

## “He is the best heroic tenor to emerge over the last decade”

THE TELEGRAPH, LONDON, DECEMBER 2009

...and Wagner Society of New Zealand members have three wonderful opportunities to hear Simon O'Neill in Wellington at the end of this month and at the beginning of March. Your first opportunity to hear him is on 26 February in the opening concert of the 2010 International Arts Festival. Simon will sing in a performance of Mahler's *Symphony No 8* with the NZSO under Vladimir Ashkenazy. Two days later, on Sunday 28 February at 4pm in St Andrew's on the Terrace, Simon will be joined by pianist Terence Dennis in a special programme for the Wagner Society in which he will discuss his Wagner career so far, including some extracts from his Wagner repertoire. Also on the programme Terence will play Busoni's transcription of *Siegfried's Funeral March* from *Götterdämmerung*. This will be a wonderful evening and an opportunity to hear two very fine musicians. We hope that as many of our members as possible can attend this concert including all those who will be in Wellington for the festival. It is very important that we have a big turnout for this special event so please do make every effort to be there and encourage non WSNZ members to also attend.

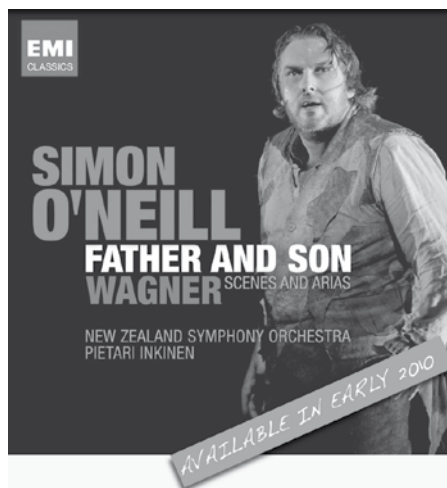
**SUNDAY 28 FEBRUARY 4.00 PM**

Venue: *St Andrew's on the Terrace*

**Simon O'Neill - My Career So Far.**

Recital/talk with Terence Dennis

On the following Friday evening, 5 March at 8pm, Simon, with the NZSO conducted by Anthony Legge, will present a *Wagner Gala* concert that will double as the launch of his CD *Father and Son, Wagner Scenes and Arias*. Recorded last year with the NZSO under Pietiri Inkinen, the CD will be initially launched in New Zealand before its international release in April. The *Wagner Gala* will include music from *Lohengrin*, *Siegfried*, *Die Walküre*, *Parsifal* and *Götterdämmerung*, works that are featured on the recording.



### GALA RECEPTION.

At the conclusion of the 5 March concert all WSNZ members are invited to attend the New Zealand launch of the CD at a reception in the Lion Harbourview Lounge in the Michael Fowler Centre.

### GALA TICKET WINNERS.

The winners of our Christmas draws for tickets to the *Wagner Gala* on 5 March:  
*Auckland* – Yvonne Chetwin  
*Christchurch* – Lawrence Higgins & Audrey Harrison  
*Dunedin* – Patricia Bishop & Judy Wilson  
*Wellington* – Lady Mowbray, who passed her tickets to tenor Michael Gray.

### SIMON GIVES US MOOR

Just before Christmas last year, Simon O'Neill was making headlines in the British press for standing in at 24 hours notice to sing the role of Otello in a concert performance of Verdi's opera with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Colin Davis. Making his debut in what is regarded as one of the most taxing roles in the repertoire, Simon generated some 'wow' reviews which included Rupert Christensen's comment in *The Telegraph* that heads this page. Richard Morrison in the *Times* wrote "...stepping in at 24 hours' notice to tackle the title role for the first time in his life, [Simon] gave an immense performance. If he can cultivate more tonal lustre to go with his typhoon-force top notes, he will make the Moor his own."

