



VOL. 10 No. 3

JULY 2011

LUST, GREED & CORRUPTION

The highlight of 2011 for the WSNZ will be a concert performance of *Das Rheingold* on 29 July in the Auckland Town Hall. With members from all over the country flying into the City of Sails for the event it will be a chance to catch up with friends from other centres as well as some homegrown Wagner.

The performance which will be given by the Auckland Philharmonia under the baton of Eckehard Stier is another in the Westpac Opera in Concert series that has seen performances of *Elektra*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Salome* and *Fidelio* given in concert performance.

Heading a cast of international singers is Paul Whelan who will sing the role of Wotan. Christchurch-born Paul studied at Victoria University before moving to Manchester's Royal Northern College of Music, where he won several prestigious prizes and scholarships. In 2006 he sang the role of Amfortas in the International Festival/NZSO performances of *Parsifal* and next year he will appear as Hans Schwarz, the stocking weaver, in Glyndebourne's production of *Die Meistersinger*. "Paul is an exciting choice in this role and we're so pleased he's returned home for this concert," says APO Chief Executive Barbara Glaser. "New Zealand has a fine tradition of producing outstanding bass-baritones; Paul is a worthy heir to Donald McIntyre and has already proved himself to be one of our finest ever singers."

For those members who were lucky enough to attend the Adelaide Ring in 2004 you will have a chance to reacquaint yourselves with John Wegner's magnificent portrayal of Alberich, Elizabeth Campbell's memorable Fricka and Richard Greager's mealy-mouthed Mime. The cast also features local artists Anna Pierard, Patrick Power, Jenny Wollerman, Sally-Anne Russell and Anna Leese. As this newsletter is being



Paul Whelan

complicated Anna Leese is competing as New Zealand's sole representative in the Cardiff 'Singer of the World' competition. Back in 1993 Paul Whelan won the lieder prize in this prestigious singing competition.

While it's the singers that receive the initial attention we should remember that in Wagner's idea of *Gestamkunstwerk* (Total Work of Art) everyone involved in the production has an important role to play, none more so than the orchestra. Like the singers the APO's musicians are excited by the prospect. "With its cast of gods, dwarves, giants and naked water nymphs (possibly), *Rheingold* has everything," says APO viola player Owen Gordon. "Wagner sets the themes of lust, greed and corruption to the most sublime music; I know it will be the highlight of my musical year."

APO Music Director Eckehard Stier agrees. "This is a dream come true," he says, describing *Das Rheingold* as a "masterpiece of darkness and light".

The Wagner Society of New Zealand and the Wagner New Zealand Foundation are proud to be supporting this concert presentation of *Das Rheingold*.



Paul Whelan..... Wotan
Eberhard LorenzLoge
Elizabeth CampbellFricka
Anna Leese..... Freia
Patrick PowerDonner
José AparicioFroh
Deborah HumbleErda
John Wegner.....Alberich
Richard GreagerMime
Peter Rose Fasolt
Gary Jankowski.....Fafner
Jenny Wollerman.....Woglinde
Anna Pierard.....Wellgunde
Sally-Anne RussellFlosshilde
Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra
conducted by Eckehard Stier

DRESS REHEARSAL

The *Rheingold* Dress Rehearsal takes place on Thursday 28 July and is open to members who have a ticket to the performance the next day. Please note that you will have to book for this event - before 15 July, and that tickets are non-transferable. To book contact Michael Sinclair (info@wagnersociety.org.nz or 09 528 0776).

INTERVAL & AFTER DRINKS

For those who purchased tickets through the WSNZ, interval wine and cheese was included in your ticket and as we will be in a semi-exclusive area in the Town Hall it will be a good opportunity to mingle with other members. If you have purchased a ticket via another source and you would like to join us for the interval then this can be pre-arranged at a cost of \$5.00 per person by sending a cheque for the appropriate amount (payable to the WSNZ) to:-
The Secretary, WSNZ, PO Box 99826, Newmarket, Auckland 1149.

After the performance members are invited to join with the orchestra at the bar for an informal gathering

NEWSLETTER

BY EMAIL

With this edition many of you will be receiving, for the first time, your newsletter by email. We thank everyone who has chosen this method as it saves the Society money and is an environmentally friendly alternative.

Please note that it is not our intention to discontinue the printed edition as we appreciate that many people prefer this version. If at any time you wish to switch the version you are receiving then please contact Michael Sinclair on 09 528 0776 or by email on:- info@wagnersociety.org.nz



SEATTLE CELEBRATES - WITH WAGNER!

Das Rheingold - Seattle Opera

For those of you who like to plan ahead the latest news from Seattle Opera should be put into the mix. In what is described as Back-to-Back Seattle Wagner Summers the company will celebrate Richard's Bicentennial, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the company and the conclusion of Speight Jenkins' 30 years as the company's General Director, with performances of the *Ring* in 2013 and *Die Meistersinger* in 2014.

