



## A WAGNERIAN WINTER AHEAD!



Deborah Voigt as Brünnhilde and, from the NZSO brochure, four? Valkyries on wolves? rescue Sieglinde.



In what could be described as a warm-up to the big Wagner celebrations in 2013, WSNZ members are in for a Wagnerian feast in the winter of 2012!

The opening course will take place in Auckland on Thursday 12 July when the Auckland Philharmonia host American soprano Deborah Voigt in one of their subscription concerts. Voigt is a star of New York's Metropolitan Opera and is regarded as one of the world's great dramatic sopranos. She has astounded audiences with her magnificent singing and has made her mark on operatic and concert stages with repertoire that in particular features Strauss and Wagner. And it is these two composers who will feature in the APO concert, with Strauss' orchestral tone poem *Death and Transfiguration* and Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* along with Strauss *Lieder* and the *Prelude & Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde* with Voigt as soloist.

A month later on Thursday 9 August the Auckland Philharmonia feature more Wagner - of sorts! The concert under the banner The American Experience will feature John Adams - *Chairman Dances*, Copland - *Appalachian Spring*, Gershwin - *Porgy & Bess: Symphonic Picture* and a work by American composer Christopher Rouse - *Der Gerettete Alberich* or *Alberich Saved*. The work, which features the brilliant percussionist Evelyn Glennie, is a fantasy for solo percussionist and orchestra on themes of Wagner, with the soloist taking on the "role" of Alberich.

The idea behind this work is based on the question of what happens to Alberich at the end of the *Ring*? This piece will be fascinating to those who know their *Ring* and/or want to test out their knowledge of the motifs.

Sandwiched between these two concerts is another treat - *Die Walküre* in concert performance with the NZSO and a 'stellar international cast' led by:

**Simon O'Neill** (Siegmund)  
**Edith Haller** (Sieglinde)  
**Christine Goerke** (Brünnhilde)  
**John Wegner** (Wotan)  
**Jonathan Lemalu** (Hunding)  
**Margaret Medlyn** (Fricka)  
with **Amanda Atlas, Anna Pierard, Sarah Castle, Kate Spence, Kirsten Darragh, Lisa Harper-Brown, Morag Atchison** and **Wendy Doyle** (Valkyries), under the baton of **Pietari Inkinen**.

There will be three performances:

Wellington, Sunday 22 July, 3pm  
Christchurch Wednesday 25 July, 5pm  
Auckland Saturday 28 July, 4pm.

What a wonderful opportunity to hear our great heldentenor, Simon O'Neill, in what has become one of his signature roles, singing alongside Italian soprano Edith Haller who was recently described as "simply sensational...erotic, seductive and passionate" and "the new discovery par excellence as Sieglinde" at Bayreuth. With Grammy Award winner soprano Christine Goerke singing Brünnhilde, we will eagerly anticipate Act 2 and the opportunity to hear John Wegner reprise

his Wotan from the 1998 Adelaide *Ring* and our own Margaret Medlyn in the role of Fricka. Last but certainly not least what about Jonathan Lemalu as Hunding? Once described by the Times of London as "a singer who hooks an audience even before opening his mouth" it will be fascinating to hear that silky bass singing the Wagner repertoire.

Bookings for *Die Walküre* open on 12 January 2012.

And in a case of 'Wait! There's more' Michael has just discovered that the Hamburg State Opera with Simone Young will visit Brisbane in August 2012 and give two concert performances of *Das Rheingold*. The dates are 23 & 25 August. We will give you more details when they are available.

### IMPORTANT NOTICE AUCKLAND MEETING - 4 DECEMBER 2011

As the Music School will be under renovation from November, the final meeting this year will now take place at: **Kenneth Myers Centre, 74 Shortland Street, Auckland**. The Kenneth Myers Centre is located near the top of Shortland Street, next to the Lumley Centre. There is a reasonable amount of on street parking available in the vicinity and there is also a Tournament Parking building across the street. We hope to see you there to join in our Christmas festivities!

# BAYREUTH REVISTED

*Les Holborow reports on this year's Bayreuth Festival*

It was a great pleasure for Patricia and me to go back to Bayreuth for a third time in August, together with eight other members of the Wagner Society. It was a non-*Ring* year, which suited us after seeing the Los Angeles *Ring* last year. It was also the debut year for Simon O'Neill who sang *Parsifal*. Martin Snell added the role of Reinmar von Zweter in the new production of *Tannhäuser* to the roles which he had previously taken in *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*.

