



## A Richer New Year, with Some Fantastic Events

A Happy New Year to you all. Having largely come through the Covid pandemic over the past year (one fondly hopes), not to mention the catastrophic flooding events these past weeks, we can now hopefully and cautiously look forward to a better and richer year ahead, with some tremendously exciting events both here at home and across the ditch in Australia. Lest we forget, there will be not just one, but two *Ring* cycles given in Australia this year, the first from Melbourne Opera, directed by Suzanne Chaundy and performed in the Ulumbarra Theatre in Bendigo (24 March – 30 April). Anthony Negus, who so memorably conducted the 2006 *Parsifal* in Wellington, is returning to conduct the 90-strong Melbourne Opera Orchestra for the first two cycles, while David Kram AM will conduct the third. As with the Melbourne *Ring* in 2013 and 2016, there are impressive names in the cast, with Warwick Fyfe having already ‘graduated’ to the role of Wotan, after having been so well received as Alberich in 2013/16. *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* were all premiered in Melbourne in 2021/22, the latter as a concert-only performance last September.

Meanwhile, Opera Australia’s much-delayed digital *Ring* in Brisbane (director: Chen Shi-Zheng) is finally going ahead in December, again with three cycles. This will very likely be the jewel in the crown when it comes to this year’s Australian Wagner productions, and of course our own Michael Sinclair has already revived his organised tour for WSNZ members with an allocation of tickets for the second cycle. See Michael’s update on page 3 – for members who might still be interested, note that there are still some limited package options available.

Smaller in scale, but no less star-studded in their own way, there will also be two concert-only performances of

*Tannhäuser* (NB: ‘Paris’ version) on 17 and 20 May, in Hamer Hall in Melbourne’s Arts Centre. The seasoned Wagnerian, Asher Fisch, will conduct Orchestra Victoria (with the Opera Australia Chorus), and the well-known German tenor, Stefan Vinke, will sing the highly taxing titular role. Anna-Louise Cole will take on the role of Venus, and Amber Wagner (no relation!) Elisabeth. Complete performances of *Tannhäuser* in Australasia are few and far between; the last was Elke Neidhardt’s production in Sydney, in 2007. Renaissance Tours is also offering a tour to the performance on the 20th, to be led by Peter Bassett – bookings and further details available at: <https://renaissancetours.com.au/tours/opera/tannhauser-in-concert-2023-2/>

Here at home, all four regional centres have organised busy programmes for 2023, with details given on page 2. Regular presenters, Terence Dennis and Michael Vinten, will be giving further talks around the country, including a couple of new ones – Terence in Dunedin on the recording of the early, abridged, but ambitious HMV *Ring* Cycle in 1927–32, while Michael will debut a new talk in Wellington, *Wagner and Conducting*. Finally, a major highlight for all four centres will be the upcoming tour with Terence and Dunedin’s terrific young pianist/composer, Abhinath Berry.



Abhinath Berry (Photo: University of Otago)

Members will recall Abhinath’s earlier recital tour with Terence two years ago.

The programme for the new recital series is quite extraordinarily ambitious:

- *Halévy-Wagner: Le Guitarrero Overture for 4 hands*
- *Meyerbeer-Liszt-Busoni: Ad nos, ad salutarem undam – Fantasie*
- *Liszt: Sonata ‘Après une lecture de Dante’*
- *Wagner-Liszt: Der fliegende Holländer – Fantasie*
- *Wagner-Liszt: Meistersinger – Fantasie*
- *Wagner-Liszt: Tannhäuser-Ouverture*

The final item is one of the most difficult (Lisztian) pieces in the entire piano repertoire, so don’t miss out!