The *Ring* production will see the return of the highly acclaimed "Green Ring" that was first produced in 2001 in what will probably be its last outing. The production of the *Ring* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* will be conducted by Asher Fisch, Principal guest conductor for Seattle Opera who conducted the Adelaide *Ring* in 2004.

Performance dates are as follows:-

Der Ring des Nibelungen

Cycle #1:- 4, 5, 7, & 9 August 2013

Cycle #2:- 12, 13, 15, & 17 August 2013

Cycle #3:- 20, 21, 23, & 25 August 2013

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg:-

2, 7, 10, 13, 17, 20 & 23 August 2014.

TOUR DE FORCE!

While the WSNZ would love to organise regular international tours for our members, the time involved in putting them together means we are limited in what we can offer. Looking ahead we will endeavour to take a group to the Melbourne *Ring* in 2013. Thoughts had also been given to the current Metropolitan *Ring* but there seems to be a consensus that this might be a production to miss!

There are other organisations who take groups: Patricia's Opera Tours (www.operatours.co.nz/tours.htm) offer trips to Australia and Europe. While Renaissance Tours (www.renaissancetours.com.au) regularly take groups to Europe and the USA. Wellington member John Davidson joined a Renaissance Tour to Hamburg, in April this year, for which he has written a most entertaining account.



Hamburg Ring Cycle (April 2011)

Part 1 - John Davidson

This was a *Ring* redeemed for me by its *Götterdämmerung* ... but to begin at the beginning. Judith and Ann Trotter and I were the only New Zealanders who went with the Sydney-based company 'Renaissance Tours' to the Hamburg *Ring Cycle* in April, along with 147 Australians who became known as the 'Wagneroos'. The reason for such Australian interest was, of course, Simone Young, musical director of the Hamburg State Opera. She came in person to a session of the all-day symposium run for the group after *Die Walküre* and also accompanied a short recital by Australian mezzo Deborah Humble who most effectively played Erda, Schwertleite, Waltraute (*Götterdämmerung*) and First Norn. The Symposium was co-ordinated by Peter Bassett who gave lectures in New Zealand last year. Peter was also one of three speakers at pre-performance talks before each of the operas, the other two being Robert Mitchell, a member of the OA chorus, and live-wire broadcaster Christopher Lawrence. During the ten days of the tour, there were city tours of Hamburg, Lübeck and Bremen, and in the three free days after *Siegfried* different small groups went to Berlin (for a concert performance of *Parsifal*), to

Amsterdam (for Rameau's *Platée*), and to Mecklenburgh-Vorpommern (to chill out - quite literally, for it was freezing on the Baltic Sea Coast - at a luxury spa resort, as well as visiting Schwerin, Rostock and Wismar). The tour was exceptionally well-organized and I would recommend Renaissance as an excellent option for specialized culture tours.

But to return to the *Ring*. We got off to a rather slow start in a number of respects with *Das Rheingold*. The musical waters of the Rhine seemed a trifle muddy at first, though they did clear up quickly. The majority of the Wagneroos, of course, would not hear a negative word said about Young. She has a very strong and precise conducting style which perhaps borders on the mechanical at times. That's not to say, however, that she didn't elicit some sensitive and thrilling sounds as appropriate from the fine orchestra. The Director of this *Ring* was Claus Guth and, despite rather negative reviews, I had gone with high hopes for the production, having seen his, in my opinion, brilliant *Holländer* at Bayreuth. In the event, his *Ring* proved to be something of a mixed bag (sets and costumes were by Christian Schmidt, and lighting by Wolfgang Göbbel and Michael Bauer). ...*To be continued*

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2011 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 17 July 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music,
University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
An introduction to Das Rheingold

In preparation for the APO
performance. An evening that explores
the prelude to the *Ring Cycle*

Friday 29 July 7.30pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall

Das Rheingold - concert performance

Sunday, 4 September 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music,
University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
A View From The Stage – Part 1

WSNZ President Chris Brodrick looks at
those who attended the first Bayreuth
Festival in 1876

Sunday, 4 December 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music,
University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Wagner Pot Pourri - A Christmas
celebration: An evening of requests,
roundups, selections and surprises

Dunedin

Friday 29 July 7.30pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall

Das Rheingold - concert performance

Sunday, 18 September 2.00pm

Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of
Music, The University of Otago
A View From The Stage – Part 1

WSNZ President Chris Brodrick looks at
those who attended the first Bayreuth
Festival in 1876

Sunday, 6 November 2.00pm

Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of
Music, The University of Otago
Wagner: The Early Operas 1

Terence Dennis presents *Die Feen (The
Fairies)* and *Das Liebesverbot (The Ban
On Love)*

Sunday, 4 December 1.00pm

Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum
Wagner - The Early Operas 2
Rienzi plus our end-of-year Christmas
celebration

VALKYRIES CRASH PARTY!