One of the really intriguing aspects of a visit this year was to attempt some assessment of the directions in which the two Wagner half-sisters are seeking to take the Festival since taking over the awesome responsibility from their late father Wolfgang. Eva is clearly the more experienced as a manager and the person with whom artists speak and negotiate. But Katharina has already produced her own *Meistersinger* and is believed to have a strong say in the choice of directors and designers. Her own production has been controversial and not surprisingly so, as one of its key elements is to overlay the song competition with an artistic one so that the two rivals for Eva's hand are required to produce works of art on which they are judged as they sing. Despite acknowledging a certain perversity in this decision I found myself having some sympathy for Katharina as she faced up to the loud booing from some of the audience at the curtain, flicking her blond tresses defiantly over her shoulder and smiling. Her apparent message that a single-minded promotion of German culture leads either to kitsch (a Eurovision Song Contest version of the prize song complete with coloured lights and a



Simon O'Neill as Parsifal – Bayreuth 2011

large cheque from the Nürnberger Bank at the conclusion) or the reversion to a demagogic state (Hans Sachs translated into a Goebbels-like figure lit from below with Albert Speer style statues rising at his side) can hardly have been welcome to her fellow citizens.

The new *Tannhäuser* production is also radical with a set dominated by industrial tanks and beams, and with a cage-playpen which is Venus's lair lifted hydraulically when it is needed.

It was almost a relief to find only mild elements of reinvention in the *Lohengrin*, although it had the retainers in rat costumes for much of the time, and a disturbing suggestion that the whole of the action was taking place inside an institution in which green-coated attendants periodically tried to intervene. Otherwise the drama proceeded in a fairly traditional manner to a somewhat repulsive ending.

The *Parsifal* in which Simon O'Neill featured was a complex production with powerful stage effects. It moved from a domestic setting (*Parsifal's* –

and/or Wagner's – interaction with a dying mother) to a dramatic series of references to German military and political history. Simon acted and sang very impressively. He is learning not to push his voice as hard as he sometimes used to and produces a wonderfully resonant sound when required.

The Bayreuth acoustic undoubtedly helps. This performance received one of the longest ovations, with particular emphasis on the Gurnemanz (Kwangchul Youn) and Simon and his Kundry (Susan Maclean).

We had already seen the production which concluded our visit – *Tristan* set on an ocean liner with a rather sparse set. The final act was a highlight. Earlier there had been room to wonder whether Robert Dean Smith had lost the power he had previously shown. But his narration in Act 3 was positively thrilling.

Overall the standard of orchestral playing and singing was all that one is led to expect at Bayreuth – no falling away there. So the main warning to those considering a visit is that the leavening of relatively traditional productions which was a feature of the previous management appears to have ceased and one can expect to get predominately productions which require some thought and tolerance of what Bernard Williams calls "directorial whim" on the part of the audience. Some of the historical and political references will not be easy for a New Zealander to pick up, and a better knowledge of the German language than I possess would be advantageous in following the back-(and over-)projected material which has become quite common. The lectures each morning assist with some of this and the atmosphere of Bayreuth encourages some interaction with the knowledgeable Germans and other Europeans who are there. A spirit of adventure is amply rewarded.



Tannhäuser – Bayreuth 2011

# CHRISTOPHER DOIG

1948 – 2011

Two 'big' men sat on Bondi beach, Sydney, hatching a most audacious plan. The year was 1988 and both were starring in Opera Australia's production of *Die Meistersinger*. In the course of that afternoon Donald McIntyre, New Zealand's greatest Wagnerian bass-baritone and Christopher Doig, a tenor with an established international career who had recently been appointed Director of the Wellington International Arts Festival, discussed the fact that New Zealand had yet to see or hear Donald McIntyre sing the repertoire for which he was internationally acclaimed. At some point, one of them (Chris most likely) must have said "Well! Let's take the current AO production of *Meistersinger* to NZ, make it part of the 1990 International Festival, engage the NZSO and put it on in The Michael Fowler Centre!"

To those unfamiliar with producing opera, it needs to be said that this suggestion would get most people certified. The problems are enormous! To begin with the opera is 5-6 hours, requires a large orchestra and cast of soloists, plus a large chorus capable of creating a convincing riot. The OA production sets were designed for a theatre with a proscenium arch, the Michael Folwer Centre has an open stage and is not set up for theatrical productions. And all those problems to solve before one even considers the financial implications.

But it happened and what's more was a spectacular success, but believe me there was only one person in New Zealand that could have pulled it off and that was Christopher Keith Doig who very sadly died of bowel cancer on 14 October 2011. To say we will miss him is a complete understatement as I'm afraid there is no one who can fill his very large shoes. "Get Placido Domingo to sing in aid of Christchurch Arts organisations? Yeah Right!"