Writing in the *Spectator* Michael Tanner commented "Not only does he have the volume that I crave from heroic tenors and rarely get, but he never gives the impression that his voice might run out, though there is still an element of dangerous living about it". Lastly *The Independent's* Edward Seckerson "...it was refreshing, no thrilling, to hear a young singer really nail those crazed top notes. Further reviews can be found at <http://www.simononeill.com>

# WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

## 2010 PROGRAMME DETAILS

A Happy New Year to all members of the WSNZ. Once again the committees in each of our four centres have come up with interesting programmes. With a mixture of recitals, DVDs and talks with both overseas and local speakers there will be plenty of variety. As you will have already seen on page 1, Wellington starts the year at the end of February in style, with a recital/talk featuring Simon O'Neill and accompanist Terence Dennis. The following week a large contingent of members will be in Wellington for Simon's *Gala Concert* with the NZSO. Christchurch starts 2010 in the middle of February with Heath Lees looking at How the Music Changed in the *Ring* while Michael Sinclair, in Auckland, introduces a DVD looking at the life and times of legendary heldentenor Max Lorenz. The fascinating documentary on the great singer will open the year in Dunedin on 14 March when it will be coupled with another documentary on Winifred Wagner. Later in the year we have Peter Bassett talking in

### Christchurch

#### Friday 19 February 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

**The Ring: How the Music Changed and Why** - Heath Lees looks at the profound musical change that took place after the delayed Act 3 of *Siegfried*.

#### Friday 16 April 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

**View from the Stage Part 2** - Chris Brodrick continues his look at the Bayreuth Festival audiences. Part 2 is from 1882 -1914.

#### Friday 21 May (Time to be confirmed)

Venue: To be confirmed

**Pot Luck Dinner for RW's birthday.**

#### Friday 3 September 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

**The Operas Wagner almost wrote** - Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind.

#### Friday 8 October 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

**The life of Max Lorenz** - John Pattinson will introduce a DVD on the life of Wagnerian tenor of 1930-40s, Max Lorenz.

#### Sunday 28 November 6.00pm

Venue: To be confirmed

Christmas BBQ.

Christchurch, Auckland and Wellington; presentations by Heath Lees, Chris Brodrick, John Pattinson, Elric Hooper & John Drummond who will make his Society debut with a topic that will take us down a new track - Wagner: Transition and Railway Trains!! In Dunedin Roger Wilson and Terence Dennis will reprise their lecture/recital Wagner and German Tradition that they gave in Wellington last year. To round things out we have DVD presentations of *Die Meistersinger* in Dunedin, *Tristan & Isolde* in Auckland and *Tannhäuser* in Wellington along with the usual Birthday dinners and Christmas functions.

### Dunedin

#### Sunday, 14 March 2.00 pm

Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago  
**Bayreuth 1930's - Winifred Wagner & Max Lorenz** - Professor Terence Dennis presents two fascinating documentaries about Winifred Wagner and singer Max Lorenz.

#### Sunday, 11 April 2.00 pm

Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago  
**The Evolution of Wagner stage production** - Elric Hooper speaks about the evolution of stage production of Wagner's operas.

#### Sunday, 23 May 12.00 noon

Venue: The Savoy, 50 Princes Street  
**Wagner: Transition and Railway Trains** - Professor John Drummond asks - "Is it mere coincidence that Wagner's development of a new awareness of musical time and space should have occurred at times when he made important railway journeys?"

With a luncheon to honour Wagner's birthday

#### Sunday, 12 September 2.00 pm

Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago  
**Wagner And German Tradition** - Baritone Roger Wilson, with pianist Terence Dennis, brings the historical context to vivid life in a lecture/recital.

#### Sunday, 7 November 1.00 pm

Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum  
**Die Meistersinger At The Met: Acts 1 & 2** Otto Schenk's production of Wagner's comic opera from the Metropolitan, New York, conducted by James Levine.

#### Sunday, 5 December 1.00 pm

Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum  
**Die Meistersinger At The Met: Act 3** And our end-of-year Christmas celebration with *Meistersinger* Act 3.

### Auckland

#### Sunday, 21 February 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St  
**The life and times of Max Lorenz** - Michael Sinclair presents an appreciation of the legendary Heldentenor

#### Sunday, 18 April 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St  
**Wagner through the piano** - Heath Lees traces the rise of the 'wagnerist showman-pianist' in France through to today's pianists.

#### Sunday, 23 May 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St  
**Annual General Meeting** - Wagner's Birthday celebrations

#### Sunday, 11 July 4.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St  
**Tristan & Isolde** - Robert Gambill and Nina Stemme in Nikolaus Lehnhoff's Glyndebourne production.

