

Wagner in 2023 – ‘Bendigo, Bayreuth and Brisbane’!

For New Zealand Wagnerians, 2023 has got off to a cracking start, dominated by Terence Dennis and Abhinath Berry's recital tour of all the regions during the last few weeks. As Terence also describes overleaf, the tour has been a great success, well received and with good turnouts. As with their previous tour two years ago, the recitals showcased both

pianists equally, featuring mainly piano pieces and transcriptions by Franz Liszt and others, with several Liszt transcriptions of music from Wagner operas.



Abhinath Berry in St Andrew's Church, Wellington, on 23 April (photo: Terence Dennis)

One of the undoubted highlights was the astonishing Liszt-Busoni *Fantasia*,

Notice of Wagner Society AGM — Sunday 21 May

THE SOCIETY'S AGM IS TO BE HELD ON SUNDAY 21 MAY IN ST HELIERS COMMUNITY CENTRE, 100 ST HELIERS BAY ROAD, AUCKLAND, AT 7:00 P.M.

Nominations for committee as received:

President.....Terence Dennis
Vice-President.....Ken Tomkins
Secretary.....Peter Rowe
Treasurer.....Jeanette Miller

Other members:

John Davidson, Ashley Day, Juliet Rowe, Cynthia Hawes, Michael Ashdown

The President's Report will be available at the meeting, and is also printed in this newsletter, on page 2.

itself originally a monumental organ/*Pédalier* work by Liszt, based on a theme from Giacomo Meyerbeer's grand opera, *Le Prophète*, which Ferruccio Busoni, in turn, transcribed for solo piano. Terence's performance of this piece in Wellington was most assured, and he rose beautifully to the challenge of its prodigious interpretive demands.

Abhinath, meanwhile, has himself developed a truly formidable technical virtuosity to cope with the demands of this repertoire, although it was especially the Halévy-Liszt work following the interval, *Réminiscences de La Juive*, which also gave him a greater opportunity to display the gentler, more lyrical side to his playing. Abhinath was again able to demonstrate his gentler side in the more relaxed passages of Liszt's beautiful but fiendishly difficult transcription of Wagner's *Tannhäuser-Ouverture*. He shone throughout this piece, tackling it with great aplomb, and in Wellington and Dunedin (at least) he received a standing ovation – a very fitting end to the recital.

Having just completed his Bachelor of Music at Otago, Abhinath now plans to embark on a Masters programme at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in

London, beginning in September. At present, he is still looking into additional funding options, and so we would like to suggest here that if any members (including those who may have especially enjoyed one of the recitals) now feel they might like to contribute a little extra to help him meet his expenses, we warmly encourage them to

enquire with our Treasurer, Jeanette Miller, jeanettemiller@pohutukawa.com, in the first instance. We wish Abhinath all the very best for his future endeavours.

Suggestions for Future Events

A call to members – we're always trying to come up with new ideas and speakers, but if any of you might have specific suggestions for events or topics for future meetings, then please let us know, and we will consider your ideas accordingly – just contact or speak to a local committee member in your region.

Membership Renewal, 2023/24

Have you renewed your membership? A notice to renew was emailed to all members obliged to renew as at 1 April 2023. Honorary life members are not required to pay the annual subscription and some very recent new members have already paid for the 2023/24 year. Many members have renewed, others who may wish to renew have yet to do so. If you have mislaid the renewal form, do not have an email address or you have any queries, please contact our Secretary Peter Rowe – Mob.: (021) 610869; email: peter.rowe2000@gmail.com

President's Report 2022/23

It is a pleasure to report that, compared with the projected endeavours of the NZ Wagner Society centres during the Covid pandemic years 2020/21, the projected events hosted by the four national groups went according to plan for 2022, apart from some rescheduling.

