



ROA MORRISSEY TRIBUTE



Roa Morrissey (photo: Fiona Foxall)

As those who attended the NZ Opera production of *Der Fliegender Holländer* will know the season was dedicated to the late Roa Morrissey. The following tribute to her was published in the programme and is reprinted here for those unable to attend:

In the year that we celebrate the bicentenary of Richard Wagner's birth, the Wagner Society of New Zealand and the Wagner New Zealand Foundation are delighted to support this production of Der Fliegender Holländer. Over the last few years our support, made possible through the generosity of one of our members, the late Roa Morrissey, has enabled the Society to provide funding to performances of Wagner's work as well as a recording, a video documentary on the Ring and support to singers wishing to study Wagnerian roles.

Without Roa Morrissey's bequest none of this could have happened and so we are particularly delighted to be able to recognise Roa in this special year by dedicating the season to her memory.

Roa Morrissey was born into a family of policemen. Her father, William Calwell, was the police officer in charge of the Otira Police District (West Coast of the South Island) for many years and she had several uncles who were also serving policemen. In 1943 Roa followed in her father's footsteps and trained to become a policewoman after she had qualified and worked as a school dental nurse. She had a long and colourful career in the Police and met Ted Morrissey while working in Auckland. They were married in Otaki in 1947.

*In those days policewomen were not encouraged to marry serving police officers and in their book *The Longest Beat*, Kit Carson and Yvonne Davison recount a story of the steps taken by the then Police high command to 'resolve' the situation.*

"In 1954 one of the first female police officers, Constable Roa Morrissey, was sent to the Coast as punishment because she refused to cook for the male constables; she was married to a sergeant in Canterbury and it was hoped the enforced separation would prompt her resignation from the force, but the Greymouth Pensioners' Association took up her cause, organised a petition, involved the prime minister [Sidney Holland] and had her posted back to Christchurch."

Roa was the first Christchurch policewoman to be awarded the Police Long Service and Good Conduct medal and, in 1978, not long before her retirement, was awarded her second clasp and stars to this award. After retirement from the Police, Roa and her husband moved to Auckland to live and, following her husband's death, she moved into a retirement village in Sandringham.

*A bright, vivacious woman, who had a lifetime interest in music and the performing arts, Roa greatly valued her membership of the Wagner Society and seldom missed a meeting. She travelled to Adelaide with the Society to see both performances of the Ring Cycle and also to Sydney for *Die Meistersinger*.*

We are indebted to Roa for her generous bequest and delighted that this production can serve as a remembrance to her.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

As someone who is critical of how early shops put up their Christmas decorations it seems highly hypocritical to be writing you a 'Happy Christmas' message in the middle of October! Unfortunately in order to have this newsletter in your hands before many of you leave for Melbourne and for those outside Auckland to register an interest in tickets to *Tristan & Isolde* (see page 2) it has been necessary for me to become a hypocrite.

There are around 100 members in Michael Sinclair's WSNZ *Ring* party as well as other members making their own way to Melbourne so the WSNZ will have a strong presence. With 'our' Pietari Inkinen conducting and 'our' own Heath Lees at the forefront of the talks the Melbourne *Ring* will not be an Aussie-only affair!

A recent story in *The Australian* reporting that 'a brass band and warrior goddesses marching down Swanston Street to the tune of the Ride of the Valkyries will herald the beginning of the Melbourne *Ring Cycle* in November' indicates that this *Ring* will be given a high public profile.

Melbourne is also famous for food! Check out The European - fantastic service; Longrain and Gingerboy - both Asian fusion; Cumulus - great breakfast and lunch; U.U - wonderful Japanese.

Meanwhile Heath Lees' *A Tale Told in Music* is gaining wide coverage and great reviews. A feature on the web site www.the-wagnerian.com including short extracts from the DVDs has certainly helped. In addition the TTIM web site is now up and running and can be found at www.wagners-ring.com.

Finally on behalf of the committee I'd like to wish all of you a very Happy Christmas and New Year. We're pleased that in this special year for the Society we have managed so much Wagner-related activity. 2014 looks like another interesting year particularly with the performance of *Tristan & Isolde* in July.

We look forward to seeing you in the New Year!

CHRISTOPHER BRODRICK - PRESIDENT



PATRICE CHÉREAU

2 NOVEMBER 1944 – 7 OCTOBER 2013

The great French director of film, theatre and opera Patrice Chéreau has died of cancer at the age of 'only' 68.

