



TONY PALMER TO VISIT IN 2011



The WSNZ is delighted to announce that they will sponsor a visit to New Zealand by the film director Tony Palmer in March 2011. Palmer, who has made numerous films about composers including Wagner, will present talks in the four main centres. Heath Lees explains how this visit came about.

Two years ago, in Bayreuth, the dozen or so forming the New Zealand 'contingent' had moved across from the Festival Theatre to the Restaurant and set themselves up at a table, while everyone settled in to enjoy the traditional Gala Dinner that Sherwin Sloan from Los Angeles organises every year.

As usual, Sherwyn sat in the middle of the Restaurant welcoming everyone from the microphone (he forgot to mention New Zealand, but when he asked if anyone had been overlooked, we yelled it out in unison). Before the meal began, he announced that a film was being made of some of the event, and we must just pretend that we didn't know it was happening. When the film crew did appear, I said to Liz that I was sure that the director was Tony Palmer. I couldn't believe it. Tony Palmer was such a legend for me, having produced so many films of famous musicians (not to mention *All My Loving*, one of the very first pioneering histories of Rock Music). In addition, I knew that his first films had emerged from the ancient mists of the 50s and 60s, and this man, who looked like Tony Palmer, still seemed like a young or, at the very least, a middle-aged man.

But it was indeed he, as I found out, by striding up to him and introducing

myself with all the boldness of the Antipodes. He was fascinated to learn that there was a Wagner Society in New Zealand, and that we had all 'cut our teeth' on the Burton/Wagner documentary that he had directed a quarter of a century earlier.

Given that he was in the midst of filming what turned out to be his new *Wagner Family* film, to be released in September this year, and given that the large crowd of revellers had begun to generate a roomful of noise of Wagnerian volume, it seemed impossible to talk further, but we exchanged cards and I said I would contact him again.

Back home, I spoke to the Wagner Society Committee about the possibility of having him come to New Zealand in 2011. Great, they all said. But will he come? So I emailed him and asked if he would be prepared to come out here for 2 or 3 weeks of touring and lecturing. "I would be overjoyed" he wrote back in two short minutes (Tony Palmer lives, I have discovered, in continuous email contact), and soon the emails were getting down to the actual times and places, and the sort of events we might have for him. His enthusiasm for visiting New Zealand is avid, and he is a glutton for presenting his work – and that of other film-makers too – at every opportunity, so this proposal was ideal for him.

Last November, he and I met up again at the *Consequences of Wagner* conference in Lisbon, and we took care of all the provisional details, the likely itinerary, and the probable topics and presentations he would do. The whole thing fitted into place with a minimum of re-adjustment and fine-tuning, and it's rapidly appearing as one of the most exciting proposals that the WSNZ has undertaken. I have seen him at work in front of an audience, and his wealth of contacts with the art-world's Movers and Shakers, his huge knowledge of music and musical subjects (Wagner most of all) and his big and genial personality will make for some unforgettable events at the start of 2011. We are all in for a treat.

AGM - 23 May

The Wagner Society AGM is to be held on Sunday 23 May 2010 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
- PR/Liaison.....Sidney Smith
- CommitteeLesley Kendall
- Bob O'Hara
- Les Holborow
- Juliet Rowe

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.

MEMBERSHIP

After six years of looking after the WSNZ membership, George Risk is to step down. With the membership hovering around the 400 mark, George has had the unenviable task of receiving all the membership applications, writing up the cheques for banking and popping down to the local branch of the BNZ to make the deposit. On behalf of all the members I'd like to thank George for his service to us and particularly for taking on what is an essential but unglamorous role which he undertook without fuss or complaint.

As a result of George's retirement, the Membership will be looked after by the Secretary and Treasurer who will work with a new computer programme to streamline the process. We will also be looking at ways to enable members to pay subscription fees and donations on-line.

NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:

- Patricia Heuser Wellington
- Lady Jean H Platt Mosgiel
- Murdoch & Eldbjorg RileyRaumati
- Julian DarbyAuckland

A TRANSPORT OF DELIGHT

WAGNER AND TRAINS



Over the years the Society has presented a variety of topics on the subject of 'Wagner and...' Movies, Substance abuse, the Visual Arts and now Trains! John Drummond who will present his talk to Dunedin members, explains.

The economic impact in Europe of the introduction of a railway system has been well documented. More recently, scholarly attention has turned to the impact on individual lives and ways of thinking of travelling on the railways. It was a profoundly new experience of speed and smoothness, and it altered people's perception of space and time. In the safe cocoon of a railway carriage one observed the countryside passing by in an endlessly changing panorama. Hills and valleys and rivers were 'ironed out' by the level tracks. If 'home' was defined by the distance one could travel in a day and return to sleep in one's own bed, then the railways increased that perception immensely.

