



WAGNER GALA



Pietari Inkinen conducting the NZSO, Simon O'Neill singing Siegmund at the London Proms and Christine Goerke as Elektra at Covent Garden.

The WSNZ through its Foundation is proud to support the major New Zealand event for Wagner lovers this year, the NZSO's *Wagner Gala*. This concert will be particularly special with the combination of Pietari Inkinen, a young conductor on the up, and two of the great Wagner singers of today, Christine Goerke and Simon O'Neill.

Over the last few years we have been fortunate to be able to hear both *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* in concert performance. The *Wagner Gala* will provide a teaser for, what we hope will be, the completion of the *Ring*, with highlights from the last two *Ring* operas.

Siegfried – Act III, Scene iii

Götterdämmerung – Siegfried's Rhine Journey, Death and Funeral March and Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene.

The concerts will be preceded by a talk given by Heath Lees.

The times of these will be:

Wellington: Friday, 12 June

Pre-concert talk: 5.45pm – 6.15pm

Concert: 6.30pm

Christchurch: Wednesday, 17 June

Pre-concert talk: 6.15pm – 6.45pm

Concert: 7.00pm

Auckland: Friday, 19 June

Pre-concert talk: 6.15pm – 6.45pm

Concert: 7.00pm

Could this be the evening to show your friends that Wagner is a great deal more than *Ride of the Valkyries*?

HAVE A GREAT TIME!

To WSNZ members who are going to Sydney for the *Tristan und Isolde* concert performance - have a wonderful time. Perhaps some of you might share your thoughts in a future newsletter?

AGM - 24 MAY

The Wagner Society AGM is to be held on Sunday 24 May 2015 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 Peter Rowe
Treasurer Jeanette Miller
PR/Liaison Gloria Streat
Committee Lesley Kendall
..... Bob O'Hara
..... John Davidson
..... Juliet Rowe

If you wish to make a nomination:

Phone: Peter at 09-520 4690 or

Email: info@wagnersociety.org.nz.

to be sent a form. Nominations can also be made from the floor at the meeting.

WASHINGTON RING

Renaissance Tours have a new tour on offer - *Wagner's Ring in Washington with Peter Bassett*. It begins on 16 May and ends on 23 May 2016. The four performance evenings are 17 May *Das Rheingold*; 18 May *Die Walküre*; 20 May *Siegfried* and 22 May *Götterdämmerung*. Interspersed with the *Ring* performances are opportunities to 'get to know' the American capital along with introductory talks on the operas, and optional day tours including a visit to George Washington's Mt Vernon home with a return along the Potomac River.

The *Washington Ring* is directed by Francesca Zambello and stars Nina Stemme as Brünnhilde, Alan Held as Wotan and Daniel Brenna as Siegfried and as Peter Bassett writes "the consistency and style of Zambello's vision is impressive. Always, in her hands, Wagner's drama is respected which, these days, is itself worthy of respect."

For more information go to:- <http://renaissancetours.com.au/opera/wagners-ring-in-washington/>

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2015 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 24 May at 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
AGM & Wagner in Exile: Chris Brodrick introduces a documentary by Antoine Wagner in which he heads to Switzerland on the trail of his great, great-grandfather Richard Wagner who spent several years in political exile amongst the Alps

Sunday, 12 July at 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Wagner and the Operatic Drug Scene John Pattinson will present an illustrated talk on the potions, elixirs, philtres, drugs and mind-altering substances that Wagner included in his operas.

Sunday, 6 September 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
VIP evening: with Simon O'Neill and Heath Lees

Sunday 6 December 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Christmas Function: Featuring a Pot-pourri of Wagneriana plus our famous cake and wine

Wellington

Sunday 14 June at 4.00pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace Hall
Simon O'Neill and Christine Goerke, both of whom will be the stars of the *Wagner Gala* on Friday, 12 June, will talk about their training, their careers, and performing Wagner's music.'

Monday 22 June at 7.00 pm

Venue: The Bergman Theatre, Paramount Cinemas, Courtenay Place

Joint meeting with the Opera Society.

Screening of the *Château Das Rheingold* with Sir Donald McIntyre

Sunday 13 September at 4.00pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace Hall
Wagner and Hotels:

Professor John Drummond presents two life-changing moments for Wagner which took place in hotels: one in Chemnitz in 1849 and one in Stuttgart in 1864

Sunday 11 October at 4.00pm

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace Hall
Die Meistersinger 25 years on: It's 25 years since the 1990 production of *Die Meistersinger* in Wellington. Roger Wilson, a member of the cast, will give an illustrated talk on this landmark Wagnerian event in New Zealand.

