

Bo Skovhus - *Kurwenal* • Daveda Karanas - *Brangäne* • Annalena Persson - *Isolde* • Lars Cleveman - *Tristan* • Rúni Bratteberg - *Marke* • Marco Stella - *Melot*

TRISTAN & ISOLDE SAIL INTO AUCKLAND

At around 1 or 2 minutes past 4pm on Saturday 19 July the Auckland Town Hall will be filled with what has become the most famous collection of musical notes in the history of Western music. Known collectively as the *Tristan Chord* they have been described by Hector Berlioz as “a kind of chromatic moan... whose cruel effect is reinforced by long suspensions which appear in place of proper harmonic resolutions”. The Chord opens Wagner’s masterpiece *Tristan und Isolde*; a work that has had a profound influence on not only music but the whole of Western culture. The roots of Impressionism, Expressionism and Abstraction all grew in its fertile soil.

We stand to be corrected but we believe the performance of *Tristan und Isolde* on 19 July will be the first performance in New Zealand. The lack of a previous performance was no doubt due to the problems in assembling a cast of suitable quality. Unperturbed, the Auckland Philharmonia has engaged a strong cast of mainly Scandinavian singers. Tristan will be sung by Swedish tenor Lars Cleveman. From 1998 to 2009 he was a member of the ensemble at the Royal Opera in Stockholm, and he has been a frequent guest at the Royal Danish Opera in Copenhagen. He made his debut at The Royal Opera House in 2009 when he sang Tristan in two performances; made his Bayreuth debut with the title role in *Tannhäuser* in 2011; and his Metropolitan Opera debut with the title role in

Siegfried and the role of Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung* in 2013.

Isolde will be sung by fellow Swede Annalena Persson. In October 2003 she won the fourth International Competition for Wagner Voices in Bayreuth. Since then she has sung Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* for Opera North; Salome for Netherlands Opera and at the Teatro Real Madrid; Chrysothemis in Strauss’s *Elektra*; Isolde for Seattle, Welsh National Opera and Basel Opera companies.

Rúni Bratteberg who sings King Marke hails from the village of Vágur in the Faroe Islands. After graduating as a photographer in Copenhagen, he trained to become a singer, studying at the Sibelius Akademia in Helsinki and at the International Operastudio in Zürich. Engaged at the National Theater Mannheim from 2009-2011 he sang Gurnemanz, Hagen, Hunding, Fafner, Veit Pogner, König Heinrich, Basilio, Timur, Sparafucile, Sarastro, Baron Ochs, and Osmin.

Danish born Bo Skovhus sings the role of Kurwenal. He has been closely associated with the Vienna State Opera for more than a decade and he performs there regularly.

Daveda Karanas, a Greek-American mezzo-soprano, sings Brangäne while the role of Melot will be sung by another Swede: baritone, Marco Stella.

The WSNZ, through the WNZ Foundation, is once again proud to support this performance through the generosity of our members and in particular the late Roa Morrissey.

Tristan und Isolde

Opera in Concert

Saturday, 19 July at 4.00pm

Auckland Town Hall

Duration: Six hours including an interval of 20 mins and a dinner break of approx. 1hr 15 mins

Dinner Options:

The APO has arranged two options:

- Two-course express meal by Dawsons at Auckland Art Gallery café. \$45 per person, incl. glass of wine.
- Pre-paid buffet meal in the Aotea Centre’s Upper NZI Room: assorted wok boxes, rolls with meats, relishes and salads, and sweet treats to finish. Pre-paid orders: \$40 per person. Cash bar available.

Bookings can be made through the APO website or call the APO Ticketing Office on 09 623 1052.

AUCKLAND MEMBERS

PLEASE NOTE:

There has been a change to the 6 July and 31 August meetings. On 6 July members will be treated to a discussion between Ken Tomkins and the conductor of the Auckland performance of *Tristan & Isolde*, Eckehard Stier. After the break Ken will show a film about the opera. **Please also note that the time has reverted to the usual 7.30pm.** The DVD screening of *Die Walküre* is postponed to 3.30pm on 31 August

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2014 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 6 July at 7.30pm (NOTE TIME)

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St

Discussion: *Tristan & Isolde* – Ken Tomkins interviews the conductor of the Auckland *Tristan*, Eckehard Stier. Followed by a DVD screening of a film about the opera

Sunday, 31 August at 3.30pm (NOTE TIME)

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St

DVD Screening: *Die Walküre*.