In the 1850s and 1860s the newness of the experience of listening to Wagner's unfolding music had much in common with descriptions of the newness of railway travel. Could there be a connection?

In this presentation John Drummond explores Wagner's early experiences of rail travel, and suggests that it might have had a more profound influence on his compositional style than we have hitherto imagined.



John Drummond is Blair Professor of Music at the University of Otago. Much of his professional time has been spent with opera, as a composer, stage director, music director, and translator. Internationally he is well-known in the field of music education, and he was President of the International Society for Music Education in the early years of this century. At home in New Zealand he is known as a broadcaster on opera and other topics, particularly for Radio New Zealand Concert. John has been an enthusiast for Wagner's works since he studied the *Ring Cycle* as an undergraduate student, and his PhD included a detailed analysis and discussion of *Tristan und Isolde*.

Sunday, 23 May 12.00 noon: – Venue: *TECHNIQUE Training Restaurant, Harbour Terrace, Dunedin*

RING AROUND THE WORLD!

For those who like to attend productions of *The Ring* and see the world at the same time here are a few temptations.

For the first time China will be able to experience the complete *Ring Cycle* when Cologne Opera present two cycles of their acclaimed production, directed by Canadian Robert Carsen during EXPO 2010 in Shanghai

Cycle 1. September, 16-19, 2010

Cycle 2. September, 21-24, 2010

Information on the cast and tickets can be found at:-

<http://www.ringatexpo.de/english.html> – alternatively you can Google Ring@Expo.

Renaissance Tours, Australia's premier specialist tour operator is organising a 12 day tour to attend Hamburg State Opera's production of *The Ring* conducted by Australian-born Simone Young. Tour dates are 31 March - 11 April 2011.

With the large numbers expected to attend *the Ring*, three tour leaders have been engaged including Peter Bassett who will be presenting to the WSNZ in September this year. Details of the tour are still being finalised but following the Hamburg *Ring Cycle*, there will be a choice of four optional post-tours to places such as Iceland, St Petersburg, Poland and Hungary. More information:- <http://www.renaissancetours.com.au/>

LOST IN TRANSLATION

*In the last newsletter we reported that Lionel Friend had sent Margaret Medlyn a 'curiosity' to learn for her presentation with him in Wellington on 2 May. It was, supposedly, a cut verse for the *Götterdämmerung* Immolation scene. It turns out that this is not strictly true. Margaret explains.*

"Apparently I have got it wrong about the curiosity. I was trying to work out where it came from in *Götterdämmerung*, and it looked as though it belonged just before the Immolation (*Schweiget eures Jammes...*) but the deduction was a bit off the beam. The story is that King Ludwig wanted a birthday present and Wagner threw the piece together using some words he excised from his libretto!"

While the provenance of the 'curiosity' may be a bit confused, it remains a fascinating piece to hear and Lionel will no doubt explain all.

As a background to her presentation with Lionel Friend, Margaret gives us some background about her time working with him.

"As you may know I first met Lionel when he was the assistant for Jeffrey Tate for the first *Ring* in Adelaide. As a Rhine maiden and a Valkyrie I had more to do with Lionel than with Jeffrey, and he really drilled us hard!

During the production period, I was asked at short notice to cover Sieglinde. Lionel taught me the role which was a terrific luxury - while I learned the notes Lionel, who is so knowledgeable, taught me the whole piece and about *the Ring* in its entirety. Right at the end of the Adelaide season, I was asked to cover Kundry at ENO. At Lionel's suggestion I learnt the role in German, and he then coached me on it.

A coach and conductor at this level gives one so much more than the way to sing the piece. You get the historical background, the performance background, performance practices, the leitmotives, character analysis and, most importantly, what you will hear on stage. This is not as daft as it sounds as we all rehearse with piano, which plays each line equally, but one often finds that when you get up on stage you can't hear the note you require because it's much too soft to be heard!

I performed the role of Kundry with Jeffrey Tate in Adelaide, for which Lionel was the assistant, and was Guttrune in Perth with Lionel conducting. I also spent a lot of time (and the Wagner Society's money) working on *Isolde* with him and, at Donald MacIntyre's insistence, learnt the *Siegfried* Brünnhilde too.

Orchestras absolutely love Lionel - many players travelled to Perth to play in his productions of *Götterdämmerung*, and *Tristan*."

Sun 2 May 4.00 pm – *St Andrew's on the Terrace*

\$32 MILLION DOLLAR RING

42 years ago in May 1968, Richard Burton, who played Wagner in Tony Palmer's film on the composer, bought Elizabeth Taylor the Krupp diamond. The stone which is mounted in a ring and weighs a whopping 33 carats was bought for \$US305,000 (\$US2.1 million today) and has graced the hand of Ms Taylor ever since.

