

LOOK OUT FOR...

Richard Wagner: The Lighter Side

- a book of 'curious facts, lively anecdotes and thought-provoking quotations relating to the man and his music'. [Amazon circa £17]

The Ring on USB - Telarc have reissued Barenboim's 1991 Bayreuth *Ring* on a USB. Also included: a BBC documentary *Great Composers - Wagner*, and *The making of the Ring*. The libretti - pdfs of the original sleeve notes - are also there to download. Other features include biographies, articles and even a cartoon strip of the whole saga. [Amazon circa £41]

Rienzi on DVD - Recorded live at Théâtre du Capitole, Toulouse with Torsten Kerl in the title role. [Amazon circa £16]

Music in the Castle of Heaven - Not Wagner but John Eliot Gardiner's Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach. Highly recommended. [Amazon £20]

ELKE NEIDHARDT - 1941 - 2013

Just as the Melbourne *Ring* started the first of its three cycles, one of Australia's most noted opera and theatre directors, Elke Neidhardt, died at the age of 72.

WSNZ members who attended the 2nd Adelaide *Ring* in 2004 will never forget her original and light hearted approach to Wagner's tetralogy with the Ride of the Valkyries Wunder Bar being a perfect example of her touch.

"Elke was a great theatrical and operatic talent. Her *Ring Cycle* in Adelaide was one of the memorable experiences of my life and for thousands of others too," theatre critic Dianna Simmonds told the ABC. "She was funny, clever, wicked, wonderful to be with and a rigorous and encouraging friend. We will miss her so much."

Neidhardt was born in Germany, and her early career was as an actor, appearing in theatre, television and films in Europe and in Australia.

In 1977 she joined Opera Australia as

HAPPY NEW YEAR

A very happy 2014 to all members of the WSNZ. Once again we are delighted to have put together an exciting programme of events for the year that include the concert performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in Auckland in July.

In addition to the live performance of *Tristan* we have a number of operas on DVD, both acts and full performances, to show through the year. *Parsifal* Act 2, *Tannhäuser* Act 1, plus a complete *Die Walküre* and Syberberg's famous *Parsifal* film in which the title role is played by both a man and a woman on a set that is set around Richard Wagner's death mask. Complementing the operas we have a range on topics from film to hotels, Kundry to great singers, and Bayreuth visitors to Wagner in exile in Switzerland.

2014 should be another stimulating year for the WSNZ.

Sadly, this newsletter seems to be dominated by death. We have stories on the passing of Elke Neidhardt, Patrice Chéreau and Claudio Abbado as well as acknowledging the recent death of one of the founding members of the Christchurch branch of the WSNZ, Tony Ward.

This is the first newsletter since the Melbourne *Ring* and I would like to invite any member who attended the cycle to write something for the newsletter about the experience. You can write a full review, if you wish, or just a couple of lines that sum up your thoughts. Of particular interest would be comments from those of you who saw the *Ring* for the first time. Please send all comments to wsnznews@xtra.co.nz and we will publish them, anonymously or credited – your choice – in the newsletters to follow.

CHRISTOPHER BRODRICK - PRESIDENT



a resident director. She worked in that position until 1990 before moving to the Cologne State Opera. During her six years in Germany she embraced the works of Wagner including the *Ring Cycle*.

The ABC reported that "Neidhardt was outspoken on many issues and had a reputation for clashing with conductors she worked with on operas

as she pushed to realise her artistic version.

In 1998, there was a standoff in the Sydney Opera House on the set of *Tannhäuser* between her and French conductor Philippe Auguin that nearly halted the production." Clashes aside it's her version of the *Ring* for which we will remember her.



PATRICE CHÉREAU (1944- 2013)

As 2013 drew to a close, the death of the French opera, theatre and film director Patrice Chéreau (above) was announced. He was 68.

In 1976, on the recommendation of the conductor Pierre Boulez, Chéreau was engaged to stage the Centenary *Ring*. His production, which initially provoked controversy, was farewelled in 1980 with a 45 minute standing ovation.

In a piece for the Daily Telegraph Rupert Christiansen wrote “A *sweet, shy, serious man with a bewitching smile, he seemed devoid of shallow theatrical egotism. ...Yet he was no guru or ideologue. In the words of Donald McIntyre, who played Wotan in his legendary 1976 production of Wagner’s Ring cycle at Bayreuth, Chéreau was “a questioner”, who saw his role as a director in a Socratic rather than Stalinist light – he never sought to impose his will on actors or a text, only to excavate patiently into their truth.*”

CLAUDIO ABBADO (1933 -2014)

Another artist in the same vein as Chéreau, Claudio Abbado (below), died in January after a long illness. In what can be described as a stellar career, Abbado made music with the very best. He led La Scala, Milan, the Vienna Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra and in 1989 was elected by the players of the Berlin Philharmonic to head the orchestra on the death of Herbert von Karajan. In recent years he formed the Lucerne Festival Orchestra in which the Gustav Mahler-Jugend Orchestre (Youth Orchestra) was augmented by some of the best musicians in Europe all keen to continue their association with one of the best musicians of modern times, affectionately known as ‘the mild maestro’.



