



LEB WOHL JOHN

At lunchtime on Monday 29 September the news broke that on that very morning the father-figure of New Zealand music and our own Wagner Society, John Ritchie had passed away. It was his 93rd birthday. John and his family have been stalwarts of the WSNZ and in truth the society wouldn't exist without them. The Ritchie/Lees family not only set up the society but have provided the engine to keep it going. Their tireless work has created one of the most successful of all the world wide Wagner societies.

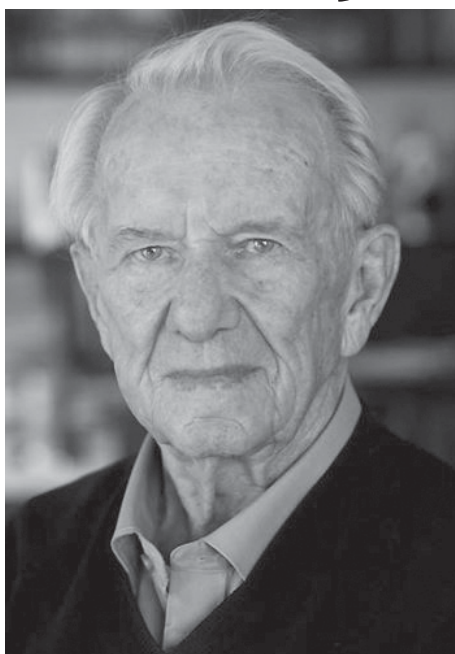
The Wagner Society of New Zealand extends its deepest condolences to Judy, Jenny, Liz, Simon and Anthony as well as son-in law Heath and thank them for sharing John with us.

Heath Lees has generously agreed to share the following tribute with us:

"You could say that John Ritchie personally sowed the seeds of the Wagner Society of New Zealand way back in the 1970s. He and his wife Anita had always been huge Wagner fans, and had at last managed to secure Bayreuth tickets — a life's ambition for them both. John used to talk fondly of them pitching their tent at a site near the green hill behind the theatre, and emerging from their cramped, makeshift canvas quarters for every opera, dressed in immaculate evening wear!

During the visit they met up with Donald McIntyre (Wotan in the *Chéreau Ring*) and revelled in the New Zealand connection. When they came back to Christchurch they decided to bring Wagner to New Zealand, and to have their own mini-Bayreuth occasions in their home, all of us seated in a circle in the front room, usually at weekends, with the stalwart hi-fi getting warmer and warmer during our six-hour sessions, plus lashings of both German and Kiwi wine, and Anita's chicken-curry *chef-d'oeuvre*.

As a group numbering anywhere between ten and two dozen, we made our way through *The Ring* first, and then



John Ritchie, Christchurch, 21 September 2011.
Photographer: Gareth Watkins

"I've flown Spitfires and conducted symphony orchestras. I've been presented to the Queen and scored an Albatross (or double eagle) at golf. I've become a Catholic in spite of Graham Greene and the Second Vatican Council. And I've met the Pope. I spent my 60th birthday with the Argentine composer, Alberto Ginastera, in a Budapest hotel drinking innumerable toasts to each other and to Béla Bartok whose centenary we were celebrating. I've heard music from Leningrad to London (Ontario), Washington to San Francisco. I've studied in London (England) and Boston. I knew Malcolm Arnold, William Walton and the novelist Anthony Burgess. In other words, I've got around".

– John Ritchie

on to the other operas. After about two years, when we had covered the whole Wagnerian course, we simply started all over again. LPs were our main Wagner-vehicle, especially the *Solti Ring*, but videos became available too, and we graduated from being a listening circle

to a viewing circle, then with the advent of CDs, back to a listening circle . . . DVDs saw us back as a viewing circle again . . . It was not long before we realised that others too were beginning to experience a wave of Wagner interest, and 'outsiders' would join. In time some of the circle left Christchurch, a couple went to Wellington, and Liz and I moved to Auckland. Once there, we missed these Wagner occasions so much that we decided to set one up in Auckland, and within a year it had become the basis for Donald McIntyre's 'founding' visit to us, and the setting up of the society. The rest everyone knows.

