



## CH-CH-CH CHANGES

The WSNZ newsletter doesn't normally acknowledge the death of a 'pop singer' but with the recent death of David Bowie we have to recognise the passing of an artist who was never afraid of reinventing himself. It also gives us the opportunity to use the words of a Bowie hit, *Changes*, to describe our 2016 programme.

**Change #1:** With the unavailability of the Music Theatre at the University of Auckland in late May we have decided to hold the AGM 'out of town' for the first time. The responsibility for this important meeting has been handed to Christchurch who will be holding a meeting on 6 May.

**Change #2 or the Ch-ch Change:** Christchurch meetings will have a change of venue, yet to be announced, during 2016 as the University of Canterbury have withdrawn all facilities to outside organisations while earthquake repairs are carried out. The alternative venue has, at the time of writing, still to be finalised but Christchurch members will be informed as soon as our new home has been confirmed. At this time we will ensure that you have very clear instructions, including a map, on where to go.

2016 will bring WSNZ members another varied programme including:

- Full screenings of *Götterdämmerung*, *Lohengrin*, *Walküre* & *Tannhäuser*
- A Heath Lees *Ring Day* in Dunedin and *Ring Refresher* in Wellington & Auckland
- Talks by John Drummond, John Pattinson, John Davidson and Terence Dennis on a variety of subjects ranging from Hotels to Tubas, from Singers to 'that' chord and Bacchanales to Dresden.
- The year will end with a number of members off to Australia for the revival of the *Melbourne Ring*.
- Wellington has to still finalise their programme - so there is more to come!

We hope that you find our 2016 programme rewarding.



The Metropolitan Opera HD live production of *Tannhäuser* will screen in your local cinemas in March.

James Levine conducts the first Met revival of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* since 2004, seen in Otto Schenk's 1977 production. Johan Botha sings his first company performances of the demanding title role, in a cast that also includes Peter Mattei as Wolfram, his second Met Wagner role; Günther Groissböck as the Landgraf; and Eva-Maria Westbroek as Elisabeth and Michelle DeYoung as Venus, the human and demonic rivals for *Tannhäuser's* affection.

For details of screenings go to: <http://nz.rialtodistribution.com/Tannhauser.html> or check your local paper around 10 March.



## IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BAYREUTH TICKETS PLEASE READ...

Most members will be aware that each year the society applies for and receives tickets to the Bayreuth Festival. Over the years our ticket allocation has dropped significantly and at the same time we have seen a drop in demand which has resulted in a long process to find members who want to purchase tickets. With our current method the society offers tickets to members who are highest on the waiting list and if they decline we move further down the list. With weak demand and the process coming right on Christmas it is taking longer and longer to find buyers.

In order to streamline the process we would like all members who want Bayreuth tickets in the future to reconfirm their interest. You will not lose your position on the waiting list. This will allow us to have a 'clean' list. Furthermore at the end of each year we will ask those members on the list to confirm their interest in the following year's festival. Again your waiting list position will not be affected by turning down the offer.

Would all members wishing to stay on the Bayreuth Festival ticket list please contact Peter Rowe at the address below or email Peter.Rowe@minterrellison.co.nz

## WAGNER MURMURS

- Roberto Alagna will sing *Lohengrin* at the 2018 Bayreuth Festival
- The Royal Swedish Opera will present the *Ring* in May 2017 with Nina Stemme as Brünnhilde
- Andreas Schager will sing *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 2017 and 2018
- Klaus Florian Vogt will sing Walther von Stolzing in a new production of *Die Meistersinger* at Bayreuth in 2017

- Michael Sinclair

# A Wagner Day In The South

## Dunedin Ring Day: 3 April



This year, on Sunday 3 April, the Dunedin Centre will start off the year with a major undertaking — a whole day of exploring Wagner's *Ring*, what John Deathridge calls "the biggest work in the history of Western music".

In four consecutive sessions, Heath Lees, president-emeritus of the WSNZ, will be taking the meeting into the bigger, plusher surroundings of Otago University's Marama Hall. Moving smoothly among the different fixtures of piano, lectern and projector screen, Heath will re-trace much of the material that he gave so successfully to the 2013 audiences for the *Melbourne Ring*.

