



wagner news

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Cover: Rhonda Browne, Winner of the Wagner Society 2013 Bayreuth Bursary Competition. See pages 36 to 39.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

“The theatre of active engagement”

The BBC Radio 3 transmission of the 2012 *Ring* from the Royal Opera House Covent Garden over ten evenings (see: page 46) is an option for seeing in the New Year 2013 which is available to all. The 2013 celebrations to commemorate the bicentenary of Richard Wagner's birth provide an appropriate occasion to remind ourselves of what it is that distinguishes his work from that of other composers

Interviewed by Gary Kahn for his splendid book which documents Covent Garden's latest *Ring* production, Director Keith Warner speaks of the resonances which Wagner has set up with your own life experiences and which deepen and reach further inside you the longer you live with them: “What's remarkable, though, is that he is not just voicing these shared experiences; he is always trying to set them in a wider context, to analyse them, to lead you to understand these issues within you in the larger, archetypal realm. This is the theatre of active engagement.”

Keith Warner describes Wagner's belief that theatre could have value to renew a whole society as “truly revolutionary”. He continues: “We, the witnesses of music drama, an act of creation, are invited to leave the theatre to think and to debate what we have seen. It is the artwork that may hold the key to the future and the arts that may hold the key to mankind's ongoing redemption in a world without gods.”

On the morning of Covent Garden's second cycle *Götterdämmerung* Guardian readers discovered that the subject of their newspaper's “In Praise Of...” feature on the Editorial page was Brünnhilde. She was described as: “a woman of steel but also of great subtlety, courage, intelligence and, above all, integrity. She is the moral core of the whole work, a woman whose unflinching truthfulness and refusal to trade love for power drives the plot of *The Ring* to its seemingly catastrophic conclusion, but in the imitation of whom a better world might emerge.”

AN EVENING WITH RACHEL NICHOLLS

Katharine Chasey Turton



Photo: Katharine Chasey Turton

A large audience assembled at Queen's Gate Terrace on 17th October to hear what proved to be a wonderful recital by Rachel Nicholls, standing in at short notice for Simon O'Neill who had cancelled for health reasons.

Rachel started the evening with Ellen Orford's *Embroidery in Childhood* aria from Act III of Britten's *Peter Grimes*. Neither Grimes nor his latest apprentice has been seen for a few days and they are assumed to be away fishing. Ellen tells Balstrode that the jersey she embroidered for the boy has been found washed up on the beach. Grimes' boat is back and Ellen tells Balstrode of her suspicions. Rachel conveyed the meditative and restrained quality of the aria with touching tenderness, sympathy and beauty.

Fiordiligi's aria '*Come Scoglio*' from Act I of *Così fan Tutte*. is a parody of *opera seria*, expressing ironic discrepancy between action and emotional response. Fiordiligi believes that she is experiencing the emotions of her character which are heroic in the extreme. She will be faithful until death. Mozart composed a splendid bravura showpiece and Rachel successfully met the challenges of huge vocal leaps from the top to the bottom of tessitura and the demanding coloratura.

Wagner composed the five Wesendonck Lieder in 1857-8 to poems written by Mathilde Wesendonck. The songs lie comfortably in the middle of the voice. Essentially lyrical, they abound in legato phrase-marks; all is for the purest singing, nothing for declamation. Richard Black provided wonderful support to Rachel and encouraged the intimate style of singing intended by the composer.

'*Der Engel*', received a pure evenness of line, whilst for '*Im Treibhaus*', (using music developed extensively for the Act III of *Tristan*) and '*Traume*' (a study for the love duet in Act II) Rachel provided the necessary roundness, gentleness of tone and tender intimacy of expression which Wagner called for. In contrast '*Stehe Still*' and '*Schmerzen*' were given the necessary ring and heroic qualities associated with a true Brünnhilde.

Following a conversation with Michael Bousfield Rachel sang the Immolation scene from *Götterdämmerung*. This was a reminder of her performances at Longborough this summer. Her voice sounded brilliant and marvellously assured with no hint of wobble and no lapse from lyrical standards: heroic yet human and moving. Even in recital Rachel demonstrated her fine acting skills and stage presence.

Praise must also be paid to Richard Black who so sensitively accompanied the pieces. It was no mean feat to produce the sound usually provided by a hundred-plus orchestra!



Michael Bousfield, Rachel Nicholls and Richard Black

Photo: Katharine Chasey Turton

VALKYRIES IN SILK STREET

Die Walküre Act III, The Rehearsal Orchestra, Guildhall School, 21st October 2012

Katie Barnes

Artists from the Mastersingers Company joined the Rehearsal Orchestra in the Guildhall School of Music and Drama's impressive concert hall, an ugly piece of architecture with a beautiful, resonant acoustic and comfortable tiered seating for over 100. This was the second time that they had tackled *Die Walküre* Act III (the first was in 2004, with a cast which included Elaine McKrill and Amanda Echalaz), and once again they surpassed themselves. I am always astonished by the dedication of these largely amateur players, who come together for a single weekend every year to perform one act of a Wagner opera, and the high standard which they achieve together in such a short space of time. And, as ever, it was such a privilege to be allowed to witness the rehearsal process.