Born in Lézigné, Maine-et-Loire, he attended school in Paris where he went on to establish his career as a director. In 1976 on the recommendation of conductor Pierre Boulez, Chéreau was invited to stage a production of Wagner's operatic tetralogy, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, at Bayreuth. He updated the action to the mid-19th century – Wagner's time – and replaced some of the mythological scenery with industrial-age machinery. For Chéreau, the story was a Marxist allegory of capitalism and the exploitation of the working class. It was an approach he based partly on ideas that George Bernard Shaw explored in *The Perfect Wagnerite*, in 1898, but his staging – in Bayreuth, no less – was unlike anything Wagner fans had seen.

Initially the production met with controversy but was celebrated after its final performance in 1980 in a 45-minute standing ovation.

At this year's Aix-en-Provence Festival, Chéreau directed Strauss' *Elektra*. It was fitting that in his final production the cast should include his 1976 Bayreuth Wotan, Sir Donald McIntyre. In his blog *The Rest is Noise* Alex Ross wrote: 'His contribution to opera, from the epoch-making 1976 Bayreuth *Ring* onward, was tremendous; if there was a greater living director, the name does not spring to mind... When greatly gifted people die prematurely, we feel not only saddened but deprived. The future seems to contain empty lots on which nothing will be built.'



The Auckland Philharmonia has just released details of its 2014 season which will feature, on Saturday 19 July, a concert performance of *Tristan & Isolde*.

Conducted by Eckehard Stier the cast includes: Lars Cleveeman (Tristan) and Annalena Persson (Isolde) with Daveda Karanas (Brangäne) Bo Skovhus (Kurwenal) and Marco Stella (Melot)

The Wagner Society of New Zealand is supporting this concert through the Wagner New Zealand Foundation and the APO will be holding tickets for members of the Society who live outside Auckland. In addition there is a possibility that a package deal for accommodation and ticket to *Tristan & Isolde* could be put together. In order to find out if this will be possible it is essential that we have an idea of numbers.

All out-of-Auckland members wishing to attend the Tristan performance are invited to email their interest to: Chris Brodrick - cbrodrick@extra.co.nz stating the number of performance tickets required and if you'd like to combine an accommodation package (if available).

Please respond by Monday 18 November.

NEW MEMBER

A big Wagnerian welcome to:
Maureen McConville..... *Auckland*

UR-RHEINGOLD?

The Bell Inn in the village of Ticehurst, East Sussex, England could be accused of taking the p***! Those wishing to use the Gentlemen's powder room are not confronted with Armitage Shanks porcelain but with three Wagner tubas that have been plumbed-in to do a job. These comparatively rare instruments that Wagner created for the *Ring* produce a wonderful mellow sound so it seems such a pity that the only noise that they will now produce is a tinkle!

TIPS: FOR FIRST TIME RING-ERS

No 5. Be Comfortable!

While it is nice to get 'dressed up' to go to the opera try to avoid looking good at the expense of comfort. Theatres can get hot even with air conditioning so try to wear layers and avoid anything that is too tight. After all you are there to experience the art not to compete with it!

No 6. Talk about it!

It is quite likely at the end of each performance you will feel a sense of excitement and want to share your thoughts and impressions with others. Arrange, as a group, to meet up after the performances preferably at a spot where you can hold a conversation without being drowned out by a live band and over a glass of wine talk about your thoughts about the performance. The way others see the production may help you gain more from your first *Ring*.

No 7. Make new friends!

Going to a *Ring Cycle* offers a wonderful opportunity to meet fellow Ring-ers from all corners of the world. Don't be surprised to find contingents from the USA and Europe. The nice thing is that you will not only see them at the theatre in the evening but in town during the day. After a performance at the first Adelaide *Ring* I met an American research chemist and his wife. He had just retired after 30 years working for Pfizer. During that time he had been offered and had taken up stock options in the company and at the moment of his retirement Pfizer released a little blue pill that would send the value of its stock through the roof. Yes my American friend was travelling the world experiencing opera on the profits Pfizer made from Viagra!

No 8. Enjoy yourself!

Going to a *Ring Cycle* is special and something you'll never forget. Above all have a really good time and take away happy memories.

NEW WSNZ SECRETARY

When Michael Sinclair stepped down as WSNZ Secretary at the end of last year we undertook a search to find a replacement. After we had for some weeks tried without success, Barry Littlewood agreed to step in albeit as a stop gap while the search continued. The WSNZ Committee is pleased to announce that Peter Rowe has agreed to take over the role of Society Secretary with immediate effect. At its last meeting the Board accepted Barry's resignation and appointed Peter in his place. On behalf of all the membership the committee would like to thank Barry for his work for the Society over the last 10 months. His willingness to step in at a time of need was appreciated.



