



BRYN TERFEL TOURS NZ

Hot on the heels of Siegfried Jerusalem who was in New Zealand to judge the Lexus Song Quest, it has recently been announced that we are to be graced by another well known Wagnerian singer in the form of Bryn Terfel. Described by The Sunday Times in the UK as "...a force of Nature..." Terfel is being brought to New Zealand by NBR New Zealand Opera to undertake a tour of the four main centres during June.

Born in Wales in 1965, Bryn Terfel is one of the world's most sought after international bass-baritones. His career, that now spans over two decades, took off soon after he came second, to Dmitri Hvorostovsky, in the 1989 Cardiff BBC Singer of the World Competition, although he did win the Lieder Prize.

His early operatic career was based around Mozart, particularly the roles Figaro and Leporello, but as time has gone on Terfel has included the heavier roles and is now an acclaimed singer of Wagner. In his current repertoire he sings the Dutchman, Wolfram (*Tannhäuser*) and Wotan (*Das Rheingold and Die Walküre*). In addition he is renowned for his role of Falstaff in Verdi's opera of the same name. Prior to his New Zealand visit, Terfel will be singing in a Munich production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* and he will leave us for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and five performances of *Tosca*.

Accompanied by New Zealand pianist Terence Dennis, Bryn will perform a selection of popular songs and classical favourites.

Tour dates:-

DUNEDIN: Thursday 11 June at 8pm
Dunedin Town Hall

CHRISTCHURCH: Saturday 13 June at 8pm
Christchurch Town Hall

WELLINGTON: Wednesday 17 June at 8pm
Michael Fowler Centre

AUCKLAND: Saturday 20 June at 8pm
Auckland Town Hall, THE EDGE



Bryn Terfel

COAST TO COAST

Writing in the New York Magazine to celebrate the opening of the last outing of the Otto Schenk *Ring* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, Justin Davidson not only managed to tell the story of Wagner's Tetrology in one sentence but also placed the work in the present day: "*When the mortgage on an oversize dream house proves unaffordable, the owner has no choice but to raise more cash by plundering little people, triggering a tsunami of greed that eventually results in global calamity.*"

While the global recession has already had its operatic casualties, in particular the delay in the launch of Washington Opera's *Ring* and just as the Schenk *Ring* reaches its finale before being retired, another production of *the Ring* is being launched in Los Angeles. The old New York and the new Californian productions offer a wonderful example of the different approach that is taken by directors of opera. Spot the difference! See page 2.

THE RING ON RNZ CONCERT

The Met's production of *The Ring* will be broadcast over five consecutive Sundays beginning on 2nd May at 3.00pm

LOHENGRIN DEBUT FOR SIMON O'NEILL

Simon O'Neill will make his debut in the role of *Lohengrin* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden this month. The performances, on 5 & 16 May, will be conducted by the Russian/American, Semyon Bychkov and feature Edith Haller as Elsa, Petra Lang as Ortrud and Gerd Grochowski/Falk Struckmann as Telramund. From London Simon will travel to Paris to sing in two performances of Janacek's *Glagolitic Mass* under conductor Pierre Boulez. For those interested in reading an extended interview with Simon, he discusses his career with Jim Pritchard on:- www.musicweb-international.com/SandH/2009/jan-jun09/oneill_interview.htm

MEMBERSHIP

Many thanks to all the members who have paid their subscriptions for the 2009/2010 year. To date well over half the membership has re-joined which has kept our Membership Secretary, George Risk, extremely busy. A big thank you also to those who, in addition to paying the membership fee, have made donations to the Wagner Foundation as well.

NEW MEMBERS

A very Warm Wagnerian Welcome to:-

Anthea & Richard Joel Dunedin
Patricia Bishop Dunedin
Adrian Simcock Wellington
Graeme & Carolyn Campbell... Auckland
Poorva Pandya Auckland
Anne Loeser Wellington
Gregory Hill Wellington

NEW LOOK NEWSLETTER

With the stock of Newsletter shells running out and the paper no longer available we thought it was a good time to give our publication a new look. So in with a new masthead, typeface and minor changes to the layout. We hope that you find these changes refreshing!