Photo: Paul Coleman

Hearing the music taken to pieces in this way makes one listen more closely to the finished result and appreciate the process that created it. David Syrus was an inspiration to everyone taking part, not only conducting superbly but ceaseless in his quest to improve and refine the performance. Under his guidance, the players learned to “patter” the music during the Valkyries' exchanges, lessening the strain on the singers, and he increased the sense of pace in the Ride, where one could really hear the sound of galloping hooves. He stressed the urgency of the strings in *O hehrstes Wunder* and the syncopation in *Wo ist Brünnhild?* The strings shone in the Ride and *Hier bin ich, Vater*, and the solo before *War es so schmählich* was exquisite.

The introduction to the Farewell was huge and majestic, with a lovely ebb and flow during Wotan's first solo, gentle, rocking strings underpinning *dieser Augen strahlendes Paar*, and the Magic Fire music was outstanding. The harps flashed, the strings sparkled, the glockenspiel danced, and the woodwinds were beautifully light and airy. It was more magical than any special visual effect could hope to be.

One of the greatest virtues of these occasions is the unparalleled opportunity that they offer to young Wagner singers to work with an orchestra. This year the quality of the cast was even more outstanding than usual, starting with the Valkyries: a crack team who created a most glorious sound when they sang together and they included a number of exceptional soloists. Outstanding were Mariya Krywaniuk's Gerhilde, whose voice was smaller than those of some of her colleagues but perfectly formed and bang on every note, Jacqueline Varsey's needle-accurate Siegrune, and, above all, Cara McHardy's thrilling Helmwig, surely a Brünnhilde in the making. Lee Bisset's Sieglinde, continuing from her performance in Act II with the Rehearsal Orchestra in 2010, was once again emotionally powerful, beginning *Nicht sehre dich Sorge um mich* with her voice slate-grey with despair, spitting out “*von dir!*” in bitter fury at Brünnhilde's interference and building to

a great climax of despair. The great cry of “*Rette die Mutter!*” rang out like any Valkyrie call, and in *O hehrstes Wunder* she rode the orchestra like a swelling wave.

I had of course read much about Rachel Nicholls' burgeoning reputation, but this was my first opportunity to hear her in person. On her first entrance she managed to sing just two words, “*Schützt mich*” before Syrus stopped the orchestra, but that was enough to bowl me over. I wanted to jump up and down with excitement at having heard such a voice. Her Valkyrie colleagues were good, but mortal. This is a goddess. My sense of discovery, of the privilege of hearing that voice, was indescribable. It isn't just that she sounds simply incredible, but that, even in a rehearsal for a concert performance, she was so completely inside the character that she riveted her audience.



Photo: Daryl Lucas

More than any other Brünnhilde I have seen, she conveyed how her compassion for Sieglinde warred with her utter terror at Wotan's approach and her dread of having to face the consequences of her defiance, but when he cast her out she made it clear that the loss of her father, and the breaking of the trust between them, hurt her far more than the loss of her Valkyrie-hood. In her great pleas to Wotan, she ranged from the utterly exquisite tone of “*dass mein Verbrechen so schmachlich du bestrafst*” to the lovely depth of “*so tief mir Erniedrigung schaffst*”. “*Deinen Befehl führte ich aus*” was genuinely defiant, and “*Weil für dich im Auge*” was most beautifully and passionately sung, culminating a glorious, swelling crescendo with “*Der diese Liebe mir ins Herz gehaucht*”. I sat there with a huge grin across my face and drank in every moment.



Photo: Daryl Lucas

When James Rutherford sang Wotan in Act II with the Rehearsal Orchestra two years ago, I was not absolutely convinced that this would be his part. It did not sound so comfortable a fit to his voice as Sachs or the Dutchman. But from his first “*Steh! Brünnhild!*” it was clear that the music is now completely in his voice. The fullness and beauty of his tone at “*nicht führst du mehr Sieger in meinen Saal*” and “*In festen Schlaf*” was truly amazing, and his sheer vocal amplitude in “*in den Trümmern der eignen Welt*” filled the hall. He too was well inside his

character and he and Nicholls created a relationship between the angry god and his defiant daughter which I found far stronger and more touching than that depicted in the recent cycles at the Royal Opera House. Their exchanges became so intimate and personal that I felt as though I were eavesdropping. His Farewell was at first huge and majestic, then beautifully lyrical and tender as the strings gently rocked Brünnhilde to sleep.