In the Melbourne Recital Centre on every performance day, to audiences often in excess of 500, Heath developed the topic of *The Music of The Ring* and *the Life-Cycle of an Audience*. "It was the dedicated focus on the music that went down so well," says Heath. "The idea was that Wagner treats his audience like little children in *Das Rheingold*, then he gives them stronger, more challenging music as they grow through adolescence in *Die Walküre*. *Siegfried* casts them in the role of parents while the boy's music 'grows up' with him. By *Götterdämmerung* we've begun to feel like grandparents, somewhat

In August, last year, the German opera director Nikolaus Lehnhoff (above right) died at the age of 76.

Born in Hanover, Lehnhoff studied in both Munich and Vienna before starting his career at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin. In the 1960's he was Wieland Wagner's assistant in Bayreuth.

During his distinguished career he worked in all the major opera houses including New York's Metropolitan, Paris Opera, San Francisco, Hamburg and Glyndebourne.

disillusioned in old age, but able, thanks to the large, all-embracing musical canvas, to see the bigger picture, and to entrust the final outcome to the next audience generation.

"In these talks, I hope that people come to understand the amazing lifelike growth and dynamic structure that Wagner was able to command from beginning to end of his 16-hour work."

The Dunedin day starts at 10am with two sessions punctuated by coffee. Each opera will be taken in turn, with *Rheingold* and *Walküre* leading up to lunch at 12.30pm. (Lunchboxes are included in the entry charge, and tea, coffee and water will be available.) The exploration of *Siegfried* will follow at 1.30pm, and *Götterdämmerung* at 3pm. After a short question time the sessions will finish about 4.30pm.

Dunedin members are welcome to bring friends (for the same door entry charge of \$50) and members from other Wagner Society centres are also warmly invited. Invitations will be going out to Opera Society members as well.

**To book for the day, contact Lesley Kendall at (03) 487 8229 or e-mail lvkendall@xtra.co.nz with your name and phone number. Please RSVP no later than 23 March, 2016.**

### NICHOLAS LEHNHOFF — 1939 - 2015 —

Alex Ross, in his blog *'The Rest is Noise'*, wrote "Lavishly cultured and innately musical, Lehnhoff occupied a middle ground between traditional and radical approaches to directing opera. Schooled in that inexact science by Wieland Wagner, among others, he seldom slavishly followed indications in the libretto, nor did he impose a soundbite-ready concept; he tailored his ideas to the particular dimensions of the work."

## FUN WITH WAGNER

When Professor John Drummond gave his talk *Wagner and Hotels* at a Wellington branch meeting in September 2015, some members didn't attend because they thought that the topic didn't sound interesting enough. How wrong they were! It was in fact so fascinating that we immediately invited him back to talk on *Wagner and Trains*. When I announced this at our final meeting in October, member Nick Bridge, with willful perversity, 'misheard' this as *Wagner and Drains*. He then suggested that this thought could be further pursued. As a result, at our Christmas party we asked everyone present to write down a 'Wagner and ...' title for a possible future talk. The entries were put in a hat and the one drawn turned out to be *Wagner and Climate Change*, an interesting prospect, depending on how one might interpret the word 'Climate'.

For the record, other suggestions included *Wagner and Me* (twice), *Wagner and his Ego*, *Wagner and Women* (with a number of variations on this – no surprise!), *Wagner and the Third Reich* (again with variations), *Wagner and King Ludwig II*, *Wagner and the Death of Nietzsche*, along with such treasures as *Wagner and the Temple of Doom*, *Wagner and Weet-bix*, *Wagner and John Key*, *Wagner and his Relationship with Dogs*, *Wagner and the Moustache*, *Wagner and Sausages*, *Wagner and Jane Austen*, *Wagner and the Wellington Airport Extension*, and *Wagner and the Basin Reserve Flyover*.

Enough here to keep the Society's branches sprouting leaves for many years to come!

