



2019 — Our Big Birthday Year!

Yes — we've made the quarter century! The Wagner Society of New Zealand is twenty-five years old this year. And it's still going strong, with a membership that's counted in hundreds, plus a well-established tradition of regular meetings in four centres up and down the country.

Through its associated Wagner New Zealand Foundation, the WSNZ boasts a fine track record of donating to Wagner-related causes, events and performances located at home and in the wider Australasian region. Nowadays it also enjoys significant links with many Wagner Societies overseas, including the Verband International based in Bayreuth.

Thanks to its ever-growing links and organisation since 1994, the Society has enabled many New Zealanders to learn more about the world of Wagner scholarship and to attend Wagner performances overseas — in Bayreuth of course (up till then exceedingly difficult), and in the world's established Wagner cities such as Melbourne, San Francisco, New York, Munich . . .

Throughout this twenty-five year growth, the WSNZ has been fortunate

in having the famous New Zealand bass-baritone Sir Donald McIntyre as our patron and champion. From his twin centres of London and Munich, 'Sir Don' has always kept a lively

interest in what we were doing, and regularly visited us on his New Zealand trips, sharing his experience and insights (in 1994 even singing for us in Auckland). In earlier days, his huge input to Wellington's 1990 *Meistersinger* was followed two years later by Auckland's *Flying Dutchman* and then in 2006 there was his moving performance in the massive role of Gurnemanz in *Parsifal*, again in Wellington.

So it is with great pleasure and pride that we are marking the arrival of our twenty-fifth birthday with the publication of Sir Don's memoirs — a richly illustrated book that maps out the journey of his operatic life while at the same time bringing alive his own personal view of opera and Wagner over the last fifty years.

This important book was funded by generous donations from the Wagner New Zealand Foundation and the Sir Donald McIntyre Trust. The editing from manuscript to book was undertaken by Heath Lees, the Society's president emeritus, who, with Bettina McIntyre, also oversaw the collection and presentation of the 120-plus photographs that give so much life and immediacy to the work.

As part of the year's ongoing celebration, the May/June meetings of the WSNZ will be devoted to four book launches (Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin and then Wellington). These



Photo: Unitel
Donald McIntyre's signature role: *The Flying Dutchman*

launches will include presentations by Heath Lees on the life and work of Sir Don. Turn the page for the full year's calendar, and see when this will be happening in your city.

There's more too: on page four of this newsletter you'll find the first instalment of Roger Wilson's fascinating tale of the vision and indomitable spirit of those who got together in Wellington in 1990 to turn that McIntyre-led *Meistersinger* from dream into reality.

Yes, indeed. There's so much to celebrate. It's going to be a great Wagner year.



Photo: Peter Coates
Die Meistersinger in Wellington, 1990

RING 2020

In April 2020 Lyric Opera of Chicago will give three complete cycles of its new *Ring*, in a production directed by David Pountney which the company has been rolling out since 2016.

Most notable amongst the cast will be Christine Goerke as Brünnhilde, and the performances will be conducted by the company's music director since the year 2000, Sir Andrew Davis.

Last year we approached members about joining a WSNZ organised trip to this Ring and it is wonderful to report that 26 people have signed up for this adventure.

While our ticket allocation has been exhausted it should still be possible to join the group. If you are interested in this trip then please contact Michael Sinclair (who will be leading the group) as soon as possible at wsnz@theoperacritic.com.

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND • 2019 PROGRAMME



Tribute to
Peter
Hoffmann
(1944-2010)

Dunedin
10 March

Complete
Film of
Rienzi

Wellington
14 July



McIntyre's
Book
Revealed

All Centres
May-June

Hollywood's
Wagner

Christchurch
13 September



Auckland

Venue: St Heliers Community Centre, 100 St. Heliers Bay Road

Sunday, 24 February at 7.00pm

Absorbing the Complexity of Wagner: emerging as a singer-actor
A visit by popular mezzo Margaret Medlyn, Senior Lecturer in Voice at the New Zealand School of Music in Wellington.

Sunday, 14 April at 7.00pm

The Tristan Chord

John Drummond returns to unravel the mysteries of "the most notorious chord in the world" and introduces the first act of *Tristan and Isolde*.

Sunday, 19 May at 6.00pm

The Only Way is Up

Heath Lees celebrates the 25th birthday of the WSNZ with a video tribute to our Wagner Society patron Sir Donald McIntyre, whose book of memoirs is now being launched.

