

Michael Haneke - Unwanted?

DON'T CALL US, WE'LL CALL YOU!

In the February issue of the newsletter we reported that the German film director Wim Wenders was being lined up to direct the 2013 *Ring*. But recent reports in the German press indicate that Wenders and the festival management have failed to reach an agreement and he is no longer being considered. The web site *Intermezzo* reports: - *The two parties had earlier seemed close to agreement, with set designs already in progress.*

But the main sticking point was a proposed 3-D film of the production. Wenders wanted the Bayreuth Festival to provide millions in financing, and wouldn't have been able come up with a finished movie until 2015-16. It was reported that Katharina Wagner wouldn't tolerate this sort of 'arrogance'.

The rumour mill was immediately set into action with the name of film director Michael Haneke put into the frame. Haneke, who is known for his bleak and disturbing style, (remember *The Piano Teacher*?) has experience of directing opera; making his debut in 2006 with Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for the Opéra National de Paris. In 2012 he is due to present *Così fan Tutte* in Madrid and there is talk about him working with Claudio Abbado on a production of Berg's *Lulu*. But as soon as Haneke became a possible candidate for the 2013 *Ring* his involvement was quickly discounted by the Festival management.

Continue to watch this space!

AGM - 22 May

The Wagner Society AGM is to be held on Sunday 22 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..... Jeanette Miller
PR/Liaison..... Gloria Streat
Committee..... Lesley 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 three years Sidney Smith is to stand down from the WSNZ committee to spend time travelling. Sidney's clear thinking and reasoned approach to problems have been of great benefit to the Society and she will be missed. Thank you Sidney on behalf of all the members for your contribution to the WSNZ.

Gloria Streat, who is instrumental in running the Christchurch branch, has agreed to put herself forward for the vacant position.

Many thanks to all the members who have paid their subscriptions for the 2011/2012 year. To date well over half the membership has re-joined, many of them using the new internet payment facility. 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 big Wagnerian welcome to:

Prof & Mrs Gary Hawke Wellington
Dr Paul Herrick Wellington
Mr Craig Wedge Auckland

CHANGES TO THE RULES

Allowing the annual membership fee to be paid via the internet without submitting a written application requires us to make a small addition to the Society rules at this month's AGM. Currently the rules re membership are:

3 Membership

- i Subject to Clause 3(ii), membership shall be open to all persons who support the aims of the Society
- ii A person shall apply in writing for membership to the Society and no person will become a member unless approved by the Committee. The Committee retains the right to refuse a person membership without having to give reasons
- iii Any Company, Club, Society or Association may become a corporate member and have the right to send a single individual to any function organised by the Society. The corporate member representative may vary from function to function and the corporate member may take up more than one corporate membership
- iv The Committee may elect to Honorary Life Membership any person who has made a recognised contribution to the understanding and acceptance of Wagner's music in the community
- v Only a financial member may vote at a General Meeting
- vi A member may be expelled only by the resolution of a two-thirds majority of members present and voting on a motion for which notice has been given
- vii All members have the right to make voluntary resignation.

It is proposed that we add:

viii Renewing members are not required to submit a written application if their membership details remain the same. In this case the payment of their membership fee indicates their agreement to continue to be bound by the Rules of the Society.

RING IN 2012

While Bayreuth remains *Ring*-less in 2012 as it prepares for its new bi-centenary production in 2013, there are still many new or near new *Rings* to enjoy in Europe next year. Here is our selection:

Hamburg State Opera

The Hamburg State Opera gave the first two complete cycles of its new *Ring* in March/April this year, and will follow this up with two further cycles in January-March 2012. Under the musical leadership of Simone Young, a star-studded cast will assemble in Hamburg for these cycles, including Simon O'Neill in the role of Siegmund. Other major roles will be performed by Catherine Foster (Brünnhilde), Albert Dohmen (Wotan) and Christian Franz (Siegfried). Hamburg's *Ring* is directed by Claus Guth.
Cycle 1: 28 January, 5, 12, 19 February 2012
Cycle 2: 1, 4, 7, 11 March 2012
Details: www.ring-hamburg.de

