Committee is supported by smaller groups in each centre who not only organise meetings but also ensure they run smoothly. In Auckland we were lucky to have Ken Tomkins, Juliet Rowe, Jeanette Miller, Bob O'Hara, David Colemore-Williams and Helen Kirkman. John Davidson led the Wellington team with Tibby and Adrian Simcock, Anne Mallinson, and Michael Ashdown. In Christchurch the meetings were run by Gloria Streat, John Pattinson, Elizabeth Cooch and Jenny Lee, while Terence Dennis, Lesley Kendall and Louise Kilby looked after Dunedin. It should also be noted that both the Christchurch and Auckland branches were forced to change venues in the last year bringing extra work for their sub-committees.

So with another year gone we have another to look forward to. May you all benefit from what we offer and have an enjoyable Wagner-filled year.

- Christopher Brodrick,
President



*Visions of Valhalla illustration:
The Dutchman rising heavenwards*

WSNZ WAIKATO?

Hamilton member, Leonardo Milani, has recently convened a meeting of Waikato Wagnerians with the aim of setting up a fifth branch of the Society. We will report the outcome of that meeting in our next issue but in the meantime if you know of anyone in the Waikato who could be interested in being part of this group please contact Leonardo at: leonardo.milani@vuw.ac.nz

ANTHONY NEGUS AWARDED

The Sir Reginald Goodall Memorial Award for outstanding services to Wagner's music was presented by the Wagner Society (London) to Anthony Negus who conducted the NZSO in *Parsifal* in 2006.



Anthony Negus (second left) with Wagner Society members: Richard Miles, (l) Jan Leigh and Paul Dawson-Bowling author of the 2-volume The Wagner Experience (r).

WAGNER TO ELGAR

Wellington member Deryk McNamara noted that during the first cricket test in Dunedin earlier in the year, it was entertaining to read of the rivalry between New Zealand bowler Neil Wagner and South African batsman Dean Elgar. Both played against each other in schoolboy cricket in South Africa before Wagner emigrated to N.Z. where he now finds himself facing his old rival.

REVIEW:

Visions of Valhalla –

A POETIC TRIBUTE TO RICHARD WAGNER

John Davidson has written an idiosyncratic tribute to Richard Wagner and I am impressed by his ability to express knowledge and admiration stylishly via poetic skill, wit and personality encased in a quality publication. The illustrations and cover design are excellent.

Here is an 'alternative way' of spending time with the master. Contemplations and narratives are offered that involve Wagnerian characters, facts, themes and music alongside the poet's own quirky vision of the world.

To quote John himself from the introduction, 'the poems are a mix of the serious and not-so-serious'. They're all linked in some way to Richard Wagner and for Wagner enthusiasts it is fun working out how and marvelling at the influence the man and his music has had in the world.

For example in *What value an opera?* (p 70) he talks about German stamps that featured Wagnerian subjects and whose issue coincided with the 3rd Reich. Playfully he considers the increasing monetary values of 9 stamps over that period, beginning with *The Flying Dutchman*, *Lohengrin*, *Siegfried* and so on - up to *Parsifal*. However he points to 'one significant canonical omission' *Götterdämmerung* and links its value to May 1945 'when even the bunker was crumbling'.

I was drawn to *Cosima* because she is of particular interest to me and because there is a photo accompanying the poem – a splendid sculpted head of her by Arno Breker. Like the other poems *Cosima* delivers a number of well-crafted facts before modulating to a darker tone – to ponder another possible reality which in turn gives way to a final touch of wit, a cruel but true part of her legacy. 'And she had the nose to sniff out competition.'

For those who have been able to ignore or dislike Wagner, or haven't had the inclination to get to know him, I think that the poems might be frustrating and less appealing. However, the notes at the back are useful in this respect.

I am not a regular reader of poetry and often approach it with dread because I've experienced bewilderment and impatience many times in the past. However, I was delighted with these poems and found them very entertaining.