I keep saying this every time, but this was the Mastersingers and the Rehearsal Orchestra's finest day yet. At the Royal Opera House I saw the Wotan and Brünnhilde of the present. At the Barbican I saw the Wotan and Brünnhilde of the near future. Bring it on!



TRAVEL FOR THE ARTS

is delighted to present tours to celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Wagner in 2013

LAST FEW PLACES ON

The Ring in Longborough

6 – 13 July 2013

Set in the beautiful Cotswolds countryside, Longborough Festival Opera is the first privately owned opera house in the UK to be mounting a production of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, bringing together productions from their last few seasons. Our tour is based in the famously picturesque village of Broadway and includes highlights such as Blenheim Palace and a visit to Stratford-upon-Avon. We also include a complementary programme of events organised by The Mastersingers, which will run on the days in between the performances and feature singers from Longborough Festival Opera as well as outside contributors.

Members of the Wagner Society will receive a 5% discount off the tour price – please mention 'Wagner Society' and your membership number when booking.

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Evelyn Krahe as Erda in *Das Rheingold* at Longborough Festival Opera 2007

Stephen Wright

Wagner

200

LONDON CELEBRATES
THE BICENTENARY
OF RICHARD WAGNER

Mark Eynon and Barry Millington reveal their programme for Wagner 200

It was in November 2009 that we first began to wonder how the Wagner bicentenary would be celebrated and whether there was some contribution we could make. Three years later we are on the verge of announcing our programme of events which includes partnerships with all the leading players: The Royal Opera, English National Opera, South Bank Centre, Barbican, Kings Place and British Library, in an eight-month-long festival of opera, concerts, film, lectures, symposia, masterclasses and exhibitions.

We begin, naturally, on 22nd May with a Wagner 200th Birthday Concert at the Royal Festival Hall with the Philharmonia Orchestra and a stellar cast led by Susan Bullock, James Rutherford and Gisele Allen conducted by Andrew Davis in Act III of *Die Walküre*, together with the Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde* and the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*. An afternoon of pop-up Wagner-related activity on the Festival Hall terrace that day: Valkyries on bicycles, balcony fanfares, an arrangement of the Ring for 16 horns, is intended to impress its significance on unsuspecting members of the public.

At Kings Place at the end of June we are promoting a week of Wagner performance, including a lieder recital by Janice Watson and Malcolm Martineau (26th June) and a piano recital by Llyr Williams (27th June), with a two-day symposium at the weekend (29th and 30th June) at which Wagner authorities from all over the world will be gathering to discuss issues arising from singing, conducting and staging Wagner.

From the start we were keen to mount a series of screenings of Wagner operas free of charge to the public, who would be able to come and go at will to see what all the fuss was about and possibly to have an experience that would change their lives. We plan to take over Hall 2 at Kings Place for a week of such screenings in collaboration with Opus Arte, which we hope will include Stefan Herheim's Bayreuth production of *Parsifal*, widely acclaimed as one of the finest Wagner productions ever created.

Other notable events include a season of Wagner films in the new cinema at the Barbican, masterclasses at Covent Garden with Gwyneth Jones and John Tomlinson, a celebrity interview with Daniel Barenboim, a symposium on Wagner and the Written Word at the British Library (8th June), two symposia on aspects of Wagner and the Jews at the London Jewish Cultural Centre (October and November), a reading of the *Ring* in English and lectures organised by the Wagner Society (which is generously supporting Wagner 200).

There are still opportunities for individual or corporate support of Wagner 200.

Please contact us via info@wagner200.co.uk and take a look at the website:
www.wagner200.co.uk for further programme announcements.

RINGING THE CHANGES

Der Ring des Nibelungen: Royal Opera House, Covent Garden Cycles 1 (24th, 26th, 29th Sept + 1st Oct) and 4 (26th, 28th, 31st Oct + 2nd Nov) 2012

Katie Barnes

Photography: Clive Barda for the Royal Opera House

Keith Warner's much-discussed production, which has had the rare distinction of having a substantial book written about it (*The Power of the Ring* by Gary Kahn – see David Edwards' review in *Wagner News* No. 207), returned to the Royal Opera House with a largely new cast. Kahn's book was reissued in paperback for the occasion, and the splendid programme for these cycles could be regarded as a supplement to it.