John Davidson



Nicholas Lehnhoff

Glyndebourne: *Tristan und Isolde*

# WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2016 PROGRAMME DETAILS

## Auckland

**Sunday, 21 February at 7.30pm**  
*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*  
**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, 10 April at 3.30pm (NB Early start)**  
*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*  
**Götterdämmerung:** complete showing of the 2009 Valencia production featuring Lance Ryan, Jennifer Wilson and Matti Salminen conducted by Zubin Mehta

**Sunday, 31 July at 7.30pm**  
*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*  
**Singers of the Cosima Era:** Terence Dennis will present this travel back in time and bring to life the great, pre-war Wagner singers who were caught in sound recording

**Sunday, 25 September 7.30pm**  
*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*  
**A Ring Refresher:** Heath Lees presents the *Ring* in 2 hours

**Sunday 11 December 7.30pm**  
*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*  
**Christmas Function:** Featuring a Pot-pourri of Wagneriana plus our famous cake and wine

## Wellington

**Sunday, 8 May at 4.00pm**  
*Venue: St Andrew's Church*  
**A Ring Refresher:** Heath Lees presents the *Ring* in 2 hours

**Sunday 10 July at 11.00 am**  
*Venue: The Bergman Theatre, Paramount Cinemas, Courtenay Place*  
**Joint meeting with the Opera Society.** Screening of *Die Walküre* (La Scala 2010, with Simon O'Neill)

**Further meetings planned include:**  
**Wagner and Trains:** Otago University's Professor John Drummond discusses the coincidence of Wagner's development at a time when he made important railway journeys.

**Christmas Party**

## Christchurch

**NB: Due to earthquake repairs at the University of Canterbury, our usual venue is unavailable in 2016**

**Friday, 11 March at 7.30pm**  
*Venue: TBA*  
**Bleeding Chunks & Bacchanales... a little taste of Tannhäuser:** Preparation for the Metropolitan Opera screening of *Tannhäuser* at local cinemas presented by John Pattinson

**Friday, 6 May at 7.30pm**  
*Venue: TBA*  
**WSNZ AGM followed by Behind the Score.....The Tristan Effect:** In this documentary, introduced by Chris Brodrick, conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and creative director Gerard McBurney present the vivid story of the opera's creation and its impact on musicians and artists of all kinds. It includes complete performances of the opera's Prelude and Liebestod, among other extensive orchestral passages from this great opera

**Friday, TBA August at 7.30pm (date to be confirmed)**  
*Venue: TBA*  
**Singers of the Cosima Era:** Terence Dennis will present this travel back in time and bring to life the great, pre-war Wagner singers who were caught in sound recording

**Friday, 16 September at 7.30pm**  
*Venue: TBA*  
**Tuba or not Tuba? That is the Question.** Mysterious, misunderstood, and a misnomer, the Wagner Tuba is an essential part of the *Ring* orchestra, and deserves to be better known. Presented by John Pattinson

**Friday, 28 October at 7.30pm**  
*Venue: TBA*  
**Tristan & Isolde....The Classical and Medieval Background.** Presented by John Davidson

**Sunday, 27 November**  
*Venue: TBA*  
**Christmas Social Function**



## WANTED

Do you have this CD recording of *Rienzi* that you'd like to sell? (Complete opera - conductor Edward Downes with John Mitchinson.) Call Ben Thomas - 04 5285 821 if you're interested.

## Dunedin

**Sunday, 3 April at 10.00am-4.30pm**  
*Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago*  
**A Wagner day in the South**  
 An exciting, day-long presentation by Heath Lees of all four operas of *The Ring*. For all interested members and their friends, and especially for those who might be considering a visit to the *Melbourne Ring* at the end of this year  
**Note: Entry (including lunchbox): \$50**

**Sunday, 22 May at 12.30pm**  
*Venue: Te Rangi Hiroa College Viewing Lounge, 192 Castle Street*  
**Wagner: Lohengrin**  
 A magnificent performance from the Vienna State Opera, conducted by Claudio Abbado with Plácido Domingo in the title role, Cheryl Studer as Elsa, Robert Lloyd as King Heinrich, Hartmut Welker as Telramund and Dunja Vejzovic as Ortrud.  
 A legendary cast in a legendary performance

**Sunday, TBA September at 2.00pm**  
*Venue: Black-Sale House, Department of Music, The University of Otago*  
**The Most Notorious Chord In The World**  
 The revolutionary opening bars of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* introduced the world to the so-called Tristan-chord, which has swept audiences off their feet and confused and bewildered music analysts ever since. In this talk Professor 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

**Sunday, 27 November at 12.00pm**  
*Venue: Carrington College, 57 Heriot Row (Turn right off Pitt Street)*  
**Wagner: The Dresden Years**  
 A special concert given in the Semperoper, the restored Dresden Opera House that saw the first performances of Wagner's major early operas, in celebration of the Wagner 200th Anniversary Year, 2013. Star tenor Jonas Kaufmann sings from *Rienzi*, *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser*, with the Staatskapelle Dresden under Christian Thielemann. Also on the programme is Wagner's early *Faust Overture*, and the overtures to *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*

## NEW MEMBER

A big Wagnerian welcome to:  
 Mary Clark ..... Christchurch



# TAKING OPERA'S TEMPERATURE

Dunedin-born singer **Martin Snell** has been performing operatic roles in Europe for over twenty years. As well as free-lancing, he has been a resident artist in Swiss opera houses, and made regular appearances at Bayreuth.