Complete opera from La Scala, Milan. A magnificent production featuring our own Simon O'Neill, with Waltraud Meier as Sieglinde.

Sunday, 7 December at 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St

Christmas Function:

Featuring a presentation by Professor Heath Lees on the Ups and Downs of Wagner on Film.

Dunedin

Sunday, 5 October at 2.00pm Venue:

Black-Sale House, Department of Music, The University of Otago

The View from the Stage - Part 3

(1924 - 1944): Chris Brodrick continues his series on the Bayreuth Festival visitors

Sunday, 7 December at 12.00 noon

Venue: TBC

Christmas Luncheon followed by

Historical Perspectives: Winifred Wagner, wife of Wagner's son Siegfried, was the director of the Bayreuth Festival through the momentous period of 1930-1945. In 1975 she was interviewed by German film director Syberberg. This presentation will cover excerpts from the original five hour interview. German, with English subtitles

DECRYPTION

Christchurch member Sid Kennedy emailed to tell us that *The Press* cryptic crossword on 26 May contained the following clue:

'Whitehead arranged composition by wealthy composer (7,6)'

While it's not difficult to guess the answer, Sid has kindly provided us with a solution.

1. *Composer* (7,6) – Two words naming a composer

2. *Whitehead* indicates a word starts with W.

Christchurch

Friday, 15 August at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Wagner in Exile: Chris Brodrick introduces -*Wagner in Exile* in which Antoine Wagner heads to Switzerland on the trail of his great-great-grandfather Richard Wagner who spent several years in political exile amongst the Alps

Friday, 31 October at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Rounding off the Wagner bicentenary year: Michael Sinclair, former secretary of the WSNZ, takes us through the Wagner year of 2013 with images, music and video from around the world including a round-up of the Melbourne *Ring*

Wellington

Sunday, 29 June at 11.00am

Venue: Film School Theatre, 86 Vivian Street

Joint meeting with the Opera Society.

DVD screening of the Hans Jürgen

Syberberg film of *Parsifal*

Sunday, 13 July at 4.00pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace, Church Hall

***Tristan and Isolde* – The Classical and Medieval Background:** An illustrated talk by John Davidson

Sunday, 21 September at 5.30pm (NOTE TIME)

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace, Church Hall

John Pattinson will give an illustrated talk entitled *Wagner and the Operatic Drug Scene*

Sunday, 16 November at 4.00pm

[venue to be confirmed]

The Ups and Downs of Wagner on Film:

Professor Heath Lees will talk about Wagner in film, and the making of the film *Wagner's Ring – A Tale Told In Music*

December

Christmas Party. Details later

3. *arranged composition* tells us to use the letters in *arranged*.

4. *by wealthy* indicates another word for wealth – Rich

So – Rich + W + re-arranged *arranged* gives us:-

Richard Wagner

Easy when you know how!

NEW MEMBER

A big Wagnerian welcome to:

Kate Livingston.....Christchurch



BEN HEPPNER RETIRES

In April the Canadian tenor, Ben Heppner, announced his retirement from singing, ending a career as the greatest Canadian Heldentenor since Jon Vickers.

During the 1990s, Heppner was in demand around the world as one of the few tenors able to succeed in the demanding heroic tenor roles of German opera, as well as in Italian works such as Verdi's *Otello* and Puccini's *Turandot*. He also created several roles in new operas, including the title role as Captain Ahab in Jake Heggie's *Moby-Dick*.

His first big break came in 1988, when he won the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the first Birgit Nilsson Prize, which came with the promise of a European opera debut. A stint the following year at the Royal Swedish Opera in the title role in Wagner's *Lohengrin* put him on the radar of opera managers everywhere.

He quickly became a regular star attraction at major European opera houses in works by Wagner and Richard Strauss.

"The time has come for a new era in my life," he said in a statement. "I wish to thank the countless people who inspired me, supported me and encouraged me to embark on a fantastic journey over the past 35 years."

