

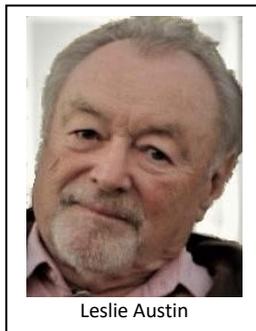
## 'Covid fan tutte, anyone?' – The 'Fun' Continues!

Welcome, all, to 2022! And you may not already be aware, but there really *is* an operatic entity entitled *Covid fan tutte* – concocted in 2020 by Finnish soprano Karita Mattila and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, it's a spoof of Mozart's *Così*, based on that opera's music with arias from *Don Giovanni* and *Die Zauberflöte* thrown in, and an entirely new, satirical, Covid-themed libretto. In it, Mattila hams it all up hilariously, with her Despina as a begoggled mad scientist! Mirroring real events, it opens with the Prelude to *Die Walküre* interrupted by Finnish Opera's 'customer interface manager', ordering Salonen to play Mozart instead, owing to 'Covid-related cutbacks'. (Brief trailer – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Hn\\_uzNoWfM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Hn_uzNoWfM) – looks like a barrel of belly laughs!)

Anyway, a year on from our first digital newsletter issue, we're still firmly stuck with Covid-19. Many members were already sorely disappointed last year when the Brisbane *Ring* was cancelled for the second year running. In the meantime, the big international Wagner Congress (held by the International Association of Wagner Societies) that was to have taken place in Madrid this month has now been postponed, while what was to have been Icelandic Opera's 'Iceland premiere' of *Die Walküre* has been cancelled. At the time of writing, the big Leipzig 'Wagner 22' event in June/July, presenting all 13 Wagner operas, is still going ahead, but it's anyone's guess how things will be looking by then, and some people have already been disposing of their tickets.

In NZ, all four regional centres have prepared detailed events programmes for the year (p. 2), but it remains to be seen whether we will be able to get back to operating as we used to, with Omicron currently on the march. Accordingly, all scheduled events may well be subject to change, so here's hoping for the best.

Finally, it is with considerable sadness that we also note the peaceful passing on 25 January 2022, in Masterton, of Leslie Austin, aged 86, a veritable doyen of the Wellington Branch. A staunch supporter of the NZSO, and with influential artistic 'friends in high places', Les was extremely knowledgeable and right up with the play when it came to leading orchestras, conductors, players and singers, whether past or present, or Wagnerian or otherwise. He always had a precisely informed opinion to hand – a very natural and well-regarded expert and enthusiast, with decades of experience. Meanwhile, he was also a true gentleman, in the very best traditional sense of the word. His later years were spent in the Wairarapa, not in



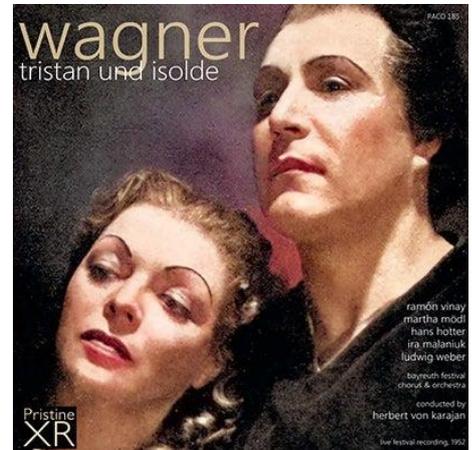
Leslie Austin

the best of health, but he maintained his contacts with fellow WSNZ members and others right up to the end. Accordingly – *leb' wohl, Du kühnes, herrliches Kind...*

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## Classic *Tristan* Re-release

Audiophiles may be interested to know that the historic 1952 *Tristan und Isolde*, recorded live at ('Neu-') Bayreuth, conducted by Herbert von Karajan and with singers Ramón Vinay and Martha Mödl, has been reprocessed in 'ambient stereo' by Pristine. It is obtainable either as a regular 3-CD set, or as hi-fi audio files, directly from their website, at [www.pristineclassical.com/products/paco185](http://www.pristineclassical.com/products/paco185) – here with full details and a very enticing seven-minute audio sample.



