



## BAYREUTH REFLECTIONZ

In August nine members of the WSNZ attended the Bayreuth Festival thanks to the increased allocation of tickets that we received through the Richard Wagner Verband International. We are always keen to hear about members' experiences when visiting overseas Wagner performances and, as we will soon hear about our ticket allocation for 2018, these reflections are timely. In this edition, we have collected the thoughts of Pat Graham and Robert Falvey but it is hoped that other members of the group will be able to provide additional material for future newsletters.

In her opening comment, Pat succinctly sums up the feeling of attending the Bayreuth festival: "For ten days one lives in a different world: one of relaxation where world news can be ignored as you leisurely move between lectures and the theatre. Productions may not always please but the feeling of anticipation, in the town and around the theatre, makes the experience special but also raises questions. For instance, what is it that justifies the continuation of Bayreuth and its generally disliked productions when Wagner's operas are performed all over the world? In a lecture series held during the Festival, called 'Deconstructing the Ring', Alexander von dem Bottlenberg suggested an answer: As a 'Wagner' theatre, Bayreuth *should* be revolutionary and encourage new views of the operas." (Members may be interested to learn these lectures are available on YouTube.)

"Whether one agrees with this idea or not, the productions certainly make one think, not just about the work itself but about its relevance to the present. Oil for example, the black gold of the Castorf *Ring*, has no beauty in itself and has a built-in curse which we are experiencing today through global warming. Is this a good reason for using Wagner to make a political statement about today's world? Or, to use the politics of oil, revolution and the reunification of Germany as



the setting? Bottlenberg's explanations certainly helped one understand the production. (It was also fascinating to hear about life in Berlin during partition.) But if one only wants the music and a romantic albeit tragic fairy tale, maybe you should avoid Bayreuth."

"Castorf crammed his *Ring* with symbolism relating to the history of oil and Germany. It was an intellectual, 'politically' challenging and brutal production that was, this year, seen for the last time as it will be replaced in 2020. I recalled that last year at the Leipzig Wagner festival I had talked to a man who said Castorf's production made perfect sense to him since he was from East Germany. In his view, West Germans would find the production as strange as other foreigners."

Commenting on *Die Walküre*, Auckland member Robert Falvey wrote "the production featured an impressive structure that worked admirably as Hunding's house in Act 1, and as an oil production facility (both in primitive and more modern guises) in Acts 2 and 3. The latter acts were set in pre- and post-revolutionary Russia (Baku, apparently) and the oil for gold exchange was carried through this opera too. It all flowed well. The singers were in even better voice,

with a new Wotan (John Lundgren) being very powerful indeed. Catherine Foster as Brünnhilde was excellent, as were the ill-fated siblings, Siegmund (Christopher Ventris) and Sieglinde (Camilla Nylund). All the expected elements were there and it was a real pleasure to experience the music and singing without too much distraction, although this was not always the case such as during Wotan's Farewell when the production upstaged the music. Overall however we were very happy when we emerged from the wonderful Festspielhaus sound space where the orchestra, under Marek Janowski, was especially good."

During the performance of *Götterdämmerung*, Pat and Robert were present for an event that *Limelight* headlined as 'Bayreuth's first male Brünnhilde' under which they reported that at the end of the first act Catherine Foster hurt her foot and had to sing from the wings while assistant director Andreas Rosar donned a sparkling golden gown and went on stage in her place. According to Robert: "her would-be doppelgänger did his thing (rather well it must be said). I cannot comment on whether he is familiar with skipping about in gold lamé, but he did the job with aplomb. Pat felt somewhat in the



Brünnhilde (Catherine Foster) and Brünnhilde (Andreas Rosar)

dark at the heroine's change of a gender as she "couldn't understand the German announcement at the beginning of the act. Someone said she twisted something when exiting from a curtain call but I did not know whether this was correct. Siegfried was pretty rough with her and it could just as easily have taken place when he gave her a great shove in front of their caravan. Siegfried remained as loutish at the end as he was when we first saw him."