#### Sunday, 5 September 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St  
**The Operas Wagner almost wrote** - Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind.  
NB: A \$10 fee will apply

#### Sunday, 5 December 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St  
**Wagner Pot Pourri** - A Christmas celebration: An evening of requests, roundups, selections and surprises.

### Wellington

#### Sunday 28 February 4.00 pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace  
**Simon O'Neill - My Career So Far.** Recital/talk with Terence Dennis

#### Sunday 25 April 4.00 pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace  
**A View from the Stage Pt 1.** - Chris Brodrick looks at those who attended the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876.

#### Sunday 11 July 10.30 am

Venue: Paramount Theatre,  
**Tannhäuser** - 1978 Bayreuth Festival production. (In association with NZ Opera Society)

#### Monday 6 September 7.00 pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace  
**The Operas Wagner almost wrote** - Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind.



# SHOCK! Wild Wagnerites Wake Workers! EXCLUSIVE PIC



The tranquil peace of Adelaide's Stamford Hotel was SHATTERED by a group of WILD Wagnerians who, intent on recreating the bacchanal from *Tannhäuser*, upset the sleeping pattern of thousands of residents! Hotel management had to intervene to control the mob of 20, who had checked in the previous day to attend a gig across the road at the festival centre. The group was so boisterous that this correspondent understands that the riot police were put on standby! A hotel spokesman, who didn't wish to be named, said "The noise was unbelievable - they were talking! Why can't they just be content with a pounding bass and texting each other rather than upsetting those who are trying to sleep? It was 7.00pm for goodness sake!" This correspondent was told that the room had been trashed - there were crumbs on the carpet and wine glass rings all over the desk! We can thankfully report that Adelaide is once again safe, as the group has since moved on!

## Der fliegende Holländer - State Opera South Australia

Chris Brodrick reports on last November's WSNZ trip to Adelaide to see *Der fliegende Holländer*.

It was a chilly 8 degrees as a small group of South Island Wagnerians walked from the domestic to the international terminal at Auckland airport last November. We were about to join WSNZ members from Auckland and Wellington for a short trip to Adelaide to see *Der fliegende Holländer*. For a number of days before our arrival South Australia had been experiencing a heat wave with temperatures reaching 40 degrees. Our arrival from the chill of Auckland was greeted with a blast furnace of heat that continued throughout our stay. With nothing planned for the day we arrived, most retired to the roof top swimming pool and an early night. After all, it had been an early start. The following day, most of the party took a day-long trip to the Barossa Valley where we indulged in good food and wine. Having collected a number of samples from our travels, it was decided that the WSNZ party should get together for pre-dinner drinks in one of the rooms. Unfortunately, we made too much noise and the party came to a rather abrupt end after hotel management knocked on the door and asked us to terminate proceedings. (see story above)

Our reason for being in Adelaide, a performance of *Der fliegende Holländer*, took place the following day. It felt slightly strange to enter the theatre in such blistering heat and then sit through the raging storm that emanated from the State Theatre pit.

The performance itself was both good and bad. Musically it couldn't be

faulted. The cast led by John Wegner and Margaret Medlyn worked brilliantly, giving what I'd describe as an ensemble performance, with each singer working with the others. But perhaps they needed to, because the direction left a lot to be desired. With the singers' voices receiving no help from the set to reflect the voice out into the auditorium and some tedious laser lighting, they had a Herculean task to engage the audience. In addition, the heat and low humidity must have affected the voices, not that we in the audience would have noticed. All the singers were good but the stand out was Stuart Skelton. His Erik was magnificent. Giving wonderful support in the pit was the Adelaide Symphony under the direction of Nicholas Braithwaite.

Sadly, all the good musical work wasn't matched by the director, Chris Drummond, and designer, Geoff Cobham, who seemed out of their depth. The climax of the opera, where Senta throws herself off a cliff in order to redeem the Dutchman and is then seen with him ascending into heaven, was treated in such a superficial way, with two light bulbs disappearing into the flies, that it created an anti-climax. So all in all it was a mixed performance. Worth the visit? Of course! The great thing about a WSNZ trip is the wonderful people who go on them. While the opera may not have been perfect, those who joined the trip ensured we all had a great time. That's what's important!