This is a notable re-release, since the new 'XR Remastering' is a significant sonic improvement over the original (mono) recording as available elsewhere. With two great leads and early Karajan at his most spontaneous and energised, this is widely regarded as one of the finest of complete, uncut *Tristan* sets. Other top-tier contenders include Knappertsbusch (1950), Furtwängler (1952), Böhm (1966, *two different* recordings, on DG/Philips and Frequenz, respectively, both made at the 1966 Bayreuth Festival), Karajan's later studio set (1971–72) and Kleiber (1980–81). Serious *Tristan* devotees will probably want to hear all these and more – note that all the above, except for Böhm's incomparably searing account on Frequenz, can also be streamed online!

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## Wagner Murmurs

- additional news from Michael Sinclair:
- Opera Australia have re-scheduled their twice-cancelled *Ring* cycle in Brisbane for December 2023.
- Seattle Opera return to Wagner with *Tristan und Isolde*, with Stefan Vinke and Mary Elizabeth Williams, to be performed in October this year.
- Jonas Kaufmann will sing the title role in Opera Australia's production of *Lohengrin* in Melbourne in May.

# WSNZ – 2022 Programme

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**NB: All events may be subject to change at short notice, in accordance with the prevailing Covid-19 situation**

## Auckland

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

**Sunday, 20 February at 7:00 p.m.**

Talk by **Michael Sinclair**: *Cities That Have Championed Wagner*.

**Sunday, 3 April at 7:00 p.m.**

Talk by **Michael Vinten**: *Rienzi: Wagner's Problem Child*.

**Sunday, 22 May at 7:00 p.m.**

The Wagner Society's AGM, to be followed by a presentation from **Terence Dennis**.

**Sunday, 14 August at 7:00 p.m.**

Round-up of the Leipzig 'Wagner 22' event, plus a showing of *Die Feen* (abridged version) on DVD, introduced by **Heath Lees**.

**Sunday, 16 October at 2:30 p.m. (note afternoon time)**

A full screening of *Rienzi*, and a catered dinner.

**Sunday, 4 December at 7:00 p.m.**

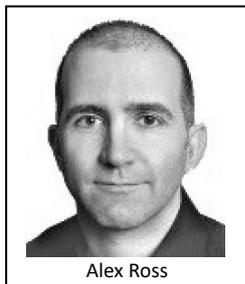
The celebratory end to the year: a Wagner 'potpourri', cake and wine.

## Wellington

Venue: St Andrews Hall, 30 The Terrace (except where otherwise indicated)

**Sunday, 20 March at 4:00 p.m.**

Talk by **Heath Lees**: *Wagnerism after Alex Ross*. Now that the initial impact of **Alex Ross's** mighty, 800-page *Wagnerism* has settled – hailed worldwide as 'the most important book on Wagner of our generation' – Heath, who was a reader for Ross's book draft, takes a wider and deeper look at the huge contribution the book makes to Wagner studies and its implications for European cultural history.



Alex Ross

**Monday, 21 March at 7:00 p.m. – postponed from last year**

*Te Auaha: NZ Institute of Creativity, Dixon Street (note venue)*

**(NB: Opera Society regular programme event, included here for information)**  
A screening of the controversial 2013 production of *Der fliegende Holländer* from Zurich Opera, with Bryn Terfel as the Dutchman.

**Sunday, 5 June at 11:00 a.m. (note early start)**

*Te Auaha: NZ Institute of Creativity, Dixon Street (note venue)*

Joint meeting with the **Opera Society**: A screening of the 1989 production of *Tannhäuser* from the Bayreuth Festival, directed by Wolfgang Wagner, conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli, and featuring Richard Versalle as Tannhäuser and Cheryl Studer as Elisabeth.

**August/October, date and time TBA – postponed from last year**

*Te Auaha: NZ Institute of Creativity, Dixon Street (note venue)*

A special screening of two documentaries showcasing two leading Australasian performers with a strong Wagnerian connection: *Five Faces of McIntyre*, about Sir Donald McIntyre (film also with Dame Malvina Major, Timothy Hawley and more – historic TVNZ production from 1979), and *Simone Young: To Hamburg from Downunder* (film originally produced for North German television, from 2008).

**September, further details TBA**

Talk by **Terence Dennis**: *Wagner on Wagner*, a presentation of Wagner's concepts of opera as defined in his polemic *Opera and Drama*.

**Sunday, 23 October at 4:00 p.m.**

**Michael Vinten** returns with a new talk on Wagner's Grand Romantic Opera based on the medieval minstrel knight torn between the poles of sacred vs. profane love: *Tannhäuser – Wagner's Unfinished Opera?*

**November/December**

End-of-year party. Date and venue TBA.

(Potential programme addition or substitution – presentation by **John Davidson** and **Michael Ashdown**: *Wagner and Humour*.)