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## Wagner Murmurs

– additional news from Michael Sinclair:

- The *Ring* returns to Seattle! Seattle Opera will perform *Das Rheingold* in August 2023 with Greer Grimsley as Wotan.
- Theater Basel will present a new production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* between 2023 and 2025. The production will be directed by Benedikt von Peter.
- Simon O’Neill will sing the title role in *Lohengrin* at the San Francisco Opera during its 2023/24 season.
- Edmonton Opera will present a new production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* using Jonathan Dove’s reduced version, beginning with *Das Rheingold* in May 2024.

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## New Members

Quite a few this time – we are pleased to extend a warm Wagnerian welcome to:

- Christine Gunn.....Auckland  
 Milan Magan.....Wellington  
 Roger Simmons.....Wellington  
 Philip Meguire/Ruth Bivins...Christchurch  
 John Matthews/Neil Rodgers.....Dunedin

Herzlich willkommen – seid Euch gegrüsst!

# WSNZ – 2023 Programme

## Auckland

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

**Sunday, 16 April at 7:00 p.m.**

Recital: **Abhinath Berry** and **Terence Dennis** return to present another blockbuster *Wagner/Liszt Piano Recital*, featuring Wagner rarities and some of the greatest virtuoso piano transcriptions.

**Sunday, 21 May at 7:00 p.m.**

*Formals and Informals* – the Wagner Society's AGM, to be followed by a presentation from **Terence Dennis**.

**Sunday, 6 August at 7:00 p.m.**

**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?*

**Saturday, 14 October at 2:30 p.m. (note Saturday afternoon time)**

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

**Sunday, 3 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, 23 April at 4:00 p.m.**

Venue: *St Andrew's Church, 30 The Terrace (note the Church, not the Hall)*  
Recital: **Abhinath Berry** and **Terence Dennis** return to present another blockbuster *Wagner/Liszt Piano Recital*, featuring Wagner rarities and some of the greatest virtuoso piano transcriptions.

**Sunday, 27 August at 4:00 p.m.**

A brand-new talk by **Michael Vinten** on another area in which Wagner has exerted an enormous influence: *Wagner as Conductor*.

**Sunday, 3 September at 4:00 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, 1 October 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 highly acclaimed 2011 production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* from Glyndebourne, directed by David McVicar, conducted by Vladimir Jurowski, and featuring Gerald Finley as Hans Sachs, Marco Jentsch as Walther von Stolzing, Johannes Martin Kränzle as Sixtus Beckmesser and Anna Gabler as Eva Pogner.

**November/December**

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

## Christchurch

**Friday, 21 April at 7:30 p.m.**

Venue: *St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room*

Recital: **Abhinath Berry** and **Terence Dennis** return to present another blockbuster *Wagner/Liszt Piano Recital*, featuring Wagner rarities and some of the greatest virtuoso piano transcriptions.

**Friday, 21 July at 7:30 p.m.**

Venue: *St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room*

Talk by **Syd Kennedy**, entitled: *Who Is Brünnhilde, What Is She?* This will include some ancient history, Norse legend and Wagner, rolled together with extracts from the 1976 Bayreuth *Ring* production as filmed in 1979/80 (directed by Patrice Chéreau, conducted by Pierre Boulez, with Dame Gwyneth Jones, Sir Donald McIntyre and others).

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

Venue: *St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room*

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 December – time and venue TBA**

Christmas function.

## Dunedin

**Sunday, 26 March at 2:00 p.m.**

Venue: *University of Otago School of Performing Arts, 145 Union St East*

Continuing his long-established series of *Historical Perspectives*, **Terence Dennis** presents the first attempt to record an abridged *Ring* Cycle, the ambitious 1927–32 HMV *Ring*, with great Wagner singers such as Frida Leider, Friedrich Schorr, Lauritz Melchior, Walter Widdop and Florence Austral, in astonishing sound for its period.

**Sunday, 7 May at 2:00 p.m.**

Venue: *Marama Hall, University of Otago*

Recital: **Abhinath Berry** and **Terence Dennis** return to present another blockbuster *Wagner/Liszt Piano Recital*, featuring Wagner rarities and some of the greatest virtuoso piano transcriptions.