OTTO SCHENK
Metropolitan
Opera production

RING IN THE CHANGES



ACHIM FREYER
Los Angeles
Opera production

As the Metropolitan Opera Ring slips into a New York retirement a new and different look at the story comes to life in Los Angeles. The contrast between the old and the new could not be more defined and as a picture is better than a thousand words we thought you'd like to see for yourselves!

"I avoided interpretations," Schenk says. "I didn't want to put on some pseudo-modern hat... I think when it says it's set in a forest, I want to see a forest, and when it's set in a cave, I want to see a cave. My imagination is limited. I can't imagine that an empty platform is a forest..." Washington Post 19 April 2009.

Otto Schenk was born in Vienna in 1930. His debut as an opera director was in Salzburg (1957) with a production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. He has worked for all the major opera companies, Covent Garden, Vienna State, La Scala and is famous for his lavish, realist, traditional productions. His Metropolitan Opera *Ring* opened in New York back in 1986.

"...watching art shouldn't be a passive activity. Freyer describes the television viewer as a voyeur, sitting safely in his room behind a screen. I don't want a spectator like that. He has to be active..." Washington Post 19 April 2009.

Achim Freyer was born in Berlin in 1934 and trained under Bertholt Brecht. He combines the disciplines of painting, set and costume design as well as theatre direction. The Washington Post described Freyer's vision for the Los Angeles *Ring* as involving "symbolic, arresting images: His figures wear large puppet heads, constructed body parts or thick makeup. Using the same set throughout, he shows the progress of the action by beginning the cycle in a distant time and place and moving it gradually closer until *Götterdämmerung*, the final segment, will literally and figuratively intrude into the audience's space, as the singers divest themselves of their constructed costumes and become more visibly human."



The Rheingold set



Wotan holds up the Ring. Froh (l), Donner & Fricka (r)



Wotan farewells Brünnhilde



Wotan & Loge capture Alberich



The Rainbow Bridge



Iréne Theorin (Brünnhilde), James Morris (Wotan)



Wotan farewells Brünnhilde



Johan Botha (Siegmund), Waltraud Meier (Sieglinde)



James Morris (Wotan), Yvonne Naef (Fricka)

Photo immediately above, Rainbow Bridge (top) and Loge (r): Beatrix Schiller/Metropolitan Opera
Middle three photos above: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera



Kim Begley (Loge)



Vitalij Kowaljow (Wotan)



Placido Domingo (Siegmund)

All Los Angeles Opera Ring
Photos: Monika Rittershaus

WSNZ 2009 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 24 May 7.30pm

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

AGM followed by DVD of Simon O'Neill in *Die Walküre* Act 1 from Ravello – Wagner's birthday celebrations

Sunday, 12 July 7.30pm

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

Michael Sinclair presents: *The Story of the Ring* – How the text evolved and what it really means

Sunday, 6 September 7.30pm

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

Elric Hooper presents: *From Maestro to Myth* – The evolution of Wagner production

Sunday, 6 December 7.30pm

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

Wagner Pot Pourri - A Christmas celebration. An evening of requests, roundups, selections and surprises

Auckland entrance fee of \$5.00 per person, per meeting except for the AGM which is free and the 6 September meeting where the fee will be \$10.00 per person.

AGM - 24 May

The Wagner Society AGM is to be held on Sunday 24 May 2009, at the School of Music, 6 Symonds Street, Auckland at 7.30pm

So far, Committee and Office-Bearer nominations have been received as follows:

President Chris Brodrick
Vice President Ken Tomkins
Secretary.....Michael Sinclair
Treasurer.....Malcolm Hammond
Membership/Liaison.. George Risk
CommitteeLesley Kendall
..... Bob O'Hara
..... Juliet Rowe
.....Sidney Smith

If you wish to make a nomination, phone Michael at 09-528 0776 to be sent a form, or email msinclair@xtra.co.nz. Nominations can also be made from the floor of the meeting.

