



WSNZ WELCOMES PETER BASSETT



PETER BASSETT PRESENTATIONS:- CHRISTCHURCH

Friday 3 September 7.30pm

AUCKLAND

Sunday 5 September 7.30pm

NB: A \$10 fee will apply

WELLINGTON

Monday 6 September 7.00 pm

Over the last few years both Heath Lees and Chris Brodrick have given presentations to the Australian Wagner Societies, so it is nice that we can host a return visit by one of their members.

Peter Bassett is a writer, speaker and broadcaster on Opera, particularly the works of Richard Wagner. Many of you will already know of him after attending the pre-*Ring* talks that he gave in Adelaide in 1998 and 2004. As an authority on Wagner, Peter has been engaged by the State Opera of South Australia as Artistic Administrator and Dramaturg for their 2004 production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and the 2009 *Der fliegende Holländer*. Peter was also engaged as a consultant for West Australian Opera's *Tristan und Isolde*.

He contributes to programme books and publications of opera companies and symphony orchestras in Australia and New Zealand and regularly leads opera tours for Opera Australia and Renaissance Tours. The list of countries visited include Germany, Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, China, Denmark, Canada, France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, the Czech

Republic, America and Spain. In April 2011 he will lead a group to Hamburg for *Der Ring des Nibelungen* with an add-on of a concert performance of *Parsifal* in Berlin. For information on forthcoming tours visit www.renaissancetours.com.au

The subject of his presentation to the WSNZ, *The Operas Wagner Almost Wrote*, promises to open up yet another area of our Wagner knowledge.

This richly illustrated talk on Wagner's many unfinished works reveals the great composer as he is rarely seen: the creator of such unusual characters as the theatre prompter who can't stop sneezing, the young man who makes his living dressed as a bear, and the poet who addresses his audience from a hot air balloon. Then there is the visionary composer who planned dramas dealing with the lives of Jesus and the Buddha, and relations between the West and Islam (Wagner was a committed internationalist). Peter's preparations for this talk have formed part of his research for a forthcoming book on both Wagner and Verdi, whose bicentenaries will be celebrated in 2013.

On 12 September, in preparation for showing the full *Meistersinger* opera later this year, baritone Roger Wilson & pianist Terence Dennis will present Dunedin with a programme on Wagner & German tradition.

Early Wagner Rarities: vocal & piano music of the Leipzig & Paris periods, including the *Faust Lieder* and Wagner songs in French will take up the first half.

In the second half Roger Wilson discusses the Rules of the Meistersinger, Hans Sachs and the concept of the Mastersingers Guild in Nuremberg, including sung illustrations from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. To conclude the afternoon Terence Dennis performs the splendid, and rarely heard, Hugo Wolf solo piano *Paraphrase on Die Meistersinger*.

Sunday, 12 September 2.00 pm

Venue: Marama Hall, Uni. of Otago



THE TONY PALMER VISIT 2011 – AN UPDATE

Arrangements for Tony Palmer's New Zealand tour early next year are humming along. Dates and centres are now in place, and the film-maker's itinerary will be:

March 22 & 23 Auckland
March 26 Dunedin
March 27 & 28 Wellington
March 30 & 31 Christchurch.

Palmer will give two presentations, both on the same day in Dunedin, and over two consecutive evenings in the other three centres. In each city the first meeting will centre around his work on Wagner, and Heath Lees will interview him about this. Several clips from the now familiar but newly re-mastered film *Wagner* with Richard Burton/Vanessa Redgrave will be shown, and these will trigger discussion, questions and answers, all of which are bound to be both fascinating and lively.

In the second half of the same meeting, Palmer's new film *The Wagner Family* will be given in its 48-minute version, and questions and comments will be invited afterwards. Palmer has recently returned from a special appearance at the Jerusalem Film Festival where he shared the stage with Gottfried Wagner and fielded the most appreciative yet often searching, questions from a large and highly involved audience, following a showing of the same 48-minute film (excerpted from the full 2-hour version, still to be released).

For our second meeting, it is hoped that Palmer's presentation will attract a number of non-Wagner Society members too, and for this he has chosen as his title *Gangsters, Criminals, Rock'n'Roll and Wagner*. Again, there will be film excerpts from the Tony Palmer films from which clips have recently been shown in all WSNZ centres, plus a few not yet shown here.

As part of the preparation for this visit, a compilation of 'all the best bits' of the Burton/Wagner film has been made and will be shown in all Wagner Society centres, probably at the first (usually February) meeting next year. Don't miss this, as it will ensure we have questions ready and ideas clearly formed, and thus make the most of having the director himself amongst us.

Press and media interviews are also being teed up, and the Wagner Society is certain to attract much presence and publicity from the visit of Tony Palmer, now well on his way to becoming a permanent icon of the film world.