- Jenny Lee, Christchurch

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2017 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 23 April at 3.30pm

Please note earlier starting time

Venue: *St Heliers Community Centre, 100 St Heliers Bay Road, Auckland*

Tristan und Isolde: Katharina Wagner's staging from 2016 Bayreuth Festival with Christian Thielemann, Stephen Gould, Evelyn Herlitzius and Christa Mayer

Sunday, 21 May at 7.00pm

Venue: *St Heliers Community Centre, 100 St Heliers Bay Road, Auckland*

WSNZ AGM followed by **Behind the**

Score: The Tristan Effect: Concert featuring conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra who present the story of the opera's creation and its impact on musicians and artists of all kinds. Introduced by Chris Brodrick.

Sunday, 30 July at 7.00pm

Venue: *St Heliers Community Centre, 100 St Heliers Bay Road, Auckland*

A Matchmaker between Wagner and Mozart: Heath Lees presents *Der Rosenkavalier*

Sunday, 17 September at 7.00pm

Venue: *St Heliers Community Centre, 100 St Heliers Bay Road, Auckland*

Visions of Valhalla: Heath Lees and John Davidson's joint presentation featuring John's recently published collection of Wagner poems. A selection of these will be read, interspersed with talk, pre-recorded clips and piano excerpts.

Sunday 10 December 7.00pm

Venue: *St Heliers Community Centre, 100 St Heliers Bay Road, Auckland*

Christmas Function: Featuring a Pot-pourri of Wagneriana plus our famous cake and wine

MELBOURNE OPERA'S 2017 *Lohengrin.*

Lohengrin will be performed at Melbourne's Regent Theatre on 7-9 August and at Robert Blackwood Hall, Monash University, on 19 August.

The principals will be Romanian tenor, Marius Vlad (the MO 2016 Tannhäuser), and Australian soprano Helena Dix whose appearance as Elsa is being supported by The RWS Melbourne Victoria. Helena is currently working with Maestro James Levine at The Met as cover for Electra in their current production of *Idomeneo*. *Lohengrin* is produced by Greg Hocking, directed by Suzanne Chaundy and conducted by Dr David Kram.

Tickets can be purchased at:
<http://www.ticketmaster.com.au/artist/1141322>

Wellington

Sunday 7 May at 4.00pm

Venue: *St Andrew's Church*
(note different venue)

Visions of Valhalla: Heath Lees and John Davidson's joint presentation featuring John's recently published collection of Wagner poems. A selection of these will be read, interspersed with talk, pre-recorded clips and piano excerpts.

Sunday 18 June at 12.30pm

PLEASE NOTE:- New time

Venue: *Paramount Cinema*

Joint Meeting with the Opera Society.

A screening of *Valencia Siegfried*.

A brunch at 11.00am is to be arranged - details later

Sunday 16 July at 4.00pm

Venue: *St Andrew's Hall*

Documentary Film. Details later.

Sunday 1 October at 4.00pm

Venue: *St Andrew's Hall*

The View from the Stage Part 3 (1924-45)

Chris Brodrick presents his illustrated talk about famous and interesting people who attended Bayreuth Festival during the most difficult period in its history

Late November or early December

End of Year Party. Details to be confirmed.

WAGNER MURMURS

- Simon O'Neill will perform Siegmund in a concert performance of *Die Walküre* at the 2017 Edinburgh International Festival alongside Bryn Terfel and Christine Goerke.

- The rumour mill suggests that the Metropolitan Opera will perform *Lohengrin* during its 2018-19 season with Stuart Skelton, Anna Netrebko and Evelyn Herlitzius.

- The Royal Opera will revive its production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* between September and November 2018 with John Lundgren, Nina Stemme, Stefan Vinke, Stuart Skelton and Emily Magee in the leading roles.

- Dmitri Tcherniakov will direct Bayreuth's next *Ring* to be presented in 2020. It will be conducted by Andris Nelsons.

- Yuval Sharon will direct the new production of *Lohengrin* at Bayreuth in 2018; while Tobias Kratzer will direct the new *Tannhäuser* in 2019.