Just down the road from her Hollywood mansion, another expensive *Ring* is about to be seen at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Los Angeles Opera's \$32 million dollar *Ring Cycle* begins on 29 May and will be performed 3 times during June. The production, by 75 year old German director Achim Freyer, is post-modern and will not sit well with those who like their Wagner trad, but it would appear that LA Opera's production is winning friends. For example Timothy Mangan in The Orange County Register: "*Achim Freyer is a brilliant genius. I think he's my hero, too. Saturday night he accomplished the impossible. He made me - an imperfect Wagnerite if there ever was one - wish that Das Rheingold was even longer. Forgive my awe.*"

We look forward to receiving reports from members of the WSNZ who are travelling to Los Angeles for this production and wonder if they will catch a glimpse of the other ring!



BUT WAIT THERE'S MORE...

Among the offerings on tap for Los Angeles Opera's *Ring* will be:

a Teutonic beer garden, lectures on Richard Wagner's masterful artistry and racist ideology, a screening of the Bugs Bunny classic *What's Opera, Doc?* and a convergence of Norse mythology and astrophysics dubbed *Light of the Valkyries*.

Let's Be Frank, Culver City-based purveyors of grass-fed beef hot dogs; will be selling a 'special German hot dog', the artist known as Double G, conductor-composer of daKAH Hip Hop Orchestra, is creating an urban soundtrack marrying the *Ring's* darker textures to some distinctively L.A. sonic influences; while the Musical Theatre Guild will present *Das Barbecü*, a country'n'western parody of the *Ring*.

Among the festival ideas that didn't make the final cut: a 'dancing blimp' over downtown L.A. and an all-German dog show – because according to the Los Angeles Times "The American Kennel Club in New York refused to play."

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2010 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 23 May 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Annual General Meeting - Wagner's Birthday celebrations

Sunday, 11 July 4.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Tristan & Isolde – Robert Gambill and Nina Stemme in Nikolaus Lehnhoff's Glyndebourne production

Sunday, 5 September 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
The Operas Wagner almost wrote - Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind
NB: A \$10 fee will apply

Sunday, 5 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

Wellington

Sunday 2 May 4.00 pm

(NB. change of date & programme)
Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace
Lionel Friend talks with Margaret Medlyn

Sunday 11 July 10.30 am

Venue: Paramount Theatre,
Tannhäuser - 1978 Bayreuth Festival production (In association with NZ Opera Society)

Monday 6 September 7.00 pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace
The Operas Wagner almost wrote - Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind

Sunday 31 October 4.00 pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace
A View from the Stage Pt 1 – Chris Brodrick looks at those who attended the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876

Christchurch

Friday 21 May 7.30pm

The home of Cynthia Hawes & Andy Buchanan, 74 Hackthorne Rd, Cashmere
Pot Luck Dinner for RW's birthday.

Friday 3 September 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

The Operas Wagner almost wrote -

Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind

Friday 8 October 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

The Life of Max Lorenz - John Pattinson will introduce a DVD on the life of Wagnerian tenor of 1930-40s, Max Lorenz

Sunday 28 November 6.00pm

Venue: To be confirmed
Christmas BBQ

Dunedin

Sunday, 23 May 12.00 noon

Venue: TECHNIQUE Training Restaurant, Harbour Terrace, Dunedin
Wagner: Transition and Railway Trains - Professor John Drummond looks at the coincidence of Wagner's development at a time when he made important railway journeys.

With lunch to honour Wagner's birthday

Sunday, 12 September 2.00 pm

Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago
Wagner And German Tradition - Baritone Roger Wilson, with pianist Terence Dennis, brings the historical context to vivid life in a lecture/recital

Sunday, 7 November 1.00 pm

Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum
Die Meistersinger At The Met: Acts 1 & 2 Otto Schenk's production of Wagner's comic opera from the Metropolitan, New York, conducted by James Levine

Sunday, 5 December 1.00 pm

Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum
Die Meistersinger At The Met: Act 3 And our end-of-year Christmas celebration with *Meistersinger* Act 3

LOOK OUT FOR...

The BBC's

'A Passion For Opera Season':
Stephen Fry On Wagner

Stephen Fry explores his passion for Wagner, arguably the world's most controversial composer. Filmed behind the scenes during the Bayreuth Festival last year, Stephen attempts to disentangle the music he loves from its indelible associations with the Nazis.

EMI
CLASSICS

SIMON O'NEILL
FATHER AND SON

"This is an exciting calling card from a singer with every chance of a big Wagnerian future."

– Fiona Maddocks

The Observer 18 April 2010

WOLFGANG WAGNER

1919–2010

The recent death of Wolfgang Wagner, at the age of 90, marks the end of another era for the Wagner family and Bayreuth Festival. With his death we also lose a link that goes back to the Master himself.