WAGNER'S MASTERSINGER, HITLER'S SIEGFRIED



The life and times of Max Lorenz

Max Lorenz was the leading Wagner tenor of his day. As Siegfried, he was the principal protagonist on the stage of the Bayreuth Festival throughout the years of Hitler's association with the Festival. But his marriage to a Jewish singer and his homosexuality were a thorn in the flesh to many Nazis, and it was only his exceptional qualities as a singer that ensured that whenever the going got tough he was protected by the powers that be: when he was indicted for homosexual actions, Hitler ordered the case to be dropped, while Hermann Göring came to the support of Lorenz and his wife when members of the SS turned up at their house with a warrant for their deportation. The story of Max Lorenz is closely bound up with that of Bayreuth's Villa Wahnfried from the time of the Weimar Republic to the early years of the Federal Republic. No attempt to retrace the singer's steps can avoid taking in the wider picture and seeing this fascinating artist against the background of his age.

On Friday, 8 October, John Pattinson presents an illustrated introduction to an absorbing 54 minute documentary, made for Swiss television in 2008 by Eric Schultz and Claus Wischmann, which features commentaries by such luminaries as Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Waldemar Klemmt, Rene Kollo and Hilde Zadek, among others. The programme examines the heroic ideal and the way in which Wagner's characters were portrayed onstage during this period, while also seeking answers to questions about Max Lorenz's career under the Third Reich and exploring the complications to which he was exposed.

Friday 8 October 7.30pm
Venue: A6, University of Canterbury

HALLÉ GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

As part of the WSNZ sponsorship of Simon O'Neill's *Father & Son* CD we sent a copy of the recording to around 40 sibling Wagner Societies around the World. We have subsequently received a steady stream of thank you letters including a reciprocal gift from the Wagner Society of Manchester: a live recording of a performance of *Götterdämmerung* given by the Hallé Orchestra under Sir Mark Elder. Recorded in May 2009 over two nights, the Prologue and Act 1 were performed on Saturday, followed by the final two acts on Sunday. The soloists included Katarina Dalayman (*Brünnhilde*), Lars Cleveman (*Siegfried*), Attila Jun (*Hagen*) and Andrew Shore (*Alberich*). Andrew Clements wrote in the Guardian "the playing has wonderful refinement and presence, and Elder paces the great musical span and the set pieces with the surest of hands."

The WSNZ copy of this performance will make the rounds of the centres for members to borrow. For those interested in purchasing the recording it is available from Amazon.co.uk.

IN AT NUMBER 3

Everything, these days, seems to be based around polls and tables, so is it any surprise that listeners to BBC Radio 3 (UK Concert programme) were invited to vote for the nation's favourite aria?

The place at the top of the poll was not music by an Italian or a German but a Brit! No! Not Andrew Lloyd Webber but Henry Purcell.

The nation's most popular aria was 'When I am laid in Earth' from *Dido & Aeneas*. Number two was 'Dove Sono' from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and at number three the 'Liebestod' from *Tristan & Isolde*. Following this trio was 'E Lucevan le stelle' (*Tosca*), 'Casta Diva' (*Norma*), 'Song of the Moon' (*Rusulka*) and 'Che faro senza Euridice?' (*Orfeo*).

Looking at this selection tells us something about the British state of mind as all these arias are to do with praying for help, loss or death!

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW A SECRET?

In an article in the San Francisco Chronicle the 20 'something' stone (+120kgs) soprano Jane Eaglen, well known for her high-wire roles such as Brünnhilde, Norma and Turandot has given up the secret of a secure high note – a firmly clenched bum!

At a recent masterclass she advised "Squeeze your bottom! That's the key to high notes. I have a big bottom, and big high notes."

THE VIEW FROM THE STAGE

On the last day of October in Wellington, Chris Brodrick will present the first of his series of talks on the Bayreuth Festival audience. Part one looks at those hardy Wagnerians who made their way to the new Bayreuth Festspielhaus in 1876 for the very first Festival. Among the pilgrims were, contingents from France, Britain, America, Russia and Germany comprising composers, artists, members of society, royalty and even an Emperor. A famous philosopher who happened to be travelling from London to Karlsbad at the time of the 1876 festival found that all the accommodation in Nuremberg was booked up by Wagnerians and was forced to spend the night on a bench at a railway station.

Sunday 31 October 4.00 pm

Venue: *St Andrew's on the Terrace*

LISA GASTEEN

Just under six years ago we were in Adelaide to hear the Australian *Ring* and marvel at the heroic performance given by Queensland, Lisa Gasteen, as Brünnhilde. Her heroism was more than just singing for you will recall that she sprained her ankle prior to the performance of *Götterdämmerung* and sang as if nothing was wrong, despite heavy strapping. Sadly, it would seem that another injury, this time to her neck, has brought her short but distinguished career to an end.