MEANWHILE.....

According to the Opera Australia website the body that contains the most thrilling voice on the planet is heading our way! Yes – Jonas Kaufmann (right) will give not one but two concerts in Sydney in August (10th & 17th). I have it on good authority that Mr Kaufmann not only has a thrilling voice but that his looks can also excite!!

For those interested in hearing (or seeing) one of the current leading singers in the world you had better go straight to Google. Search for Kaufmann Sydney and look for the OA site and the link to take you to the box office. Unfortunately no programme has been published, just arias by Verdi, Puccini, Bizet and more.

AGM

The Society AGM was held on 25 May and the following were elected to the committee:

President Chris Brodrick
Vice President Ken Tomkins
Secretary Peter Rowe
Treasurer Jeanette Miller
PR/Liaison Gloria Streat
Committee Lesley Kendall, Bob O'Hara, John Davidson, Juliet Rowe.

The amendment to the rules to allow for the notice of AGM to be sent electronically was also adopted. NB: Members who don't have email addresses will **still** receive postal notification.



COMING UP!

The highlight for WSNZ members over the next few months will be the Auckland performance of *Tristan & Isolde* on 19 July. Auckland will precede the performance with an interview with Eckehard Stier on 6 July. In Wellington (29 June) the WSNZ and Opera Society will hold a joint meeting with a screening of Hans Jürgen Syberberg's 1982 film, *Parsifal*. In order to fully appreciate the film we recommend that those attending undertake some background reading before the screening as Syberberg's approach is filmic rather than staged. Try <http://www.monsalvat.no/sybrbrg.htm>

A couple of weeks later (13 July) John Davidson will present a talk to coincide with *Tristan* - a look at the Classical and Medieval background of the work.

Christchurch will be holding a meeting on 15 August in which they will be showing *Wagner in Exile* a recent film that shows Antoine Wagner, in Switzerland on the trail of his great-great-grandfather Richard.



PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON ISRAEL'S WAGNER 'BAN'

*The Ring of Myths -
The Israelis, Wagner and the Nazis*
By Na'ama Sheffi

Revised paperback edition 2013, Sussex Academic Press.
www.sussex-academic.com £19.95

REVIEWED BY
LIZ AND HEATH LEES

Na'ama Sheffi knows that her title *Ring of Myths* can quickly conjure up another phrase in her reader's mind — Ring of Truth. And, as you might expect from a subject that is all about Israel's attitude to the performance of Wagner's music, the struggle between myth and truth haunts every page. A hugely intriguing book, it examines not only the 'unofficial' ban of Wagner performance in Israel but turns that ban into a lens through which the reader can view a mini-history of the evolution of Israeli society in relation to the Holocaust and its aftermath. Of course it's a big ask to cover such a subject in around 200 pages, yet Sheffi handles her material succinctly, honestly, and with great sensitivity – qualities that are amply extended through the fine work of her translators Martha Grenzeback and Miriam Talisman.

Professor Sheffi is as much a journalist as an academic. Her search for truth is clearly a personal odyssey, but it is also a means of revealing to the world how truth and myth have jostled with each other over the last 60 years, sometimes merging to become almost the same thing, and sometimes standing out in strident confrontation. Inevitably, the role of the media in making truth into myth (and vice versa) is paramount. When, for whatever reason, 'real' events are distorted through media-hype yet are immediately accepted as a more comfortable, more universal version — then myth is born, and carried off into public ownership.

Witness what happened to Daniel Barenboim, who writes of this process in an essay 'Wagner and the Jews' in the NY Review of Books on 20 June, 2013. There he describes conducting a performance of the *Prelude and Liebestod from Tristan und Isolde* with the Berlin Staatskapelle in Jerusalem in 2001. Rumour, he says, bred sensation, which then turned into a myth '...that has now, more than ten years later, become established in many people's minds. The pieces were played as an encore following a forty-minute discussion with the audience. I suggested to the people who wanted

to leave that they do so. Only twenty to thirty people...left the hall. The remainder applauded the orchestra so enthusiastically that I had the feeling we had done something positive. Only the next day did the dispute erupt when politicians called the performance a scandal...'