After Pat's *Ring* experience she found "*Parsifal*, both brilliantly sung and a pleasure to watch even when it contained some unexpected twists. For example, on the words 'Here time becomes space' in Act 1's transformation scene, a back-projected video image zoomed upwards, like a rocket, through the dome of the monastery and transported us into space. The monastery became a tiny speck before disappearing completely. We were now among the planets and stars before gradually descending back to earth for the second scene. For those who are interested to see this effect, without going to Bayreuth, the production has been recently released on DVD."

#### PAT'S SNIPPETS

- A comment made during one lecture revealed that a report in a Stasi (East German Secret Police) file said Castorf is so far ahead in his thoughts that he does not pay attention to what he means!

- Overheard while walking back to the hotel. 'Well we're into deconstruction so I just let it flow over me as we were told to do.'

- As the curtain closed and last notes of *Die Walküre* died away a very English female voice a couple of seats along clearly said, 'The curtain fall was the best part of the opera,' although I gather from her neighbour it was the seat that was bothering her rather than the production.

A big thank you to Pat and Robert for sharing their Bayreuth reflections.

## WSNZ NEWSLETTER – THE FUTURE

After 14 years and approximately 80 issues, I have decided that at the end of 2018 I will step down from my role of producing the WSNZ newsletter. The move has been prompted by my decision to enrol as a full-time student at Canterbury University in order to complete my degree. Over the course of the next twelve months, before I relinquish my post, we have an opportunity to consider the future direction of the newsletter. In the meantime, I will share the production of the 2018 newsletters with Heath Lees.

As things currently stand, producing between four and six issues a year could be considered a daunting task, but it doesn't have to be if more members were prepared to be involved. As we have a twelve month transition period ahead, we have a great opportunity to find a solution. Therefore I'd be grateful if, over the course of the next few months every member could consider the following ideas and/or suggest alternatives:

**YOUR INVOLVEMENT** – Would you be prepared to assist with the newsletter? This could range from providing articles, reviews, news, reactions to overseas productions. Could you provide a quarterly summary of your WSNZ branch activity? Are you a desktop publisher and able to assist with the layout?

**NUMBER OF ISSUES** – We currently produce four to five issues a year that are designed for print but, in the main, sent electronically. How would you feel if this was cut to two, possibly larger, 'printed' issues and more regular emailed news?

**DELIVERY** – Over the last five years we have progressively moved to emailing the newsletter. Should the WSNZ consider running a Facebook page for general news and events, while retaining the 'printed' newsletter for more in-depth articles? Do you have experience in social media? Could you run a Facebook page?

**IN SUMMARY** – We have the next twelve months to develop a plan for the future. Please give some consideration to the problem and convey your thoughts to any of the following:

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– Christopher Brodrick

## WAGNER MURMURS

- The West Australian Symphony Orchestra will perform *Tristan und Isolde* in August 2018 with Stuart Skelton and Eva-Maria Westbroek singing the title roles.
- The Metropolitan Opera will stage a new production of *Lohengrin* in 2022 with Anna Netrebko as Elsa.
- The State Opera of South Australia will present a concert performance of Act III of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in August 2018.

– Michael Sinclair

## SIMON O'NEILL – Siegfried

Just released is the third and penultimate recording in the acclaimed cycle of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* with the Hong Kong Philharmonic conducted by Jaap van Zweden. The star cast includes Simon O'Neill as Siegfried, one of the finest heldentenors on the international stage, soprano Heidi Melton as Brünnhilde and Matthias Goerne who, as the Wanderer, has been singled out for particular praise by the critics. *The Gramophone* wrote he "sings Wotan beautifully, with much baritonal sophistication, (predictable from an experienced Lieder recitalist), while *Opera News* wrote, "Matthias Goerne is a revelation... [he] upholds the great tradition of Wagner singing."