**WAGNER SOCIETY
2014 PROGRAM**

Auckland

Sunday, 23 February at 7.30pm

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

100 years of Wagner. Featuring the superbly restored *Silent Wagner* biographical film of 1913 and leaping 100 years to the Directors’ treatment of Wagner at the 2013 Bayreuth Festival.

Sunday, 6 April at 7.30pm

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

Tannhäuser: A look at some of the imaginative interpretations of the energetic Bacchanale embedded in the overture of Wagner’s controversial opera, followed by a showing of Act 1 complete.

Sunday, 25 May at 7.30pm

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

AGM & The View from the Stage - Part 3 (1924 -1944): Chris Brodrick continues his series on the Bayreuth Festival visitors

Sunday, 6 July at 3.30pm (NOTE TIME)

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

DVD Screening: Die Walküre complete opera from La Scala Milan, A magnificent production featuring our own Simon O’Neill with Waltraud Meier as Sieglinde



Sunday, 31 August 7.30pm

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

To be announced

Sunday 7 December 7.30pm

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

Christmas Function:

Featuring a presentation by Professor Heath Lees on the Ups and Downs of Wagner on film.

Wellington

Sunday, 6 April at 4.00pm

Venue: St Andrew’s on the Terrace (note that the venue for this meeting is the church hall, not the church itself).

NZSO Music Director Pietari Inkinen: In a Question and Answer session, Pietari will talk about his experiences in conducting Wagner

Sunday, 18 May at 4.00p.m.

Venue: Adam Concert Room, NZ School of Music, Victoria University of Wellington.

Embodying Kundry: From Metempsychosis to Metamorphosis An illustrated talk by Margaret Medlyn

Sunday 29 June

[time and venue to be confirmed] Joint meeting with the Opera Society. DVD screening of the Hans Jürgen Syberberg film of *Parsifal*



Sunday 13 July at 4 pm

[venue to be confirmed] **Tristan and Isolde – The Classical and Medieval Background:** An illustrated talk by John Davidson

August/September. Meeting not yet finalized.

Sunday 16 November at 4 p.m.

[venue to be confirmed] **The Ups and Downs of Wagner on Film:** Professor Heath Lees will talk about the making of the film *Wagner’s Ring – A Tale Told In Music*

December

Christmas Party. Details later

NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:
Rae ShurbuttDunedin
Mihnea BostinaDunedin

FAREWELL

Tony WardChristchurch

*Leb’ wohl, du kühnes,
herrliches Kind!*

OF NEW ZEALAND MEMBER DETAILS

Christchurch

Friday, 21 February at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

The Ups and Downs of Wagner on

Film: Professor Heath Lees will talk about the making of the film *Wagner's Ring – A Tale Told In Music*

Friday, 28 March at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

The Good, the Bad and the Ravishingly Beautiful - Parsifal Act 2: Sid Kennedy continues his DVD screening of *Parsifal*, filmed in Bayreuth with conductor Horst Stein.

Friday, 16 May at 7.30pm

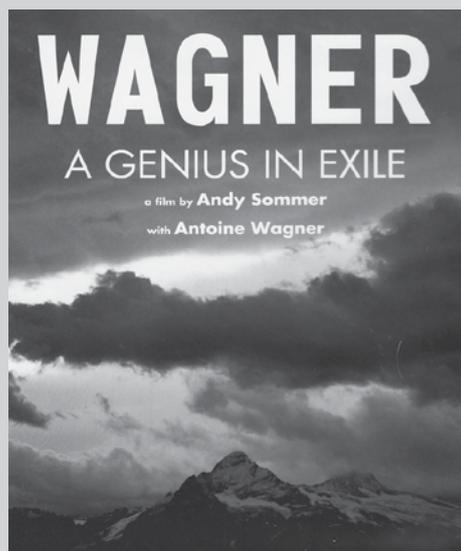
Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Wagner and Hotels: Professor John Drummond presents two life-changing moments for Wagner which took place in hotels: one in Chemnitz in 1849 and one in Stuttgart in 1864