- Michael Sinclair

Christchurch

Friday, 5 May at 7.30pm

Venue: *The Music Suite, Room P2, Rangi Ruru School, Merivale*

Visions of Valhalla: Heath Lees and John Davidson's joint presentation. (See *Wellington 7 May for details*)

Friday, 18 August at 7.30pm

Venue: *The Music Suite, Room P2, Rangi Ruru School, Merivale*

Lohengrin: John Pattinson introduces and plays some excerpts to lead into a screening of the complete opera on the following Sunday

Sunday, 20 August at 3.30pm

Venue: *Cynthia Hawes & Andy Buchanan, 74 Hackthorne Road, Cashmere*

Lohengrin: Performance on DVD, pausing after Act 2 for a meal before proceeding to the third and final act

Friday, 27 October at 7.30pm

Venue: *The Music Suite, Room P2, Rangi Ruru School, Merivale*

The Most Notorious Chord in the World - the so-called *Tristan* chord.

John Drummond explains what the chord is all about, how Wagner came up with it, and why it is so appropriate to the story of the opera

Date to be announced

Venue: *TBA*

Christmas Social Function

Dunedin

Sunday, 21 May at 2.00pm

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

Legendary Wagner Singers:

Terence Dennis shows rare film footage of some of the greatest Wagner singers of the 20th century

Sunday, 10 Sept at 2.00pm

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

Weber and Wagner: Kapellmeister in Dresden. Terence Dennis presents film and sound examples from Weber's masterpieces

Sunday, 8 Oct at 2.00pm

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

Tuba or Not Tuba? That is the

Question: John Pattinson traces the development of this noble creature from the depths of the Rhine to its emergence on the modern concert platform

Sunday, 26 Nov at 12.00 noon

Venue: *Carrington College, 57 Heriot Row*

Christmas Luncheon and Wagner Concert to inaugurate the Sydney Opera House

A POET CORNERED

Heath Lees Writes About His Projected Tour with John Davidson

If anyone were to ask me what's best about Wagner Societies I would quote the title of journalist Beth Whitehead Scott's book: *You Meet Such Interesting People*.

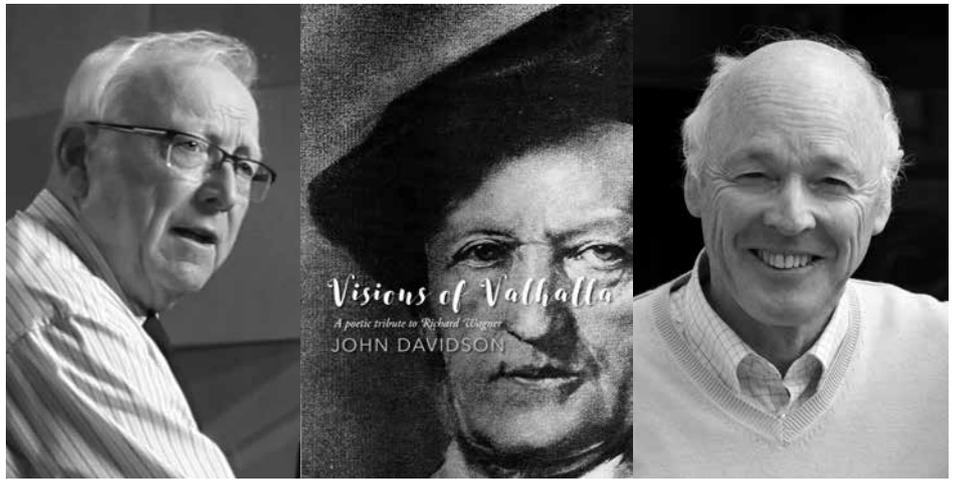
All over the world, Wagner Society memberships include the most fascinating folk from the most varied callings. In Wagner Society company I have met — in male and female forms — a number of eye surgeons, urologists, tax inspectors, building site workers, a butcher, two bakers, a US senator . . . judges, journalists, joiners, dress designers . . . all of them drawn (sometimes unwillingly) to Richard Wagner's largely overpowering music and his largely despicable personality. Trying to reconcile the two aspects is one of the challenges that these interesting people regularly get their teeth into.