Sunday 29 November

Time and venue to be confirmed

Christmas Party. Details later

Christchurch

Friday 8 May at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Château Wagner Commemorative.

With the death in 2013 of the French opera and theatre director Patrice Chéreau, Prof. Terence Dennis presents a commemorative tribute, drawn from the 1979 filming of his *Ring* at Bayreuth

Monday 15 June at 6.00 – 8.30pm

Venue: Rangi Ruru Boardroom, Hewitts Road, Merivale

(NB Both early start and new venue)

An informal meeting, including wine and nibbles, with Simon O'Neill and Christine Goerke, soloists in the NZSO *Wagner Gala Concert* being held in the Hornbrook Arena on Wednesday 17 June. \$10 admission

Friday 7 August at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Sid Kennedy presents Act 3 of the Wolfgang Wagner Bayreuth production of *Parsifal*, with a preceding talk entitled *Parsifal, and Piratical Persil*

Friday 25 September at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

Wagner and the Operatic Drug Scene

John Pattinson will present his illustrated talk on the use of mind altering substances in Wagner's operas

Friday 30 October at 7.30pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury

An illustrated talk based on Arthur Rackham drawings for *The Ring Cycle*, as seen in Heath's *A Tale told in Music*, presented by Jenny Lee

Sunday 29 November Christmas BBQ,

venue and time to be confirmed.

NEWSLETTER

There was a positive response to the request for help with the newsletter with a number of members agreeing to provide contributions.

Heath Lees has volunteered to provide 'the back page' where he will provide reviews and comments, Michael Sinclair will also provide regular updates on world-wide Wagner productions, Ben Thomas will write about historic Wagner recordings and Michael Ashdown has also agreed to chip in. In addition we may look at reducing the frequency of the newsletters from 6 per year to 4 or 5. As I will be away in July this year the next edition will be produced in August/September.

Dunedin

Sunday, 24 May at 11.00am

Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum

Operatic Perspectives: Rossini's

William Tell

Rossini's crowning masterpiece, the grandiose *Guillaume Tell* influenced Wagner as a composer for the dramatic stage. This superlative performance from La Scala, Milan is conducted by Riccardo Muti, with Giorgio Zancanaro in the title role, along with soprano Cheryl Studer and tenor Chris Merritt.

Sunday, 19 July at 12.30pm

Venue: Te Rangi Hiroa College Viewing Lounge, 192 Castle Street

Wagner: Lohengrin

A magnificent performance from the Vienna State Opera, conducted by Claudio Abbado with Plácido Domingo in the title role, Cheryl Studer as Elsa, Robert Lloyd as King Heinrich, Hartmut Welker as Telramund and Dunja Vejzovic as Ortrud.

Sunday, 6 September at 2.00pm

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

Historical Perspectives: The First Recorded Ring

Terence Dennis presents a guided tour of the highlights of HMV's *Ring* recordings made between 1926-1932, including such singers as Frida Leider, Florence Austral, Lauritz Melchior, Walter Widdop, Friedrich Schorr and Ivar Andresen

Sunday, 29 November at 12.00pm

Venue: To be confirmed

Christmas Luncheon followed by Wagner In Exile - DVD

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.

At the conclusion of the above, and as a bonus, Terence Dennis will give a piano recital of works from Wagner's Swiss period.

NZSO WAGNER GALA

Wellington

Friday, 12 June at 6.30pm

Venue: Michael Fowler Centre

Christchurch

Wednesday, 17 June at 7.00pm

Venue: Horncastle Arena

Auckland

Friday, 19 June at 7.00pm

Venue: Auckland Town Hall

NEW MEMBER

A big Wagnerian welcome to:

Eleanor Ingle Dunedin

TWO FACES OF WAGNER: WILD IN THE EAST, MILD IN THE WEST

Scandal has erupted again in the Wagner world. This time it's in Siberia — not a centre with a huge reputation as a Wagner troublespot. Once again an opera director has updated Wagner's story and affronted the proudly cherished beliefs of many people — or at least enough people to stage a demonstration, attract media headlines and, in the end, get the theatre director fired.

The site of this fierce cultural battle is a city called Novosibirsk, which counts itself as Russia's third-largest city, and seems to have a thriving arts population in addition to a large and powerful Russian Orthodox community. Now however, Wagner has put the two groups at loggerheads.