Taking such troublesome myths in hand, Na'ama Sheffi traces the history of Holocaust-reaction in Israel and the ambivalent relationship to Germany, German culture and Wagner in particular. In almost every chapter she talks about the Holocaust victims, their absolutely central place in this perplexing situation and the incredible support they continue to receive from Israelis generally.

In her first chapters, Sheffi gives a fair and frank outline of Wagner's life and writings against the wider background of increasingly rampant anti-semitism in Germany. She details the ever-increasing appropriation of Wagner by the Nazis as part of their powerful propaganda campaign to propagate their racist ideology.

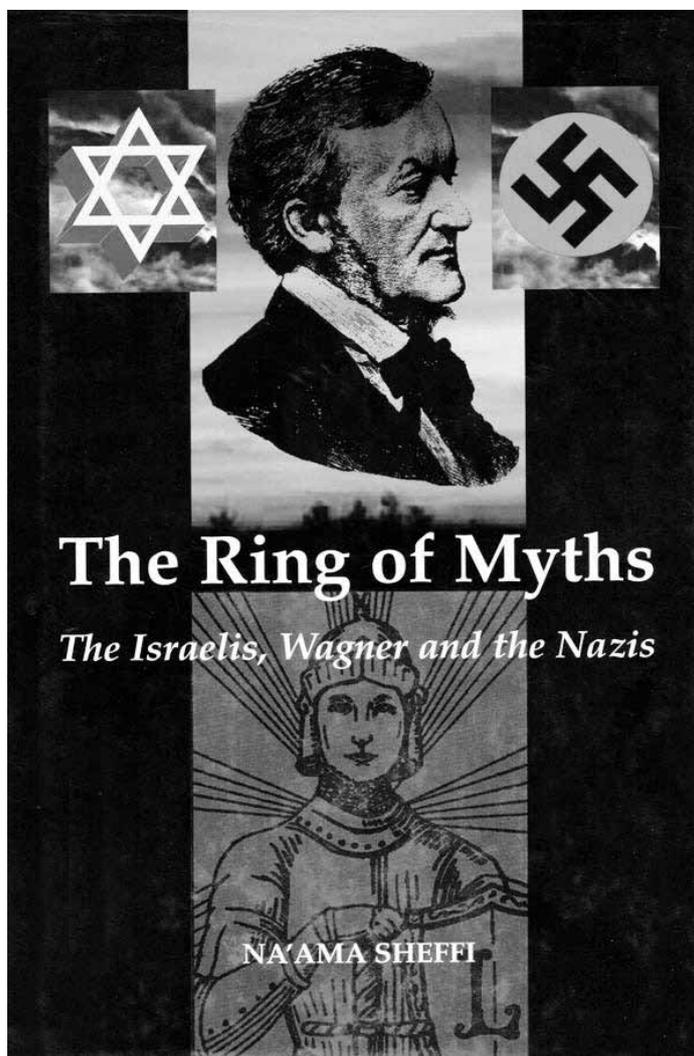
Soon we learn that the first instance of the cancellation of Wagner's music in Israel actually happened in November 1938, just a few days after the terrifying destruction of Kristallnacht when a number of Nazi paramilitary groups and civilians went on the rampage in Berlin. They attacked Jewish shops and businesses causing massive damage to buildings and property and killing nearly 100 Jews. The effect in Israel included a last-minute withdrawal from the programme of the overture to Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* by the Palestinian Symphony Orchestra, later to become the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO). The orchestra felt they could not let Kristallnacht pass without some form of protest, and it was common knowledge by this time that Wagner was Hitler's favourite composer and that Wagner's music and the Bayreuth Festival took pride of place in the Nazi regime's cultural activities. From this moment on, the summary removal of Wagner's

music marked the point where Wagner became a lasting symbol of Germany's racial persecution.

During the late 1940s and 50s, Wagner was not the only German composer to be shunned on virtually every musical occasion. 'Problematic composers' like Richard Strauss and Carl Orff were not performed and artists like violinist Jascha Heifetz who tried to make them heard, were sometimes given a hot reception. In fact, Heifetz was attacked after one of his concerts and had to ward off his assailant's iron pipe with his violin case!

