



## Another Aussie Triumph – Melbourne’s New *Meistersinger*

Reviews of Melbourne Opera’s new *Meistersinger*, with four performances given on 16, 18, 20 and 22 February, have generally been very favourable. *Die Meistersinger* had not been given in Melbourne since the successful Kasper Holten production run at the Arts Centre in 2018, which featured a fine international cast and was conducted by Pietari Inkinen. This time, unusually, the performances were given in the grand UNESCO World Heritage Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton, built by Dame Nellie Melba’s father for the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition, and not necessarily conceived as a space for operatic events. Nevertheless, Melbourne Opera, still fresh off the success of their much-admired *Ring* in Bendigo, made the cavernous space their own, integrating the staging into the surroundings, celebrated as one of the most innovative aspects of the enterprise, even if Suzanne Chaundy’s approach to her production was otherwise relatively conventional. However, this is *Meistersinger*, after all, in which attempts to ‘modernise’ productions can be problematic, and it seems that Chaundy and stage designer Andrew Bailey were very deservedly praised.



End of Act 2: Christopher Hillier (Beckmesser) in the foreground. (Photo: Melbourne Opera/Robin Halls)

The line-up of singers was particularly impressive, with Warwick Fyfe garnering high praise for his role as Hans Sachs, having already impressed audiences as Beckmesser in Melbourne’s 2018 *Meistersinger* (and, of course, as Alberich in Melbourne’s 2013 and 2016 *Ring* productions). Other soloists included James Egglestone as Walther, Christopher Hillier as (a fairly buffoonish) Beckmesser, Robert MacFarlane as David, Steven Gallop as Pogner, Lee Abrahmsen as Eva, and Deborah Humble – well known to New Zealand audiences – as Magdalena.

The conductor, meanwhile, was Anthony Negus, who has generously conducted several Melbourne Opera productions over the years, including *Tristan*, and two cycles of the Bendigo *Ring* in 2023. Both in Australia and at the Longborough Festival in his native England, Negus is well known for drawing the most out of comparatively small ensembles, in this case members of the Melbourne Opera Orchestra, comprising around 60 players. One review praised the orchestra’s rich, finely textured sound, with strings that could be both delicate and lush, and fine woodwinds and brass; those of us who remember Negus conducting *Parsifal* in Wellington in 2006 can well imagine that Melbourne’s players were in good hands. Notably, all the other cast and creative team members were drawn from Australian talent.



Act 3: Lee Abrahmsen (Eva) and Warwick Fyfe (Sachs). (Photo: Melbourne Opera/Robin Halls)

A range of filmed interviews, etc. are also available at the Melbourne Opera website – they’re all well worth exploring: [www.youtube.com/@melbourneoperaofficial](http://www.youtube.com/@melbourneoperaofficial)

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## Bayreuth Memorabilia

We have been contacted by Maurice Clarke, the former managing director of a construction company (now long since retired), who lives in Karori, Wellington and is a veteran of both the 1962 and 1963 Bayreuth Festivals, and a number of others since. He has a collection of memorabilia from the 1962/3 Festivals, along with other items such as DVDs; if any members might be interested in procuring these or any other such Wagneriana, please telephone Mr Clarke directly at (021) 203 1806 (mobile) or (04) 976 4458 (landline).

## Wagner Murmurs

– additional news from Michael Sinclair:

- The Deutsche Oper Berlin will revive its *Ring* cycle in May 2026. The performances will be conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles, marking his farewell as General Music Director.
- Likewise in Berlin, the Staatsoper Unter den Linden will revive its *Ring* cycle in September/October this year. Christian Thielemann will conduct.
- Renowned Austrian opera and theatre director, Otto Schenk, died in January this year, aged 94. One of his most endearing legacies will be the *Ring* cycle he directed for the Metropolitan Opera (1986–2009).
- Lise Davidsen has announced that she is pregnant with twins, and so she will be cancelling all performances from April through to the end of the year. This includes performances of Sieglinde in La Scala’s new production of *Die Walküre*.
- The San Francisco Opera will mount a new production of *Parsifal* in October/November this year. Brandon Jovanovich will sing the title role.
- The Metropolitan Opera will mount a new production of *Tristan und Isolde* in March/April 2026. Michael Spyres and Lise Davidsen will sing the title roles.