More than four hundred people came to John's funeral, I spoke one of the eulogies, but since it was such a wide-ranging group (a tribute to John's work and influence) I didn't make special mention of his love of Wagner's music, but am happy to make good that omission here, in the pages of the WSNZ newsletter, which John read religiously. I concentrated on John as a New Zealander, as a family man, a self-made man, a devoted teacher, and above all as a prolific composer. This is how my eulogy ended:

"John's musical compositions will remain the most vibrant and lasting way of remembering him. When Igor Stravinsky died in 1971 the obituary writer of the *London Times* described him as "the last of the Great European Composers". Well John Ritchie was — or rather is — the Last of the Great European tradition of New Zealand Composers. In terms of his contemporaries, he never had the sky-rocket, spectacular fame of a Douglas Lilburn, nor the cheeky global patchwork-palette of a David Farquhar, nor the angst-ridden utterance of an Antony Watson. In some measure he had all of these, but his greatest gift lay in his ability to blend serious purpose with joy and a reverence for life that shines through every note he composed. Just

listen again to the boisterous cacophony of his *Papanui Road Overture*, and then turn to the simple and beautiful faith of *Lord When the Sense of Thy Sweet Grace* . . . John's life was big enough to accommodate and to revel in such wide contrasts; they also make up the warp and the weft of his music.

And he wrote a lot of music. If you go to Radio New Zealand's online music archives and do a search for the name "John Ritchie", you'll come up with more than 7000 entries, stretching from 1950 to yesterday. From the *Clarinet Concertino* that was impressively published by the mighty UK firm of Novello in 1957 through the *Zhivago Songs* twenty years later, to the revised *String Quartet* premiered in Wellington in April last year, John Ritchie has given his own clear and distinctive voice to New Zealand music.

In the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral in London lies the body of Sir Christopher Wren, the architect and prime mover of that vast public monument. At the side of the gravestone are the words "Si monumentum requiris, circumspice": If you require a monument, look around you. It's a bit like that with John Ritchie: if you require a monument, listen around you. For you will continue to hear his music — in concerts, on the radio, during sporting and academic events, in schools, in churches, on family occasions and even at private moments when you're sitting down and a snatch of the *Zhivago songs* floats into your head, or when you walk down the street and find yourself whistling the perky finale-theme from the *Clarinet Concertino*.

John Ritchie the man may now be dead, but the living legacy of his music will go on for a long time yet. 'Si monumentum requiris circumaudite': if you require a monument, just listen around you: for his music goes on. . ."

JOHN RITCHIE AT NINETY - A FESTSCHRIFT

To celebrate John Ritchie's 90th birthday composer and writer Philip Norman compiled a festschrift (a collection of writings in honour of a scholar) with recollections of John from friends, family and former students. These fascinating stories, as Philip writes in the Preface reveal "wide-ranging admiration and respect not only for the talents and achievements of the man some call Prof, some call Mr Ritchie, some call J.A.R., some call Dad and some John, but also for the man himself."

Philip still has a few books left – \$35 plus \$5 postage & packaging – that can be ordered from:

Nota Bene Music
PO Box 29-125,
Christchurch 8540
or email: philipnorman@xtra.co.nz

MAR-BACK-S!

Do you feel a pang of guilt every time you make that order on-line? Do you miss that wonderful lost hour browsing through racks of wonderful music? There is no question that the demise of the independent bookshops and record stores has been hastened by companies such as Amazon. It's easier for us to sit at a computer and make that purchase to the detriment of the 'local' shop. Over the last few years there has been a steady progression of closures of specialist retailers. In February this year Wellington's famous Parsons bookshop announced it was closing down and in Christchurch Radar Records, the only store with any serious music, collapsed, along with the buildings around them, in the February 2011 earthquake.

The closures play, of course, into the hands of the big on-line companies and as a result our choice is narrowed in both who we deal with and what we can buy.

All is not doom and gloom though. Like Phoenix rising from the ashes we can report the return of a New Zealand music institution!

After a seven year absence the original Marbecks is back. Previous owner Roger Marbeck has bought back the business and built a new store on the original site in Queens Arcade. It may well, as they say, be the last record store built in New Zealand.

The new Marbecks is stocked with an even bigger range of classical, jazz, world, pop, vinyl, arthouse dvds and is backed by something you will not find at the Warehouse or Whitcoulls: specialist knowledge.

But wait there's more. While those in Auckland can pop down to Queens Arcade those of us away from the City of Sails can browse the Marbecks catalogue on-line at:

www.marbecksclassical.co.nz.



To whet your appetite here are a selection of new-release Wagner DVDs plus a CD from an up and coming baritone.

Götterdämmerung – DVD

Complete opera recorded in 2013 at Teatro alla Scala with Lance Ryan, Iréne Theorin, Mikhail Petrenko, Johannes Martin Kränzle, Gerd Grochowski, Waltraud Meier and conducted by Daniel Barenboim

Der fliegende Holländer– DVD

Complete opera recorded in 2013 at the Bayreuth Festival with Samuel Youn, Franz-Josef Selig, Ricarda Merbeth and conducted by Christian Thielemann

James Rutherford sings Wagner – CD

Winner of the first Seattle Opera International Wagner competition in 2006, James Rutherford (baritone) performs 'arias' from *Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Parsifal* and *Die Walküre* with Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Andrew Litton

Contact information:

Phone: 09 379-0444

Email: info@marbecksclassical.co.nz.

