



## PALMER POSTPONEMENT PERMUTES PROGRAMME

Plans for WSNZ's 2011 programme were thrown into disarray over Christmas/New Year with the postponement of Tony Palmer's March visit. The result of this change means a complete revamp of the first three months and, at the time of writing, not every centre has found a replacement programme. From April onwards most centres have settled their plans and once again are able to offer WSNZ members wide ranging and stimulating programmes.

The highlight of the year will be the APO's concert performance of *Das Rheingold* in the Auckland Town Hall on 29 July. Of major interest will be the chance to hear Paul Whelan sing the role of Wotan; Anna Leese, Freia; John Wegner, Alberich and Richard Greager, Mime with the APO (bottom right) conducted by Eckehard Stier. *Rheingold* is presented in association with the Wagner Society of New Zealand and the Wagner New Zealand Foundation.

In addition to the July performance of *Das Rheingold* the Metropolitan Opera live in HD will be screening *Die Walküre*, the second part of Robert Lepage's new production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Screenings will take place in all centres in June. As preparation, Christchurch members are encouraged to attend two John Pattinson lectures that will be held in the weeks prior to the screening. They form part of Canterbury University's Continuing Education programme.

Auckland will open 2011 with a very special guest, Simon O'Neill, who is making a quick visit home 'between engagements'! In addition to *Rheingold* and *Walküre* Auckland will be showing a new DVD of a recent Deutsche Oper Berlin production of *Rienzi*.

Dunedin will also be showing *Rienzi* which forms the second part of a two-part presentation that Terence Dennis will give on Wagner's early operas. In Part One he looks at *Die Feen* (*The Fairies*) and *Das Liebesverbot* (*The Ban On Love*). Earlier in the year, at the first

of Dunedin's two May meetings, Terence will discuss and perform a selection of Liszt's Wagner transcriptions and works associated with Wagner's death.

Heath Lees will visit Christchurch, Dunedin and Wellington to present *Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano*, a look at Wagner's hot-and-cold attitude to the instrument and claim that, by comparison with the human voice or even the orchestra, it was a failure. Some send-ups of Wagner by pianists young and old will be included, and Heath promises lots of examples and illustrations.

Chris Brodrick will also be on the road with September visits to Auckland and Dunedin. He'll present his talk, *A View from the Stage Part 1*, about the well-known and not so well-known names who were in the audience for the first production of the *Ring* in 1876.

*Stephen Fry on Wagner* will be shown at Christchurch's first meeting and the year will be rounded out with Pot Luck dinners, Christmas BBQs, a Wagner Pot Pourri and, of course, the Annual General Meeting!

At the time of writing the Wellington programme was still being finalised and will therefore be published in full in a future newsletter.

### TONY PALMER

Controversial British film Director Tony Palmer, who was due to visit New Zealand in March this year will not be coming. The WSNZ was unable to accommodate changes to an already agreed programme in the time available before the visit. It was felt that the best option was to postpone the event to a future, mutually agreed, date.

In the meantime Tony Palmer will soon be releasing a collection of Wagner related DVDs. The set includes a remastered version of his Richard Burton/Wagner film that has a 7-hour 50-min running time, his documentary on Parsifal, the 1913 film *The Life and Works of Richard Wagner* directed by Carl Fröhlich which has been remastered and released under the title *Silent Wagner* and finally his documentary on the Wagner family.

The boxed set should be available, on the internet through Amazon.com or Amazon.co.uk, in the next two-three months.





Credit: Brescia e Amisano / Teatro alla Scala

## WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE? – SILLY QUESTION!

On a recent episode of America's *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, a Middletown resident and Navy War College Professor, Kyle Barrett, reappeared as a hold-over contestant from the previous night's show after accumulating \$100,000 in his "Millionaire Bank." With the decision to keep going for that million dollar ultimate prize, or to take home the \$100,000 he'd already earned, Barrett faced the following \$250,000 question:

"The familiar song known as 'Here Comes the Bride' comes from the opera *Lohengrin*,' in which it plays for a bride named what?"

The multiple-choice options were:

- A: Uda
- B: Elsa
- C: Grete
- D: Petra

Having used up all his lifelines Barrett decided to not answer his \$250,000 question, but instead go home with his \$100,000 prize winnings from rounds one and two.

If he had guessed incorrectly on the \$250,000 question, he would have fallen back to \$25,000. See! It pays to brush up on your Wagner knowledge as you never know when you might be asked the \$250,000 question!



## RING WENDERS!

The German newspaper *Die Welt* recently reported that the Bayreuth festival is engaged in talks with the well-known German film director Wim Wenders (above) to direct *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the 2013 Bayreuth Festival.

Wenders, whose work includes *Paris, Texas*, *Wings of Desire* and the documentary about Cuban musicians *The Buena Vista Social Club*, is apparently to be paired up with Russian conductor Kirill Petrenko for the festival that marks the 200th anniversary of Richard Wagner's birth.

"It's true, talks are underway, but no contracts have been signed," Peter Emmerich, the Bayreuth Festival's spokesperson, told *Die Welt*.