Seeing it again after five years I found that the production still looked handsome, although as before viewers needed to keep their wits about them to be able to pick up all of the visual references between operas. Given that Warner had indicated in 2007 that he wanted to make changes in 2012, I was surprised that comparatively few amendments had been made to the physical production. In *Das Rheingold*, Father Rhine, who in 2007 was seen briefly during the prelude with a bloodstain on his breast before disappearing, now remained onstage for far longer to watch his daughters as they sang and played. This suggested that he was still alive during the action of the opera, which made it surprising that he played no subsequent role in the proceedings. The Valkyries' scene was substantially restaged, allowing them to use the stage more freely, and I liked the idea of them sitting in a ring and relaxing, passing a drinking horn around while waiting for Brünnhilde to join them. In *Siegfried*, the dragon had been much improved. As before, only the head was visible, but it was much more mobile than before, moving about, darting back and forward in a way which made the fight much more convincing. Lighting changes and better technology aided its removal before Siegfried found Fafner's headless body, whereas in 2007 they were onstage at the same time. In *Götterdämmerung* Act III the Funeral March was beautifully restaged, with Siegfried dying on the forestage and the shadowy figure of the Wanderer glimpsed in the darkness, holding out his arms to his dead grandson before collapsing in despair, a lovely moment which reminded me of Kupfer's unforgettable treatment of this scene. The final scene was also reorganised, improving traffic flows when movement was confined to the narrow walkways surrounding the stage, and keeping more of the non-essential action at the rear.

I was disappointed that the opportunity had not been taken to improve some of the weaker points of the production, including the hopelessly inept concealment of Freia (why was she apparently changed into Erda by the Tarnhelm? Why did Froh conceal a suitcase full of gold which might have concealed Freia without any need for the Ring or Tarnhelm? Why did Loge subsequently encourage Fafner to kill Fasolt?); the concealment of Brünnhilde behind a slab while Siegfried kissed her awake – although at least he was not required to go behind the slab so often, and the film projected onto it as he kissed her was far clearer than before – and the messy, confusing ending to *Götterdämmerung* Act I, which brought both Siegfried and Gunther onstage, with him standing at the side of the stage wearing the Tarnhelm (which muffled his voice badly) leaving it unclear as to which of them actually conquered Brünnhilde.

What had changed throughout was the beautifully detailed and sensitive *Personenregie*, which had been fine-tuned to every nuance of the substantially new cast,

two thirds of whom were new to the production, and a number of whom were new to their roles and/or to the house. Although Warner rather rashly claimed at the *Ring* Insight event on 22nd September that this "had to be the finest singing/acting cast that any director ever had", for me a number of new members of the cast did not match up to their predecessors. This may in at least some cases have been because the first cycle overall had a slightly tentative air, due to a combination of under-rehearsal (unlike the 2007 cycles, it did not have the benefit of open dress rehearsals to fine-tune the production before it went before the public), the malevolence of certain malfunctioning special effects, and first night nerves. It was notable that the nine principals who had been associated with the production in one or more of its previous incarnations were generally those who showed the greatest assurance and gave the most polished performances. Previous experience of the production and its highly dangerous set was clearly a huge advantage. The fourth cycle was considerably more confident and more technically assured.

Naturally attention focused upon Bryn Terfel in his first London cycles. Except for the unforgettable *Die Walküre* Prom, I did not find his performances in 2004 and 2005 entirely satisfactory. Much has improved since. In the interim he has played complete cycles at the Met, and the experience has clearly given him the confidence which I found lacking in his previous London appearances as Wotan. He sang with at times almost unbearable magnificence, and the high phrases flashed out with unbelievable glory, although I missed the sumptuousness which a deeper voice than his can bring to the Wanderer. His *piano* moments were the most thrilling of all: the final "*das Ende!*" was soft yet bloodcurdling. He had the authority, matching his impressive physical presence, to be ruler of the Gods. Yet I found his portrayal unsatisfying because it was so externalised. For much of the time, he seemed so detached from the action that I found it impossible to feel any involvement with the character: I was too aware of Terfel, standing on the outside and watching himself; he was *observing* Wotan rather than *being* Wotan. I had the impression of being somewhere in the same city as the great singer, and nowhere near Wotan at all. The god's power and the failure of his marriage isolated him in loneliness. The most effective moments came in his sorrow for his lost Wälzung children when he reached out unseen to the delirious Sieglinde and when he raised his arms in mourning over the dead Siegmund, his head flung back, his mouth open in a wordless scream.

By contrast, in the first cycle Wotan's all-important relationship with Brünnhilde registered so little that Terfel merely seemed for much of the time to be sharing a stage with her, and in Act III of *Die Walküre* his Wotan came across as a selfish, vindictive, petty man who could not bear for someone else to be right, not as a towering, tremendous god brought down by his fatal weakness. The Farewell, although superbly sung, went for little because he could not persuade me that his daughter was the most precious thing in life to him and that losing her would break his heart. In the fourth cycle, he 'opened out' more and their scenes together improved immeasurably as a result.