Location: Shop 22 Queens Arcade, 34 Queen St, Auckland City.

Opening Hours:

9am - 5.30pm Monday - Friday

9am - 5pm Saturday

10am - 5pm Sunday

BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 2015

The WSNZ has, once again, applied through the Friends of Bayreuth for tickets to the 2015 festival. We don't expect to hear how many sets of seats have been made available to us until closer to the end of the year but if you are interested in attending the Festival and wish to obtain seats through the WSNZ you need to make sure that you contact Peter Rowe (Peter.Rowe@minterellison.co.nz) and request that your name be placed on the list. In the meantime for those who may wish to purchase their own tickets the programme for 2015 is set out below. The performances in semi-bold are those for which the WSNZ has applied for tickets.

WAGNER FESTIVAL BAYREUTH 2015

Sat 25 July.....	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
Sun 26 July	<i>Lohengrin</i>
Mon 27 July.....	<i>Das Rheingold</i>
Tues 28 July.....	<i>Die Walküre</i>
Thurs 30 July	<i>Siegfried</i>
Fri 31 July	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>
Sat 01 August.....	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>
Sun 02 August.....	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
Mon 03 August....	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>
Tues 04 August	<i>Lohengrin</i>
Wed 05 August.....	<i>Siegfried</i>
Fri 07 August.....	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
Sat 08 August.....	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>
Sun 09 August.....	<i>Das Rheingold</i>
Mon 10 August	<i>Die Walküre</i>
Wed 12 August	<i>Siegfried</i>
Thurs 13 August.....	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
Fri 14 August.....	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>
Sat 15 August.....	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>
Sun 16 August.....	<i>Lohengrin</i>
Tues 18 August	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
Wed 19 August ...	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>
Thurs 20 August	<i>Lohengrin</i>
Fri 21 August.....	<i>Das Rheingold</i>
Sat 22 August	<i>Die Walküre</i>
Sun 23 August.....	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
Mon 24 August.....	<i>Siegfried</i>
Wed 26 August	<i>Götterdämmerung</i>
Thurs 27 August.....	<i>Lohengrin</i>
Fri 28 August.....	<i>Der fliegende Holländer</i>

NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:
Janet Barnard..... Auckland

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND 2014 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 7 December at 7.30pm
Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St
Christmas Function:
Featuring a presentation by Professor Heath Lees on the Ups and Downs of Wagner on Film.

Wellington

Sunday, 16 November at 4.00pm
Venue: The Hall, St Andrew's on the Terrace.
The Ups and Downs of Wagner on Film:
Professor Heath Lees will talk about Wagner in film, and the making of the film *Wagner's Ring – A Tale Told In Music*
Sunday, 30 November 5.30 - 7.00pm
Christmas Party
Venue: Tibby and Adrian Simcock's home at 27 Wade Street, Wadestown

Christchurch

Sunday, 30 November at 6.00pm
Venue: TBA
Christmas Party. Details later

Dunedin

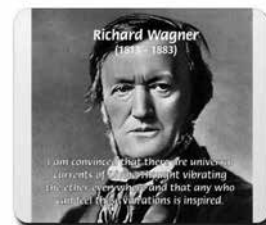
Sunday, 7 December at 12.00 noon
Venue: Te Rangi Hiroa College, 192 Castle Street
Christmas Luncheon followed by Historical Perspectives:
Winifred Wagner, wife of Wagner's son Siegfried, was the director of the Bayreuth Festival through the momentous period of 1930-1945. In 1975 she was interviewed by German film director Syberberg. This presentation will cover excerpts from the original five hour interview. German, with English subtitles

STOCKING FILLERS

At a loss to know what to buy this Christmas? Well here are a few ideas from www.cafepress.co.nz:

From opposite right, clockwise we have:

- A Wagner mug with his immortal words "Never look at the Trombones it only encourages them" \$17.00
- A cap for wannabe Valkyries that saves the voice by displaying the battle cry 'Hojotoho' \$18.50
- A Richard Wagner mousepad with the quote: "I am convinced that there are universal currents of Divine Thought vibrating the ether everywhere and that any who can feel these vibrations is inspired." \$16.00
- A crew neck sweatshirt that is also available as a T-shirt with the word 'Götterdammitlong' emblazoned across the chest. Sweatshirt \$46.00 T-shirt \$21.00.
- Finally the whole hog: 'Wagner groupie' PJs! Unisex flannel bottom is 100% cotton. Unisex T-shirt is 100% cotton tagless & with a crew neck. \$47.00.