"Anyone who has seen his films recognizes instantly that he cultivates a special visual language and that music plays an important role in his films," Emmerich added.

Auckland's special guest in February – Simon O'Neill as Siegmund and Waltraud Meier as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan in December 2010.

## WELCOME TO NEW SIBLING

The WSNZ welcomes a new sister society into the family. The birth of this particular organisation has been long, protracted and painful but with Government agency approval the Wagner in Israel Society has finally arrived. The aim of the society is to encourage the performance of Wagner's music, which has been unofficially banned in Israel as a symbol of the Nazi era, by opening up an honest discussion about the boycott. The head of the new Society, Yonatan Livni, said "I'm against any type of a boycott. If we were to boycott every composer who was anti-Semitic then there would be very few composers we would be able to hear in Israel. It will never be enough time (since the holocaust). But the question is do we have to wait until we get a certificate from someone who says that the last survivor has passed away?" asked Livni, who himself is a child of Holocaust survivors.

"My father used to say that Wagner was a horrible, terrible man, but he wrote the most beautiful music. We don't listen to Wagner's political views. What we do is listen to his music," he said.



# WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2011 PROGRAMME DETAILS

## Auckland

**Sunday, 20 February 7.30pm**

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

**An evening with Simon O'Neill**

Michael Sinclair talks to tenor Simon O'Neill with excerpts from his performance in *Die Walküre* at La Scala

**Sunday, 17 April 5.30pm**

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

**Rienzi**: A complete screening of the new DVD from the recent Deutsche

Oper Berlin production

**NB: This meeting will begin at 5.30pm**

**Sunday, 22 May 7.30pm**

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

**Annual General Meeting** - Wagner's Birthday celebrations

**Sunday, 17 July 7.30pm**

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

**An introduction to Das Rheingold**

In preparation for the APO performance an evening that explores the prelude to the *Ring cycle*

**Friday 29 July 7.30pm**

*Venue: Auckland Town Hall*

**Das Rheingold** - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

**Sunday, 4 September 7.30pm**

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

**A View From The Stage – Part 1**

WSNZ President Chris Brodrick looks at those who attended the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876

**Sunday, 4 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

## APO RHEINGOLD - TICKETS

There has been strong demand for tickets to the APO's concert performance of *Das Rheingold* on 29 July 2011. Our allocation is available until April before the tickets are returned for general sale, so if any WSNZ members wish to make a booking through the Society at a preferential rate they are advised to contact Michael Sinclair as soon as possible.

Email: [msinclair@extra.co.nz](mailto:msinclair@extra.co.nz)  
or phone: (09)528 0776

## Christchurch

**Friday 25 February 7.30pm**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**Stephen Fry on Wagner**: Chris Brodrick introduces this 1-hour BBC programme

**Friday 1 April 7.30pm [NEW DATE]**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano**

Heath Lees looks at Wagner's attitude to the instrument. Some send-ups of Wagner will be included & lots of illustrations.

**Friday 20 May 7.30pm**

*Venue: TBA*

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

*Associated Events of Interest*

**Thursdays 16 & 23 June, 7.30**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**John Pattinson lectures** on *Die Walküre*

in preparation for the Met. Opera production which will screen at the Rialto & Metro Cinemas from Thursday 30 June until Friday 8 July, 2011.

(NB. You will need to enrol at University Dept of Continuing Education for this course)

**Friday 29 July 7.30pm**

*Venue: Auckland Town Hall*

**Das Rheingold** - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

**Friday 30 September 7.30pm**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**Programme to be announced**

**Friday 28 October 7.30pm**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**Wagner in Venice**: Chris Brodrick looks at the city that was Wagner's second home

**Sunday 27 November 6.00pm**

*Venue: TBA*

Christmas BBQ

## Wellington

**Sunday 27 March 4.00pm**

*Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace*

**Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano**

Heath Lees looks at Wagner's attitude to the instrument. Some send-ups of Wagner will be included & lots of illustrations.

**Sunday 12 June 11.00am**

*Venue: Adam Concert Room*

**Lohengrin**: DVD screening of the opera. (In association with NZ Opera Society.)

## Dunedin

**Saturday, 26 March 2.00pm**

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

**Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano**

Heath Lees looks at Wagner's attitude to the instrument. Some send-ups of Wagner will be included & lots of illustrations

**Sunday, 1 May 2.00pm**

*Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago*

**Liszt and Wagner: A Commemorative Lecture Recital**

Professor Terence Dennis discusses and performs a selection of Liszt's Wagner transcriptions and works associated with Wagner's death

**Sunday, 22 May 12.00 noon**

*Venue: Technique Training Restaurant, Otago Polytechnic, Harbour Terrace*

**Catered luncheon** to commemorate

Wagner's birthday (1813) followed by the 1-hour BBC programme

**Stephen Fry on Wagner**

**Friday 29 July 7.30pm**

*Venue: Auckland Town Hall*

**Das Rheingold** - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

**Sunday, 18 September 2.00pm**

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

**A View From The Stage – Part 1**

WSNZ President Chris Brodrick looks at those who attended the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876