As Wagnerians we will always be grateful to Chris for his courage and conviction in mounting *Die Meistersinger*. For a number of us it was the first full production of a Wagner opera that we had seen and didn't it just open the eyes and ears? On top of it all we had the chance to see and hear our Patron, Sir Donald McIntyre, on home soil. It was as special for us as it must have been for him.

Farewell Chris, you've shown us that dreams can come true.

*Leb' wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind!*



Chris Doig as David in Opera Australia's 1988 production of *Die Meistersinger*



## FOR SALE

Pravonin Castle, where Wagner composed his early opera *Die Feen* (*The Fairies*), is on the market. With an asking price of 400,000 Euros it would seem very reasonable but the building needs serious renovation. Situated 70km from Prague Pravonin Castle was also home to Gustav Mahler. More information can be found at: <http://www.sibeinvest.cz/Pagina.asp?ID=202>

## THE GREEN HILL WAS ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF KIWI MUSIC

In what was probably a first for the Bayreuth Festival, two New Zealand singers sang in a production at the same time. On 9 August Thomas Jesatko, who was cast to sing the role of Klingsor in *Parsifal*, was indisposed and unable to sing. Up stepped our own Martin Snell who was in Bayreuth to sing roles in *Tannhäuser*, *Meistersinger* and *Tristan* to sing Klingsor from the wings while on-stage Simon O'Neill sang the title role.

You will recall that Martin Snell sang the role of Klingsor to Simon's Parsifal at the Wellington International Festival.

## CONGRATULATIONS...

...to Simon and Carmel O'Neill who have another child – Violet Rose Veronica O'Neill born in London on 7 October 2011. A sister to Tom and Gracie.

## APO RHEINGOLD

The APO have sent us information to say that the full Opera In Concert *Rheingold* performance – and much else besides – is now streaming free of charge on their website: [http://www.apo.co.nz/play\\_it\\_again.aspx](http://www.apo.co.nz/play_it_again.aspx)

## WSNZ 2011 PROGRAMME DETAILS

### Auckland

**Sunday, 4 December 7.30pm**

Venue: *Kenneth Myers Centre, 74 Shortland Street, Auckland*  
**Wagner Pot Pourri** - A Christmas celebration: An evening of requests, roundups, selections and surprises

### Wellington

**Saturday 3 December 5.00pm**

Venue: *27 Wade Street, Wadestown*  
**Christmas Cocktails**  
End-of-year Christmas celebration at the home of Tibby and Adrian Simcock

### Christchurch

**Sunday 27 November 6.00pm**

Venue: *6 Parkinson Place, Ilam, Christchurch*  
Christmas BBQ at the home of Audrey Harrison and Laurie Higgins

### Dunedin

**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

### MELBOURNE RING

There is no new information about the Melbourne *Ring* apart from the time-frame being confirmed as November/December 2013 and that ticket sales will go on sale at the beginning of next year. As expected Michael has already received interest from a large number of members and we will be working on putting a package together.

In the meantime Opera Australia invites members of the WSNZ, who are in Melbourne on Wednesday 23 November, to attend a special event at which Neil Armfield, director, and Richard Mills, conductor discuss their vision for this *Ring*.

Wednesday 23 November at 6pm  
The Opera Centre

Corner of Fawker and Fanning Streets  
Southbank VIC 3006

To register attendance please email [sally.percival@opera-australia.org.au](mailto:sally.percival@opera-australia.org.au)