## New Member

We are most pleased to extend a warm Wagnerian welcome to:

Craig Wedge.....Auckland

Wie immer, sei recht herzlich gegrüsst!

## In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we report the death of former Wellington member, **William Samuel ('Bill') Gates**, on 9 January 2025, aged 95. Bill and his wife, Pamela, had both been members of the Wellington Branch for a number of years around the turn of the millennium. Pamela later died, while Bill subsequently kept up his membership, but eventually he had to resign after being transferred to a care home in Lower Hutt. Sadly, in recent years, he suffered from total dementia. Our condolences and best wishes go out to the family.

# WSNZ – Full 2025 Programme

## Auckland

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

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

An afternoon with New Zealand heldentenor, **Simon O'Neill**.

**Sunday, 18 May at 2:00 p.m.**

The Wagner Society's AGM, to be followed by a presentation given by **Terence Dennis: Historical Perspectives – Great Wagner Singers – full details under Christchurch entry (2 May) at right.**

**Sunday, 13 July at 1:30 p.m.**

Introduction by **Heath Lees** to a recent production of *Das Rheingold*, followed by a screening of the complete opera. **NB: 4½ hour session.**

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

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, 9 November at 2:00 p.m.**

An afternoon with Maestro **Giordano Bellincampi**, Music Director of the Auckland Philharmonia.

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

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

## Wellington

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

**Autumn meeting (date and time TBC)**

Te Auaha: NZ Institute of Creativity, Dixon Street

Documentary screening; topic TBC.

**Sunday, 8 June at 5:00 p.m. (NB: note later starting time)**

A presentation by **Terence Dennis: Historical Perspectives – Great Wagner Singers – full details under Christchurch entry (2 May) at right.**

**Spring meeting (date and time TBC)**

*Richard Wagner and the Spirit of Greek Tragedy*: **John Davidson** (standing in for **Terence Dennis**) and **Scott Bezett** – **full details under Dunedin entry (2 March) at right.**

**Sunday, 5 October (start time TBC)**

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

Joint meeting with the **Opera Society**: A full screening of the 2016 production of Wagner's early opera, *Das Liebesverbot* (based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*), from the Teatro Real in Madrid, in a modern production by Kasper Holten, conducted by Ivor Bolton with soloists Christopher Maltman, Manuela Uhl and Ilker Arcayürek.

**November/December**

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

## Christchurch

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

Venue: St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room

A screening of a DVD of *Der fliegende Holländer*, to be introduced by **John Pattinson**.

**Friday, 2 May at 7:30 p.m.**

Venue: St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room

A presentation by **Terence Dennis: Historical Perspectives – Great Wagner Singers**, continuing his fascinating series of historic Wagner performers, a treasure trove of some of the rarest, and historically most precious, recordings – from the earliest days of the era of Cosima Wagner to the Golden Age of the 1930s, with the original Parsifal and Kundry from the 1882 *Parsifal* premiere.

**Friday, 11 July at 7:30 p.m.**

Venue: St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room

**Jared Holt** (who sang the role of Melot in *Tristan und Isolde* in last year's Auckland Philharmonia performance) will give a talk about his operatic career, including his Wagnerian experiences. He promises to sing as well, accompanied by **John Pattinson** on the piano.

**Friday, 10 October at 7:30 p.m.**

Venue: St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room

Fellow Wagner Society member, **Simon Kane**, will give a talk on aspects of Wagner's non-operatic music.

**November/December – date, time and venue TBC**

Christmas function.

## Dunedin

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

192 Castle College, Ground Floor Seminar Room

*Richard Wagner and the Spirit of Greek Tragedy*: **Terence Dennis** and **Scott Bezett** discuss Wagner's deep inspiration from Classical Greek Drama; how this profoundly influenced his ideas of a new aesthetic for opera, its place in contemporary society and in the writing of the *Ring of the Nibelung* tetralogy.