**Sunday, 6 November 2.00pm**

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

**Wagner: The Early Operas 1**

**Die Feen (The Fairies) and Das**

**Liebesverbot (The Ban On Love)**:

Terence Dennis presents the first two operas completed by Wagner

**Sunday, 4 December 1.00pm**

*Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum*

**Wagner: The Early Operas 2**

**Rienzi**: Wagner's third opera in HD

Blu-Ray from the Deutsche Oper

Berlin plus our end-of-year Christmas celebration

## NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:

Lyn Holland .....Christchurch

Peter Hatfield..... Wellington

David Morriss & Nerissa Barber . Wgtn

Gerald & Caroline McGhie..... Wgtn

Beverley Cocks.....Christchurch

# EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

The auctioning of a photograph of smiling opera singer Margery Booth has revealed an astonishing story of a double-life and intrigue at the heart of Nazi Germany.

When the BBC headlines a story, tabloid style, 'WWII knicker spy Margery Booth photos to be auctioned' you have to wonder at what the world has come to. Are they trying to tell us that some of the strange behaviour of modern day life was prevalent during the second world war? Why was she spying on knickers? And what you may ask has this to do with Wagner? Read on... (it is quite safe!)

Margery Booth was a mezzo-soprano who was born in Wigan in 1905. In 1933 she appeared in *Parsifal* at the Bayreuth Festival carrying the Holy Grail. She made such an impression on one member of the audience that he burst into her dressing room and told her how elegant and lovely he thought her, and sent her a basket of 200 red roses the next day, with a card signed 'Adolf'.

In 1936 she made her debut at Covent Garden. She then married Dr Egon Strohm, son of a wealthy German family of brewers and moved to Germany.

When the war began, she was singing with the Berlin State Opera, and she was later allowed to perform for British prisoners of war at a camp in Genshagen, near Berlin. Stalag IIID was known as a propaganda 'holiday camp' for British officers



Bournemouth News & Picture Service

who the Nazis hoped to use as double agents. One inmate, John Brown, who was transferred to the camp in 1943, convinced the Nazis that he was willing to work for them and as Vanessa Allen writes in the Daily Mail *"he used their trust to send coded messages home in his letters, and also to pass secret documents to Miss Booth to send back to MI9, the intelligence branch tasked with unmasking traitors.*

*Ironically, the opera singer's links to the Nazi regime were so well-known that she was accused of collaborating against Britain, and turning traitor against her country.*

*In his book, In Durance Vile, Mr Brown wrote that she was initially given personal assurances from Hitler and Goebbels that they would 'deal*

*with the matter personally' if she was insulted because of her British birth.*

*But when Mr Brown's secret work for Britain was discovered by the Nazis, Miss Booth was arrested and tortured by the Gestapo.*

*She kept silent and was eventually released, and she later escaped Berlin during an air raid and fled to Bavaria, where she was picked up by the Americans."*

She returned to Britain, where the information she provided helped in the Old Bailey trials of traitors William Joyce, known as Lord Haw Haw, and John Amery, who were hanged for treason.

After the war she divorced her German husband and moved to America, where she died from cancer in 1952.

All this information about a relatively unknown singer has recently come to light with the auction of a collection of photographs taken at Stalag IIID. The picture of Margery Booth is inscribed 'With kindest remembrances, good luck, Margery Booth'.

So where do the knickers come in this story? Well the secret documents that she passed on were concealed in her underwear and, to make the story even more salacious, it is reported that on one occasion she sang for Hitler with secrets secreted in her smalls!!!

For those of you who wish to find out more and in particular about Margery Booth, the singer, you can hear her perform the role of Flosshilde in a performance of *Götterdämmerung* that was recorded at Bayreuth on 21 July 1942 and conducted by Karl Elmendorff. (Label: Music & Arts ASIN: B00004SCE8)



## PETER HOFMANN (1944 – 2010)

The German tenor Peter Hofmann died in November last year. He was 66.

Hofmann was born in Marienbad and became a singer in a rock band before joining the army. During his military service he started studying singing which he continued in Karlsruhe. He made his opera debut in 1972 in Lübeck, as Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*. He subsequently appeared in Stuttgart, Paris, Vienna, London, Chicago and San Francisco.

His international breakthrough came in 1976, when he sang Siegmund in what we know as the Chéreau *Ring* at Bayreuth. Other Wagner roles in his repertoire were Lohengrin, Parsifal, Tristan, Walter and Loge,

He was heard at the Metropolitan Opera from 1980 to 1988, in *Lohengrin*,

*Parsifal, Die Meistersinger and Die Walküre.*

In 1990–91, he performed the role of the Phantom in the German version of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Phantom of the Opera* in Hamburg. He also hosted a TV show in Germany and performed Elvis Presley songs on a tour across Europe.

Hofmann stopped performing in 1999 after he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He moved to live in Bayreuth and spent his time writing his autobiography and supporting research through the Peter Hofmann Parkinson Project.

He is survived by his wife and three children.

*(Les Holborow believes that Hofmann sang the title role in an Opera Australia Tristan. Can anyone confirm this?)*