(The AGM will take place before the launch)

Sunday, 14 July at 2.30pm

Lohengrin in Perspective

Australian Wagnerite Antony Ernst flies in from Denmark to give an extended (four-hour) presentation on *Lohengrin*.

Sunday, 22 September at 3.00pm

Lohengrin

A full screening of the opera plus optional catered dinner.

Sunday, 8 December at 7.00pm

Festive fare of Wagner items, plus our famous cake and wine.

Wellington

Venue: St Andrew's Hall, 30 The Terrace (except 14 July)

Sunday, 10 March at 4.00pm

Title & Description to follow

Sunday, 19 May at 4.00pm

Cities that have Championed Wagner

Michael Sinclair looks at centres that have taken possession of Wagner's work and displayed it to the outside world.

Sunday, 9 June at 4.00pm

The Only Way is Up

Twenty-fifth birthday celebration and McIntyre book launch with Heath Lees. See entry for Auckland, 19 May.

Sunday, 14 July at 11.00am

Venue: Te Auaha: NZ Institute of Creativity, Dixon St.

Rienzi the Last of the Tribunes

Joint meeting with the Opera Society. DVD screening of the Deutsche Oper Berlin production.

Sunday, 21 July at 4.00pm

Lohengrin

Antony Ernst, artistic director of the Royal Danish Orchestra, presents a two-hour session on this opera.

September/October/Date TBA

Date and Programme to be arranged.

November/December/Date TBA

End of year party.

Christchurch

Venue: The Music Centre, St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Manchester St.

Friday, 29 March at 7.30pm

Weber and Wagner, Dresden Kapellmeister

Terence Dennis will introduce Wagner's music for the Dresden interment of the remains of Carl Maria von Weber. Striking parallels between Weber's operas and Wagner's early works will also be revealed.

Friday, 24 May at 7.30pm

The Only Way is Up

Twenty-fifth birthday celebration and McIntyre book launch with Heath Lees. See entry for Auckland, 19 May.

Friday, 19 July at 7.30pm

Tristan und Isolde

Antony Ernst, artistic director of the Royal Danish Orchestra presents a lecture on *Tristan und Isolde*, the opera to be screened on 13 October.

Friday, 13 September at 7.30pm

Magic Fire

William Dieterle's 1955 film of the life of Wagner. Alan Badel plays the composer and Erich Korngold arranges the music.

Sunday, 13 October, Afternoon Time and Venue TBA

Tristan und Isolde

DVD screening with a meal between the acts.

Sunday, 1 December, Evening Time and Venue TBA

Christmas BBQ/Pot-Luck

Dunedin

Venue: Black-Sale House Lecture Room, cnr. St. David and Leith Streets

Sunday, 10 March at 2.00pm

A Peter Hoffmann Retrospective

Terence Dennis presents a further review of the life and work of the dynamic tenor who burst onto the Wagner scene as Siegmund in the Chéreau Centenary *Ring* (1976).

Sunday, 7 April at 2.00pm

Great Wagner Sopranos of the 1930s

A second visit by Terence Dennis who now turns the spotlight on Kirsten Flagstad, Lotte Lehmann, and Germaine Lubin.

Sunday, 26 May at 2.00pm

The Only Way is Up

Twenty-fifth birthday celebration and McIntyre book launch with Heath Lees. See entry for Auckland, 19 May.

Sunday, 20 October at 2.00pm

Don Juan in Hell

Mozart, Ibsen, Wagner, and George Bernard Shaw: Chris Ackerley weaves a tapestry that joins this quartet through two semi-serious wagnerian parodies by GBS himself.

Sunday, 24 November at 12 noon

Venue: Carrington College, 57 Heriot Row (Turn right off Pitt Street)

Our Christmas lunch date followed by goodies à la Wagner.

A Memorable *Meistersinger* in Melbourne

Warwick Fyfe (*Beckmesser*) offers his serenade to the woman he thinks is Eva in Act 2 of *Die Meistersinger*, in the Melbourne production last November.

In fact, the subject of his musical charm is a very bored Magdalena, disguised as Eva, who stands at a reading desk disguised as a window. Beckmesser himself is playing on the inside frame of a harpsichord, disguised as a lute, in an enclosed space that is disguised as an outdoor street in Nürnberg.

In the following review, **James Bade** greets the production with undisguised anxiety over matters of direction, but allocates full marks to the musical performances.



Courtesy Opera Australia. Photo: Jeff Busby

Behind the veil, Dominica Matthews is distinctly unimpressed by Warwick Fyfe's serenade

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

State Theatre, Melbourne, 13 November, 2018
Orchestra Victoria/Opera Australia Chorus
conducted by Pietari Inkinen.