## Christchurch

**Sunday, 27 February at 2:00 p.m.**

Venue: 74 Hackthorne Road

DVD showing of *Der fliegende Holländer*, introduced by **John Pattinson**, and an afternoon tea.

**Friday, 6 May at 7:30 p.m.**

Venue: St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room

**Edmund Bohan** will give a presentation on the topic of *Wagner and the Voice*, drawing on his extensive knowledge and experience as a singer and historian.

**Friday, 29 July at 7:30 p.m.**

Venue: St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room

**Michael Vinten** returns with a talk on Wagner's Grand Romantic Opera based on the medieval minstrel knight torn between sacred and profane love: *Tannhäuser – Wagner's Unfinished Opera?*

**September/October, further details TBA**

Presentation by **Terence Dennis** on Wagner's early opera, *Das Liebesverbot*.

**Sunday, 27 November at 4:30 p.m., venue TBA**

Christmas function.

## Dunedin

Venues TBA (except where otherwise indicated)

**Sunday, 10 April at 2:00 p.m.**

Talk by **Terence Dennis**: *Wagner and Meyerbeer*. Terence discusses Wagner's infamous *Jewry in Music* and the music of Giacomo Meyerbeer, the most successful of French Grand Opéra composers, including a film of the complete 4th act of *Les Huguenots* – held to be the finest act of Grand Opera before the 4th act of Verdi's *Don Carlos* – and also music from *Le Prophète* and *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*.

**Sunday, 3 July at 1:30 p.m.**

A screening of the complete *Das Rheingold* from the epochal 1976 Bicentenary Chéreau *Ring* production at Bayreuth, as filmed in 1980 with Sir Donald McIntyre as Wotan – introduced by **Terence Dennis**.

**Sunday, 14 August at 2:00 p.m.**

Talk by **John Drummond**: *Reforming the Reformer*. John discusses Wagner's extensive 1847 revision (with rescoring, a new ending and even some of his own music) of Gluck's first French opera, *Iphigénie en Aulide*, for a performance in German at the Dresden Court Opera.

**Sunday, 30 October at 2:00 p.m.**

**Michael Vinten** returns with a new talk on Wagner's Grand Romantic Opera based on the medieval minstrel knight torn between the poles of sacred vs. profane love: *Tannhäuser – Wagner's Unfinished Opera?*

**Sunday, 27 November at 12:00 noon**

Venue: Carrington College Dining Room and Linten Lounge, Heriot Row  
Our traditional end-of-year Christmas event.

## In Memoriam: Barry Mora, 1940–2021



Barry Mora (with hat!) as Gunther, *Götterdämmerung*, Frankfurt Opera, 1980s (www.barrymora.com)

Barry Mora, Wagner Society member and international star of the operatic stage, died at his home in Auckland on 11 October 2021, in his 81st year. A long career and an extensive and varied repertoire took him to the great opera houses of Europe as well as Canada, South America, Japan and Australia, and, late into his 70s, he was also seen in memorable roles in New Zealand.

The son of farming parents in Taikorea in the Manawatu, he attended Palmerston North Boys' High, making the rugby First XV. His first job upon leaving school was with radio 2ZA, followed by a stint in Wellington in a management position with the NZSO. He moved to Tauranga, taking part in amateur musicals and contesting the Hamilton Competitions. Rather than pay his accompanist, he married her – Dianne South, who risked it all for the precarious life of a singer's wife. They had 58 years of marriage, two children – Chris and Clare – and 22 moves.

They headed for London, where Barry took lessons from renowned baritone Otakar Kraus. In 1976, he successfully auditioned for the opera theatre in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, where he soon became the company's principal baritone. Four years later, he was offered a contract in Frankfurt, one of Germany's 'A' houses, where he remained for seven years, garnering experience in the German and Italian repertoire and roles ranging from the heroic to the tragic to the comic. Frankfurt freely granted him release from his contract to take guesting roles in theatres throughout Germany.

With engagements well into the future, Barry 'went freelance' and the family moved to Cardiff, which led to many roles with

Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and Covent Garden – which provided the high points of his Wagnerian career with appearances in *Das Rheingold* (Donner) and *Götterdämmerung* (Gunther), roles that he also sang for Frankfurt Opera.

