

All Eyes Firmly on Brisbane!



Three New Zealand Wagnerian *Helden* snapped in Munich, January 2023 – bass Martin Snell, retired bass Sir Donald McIntyre (our Society's patron) and tenor Simon O'Neill. (Photo: Bettina McIntyre)

Here's hoping that everyone's having a good spring! Admittedly, it's still a bit dark and stormy out there in some places, so Heath Lees has sent in the above photo to help lift our spirits, as forwarded by Simon O'Neill, who passed through Munich early in the year. It provides a rare opportunity to see the Society's patron, Sir Donald McIntyre, together with Simon and Martin Snell. All three are well known to members, of course; all have had highly distinguished singing careers, and they have all sung at Bayreuth at some time or other.

As the year gradually draws to a close, the main focus for many New Zealand Wagnerians right now is the long-awaited *Ring* in Brisbane, with more than 50 participants already registered to attend as part of the tour organised by Michael Sinclair. By now, all those who are taking part in the tour should have made their final payments. Meanwhile, for other members who are making their

own arrangements – regardless of which cycle they might be attending – Michael would like to draw their attention to three special receptions being given by the Wagner Society in Queensland, which New Zealand members are also welcome to attend. If this appeals to you, then please read Michael's announcement on page 2 and get in touch with him directly.

In our last issue, we also briefly touched on Barrie Kosky's new *Ring* cycle at Covent Garden – this has now commenced, with *Das Rheingold* having run from 11 to 29 September. According to Kosky, the cycle contains both reality and three-dimensional characters, but 'it's very important that the *Ring* is a metaphorical poetic dream world'. Initial reviews have been very positive, praising Kosky's uncluttered, dramatically pointed staging, Antonio Pappano's assured conducting and a fine cast. It is hoped this will also be a *Ring* that says something important about how we live now.

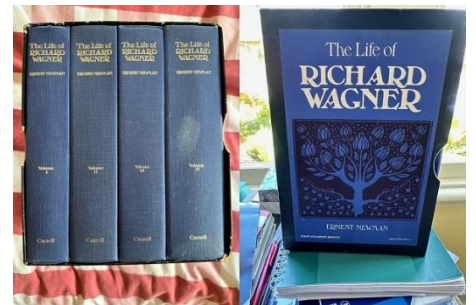
Heath Lees – DVD Sets



Heath Lees, as he appears in his 2013 documentary series, *Wagner's Ring – A Tale Told in Music*. Trailer here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUAav4hTds

The Society has a limited supply of DVD sets of Heath Lees' excellent 2013 documentary series, *Wagner's Ring – A Tale Told in Music* (2h 40m approx.), for members to purchase. These 4-DVD sets are now available from our Secretary, Peter Rowe, at a special price of \$40 per set; please enquire with Peter at peter.rowe2000@gmail.com. Widely regarded as one of the best audio(visual) analyses of the music of the *Ring* since Deryck Cooke's classic 1967 audio survey of the leitmotifs, Heath's series is a must.

Ernest Newman – Wagner Biography



Michael Humble of Khandallah, Wellington has just bequeathed his set of Ernest Newman's seminal four-volume biography, *The Life of Richard Wagner* (1976 hardback Cassells edition), to the Society – free to a good home! Often out of print, this historic bio typically sells for around \$100 second-hand, so this is a very rare, one-off opportunity to acquire a genuine classic – best be in quick. Please send enquiries to John Davidson (Chair, Wellington Branch Committee) at john.davidson@vuw.ac.nz.

WSNZ – 2023 Programme October to December

Auckland

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

Saturday, 14 October at 1:30 p.m. (note Saturday afternoon time)
A full screening of *Tannhäuser*, with tea, coffee and biscuits.

Sunday, 3 December at 7:00 p.m.

The celebratory end to the year: a Wagner ‘potpourri’, cake and wine.

Wellington

Sunday, 26 November at 4:00 p.m.

Venue: private home in Wadestown

End-of-year party – full details to be given in the Wellington Branch local newsletter next month.

Christchurch

Sunday, 3 December – time and venue TBA

Christmas function.