For those wishing to give themselves a Christmas treat the 4 set CD is available through Marbecks. ([www.marbecks.co.nz](http://www.marbecks.co.nz))



### NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:

Graeme & Mary Fogelberg..... Wellington

Annette Boddy ..... Wellington

**HAPPY CHRISTMAS  
TO ALL WSNZ MEMBERS**

# WSNZ PROGRAMME DETAILS 2018 PRELIMINARY VIEW\*

2017

## Auckland

**Sunday 10 December 7.00pm**

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

**Christmas Function:** Featuring a Potpourri of Wagneriana plus our famous cake and wine.

## Wellington

**Sunday, 19 November at 4.30pm (please note early starting time)**

Venue: *Tibby and Adrian Simcock's 2 Rankin Street, Wadestown*

End of Year Function: For catering purposes, please ring Tibby (472 7029) to let her know you're coming. There will be a charge of \$10.00 per head.

## Christchurch

**Sunday, 3 December at 6pm**

Venue: *Leith McMurray's home 8d Hillsborough Terrace, St Martins*

**Christmas Social Function:** Pot luck meal. RSVP by 25 November – phone: 332 3242, mob: 021 109 4576 or email: [gstreat@xtra.co.nz](mailto:gstreat@xtra.co.nz) with contribution.

## Dunedin

**Sunday, 26 Nov at 12.00 noon**

Venue: *Carrington College, 57 Heriot Row*

**Christmas Luncheon and Wagner Concert** inaugurating the Sydney Opera House.

## Auckland

**25 February 2018**

Heath Lees on *The Ring and The Rings, Wagner, Tolkien and Peter Jackson*

**15 April 2018**

Presentation by Terence Dennis

**20 May 2018**

AGM and 'The Golden Ring'.

**12 August 2018**

Peter Bassett on *Die Meistersinger – Models, Motivations and Misconceptions.*

**30 September 2018**

Heath Lees introduces a complete Opera

**9 December 2018**

Christmas potpourri

## Wellington

**29 April 2018**

Heath Lees on *Der Rosenkavalier: a match-maker between Mozart and Wagner.*

**27 May 2018**

Documentary

**8 July 2018**

Opera Society/Wagner Society screening: *Götterdämmerung*

**19 August 2018**

Peter Bassett on *Die Meistersinger – Models, Motivations and Misconceptions.*

**28 October 2018**

John Drummond on *The Most Notorious Chord in the World: The Tristan Chord.*

## Christchurch

**2 March 2018:**

Heath Lees on *The Ring and The Rings, Wagner, Tolkien and Peter Jackson*

**17 August 2018:**

Peter Bassett on *Die Meistersinger – Models, Motivations and Misconceptions.*

**7 September 2018:**

Heath Lees on *Der Rosenkavalier: a match-maker between Mozart and Wagner.*

## Dunedin

**4 March 2018:**

Heath Lees on *The Ring and The Rings, Wagner, Tolkien and Peter Jackson*

**22 April 2018:**

Terence Dennis discusses *Deep In The Forest: Wagner's Siegfried*

**May 2018:**

10th Birthday Party

**24 June 2018:**

Terence Dennis introduces DVD presentation: *Parsifal*

**9 September 2018:**

Heath Lees on *Der Rosenkavalier: a match-maker between Mozart and Wagner.*

**25 November 2018:**

Christmas Luncheon

\*Programme not necessarily complete and could be subject to change.

## MELBOURNE *Meistersinger* FULL CAST LIST

Conductor..... Pietari Inkinen  
Director..... Kasper Holten

*Eva* ..... Natalie Aroyan  
*Magdalene*..... Dominica Matthews  
*Walther Von Stolzing*..... Stefan Vinke  
*David* ..... David Portillo  
*Hans Sachs* ..... James Johnson  
*Sixtus Beckmesser* ..... Warwick Fyfe  
*Veit Pogner*..... Daniel Sumegi  
*Fritz Kothner* ..... Luke Gabbedy  
*Nightwatchman*..... Adrian Tamburini  
*Kunz Vogelgesang*..... John Longmuir  
*Balthasar Zorn*..... Nicholas Jones  
*Augustin Moser* ..... Kanen Breen  
*Ulrich Eisslinger*... Graeme Macfarlane  
*Konrad Nachtigall*..... Andrew Jones  
*Hermann Ortel*..... Michael Honeyman  
*Hans Foltz*..... Gennadi Dubinsky  
*Hans Schwartz* ..... Richard Anderson  
Opera Australia Chorus  
Orchestra Victoria  
Arts Centre Melbourne, State Theatre  
November 13 – 22, 2018

## THOUGHTS OF ABROAD FROM HOME

For those members who may wish to experience Wagner performances during 2018 here is a list of events that may be of interest.

