



APO TO PRESENT DAS RHEINGOLD IN 2011

The Society is extremely pleased to announce that the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra will be giving a concert performance of *Das Rheingold* as part of their 2011 concert season. This performance has been made possible thanks to a generous donation by the Wagner Society of New Zealand via its charitable arm, The Wagner New Zealand Foundation.

The concert will be given on Friday, 29 July 2011 at the Auckland Town Hall and includes a standout cast with an exciting mix of New Zealand and overseas singers. The cast is headed by New Zealand's own Paul Whelan making his debut singing the pivotal role of Wotan, and he will be accompanied by fellow Kiwis, Anna Leese (Freia), Richard Greager (Mime), Anna Pierard and Jenny Wollerman (Rhinemaidens). Adding depth to the cast will be a number of renowned overseas singers, including John Wegner (Alberich), Peter Rose (Fasolt), Gary Jankowski (Fafner) and Deborah Humble (Erda). The performance will be conducted by the APO's Music Director Eckehard Stier (below).

Das Rheingold has not been heard in New Zealand for over a decade and will be the first Wagner opera to be performed here since *Parsifal* was performed at the 2006 New Zealand International Arts Festival. We are therefore delighted to be associated

with this auspicious event and hope that Society members from all around the country will make the effort to come to Auckland to hear this performance. With this in mind we will be selling tickets to Wagner Society members (see panel below) giving you the opportunity to secure good seats before single tickets go on sale to the general public. We also hope to be able to arrange some special events for members to compliment the performance. Details of these will be announced at a later date.

TICKETS

Purchase your tickets to *Das Rheingold* through the WSNZ!

The Society will have an allocation of tickets to the 29 July 2011 performance of *Das Rheingold* to be made available exclusively to its members. We will have full details of our allocation within the next few weeks but we plan to make tickets available in two price categories – Premier and B Reserve.

Members who are interested in purchasing tickets via the Society should register their interest by emailing Michael Sinclair at info@wagnersociety.org.nz indicating how many tickets they wish to buy. Those who have registered in this way will be given the first chance to buy tickets when our allocation is confirmed.



PAUL WHELAN

Singing Wotan for the first time will be New Zealand bass-baritone Paul Whelan. Paul studied in Wellington and at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and has sung all over the world with numerous major opera companies such as The Royal Opera, Metropolitan Opera, Opéra national de Paris, Bavarian State Opera and English National Opera. In 2011 he will make his Glyndebourne debut singing Alidoro in *La Cenerentola*, Claggart in *Billy Budd* and Seneca in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.

Although Paul has never sung Wotan before this is not his first Wagner role. Many Society members will recall that he was an expressive Amfortas in *Parsifal* at the 2006 New Zealand International Arts Festival and he also sang the role of the Nightwatchman in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at the 2006 Edinburgh International Festival. One commentator described Whelan's Amfortas as having a "lieder-like quality" to it, and this is surely a facet that he will bring to his much anticipated portrayal of Wotan.



A WSNZ QUINTET



The above quintet were photographed together in Berlin last month. They include, from left to right, Kiwi tenor Simon O'Neill, Olaf Saathoff and his partner Matthias Seidenstucker, who are WSNZ members and live partly in Berlin and partly in New Zealand. No introductions are needed for the pair on the right, past Secretary and President Liz and Heath Lees, who had temporarily forsaken Paris for an opera-crawl in Berlin, centred around the premiere of *Die Meistersinger* at the Deutsche Oper.

Before the Wagner event, Liz and Heath attended *Tosca*, and saw Simon O'Neill in full-throated Mediterranean glory as Cavaradossi, and then joined up with him a few days later at an impromptu brunch. Simon had just had the pleasure of walking into Dussmann's, the premier CD outlet in Berlin, and caught sight of himself in a big poster display publicising his recent *Father and Son* CD of Wagner items with the NZSO.

As members will remember, the Wagner Society of New Zealand made a substantial sponsorship towards this CD, and its launch was held in Wellington last March. In Berlin, Simon once again expressed his appreciation of the Society's involvement, and noted with enthusiasm the CD's very successful entry into the European market.



Christoph Schlingensiefel (above centre) & his Bayreuth Flowermaidens (left).



INFLUENTIAL GERMAN DIRECTOR DEAD

Christoph Schlingensiefel, the German stage director who scandalized conservative Wagnerians with a rotting hare at the Bayreuth Festival, died on 21 August of lung cancer, aged 49. Shirley Apthorp in Bloomberg News writes "The worm-riddled image appeared in his 2004 staging of *Parsifal*," and incensed those who thought Wagner's epic about redemption deserved a nobler image than a dead Easter bunny.

Born in 1960 in Oberhausen, Schlingensiefel studied German, philosophy and art history in Munich before turning to stage and screen with a vengeance.

Always superb at self-promotion, Schlingensiefel made sure that his battles with the Bayreuth establishment received as much publicity as the show itself with its prominent voodoo component and naked African women. He disappeared during rehearsals, only to resurface still complaining about festival director Wolfgang Wagner and what he called his authoritarian manner. He traded insults with tenor Endrich Wottrich, who complained Schlingensiefel had no idea what he was doing.