*If you are interested in a full review of Der fliegende Holländer you can find it on page 45 of the January issue of Opera News.*

## NEW MEMBERS

A very Warm Wagnerian Welcome to:-  
Clare Aspel..... Christchurch  
Prof Dunstan Ward..... Paris, France  
Annette Frances Wilson..... Auckland  
Felicity & Maurice Tetley-Jones .. Wellington

## CONGRATULATIONS...

... to WSNZ members Ann Mallinson and Lloyd Morrison whose services were recognised in the New Year's Honours

## FELICITATIONS...

It is very very rarely that we get to announce a wedding in the WSNZ family (in fact I can't remember it ever happening) but on 20 February Wellington members Tibby Warmington and Adrian Simcock tie the knot. All of us in the WSNZ wish both of them a wonderful day and a very happy life together.

## LISA GARSTEEN

Distressing news via the Richard Wagner Society of South Australia that Lisa Garsteen, Brünnhilde in the Adelaide *Ring*, may never sing again. She apparently is suffering from neuromuscular spasms in her neck, which may respond to treatment or recover naturally, but doctors cannot guarantee that she will recover. We send her our very best wishes and our hopes that treatment will be successful.

## GIVE MELBOURNE A RING

The Melbourne Age recently reported that Opera Australia's new artistic director Lyndon Terracini hopes to premier Wagner's *Ring Cycle* in repertory in Melbourne from 2012. "If we raise enough money to do the *Ring*, we will premiere it in Melbourne, beginning with *Das Rheingold* of course and then doing one a year" Terracini was quoted as saying. With the huge cost of such a project 'if' will be the critical word. Watch this space!

## QUITE A DISH

Many years ago Christchurch member Sid Kennedy's late mother picked up this small dish at a church stall in Taranaki.



Measuring 65mm in diameter the inscription on the back reads 'Gloria fine porcelain, Bavaria, handwork Bayreuth - Wilhelmine Sulxer'. As one of King Ludwig of Bavaria's beauties, Ms Sulxer's portrait hangs in the Hall of Beauties, Nymphenburg Palace, Munich. If any WSNZ member collects Bayreuth pottery and would like to add the dish to their collection please contact Sid - Ph. 03 365 1524; Email. sid@kd.co.nz

# Portuguese Wagner

-Explorers Discover New Consequences

*Liz and Heath Lees (past secretary and past president of the WSNZ) went off to Portugal towards the end of last year. Heath was giving a presentation to an international Wagner conference in Lisbon, and has sent this 'write-up' of some of the subjects and ideas that came out of the event.*

Under the banner of the New University of Lisbon's research arm CESEM (Centre for the Study of Music Sociology & Aesthetics) an international conference was held over three days, 26-28 November, with a theme of *Consequences of Wagner*.

In fact, Portugal was proudly celebrating one hundred years since the first staging of Wagner's *Ring* in that country. The anniversary conference was held in Lisbon's famous and wonderfully picturesque Teatro Nacional de São Carlos (right), which was exactly the same venue in which the country's first *Ring* performance had taken place a hundred years earlier. As well, the professional opera company in Lisbon had offered, in the preceding month, operas by Weill and Respighi, as well as a dozen — yes, a dozen — performances of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, neatly entitled in Portuguese as *O Crepúsculo dos Deuses*.

At first sight, the *Consequences of Wagner* theme seemed a little forbidding. You could say that there were only 13 consequences of Wagner, each of them operas, of which 10 are agreed to be masterpieces, from *Flying Dutchman* to *Parsifal*. But of course, once you sat down and thought about it, you realised that the subject was actually enormous. What was really being discussed was Wagner's impact, both in his own day, in the period after his death, and up to our own age.