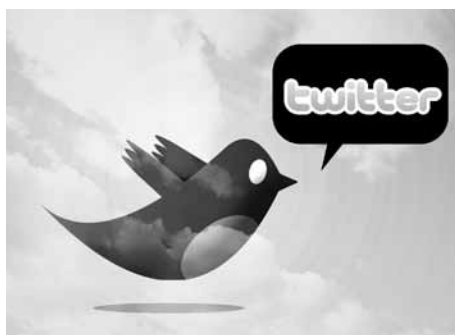
Bavarian State Opera

During its 2011/12 season the Bavarian State Opera will unveil all four *Ring* operas in new productions by Andreas Kriegenburg, culminating in two complete cycles during the Munich Opera Festival in July 2012. Munich has chosen to cast different singers in the key roles and thus expect to hear Katarina Dalayman, Catherine Naglestad and Nina Stemme as Brünnhilde, Lance Ryan and Stephen Gould as Siegfried and Johan Reuter and Juha Uusitalo as Wotan. The performances will be conducted by Kent Nagano.
Cycle 1: 3, 4, 6, 8 July 2012
Cycle 2: 10, 11, 13, 15 July 2012
Details: www.bayerische.staatsoper.de

Oper Frankfurt

Oper Frankfurt will complete its *Ring* cycle directed by Vera Nemirova during its 2011/12 season with new productions of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. It will then present two complete cycles in June/July 2012. This cycle is conducted by Sebastian Weigle and the cast includes Susan Bullock (Brünnhilde), Terje Stensvold (Wotan) and Lance Ryan (Siegfried).
Cycle 1: 2, 7, 10, 17 June 2012
Cycle 2: 22, 24, 28 June, 1 July 2012
Details: www.oper-frankfurt.de

Those looking forward to the Opera Australia *Ring* in Melbourne in 2013 might like to note that Susan Bullock, Juha Uusitalo, Gary Lehman and John Wegner are scheduled to sing Brünnhilde, Wotan, Siegfried and Alberich respectively. We hope to have more information about this production in the near future.



FOUND THE PLOT?

The Los Angeles Times recently reported the return of a Twitter based competition, Operaplot. This competition requires individuals to summarize the plot of an opera in the length of a tweet, which is 140 characters or less, including spaces, leading to some very amusing and clever results.

The competition is organized by Marcia Adair, a classical-music blogger in Toronto. The incongruity of shoehorning an unwieldy opera synopsis into the length of a tweet is what gives Operaplot its comic spin. The best tweets "are simple in that they play with language or have a pop culture reference or are poetic -- not all in one," said Adair.

The most successful tweets combine cultural erudition with lowbrow irreverence, acknowledging the complexities of opera while lampooning their frequently far-fetched narrative conceits. As one tweeter recently summarized Bellini's opera *Norma*: *Druid love triangle goes up in flames while secret squeeze runs off with the kids.*

Here are some Wagnerian Operaplots:
Der fliegende Holländer: *Look, I know I said I'd marry you, but there's this new sailor in town. I'd jump off a cliff for him.*
Das Rheingold: *Alb. makes a ring, Loge & Wotan plan a sting. Erda: give up the bling! Fafner: Ka-ching!*
Lohengrin: *Their relationship was doomed from the beginning. Elsa wanted a champion, but he preferred swanning about.*

Tristan & Isolde: *Irish princess harbors a secret lover. Day turns to night, dying to be together, sing themselves to death, takes hours.*
Tannhäuser: *Venusburg boring. Elisabeth adoring. Lovesong soaring. Prudish crowd roaring. To Rome I'll be touring. Salvation I'll be scoring.*
Siegfried: *SWF seeks man willing to relocate to a rock for eternal love and the occasional ring of fire. But you have to go thru dad first.*

Die Walküre: *Wotan's wife doesn't think his kids should date each other, so he arranges for his other daughter to marry his grandson.*

Die Meistersinger: *C'mon lad - don't despair - just enter 'Nuremberg Idol' and you'll get the girl!*

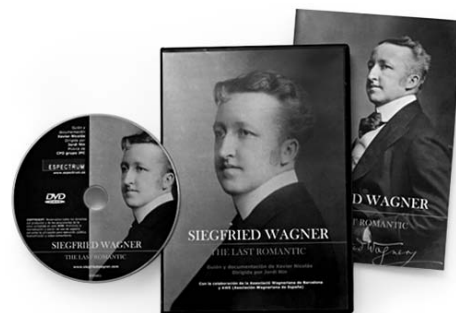
CHRISTCHURCH EARTHQUAKE CAUSES CANCELLATIONS