**Sunday, 27 April at 11:00 a.m.**

192 Castle College Viewing Room – luncheon provided

*Wagner – Parsifal*: After last year's presentation on Wagner's final opera by international guest speaker, Anthony Ernst, we follow this with a complete viewing of Wagner's great *fin-de-siècle* masterpiece: Wolfgang Wagner's production for the 1988 Bayreuth Festival, conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli, with Poul Elming (*Parsifal*), Hans Sotin (*Gurnemanz*), Linda Watson (*Kundry*), Falk Struckman (*Amfortas*) and Ekkehard Wlaschiha (*Klingsor*).

**Sunday, 29 June at 2:00 p.m.**

192 Castle College Viewing Room

*Götterdämmerung – The Twilight of the Gods*: **Terence Dennis** discusses *Götterdämmerung*, the climactic fourth opera of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, before our forthcoming winter viewing:

**Sunday, 6 July at 11:00 a.m.**

192 Castle College Viewing Room – luncheon provided

*Wagner – Götterdämmerung – the complete opera viewing*: We complete our winter viewing sessions of the 1976 Centenary *Ring* from Bayreuth with *Götterdämmerung* (as filmed in 1979), the fourth and final opera of the tetralogy, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in the acclaimed production of Patrice Chéreau. Introduced by **Terence Dennis**.

**September (exact date TBC), at 2:00 p.m.**

192 Castle College, Ground Floor Seminar Room

*Wagner and Beyond*: **Terence Dennis** discusses the influence of Wagner's music and aesthetics from his time to our own. Including music from Richard Strauss' *Die ägyptische Helena* and *Capriccio*, and Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane*.

**(date and venue TBC)**

*2025 Christmas Luncheon and Wagneriana*: Join us for our annual end-of-year luncheon and special contributions from the world of Wagner. This year, **Terence Dennis** discusses Wagner and Gaspare Spontini.



## And Now for Something Completely Different – A Rare 1965 PhD thesis on Wagner, Recently Unearthed at the University of Pretoria, South Africa



Historical photograph from c. 1895 showing Trevor Anders' great-grandfather, with his wife, daughter and three of his five sons, taken in front of the Parsonage at Braunschweig, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The pensive young boy in the foreground with the dog is Trevor's great-uncle, Godfrey Anders, who seventy years later was to submit a doctoral thesis on Richard Wagner to the University of Pretoria. (Photo supplied by Trevor Anders)

Last July, in the middle of a wet Wellington winter, I happened to drop in on the Karori Community Book Fair in the Baptist Church in Marsden Village to see what was on offer – this was a combined Rotary and (mostly) Lions event which takes place on an annual basis. I usually manage to find something at such events, and this time was no exception: I picked up several good opera DVDs, all in excellent condition for just a couple of dollars – a real bargain. And at the entrance, I also got chatting with Trevor Anders, Director Membership and Comms of the Karori Lions, who was collecting the proceeds, and had similar musical interests to mine; the topic of Wagner also came up, and a most unusual story then presented itself.

Trevor is originally from South Africa and first came to New Zealand with his family in 1991. While we were talking, he also told me about his paternal great-uncle, Christoph Gottfried Theodor Anders (known as Godfrey in his adult life), who managed the remarkable feat of completing a PhD thesis on Richard Wagner, which he submitted to the University of Pretoria in May 1965, when

he was 78 years old – as such, the oldest candidate at the Pretoria University ever to obtain a doctorate up to that time. Trevor, meanwhile, had been in his last year of school, and attended the awards ceremony. He had never actually seen the thesis himself, but, following our conversation, he decided he would enquire about it with the university.

At first, Trevor had no response from Pretoria, but he tried again and, eventually, in late October – somewhat to his astonishment – he received a digitised PDF file of the entire thesis (150 pages), which he then generously forwarded for me to examine further.

The thesis itself is written not in Afrikaans or English, but in German. The Anders family were of German origin: Trevor's great-grandfather had come out to South Africa with the German Missionary Society, and, after a long spell as a missionary, he later resigned and became the head of his own Lutheran church – Pastor Anders, who established the Anders clan in South Africa. The photograph, from c. 1895, shows the Pastor with his wife, daughter and three of his five sons. (Noteworthy, too, is the African

maid carrying the silver tea service and wearing her immaculate German uniform.)