In an interview in the Sydney Morning Herald she described how it happened *"I was having a cup of tea on the back verandah and saw that the tree was full of cumquat. I thought I'm going to make marmalade - which is what you do when you come home, you start nesting," she says. "I got the ladder out, I was in my heels and everything, climbed up the ladder and pinched a nerve."*

The pain and the continuing muscle spasms meant that Gasteen has cancelled her engagements. She is unsure if she will sing again. Even if she can, she will not resume her international career. "I just don't have the drive to do it any more."

She plans to establish a summer school for young opera singers in Australia to allow them to concentrate on their performance and raise standards.

CDs FOR SALE

Der Ring des Nibelungen

Adam, Altmeyer, Jerusalem, Kollo, Minton, Moll, Nimsgern, Norman, Popp, Wenkel.

Conductor Janowski - Staatskapelle Dresden.

16 CDs in pristine condition. Each opera includes a glossy booklet in English, French, Italian, German with the complete lyrics in German and English. Asking price: \$140.00. Please phone Katherine Masters (09) 940 9960 if you are interested.



The giant set is rolled onto the stage

In the last newsletter we reported on the need to strengthen the Metropolitan Opera House stage to take the 45 ton set for their new production of the *Ring*.

In July the New York Times reported that the monster set had arrived from a warehouse outside Montreal. "On Wednesday, it passed a key test when it was rolled from a wing onto centre stage. The trial run was delayed by several hours when an inspecting engineer found that the metal structure underneath the stage needed some touch-up welding."

In addition to the huge set the Met has had to install 32 computers and a new server room to run the technical aspects of the production.

KEEPING UP WITH THE TIMES

While we need to be conscious that not all our members are whizz-kids with computers, we also have to take into account that some would like to pay the WSNZ annual subscription by direct credit over the internet. Prior to April 2011 we will be introducing a system that will allow those who wish to pay by this method to do so.

Another area to look at is the newsletter. While a large number of you probably like to receive a printed copy, there will be others who are happy to receive all the WSNZ news via email. For those of you who wish to receive the newsletter electronically would you please send an email to info@wagnersociety.org.nz with Newsletter in the subject and your name in the message. Copies of the latest newsletter will always be available at meetings if you wish to have a hard copy.

NEW MEMBER

A very Warm Wagnerian Welcome to:-
Christine Goode Christchurch

FAREWELL

While we love to welcome new members to the Society, we also have to sadly farewell those who have died. Over the last three months Christchurch has lost two stalwart members in John Warham and Garth Streat. Both will be deeply missed and our love and thoughts go to Pat and Gloria.

Leb' wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind!

2010 PROGRAMME DETAILS

Auckland

Sunday, 5 September 7.30pm

Venue: *Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*

The Operas Wagner almost wrote -

Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind
NB: A \$10 fee will apply

Sunday, 5 December 7.30pm

Venue: *Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*

Wagner Pot Pourri - A Christmas

celebration: An evening of requests, roundups, selections and surprises

Wellington

Monday 6 September 7.00 pm

Venue: *St Andrew's on the Terrace*

The Operas Wagner almost wrote -

Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind

Sunday 31 October 4.00 pm

Venue: *St Andrew's on the Terrace*

A View from the Stage Pt 1 - Chris

Brodrick looks at those who attended the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876

Christchurch

Friday 3 September 7.30pm

Venue: *Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

The Operas Wagner almost wrote -

Peter Bassett gives a behind the scenes look at Wagner's creative mind

Friday 8 October 7.30pm

Venue: *Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

The Life of Max Lorenz - John

Pattinson will introduce a DVD on the life of the Wagnerian tenor of 1930-40s, Max Lorenz

Sunday 28 November 6.00pm

Venue: *To be confirmed*

Christmas BBQ

Dunedin

Sunday, 12 September 2.00 pm

Venue: *Marama Hall, University of Otago*

Wagner And German Tradition -

Baritone Roger Wilson, with pianist Terence Dennis, brings the historical context to vivid life in a lecture/recital

Sunday, 7 November 1.00 pm

Venue: *Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum*

Die Meistersinger At The Met: Acts 1 & 2

Otto Schenk's production of Wagner's comic opera from the Metropolitan, New York, conducted by James Levine

Sunday, 5 December 1.00 pm

Venue: *Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum*

Die Meistersinger At The Met: Act 3

& our end-of-year Christmas celebrations

FROM ONE EXTREME TO ANOTHER?

While the big budget Los Angeles Ring comes to a close on the West Coast of America a much more low key production is underway in the English countryside.

First Les Holborow presents his review of this year's controversial production.

The Los Angeles *Ring* which ran through three cycles from late May this year was an intriguing prospect. Rumours that George Lucas had declined an invitation to produce it (and made a cost estimate of \$US50 million) leading to the engagement of the German Achim Freyer at a production cost of merely \$32 million encouraged the expectation that it would be different from any previous realization.