The 22 February Christchurch earthquake has devastated the city's cultural life and will unfortunately affect it for years to come. The Town Hall, for instance, which is officially closed until 2012 has 'apparently' suffered significant damage and may not open for another 5 years. The floors are badly 'out of flat' and there has been major liquefaction under the building that has filled the spaces under the stage leaving only the top 250mm of the \$600,000 Steinway grand visible.

With most of the University buildings closed until July and a curfew in place at night the Christchurch branch of the WSNZ lost its home and had to cancel the first two meetings of the year. Also cancelled are John Pattinson's Dept. of Continuing Education lectures on *Die Walküre*. These talks were to coincide with the screening of the Metropolitan Opera production of the work in June/July. With the Rialto closed until further notice and the Metro cinema destroyed the fate of the screenings is unknown.

The Pot Luck dinner on Friday 20 May will be a very special event for Christchurch members who will not have seen each other since November last year.

Heath's talk *Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano* and the programme *Stephen Fry on Wagner* have both been rescheduled into the second half of the year.



NEW DOCUMENTARY

We have received notice from the Wagner Society of Barcelona about the release of a new DVD documentary on Wagner's son Siegfried. Siegfried Wagner, The last Romantic, is a 60 minute film that includes excerpts of his 16 operas with stage sets, pictures, projects and drawings. The film includes interviews with Giacomo Aragall, Wolfgang Wagner and Elena Obrastzova who talk about Siegfried's life, his compositions and his approach to directing.

The DVD costs €18 plus shipping and handling. If you are interested email: wagneriana@telefonica.net

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

2011 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 22 May 7.30pm

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

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

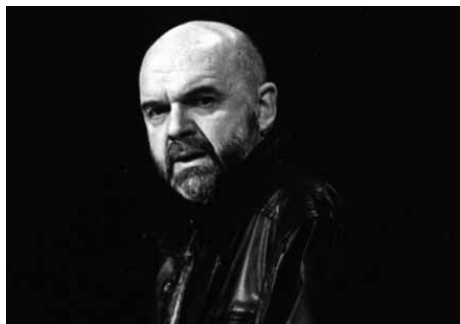
Venue: Auckland Town Hall
Das Rheingold - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

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



ROBERT TEAR (1939 – 2011)

The death was recently announced of Welsh tenor Robert Tear, from cancer at the age of 72. Tear was one of the most versatile and intelligent singers of his generation. Born in Barry, Glamorgan his talent won him a scholarship at Kings College Cambridge where he came under the tutelage of Sir David Willcocks. In the 1960s he came to the attention of Benjamin Britten and joined the English Opera group where he sang a number of Britten's tenor roles. He was also associated with the work of Michael Tippett.

The Wagner roles in Tear's repertoire included David in *Die Meistersinger* and his favourite role of all, Loge in *Das Rheingold*.

Christchurch

Friday 20 May 7.30pm

Venue: 101 Leinster Road, Merivale, Christchurch.

Our annual **Pot Luck dinner** to celebrate RW's birthday (May 22) at the home of Alastair & Susan Stokes

Friday 29 July 7.30pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall
Das Rheingold - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

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

RING FIRE SALE

The costumes and props from the the 2004 State Opera of South Australia's *Ring* Cycle went under the hammer in March, raising only about \$30,000

Designer chairs that furnished Valhalla - made for \$2500 each - were offered at \$500 and the sixteen transparent replicas of Michelangelo's David, meant to symbolise fallen heroes and made at a total cost of \$90,000, were offered for as little as \$1500.

The Adelaide *Ring* enjoyed sellout performances that attracted opera lovers from around the world and generated an estimated \$14 million for the state. But seven years later, the curse of the *Ring*, as it is known in opera circles, has reduced Adelaide's Wagnerian ambitions to dust because the company could not afford to keep the production in storage knowing that it is unlikely to be revived.