JONAS KAUFMANN AUSTRALIA BOUND

Opera Australia have announced that superstar tenor Jonas Kaufmann is heading down under in 2014. Kaufmann is scheduled to perform two concerts in Sydney and Melbourne next August with the possibility of a third concert if the first two sell out.

KICKSTARTER

RICHARD WAGNER – RARELY PERFORMED & RARELY RECORDED

A small independent classical record label (www.americuscd.com) based in Washington DC is involved in a recording project to record 4-plus hours of Wagner's music that has been rarely recorded.

For the project to go ahead \$US163,000 needs to be raised to make the 4-CD recording a reality. To achieve their goal Americus Records have turned to the crowd funding website Kickstarter (www.kickstarter.com/projects/672747621/richard-wagner-rarely-performed-and-rarely-recorded) or go to Kickstarter: www.kickstarter.com and enter 'Richard Wagner' in the search box. It is the only Richard Wagner project so it should be easy to find.

The Kickstarter project page has all the information about the project as well as a 6 minute video.



THE ULTIMATE CHRISTMAS GIFT?

The website The Wagnerian (www.the-wagnerian.com) is a wonderful source of information on Wagner matters and those of us who produce newsletters are extremely grateful to the person(s) running the site for the wide range of Wagner related stories that appear. This stirring story is typical of the wacky side of Wagnerism that they find and publish.

We see lots of Wagner related "memorabilia" on auction sites and out of principle we don't normally mention them but thought these too "nerdy" to let pass-by: A set of 4 Vintage WMF Zinn Pewter Wagner Spoons!

Apparently they come from the home of an elderly relative who didn't smoke. Exactly why that is important in the case of spoons is not mentioned - although we assume that might depend on what the person didn't smoke.

Should you be interested - and quick - a brief search on a certain well known auction site [Ebay] should help. Otherwise, well at least you can say you have seen a set. Anyone for sugar?



ANTHONY NEGUS

Apologies for the error that crept in to the Melbourne *Ring* report in the September newsletter. It should have been conductor *Anthony* Negus (top right) not *Arthur* (bottom right). For those of you find the name Arthur Negus familiar he was, of course, a well known British broadcaster on antiques on such programmes as *Going for a Song* and the *Antiques Roadshow*.

Anthony, you will recall, conducted two wonderful performances of *Parsifal* at the Wellington International Festival in 2008 and this year's Longborough *Ring* in the UK.

Thanks to Rex Benson and Bryan Magee for pointing out the mistake.

WSNZ 2013 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday 8 December 7.30pm

Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Rounding off the Wagner Bicentenary: Michael Sinclair takes us through the Wagner year with images, music and video from around the world to celebrate this bicentennial year, including a round-up from the Melbourne *Ring* and our usual Christmas festivities!

Christchurch

Sunday 24 November 6.00pm

Venue: The home of Cynthia Hawes & Andy Buchanan, 74 Hackthorne Rd, Cashmere

Christmas BBQ

Dunedin

Sunday, 1 December 2.00pm

Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago
Christmas Concert: Special Wagner concert to conclude the Wagner200 Year as well as celebrating Christmas and our sixth birthday

NEW WELINGTON CHAIR

With four branch organisations and an overseeing National committee the WSNZ is well set up to run interesting programmes for its members and coordinate support for Wagner events. For most members it's the work on the local level that is most evident so Wellington members will be sorry to see Les Holborow stand down as the chair of the Wellington branch. Les has been leading membership in the Capital for 8 years and during that time has provided the National committee with valuable input. We all give Les our thanks for all his work and we look forward to working with his replacement, John Davidson.



STAATSOPER RING PART II

John Davidson continues his report on the new Berlin Staatsoper Ring.

Now for the production. The stated aim of the Flemish Cassiers was, through projection and interaction, to offer a new way of understanding the past in relation to the present and future, the past being omnipresent in the form of hints, memories, quotations and flashbacks. There were reminders of famous past productions, such as those of Wieland Wagner and Patrice Chéreau and, in particular, a specific attempt to link the time of Wagner's composition of *The Ring* with our own age. At the back of the stage was a mysterious, multi-dimensional screen onto which constantly changing images were projected, sometimes fragmentary, sometimes complete, sometimes aesthetically pleasing, sometimes grotesque and disturbing, to suggest the interplay of truth, falsehood and illusion, in an environment of visual stimulation which could (at least in the case of Alberich) tip over into a kind of global voyeurism. In *Das Rheingold*, for example, romantic landscapes morphed into pictures of piles of rubble in the style of photographer Edward Burtynsky. Gold was at times a dominant colour, suggesting the themes of love/lust, power and knowledge. The screen also functioned as the 'door' to a basically unseen Valhalla.