To get your academic adrenalin going, the organisers had written out all the aspects they could think of, and made it clear this was only scratching the surface. Their pre-publicity brochure said:

*"We are particularly (but not exclusively) interested in topics such as the theory, aesthetics and history of opera staging and performance, the status of music and music drama in fin-de-siècle culture, Wagner and modernism, eroticism and sexuality, post-Wagnerian compositional techniques and musical styles, the appropriation of Wagner by artists from different media and nationalities, the repercussions of 'the case of Wagner' in historiography, philosophy, politics and popular culture, Wagner as myth and the wider implications of Wagnerism and anti-Wagnerism."*

So there you have it. Like I said, enormous. One interesting fact that did



*Heath Lees (top left) answers questions. Teatro Nacional de São Carlos, Lisbon (below)*

emerge was that, although the brochure had not specifically mentioned films, computers, media studies and the like, many of the papers centred around these very modern aspects of Wagner and Wagnerism. The major keynote speaker was Professor John Deathridge, King's College London, one of the very top Wagner scholars in the world today, and most of his presentation was on the changing perception of Wagner through films.

Since we also had Tony Palmer in our midst (the director of the film *Wagner* with Richard Burton, and the maker of a host of other musical and 'straight' films) it was obvious that film was to take up much of our time. Palmer had also brought with him a 48-minute version of his new, 2-hour film *The Wagner Family*, and we all trooped off to the Lisbon Cinematheque to view it as a wonderful sneak preview. The full film version is to be available later this year, and a completely re-mastered version of *Wagner* will also be available soon. Also on the menu was Carl Froelich's 1913 film *The Life of Richard Wagner* from which I had seen only a few clips, but at last had the opportunity to see the film in its entirety.

Of the more traditional, or 'academic' papers, the first afternoon was devoted to Wagner and the French. It brought to mind the question that was once asked of Nietzsche "Where was Wagner best understood?" To which his answer was "In France". But there were many offerings that discussed Wagner reception and Wagnerism in other countries, like Portugal (of course), Spain, and Greece.

Particularly rewarding for me was Anastasia Belina's paper on *Wagner in Russia*. Anastasia was a Master's student in the University of Auckland about 10 years ago now, and lives in Leeds, though she still remains a member of the WSNZ.

Recently awarded a PhD from Leeds University, she spoke on the relationship between the Russian composer Taneyev, Wagner, and Wagnerism.

Academic giants wandered around as though they were ordinary people. In addition to Deathridge, William Weber was there (*Music and the Middle Class* — a book that completely changed how people thought about music). Jean-Jacques Nattiez was able to come at the last moment; his books include *Foundations of a Semiology of Music* (1975); *Proust as Musician* (1989) and *Wagner Androgyne* (1993) — all of them key works for any musician/musicologist. Kathryn Seyr, whose co-authored, encyclopaedic book on *Parsifal* came out a couple of years ago, spoke on her favourite topic of Wagner performance, and many of the younger researchers followed this lead, surveying the consequences of Wagner, his "all-embracing art-work", and its impact on stage, screen, literature and the fine arts. Hans Vaaget, who visited New Zealand Wagner Societies a decade ago, spoke on *Operation Walküre: German History and Wagnerian Opera*. All these papers were fascinating, and very thought-provoking.

By the way, my own paper appeared in the first session (on France) and traced the rise of the 'wagnerist showman-pianist' in that country. An expanded version of this paper will form the basis of my talk to the Auckland centre of the WSNZ on 18 April.

Thrilled with the success of the conference, the organisers have now decided to collect all the papers and presentations in CD-ROM format, and make it widely available. So it looks as though everyone interested in Wagner, Wagnerism, and their consequences can enjoy all the benefits of the conference without having had to go to Lisbon. Though I should add, as a very vivid afterthought, that the city is wonderful, and Liz and I agreed we will be back there as non-Wagner tourists as soon as possible.

PS If you want to read (alas, in French!) some of the material I presented about Wagner, the piano, and the German pianist Stefan Mickisch (also a one-time WSNZ visitor), it's on the Presse Musicale Internationale website under the name *Wagner au Piano* at: [www.musicalpress.org/Dossiers/dossiers.php](http://www.musicalpress.org/Dossiers/dossiers.php)

## AWARD

The Gramophone Magazine 2009 DVD of the year has been awarded to Royal Danish Opera's production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen (The Copenhagen Ring)*. Experienced as an extended flashback, Wagner's epic is presented as a family saga from a feminist perspective and been described as "visually stunning, disturbing and at times explicit"