Wolfgang Manfred Martin Wagner was born in Bayreuth on 30 August 1919 the third child of Siegfried and Winifred Wagner. With Richard Wagner as a grandfather, Franz Liszt as a great grand-father and Adolf (*Uncle Wolf*) Hitler, as a defacto Uncle much was expected from Wolfgang and his elder brother Wieland.



Adolf Hitler (*Uncle Wolf*) & Winifred Wagner with Wieland (2nd left) and Wolfgang (right) – Bayreuth 1937.

Although both Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt died in the 1880s, Wolfgang had strong memories of his grandmother Cosima (Richard Wagner's widow) who lived until 1930. *'This closeness to the source of the cult',* according to Rupert Christiansen in London's Daily Telegraph, *'made him (Wolfgang) a fierce defender of what he saw as the truth, the way and the light of Wagnerism, but one wonders if he had any profound understanding of them.'*

With the deaths of both Cosima and Siegfried in 1930, the running of the Bayreuth Festival was taken over by Wolfgang's mother Winifred. Her close association with Adolf Hitler prior to and during the War provided financial security for the Festival but became a liability after it. Winifred who was unrepentant in her admiration of the Führer up to her death in 1980, was banned by the allies from being involved with the Bayreuth Festival and its running was handed to her sons Wieland and Wolfgang. Some have suggested that Winifred's staunch support of Hitler was designed to deflect attention away from her sons and their association with the Nazi regime.

In 1951 the post war Bayreuth Festival opened. Under the direction of Wieland Wagner, the "New Bayreuth"



ushered in an era that was nothing less than revolutionary. Gone were the elaborate naturalistic sets, replaced with minimalist modern productions. For the first time in its history, the Bayreuth audience booed at the end of productions. Wieland was particularly derided for his 1956 production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Stripped of its pageantry, conservatives viewed the breaking of this "sacred German tradition" as an outrage.

Wieland's innovative productions invited comparison to Wolfgang's, which critics unanimously found to be uninspired. If Wieland's productions were radical, Wolfgang's were regressive. Although still minimalist in approach, Wolfgang resurrected much of the naturalistic and romantic elements of pre-war productions. Thus, when Wieland died prematurely from lung cancer in 1966, many wondered if Bayreuth had a future.



Wieland (L) & Wolfgang Wagner (R) in 1951

As Tom Sutcliffe wrote in the Guardian *"Wolfgang was always the more practical of the two brothers, with a considerable flair for management and money. Once in sole command after 1966, he started to give rein to his instinct as an impresario, with variable but sometimes fabulous results. His first choice of outsider was typically cautious – the conservative director August Everding. His next was the East German Götz Friedrich, whose Tannhäuser in 1972 introduced the communist clenched-fist salute to the hallowed Bayreuth stage...and caused suitably deep offence to the semi-Nazi old guard among the Bayreuth supporters'*

club. But it was above all his inspired engagement of Patrice Chéreau to direct the centenary Ring in 1976 that proved historic.

The original plan had been to engage Ingmar Bergman. Then Wolfgang approached the notable German director Peter Stein – who gave up on the project in September 1974, at a very late stage indeed, forced out by Wolfgang's refusal to allow the director to abandon for his production the orchestra-pit cover which ensured the famous Bayreuth sound. Pierre Boulez's sister Jeanne was responsible for bringing the name of the brilliant French director to her brother's, and ultimately to Wolfgang's, attention.



Hans Knappertsbusch, Wolfgang Wagner, Herbert von Karajan & Wieland Wagner – 1950

None of Chéreau's theatrical work had ever been seen either by Wolfgang or by Boulez, but Bayreuth once again seemed to be setting the style. A thrillingly new and politically overt approach to a 100-year-old epic made it into the most exciting theatrical place in the world."

In 1990 Wolfgang and his second wife Gudrun visited New Zealand for the International Festival production of *Die Meistersinger* in which our Patron Sir Donald McIntyre sang Hans Sachs.

In the last decade of his life, Wolfgang was under considerable pressure to name his successor for the Bayreuth Festival. When his initial proposal that his wife, Gudrun, take over was rejected, a stalemate ensued that was only broken by Gudrun's death in 2007. The following year Wolfgang agreed to hand over the festival to his daughters, and half sisters, Katherina Wagner and Eva Wagner-Pasquier.

While Wieland Wagner will be remembered for groundbreaking productions, Wolfgang's legacy, apart from the 50 plus years stewardship of the festival, will probably be more low-key. He will certainly be remembered for his courage to engage 'non-opera' and/or radical directors for the festival that achieved both good and bad results. The good has been spectacularly good, while the bad generated an awful lot of publicity!