Original director Kasper Holten;
re-creation by Dan Doonen.

Review by James Bade

There was an air of expectation for this opening performance of *Die Meistersinger*, particularly for the New Zealanders in the audience who know Pietari Inkinen so well from his association with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

They were not disappointed. Inkinen kept the orchestra, chorus and singers under perfect control and maintained a sprightly pace throughout, while conducting key passages, such as the prelude to Act III, with considerable sensitivity. Kasper Holten's staging was appropriate overall, and at some points quite spectacular, though one would have to ask why the first half of Act III is relegated to such a dreary backstage set.

The opening staging for Act I was convincing, the design evoking that of a church and organ. The introductory hymn set the very high standard throughout for the Opera Australia Chorus - the only time they were ever slightly out of tempo was during the 'Johannistag' chorus in Act II, but Inkinen quickly corrected that.

All the soloists had strong voices with fine enunciation. The Australian mezzo-soprano Dominica Matthews was a very nice Magdalene, and a perfect match for the young Australian tenor Nicholas Jones as David, a role to which he brought much energy and verve. This was Jones's first major role, and he acquitted himself well-nigh

perfectly; the line he had to repeat in Act III was barely noticeable, and it was corrected just as an apprentice would. His explanation of the rules to Walther in Act I was perhaps the best I have ever witnessed. The German tenor Stefan Vinke impressed with a very polished performance as Walther. The Australian baritone Warwick Fyfe as Sixtus Beckmesser was delightfully duplicitous from his very first appearance in Act I, appearing much of the time like an evil and conniving Nosferatu, and was a favourite with the audience.

In the all-important role of Hans Sachs, Michael Kupfer-Radecky gave a profound rendering of 'Was duftet doch der Flieder' at the beginning of Act II, displaying the whole range of his extensive vocal modulation, which he made full use of throughout the opera; he was ideal for this role, with just the right mix of humour and solemnity. The vocal skills and dynamic stage presence of the Armenian-Australian soprano Natalie Aroyan as Eva came to the fore here in the key encounter that follows between Eva and Hans Sachs. The nightwatchman, sung well by the Melbourne bass-baritone Adrian Tamburini, is portrayed at the end of Act II as a satyr, the brawl degenerating into a chaotic Dionysian nightmare. But why does he not blow his night-watchman's horn?

Questions such as this tended to multiply as we moved from Act II to Act III. Why does Beckmesser play a keyboard rather than a lute? Why does David bring Sachs takeaway coffee in thermal cups? Why does Sachs have a backstage desk lamp? Why do Beckmesser and Walther drink from a water cooler? Why do Magdalene and David have earphones and microphones?

Why does the assembled chorus sing all the separate guilds' songs as an audience? Why all the modern gestures, photos and selfies?

However, the entry of the Meistersinger in Act III was magnificent, with all the pomp and ceremony that the occasion calls for. The 'Wach auf' chorus, Walther's prize song, and Sachs's call to honour German art and culture, which is more highly prized than the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (the surtitles got this point across well), brought the production to a stunning finish.

In spite of the annoying and completely superfluous anachronisms, this production was a musical triumph for Pietari Inkinen, the Victoria Orchestra, the Opera Australia Chorus, and all the soloists.

Wagner Murmurs

The latest whispers in Michael Sinclair's ears include the following:

- Katharina Wagner will direct a new production of *Lohengrin* at the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona in 2020. Klaus Florian Vogt will sing the title role.
- Stephen Gould, Lise Davidsen, Ekaterina Gubanova and Markus Eiche will sing the leading roles in Bayreuth's new *Tannhäuser* this year.
- Christian Thielemann will conduct a new production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at the forthcoming Salzburg Easter Festival.
- Göteborg Opera in Sweden will produce an 'ecologically sustainable' *Ring* between 2018 and 2021.
- Opera Australia will not be performing *The Ring* in 2020, citing renovations at Melbourne's State Theatre as the reason.

That Amazing 1990 Meistersinger in Wellington

Was this New Zealand's Greatest Wagner Triumph?

In the first of four instalments, Roger Wilson (Fritz Kothner) re-tells the story

There had never been anything in New Zealand to compare with the 1990 Festival production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Wellington. Festival Director, the late Christopher Doig, rightly regarded the whole project as one of his finest hours. He was the only person who would have dared dream of such a thing. After a successful European career as a tenor, Chris had returned to New Zealand to become director of the Christchurch Arts Centre (destroyed in 2011 and progressively re-built following the earthquakes).