Friday, 15 August at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Wagner in Exile: Chris Brodrick introduces this DVD - *Wagner in Exile* in which Antoine Wagner heads to Switzerland on the trail of his great, great-grandfather Richard Wagner who spent several years in political exile amongst the Alps



Friday, 31 October at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Rounding off the Wagner bicentenary year: Michael Sinclair, former secretary of the WSNZ, takes us through the Wagner year of 2013 with images, music and video from around the world including a round-up of the Melbourne *Ring*

Dunedin

Sunday, 23 February at 2.00pm

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

The Ups and Downs of Wagner on

Film: Professor Heath Lees will talk about the making of the film *Wagner's Ring – A Tale Told In Music*

Sunday, 16 March at 2.00pm

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

Château Wagner Commemorative:

With the death of Patrice Chéreau Professor Terence Dennis presents a commemorative tribute, drawn from the 1979 filming of his *Ring* at Bayreuth

Sunday, 11 May at 2.00pm

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

Wagner and Hotels: Professor John Drummond presents two life-changing moments for Wagner which took place in hotels, one in Chemnitz in 1849 and one in Stuttgart in 1864.

Sunday, 8 June at 2.00pm

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

The Golden Age Part 3 (Singers of the Cosima Era): In this third historical retrospective of famed Wagner singers of the past, Professor Terence Dennis features some of the rarest recordings of Wagner preserved for posterity. It is astounding to hear the voice of the first Parsifal, Hermann Winkelmann, Ternina, the Kundry of the 1899 Bayreuth *Parsifal*, and Lilli Lehmann, the Woglinde, Ortlinde and Woodbird in the original 1876 *Ring!*

Sunday, October at 2.00pm (Date TBC)

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

The View from the Stage - Part 3

(1924 -1944): Chris Brodrick continues his series on the Bayreuth Festival visitors

Sunday, 7 December at 12.00 noon

Venue: TBC

Christmas Luncheon followed by

Historical Perspectives: Winifred Wagner, wife of Wagner's son Siegfried, was the director of the Bayreuth Festival through the momentous period of 1930-1945. In 1975 she was interviewed, by German director Syberberg. This presentation will cover excerpts from the original five hour interview. German, with English subtitles



2020 VISION

Many of those who attended the NZSO *Die Walküre* performances in 2012 marvelled at the wonderful voice of Christine Goerke (above) and predicted great things for her. This week Chicago's Lyric Opera announced it is to embark on a new David Pountney production of the *Ring Cycle* conducted by Andrew Davis and starring Eric Owens as Wotan and Christine Goerke as Brünnhilde. The four operas are to be unveiled one by one in consecutive seasons beginning in 2016-17, and then as a cycle in April 2020. Chicago then in 2020?

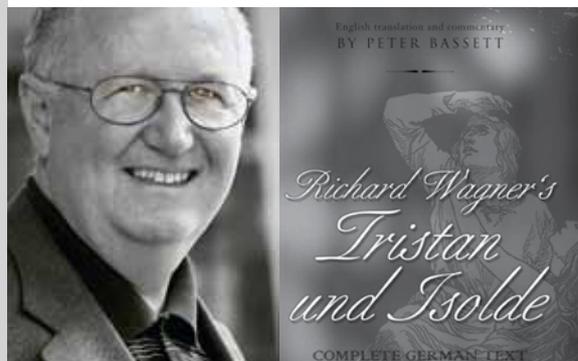
OH DEAR!!!

In a classic example of a little bit of knowledge being a dangerous thing the opera diva Angela Gheorghiu has declared, in an interview, that she would perform Wagner only if he wrote for her voice! It is not recorded whether or not the interviewer reminded the temperamental Ms G that the composer was in fact dead!

TRISTAN & ISOLDE PREPARATION

Members who would like to undertake a bit of homework before the July performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in Auckland might be interested in a new English translation and commentary on the opera by Peter Bassett (below). The book is available from www.peterbassett.com.au and if you identify yourself as a member of the WSNZ Peter will donate 40% of the proceeds to our Society.

Incidentally Peter will be in Auckland for *Tristan* as he is bringing a group of Australian Wagnerians across the Tasman for the performance.



DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN - REVIEW



Auckland WSNZ member Neil Jenkins gives us his thoughts on the Seattle Ring that he attended in August last year.

The success of Seattle Opera's massive undertaking of Wagner's epic is largely due to the outstanding design and clever staging together with a superb cast of principal singers and chorus. The costuming is excellent and the idea from set designer Thomas Lynch, in bringing the singers close to the audience, is overwhelming.

The depth of the stage may not equal that of other large houses, but scenery changes are slick due to an extremely wide wing space. The forest is a replica of that of a mountainous area north of Seattle which has been created with the care and detail needed to give it authenticity.