In 1990, the pull of their homeland brought the Moras back to New Zealand, and they settled in Wellington, subsequently moving to Auckland, with Barry able to continue his international career with guest engagements, also taking on numerous roles in Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury. Barry served on the NZ Opera board and, despite the early stages of pancreatic cancer, which he battled for three years, made his final stage appearances with NZ Opera as the Sacristan in *Tosca* and the dual roles of Alcindoro and Benoît in *La bohème*. Those of us who heard him here can attest to the robustness of his technique, the beauty and resonance of his voice and the flair-without-flamboyance with which he commanded the stage.

Ever supportive of his colleagues and especially of the younger up-and-comings, Barry gave freely of his time, knowledge and skills as mentor and tutor. His experience and counsel were immensely beneficial to students of the New Zealand Opera School in Whanganui.

The consummate performance artist, Barry had quality of tone, range and technique, a flair with languages, was thorough in his preparation of his work, a quick learner who brought warmth, encouragement and good cheer to the rehearsal room, and – rare in the performance world – he was a benevolent 'giving', supportive colleague.

– Richard Green

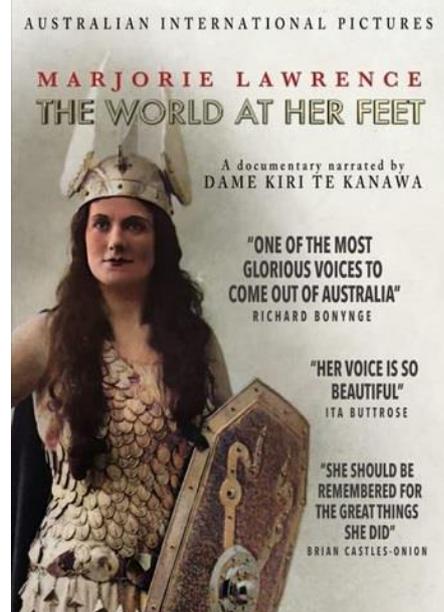


Appointment as member of the NZ Opera Foundation, with Simon O'Neill at right, November 2020 (www.barrymora.com)

With engagements well into the future, Barry 'went freelance' and the family moved to Cardiff, which led to many roles with

## New Film – The Legendary Soprano Marjorie Lawrence

From Australian International Pictures comes an 80-minute documentary about the legendary Australian dramatic soprano, Marjorie Lawrence (1907–1979), narrated by Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. The film premiered in Australia just before Christmas last year:



Lawrence was born at Deans Marsh, southwest of Melbourne, and her life story was a mixture of triumph, tragedy and lastly triumph again. After winning the Sun Aria vocal competition in Geelong in 1928, she moved to Paris for further voice study, and in 1932 she made her Wagnerian debut at Monte Carlo, singing Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*. This eventually led to her debut at The Met in New York City in late 1935, as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*, and soon built up an enviable reputation, being the first to ride an actual horse into the flames at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, performing 'The Dance of the Seven Veils' in Richard Strauss' *Salome* and otherwise alternating with Kirsten Flagstad and often singing together with Lauritz Melchior as her Siegfried. Then, in 1941, she was struck down with polio. Although physically hampered as a result, she continued to entertain Australian troops at charity concerts during World War II, seated in a chair, and returned to concerts and opera performances after the war, but ceased performing after 1952 and became a teacher. Once Australia's most famous living woman, she is relatively little known today.

You can enjoy the official trailer here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjUsgQruQfI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjUsgQruQfI) – it's not every film trailer that kicks off with 'Der Männer Sippe sass hier im Saal' from Act 1 of *Die Walküre*! That's actress Eleanor Parker introducing Lawrence at 00' 40" – Parker, herself an opera lover and singer, starred as Lawrence in the 1955 Hollywood biographical film, *Interrupted Melody* (her singing dubbed by Eileen Farrell). For this, she was nominated for an Academy Award.

## Notable Kiwi Connections in Recent Productions Abroad

### Kirstin Sharpin's Thuringia *Tristan Triumph*



Kirstin Sharpin, soprano  
(Photo: Kirstin Sharpin)

A few weeks ago, we received an email quite out of the blue from New Zealand soprano, Kirstin Sharpin, alerting us to the fact that she was about to sing the Herculean role of Isolde in a production of *Tristan und Isolde* to be given at the Theater Nordhausen in the provincial city of Nordhausen in Thuringia, Germany. This was a surprise, since we were unaware of any other New Zealand singers who had tackled the role in a full-scale production, other than Margaret

Medlyn, who once prepared the role in full for Welsh National Opera.