**Sunday, 7 July at 11:00 a.m.**

Venue: *Te Rangi Hiroa College Viewing Room*

Our winter viewing continues the seminal Bayreuth Centenary *Ring* in Patrice Chéreau's production of *Die Walküre*, filmed in 1980. The cast features Peter Hofmann (Siegfried), Janine Altmeyer (Sieglinde), Dame Gwyneth Jones (Brünnhilde), Sir Donald McIntyre (Wotan) and Ruth Hesse (Fricka). Luncheon/afternoon tea to follow Acts 1 and 2.

**Sunday, 17 September at 2:00 p.m.**

Venue: *University of Otago School of Performing Arts, 145 Union St East*

What are we to make of the *Ring*? Emeritus professor **John Drummond** explores Wagner's most monumental work in the context of the artform to which it belongs: music-drama. Given the ever-new contexts afforded the complex and at times contradictory tetralogy, John asks, 'Is the *Ring* Cycle flawed, or impenetrable, or what? What sort of response should we have to it? Does analysis help? Should we just lie back and enjoy it?'

**Sunday, 26 November at 12:00 noon**

Venue: *Carrington College*

*Wagner Christmas Luncheon and Conversazione/Concert*. To end our year, **Scott Bezett** and **Terence Dennis** discuss the origins of Greek Classical Drama and how these inspired the origin of opera and, by extension, Wagner's music-drama. Many will remember Scott's vocal MMus Recitals, with Terence, and he is completing his Masters in Classics. He also performed memorably at one of our past Christmas Luncheons. Scott will also sing the first great scena for the male singer in operatic history: the *Lament of Orpheus* from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607).

## The Brisbane Ring – Third Time Lucky!

## Changing of the Guard

### Daniel Barenboim Steps Down in Berlin

Many members will already be aware that Daniel Barenboim (80) has stood down as general music director of Germany's Berlin State Opera, effective as of 31 January this year. Last October, he had been diagnosed with a severe neurological condition, vasculitis, which causes painful inflammation of the blood vessels, and he increasingly felt that he was unable to meet the required standards of a general music director. For the current Berlin State Opera *Ring* cycle, a brand-new production by Dmitri Tcherniakov, Barenboim's place on the podium has been taken by potentially one of his keenest rivals, Christian Thielemann; in fact, Barenboim asked Thielemann to take over his role.

Daniel Barenboim has been a leading figure in the Wagnerian world for four decades. For example, he conducted seminal productions of *Tristan* at Bayreuth (dir. Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, 1981–87, and dir. Heiner Müller, 1993–99) and at La Scala in Milan (dir. Patrice Chéreau, 2007–08), as well as recording the work in the studio with the Berlin Philharmonic (1995); likewise, his first *Ring* at Bayreuth with director Harry Kupfer (1988–92) counts as one of the very finest latter-day productions of Wagner's tetralogy. These, together with his recordings of *Parsifal* (studio recording with the Berlin Philharmonic, 1993, and a stage production by Harry Kupfer with the Berliner Staatskapelle, also 1993), are all among his greatest Wagnerian achievements, showcasing his tremendous musical finesse, understanding and attention to detail. Others have included *Die Meistersinger* at Bayreuth (1996–2002), and another *Ring* at La Scala (2010–13); all the abovenamed productions are also available on video. Barenboim will continue to conduct (as chief conductor of the Berliner Staatskapelle, for example), but he will leave a huge gap.

(Just at this point, we should also mention the passing on 4 February of the highly respected Hamburg theatre director, Jürgen Flimm, aged 81. Flimm is best remembered in Wagnerian circles for directing the 'Millennium *Ring*' at Bayreuth in 2000–04.)