ECKEHARD STIER

IN CONVERSATION

A couple of weeks before the July performance of *Tristan und Isolde*, conductor Eckehard Stier, the Music Director and principal conductor of the Auckland Philharmonia, attended the Auckland meeting of the Wagner Society and was interviewed by WSNZ Secretary Peter Rowe about the work he was about to conduct.

For those who were unable to attend this meeting here's a summary of Eckehard's thoughts on the work.

- The score of *Tristan* is amazing and for some time he had been living, breathing and dreaming it and always discovering new things.
- The opera was a huge undertaking for conductor, orchestra and singers and there would be an immense amount of work to do over a relatively short rehearsal period of ten days or so. However, all of the singers would be familiar with their roles.

• Eckehard acknowledged that some people could find *Tristan* a difficult opera to listen to over its entire length. He thought the best way to make the opera accessible was to feel the emotion and the music first before being concerned about the words – the music tells the story and lays out clearly the emotions of the characters.

• *Tristan* is an ideal opera for a concert performance. The orchestra can be heard much better than when it is in the pit – except for Bayreuth. Also, in a concert performance, the opera is not spoiled by the dreadful conceits of directors who often don't come from an opera background and sometimes can't even read music.

• Eckehard noted his pet audience behaviour hates – unrestrained coughing, prolonged crackling of cough drop wrapping paper, and wine glasses rolling about the floor.

• When asked what the opera was really about, he said the principal emotions were yearning and ecstasy.

• Wagner's harmonic language revolutionised music and was hugely influential on composers such as Mahler, Zemlinsky, and Richard Strauss.

• Eckehard's favourite recorded version of the opera is that by Carlos Kleiber. He acknowledged that Kleiber sometimes pushed the music harder than the score indicated, but only in the passages of extreme emotion where such an approach is justified.

• He noted that the cast for the upcoming performances is a very strong one and he is very much looking forward to working with them.

• Eckehard expressed his thanks for the financial contribution of the Wagner Society without which the APO concert performance would not be possible.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

As this is the last newsletter for 2014 I, on behalf of the Executive Committee offer all our members an enjoyable Christmas and a relaxing Summer break.

Over the next few weeks the committees who look after each of our four centres will be hard at work organising the events for 2015. I am sure that they will put together another stimulating year for us.

The NZSO has already announced a *Wagner Gala* for June 2015 (Wellington, Christchurch & Auckland) that will feature Simon O'Neill and Christine Goerke who you will recall stunned us with her singing of Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* in 2012. The gala will feature highlights from *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*.

Thank you to each and every one of you for your active support of the Wagner Society of New Zealand and 'see you next year'.

Christopher Brodrick - President

TROUBLED TIMES

The New York Times reported recently on the continued troubles at The Vienna State Opera. Less than two weeks after the surprise resignation of its music director, Franz Welser-Möst, the French conductor Bertrand de Billy announced this week that he was cancelling his upcoming performances there because of differences with the company's management. *The Times* reports that Bertrand de Billy's "troubles in Vienna began last season with a bar fight — or a fight over several bars, actually. He walked out of a production of Wagner's *Lohengrin* in March after he lost a battle to retain several bars of music that the production team wanted to cut.

He was supposed to return this season, but he told *Kurier*, an Austrian newspaper, that he was cancelling all his upcoming performances at the opera house and would not return there to conduct so long as Dominique Meyer remains as the opera company's artistic director."

Oh dear!

On the other side of the world, in Perth actually, they have had problems with *Carmen*. One of the West Australia Opera sponsors, Healthway, doesn't like the fact that the opera, which includes a chorus of 'cigarette girls' includes smoking!!!

Carolyn Chard, General Manager of WAO told the ABC "*Carmen* is an opera that is actually set in a tobacco factory, so that does present some difficulties if you're promoting non-smoking and healthy work environments."

Hmmm! What next? No *Peter Grimes*? No *Boris Godunov*? *La Traviata*'s a bit dodgy and *Trovatore* is definitely out. Goodbye Puccini and as for the working conditions that the Nibelungs have to work under! *Eugene Onegin* is out as we can't have people pointing guns at each other and as for *Figaro*, *Giovanni* and *Così*? No, No and No!!!

So let's have a Christmas Competition. Put your thinking caps on and nominate your politically correct opera. The prize will be full acknowledgement in this august newsletter. Send your entry(ies) to: cbrodrick@xtra.co.nz



Wolf-Ferrari's Susanna's Secret is out. She smokes! But don't tell anyone! It's a secret!