**Wagner's *Ring Cycle* in San Francisco with Heath Lees.**

Cycle Two: 18–25 June

Cycle Three 25 June - 2 July

More information on Hayllar website: [www.hayllarmusicstours.com](http://www.hayllarmusicstours.com)

**Western Australian Symphony Orchestra *Tristan und Isolde***

16 August – Perth Concert Hall

19 August – Perth Concert Hall

More information on WASO website: <http://tickets.waso.com.au/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=10020>

**A Wagner Voyage**

**The *Ring Cycle* in Kiel and**

**Deborah Humble in recital in Hamburg**

21 June – 02 July

Info on The Travelling Tenor website: [www.thetravellingtenor.com](http://www.thetravellingtenor.com)

## BAYREUTH TICKETS:

We will shortly be informed as to the number of tickets we are to be allocated for the 2018 Bayreuth Festival. For those of you who would like to obtain tickets for the event next year, you are urged to make contact with WSNZ Secretary, Peter Rowe, ([Peter.Rowe@minterellison.co.nz](mailto:Peter.Rowe@minterellison.co.nz)) and request that your name is placed on the Bayreuth ticket list. If you are unsure if your name is already on this list, please play safe and contact Peter anyway.

**To save us time:** If your name is on the list but you will be *unable* to attend in 2018 please let Peter know. Your name will be retained on the list for 2019 and beyond but we won't waste time making contact for a negative response.

Finally, all members are welcome to add their names to the Bayreuth ticket list at any time. Please note having your name on the list does not mean you are committed to purchasing tickets nor does it guarantee that you will receive an allocation.

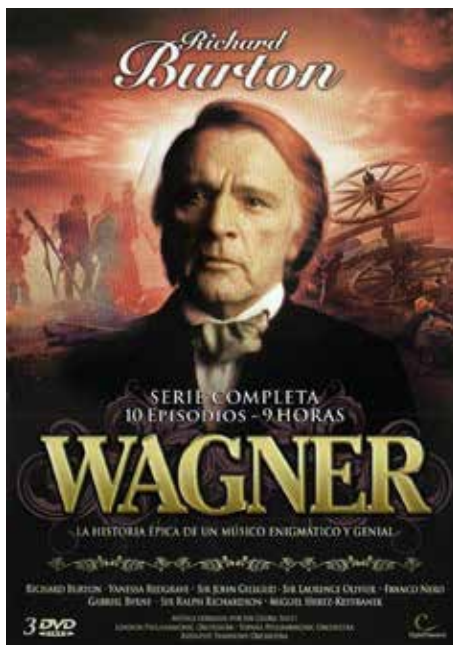
# THEN AND NOW: TONY PALMER'S *Wagner*

- Did you know that Prunella Scales, Basil's long-suffering wife in *Fawlty Towers* had a bit-part as an aristocratic German lady in Tony Palmer's film *Wagner*?
- Did you realise that the same film had another walk-on part (the King of Saxony no less) played by the English composer Sir William Walton — an amazing coup, but a startlingly bad performance.
- Can you recall that blistering, 90-second scene where Dame Joan Plowright as a rich Scottish philanthropist in Bordeaux chokes off young Richard's advances to her daughter (rather than to her)? At the time, Dame Joan was about to celebrate her silver wedding to another regular on the set of the *Wagner* film — Laurence Olivier, who played Bavaria's dithering Minister of the Interior.

The reason why all these not-so-trivial pursuits came upon me recently is because I learned that Tony Palmer's mammoth 1983 film *Wagner* is 'officially' thirty-five years old next month — an event that justifies another look and maybe a re-considered assessment. Looking back, one can see how stunned the critics were and how quickly they ran out of superlatives. "One of the most beautifully photographed motion pictures in history" said *Opera News*. In Germany, *Der Spiegel* was almost inarticulate — "Wonderful . . . musically and filmically on the highest level". Even the *Sunday Times* burst out that "it takes the screen by storm."