The funky Wunderbar nightclub set - which caused whoops of delight in the famous Ride of the Valkyries scene - may find a second home as a cabaret venue at the Brisbane Festival.

Dunedin

Sunday, 1 May 2.00pm

Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago
Liszt and Wagner: A Commemorative Lecture Recital
Professor Terence Dennis discusses and performs a selection of Liszt's Wagner transcriptions and works associated with Wagner's death

Sunday, 22 May 12.00 noon

Venue: Technique Training Restaurant, Otago Polytechnic, Harbour Terrace
Catered luncheon to commemorate Wagner's birthday (1813) followed by the 1-hour BBC programme **Stephen Fry on Wagner**

Friday 29 July 7.30pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall
Das Rheingold - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

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

Wellington

Sunday, 29 May 4.00pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace
Liszt and Wagner: A Commemorative Lecture Recital
Professor Terence Dennis discusses and performs a selection of Liszt's Wagner transcriptions and works associated with Wagner's death

Sunday 12 June 11.00am

Venue: Adam Concert Room
Lohengrin - DVD screening of the opera. (In association with NZ Opera Society.) Bavarian State Opera production with Jonas Kaufmann & Anja Harteros conducted by Kent Nagano

Friday 29 July 7.30pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall
Das Rheingold - concert performance by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

WAGNER AND THE EROTIC IMPULSE:

LAURENCE DREYFUS — HARVARD, 2010.

Reviewed by Heath Lees

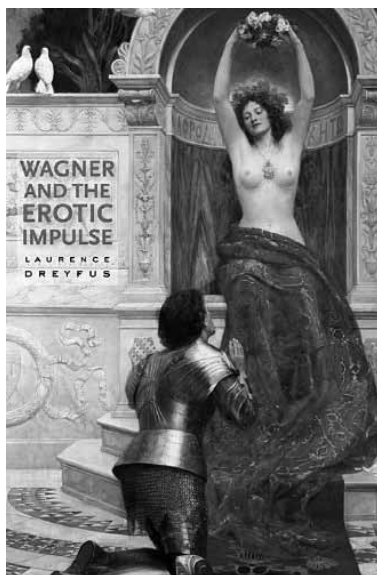
The title is strangely prim. Why would any author choose it when the neon-lit alternative of *Wagner and Sex* was obviously available? Throughout the book, the author hardly mentions “the erotic impulse”, yet by page 2 of the Introduction, this Oxford professor has already slipped in the real title:

“Writing about Wagner and sex wasn’t imaginable when I was a graduate student in musicology ...” Aha. Then we can assume that the title’s “erotic impulse” was preferred to “sex” so that the book’s academic tone would not be compromised.

A pity this, because the subject is fascinating, and the treatment not that academic. Dreyfus is the first writer to collect and confront Wagner’s ideas on sex and sexuality. More daring still, he aims to show how these sexual stirrings and passions became the major force in the composer’s stageworks, particularly in relation to their musical experience.

There are five chapters, and the first two (called “Echoes” and “Intentions”) are intended to legitimise a subject which, as Dreyfus rightly observes, virtually every Wagnerian scholar has avoided. So he assembles and parades a large number of witnesses who noted the sexual content of Wagner’s texts and the sexual effect of his music, but preferred not to discuss them openly, for whatever reason. Some, like Baudelaire, declared that the music had “penetrated” them; some, like Clara Schumann, breathed fire and brimstone. For her, a performance of *Tristan* was *“the most repulsive thing I have ever seen or heard in my life. To be forced to see and listen to such sexual frenzy the whole evening ... the saddest thing I have experienced in my entire artistic life”*.

Tristan was not the only object of attack; Dreyfus points out that *Die Walküre* excited both passion and revulsion. Faced with the ending of Act 1 where Sieglinde and Siegmund throw themselves into each other’s arms, the critic Stoeckel, first Professor of Music at Yale, found himself fascinated and horrified: *“The curtain closes upon a scene which offends Morality and Religion, wakes up those sleeping passions in human nature, which a refined and cultivated taste must abhor and detest. The masterly treatment is all the more offensive, because of its influence upon a sensitive nature.”* Dreyfus notes Stoeckel’s admiring use of the word ‘masterly’ and comments on *“the widely-held view that Wagner’s music provokes an explicit erotic charge ... that should be condemned”*. Should be, yes, but not before it has first been experienced and, it would seem, enjoyed. One remembers Augustine’s



famous prayer *“O Lord, help me to be pure, but not yet.”*

To help his theme, Dreyfus introduces the term ‘musical erotics’, a phrase that parallels the fashionably current ‘erotics’ approaches in other scholarship areas (e.g., Ruth Austin Miller’s recent work *The Erotics of Corruption*). Music, we are told, can be one of the most sensual and suggestive arts, and Wagner’s claim to musical modernism is that he used this erotic aspect as the central animation for his stageworks.