Kirstin originally studied English and Italian at the University of Auckland and went on to graduate from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (in Glasgow), with a Master of Opera with Distinction. Further study followed at the Cardiff International Academy of Voice. In 2015, she won the 8th International Wagner Voices Competition (*Gesangswettbewerb für Wagnerstimmen*) in Karlsruhe, Germany, organised by the International Association of Wagner Societies. Since graduating, she has amassed a diverse repertoire of Classical and Romantic opera roles and concert pieces. On the Wagnerian front, she has sung Helmwige, Ortlinde, Gerhilde and Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*, the *Wesendonck-Lieder*, and roles in Wagner's early operas, *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot*. Her debut as Senta (*Der fliegende Holländer*) for Longborough Festival Opera was also highly praised.



Now, we hear that her Isolde at the small Theater Nordhausen, in which she made her debut on 29 January, has been a resounding success. Accompanied by the Loh-

Orchester Sondershausen conducted by Michael Helmroth, Kirstin is appearing together with Alexander Schulz as Tristan, Thomas Kohl as Marke, Nina Keitel as Brangäne and Thomas Berau as Kurwenal. The orchestra is small, just 50 players, with the audience limited to a few hundred (social distancing). There is also the 'traditional' cut in the Act 2 Love Duet, while the 'moderately modern' production, directed by Ivan Alboresi, features imaginative lighting effects and backdrops. Brief trailer here – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbTLfY2 -Aw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbTLfY2-Aw) – the premiere elicited eight minutes of applause and a standing ovation!

It was Kirstin in particular, however, who won special praise for the clarity, assuredness, articulation, suppleness and radiance of her voice, and for her acting skills. The remaining performances have been scheduled for February, March and May; we send Kirstin our heartiest congratulations, and wish her 'toi, toi, toi' for those performances as well. (Photos: Theater Nordhausen)



### Sani Muliaumaseali'i, GAFA and *RinGafa*



*RinGafa*, St Mary's Church, Putney, London (photo: GAFA Arts Collective)

GAFA (pronounced 'nafa', and Samoan for 'genealogies') is a small arts collective in London, run by artists of Samoan descent, and – extraordinarily – it presented a *complete*, intimate *Ring* cycle over four Saturdays last October/November in St Mary's Church in Putney, southwest London. Under the moniker *RinGafa: The Power of Love of Power*, these were semi-staged performances, sung in German, and augmented with Samoan elements including traditional costumes and, in *Siegfried*, even a fire dance. This was the brainchild of artistic director and GAFA co-founder, Sani Muliaumaseali'i, born in Auckland to Samoan parents. Sani is an internationally known tenor who studied music at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music; he also sang the role of Siegfried, as he did in GAFA's original standalone production of *Siegfried* three years ago. The international cast, which featured emerging Wagnerian singers, also included mezzo-soprano Christie Cook from Auckland, singing Flosshilde, Siegrune and the Second Norn, and contralto Rhonda Browne from Havelock North, singing Erda and Schwerteleite. Meanwhile, soprano Isabella Moore, whom Wellington members may remember singing Wagner's *Wesendonck-Lieder* a few years back, and who herself has a Samoan background, sang Gutrun. The excellent accompanying Rosenau Sinfonia ensemble, reportedly playing from a 'reduced-wind score' by Alfons Abbas (1854–1924), was conducted with verve by Stephen Anthony Brown, who exhibited a real flair for the Wagnerian idiom.

More a complete presentation of the *Ring* than an adaptation, here the work's original mythological elements were dovetailed with Samoan interpolations, generating a pointed subtext that critiqued irreversible change in Samoa and the Pacific following the Europeans' arrival, associated with the imposition of foreign culture and values, confiscation of land, the 1918 flu pandemic and climate change – and the Samoan gods lost their power, just like their Nordic counterparts did. The performances were received very enthusiastically indeed, with the Samoan elements also adding to the overall performance times – so GAFA hopes to be able to repeat them in a full production in the future, maybe even this year. All kudos to Sani and GAFA for such a strikingly original achievement! – judge for yourself:



Sani Muliaumaseali'i  
(Photo: GAFA Arts Collective)

– TVNZ *One News* report, 30 October 2021 (2 min.):

<https://www.1news.co.nz/2021/10/29/kiwi-in-london-putting-samoan-spin-on-famous-opera/>

– An Audience with *RinGafa – Das Rheingold* (3 min.):

<https://vimeo.com/641106940>

– *Siegfried* – An Audience with *RinGafa* (7 min.):

<https://vimeo.com/648036289>