



‘TROUBLE AT T’MILLS’



Photos:

Left – Neil Armfield (Director), Stuart Skelton (Siegmund) and Richard Mills - at a Melbourne Ring rehearsals. Photo: Jeff Busby

Centre – Asher Fisch

Bottom – Simone Young

Wagner's opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is a massive undertaking for any opera company. The length of the work and the forces involved stretch not only financial but human resources often beyond breaking point. Recent examples would be the troubles the Metropolitan Opera faced with their new production and the infamous *Ring* machine. Closer to home, the first of the two Adelaide productions of *The Ring* required extensive alterations to the theatre to accommodate the Châtelet Theatre set as well as months of rehearsals, while the second production was marred by cost overruns that were so bad the 'politicians' washed their hands of any future revivals.

So when news broke, five months out from the opening of the Melbourne *Ring*, that the conductor Richard Mills had resigned, there was no great surprise.

Writing in *The Australian* arts correspondent Matthew Westwood reported that the cause of Mills' resignation was a "spectacular blow-up" between the conductor and a senior cast member. According to the report there had been a number of disagreements during the rehearsals which centred on



Mills' inexperience conducting *The Ring* in performance.

Mills and director Neil Armfield had been leading rehearsals for the first two parts of *The Ring* on a sound stage at Melbourne's Docklands. After the initial rehearsal period finished on May 31, Mills told Opera Australia's artistic director Lyndon Terracini that he could not continue.

Internet site *The Wagnerian.com* reported that Terracini was putting on a brave face and quoted him as saying that he had "received about 50 emails from conductors and agents touting their availability and readiness to replace Richard Mills ...". While perhaps rightly not responding to all of these emails, it appears he is now in discussion with two or three conductors and an announcement will be made in the next few weeks. Indeed, so confident is he that he firmly declares he is "Not worried at all".

Interestingly the list of possible candidates to replace Mills has produced its own intriguing story. One name that has already been ruled out by Terracini, despite being theoretically available, is that of Asher Fisch who conducted the second Adelaide *Ring* in 2004. On the other hand one conductor apparently under consideration is Opera Australia's ex-musical director Simone Young who conducted *The Ring* in Hamburg. Those in the know wonder how she would be able to fit the Melbourne *Ring* into her already crowded schedule and question her desire to come to the aid of an organisation that surprisingly decided not to renew her contract 10 years ago.

As they say – "Watch this space!"



BASTILLE DAY - 14 JULY

On the day the French celebrate the storming of the Bastille, WSNZ members in Auckland and Wellington will witness another riot, this time in the German city of Nuremberg, from the safety of their seats! Each centre will be showing Wagner's comic opera *Die Meistersinger* and, while the anarchy at the end of the second act is more boisterous than violent, it is indeed a riot!

The Wellington performance is a joint meeting with the Opera Society and will take place at The Film School, 86 Vivian Street and will start at 11.00am. Later in the day, more precisely 4.00pm, a different production of the same opera will be shown in Auckland in the Music Theatre of the School of Music.

A few weeks later, in Christchurch, John Pattinson will start his *Beginner's Guide to The Ring: Singing in the Rhine*. This illustrated talk will be held over two evenings (16 August & 13 September) at 7.30pm in the Arts Lecture Theatre, University of Canterbury.

While John Pattinson will introduce *The Ring* in Christchurch, Aidan Lang will, on 25 August, present a talk to Wellington, on *Der fliegende Holländer* which opens in the capital on 14 September.

WSNZ Committee

At the AGM on Sunday 19 May 2013 the following were elected Committee and Office-Bearers of the Wagner Society of New Zealand:

President Chris Brodrick
 Vice President Ken Tomkins
 Secretary Barry Littlewood
 Treasurer Jeanette Miller
 PR/Liaison Gloria Streat
 Committee Lesley Kendall
 Bob O'Hara
 Les Holborow
 Juliet Rowe
 Hon. Solicitor Peter Rowe
 Auditor John Hambling

DUNEDIN CELEBRATES WAGNER'S 200TH BIRTHDAY TO THE DAY

On Wednesday 22 May 2013 a large audience gathered in Marama Hall at the University of Otago shortly before 1.00 pm to hear a splendid 200th Birthday Tribute concert of Richard Wagner's music given by Professor Terence Dennis.