The Rhinemaidens – Australian style! (Photo: Opera Australia)

After postponements in both 2020 and 2021, Opera Australia is finally set to debut its new production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Brisbane in December 2023. The production will be the brainchild of Chinese director Chen Shi-Zheng, who will explore Wagner's legendary tale through a futuristic lens, using towering, moving digital panels to create an immersive virtual world.

The performances will be conducted by the experienced *Ring* conductor, Philippe Auguin. He leads a cast of international stars, including Lise Lindstrom as Brünnhilde, Stefan Vinke as Siegfried and Daniel Sumegi as Wotan. The cast will be complemented by the Queensland Symphony's Ring Cycle Orchestra, which will unite musicians from across Australia.

Opera Australia has scheduled three cycles during December 2023, and the Society has obtained an allocation of tickets for the second cycle, which will run from 8–14 December 2023. Members have the option to purchase a full package to the *Ring*, including tickets, accommodation and ancillary events, or they can purchase tickets only, which are being offered at a 10-percent discount over the standard published price. Full information can be found on the Society's website at <http://wagnersociety.org.nz/brisbanerimg/package.html>, or members can also email Michael Sinclair directly at

[wsnz@theoperacritic.com](mailto:wsnz@theoperacritic.com) for further information.

Please note that space on the package arrangements is now very limited, so don't delay if you would like to join the Society for this exciting event.

– Michael Sinclair

... In addition to the details given by Michael above, note too that the performances are to be given in the ultra-modern Lyric Theatre in Brisbane's Queensland Performing Arts Centre. Some may also be interested to see the following brief video clips made to promote this long-awaited new *Ring* – potentially, it looks very stylish indeed:

– **The *Ring* Cycle | Chen Shi-Zheng on creating a digital epic for Brisbane:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICji1aTp0jQ>

– **The *Ring* Cycle | Chen Shi-Zheng on directing Wagner's epic:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEptDR0qPok>

– **The *Ring* Cycle | Digital Content Designer Leigh Sachwitz:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUJ7D7JJB14>

– **The *Ring* Cycle | Costume designer Anita Yavich's futuristic world:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ml60ltuhNi4>

## In Memoriam

### Rodney Macann

4 June 1942 – 20 January 2023



Investiture of Rodney Macann as MNZM for services to opera and the Baptist Church, 14 April 2016 (photo: Government House)

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of New Zealand's distinguished bass-baritone, Rodney Macann, in Wellington on 20 January, following a brief illness. Our thoughts are with his widow, Lorna, and his family at this time; to Rodney, we say: 'Leb wohl'.

Rodney grew up in a musical Baptist family in St Martins in Christchurch. In 1963, he took part in the finals in the Mobil Song Quest in Hamilton; one of the other participants was Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. Rodney and Dame Kiri became very close at this time, and were ultimately to remain lifelong friends. She and Rodney also took part in the 1965 Mobil Song Quest (which she won), and they both ended up in England, where Rodney joined the BBC Singers in 1966.

Rodney was based in the UK for more than 20 years, where he pursued a career as an operatic bass-baritone, concert and oratorio singer. This included the role of Barnabotto on the acclaimed 1980 Decca recording of Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*, alongside Monserrat Caballé and Luciano Pavarotti. Among conductors that he worked with, he had special praise for Reginald Goodall, Sir Georg Solti and Otto Klemperer. When it came to Wagner, he was also credited with voicing the minor role of Biterolf in *Tannhäuser* in Hungarian director István Szabó's 1991 drama film, *Meeting Venus* (also with Dame Kiri voicing the role of Elisabeth for the American actress, Glenn Close). He also admired great Wotans such as Hans Hotter and David Ward.

Returning to New Zealand in the early 1990s, he later sang the role of Gunther in *Götterdämmerung* in the first Adelaide *Ring* in 1998, although he noted that being in faraway New Zealand obliged him to turn down offers of Wagnerian roles. Nevertheless, he felt this may have been fortunate, since it may well have enabled him to save his voice. In any case, he was rare, if not unique, among international opera singers in that he enjoyed a second career as a minister in the Baptist Church, which also included a role as leader of the New Zealand Baptists. (For the NZ International Festival of the Arts, he memorably took on the role of John the Baptist in Richard Strauss's *Salome* – most notably as a Baptist minister himself!)