Dunedin

Sunday, 24 May 2.00pm

Venue: Music School Lecture Room, Sale-Black House, University of Otago

Terence Dennis presents: *Wagner in Paris* - Exploring Wagner's periods of crisis and ultimate inspiration in the City of Love

Sunday, 12 July 2.00pm

Venue: Music School Lecture Room, Sale-Black House, University of Otago
Chris Ackerley presents: *Wagner and Literature*. 'Chantant dans la coupole' – the voices of *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal* in TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*

Sunday, 27 September 2.00pm

Venue: Dunedin Public Art Gallery
Chris Brodrick presents: *Wagner and the Visual Arts* - A look at some of the artists who were influenced by the Master of Bayreuth. (In conjunction with Friends of the Art Gallery)

Sunday, 8 November 2.00pm

Venue: Music School Lecture Room, Sale-Black House, University of Otago

Ludwig - Luchino Visconti.
A DVD screening of the film based on the life of Wagner's benefactor, King Ludwig II of Bavaria

Sunday, 6 December 2.00pm

Venue: Music School Lecture Room, Sale-Black House, University of Otago

Complete viewing of the famed Bayreuth production of *Lohengrin*, and our end-of-year Christmas function

Wellington

Monday, 15 June 7.00pm

Venue: Paramount Theatre, Courtney Place

DVD screening of *The Flying Dutchman* (in association with NZ Opera Soc.)

"Wagner's romantic opera presented as a ghost thriller, incredibly gripping, densely atmospheric." - (*Saarbrücker Zeitung*). With Donald McIntyre as the Dutchman.

Sunday, 9 August at 4pm

Venue: TBC

Talk on *The Flying Dutchman* in preparation for the Adelaide performances

September/October

Proposed talk by Peter Walls on *Siegfried* with performance of the *Siegfried Idyll*

FOR SALE – The Solti Ring on vinyl

Anyone interested in acquiring the Solti Ring in vinyl format should contact Shuna Askew on 09 419 9432.

Christchurch

Friday, 22 May 7.30pm

Venue: Gloria & Garth Streat's home, 20 Pentre Terrace, Cashmere

Pot Luck meal for Richard Wagner's birthday plus DVD *The Wagner Clan*

Friday, 14 August 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Terence Dennis presents: *Wagner in Paris* - Exploring Wagner's periods of crisis and ultimate inspiration in the City of Love

Friday, 18 September 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Chris Brodrick presents: *Wagner & the Visual Arts*. A repeat presentation from 2006

Friday, 9 October 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

John Pattinson presents: *The Black Sheep of the Family* – An introduction to *Rienzi*

Sunday, 29 November 6.00pm

Venue: Jonet & Tony Ward's home
949 Shands Road, Christchurch
Christmas BBQ

Christiane Libor as *Ada* in *Théâtre du Châtelet à Paris* production of Wagner's early opera 'Die Feen'. A full review of the production can be found on page 4. (Photo Pierre Verdy/AFP)





photo: Getty Images

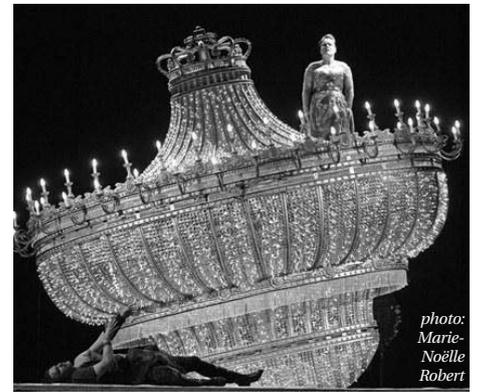


photo: Marie-Noëlle Robert

DIE FEEN IN PARIS: FAIRYTALE SUBJECT GETS A REAL PERFORMANCE

In March the *Théâtre du Châtelet* in Paris took the bold decision to mount a commercial performance of *Die Feen*, Wagner's first complete opera, written when he was only 20 years of age. Until now, most critics, commentators and theatre people have dismissed the work as little more than a youthful exercise. But publicity for the *Châtelet* performance promised real dramatic substance and musical interest. Heath and Liz Lees asked Ernesto Rodriguez, an opera-buff friend in Paris, to send us his reaction to the premiere performance.

How fitting for the *Théâtre du Châtelet* to schedule Wagner's *Die Feen* for late March! The burgeoning ambition contained in Wagner's first completed opera provided a good musical nudge to winter's grudging farewell to Paris this year. It also served well the inspired production team responsible for this long overdue première staging in France.