The title of the thesis is *Richard Wagner and the Question of Redemption in His Operas*, and Godfrey Anders dedicated it to his wife, Doris May. Following an introduction and an outline of Wagner's life, each of Wagner's ten 'canon' operas (i.e., from the *Holländer* to *Parsifal*) is discussed in some considerable detail, specifically touching upon the question of redemption as well. This also makes for a very good introduction and guide to the operas themselves – in its way, reminiscent of Ernest Newman's classic 1949 *Wagner Nights* book, but without the detailed musical notation examples.

Anders then devotes a few pages to Wagner's *Weltanschauung* (philosophy of life), followed by some thoughts on the music. Here, too, as throughout the thesis, Anders refrains from commenting much on Wagner's more controversial aspects; 1965 was perhaps not yet the time. On p. 125, for example, he states: "Wagner expressed his views on miscegenation. He saw therein a great risk to European culture, which he felt

## Other Wagnerian News, 'from Bayreuth to the World'

could gradually lose its original purity through mixing with the yellow and black races. Since he also goes into considerable detail regarding the Jewish question, I find it perilous to discuss this point any further."

In summing up, on p. 138, he writes: "To conclude and round off this dissertation, I would like to add the insightful words of Theodor Hoffmann, who states, 'that Richard Wagner manifests a marked pursuit of redemption in all of his musicodramatic works from the *Holländer* on'. In this respect, the works that precede the *Ring* and *Tristan*, including *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* in particular, were created in an intuitively artistic fashion, while freely incorporating traditional myth. With the influx of Schopenhauer's philosophy into Wagner's creative work, these intuitively artistic creations gain a spiritual clarification through philosophical insight. The goal of the quest for redemption, particularly from *Tannhäuser* to *Parsifal*, remains basically the same: it is supported by a strong belief in a higher, purer world than the Earth with its shortcomings can offer. The path to this goal is pursued by Wagner in his works with ever renewed, passionate and personal seriousness – for the creatures of his imagination, for the course of his dramas and music as a direct means of expression. Schopenhauer revealed to him the inevitability of the seriousness of the demands that must be met by those who attempt to follow such a path. In *Tristan*, the redemption was still rooted more in the personal and individual realm, whereas in the *Ring* and *Parsifal* it expands to encompass all humanity. It thus moves ever further from sensual and personal love towards a liberating altruism. It is in this altruism that Wagner finds the great conclusion to his entire musicodramatic oeuvre. This is also evident in his other later drafts of the music-dramas, in the relevant compositions, and in the theoretical writings of his mature period.

A powerful, spiritual, inner light, conditioned by Schopenhauer's insights, has thus flowed into Wagner's works, where they seek to lead us to a better, purer world. This is also the case with *Die Meistersinger*, whose festive enchantment and inner glow is essentially created by the cognitive forces presented. This light, which flows towards us in the sounds of music and in the images of atmospheric performances, manifests an eternal spirit." (Translation from German.)

In short, Godfrey Anders' thesis represents an eloquent and intriguing summary of Wagner's oeuvre and thinking at a time when a more concerted, targeted critical approach to Wagner's controversial aspects was still to come, particularly with Robert W. Gutman's controversial biography, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (1968). Anyone who may be curious to know more about the thesis is welcome to contact me at [MvonKolinahr@gmail.com](mailto:MvonKolinahr@gmail.com).