Wagner was fond of a competition
as he included two song contests in
his music dramas; one in *Tannhäuser*
and the other in *Meistersinger*.
Whether he would have approved of
an overblown television event with
little or no musical merit is doubtful
even if it was one of the world's largest
televised events - the Eurovision Song
Contest

In May the BBC reported that
Brighton's main Eurovision 'party',
one of the biggest in the UK, had to be
cancelled to make way for Brünnhilde
and her sisters! The annual event that
is the Eurovision Song Contest is a
live television competition between
European countries that, in the
opinion of this writer, brings out the
worst of everything! The songs are
banal, the performances are only
about being noticed and the voting
system is, urgh....!

All Europe's ingrained prejudices
come to the surface in this event so
that the Greeks never vote for the
Turks, the French dismiss Germany
and no one votes for England.

While we may scorn this non-event,
Brighton's Duke of York picture house
is renowned for holding a Eurovision
party in which the auditorium is filled
with Eurovision fanatics. This year the
mirror balls stopped rotating and the
thumping beat was silenced. Why?
Well the cinema had been booked,
before the Eurovision Song Contest
date had been announced, to show
...WAGNER! Five hours of *Die Walküre*
direct from the Metropolitan Opera
in New York. Jon Barrenechea, the
cinema's manager, was quoted as
saying "We [had] sold a lot of tickets
for the opera. *It's a different crowd* but
we try to be all things to all people."
Isn't it nice to be different!

Wellington

Sunday 3 July 4.00pm

Venue: Spectrum Theatre (previously BP
Theatrette), Johnstone St

Der Ring des Nibelungen - an
illustrated talk by John Davidson with
particular reference to a recent visit
to Hamburg. Slides of the Hamburg
production will be shown and musical
excerpts will be played

Friday 29 July 7.30pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall

Das Rheingold - concert performance

Christchurch

Friday 29 July 7.30pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall

Das Rheingold - concert performance

Friday 30 September 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of
Canterbury

Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano

Heath Lees looks at Wagner's attitude
to the instrument. Some send-ups
of Wagner will be included & lots of
illustrations.

Friday 28 October 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of
Canterbury

Stephen Fry on Wagner: Chris Brodrick
introduces this 1-hour BBC programme

Sunday 27 November 6.00pm

Venue: 6 Parkinson Place, Ilam,
Christchurch

Christmas BBQ at the home of Audrey
Harrison and Laurie Higgins



The Queen's Birthday honours brought
well deserved recognition for one
WSNZ member. James Wallace was
awarded a Knight of the New Zealand
Order of Merit for his services to the
Arts. Sir James, who formed The James
Wallace Arts Trust back in 1992, is New
Zealand's biggest arts patron. His art
collection, which he began acquiring
in the 1960s, now numbers over 5000
pieces and is held at the historic Pah
Homestead in Auckland. He also
founded the annual Wallace Art Award,
the longest surviving and richest art
award in Australasia.
Congratulations from all of us at the
WSNZ!

SIMON SINGS AT BAYREUTH

The day before the Auckland
Philharmonia performance of
Das Rheingold (28 July), Simon
O'Neill will step onto the stage
of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus to
sing *Parsifal* at this year's Bayreuth
festival. We wish him and those
members of the Society who are
travelling to Bavaria for the Festival
our very best wishes.

A visit to Simon's website (www.simononeill.com) shows that
our very own heldentenor has
engagements as far ahead as 2017!

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2011

Borrowing a term from our National sporting code, the WSNZ 2010/11 year was one of two halves. This time last year we were announcing a visit by Tony Palmer, a major project for the Society that we hoped would not only present a wonderful opportunity for our members but also an event to raise our public profile. A huge amount of effort was put into this project and the response from within and outside the Society was extremely positive. By January the plans were in tatters and we were left with no alternative; Tony Palmer's tour to New Zealand could not go ahead at the time planned.

The breakdown between the film director over his threat to cancel at what would have been the last minute if he hadn't completed his then current project, and the Society's decision to postpone in the event of that scenario, means there is no hope of resurrecting the project. Ironically, this is the one thing on which both parties would agree.