The concert commenced in true ceremonial fashion with the magnificent Reger transcription for two pianos of the *Overture to the Mastersingers of Nuremberg*. Terence Dennis was joined for this by one of his senior university piano students, Corwin Newall, whose compositions have already been performed by the NZSO. The programme then consisted of some of the solo Wagner piano works recorded by Terence Dennis on Ode-Manu 2038, that CD being one of the classical best sellers in New Zealand in 2007. Terence played works written between 1840 and 1875, highly-prized pièces d'occasion for special friends and acquaintances. Firstly the most extended of these, *A Sonata for the Album of Mathilde Wesendonck* followed by four more compositions - *Albumleaf for Ernst Benedikt Kietz*, *For the Album of Princess Metternich*, *Arrival at the Black Swans*, and the *Albumleaf for Frau Betty Schott*.

This concert concluded with pieces of Liszt associated with the last months of Wagner's life, *La lugubre gondola II (The Mournful Gondola II)* and, after his death, *Am Grabe Richard Wagners (At the Grave of Richard Wagner)*. The former was written in December 1882 in Venice and the latter, dated 22 May 1883, in Weimar. The applause at the conclusion of the one hour concert was long and appreciative.

This however, was not the only Wagner concert enjoyed by Dunedin audiences at University of Otago concerts in Marama Hall. The previous Wednesday they were entertained by Italian flautist, Luca Manghi, Terence Dennis and another of his senior pianists,

Jonathan Drummond. This concert also recognised the Verdi 200th Anniversary as well as that of Wagner. Luca and Terence played the Verdi-Bruccialdi *Fantasia Drammatica on Aida*, Op. 134 (based around the opera's ballet), the Verdi-Briccialdi *Rigoletto-Fantasia*, Op. 106 and the Wagner-Briccialdi *Lohengrin Fantasia*, Op. 129. Virtuoso Italian flautist Briccialdi played in the Milan premiere of *Aida*, at Verdi's request. The second Wagner performance was a two piano transcription again by Max Reger, the *Prelude and Love Death from Tristan and Isolde*. Jonathan Drummond joined Terence Dennis to play this prelude which changed the face of music.

An April lunchtime concert at Marama Hall had started this year's commemorative series of great two-piano transcriptions of some of Wagner's compositions with senior piano students and Terence Dennis presenting the *Siegfried Idyll*, the Wagner-Reger *Wotan's Farewell and Magic Fire from Walküre*, and Siegfried's *Trauermarsch (Siegfried's Funeral March from Götterdämmerung)*.

These concerts were especially designed by Terence Dennis as tributes to the Wagner 200th Commemorative Year and many of our Wagner Society members, as well as the wider public, have had a wonderful trio of local concerts to attend and enjoy.

TIPS: FOR FIRST TIME RING-ERS

No 1. Prepare, prepare, prepare!

As with most things in life the more you put into something the more you will get back. *The Ring* is a classic example of this saying. Before you stands the Mt Everest of musical creation, a work that deserves respect and a little bit of time spent on preparation.

To fully appreciate your *Ring* experience we suggest this little tip. Get hold of a recording of the work and start to listen to one act per day. If you divide *Rheingold* into two parts you will be able to listen to the whole *Ring* in manageable bites over 11 days. We'd suggest that on day 12 you restart the exercise and listen to the work once more over the next 11 days and so on until you have the music under your skin. As the end of the year draws near you may wish to set aside a little more time and listen to each opera in one sitting. In parallel to the study of the music, study the story and what is happening in each scene. This will help you from feeling lost, and you will have less reliance on the sur-titles. With study behind you your *Ring* experience will be truly uplifting.

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2013 – WAGNER200 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 14 July 4.00pm (NOTE TIME)
Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
DVD Screening: Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. A screening of the recent Glyndebourne production of Wagner's only comedy, starring Gerald Finley, Marco Jentsch and Anna Gabler

Sunday, 8 September 7.30pm
Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Wagner, Paris and Der fliegende Holländer: In anticipation of New Zealand Opera's new production of Wagner's early work Heath Lees looks at various aspects of the work with musical and visual excerpts

Sunday 8 December 7.30pm
Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Rounding off the Wagner Bicentenary: Michael Sinclair takes us through the Wagner year with images, music and video from around the world to celebrate this bicentennial year, including a round-up from the Melbourne *Ring* and our usual Christmas festivities!