A cheering standing ovation from the audience at the close of each opera left me in no doubt of why Seattle Opera are so proud of their *Ring*.

For the opening of *Das Rheingold* Jennifer Zetlan (also as Forest Bird), Cecelia Hall and Renée Tatum moved gracefully as Rhinemaidens, not unlike mermaids, as they were flown around the stage narrowly escaping Alberich's clutches. Richard Paul Fink as Alberich showed his true nature throughout – a character we love to hate especially in *Götterdämmerung* where his persuasive manner highlights the dream sequence with Hagen.

Once in the forest Fricka reminds her husband that the giants will soon claim their reward for building their home. Stephanie Blythe commanded the stage with her presence throughout the cycle, whether it be as Fricka, Second Norn or Waltraute. Her voice has warmth and strength and yet she can be passionate, an attribute that must be the envy of the very best of mezzo sopranos. Here, the role of Fricka seemed stronger

than I have experienced in previous productions so it was no surprise that director Stephen Wadsworth had her witnessing the death of Siegmund, almost as if she trusts no one; not even her husband, to uphold her wishes.

Wotan was dramatically played by Greer Grimsley. His stature alone gave him a compelling presence at all times, regardless of what else was happening. His tenderness for Wotan's farewell compared to his loud stern call for Loge to place a fire around Brünnhilde's rock was impressive.

Mark Schowalter, a newcomer for Seattle, was breathtaking as Loge and together with Greer, and Dennis Petersen as Mime, we see much adroitness in the Nibelheim scene.

Giants Andrea Silverstrelli as Fasolt (later as Hunding) and Daniel Sumegi as Fafner (later Hagen) asserted supremacy. (I recall Sumegi's memorable performance as Jokanaan in *Salome* - Sydney 2003) The giants, as with the dwarfs, were evenly matched both physically and vocally. Sumegi's rendition as Hagen was of unveiling importance.

Wendy Bryn Harmer, as with Blythe, delivered the same roles she had previously undertaken with The Metropolitan Opera. Her Freia and Gutrune were delivered with a strong full-bodied, warm, lyric sound.

In the opening of *Die Walküre* Stuart Skelton as Siegmund and Margaret Jane Wray as Sieglinde were the incestuous lovers. They were perfectly matched vocally. Their singing was outstanding and Skelton's *Winterstorm* created an exciting highlight.

Alwyn Mellor sang Brünnhilde. She was vocally stronger, with vibrato in the upper register, and at times too soft with her lower notes, but this is a huge role and I believe she had suffered a virus the previous week. Her acting, second to none, was delivered with total conviction

especially during the final scene from *Götterdämmerung*.

The Ride of the Valkyries was to be another high spot of the evening and I should comment here that the occasional humour shown in the English surtitles was not missed eg. one of the Valkyries when questioned where she was replied 'I was busy!' Some of Siegfried's remarks when attempting to communicate with the Forest Bird were very apt.

Perhaps the most unexpected surprise for me, right from his first entry in *Siegfried*, was the excellence of tenor Stefan Vinke. What strength and energy he gave. The lengthy scene with Mime seemed to go more quickly than I have experienced previously. Vinke's clarity of sound together with his excellent diction and his beauty of tone impressed me from the first note to the last. It was nowhere better than in the scene shortly before Siegfried's death when he recalls his first meeting with Brünnhilde.

Götterdämmerung also had its special moments. Blythe and Wray were joined by a warm and pleasing tone from Lauretta Bybee in singing the three Norns.

Baritone Markus Brück sang an admirable Gunther and we had already heard him as Donner. Lucille Beer as Erde appeared through a stone wall for her final entrance. Her rich mellow tone was evident and she showed an exceptional legato line.

There were special effects with this *Ring* – the fire to surround Brünnhilde, (though not the finest I have seen); a huge bear appearing behind Siegfried as he returns from the forest; a magnificent and definitely the finest dragon we are ever likely to see, complete with a mighty wing span; and a live horse being led onstage ahead of Siegfried's 'Rhine Journey'; to name a few. Other principal singers include Ric Furman as Froh and Jessica Klein, Suzanne Hendrix, Tamara Mancini and Sarah Heltzel as Valkyries.

Conductor Asher Fisch was in complete control of each evening together with members from the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. There were no surprises with tempi. I must comment on the noteworthy sounds from the woodwind and brass.

Following the *Götterdämmerung* curtain calls the company's retiring director Speight Jenkins acknowledged the many people who gave their unlimited support to the success of this production and he indicated that there will be more future performances of the *Ring*.