Dunedin

Sunday, 26 November at 12:00 noon

Venue: Carrington College

Wagner Christmas Luncheon and Conversazione/Concert. To end our year, **Scott Bezett** and **Terence Dennis** discuss the origins of Greek Classical Drama and how these inspired the origin of opera and, by extension, Wagner’s music-drama. Many will remember Scott’s vocal MMus Recitals, with Terence, and he is completing his Masters in Classics. He also performed memorably at one of our past Christmas Luncheons. Scott will also sing the first great scena for the male singer in operatic history: the *Lament of Orpheus* from Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* (1607).

New Members

We are delighted to extend warmest Wagnerian greetings to:

Michael Webb.....Auckland
Elizabeth Wilson.....Dunedin

As ever, herzlich willkommen! – seid Euch gegrüsst.

*** Stop Press – Obituary Notice ***

It is with great sadness that we report the peaceful passing on 8 October 2023 of **Marvin Rothman** of Wellington (originally from the USA). Along with Heath Lees and others, Marvin was instrumental in setting up the WSNZ in the mid-1990s and was a supremely dedicated Wagnerian (this even given his Jewish background), attending many live Wagner performances together with his wife Elisabeth, especially on their regular visits to Berlin. Our fondest thoughts and best wishes go to Elisabeth and the family at this time.

APO Concert with Wagner Items



We would also like to remind members that the **Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra**, conducted by **Giordani Bellincampi**, will be presenting a long-awaited concert of Wagner and

Gustav Mahler at **7:30 p.m. on Saturday, 11 November, in the Auckland Town Hall**. This concert had originally been planned for the APO’s 2021 season, but – unsurprisingly – it had to be postponed because of the pandemic. Performances of Wagner’s music by New Zealand’s leading professional orchestras have become comparatively rare in recent years, and so the half-hour of Wagner items that open this concert will mark a welcome return. The items are the Overture from *Rienzi* and the well-known orchestral conflation of the Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*. After the interval, there will be a performance of Gustav Mahler’s *Fifth Symphony*.

Wagner Murmurs

– additional news from Michael Sinclair:

- The Theater Erfurt will give a new production of the *Ring*, its first in 90 years, beginning with *Das Rheingold* in March 2024.
- Andreas Schager and Camilla Nylund will sing the title roles in Bayreuth’s new production of *Tristan und Isolde* in 2024.
- The Metropolitan Opera will now not start a new production of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle in 2025, and it remains uncertain which production they will present. With Richard Jones’ production for ENO in doubt, it is now rumoured that the Met will take David McVicar’s new production at La Scala. In either case, it seems likely that their next *Ring* will not begin until 2027. It is also rumoured that Lisa Davidsen will sing Brünnhilde.

*** NB – Re the upcoming Brisbane Ring, Michael adds: ***

‘Last month, we received an invitation from the **Wagner Society in Queensland** for members to attend one of the **three receptions** they are hosting during the Brisbane *Ring* cycles in December. The receptions are being held so that Wagnerians from around the world can meet to share their experiences of the Brisbane *Ring* and all things Wagner.

The receptions will be held at the **Tattersalls Club Brisbane** between **4:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.**, on the following dates:

- Cycle 1: Saturday, 2 December 2023**
- Cycle 2: Saturday, 9 December 2023**
- Cycle 3: Saturday, 16 December 2023**

If you are travelling to the *Ring* independently of the arrangements organised by Michael Sinclair and would like to attend one of these receptions, then **could you please RSVP to Michael** at wsnz@theoperacritic.com so that he can let The Wagner Society in Queensland know how many people will be attending.’

– Michael Sinclair

Introducing Michael Zaragoza

An ongoing issue that affects all the WSNZ regional branches, and indeed other Wagner societies abroad, is that of their ageing membership, and a lack of new, younger members. So it is with great pleasure that we introduce Wellington member, Michael Zaragoza, who is still 'only' around forty, and who has a most interesting and unusual background that has also included some operatic set design. Originally from



Wellington member, Michael Zaragoza (with friend Massimo!)

Miami and New York City, Michael studied film, theology, philosophy and Latin, and then graduated in architecture in 2007, enabling him to address his varied interests in a holistic fashion. He also completed an MSc in Construction Management and a Certificate in Classical Architecture, while working for a design-build developer erecting luxury condominium buildings in Lower Manhattan.