The national centres were able to host a fine complement of sessions that were wide-ranging indeed in their embrace of Wagnerian topics; several of these 2022 sessions notably featured rarely encountered music from the dawn of Wagner's career, including viewings from the first two Wagner operas, *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot*, and – even from the pre-opera period – a performance of Wagner's extended *Fantasia in F sharp minor* for solo piano. The importance of exploring the boundaries of Wagnerian knowledge is of vital import to the Wagner Society; our sessions afforded their individual, valued contributions to the furtherance of this ideal.

All these sessions were much appreciated, and I wish to extend a hearty thankyou from the NZ Wagner Society to our 2022 presenters, in alphabetical order: Michael Ashdown, Edmund Bohan, John Davidson, John Drummond, Heath Lees, John Pattinson, Michael Sinclair and Michael Vinten, apart from my own contributions to each of the national centres.

The current year 2023 similarly offers many stimulating sessions and viewings: to date, in April and early May, innovative, large-scale piano recitals were presented to the national centres by Abhinath Berry and Terence Dennis, featuring works by Wagner–Liszt, Liszt and Liszt–Busoni. They commenced with a real Wagner rarity, the composer's four-hand version of the Halévy comic opera, *Le Guitarrero*, written



Terence Dennis
– WSNZ President

by Wagner in 1841 during his first Paris sojourn, and recently made available in the Wagner Complete Edition. These recitals featured major, virtuosic piano works rarely heard live; Abhinath Berry was the recipient of a Wagner Society Professional Development Grant two years ago, because of his specialisation in the Wagner–Liszt repertoire, and he was keen to say a particular 'thankyou' to our Wagner Society centres, after his first set of joint recitals with Terence Dennis in 2021.

In 2022, the NZ Wagner Society was pleased to support soprano Kirstin Sharpin with a Professional Development Grant to receive vocal coaching in Berlin from American Wagner soprano, Deborah Polaski, as Kirstin prepares the three Brünnhilde roles for her forthcoming appearances in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Those who attended the complete series of Wagner opera performances in Leipzig last year will recall her appearance in the lead soprano role in *Die Feen*.

Our online newsletter is much appreciated; many thanks to our production team of Michael Ashdown and John Davidson for their assiduous efforts in this regard. Each newsletter has much of interest, and keeps members connected both with the annual programmes of national centres and with events in the international Wagner world.

By way of conclusion, my hearty thanks to all our National Committee members and support teams across the country, and to you, our members of the NZ Wagner Society, for your continuing support.

Terence Dennis, May 2023

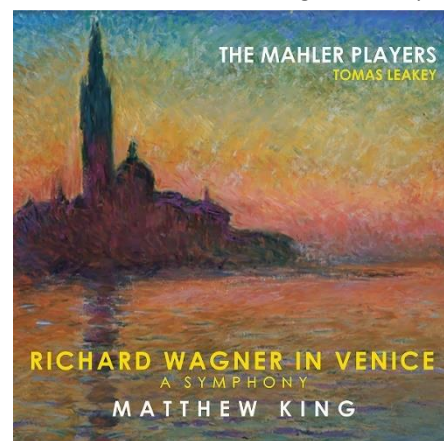
New Music Post-Parsifal? – Wagner in Venice

Some forty years after Richard Burton assumed the titular role in Tony Palmer's epic eight-hour film, *Wagner* (1983), the German actor, Thomas Kretschmann, who is well known from major, notable films such as Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002) and Peter Jackson's *King Kong* (2005), is to star as Wagner in writer-director Daniel Graham's English-language film, *Wagner in Venice*, which is about to go into production. The new film will feature a fictionalised story from the very end of Wagner's life: after the premiere of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth in July 1882, Richard and Cosima arrive in Venice, where the appearance of a large comet in the sky inspires him to write one last piece of music. There, they are also joined by Cosima's father (Wagner's father-in-law), Franz Liszt. In his film, Graham will be addressing the theme of the artist seeking answers beyond

the material world, conceived as a homage in the spirit of one of Wagner's own works.