Likewise, in the first cycle his Wanderer was initially too detached, looking down amusedly from his great height at the strivings of the little mortals below him. But in Act III, Terfel was suddenly, inexplicably transformed. That figure spinning helplessly on a tilting platform, flinging away the last of his possessions, invoking Erda with wildest passion and power, at last found the heart of the role and shared it with us. The glory of it shone through the passionate colloquy with Erda, his exultant renunciation which seemed to illuminate the theatre like a sunrise and his love and vulnerability in his encounter with Siegfried. His final appearance, sagging despairingly before he vanished forever, was tear-jerking. If only he had played the whole of the role like this, then this

would truly have been a Wotan for the ages. In the fourth cycle he gave far more to the first two acts, bringing cynical humour to the “question and answer” session with Mime and sudden, illuminating flashes of pain to his exchanges with Alberich (“*eines Knaben*” and “*Wen ich liebe*” both pierced his emotional armour), but, perhaps because of this, Act III did not have quite the same overwhelming impact.



Perhaps it was significant that Wotan's only relationship with another character which registered strongly was with Sarah Connolly's Fricka. Connolly gave notice of her Wagnerian credentials with a sumptuous Brangäne at the Proms two years ago, and with her debut performances in the role she made Fricka her own with glorious, rich mezzo sound, lovely attention to the words (as one would expect from such an accomplished recitalist), and beautiful vocal line. She made the usually haughty and forbidding goddess a loving, vulnerable woman whose desperate attempts to keep her husband made her suffocatingly needy, clingy and possessive. In *Das Rheingold* Wotan clearly loved her very much, in his fashion. The intensity of their kiss at "*Gewänne mein Gatte sich wohl das Gold?*" said volumes about their physical relationship, but he was the last man (or god) to allow himself to be dominated by this demanding woman, and every time she reached out to him and tried to own him Wotan pulled away.

In *Die Walküre*, predictably, their relationship had turned toxic. He tried to use the remains of her love for him to enforce his argument – the moment when he tenderly took her hands in his and laid his forehead against hers was heart-stopping, but when she overruled him, the last remnants of his love turned to a hatred, all the stronger and more bitter for having loved her once. When he breathed the word "*Eid!*" onto her outstretched hand one expected Fricka's hand to shrivel or burst into flames. Connolly sang wonderfully and showed how Wotan's cruelty had all but destroyed Fricka's love and turned a tender, vulnerable woman into a bitter shrew. The pain was tangible, but when Fricka knew that she had won, her pleasure was almost sexual. Connolly was one of the greatest success stories of this *Ring*.

When the casting was first announced I was surprised to learn that Wolfgang Koch (who sang Sachs here earlier this year) was to sing Alberich, and more so that he is to be Bayreuth's next Wotan. On this evidence Alberich appears to be more his métier than his interesting but low-key Sachs, and it is hard for me to imagine him as Wotan. He generated massive power; the curse was terrifying and his self-blinding was so intensely played that it was almost impossible to watch. He sang splendidly and his incisive German was a huge asset. In contrast with the sympathetic view given to the character by his predecessor in 2007 this was a conventionally violent and brutal Alberich who struck Wellgunde across the face and raped Woglinde before stealing the gold. Koch gave us the horror of the character but not the pity. The encounter with Wotan in *Siegfried* was powerfully played by both, but because they did not convey the same close connection between the characters as their 2007 predecessors it felt more like two old feuding gangsters meeting in the midst of a turf war than the cathartic, cosmic experience it was before.

In the first-cycle *Siegfried* Kaspar Holten charmingly explained to the audience that Wolfgang Koch had lost his voice and that, because the set was dangerous, Jochen

Schmeckenbecher would sing at the side of the stage while Koch acted the role. Mercifully, to the best of my knowledge this was the only indisposition in the course of the four cycles, but I had to wonder why, yet again, the Royal Opera House was incapable of providing a cover who could take the role onstage. Schmeckenbecher sang very well, but his smooth, ringing, youthful baritone sounded so very unlike Koch's voice and appearance that the effect was somewhat disconcerting.



Hitherto, London opera houses' casting of Brünnhilde had inexplicably excluded Susan Bullock, apart from one emergency replacement performance in 2007 which earned her the role in these four cycles. She created a character who was as childlike and heedless as the Rhinedaughters (as she looks so young, it came across to the audience as youthful heedlessness rather than the mature delinquency of her predecessor) but who, unlike them, matured when calamity struck. She started badly in the first cycle, where she had to overcome a horrendous mishap on her first entrance in *Die Walküre* which must have affected her confidence. The *Todesverkündigung* was masterly as she entered slowly and uncertainly in her full battle panoply, bowed down by grief, stopping again and again to nerve herself to confront Siegmund. She was deeply touching in *Siegfried*, where I have rarely seen the shifts in the lovers' emotions explored so minutely and with such understanding.

In *Götterdämmerung* she hurled herself at the incredibly taxing material in Act II and personified the betrayed, enraged, vulnerable Valkyrie. Her cries of anguish, pain and rage were searing in their intensity. In the Immolation she came into her own: regal, womanly, glorious, ruling the end of the cycle as she should. The moment when she kissed the fallen statue of Wotan on the brow and drew a fold of drapery over its face while she softly sang “*Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott*” was heart-wrenching, as though the erring, doomed god was a child to whom she was singing a lullaby.