MEMBERSHIP RECEIPTS

Your committee has decided that receipts will no longer be issued for subscriptions, except where especially requested. This decision, which will save much postage expense, does not apply to donations to the Wagner Foundation. We also believe that not all donations made since March 2013 have been receipted, or receipted for the right amount, and for this we apologize. So that we can rectify such errors, we ask members affected to contact the Secretary, Barry Littlewood, at his address on page 1 or by email to info@wagnersociety.org.nz.

ANDY'S ARCHITECTURAL AWARD

University of Canterbury professor of Engineering and WSNZ member Andy Buchanan has been honoured with the New Zealand Institute of Architects President's Award in recognition of his contribution to New Zealand architecture. Andy was part of a team that developed a new system of earthquake-resistant buildings that use post-tensioned structural timber as an alternative to concrete and steel.

A number of new buildings, in the Christchurch re-build, are being constructed using this method.

On behalf of all WSNZ members we offer Andy our warmest congratulations.

Christchurch

Friday 16 August 7.30pm & Friday 13 September 7.30pm
Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury
Singing in the Rhine: a Beginner's Guide to Wagner's Ring. John Pattinson presents an illustrated two-part series on the *Ring* with the dual aim of dispelling any trepidations for newcomers and to provide a refresher for veterans
The rest of the year's programme has still to be finalised.

Wellington

Sunday 14 July at 11.00am
Venue: The Film School, 86 Vivian St
 Joint meeting with the Opera Society. DVD screening of **Die Meistersinger**:
NB: Spaces limited, members should confirm attendance by emailing <tibby.warmington@gmail.com>.

Sunday 25 August at 4.00pm
Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace
 Aidan Lang on *Der fliegende Holländer* which opens on 14 September

Sunday 20 October at 4.00pm
Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace
Richard Wagner – Before, During and After: Heath Lees takes a panoramic view of Wagner's 200-year-long impact

A NICE NOISE!

For those of you who haven't read Alex Ross's book *The Rest is Noise* please do. We can't recommend it highly enough. In the book Alex, who is the music critic of the New Yorker magazine, "weaves together the histories of the twentieth century and its music, from Vienna before the First World War to Paris in the twenties; from Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia to downtown New York in the sixties and seventies up to the present. Taking readers into the labyrinth of modern style, Ross draws revelatory connections between the century's most influential composers and the wider culture. The Rest Is Noise is an astonishing history of the twentieth century as told through its music." In addition to the book Alex writes a blog (www.therestisnoise.com) on which he posts some fascinating articles and is well worth following.

But what, you might be saying, is this to do with Wagner? Well, please do go to an article he posted on the New Yorker web site on 21 May 2013, called *A Wagner Birthday Roast*. (Search for 'A Wagner Birthday Roast'). It's guaranteed entertainment!!!

Dunedin

Sunday, 8 September 2.00pm
Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago
The Golden Age Part 2 (The inter-war years): Terence Dennis continues his fascinating journey with live performances from Bayreuth and Covent Garden: the era of Furtwängler, Beecham, Leider, Flagstad and Melchior

Sunday, 6 October 2.00pm
Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago
Contrasts and Compliments: Terence Dennis discusses how great composers such as Verdi and Chausson drew from Wagner to renew their own traditions

Sunday, 1 December 12.00 noon
Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago
Christmas Concert: Special Wagner concert to conclude the Wagner200 Year as well as celebrating Christmas and our sixth birthday

Other Dates:

NBR NZ OPERA

Der fliegende Holländer

WELLINGTON	14, 19, 21 Sept - 7.30pm, 17 Sept - 6.00pm
AUCKLAND	5, 10, 12 Oct - 7.30pm, 8 Oct - 6.30pm

MELBOURNE RING

	CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3	
<i>Das Rheingold</i>	7pm Mon 18 Nov	7pm Wed 27 Nov	7pm Fri 6 Dec	
	<i>Die Walküre</i>	5pm Wed 20 Nov	5pm Fri 29 Nov	5pm Mon 9 Dec
		<i>Siegfried</i>	5pm Fri 22 Nov	5pm Mon 2 Dec
<i>G'dämmerung</i>			4pm Mon 25 Nov	4pm Wed 4 Dec

MET RING TO BE RETIRED?