Recently Martin was in New Zealand. **Heath Lees** caught up with him to put some questions about the current state of opera. Here, Martin addresses wider operatic issues. In the next newsletter, he will turn his insider's impression to the current situation in Bayreuth

**HL:** *What do you think are the major problems facing opera today?*

**MS:** First, funding, or rather, the lack of it. Opera as an art form is complex and expensive. In Europe, for many generations, the public purse has had to substitute for aristocratic largesse. Today, in the German-speaking world, opera houses and theatres are funded through federal and local authority sources, private and corporate sponsorship, and of course ticket revenues. It is a feature of European life which has taken several centuries to establish as an integral part of the social psyche of a people and its culture. Through the economic turmoil of recent years, the viability of much of this cultural activity is in jeopardy. Governments are technically broke and increasingly driven to reduce expenditure.

There is also a marked emphasis on increased accessibility. New technology has opened the way to free opera performances outside, live streaming, simultaneous cinema broadcasts, DVD video productions, TV and radio broadcasts . . . not all the results are good, in fact many technologically progressive houses have seen a reduction in attendances. What's more, recordings are now generating little or no income.

**HL:** *What are the most worrying trends?*

**MS:** A very worrying feature is the increased emphasis on the employment of youth and exploitation of that youth because it is 'cheap'. I have been greatly concerned to see the premature exposure of inexperienced young singers to inappropriate repertoire, unrealistic workloads, minimal remuneration and the lack of a long-term career development strategy. Many conductors have little or no knowledge of voices and seek to further their own careers. It is difficult to see oneself as belonging to a core group of artistic personnel which has been nurtured

and developed over a period of years. Managements will engage performers as guests according to a chosen repertoire rather than selecting repertoire that suits the abilities of the existing ensemble. Ensemble singers may find that in one season they are continuously engaged for a monthly wage, but in the next season they may be seriously under-utilised, or even dispensed with.

An over-riding concern is the increasing loss of audiences. Many theatres and companies have good education programmes but these may bear fruit only after a period of years. Other supply-channels are virtually non-existent. Reduced importance is attached to the teaching of music in school, or to 'traditional' music-making in the home. Singing or playing together are activities that have been eroded with the passage of time. If parents have not been exposed to classical music and theatre then their children will also miss out, unless through enlightened teaching staff or benevolent relatives — who are very thin on the ground.

**HL:** *What advice would you give to aspiring opera singers keen to leave NZ and make a career overseas?*

**MS:** Major obstacles to New Zealand-born singers are immigration and access to the traditional musical employment markets. Many emerging vocalists still aim to go to the UK, but I'm sorry to say that the rising costs of both tuition and maintenance in the UK are increasingly untenable. I would actively advise NZ students against pursuing music studies in the UK unless they have all the requisite paper work, specifically an EU passport or an ancestry visa as well as guaranteed funding. As for future prospects well, frankly, the lack of employment opportunities and viable income sources present virtually insurmountable barriers.

In terms of wider Europe, German-speaking countries have always

offered the major operatic and musical activity. Germany levies no charges for tertiary education while Austria and Switzerland levy modest fees (c. EUR500 per semester). Of course a knowledge of German is a pre-condition. At the end of the day however, it is not the acquisition of a postgraduate qualification which will secure employment but rather one's ability to perform. Still, I would like to see a greater effort on the part of universities and opera companies in Australasia to retain and utilise those music graduates who would otherwise not have the means to pursue overseas studies.

There needs to be much more emphasis on performance as an integral part of any course of study, particularly during any initial postgraduate course. In my opinion, strong, pre-professional bodies such as the Opera Factory in Auckland provide the very minimum of what all tertiary vocal performance students should be exposed to before any consideration of additional studies or a career further afield.



*Martin Snell (R), as Prince Gremin, in NZ Opera's 2009 production of Eugene Onegin.*