So while one half of the year was spent planning, the other was spent dismantling and this was echoed by the events in Canterbury. On 4 September with WSNZ visiting speaker, Peter Bassett, sleeping peacefully in the Copthorne Hotel, the first Canterbury earthquake hit. Peter was thrown out of bed, then the city, and then had to spend all day at the Antarctic Centre while he waited for a flight to Auckland, from where he continued his tour. Life settled down and, apart from the problems alluded to earlier, there was little disruption to the Society's activities for the rest of 2010. But as far as Christchurch was concerned, it all came crashing down with the major aftershock on 22 February. The resulting damage to Canterbury University has left the Christchurch branch of the Society without a suitable home. The first two meetings of 2011 were both cancelled and it was two days ago that Christchurch members had their first meeting of 2011, a pot luck dinner to celebrate Richard Wagner's 198th birthday and a chance to exchange 'shaky' dog stories.

In the other centres the Society continued very much as usual. In all we presented 22 meetings through the year when once again there was a wide range of subject matter. Heath gave talks on *Wagner and the piano*, Peter Bassett told us all about the *Operas Wagner never wrote*, John Drummond, presenting to the Society

for the first time, gave a talk about *Wagner and Trains* and Chris Brodrick presented parts one & two of his *The View from Stage* tetralogy. In addition there were the two very successful interview meetings in Auckland and Wellington with Simon O'Neill and Lionel Friend respectively. Reports from both meetings indicated that our guests were not only generous with their time but were really interesting subjects. In Dunedin Roger Wilson joined with Terence Dennis to present a recital programme - *Wagner & German Tradition* while there were full showings of *Tristan, Tannhauser* and *Meistersinger* as well as the documentary on Max Lorenz. Our national programme was rounded out with Christmas celebrations, pot luck dinners and other 'social' events all publicised in the seven newsletters that were produced during the year. A big thank you to all who contributed.

As we said last year the society is extremely lucky to have such a dedicated team of members to run all these meetings.

In Dunedin Terence Dennis and Lesley Kendal lead our most southerly group, in Christchurch Gloria Streat organises the programme with able assistance from Jenny Lee, John Pattinson and Chris Brodrick. In Wellington, Tibby & Adrian Simcock, John Morrison, George Risk, Michael Ashdown and Elizabeth Warmington are led by Les Holborow and in Auckland Michael Sinclair is ably assisted by his fellow Auckland committee members and David Colemore-Williams and Helen Kirkman at Auckland meetings, while Margaret Thomas and Liz Lees have helped with the dispatch of the newsletter. My thanks goes to all of these people.

Thanks are also extended to our committee: Bob O'Hara, our minutes secretary Juliet Rowe, Vice President Ken Tomkins, and Jeanette Miller who took up the role of Treasurer during the year. We are very sad that Sidney Smith is stepping down this year as she has made an enormous contribution to the Society. Her Sponsorship Evaluation document will be an invaluable guide for the committee in determining the value of projects that are seeking funding from the Society and Foundation.

In addition to the committee members already mentioned there are the out-of-Auckland-ers who huddle around conference call telephones to take part in our meetings, Lesley Kendall, Gloria Streat and Les Holborow. We thank honorary solicitor Peter Rowe for the use of this telephone technology, John Hambling

for auditing the accounts, Heath Lees for his support of both the committee and for being ever ready to present a talk. Binding us all together is Michael Sinclair who ensures that we run our Society like a well-oiled engine. The fact that our Society runs as smoothly as it does is down to Michael's meticulous preparation. It all seems so easy but that's because it's done so well.

One of the issues that Michael has had to handle this year is a change in the way the Wagner Verband (the international overseeing organisation for Wagner Societies) collects their fees. It is through the Verband that we obtain our tickets to Bayreuth and we believe it is an organisation to which we should belong. While in the past we have paid a fee of 150 euros per annum, the fee structure was changed this year and we are now levied 2 euros per member resulting in a significant increase in our levy. With such a major increase, Michael has successfully negotiated a staggered increase over two years so as to lessen the impact. Ultimately we will need to raise the membership fees to cover the increase but at our last committee meeting it was decided to weigh the increased levy on those who actually see a return, namely Bayreuth attendees. In future for each set of Bayreuth tickets we will charge an extra \$50 to go towards our Verband levy. This will enable us to keep the future membership fee rise to a minimum.

While the excitement of last May's announcement of the visit of Tony Palmer had by January turned into a nightmare all was not lost. In July the APO will present a concert performance of *Das Rheingold* for which the Wagner New Zealand Foundation and the Wagner Society are providing substantial funding. It is expected that about 150 WSNZ members will attend. Opera Australia have also announced a *Ring Cycle* for Melbourne in 2013. So, like our Christchurch members, we need to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down and, rather than start all over again, just get on with it!

New Committee

The WSNZ committee elected at the AGM on 22 May is as follows:-
President..... Chris Brodrick
Vice President..... Ken Tomkins
SecretaryMichael Sinclair
Treasurer..... Jeanette Miller
PR/Liaison..... Gloria Streat
Committee.....Lesley Kendall
..... Bob O'Hara
.....Les Holborow
..... Juliet Rowe