It was during this time, in late 2015, that Michael was unexpectedly inspired by a performance of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, given by Apotheosis Opera, a small but ambitious opera company whose mission was to nurture a new generation of opera lovers through performances in English. Sensing an opportunity to support this company and their mission, Michael persuaded his employer to channel their design and construction expertise towards more philanthropic ends, and he soon found himself designing the sets for Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West*, Apotheosis's next production. He later built the staging for an Italian-language production of Verdi's *Macbeth* (for LoftOpera, another small, dynamic, NYC company), the performances attracting rave reviews; then came Richard Strauss's *Capriccio* for Apotheosis, and later Rossini's *Otello* for LoftOpera, again in Italian.



Set for Apotheosis Opera's production of *La Fanciulla del West* (Act 3)

Michael ultimately came to Wellington with his wife Julie several years later, joining the NZ Wagner Society's Wellington Branch in mid-2019. Michael worked with an array of local designers and developers before striking out on his own as Managing Director for Risposta, a fully integrated design, construction and development platform delivering quality multi-unit residences in the Wellington region. (Visit <https://www.risposta.co.nz> for full details.) Risposta's mission is to activate and deploy the full power of a unified design and construction process, aspiring to make each project a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Michael's ongoing, personal study and experience of Wagner's work is strengthened by the events sponsored by the Wagner Society, which he attends at every opportunity. His favourite Wagner works include the *Ring*, *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, all of which he has also been playing to his young daughter, who seems to enjoy them!

In Memoriam

Graham Clark

10 November 1941 – 6 July 2023



Graham Clark as Mime in Harry Kupfer's *Ring* cycle production, Bayreuth, 1988 (Bayreuther Festspiele)

Tenor Graham Clark was one of the most intelligent and admired Wagnerian singer-actors of modern times. Originally from Littleborough in Lancashire in the UK, he first sang as a treble in the local church choir, but initially pursued another career path altogether – physical education. Only in his mid-30s did he finally decide to take singing lessons. He then made very rapid progress, auditioning for Richard Bonyngé, and was later offered a contract with Scottish Opera. Specialising early on as a character tenor with striking and precise interpretation, he sought out roles with psychological

depth, finding them in the music of northern European composers.

Accordingly, he came to Wagner, most especially the roles of Loge and Mime in the *Ring* at Covent Garden, Bayreuth and Barcelona; his Bayreuth readings in particular are preserved in the video recordings of Harry Kupfer's spectacular *Ring* staging (1988–92). There, Clark's Loge in *Das Rheingold*, in a black leather coat and a blonde wig reminiscent of contemporary 1980s 'new wave' rock music acts, helped firmly anchor Kupfer's ambitious production in an era of laser light shows and the dystopian, cyberpunk world of futuristic sci-fi films such as Ridley Scott's seminal *Blade Runner* (1982). His performances as a nervously deranged Mime in Kupfer's Bayreuth and Barcelona *Ring* stagings, and in Richard Jones's production for Covent Garden, were no less impressive. His other Wagnerian roles included Melot and the Young Sailor in *Tristan*, the Steersman in Kupfer's 1980s staging of *Der fliegende Holländer* and David in Wolfgang Wagner's 1980s staging of *Die Meistersinger* – the latter two (from Bayreuth), again, are on video. Other notable roles included Herod in R. Strauss's *Salome* and Steva in Janáček's *Jenůfa*.

Stephen Gould

24 January 1962 – 19 September 2023

Fans of the much-admired American heldentenor, Stephen Gould, will be very sad to learn that he has died after having been stricken with bile duct cancer with complications, an illness for which there was no cure. Having initially made a name for himself in musicals in the 1980s, he later turned to opera, also moving from a baritone to a heldentenor, beginning with Florestan in Beethoven's *Fidelio* at Linz in 1999. As well as performing demanding roles by Wagner and others at the Vienna State Opera and elsewhere, he made a strong impression in Bayreuth, where he sang the roles of Tannhäuser in



Evelyn Herlitzius and Stephen Gould in Katharina Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* production, Bayreuth, 2015 (Bayreuther Festspiele)

2004 and Siegfried in 2006, along with the titular role in Katharina Wagner's production of *Tristan und Isolde* (2015–19), and then, last year, in Roland Schwab's new production of *Tristan* as well. This year, however, he had to withdraw from the Festival entirely – ultimately divulging the reasons on his website just two weeks before his death.

A Brief Round-Up – The 2023 Bayreuth Festival



Carol and Geoffrey Reed outside the Bayreuth Festival Theatre, August 2023. (Photo supplied by Carol Reed)

Firstly, our thanks to Carol and Geoffrey Reed of Wellington (above, actually taken outside in front of a gate – look closely!) who contacted us to let us know that they would be travelling to Bayreuth in the first week of August. It would seem they were the only WSNZ members who attended the Festival this year, after having first visited Bayreuth in 2010 . . . needless to say, quite a lot has changed since then. That included getting tickets – this time, the pair just bought theirs online, as there were still some available.