There was much interest in the house debut of Stefan Vinke as Siegfried. Accounts of his appearance in *Das Lied von der Erde* in London last year had not been encouraging so I feared the worst, and was pleasantly surprised to find that he was far better than report had suggested. At first the voice sounded slightly small and tight, probably due to nerves. Even when it opened out it was colourless, and his high notes were not things of beauty. But, unlike a number of singers nowadays who attempt this impossible role, he has all the notes, and vocally he seemed absolutely fearless. Initially the character was a bullet-headed, charmless thug, and I deeply regretted the loss of the close, grudgingly affectionate, Odd Couple-relationship between Siegfried and Mime, which was one of the glories of the 2007 performances. But the “Forest Murmurs”



aria was beautifully phrased and paced, revealing what a musical singer he is, and he developed the character beautifully, making Siegfried's compassion for the dying Fafner very moving, fetching the disembodied head a drink and stroking its bloody brow, and his shock and horror at having to kill Mime was also very movingly conveyed. The character developed further as the erstwhile thug became touchingly chivalrous in his wooing of his strange goddess-bride, even preparing to pack up and leave at her request during "*Ewig war ich*". He showed so well how all Siegfried's experiences, not just his wooing of Brünnhilde, matured him into a worthy mate for her.

He further warmed to his task in *Götterdämmerung*, bringing light, shade, charm and humour to the character, especially in his dealings with the Rhinedaughters, where his business with the dead raven which he found in the boat, and with the fish which they threw to him, suggested that he could have a second career in comedy. Once he had relaxed enough to use it, he also turned out to have a most engaging smile. He was utterly fearless in the fiendish vocal writing in the second and third acts, where he was very touching in his uncomprehending bewilderment and anger at Brünnhilde's accusations. His spirited spear oath nearly set the theatre on fire and the top C on his exultant "*Hoihe!*" to the vassals, which has been the downfall of many a heldentenor, seemed to go on forever. He brought great pathos to the death scene in which Siegfried became an innocent once more: killed without quite understanding why.



The late, lost and loved Philip Langridge set a benchmark for Loge with his irresistible performances between 2004 and 2007. Stig Anderson, a well-remembered Siegfried for the Royal Opera at the Royal Albert Hall in 1997, sang the role beautifully but without much personality, and the production's conception of the character, tailored for the quicksilver Langridge, did not suit a chunky heldentenor. He could not convey the character's mercurial nature or his mischief, and his portrayal of Loge as a down-at-heel, greasily confidential butler was no substitute.

Das Rheingold is usually Wotan's, Loge's or Alberich's night. With none of the leading trio totally satisfactory, it became Fricka's and Fasolt's night. As he has done every time I have seen him sing the role, Iain Paterson broke every heart in the house with his gentle, loving, passionate Fasolt. His voice is higher than one usually expects in the role but it fitted the music well. "*Ein Weib zu gewinnen*" was the touching moment it should be, benefiting from the Mozartian grace with which he sang Don Giovanni at the Coliseum at the same time as the *Ring* cycles, surely a unique double. This Fasolt appeared to have taken advice from Paterson's operatic *alter ego* in his wooing of Freia – the moment when he sexily tipped his flat cap forward to gain her attention was enchanting, and she needed little encouragement. Their courtship, shy on his side and eager on hers, was very touchingly portrayed. Instead of being dragged away by the giants it was she who dragged Fasolt away by the arm, and on their return in Scene 4 she nestled into his side as they kissed tenderly. They had evidently thought up the idea of covering her with the gold to prevent her being handed back to the gods. Fasolt's devastation on losing her was only exceeded by her horror at seeing her lover's brutal murder. Making her house debut as Freia, Ann Petersen sang with greater strength than one normally associates with this role. An Isolde singing Freia is truly luxurious casting.

Eric Halfvarson, a former Hunding in this production, was a great contrast to his onstage brother as a surprisingly engaging Fafner who had a habit of scratching his conical

head when puzzled, and who was as downtrodden by Fricka as he in turn downtrod Fasolt. His voice was as big and black as a cellar. On his return in *Siegfried*, he sang Fafner's dying words with wondrous beauty and dignity. Andrew Rees gave the usually lyric Froh heldentenor credentials, but his voice sounded a little forced in this large house. Maria Radner's Erda was another role which had been rethought, not the wild hag her predecessor made of the role last time, but a glamorous goddess, agelessly beautiful and enticing, with a wonderful deep contralto. The Rhinedaughters were a vocally and dramatically outstanding trio, sensitively directed. These girls really were children, just as Loge describes them, with all the heedlessness and cruelty of childhood. They even marched around the globe containing the gold like a trio of little toy soldiers. Alberich's mistake was to treat them as adults, and they responded to him with playground spite, a childish reaction which he took as an adult one and responded accordingly.