Word is around that the MET/Le Page Ring will not be revived as planned in 2016/17 and indeed may not be seen again. No 'official' reason has been given but the consensus is that straight-forward economics have ruled it out!

NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:

Molly Ah-Chee..... Auckland
 Amanda Atlas..... Christchurch
 Olivia Sheehan..... Auckland



THE 'OFFICIAL' BACKGROUNDER FOR THE PROJECT

Four illustrated, 50-minute DVD documentaries presented by well-known broadcaster and Wagner expert, Heath Lees

In his colossal, four-opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Wagner aimed to tell an unforgettable tale of good and evil; of love, greed, betrayal and redemption, through a universe peopled by gods, humans, fantastic creatures and magical happenings. In his mind he determined that it would be the music — the orchestra as well as the singers — that would embody the action and tell the tale.

In these four DVD-documentaries, Professor Heath Lees follows Wagner's lead and concentrates first and foremost on the music of Wagner's *Ring*. He guides the viewer through each of the four operas and throws the spotlight on the composer's techniques and effects. He shows how the many themes (the leitmotifs) come to embody a person or an event, or an emotion . . . and how they are subtly changed so that they act like characters in the drama, giving the whole work its unforgettable impact.

Heath also places the operas in their historical context. He explores Wagner's revolutionary ideas. He examines how the women he loved influenced what went on in *The Ring*. He tells how Wagner's dream of Total Art caused a whole new theatre to be built for this unique operatic cycle. We learn about Wagner the man, Wagner the composer, and Wagner the genius.

Each of the four episodes of *A Tale Told in Music* focusses on one of the operas, and Heath frequently 'talks through' musical passages at the piano, explaining the techniques used. This approach is direct and non-technical, and there are also animation sequences, interviews with Wagner experts, and occasional moments of performance by professional opera singers.

Wagner's Ring: A Tale Told in Music is essential viewing for everyone with the slightest interest in *The Ring*. It will open up new horizons for all: young, old, musical, non-musical, tentative first-timer, and seasoned *Ring*-goer.



Heath makes a point in Bayreuth, while Richard Wagner looks on



Addressing the camera at the gate of Wagner's Haus Wahnfried



Sitting with Heath is Dr Albert Lutz, director of the museum in the Wesendonck Villa, Zurich. The terrace is part of the house that now stands where Wagner's "Der Asyl" once stood, conveniently close to Mathilde's balcony, across the treetops.

HEATH EXPLAINS HOW THIS DVD PROJECT HAPPENED:-

Last year I was giving lectures for a number of Australian arts organisations and one of the audiences (in Melbourne) happened to include a TV producer. When he approached me afterwards to consider making a film of my 'routines' at the piano, I suggested that a Wagner series might be the best project, given the interest in the Melbourne *Ring* at the end of this year.

Usually these kinds of conversations peter out within a couple of weeks, but this time was different. This man was serious. Arrangements escalated, multiplied and then took actual shape, with four 50-minute scripts produced within a couple of months, followed by a complete week of filming in the plush surroundings of the Melbourne Recital Centre, the willing involvement of a number of fine young opera singers and an innovative graphics team for the stills and animation sequences.

In addition, the series includes interviews with Wagner singers, and scenes in Bayreuth (of course!) as well as Lucerne, at Wagner's Villa Tribschen, plus a segment in Zurich where he fled after the Dresden revolution, and met the lovely Mathilde Wesendonck. The whole thing will give a new and completely comprehensive overview of the creation of *The Ring*, plus a detailed exploration of the music, much of it taken apart and re-assembled by me at the piano. Wagner Society members will be used to these kinds of presentations that I do; in fact, the series is built up out of many of the presentations I have done over the last twenty years since the Society got going.

It was a great thrill for me that the WSNZ and Foundation agreed to become one of the sponsors for these DVDs. A number of other donors here and in Australia have helped to make this project (a pretty costly one in terms of travel and technical resources) come to fruition. As part of the 'contra', the DVDs will be available to all WSNZ members with a reduction of 20%.

A website backgrounding and advertising these DVDs is due to open in the next few weeks, and its address will be made known to members in due course.

*(We very much look forward to seeing this project in its finished form
- Editor)*

WAGNER'S RING A TALE TOLD IN MUSIC

SUPPORTED BY THE

WAGNER NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION

The WSNZ, through the Wagner New Zealand Foundation has agreed to support this project with a grant of \$10,000.