Wagner's musical theatre genius, his indebtedness to earlier masters, and his inspired flair for innovation are all-evident in *Die Feen*. Some may quibble that the opera is not as seamless or as dramatically coherent as those that followed, particularly *Der Fliegende Holländer*. But remember that Wagner wrote this impressive three-hour work, including the libretto, at the age of twenty, and in the face of discouragement from his family and the theatre establishment of his time. Wagnerians and other music lovers should be grateful for more frequent performances of this prescient work.

Wagnerian operagoers were in the majority on opening night. They made for an audience that was focused and serious. Unlike the motley crowd usually attending opera premières here, they came ready to fine comb the singers' German diction, and to pore sacredly over Wagnerian concerns of all sorts. At intermission, two ladies were even overheard comparing the relative levels of seating (dis)comfort in Bayreuth and at the *Châtelet*!

Marc Minkowski's conducting ensured that the audience heard well beyond the obvious influences of Beethoven, Mozart,

and particularly Weber. He sensitively led Les Musiciens du Louvre-Grenoble orchestra and choir through all the rich musical textures contained in the opera. Most rewarding for music lovers, he refrained from making too many cuts to the score. Such editing might have fine-tuned the theatrical flow of this production, but it would have risked losing the composer's youthful musical experiments. One could speculate, for example, that had Wagner more doggedly pursued a staging of *Die Feen* in his lifetime, even he might have excised the Gernot and Drolla scenes. They serve no essential dramatic purpose in this opera. Luckily, the roles were kept here, and enriched by the talented interpretations of Laurent Naouri and Judith Gauthier.

Minkowski had gathered a young and attractive cast for this venture. Christiane Libor sang a splendid Ada (in 2011 she will join the Paris Opera's *Ring*) and William Joyner was her brilliantly toned Arindal. Lina Tetrushvili was a moving Lora, partnered excellently by Laurent Alvaro as Morald. Salome Haller and Eduarda Melo were impressive as the lead Fairies, Farzana and Zermina. Nicolas Teste's sonorous basso was outstanding in his brief appearances as Groma, the magician, and as the Fairy King.

This high-quality singing was matched by decors and costumes that struck a fine balance between the mythic, the magical, and the colourful. A stunning opening Fairy Kingdom scene set the tone for the evening, as did the dazzling final pageant in various shades of red, raspberry and pink. All the action took place on a raised platform at stage-centre, expertly lit for spectacular effect. As scenes evolved, hues of a magic underwater world gave way to mysterious forestscapes, and then to a royal palace of shimmering, deepest blue floors. Props were suggestive and minimal in a production that gave unashamed precedence to the music.

Every scene featured one giant "thematic" object around or on which singers performed: A giant rose at the end of Act I; A heraldic disc denoting the earthly Kingdom of Tramond in Act II;

A magnificent fallen chandelier in Act III to accentuate Arindal's madness and fateful struggles. (On opening night, Ada's climb on and off that giant rose seemed somewhat trying, but perhaps this was due more to first night jitters than to some design fault.)

In general the costumes were tasteful and elegantly fitting, particularly the women's gowns. Less fortunate were the leading men in their daringly cut, bare-chested outfits that spoke less of medieval armour than of bad nights of trans-gender clubbing.

I would have preferred that some scenes and singers' gestures competed less with the music. While director Emilio Sagi evidently had a convincing overall concept for this production, he allowed some kitsch and gimmicks to surface. Like the heavy gags that nearly sunk his recent *Le Chanteur du Mexique* and *La Generala* productions at the *Châtelet*, some exaggerated features threatened the ephemeral atmospherics of this production. Was it necessary that a cutesy giant Jeff Koons-like blonde siren's head overwhelm Ada's chambers in Act II? And why did Farzana and Zemina get friskier as the evening wore along? Surely part of their brief is to thwart Arindal's mortal lover's efforts to free Ada from her stony spell. But there they were, giddily fidgeting and poking our tormented hero while everyone else adopted a more coherent, solemn mode. And the staging would have fared better without the Papageno-and-Papagena treatments given to all those Gernot and Drolla's scenes. Wagner's *Die Feen* makes a good case for searching for the magic within, but it is also an opera where production values should leave well enough alone.

But to be honest, these are minor reservations to a most laudable staging. Let us hope that the evident delights of this production will encourage many other houses to bring it back soon, and more often.