In a bizarre denouement, he told the press, "Bayreuth will give me cancer." Four years later, the non-smoker learned that his prediction had come true.

JOAN SUTHERLAND

The sad news of the death of Joan Sutherland was announced just as we were compiling information for this newsletter. While Dame Joan was well known as the supreme exponent of the Bel Canto repertoire she was also a great admirer of Kirsten Flagstad and she initially trained to be a Wagnerian soprano. Early in her career she sang the role of Eva in *Die Meistersinger* at Covent Garden and for those of you wishing to hear La Stupenda in the role of Eva, an Arkiv music CD *The Golden Age Of Covent Garden* includes the Act 3 Quintet with Jon Vickers as Walter. In addition the 5 volume CD set *The Art of Joan Sutherland* features Sutherland singing a number of Wagner arias such 'Dich, teure Halle' and 'Elizabeth's prayer' (*Tannhäuser*), 'Elsa's Dream' (*Lohengrin*), 'Du bist der Lenz' from *Die Walküre* Act 1 and 'Mild und leise' – Liebestod from *Tristan*. A number of these 'arias' can be viewed on YouTube. But perhaps Sutherland's most well-known Wagnerian role came in 1962 with her cameo in the most famous of all Wagner recordings, the Solti *Ring*. In his book *Ring Resounding*, John Culshaw, the producer for that famous recording, writes...

...and we had the impudence to ask Joan Sutherland to sing the Woodbird. With an engagement book full of appearances all over the world as Lucia and Violetta and all her other star parts, and with all the major opera houses queuing for her services at any time or fee she cared to name, she agreed to come to Vienna and sing a part at which she had not looked since she was an unknown, undiscovered underling at Covent Garden. We were very moved by her acceptance.

Farewell to a true Diva.



Joan Sutherland as Lucia

TONY PALMER IN NEW ZEALAND

*“Palmer is thrilling,
controversial, occasionally
outrageous, but with
profound musical insights”*
– DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

Organisation for Tony Palmer's visit to New Zealand next March is in full swing. With dates finalised we are now working on venues, particularly for the second, more general, meeting in each centre. (Please note that while Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch will have two meetings, Dunedin will be holding one all day event.)

In addition, a media release has been sent out to just under 500 people involved in radio, television, print, university film studies, music schools and those in the film industry. Reaction to the release has been extremely positive with interviews already being arranged prior to and during Tony Palmer's visit. A number of people have responded to say they are looking forward to coming to one of the meetings and will be encouraging others to do likewise.

A poster has also been developed and, after printing, will be sent out to each centre to add to the general publicity surrounding the visit.

Between now and next March it is hoped that each branch of the WSNZ will make use of a compilation DVD that Heath Lees has put together with extracts from Tony Palmer's film *Wagner*. A number of members will have already seen this film, in which case the DVD will act as a reminder. Others may never have seen it so the extracts will provide a good introduction. Either way Tony Palmer's visit will present you with the opportunity to find out about all sorts of things from a man who is not afraid to speak his mind. In an interview with Tony Palmer which is an 'extra' on his *All My Loving* DVD he says quite openly that he thinks that everything that Paul McCartney says is "B****cks!" It is also worth remembering the words of David Attenborough that head this article.

To get the most out of this visit you are encouraged to seek out and watch as many of Tony Palmer's films as you can find. The July edition of the newsletter contains a chart of his films that are available in public, University and commercial film libraries and if you are planning to sit down and watch the *Wagner* film one more time why not invite a few WSNZ members to join you.

MELBOURNE: SPRING 2013 – PUT A RING AROUND IT

Opera Australia have officially announced that they will be staging three cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Melbourne during the Spring of 2013. With an estimated cost of \$AUD15.5million the production will receive a massive \$AUD 5million gift from the co-founder of the Lonely Planet, Maureen Wheeler, and her husband, Tony. The donation is the largest in Opera Australia's history and will be supported by a grant of \$AUD 2 million from Victorian Major Events who want to reinforce the State's cultural credentials.

Details released so far reveal that *the Ring* will be a co-production with Houston Grand Opera, will be directed by Neil Armfield and conducted by Richard Mills. The cast will include Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde, Juha Uusitalo as Wotan, Gary Lehman as Siegfried and John Wegner as Alberich. The orchestra, which will be known as The Opera Australia *Ring* Orchestra, will be made up of players from Orchestra Victoria, the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra as well as musicians from other major orchestras around Australia. To give some idea as to the scale of the task and to give an indication as to why *the Ring* is so costly, OA presented the following information in their press release.

“The production will require 600 hours of rehearsal – 240 hours of this for the orchestra alone. No less than 350 singers, dancers, designers, costume-makers and backstage staff will be part of bringing The Melbourne Ring Cycle to fruition, along with up to 100 technicians behind the scene. The spectacular set is expected to take 14 months to build.”

Tickets will go on sale in late 2011.