Act I of *Die Walküre* engaged with the audience in a way that, for me, *Das Rheingold* did not. The three singers took the theatre apart and the orchestra seethed like a volcano. There was a tension between the trio that I have rarely seen equalled, at least in part because in Sir John Tomlinson we had the strongest and most magnificent Hunding I have ever witnessed. That huge, menacing snow-haired figure, every movement full of purpose, as world-shaking in his intensity as any god, absolutely nailed the

audience, and he made the role seem larger than it is. He sounded amazing, every note inky black and full of menace. His bedtime ritual in which he lit a candle, pricked his finger, smeared his blood on the blade of his axe, and knelt before the candle, holding the axe on high, became something awful and primal, dating back to deities far older than Wotan. The tension was heightened when he faltered and nearly fell just before completing the ritual, staggered to the steps, sat down there, and went to sleep. There was an awful sense of dread that he might stay there all through the love scene, before he managed to awaken enough to stagger into the bedroom. In Act II, one rarely cares about Wotan's dispatching of Hunding, but Tomlinson riveted the audience as he heard Wotan's voice and slowly responded, reacting with astonishment as he recognised his mysterious wedding guest, then with respect and, gradually, fear, before his sudden, brutal murder.



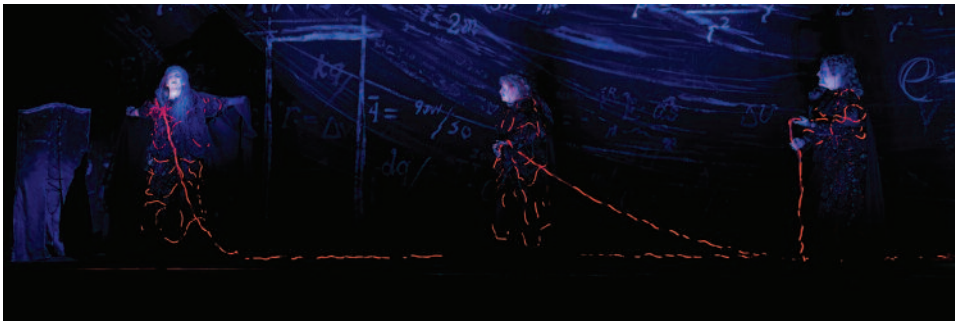
As Siegmund, Simon O'Neill was right back on form after his disappointing Stolzing last winter. The voice sounded wonderfully free again, making the music sound almost insolently easy. I only wish that his voice had a greater variety of vocal colour, as it sounds beautifully bright but monochrome. Dramatically he was superb, wonderfully strong and defiant yet doom-laden, and he and Eva-Maria Westbroek forged a bond so intense that one could look at them and swear that they were identical twins even though they look nothing like each other. She was a demi-goddess who had retained her strength and defiance throughout everything she had suffered and who blazed like Isolde's torch at the realisation that she had found her long lost brother. But no mortal could sustain such ecstasy for long

and it was no surprise to find in Act II that she was burned-out and terrified, only her love still sustaining her. Her singing was simply astonishing and it was no surprise to me to learn that she will sing Isolde in 2015. In Act III she had changed her interpretation so that, where in the 2007 cycles Sieglinde was exhausted and on the point of collapse, now it was she who found a Valkyrie-like strength of her own as she towered over Brünnhilde, gravely intoning "*Nicht sehre dich Sorge um mich.*" "*O hehrstes Wunder*" was the celestial, amazing, overwhelming moment it should be, and her radiance at the knowledge of her impending motherhood was one of the most potent images in the entire cycle.

With one exception (Sarah Castle's scary Siegrune) the Valkyries were all new to the production. They made a fine team, with outstanding contributions from Alwyn Mellor's trumpet-like Gerhilde, Elisabeth Meister's ringing Helmwige and Karen Cargill's rich Waltraute. Together, the eight created a single, amazing sound. I liked the way that "*O hehrstes Wunder*" had an ecstatic effect upon them, and they sank to their knees in adoration, some holding out their arms to Sieglinde and Brünnhilde. For a few moments, this rough, tough band of warrior maidens were touched by something higher and nobler than they had ever experienced.

In *Siegfried* Gerhard Siegel's unforgettable Mime, who deserves a medal for long service to this production, was the only returnee from previous performances. Vinke worked more in a vacuum than his predecessor, but fortunately Siegel, as gloriously shameless as ever, did not allow that to stop him stealing the show, especially when cooking up the lethal broth, becoming tangled with his sleeping bag, and battling with Siegfried over ownership of the flask containing the fatal brew. As before, his desperately moving account of Sieglinde's death brought tears to my eyes. Unfortunately the major weakness in the production of this opera, the rat head which Mime wore whenever Siegfried learned he was lying, remained unchanged. Siegel played the scene for all he was worth, which was a lot, but it would have been so much more effective if we could have seen that expressive little face all the time. Sophie Bevan brought the grace of a ballet dancer to the Woodbird, singing with bell-like clarity, and she twirled fearlessly in her somersault harness.