Rodney will also be remembered for his mentoring and coaching of young, upcoming New Zealand classical singers, giving them the benefit of his long experience, expertise and wisdom. This gave him great satisfaction, and his protégés were enormously grateful. He was further associated with the Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation, acting as one of its trustees from 2006, as a member of its Artistic Committee. Here, his input included the Kiri Project, the mentoring workshops of the Foundation. Lastly, amongst other things, he acted as adjudicator for several of the Mobil and Lexus Song Quests, and as a Trustee of the NZ Opera School, held annually at Whanganui Collegiate School.

... And Now for Something Completely Different ...

## Angela Merkel's *Ring* Podcast



Angela Merkel, former German Federal Chancellor and devoted Wagnerian / *Ring* fan (original photo: Wikimedia Commons)

Angela Merkel has long been known as a keen Wagnerian, as her regular appearances at Bayreuth Festival premieres clearly attest, but now, having stepped down as German Federal Chancellor, she is able to pursue her interest in ways that she never had time for in the past. Last December, she took part in a genuinely fascinating, 90-minute, three-part 'True Crime' audio podcast series for the German SWR2 radio network, in which she discussed, in depth, the classic themes of greed, vengeance and vanity, as she has experienced them

both in the *Ring* and in everyday politics. She was joined by host and terrorism expert, Holger Schmidt, and former federal judge, Thomas Fischer – a rare opportunity to hear her from a very different angle.

In brief: Merkel initially became familiar with Wagner through *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *Tristan* – later, her interest deepened markedly, thanks to her Wagnerian husband, Joachim Sauer. Merkel relates how she has been impressed by how comprehensively the *Ring* deals with all the human strengths and weaknesses in the world; she has gladly seen it time and again, letting its impact 'work' on her. On politics, she is quick to stress that she does not sit down each day and ask, 'Now, what does the *Ring* tell me?', but instead views the tetralogy as a means of 'training' in (often, all too) human behaviour, including in politics, where no person can be 'almighty'. For her, the saddest moment in the *Ring* is Siegfried's murder by Hagen, while her favourite scene is Fricka's admonition of Wotan (*Die Walküre*, Act 2), ideally as heard in Solti's recording with Christa Ludwig, Hans Hotter, and Birgit Nilsson as Brünnhilde. (She also wryly observes that Wotan cannot argue effectively with *any* women that he meets; instead, the women must explain to *him* what they believe he is thinking!) Merkel reads from the *Ring* on 'how not to do things', how never to forget her own weaknesses, and how to acknowledge a central dilemma that all politicians face: that they are typically plunged into situations which may not be of their own making, and which they must often pass on to others after only a limited time. She views the world's end in *Götterdämmerung* as an incentive to act – not to give in too early, but rather always to find a positive solution. On greed (in the *Ring*, in constant conflict with love): natural ambition, individualism and the desire to own all need to be tamed, for example through the state of law; excessive greed is always destructive. On vengeance: one should not be consumed by one's feelings, but instead not let any hurt show too much, and just get on with the job, as she herself has had to do; those too fixated on vengeance should best leave politics. And on vanity: the 'heroic' Siegfried is in fact naïve, foolhardy and too full of himself, with a weak spot on his back, and all this seals his downfall.

And so on – there is much more, in German only, unfortunately! Stream or download full content here: [www.swr.de/swr2/leben-und-gesellschaft/sprechen-wir-ueber-mord-mit-angela-merkel-100.html](http://www.swr.de/swr2/leben-und-gesellschaft/sprechen-wir-ueber-mord-mit-angela-merkel-100.html)