Opera Australia have an enormous task to bring this production off with such a short lead time but, if successful, the plan is to repeat the production, in Melbourne every three years. And why you may ask will *the Ring* not be produced in Sydney? Well, Sydney lacks a suitable theatre.

Finally our commiserations to Adelaide who when they lost the Australian Grand Prix to Melbourne in the late 90s replaced it with the Strosser *Ring*. They followed that event with the first Australian *Ring* (Elke Neidhardt) in 2004 and because of a delay in remounting the latter production they have now lost another event to Melbourne.

As further information comes to hand we will update you via the newsletter. In all probability the WSNZ will be organising a tour to this event.

2010 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 5 December 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Wagner Pot Pourri - The BBC film *Stephen Fry on Wagner* will be screened, followed by Wagnerian musical moments to round out the year

Wellington

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

Sunday 12 December Early evening

Venue: To be confirmed
Christmas Party – a preview video about Tony Palmer's films will be shown

Christchurch

Sunday 28 November 6.00pm

Venue: 113b Hackthorne Road, Cashmere
Christmas Pot Luck dinner at Jenny Lee's home

Dunedin

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
& our end-of-year Christmas celebrations

NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:

Claudia Elliott Auckland
Frane Karaman Auckland
Michael & Creena Gibbons..... Wgtn
Michael & Jane Humble Wgtn
Elizabeth Purves..... Christchurch

NEW TREASURER

Malcolm Hammond's decision to step down from the position of WSNZ Treasurer for health reasons came too close to the AGM for us to find an immediate replacement. The search is now over and we are delighted to report that Jeanette Miller has agreed to take on the role with immediate effect. Jeanette will look after the finances of both the Wagner Society of New Zealand and the Wagner New Zealand Foundation.

METROPOLITAN OPERA: DAS RHEINGOLD



Metropolitan Opera's new production of *Das Rheingold*.

Clockwise from top left:- Scene 2; the Rheinmaidens; Wotan and Loge descend into Nibelheim; Alberich transforms himself into a dragon.

Photo credit:- Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera



HELP!

*"When I was younger, so much younger than today,
I never needed anybody's help in any way.
But now these days have gone...."*

It's not really that we are getting too old but, like the Beatles song, we could do with a hand!

Running a society the size of the WSNZ over four branches takes an enormous amount of effort from a small number of people. While this has been manageable in the past, our involvement in projects such as the Simon O'Neill recording, Tony Palmer visit and APO *Rheingold* has led to a significant increase in the workload, particularly in Auckland. While the Auckland members of the WSNZ committee are responsible for the administration of the 'national' society we are looking for someone to take charge and be responsible for running the Auckland branch. There are similar roles in Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin where Les Holborow, Gloria Streat and Lesley Kendal look after their local branches and act as links to the WSNZ committee. In turn these 'leaders' draw others around them to ensure meetings run smoothly and it is this practice we would like to adopt in Auckland. There is no expectation that anyone taking on this role is expected to 'present' talks or even 'front' meetings.

If you feel you have something to contribute to the Auckland branch of the WSNZ please call Michael Sinclair ph. (09) 528 0776.

PETER BASSETT'S RUDE AWAKENING

When Peter Bassett decided to come to New Zealand to present his talk on *The Operas Wagner never wrote* he surely envisaged a relaxed series of meetings with fellow antipodean Wagnerites. He would not have expected to be thrown out of his bed at 4.36am on Saturday 4 September (yes we do remember the exact time!), then thrown out of the multi-storey Copthorne hotel and then thrown out of the central city to the relative safety of the Antarctic Centre as a result of Christchurch's 7.1 magnitude earthquake. With the airport closed Peter had to spend the day hoping that he would be able to get out of the shaken Southern city to the safety of Auckland. Not knowing Peter's cell phone number we weren't exactly sure where he was until he rang to say he was spending the day with the penguins and that Air New Zealand had rebooked him on to a late afternoon flight. The airport finally reopened around 3pm and Peter flew out of Christchurch around 6.00pm completing the rest of his New Zealand engagements without further incident. At least he wasn't thrown out of the country.

In September the Metropolitan Opera opened their 2010/11 season with *Das Rheingold*, marking the first steps of their new production of *Der Ring des*

Nibelungen directed by Robert Lepage.

As we have reported in previous issues of the newsletter, the stage is dominated by a 45 ton platform whose movement is controlled by a vast bank of computers. The four pictures above offer the first glimpse of the platform's flexibility and the different look it can give each scene. First night didn't go without a hitch as an over-zealous safety sensor refused to allow the platform to form the Rainbow Bridge. This resulted in Wotan and the Gods exiting stage left - the equivalent of having to enter Valhalla via the back door.

Reviews for *Das Rheingold* have been somewhat mixed, but these are early days so we'll carry out a summary of the critic's thoughts at a later date when the cycle is complete.

In the meantime the Metropolitan Opera's 2010-11 Live in HD season commences in New Zealand cinemas in November with *Das Rheingold* and will conclude in June 2011 with *Die Walküre*. Nearly thirty cinemas nationwide have committed to screening the new series for which details can be found at www.nzmetopera.com or in your local newspaper.