– Michael Ashdown

Beginning with the centre of the Wagnerian universe . . . Bayreuth wouldn't be Bayreuth without a controversy, and recently there has been another situation developing there. This time, it concerns the funding for the 150th anniversary of the Bayreuth Festival in 2026. There had been a proposal to put on an extra-large festival next year, with productions of no less than 11 stage works, including Wagner's early *Rienzi*, which up to now has never been part of Bayreuth's 'Wagner canon'. Now, however, it has proved necessary to make cutbacks, on financial grounds: accordingly, only seven works will still be given, with *Tannhäuser* (in the popular Tobias Kratzer staging), *Lohengrin* (with Christan Thielemann conducting), *Tristan* and *Die Meistersinger* all dropping out. In short, this is because it would have been necessary for the Bayreuth partners to have guaranteed the extra financing required, but this was not clearly forthcoming, e.g., from the federal and Bavarian state governments. This means there will still be a new *Rienzi* production, along with revivals of *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Parsifal*, and a special *Ring*, according to festival spokesman, Hubertus Herrmann. Nevertheless, the financially strong Friends of Bayreuth now feel a little unhappy with Katharina Wagner's rationale for the cuts, since the Friends had managed to raise one million euros to go towards the *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* productions, which they had particularly wanted to see retained. Katharina has responded by saying that the offer from the Friends regretfully came too late. The anniversary festival will otherwise open with a performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, which Wagner himself had conducted in Bayreuth's Margravial Opera House in 1872, and the first 'New Bayreuth' Festival, too, had opened with the *Ninth* conducted by Furtwängler on 29 July 1951.

As for this year's Bayreuth Festival, it will run from 24 July to 26 August, with productions of the *Ring* (again with Simone Young conducting), *Lohengrin*, *Tristan*, *Die Meistersinger* (a new production by Matthias Davids, to be conducted by Daniele Gatti, returning to Bayreuth for the first time since 2019) and *Parsifal*, together with two open-air events. A full programme in English can be downloaded from the Festival website at: [www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/en/programme/programme/](http://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/en/programme/programme/)

Meanwhile, hot off his performance with the Auckland Philharmonia last August, Simon O'Neill was again singing *Tristan* at San Francisco Opera in late October – the first time *Tristan und Isolde* had returned to the city in 18 years. This time, he was partnered with the German soprano, Anja Kampe, as *Isolde*, with whom he'd sung in the recent Bavarian State Orchestra recording of *Siegfried* in Munich (under Simon Rattle). The

San Francisco *Tristan* was conducted by Music Director Eun Sun Kim, with the well-known South Korean bass, Kwangchoul Youn, as King Marke, in a straightforward, atmospheric production directed by Paul Curran with sets by Robin Innes Hopkins.



Simon O'Neill as Tristan and Anja Kampe as Isolde. (Photo credit: San Francisco Opera/Cory Weaver)

Given Simon's assumption of *Tristan* in Auckland, and how well he and Anja Kampe sounded together in Munich, we can imagine how fine the San Francisco *Tristan* would have been. Our heartiest congratulations to Simon on 'having done it again'!

Those who have seen Axel Brüggemann's intriguing 2021 documentary, *Global Wagner – from Bayreuth to the World*, may remember the segment on the Richard Wagner House in Riga, Latvia, and how it was due for renovation; it is hoped the building will become a Richard Wagner Museum, and that the theatre can be used for smaller performances of music and drama. Two years ago, the Riga Richard Wagner Society held a conference entitled 'From Vietinghoff's Theatre to the Wagner House', financially supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the Baltic States. Now, a film of conference presentations, with simultaneous translations into English, can be viewed here, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJ6TQYrGZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJ6TQYrGZE), which is bound to be of potential interest to anyone curious about Wagner's time in Riga – <https://vagneriga.lv/en/wagner-in-riga/>.

Finally, a significant and unusual new *Ring* has now been completed at the Theater Basel in Switzerland, with both *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* having been premiered September/October last year, in a production by Benedikt Peter, featuring just one evolving set, a modern house under construction, and also extensive use of puppetry – for example, with the Rhinemaidens as Chinese puppets on rods. Other non-singing members of the characters' families, etc. (who were often not even in the libretto) were also depicted in this way, necessitating as many as 15 puppeteers on stage at once! Reviews have been positive, despite the often very busy stage action that resulted. The production was also well cast, with some promising upcoming younger singers, but also the veteran Hanna Schwarz as Erda, a role that she originally assumed in the Bayreuth Chéreau *Ring* in 1976. The fine conductor was Jonathan Nott, and two complete cycles will also be given in April and May.