Fascinatingly, the film may well prove to have a genuine factual basis, at least in part: in reality, Wagner, Cosima and Liszt did travel to Venice following the *Parsifal* premiere, and there was also the 'Great Comet of 1882', which was so bright in mid-September of that year that it could be seen in broad daylight. Additionally, Cosima's diaries reveal that Wagner had indeed been contemplating some final compositions at the time – purely instrumental music in the form of 'symphonic dialogues', i.e., new, smaller-scale pieces, potentially in the vein of the *Siegfried Idyll*. In fact, Wagner's late sketches for just such works had lain in the Bayreuth archives for decades, and British composer, Matthew King, has now expanded the fragments into a single 22-minute piece, not unlike the *Idyll* in overall conception, and composed in a somewhat 'Parsifalian' idiom. This has been recorded by Tomas Leakey and his Mahler Players in Scotland, and recently

released as a CD/digital download. It's very much an autumnal mood piece, and well worth hearing. To order (with the *Idyll*), see <https://mahlerplayers.bandcamp.com/album/richard-wagner-in-venice>. (NB: you can also stream the entire CD content using just this link.) For a little more background, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1p6g1dD8RU, with brief interviews with King and Leakey.



WSNZ – 2023 Programme

May to December

Auckland

Venue: St Heliers Community Centre, 100 St Heliers Bay Road

Sunday, 21 May at 7:00 p.m.

Formals and Informals – the Wagner Society's AGM, to be followed by a presentation from **Terence Dennis**, continuing his *Historical Perspectives* series, on the first attempt to record an abridged *Ring* Cycle, the ambitious 1927–32 HMV *Ring*, with great Wagner singers such as Frida Leider, Friedrich Schorr, Lauritz Melchior, Walter Widdop and Florence Austral, in astonishing sound for its period.

Sunday, 6 August at 7:00 p.m.

Michael Vinten returns with a talk on Wagner's Grand Romantic Opera based on the medieval minstrel knight torn between sacred and profane love: *Tannhäuser – Wagner's Unfinished Opera?*

Saturday, 14 October at 2:30 p.m. (note Saturday afternoon time)

A full screening of *Tannhäuser*, and a catered dinner.

Sunday, 3 December at 7:00 p.m.

The celebratory end to the year: a Wagner 'potpourri', cake and wine.

Wellington

Venue: St Andrews Hall, 30 The Terrace (except where otherwise indicated)

Sunday, 4 June at 3:00 p.m. (note earlier starting time)

Te Auaha: NZ Institute of Creativity, Dixon Street (note venue)

A screening of the recent German-produced, feature-length documentary, *Global Wagner – From Bayreuth to the World* (2021), a highly original, kaleidoscopic film portrait that examines the world's fascination with Wagner and how such a worldwide cult following developed around him. It studies Wagner's legacy from one Bayreuth festival to the next, showcasing devoted Wagnerians from all around the world, while also interviewing those who are most intimately involved with commenting on and producing his work.

Sunday, 27 August at 4:00 p.m.

A brand-new talk by **Michael Vinten** on another area in which Wagner has exerted an enormous influence: *Wagner as Conductor*.

Sunday, 3 September at 4:00 p.m.

Talk by **Terence Dennis: Wagner and Meyerbeer**. Terence discusses Wagner's infamous *Jewry in Music* and the music of Giacomo Meyerbeer, the most successful of French Grand Opéra composers, including a film of the complete 4th act of *Les Huguenots* – held to be the finest act of Grand Opera before the 4th act of Verdi's *Don Carlos* – and also music from *Le Prophète* and *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*.

Sunday, 1 October at 10:30 a.m. (note morning starting time)

Te Auaha: NZ Institute of Creativity, Dixon Street (note venue)

Joint meeting with the **Opera Society**: A screening of the highly acclaimed 2011 production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* from Glyndebourne, directed by David McVicar, conducted by Vladimir Jurowski, and featuring Gerald Finley as Hans Sachs, Marco Jentzsch as Walther von Stolzing, Johannes Martin Kränzle as Sixtus Beckmesser and Anna Gabler as Eva Pogner.

November/December

End-of-year party. Date and venue TBA.