In New Zealand we too have our own big, kaleidoscopic membership, but occasionally someone floats onto our radar who displays striking talents that we never really knew they had. For most of us this is the case with Professor John Davidson, for years an 'ordinary' Wagner Society member, then a voice on the committee, now the 'front man' for the Wellington centre, and most recently a Wagner poet in a world where almost no Wagner poets exist.

For more than forty years, John has taught in the Classics department at Victoria University, Wellington, and thanks to his deep knowledge of Greek myth and drama, he has frequently enlightened our Wagner Society audiences with talks that open up the classical background of Wagner's works and ideas.

Not many people know John as a poet. But he is. His hot-off-the-press collection, *Visions of Valhalla*, is rooted and grounded in Wagner and Wagnerism, and has been neatly reviewed in this newsletter by Christchurch member Jenny Lee, who homes in on John's "poetic skill, wit and personality". She admits to finding the collection delightful and entertaining, and says that it made her re-discover the huge impact that Wagner had during his lifetime, and beyond.

The poems have also been commented on by UK Wagner writer Barry Millington, who praises John's "deep love and knowledge of Wagner". He too notes that the poems make



Heath Lees, (left) John Davidson (right) with the man in the middle

people think about their subject in a new way — "the mark of a true poet", he says.

To celebrate this event within the ranks of the NZ Wagner Society, John Davidson and I are about to team up and travel. Together we will visit three New Zealand centres, bringing a packed roadshow of comments, readings, interview slots, and musical illustrations — live and recorded. First up is Christchurch on 5th May, and then Wellington, two days later. Towards the end of the year, we will visit Auckland (17 September) and hopefully Dunedin in 2018.

It's always fascinating to hear writers 'perform' their own works. With poets, the voyage of discovery can be particularly revealing. In front of an expectant public, they can let their words and emotions write themselves much larger than is possible on the page, while every deft little nuance and detail comes into full view in live performance.

This sort of insight will be specially enjoyable here, because John's poems are kaleidoscopic in subject and mercurial in treatment. Serious one minute, funny the next. Wry and challenging at times, and never outstaying their welcome. On the contrary, each poem flashes by with its individual lights glowing, yet always contributing to the collection's overall illumination, and showing us the musician Wagner, the poet John Davidson, and of course ourselves, the readers and listeners.

During the show (as they say) you'll hear a number of Wagner-isms that you've never heard before. For example a sulky, adolescent Brünnhilde who blames her father Wotan for being overbearing yet indecisive. You'll smile at the inclusion of Fate's little joke that made Germany's major trade union, the tongue-crunching Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft threaten to disrupt Berlin's period of the Wagner bi-

centennial celebrations with its startling abbreviation of VER.DI.

One of my own favourites is *The Millionaire Question* which starts not from Wagner but from Cole Porter and the film *High Society*, where Frank Sinatra pops the question to Celeste Holm "Who wants to be a millionaire?" John turns the question on its head and immediately puts his hand up with a resounding — "I do!" then goes on to contradict the line "And sleep through Wagner at the Met". No fear, says John, who would always be wide awake in his plush opera-box.

John's bantering, clear-eyed approach to over-zealous Wagnerism is *My Sixth Ring* where he treads delicately around Ring-hardened Wagnerists in a theatre foyer as they loudly exchange their *Ring* attendances like cricket scores. But the tolling bell of the final line brings a different reality: "Make the most of this Ring. It may be your last."

All of Wagner's characters appear in this poetic parade. There's Minna, Mathilde, Cosima, Robber the dog, the scurrilous jockeys of Paris, a dark character with the stamp of Adolf (read the poem *What Value an Opera?* to get the joke), King Ludwig, Queen Victoria, Siegfried, the Dutchman, etc, etc. . .

Punctuating John's readings, there will be conversations, reflections, and some reading between the lines. Along with a few musical embroideries, there'll be well-chosen questions that will no doubt tease our poet into revealing a bit more of himself than his well-crafted words already allow.

It promises to be a mixture of fun, fable, and fascination. You shouldn't miss it.

NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:

Michael Beard..... Christchurch

Judith Ross..... Christchurch