The most powerful recurring projected image, however, was that of the colossal marble bas-relief by Belgian sculptor Jef Lambeaux entitled 'The Human Passions', depicting the excesses of 'modernity', as a kind of secular pendant to Michelangelo's 'Last Judgment'. Unveiled in 1898, it caused a scandal on account of its provocative presentation of carnal delights, not to mention a crucified Christ figure positioned below Death. Cassiers chose it because of its mediating chronological position between Wagner's life-time and our own. It even featured in solid form as a 'drop curtain' at the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung*.

Another important feature throughout the cycle was the regular use of 'drops', sometimes one or more (intact or broken) thin, hanging threads of red light, perhaps suggesting the fate motif, since they were brilliantly drawn together in the Norns scene at the start of the final evening. A most effective use too was made of 'drop poles' for the evocation of forests, for example, the colour then changing to suggest something sinister or associated with fire. At times, the 'drops' evoked



The Human Passions - Jef Lambeaux

contemporary popular culture, as seen, for example in films such as *Avatar* and *The Matrix*.

More controversial was the use of a troupe of about half a dozen dancers who first emerged crawling after Alberich's theft of the gold, perhaps suggesting slime or the release of negative energy. At times these dancers seemed unnecessary and distracting, for example during Siegfried's Rhine journey, and as they performed a kind of sword dance when they 'emerged' with Siegfried from Fafner's 'cave' as the Tarnhelm. Immediately prior to this they were involved in Fafner's dragon appearance, though this was basically ludicrous, with lighting effects behind visible stage-hands flapping a large sheet, out of which the human figure emerged with the sword 'through' his body. The dancers were booed at their curtain call by a section of the audience on each of the three evenings in which they appeared. But at times they were brilliantly effective, for example as the 'Wurm' into which Alberich transforms himself, as the means of binding him after his capture, and as the Tarnhelm again in Siegfried's treacherous invasion of Brünnhilde's rock. They could also be used to supply movement when the singers were basically static.

A few other features of the production are worth mentioning. In *Das Rheingold*, there was a large revolving globe of uncertain significance which became the moon in Act 1 of *Die Walküre* when Hunding's hut opened out magically for 'the Spring smiling into the room'. The same globe was then seen spinning above Wotan's head in the next act with changing projections inside it, especially two different faces of Wotan himself. The set here also featured a horse sculpture sequence (rather like the procession in the Parthenon Marbles) through which Brünnhilde initially emerged. In Act 1 of Siegfried, the two 'doorposts' of Mime's dwelling took the form of a serpent's body and head consisting of sword fragments, a very nice touch. The forging

scene was most effective through the use of a gradually upward tilting stage, though Lance Ryan had to step carefully to avoid tumbling off! In Act 3 there was a brilliant raising of Mother Earth. In *Götterdämmerung*, a grandstand slid into view, on which the vassals conveniently gathered. At the end, the crowd turned their backs to the audience looking back stage for the exciting action which couldn't be seen! This was a non-event, but it didn't really matter, given the overwhelming effect of the music.

The costuming had some odd touches, at least from my point of view. Alberich's gear was said to evoke 'steam punk' and to be somehow connected with the invention of the Victorian traction engine (I missed this reference!). The red on his face (Mime had a touch too) was said to evoke the nihilist Joker in the Batman movie. The famous ring itself took the form of a glove which, from my seat anyway, gave out a silver rather than a gold glitter and was apparently linked to Michael Jackson. The Valkyries were dressed in what looked like ball gowns with long trains (horses tails?) which they had great trouble avoiding tripping over, especially since, during their 'ride', they were clambering over a series of platforms at different levels. This was a total shambles. On the other hand, in *Götterdämmerung*, Gunther dressed up in a top hat for his supposed wedding, with one half of his suit blood red and the other grey, with the background projections most effectively matching this.

Well, it was all something of a mixture. But who has ever seen a production of *The Ring* which came across as totally effective and successful or, on the other hand, one which seemed totally ineffective and unsuccessful? For me, Cassiers provided far more pluses than minuses. And then there was that divine music!

Next issue: Neil Jenkins reports on the Seattle *Ring*.