Christchurch

Friday, 21 July at 7:30 p.m.

Venue: St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room

Talk by **Syd Kennedy**, entitled: *Who Is Brünnhilde, What Is She?* This will include some ancient history, Norse legend and Wagner, rolled together with extracts from the 1976 Bayreuth *Ring* production as filmed in 1979/80 (directed by Patrice Chéreau, conducted by Pierre Boulez, with Dame Gwyneth Jones, Sir Donald McIntyre and others).

Friday, 6 October at 7:30 p.m.

Venue: St Mary's pro-Cathedral music room

Talk by **Terence Dennis: Wagner and Meyerbeer**. Terence discusses Wagner's infamous *Jewry in Music* and the music of Giacomo Meyerbeer, the most successful of French Grand Opéra composers, including a film of the complete 4th act of *Les Huguenots* – held to be the finest act of Grand Opera before the 4th act of Verdi's *Don Carlos* – and also music from *Le Prophète* and *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*.

Sunday, 3 December – time and venue TBA

Christmas function.

Dunedin

Sunday, 7 July at 11:00 a.m.

Venue: Te Rangi Hiroa College Viewing Room

Our winter viewing continues the seminal Bayreuth Centenary *Ring* in Patrice Chéreau's production of *Die Walküre*, filmed in 1980. The cast features Peter Hofmann (Siegfried), Janine Altmeyer (Sieglinde), Dame Gwyneth Jones (Brünnhilde), Sir Donald McIntyre (Wotan) and Ruth Hesse (Fricka). Luncheon/afternoon tea to follow Acts 1 and 2.

Sunday, 17 September at 2:00 p.m.

Venue: University of Otago School of Performing Arts, 145 Union St East

What are we to make of the *Ring*? Emeritus professor **John Drummond** explores Wagner's most monumental work in the context of the artform to which it belongs: music-drama. Given the ever-new contexts afforded the complex and at times contradictory tetralogy, John asks, 'Is the *Ring* Cycle flawed, or impenetrable, or what? What sort of response should we have to it? Does analysis help? Should we just lie back and enjoy it?'

Sunday, 26 November at 12:00 noon

Venue: Carrington College

Wagner Christmas Luncheon and Conversazione/Concert. To end our year, **Scott Bezett** and **Terence Dennis** discuss the origins of Greek Classical Drama and how these inspired the origin of opera and, by extension, Wagner's music-drama. Many will remember Scott's vocal MMus Recitals, with Terence, and he is completing his Masters in Classics. He also performed memorably at one of our past Christmas Luncheons. Scott will also sing the first great scena for the male singer in operatic history: the *Lament of Orpheus* from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607).

New Member

We are delighted to extend a warm Wagnerian welcome to:

Jennifer Moates.....Dunedin

Herzlich willkommen, sei Dir gegrüsst!

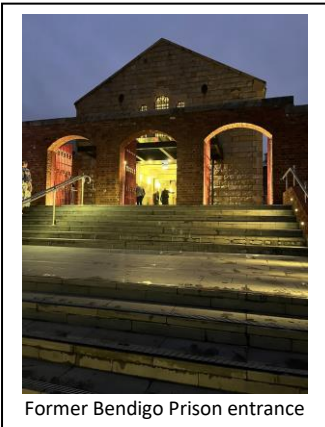
Recent and Upcoming Live Events Abroad

The Bendigo Ring Cycle – Report



Melbourne Opera's *Götterdämmerung* (photo: Melbourne Opera/Robin Halls)

Below, **Ashley Day** reports on Melbourne Opera's Ring Cycle at Bendigo, as conducted by Anthony Negus, with a production by Suzanne Chaundy. (Thanks to Ashley, too, for his photographs.)