So it proved to be. Almost inevitably there were some widely criticized features but overall the four of us from Wellington who attended (the Rothmans and the Holborows) agreed that it had been a most interesting experience, well worth the trip and musically most rewarding.

Staging and costumes at first seemed overblown and even bizarre. But as the operas progressed we found ourselves becoming more accustomed to the language of the production. Not all of it made sense to any one of us, but there were some striking ideas which one hopes might be taken up by others. For example, there were few of the *long quarter hours* of which Rossini complained, principally because the many narrations in which previous events are reviewed were accompanied by fairly simple symbolic re-enactments of the events in question at the back of the stage. This was facilitated by the fact that costumes and staging used a technique of cartoon-like caricature in characterizing protagonists and items such as the ring, the Tarnhelm and the swords (all laser sticks). Dwarfs looked rather like elves with over-sized heads (occasionally removed where a long section had to be sung). Lighting was dramatic and there were some awesome effects such as the disintegration of a suspended spiral ring into fragments, as if its DNA had come asunder. Other ideas, such as the number of figures who intermittently moved slowly across the stage, some identifiable and some not, were more puzzling.

The orchestra played well under the vigorous direction of James Conlon, who undertook the added task of giving an introductory talk commencing one hour before each opera. He frequently over-ran the advertised 45 minutes and would accordingly reassure the restive audience to ignore the bells summoning them

to their seats with the injunction "just stay where you are – they don't actually start without me". There were three Wagner tubas but the orchestra was not otherwise augmented to the prescribed Wagner strength. Given the size of the Dorothy Chandler auditorium, they and the singers did surprisingly well for the most part.

The singing ranged from exceptionally to very good. Placido Domingo showed that he can still do a wonderful Siegmund. Linda Watson (Brünnhilde), John Treleaven (both Siegfrieds, and despite a costume which made him look rather like a village idiot) and Graham Clark (Mime) all lived up to their substantial reputations. A great revelation was the locally-based Ukrainian bass Vitalij Kowaljow whose Wotan was up with the best I have heard. Several others impressively discharged multiple roles: Eric Halfvarson (Fafner, Hunding and Hagen), Michelle DeYoung (Fricka in Rheingold, Sieglinde, Second Norn and Waltraute), Jill Grove (Erda and 1st Norn). Arnold Bezuyen's Loge and Richard Paul Fink's Alberich also stood out.

Unfortunately attempts to find sponsorship for a commercial video apparently did not succeed and bookings fell short of budget, so the chances of seeing the whole cycle again may well depend on some other house acquiring rights to the production. One can only hope that this does occur.



The Hollywood Hills to the Cotswolds

Most of us will have never heard of Longborough let alone know where it is! To find it get a map of Britain, draw a line from Oxford to Stratford-Upon-Avon to Worcester to Gloucester and back to Oxford. In the middle of your almost square box you'll find Longborough.

This small village in the Cotswold Hills consists of around 250 houses, a school, a 12th century church, a village shop, two pubs and an opera house! Yes, in the words of Tom Service in the Guardian "a perfectly proportioned 480-seat opera



Above: The LA *Ring*. **Below:** Lizzie & Martin Graham outside their opera house

house, complete with the Royal Opera House's old red-velvet seats, thrown away after Covent Garden's refurbishment."

The opera house and the associated Longborough Festival are the brain-child of property developer Martin Graham and wife Lizzie. With successful productions of *Così*, *Figaro*, *Bohème*, *Giovanni*, *Traviata*, *Flute* and *Carmen* under the operatic belt, Longborough has embarked on 'the biggie' – Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* albeit with a reduced orchestra.

They started three years ago with *Das Rheingold* and this season it was the turn of *Die Walküre*. *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* will be performed over the next two years, and the complete cycle is set for 2013. To achieve this goal the Graham's will need to raise a million pounds. Somehow this all seems quite achievable as, according to the Guardian, some of the enormous technical requirements needed to stage the *Ring* were resolved with refreshing simplicity.

"Discovering the pit wasn't big enough to accommodate the 65-strong orchestra, Martin's solution was simple. "We got a digger in and had a go underneath the theatre. It was a pretty big job." The result is an orchestra pit that's like a smaller version of Wagner's in Bayreuth, descending yards underneath the stage to create the ideal sonic balance between the singers and the orchestra.

Reviews for this season's *Die Walküre* have been generally favourable. In the Times Richard Morrison wrote "In a small theatre the musical impact is often terrific, sometimes terrifying. And with minimal props and scenery...Alan Privett's staging tells the story vividly and resourcefully."

Planning on attending the 2013 *Ring*? Be in early as the beds at *The Coach & Horses* are bound to be in great demand!