Part of the adulation was thanks to the sheer visual treat that Palmer's film presented through its ravishing locations and the lush cinematography of Vittorio Storaro and Nic Knowland. If I ran the Swiss Tourist Board, I would have given Palmer the keys to the country for the film's contribution to the scenic magic of Switzerland, which housed the composer's various exiles.

Having Richard Burton in the title role was another triumph. Not that he brought any real character interpretation. On the contrary, he often wandered myopically through scenes, relying simply on his amazing voice to impart the necessary conviction to a figure who was in every sense larger than life, perhaps even unportrayable.



Aside from Burton, *Wagner* had a cast list that read like a Who's Who of British and European film and theatre. How did Palmer manage to ensnare so many stars? Some say that everyone knew it would be Burton's last role, and they wanted a piece of it. Or maybe it was Palmer's full-frontal salesmanship that intimidated them all. Maybe it was just the irresistible attraction of that ultimate showman and genius, Richard Wagner.

It's a fact that Wagner's influence and reputation have grown enormously over the last half-century. This film has had a lot to do with that. Its music was specially recorded by Georg Solti with a variety of orchestras. It was shot in nearly 200 European locations (Wagner was an obsessive traveller) and provided work for a small army of film people from 20 different countries. Shortly after the release of the 9-hour version (in videotape of variable technical quality), it was chopped into a TV mini-series and bought up by 37 countries. It ran into distribution and copyright problems, and the definitive, re-mastered feature-film version only appeared in 2013 — an ironic touch since this marked the bi-centenary of Wagner's birth, whereas the original idea had been to mark the centenary of his death.

Here in New Zealand, with a Wagner Society founded in 1994, the film provided a brilliant introduction to the composer, his times and his music. Up and down the country, regular meetings for learner-Wagnerians would often include tit-bit showings and short excerpts that presented the composer from his revolutionary days to his final operatic success in Bayreuth.

The film also illustrated the world events that framed Wagner's story, plus

a breathtaking gallery of people who had rubbed shoulders with him — a wild, red-haired co-revolutionary in Dresden, a sinister police-inspector in Venice, crowds of political demonstrators in Paris, famous artists and philosophers everywhere, and of course a besotted King in Munich (played by the Hungarian actor Laszlo Galffi, whose resemblance to Ludwig's portraits was uncanny).

Of course there were failings, mainly twofold: firstly the film frequently played ducks-and-drakes with matters of historical fact. Sometimes original script-words were grafted into authentic quotations in a disturbing way. Most of the script was by Charles Wood, a satirist by trade and the scriptwriter for the Beatles' film *Help!* but someone whose Wagner credentials seem non-existent. And it shows: for example, Wagner's 'revolutionary' speech in Dresden was a direct attack on the power of both money and the aristocracy, but it did *not* advocate German domination the way this film pretends. The closest it got was to hold out a promise of "the sun of German freedom and German gentleness warming all nations". Quite different from the sleight-of-hand that has Burton anticipating Hitler with Germany's bellicose demand for "a place in the sun".

Secondly, the approach to the music was scattershot, with an ear for its dramatic mood rather than for its proper Wagnerian place. In 1861, when Richard and Minna are separating in Paris amid lots of steam and industrial clanking, the transcendent music is from *Parsifal*, a work that actually appeared two decades later. Again, only just avoiding his Dresden pursuers, Wagner boards the riverboat to Switzerland, with a soundtrack that is beautifully apt, but was composed fully 25 years later.

There were some surprising omissions in the film too. Little about Wagner the non-stop article-writer. Just a couple of perfunctory, arm-flapping shots when we all know what an excellent conductor he was. Nothing about the huge effect he had on the French symbolist artists . . . and so on. But in a life so vast what do you leave out and what do you include? Hard to say, especially since Wagner constantly spun out so much fiction about himself and others.

The wonder is that Tony Palmer succeeded so well. No-one else could have had the artistic effrontery to tackle it, nor the vision and guts to see it through.

Heath Lees