# DIE WALKÜRE - HAMBURG



*Siegmund & Sieglinde: Die Walküre Act 1*

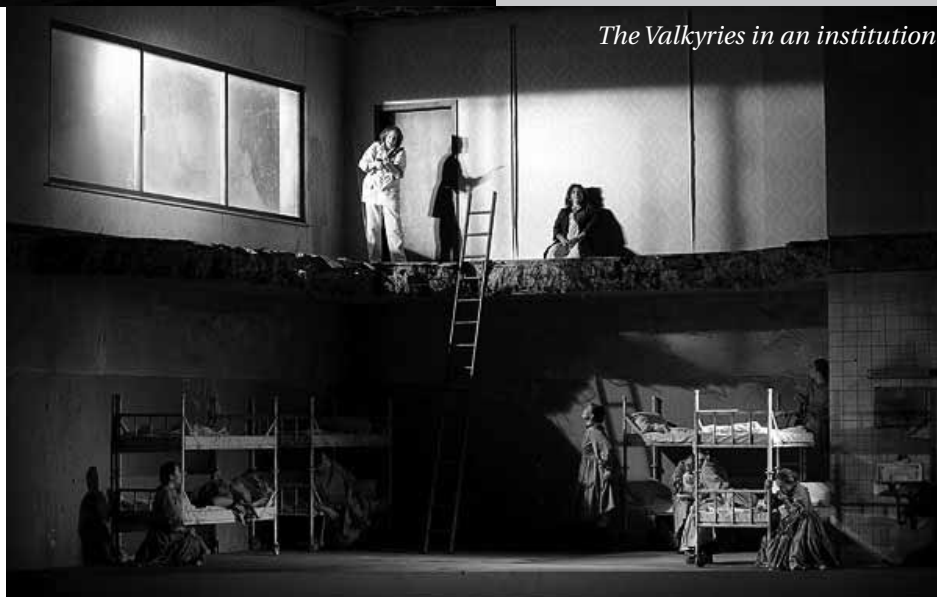
## FESTIVE GREETINGS

As this will be the last newsletter of 2011 we would like to wish everyone a very happy Christmas and a Wagner filled 2012. After an eventful 2011, with the cancellation of Tony Palmer's visit and a year that was dominated by earth shaking events in Christchurch we can all look forward to 'getting back to normal' and the run into the celebratory year 2013 that will culminate in the Melbourne *Ring!*

### *Part three of John Davidson's thoughts on the Hamburg Ring.*

For my money, the first Act of *Die Walküre* teetered on the brink. We had all held our breath when, before curtain up, a spokesperson craved our indulgence for Sieglinde (Angela Denoke) who had a throat infection. In the event, she was a class act, in trying circumstances, singing beautifully. The 'downside' rather won the day, however. The wonderful orchestral opening somehow didn't generate excitement. Enter a rather short and tubby Siegmund (Christian Franz) in a duffle coat. Minimalist set – a free-standing white frames which revolved on a turntable to form different configurations. White table and chairs on one side, small side table with basic food and drink on the other. All this on a slightly raised white platform with what seemed to be a large red light switch at one end. No sword visible. Siegmund was unimpressive vocally and made a meal of 'Winterstürme'. Hunding (the excellent Tsymbalyuk again), menacing in black leather jacket, offered much needed pep. A Wotan figure wandered past, clicking his fingers to set his puppet sibling children in motion. As the twins realized their identities, two children representing them as children walked extremely slowly round the set. The sword was finally introduced by the Wotan figure while Sieglinde was describing the stranger's entry at the wedding feast. Some interesting ideas, but there could be absolutely no magic in the awakening love (a few gold 'leaves' falling from above was no substitute!) with a woefully lame Siegmund and the ghastly white setting. I was an unhappy man at the first interval.

But it all came right in Act 2! The set was clean to start with – Wotan now had a well-appointed office with central heating, flash blinds, and a large circular



*The Valkyries in an institution*

model of the *Rheingold* set leaning against the wall. There were also models of other sets on light boxes on tables, and now we realized that what we'd seen in Act 1 had in fact been a larger version of one of these models – the light box in fact complete with its switch. Fricka seemed to have lost a huge amount of weight in a couple of days until the realization dawned that she was a different singer, most impressive, and an engaging actor as well – Lilli Paasikivi! Struckmann had also moved into top gear, and from the time that the grey trouser-suited Brünnhilde (Katarina Dalayman) popped in the long window at the back in imperious voice an impetus began that lasted till the end of the opera.

The atmospheric setting for the fight was the bare stage with the Act 1 platform as a standing overhang with fluorescent lighting flashing at crucial times. Brünnhilde's appearance to Siegmund was brilliantly handled. The only puzzle were strange robotic figures who at one stage advanced towards Siegmund from both directions. Interestingly, Wotan himself didn't break Siegmund's sword. This was left to Hunding, but

Wotan was clearly manipulating again. Young generated genuine drama here with wonderfully warm string sound as well, even if the woodwind and brass ensemble playing was occasionally not together. But this was heady stuff.

I just loved the start of Act 3. The Valkyries were very disturbed young women, inmates of a mental institution, wearing their grey dresses back to front (locked in them, like straitjackets, as it were) and heavily into self-wounding. They were riding around on two-tier bunk trolleys. Brilliant. The institution also seemed to have been bombed – were we dealing with post-battle trauma? There was a most effective use again of the upper level from where both Brünnhilde and Wotan stormed in. The scene between Wotan and Brünnhilde was nothing short of sensational, with magnificent singing, Brünnhilde being put to sleep in the institution from which her sisters had fled. Perhaps ominously, though, half of the ring of fire (actually a straight line) failed. But the wild applause and standing ovation were fully deserved (unlike the rousing reception offered at the end of Act 1).