In his new executive position, Chris showed such entrepreneurial and commercial flair that he was shoulder-tapped to head the embryonic New Zealand International Arts Festival. Shortly before this he had been engaged by Opera Australia to sing the rôle of David in their *Meistersinger*, a production created for Cologne Opera by Michael Hampe and gifted by the federal government (as it was then) to Australia in token of its 1988 Bicentenary.

Hans Sachs

At the time, the role of Hans Sachs was played by Donald McIntyre, whose Wagner reputation was growing to such an extent that for some years he had been Bayreuth's first choice for the role of Wotan. As two New Zealanders abroad, Chris and Don (now 'Sir Don') had become great mates and back home they often went to the beach together.

On one of these occasions, Chris was astonished to hear Don remark, rather wistfully, that if he'd gone about things differently he "might have had quite a good career". How could someone of his

distinction think such a thing? But then he went on to say how he regretted never having had the chance to perform in his home country the sort of work he did best. It has to be remembered that, back then, even knowledgeable opera-lovers in New Zealand had little notion of just how highly McIntyre rated internationally. But Christopher Doig did. Forthwith, he resolved to remedy this state of affairs by bringing the German-Australian *Die Meistersinger* and its stellar Hans Sachs to New Zealand.

Chutzpah is hardly the word. 'Wahn, Wahn, überall Wahn!' Sachs would have said. "Madness everywhere!" Doig carried all before him with single-mindedness, charm and, if necessary, ruthlessness. Revealing a genius for fund-raising, he persuaded Petrocorp to underwrite the enterprise with a cool million. Opera Australia co-operated, the German government and others came to the party. Suddenly, it was under way.

"It's Going to Happen!"

Terence Dennis and I happened to be in Chris's office in 1989 discussing other matters when he announced it to us in strictest confidence. I told him he was mad. He got that well-known gleam in his eye: "It's going to happen" he stated. And if Chris Doig said something would happen, it did.

He went on to share his plans thus far. His policy on casting was that first choice would be for singers who could not just pronounce German but actually speak it. The long Act 1 *Meister* scene — essentially a committee meeting set to music — is very wordy and can be a bore if the actors cannot understand and react to

every word. He said he wanted me to play either Kothner or Schwarz/Foltz, doubling with the Night Watchman. I walked on air all the way home, hoping it would be the former. Schwarz and Foltz are both 'bottom liners', rather low for me, and the Night Watchman, though a wonderful part, is very brief. But Kothner, a sort of head prefect and the Mastersingers' spokesman, lies comfortably in the Wagnerian Higher-Bass range, and could almost have been written for me.

Kothner — A Sort of Head Prefect

I was lucky and Fritz Kothner the Baker it was. Other NZ names came up almost naturally. Margaret Medlyn, now such a well-known mezzo-soprano (and Wagner Society life member), actually made her Wagner début in the four-note part of the apprentice who brings his master's apology for illness. Another NZ mezzo, Nadia Bishara, now a recognised soloist in the UK, was another apprentice, as was Suzanne Blackburn. Then of course there was Conal Coad, Peter Baillie, Edmund Bohan, Richard Green, Peter Russell, and a large number of unknowns — one of them a young chorus member named Martin Snell, who was later to become a regular at Bayreuth.

Clearly Doig had worked out how his *Meistersinger* could be cast from a New Zealand base. But where could it be staged? Every New Zealand venue presented huge obstacles to the project. Doig would need either magic or genius to solve this one. In the end, he succeeded, with what seemed like a heady mixture of both.

... As we'll see in the next newsletter.

(to be continued)

On the right is the latest Wagner joke going the rounds on the Internet.

Print or Digital?

Last year, the Committee of the WSNZ decided for reasons of economy, that print versions of the Newsletter should be discontinued at the end of 2020 (the point in time when our store of green 'shells' will run out).

After that, Newsletters will be distributed only through an e-mailed link, as happens in most cases now.

However, if you receive the print copy by mail and would like to switch over now, drop the Secretary an e-mail at:

peter.rowe@minterellison.co.nz



New Members

A hearty Wagnerian welcome to

James BagshawWellington
John BeckAuckland
Monika LevinsonAuckland
Paul LittleKaikohe
Anne McLeanWellington
Rita PaczianAuckland
Carolyn Rickards-ReesAuckland
Alywyn ReesAuckland

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