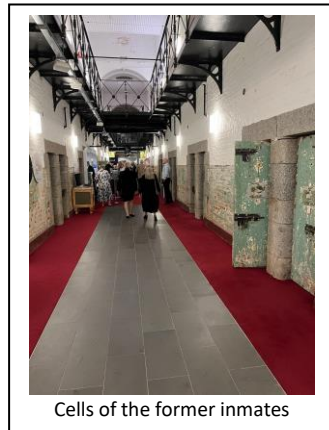


Former Bendigo Prison entrance

main entrance of the prison, one passes the tiny oppressive cells of former inmates and enters a very large and modern foyer and cafeteria area, where hot meals were served during the intervals.

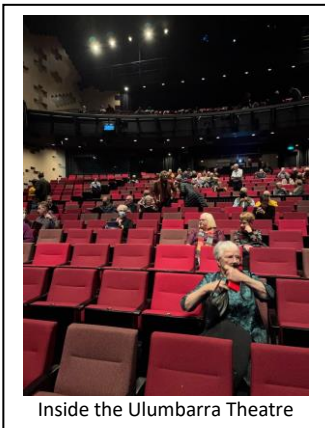
The production was superb, and the singing outstanding. Wotan was superbly sung and acted with great feeling by Warwick Fyfe, and Brünnhilde equally so by Antoinette Halloran, who built Brünnhilde with a masterpiece of an emotionally evolving character through to the devastating climax of the final farewell between her father and herself.

Bradley Daley, meanwhile, gave an excellent performance as Siegfried, playing the role with great gusto in the anvil scenes and the forging of the sword. His scenes in the forest with the Woodbird and the slaying of the dragon Fafner were done with much conviction.



Cells of the former inmates

A highlight of the Cycle was undoubtedly the glorious performances by James Egglestone as Siegmund and Lee Abrahmsen as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*. They gave profoundly emotional and exciting interpretations which were utterly



Inside the Ulumbarra Theatre

convincing. Lee Abrahmsen also sang Freia in *Das Rheingold*, with great intensity and conviction.

Erda was beautifully played by Deborah Humble, who also made a fine Waltraute. Other fine performances were given by Simon Meadows (as Alberich), Robert Macfarlane (as Mime) and James Egglestone (as Loge).

The sets were wonderful, with lighting used to great effect. A giant drawbridge the full width of the stage, and with a great circular cut-out, provided demarcation between the worlds above and below. There were some wonderful extra surprises too, such as Valkyries swinging widely on the tops of long poles! All in all, a wonderful *Ring* Cycle. Roll on Brisbane!

Tannhäuser in Salzburg



The hills are alive with the sound of . . . the Venusberg! – major role debut for Jonas Kaufmann in Salzburg (photo inset: Wikimedia Commons)

Jonas Kaufmann has made an impressive debut as Tannhäuser at the Salzburg Easter Festival, heading a fine cast including Marlis Petersen as Elisabeth and Georg Zeppenfeld as the Landgrave. The production (Paris version) was the weird, yet visionary one by Romeo Castellucci, first given in Munich in 2017. Andris Nelsons conducted the Leipziger Gewandhausorchester with broad tempi and his usual transparency.

– Brief and spectacular promotional video clip, with English subtitles: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekbZj0qOlzI

– Complete performance, April 2023 (be in quick!) – audio only: www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCFXUZAPhU8

Wagner Murmurs

– additional news from Michael Sinclair:

- Christof Loy will direct a new production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Oslo. *Die Walküre* will premiere in 2026, and two complete cycles will be performed in 2028.

- We hear that English National Opera has abandoned plans to complete its new production of the *Ring*, owing to its uncertain future, thus thwarting plans for the Metropolitan Opera to present this production at a future date.

- La Monnaie Brussels embarks on its first *Ring* since the 1980s with *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* being presented in its 2023/24 season. Alain Altinoglu conducts, and Romeo Castellucci directs. This will be a co-production with the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona.

- Over the course of its 2023/24 season, the Deutsche Oper Berlin will present all ten of Wagner's mature operas, including three cycles of the *Ring* in May/June 2024.

- Berlin's Staatsoper Unter den Linden will revive its Dmitri Tcherniakov production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, with two cycles in March/April 2024. Philippe Jordan will conduct.