Well, not actually Wagner, though some of last month's news reports did seem to blame him. The real targets were Boris Mezdrich (left), the overall director of the theatre, and the opera's director Timofei Kuliabin who

had cast Tannhäuser as a present-day film director. In Wagner's opening, steamy, pleasure-house scene, Tannhäuser shows his surrounding revellers an 'erotic film' with a male lead whose face and garb resemble the typical Jesus-like figure of the painters.

This by itself was not the main cause of religious ire in Novosibirsk. The real trouble came from the advertising posters that bore the image of a crucifix placed between a woman's legs — the kind of dramatic juxtaposition we see regularly in film adverts nowadays. Russian Orthodox activists pronounced themselves deeply offended and called the whole production 'sacrilege', (though many admitted they hadn't actually seen it). The matter was duly taken to the Novosibirsk court. On 10 March the court found nothing wrong and dismissed the charges, but on 30 March, Mezdrich found his contract had been terminated.

Despite all the local and political overtones, you can't help thinking about the striking similarities between the outrage of the protesters in Novosibirsk, and the outrage of the nobles in Tannhäuser's own Wartburg. Their fury broke out when Tannhäuser sang about postured piety and hypocritical hymns that evoked a hopelessly idealised womanhood.



Below decks: *The Melbourne Die fliegende Holländer*

In the opera, Tannhäuser's 'sacrilege' comes when he urges them to visit Venus's grotto in order to confront the issue of sexuality. The situation stems from Wagner's hatred of the social hypocrisy and ritual silence over the bodily enjoyments of human love. In a number of his writings (especially *Opera and Drama*) he blamed the Christian church for having virtually outlawed sex in the name of religion.

In Novosibirsk, the opera director's 'sacrilege' lay in his intentionally shocking imagery. Yes, he might well have re-considered the effects on his local community before going ahead. But the fact is that the advertising poster did indeed capture the nub of Wagner's story through its graphic symbol of the social collision of sex and the sacred.

As usual, the media reports chattered their way through the trivial details and avoided any kind of informed context about the opera. Masha Lipman in *The New Yorker* pointed this out, noting that in the court proceedings, "None of the participants mentioned the orchestra, the performers, or the sets. The hearings were fully focused on the 'insulting' quality of the production." No surprise there.

On the other hand, the *New York Times* and the UK *Independent* shared a bite-sized run-down of the 'plot' of the opera. "The piece," they said, "follows a hero, Tannhäuser, who is initially tempted by Venus and her entourage, but is eventually drawn back to the Catholic Church".

How wrong can you be? Even the slightest knowledge of the opera — sorry, 'piece' — would tell anyone that the Pope stolidly refused to forgive Tannhäuser. Yet Wagner believed enough in the spiritual love of a woman to have Tannhäuser's 'angel' Elisabeth sacrifice herself through her devotion, so the redemptive miracle of the Pope's staff bursting into bloom was something of a private affair between the two of them, plus a sympathetic Mother Nature. The Church had no part in it.

So while people are weighing in about the violence done to cultural and religious

views today, could they also spare a thought for the violence done to Wagner's opera by lazy reporters who know almost nothing about the works, and are not really interested in culture, but only in aggro-culture.

One last thought: this Russian controversy is wearily reminiscent of all the similar Wagner controversies that have regularly flared up in the West for more than fifty years now. But maybe in our part of the world the shock tactics of Schlingensiefel, Konwitschny, Katharina Wagner and the others are actually wearing off?

I ask because last February, two Dutchmen (Dutchmans?) sailed into port in the Western sphere of the New World, though oceans apart: one in Washington DC and one in Melbourne. The Washington Dutchman was solid and enjoyable, with excellent singing but no fireworks in the production. It was a fine performance of the opera the way Wagner might have conceived it; and the audience loved it.

In Melbourne there were a few whizz-bang elements, in particular the 3-D hook-up with the technical wizardry of Deakin University's Motion.Lab, resulting in stunning animation for the seascapes. The arrival of the Dutchman's ship had the audience ducking for cover, and the late scene below decks seemed ghostly and dreamlike — just what Wagner wanted but couldn't achieve in his own day.

And Melbourne had another ace up its sleeve: the Australian Youth Orchestra was in wonderful form in the pit, under the commanding baton of Richard Mills.

Both productions suggested that in the West at least, the long-running obsession for frenzied (and shocking) updates might be ending. Perhaps Wagner production might be going back to more Wagner and less production.

In the East though, it may be just beginning . . .

Heath Lees