Carol and Geoff also caught Dmitri Tcherniakov's 2021 *Der fliegende Holländer* production, but they mainly came for Valentin Schwarz's highly controversial *Ring* staging, as premiered last year. They both enjoyed this, Carol describing it as 'a most interesting *Ring* with a few twists'. Some aspects left them perplexed, however – Geoff thought the staging worked best when things still adhered reasonably closely to the original story, but it then became harder to follow whenever the symbolism, etc. had been changed, which, in this production, was frequently the case. One major difference with this year's *Ring* was that – at long last – the entire cycle was conducted by former NZSO Music Director, Pietari Inkinen. Carol reports that it was Inkinen who received the most applause during the curtain calls; his conducting was also widely judged to be superior to that of Cornelius Meister, who conducted last year's *Ring* once Inkinen had had to withdraw after contracting Covid.

Other productions given included *Tristan and Tannhäuser*, the latter under Bayreuth's second-ever female conductor, Nathalie Stutzmann. The premiere production was American producer Jay Scheib's 'augmented reality' (AR) staging of *Parsifal*. There had already been controversy regarding the

staging, since the special glasses needed to view the AR elements were not going to be available to most of the audience members in the first place . . . yet, on the night, this may have been a blessing in disguise.



AR elements as seen in the 2023 Bayreuth *Parsifal* (photo: Bayreuther Festspiele)

In theory, the use of AR technology for *Parsifal* should have been a potentially fascinating opportunity to experiment with a novel approach, provided it was all properly thought through. On the surface, this would seem to be all too obvious; allegedly, however, those 'fortunate' enough to have had the AR glasses were instead subjected to a non-stop, headache-inducing barrage of mostly superfluous images that evidently failed to contribute anything much of substance to the audience's *Parsifal* experience. The exasperated *Financial Times* reviewer, for example, hilariously described watching the opera through the rather hot and heavy AR glasses as if viewing it 'through a fish tank', adding: 'Now take a class of over-enthusiastic young computer geeks and ask them to generate images loosely inspired by Wagner's *Parsifal*. Gather absolutely everything they make and throw it all into the tank with the fish, and you're getting close to what we saw.' Along with disembodied hands, rifles, grenades, rubbish and insects, in Act 1 the images also included an entire flock of swans that squirted blood when struck by many arrows. Meanwhile, as one Bavarian Broadcasting (BR) online

commentator pointed out, the dark AR glasses also filtered the light from the (deliberately) very brightly lit stage in order to make the superimposed AR images easier to see against the backdrop. However, this meant the stage was then unduly overlit for anyone *not* wearing the glasses – a further problem for most of the audience. Perhaps the best alternative to the glasses (as we pondered in July) might simply have been a good pair of sunnies!

The 'real' onstage action as seen without AR glasses, while colourful and pleasant enough per se, was judged to be somewhat static, and not

especially meaningful. The Grail itself was represented by a dark crystal that also brought bad luck. At one point, Parsifal reaches into a puppet and removes a hard crystal and a heart; this was taken by some to mean that whoever desires beautiful but inanimate objects risks developing a heart of stone and missing out on real life. At the end, Parsifal destroys the crystal; a 'release', so that he and Kundry can look forward to a 'bright future' . . . so the interpretation goes.



Andreas Schager (Parsifal), Elina Garanča (Kundry) (photo: Bayreuther Festspiele/Enrico Nawrath)

On the plus side, the musical and vocal aspects of the performances were very highly praised indeed. Conductor Pablo Heras-Casado mastered the festival theatre's difficult acoustics with aplomb, conducting swiftly but never driving too hard, while also leaving plenty of 'air' around the choir and soloists. Many even considered this to be the best-sung *Parsifal* at Bayreuth over the entire last two decades, with tenor Andreas Schager deploying his powerful voice in the title role with subtlety and depth, and Elina Garanča singing Kundry with considerable feeling and beauty. The Australian bass-baritone, Derek Welton, as Amfortas and the well-known German bass, Georg Zeppenfeld, as Gurnemanz also demonstrated class and finesse, rounding off a most impressive cast.