This is important and revealing, but it asserts too much. Surely Wagner’s claim to musical modernism needs to be based on his music. Too often, Dreyfus relies on the composer’s wide-ranging, sometimes half-baked ideas, and we are ourselves deceived as the author gently slides from the phrase “musical erotics”, to “Wagner’s erotics” as though this (these?) were available as a collected and coherent system. Not so; Wagner was delightfully inconsistent about everything in life and music, and even Dreyfus admits that the composer’s philosophical journey from Feuerbach (universal love, not carnal love) through Schopenhauer (love as illusory sexual fulfilment) to Parsifal (global but intense human sympathy) was as thorny as Tannhäuser’s march to Rome, and included many wrong turns.

But although he doesn’t seem to see it, Dreyfus has a good reply to make. For if we try to avoid the erotic as the cornerstone for Wagner’s ‘musical modernism’ and concentrate only on his hugely original music, we discover that this very originality, its breaking of all the current tonal boundaries, is actually a subversive quality. What’s more, it shares this subversive quality with obscenity and pornography — the ‘thrill’ factor of distorting accepted relationships. Georges Bataille seems to have been the first to frame it: *“Eroticism always entails the breaking down of established patterns, the patterns ... of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of*

existence.” (*L’Érotisme*, 1957). Similarly, Wagner’s breaking down of the established musical patterns carry with them a sense of thrill and decadence that certainly must include a strong sexual element.

Yet if we turn back from music and follow Dreyfus by seeking a historical basis for Wagner’s claim to musical modernism, we need to begin with the ideas that swam around in his head during the start of his musical career, when he asserted Feeling rather than Knowledge as the animating force for his music and drama. It should never be forgotten that Wagner’s first mature womanly idol was Senta, whose name means ‘feeling’, and in his early text *Opera and Drama*, he even stated that music *“was woman”*. The birth of music out of drama, he said, was the fruit of an act of heterosexual intercourse that resulted in the most intimate transfer of the ‘fertilizing seed’ from drama to music. This, I think, would have made a better historical starting-place for Wagner’s ‘erotics’.

The later parts of Dreyfus’ book are wider in scope yet less interesting, Chapter Five dwells somewhat aimlessly on Homoerotics (Kurwenal appears a lot here, Ludwig a bit), and chapter four, entitled “Pathologies”, surveys Wagner’s life and ideas through the modernist lens of erotic/sexual background. Some pages on Nietzsche act as a prelude to the now-boring obsession that Wagner had for silks, satins, flowers and perfumes, and then offers an ‘eroticised’ texture against which Dreyfus, a Jewish author himself, tries to re-inspect Wagner’s anti-semitism.

Chapter Three (“Harmonies”) is central in every respect and deals with the manner in which Wagner’s stageworks present and deify his sexually-driven music. There are highly illuminating plusses and disappointing minuses here. Among the plusses is the section on the introverted, decadent sensuality of the so-called ‘Tristan chord’, and its later liberation (Freud might have said its ‘sublimation’; Wagner its ‘redemption’) through the musical community of the quintet from *The Mastersingers*. In the minus category, there is a too-summary dismissal of *Rienzi* (what about Adriano’s ‘trouser’ role then?!), and the usual stodginess that arises when people try to talk about specific musical effects without being able to liberate themselves from words into sounds. To be fair though, Dreyfus does add a nicely annotated appendix of major themes.

In today’s sexually liberated world, much is to be learned about Wagner and his music from this book, but the claims it makes need to be topped and tailed. In other words, the basis for Wagner’s ‘erotics’ need to be more securely founded, while the conclusions need to be more carefully limited.