For a while, it looked as though the 1960s would usher in a period where artistic expression for the professionals and freedom of expression for the public might carry the day. Shortly after his appointment as conductor of the IPO, Zubin Mehta announced his determination that the orchestra should play Wagner, in order, as he said, to give polish to their performances. Most orchestral players were on his side, but public and media united against him. He finally got his performance in the early 80s but it unleashed a storm of protest, called simply 'The Wagner Affair'. The Begin government was caught in a cleft stick, and roundly embarrassed when a deputy minister stated that Mehta should 'go back to India'. Begin himself (not known for his tact) distanced himself from the comments realising that 'ethnic arguments against Zubin Mehta were hardly an appropriate way to justify opposition to a symbol of racism [Wagner].'

With some relief, Sheffi notes that more recent decades began to show a glimmer of light in the tunnel. In the 1990s, with the rise of electronic media, Israelis had open access to cable TV, so more and more people were able to hear and watch Wagner performances. Somewhat surprisingly though, the measure of acceptance that this brought helped Richard Strauss more than Wagner. The former had actually accepted — briefly — an official position under Hitler's Third Reich, whereas Wagner had of course been dead some 50 years before the arrival of the Nazi regime. In addition, Strauss' music was less aggressively German than Wagner's, and it seemed less threatening, especially when the first Strauss piece to be played



The Ring of Myths

The Israelis, Wagner and the Nazis

was the late and gentle *Metamorphoses* for strings. When it became known that Strauss actually had a Jewish daughter-in-law and two Jewish grandchildren, the 'Strauss affair' dissolved virtually into thin air.

But large sections of the media and public continued their implacable opposition to Wagner. Twenty years ago, Daniel Barenboim entered the fray. Arguably, this world musical figure, being both Jewish and Israeli, was best-placed to break down the 'Wagner ban', but there was still virulent public opposition. To the dismay of many, following the controversial 2001 performance, the Knesset's Education and Culture Committee declared him persona non grata. Undaunted, the doughty Barenboim continued to campaign with his steadfastly multi-racial West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, originally founded in 1999.

One of the final incidents mentioned in Na'ama Sheffi's publication happened in 2012 and involved the Israeli Wagner Society (yes, it does exist) and the conductor Asher Fisch. A special concert/seminar was held with Fisch as the Society's guest speaker. The subject was 'An Academic musical encounter: Herzl-Toscanini-Wagner'. The seminar went ahead without problems but the concert had to be cancelled because

attempts to hire a venue for the performances proved futile.

As a coda to this present review, a friend recently sent an email from Israel regarding a report in Haaretz (the Israeli daily newspaper) on a Wagner-based conference held in Jerusalem in December 2013, the bi-centenary year. The conference, organized by French conductor Frédéric Chaslin, was no more than a meeting of composers, intellectuals and singers to discuss Wagner and his world. There were no performances of Wagner's music. Shortly after the conference began, a man jumped on to the stage and began shouting and screaming until the police were called to remove him.

In the report in Haaretz by Noam Ben Zeev entitled: What more can be said about playing Wagner in Israel? he says: 'When it comes to Wagner in Israel, it's hard to know who is representing freedom of expression and who is the reactionary; who is the minority in need of protection and who the violent strongman; and who is forcing what on whom. Volkswagen

and Ludwig II, Nordic Teutonic mythology and the Jewish Holocaust, 'the music of the future' and Nazism and democracy — all are thrown into the same pot and the discussion is burned.'

But, despite the frustration shown here, Na'ama Sheffi continually reminds us towards the end of her book that there was never any official ban. Perhaps this makes people feel that, when history has moved us on a little further and old hatreds have died out, the performance of Wagner's music in Israel will be able to take place without major outcry. If so, those Wagner enthusiasts in Israel (Sheffi tells us they are quite a few) will be able to hear some of the greatest music of the 19th century in their own country, played by their own country's orchestra. That this day will come seems probable from this book, whose subject-matter is perplexing and often harrowing, but whose sense of the future inevitability of Wagner performance in Israel, is heartening.

Na'ama Sheffi is Professor of History at the School of Communication at Sapir College, Sderot in Israel. She completed her studies in modern history at Tel Aviv University and has published extensively on German and Israeli culture.