In a new touch to the production, before *Götterdämmerung* began Erda lay dead in her armchair on the forestage. It revolved to hide her from view when the opera began. The Norns' scene was reworked, allowing them to move about more freely than before and they continually glanced cautiously towards the chair. All three were outstanding: Maria Radner in sumptuous voice, an unusually febrile First Norn; Karen Cargill an urgent harbinger of doom; Elisabeth Meister, high, fierce and rebellious. It was the Third Norn who several times threatened the stability of the rope, but the Second Norn who eventually snapped it.





Tomlinson's Hagen, one of his greatest roles, ruled the opera. The power he generated was unbelievable, and although his voice showed the occasional sign of wear its depth and intensity remain incredible. His portrayal of the half-Nibelung living the events he was bred for, his natural grimness alternating with wild ecstasy, was a thing of wonder, and the look on his face as he greeted Siegfried, face to face with his destiny for the first time, was simply indescribable. The moment when he poured himself, serpent-like, over the top of the sofa and subsided onto it full-length to sing the Watch was unbelievably sexy, and the high spirits with which he mixed the *blutsbrüderschaft* cocktail were a joy. His playing of the encounter with Alberich was a masterpiece, showing so clearly how Hagen was utterly dominated by the inescapable nightmare of his father, personifying the horror that the audience felt and shared, making Hagen briefly a person to be pitied as well as feared, another victim of the Ring.

There was a wonderful sense of cleansing in the lovely dawn music, of Hagen's awakening from the nightmare and finding himself free, his own man at last, tumbling into dizzy high spirits as he approached his long-awaited triumph. The summoning of and address to the vassals was wondrously powerful, and he dominated the stage throughout Act II even when sitting inconspicuously in a corner, effortlessly manipulating events, watching for every opportunity, his eyes gleaming as his plan moved forward stage by stage. The hugely augmented chorus of vassals thundered thrillingly. In an amusing moment of life catching up with art, their homage to Froh, unchanged since 2007, looked uncannily like a mass tribute to Usain Bolt.



The Gunther and Gutrune were both disappointing. Rachel Willis-Sorensen looked lovely and sang prettily, but I found her voice unpleasantly glassy and she made little of the character. I wished that Petersen could have doubled the role with Freia. Peter Coleman-Wright, formerly excellent as both Donner and Gunther in 2007, was in poor voice in both roles. This mattered more for Donner, where opportunities for characterisation are limited. As Gunther, his brilliant acting of the wily, shifty, image-obsessed politician-king (a characterisation not a million miles from a former British Prime Minister) partly made up for his vocal deficiencies. He gave the character more of

a conscience than before, listening in on Hagen's exchanges with Brünnhilde and exchanging potent glances with Hagen, knowing that he was being given a chance to get an embarrassment out of the way but hesitating to destroy his blood-brother and feeling genuine anguish over how his decision would affect Gutrune. He showed genuine remorse over Siegfried's death ("*Hagen, was tatest du?*" became an expression of horror, whereas in 2007 Gunther was clearly disowning any knowledge of Hagen's murderous intentions) and in his sorrowing efforts to comfort Gutrune.

Mihoko Fujimura's doom-laden Waltraute held the audience's attention with pin-dropping intensity and power. Her little face, blank with tragedy and despair, conveyed a whole world of emotion as she relived what she had been experiencing all around her in Valhalla. When she quoted Wotan, for a few moments she *became* him. She personified the whole of Valhalla as it awaited its end in silent terror, her tiny frame holding the anguish of the world, and her final wild, frozen despair was simply unbelievable. What a communicator she is.

At the curtain calls for *Götterdämmerung*, following the tradition established at the final cycle in 2007, the orchestra were brought onstage, as many as possible clutching their instruments, with Antonio Pappano standing in their midst. The audience's wild acclaim was well deserved. Pappano's interpretation of the tetralogy has matured still more from what it was in 2007, driving the action forward, tumultuous yet keeping a firm control of the overall architecture and sweep of the work, seeming to unleash almost unlimited orchestral power while ensuring that the singers were equal partners who never had to struggle to be heard. He is a true singers' conductor, and aside from the occasional squally brass note, the orchestra has rarely sounded finer. They were all Wagnerian heroes.



Pleased to meet you

KEVIN STEPHENS



A Wagner Society member since 1970, Kevin appears in this issue reporting the Cobweb Orchestra event and reviewing the book ‘Visconti and the German Dream’. His first step in the music business was playing pub piano from the age of 16 leading on to a Butlins season, which helped to make him a reasonably well-off student. Studying for his music degree at Birmingham University in the mid sixties he saw *Parsifal* at Covent Garden where, more often than not, he would pay £1 to stand. “I particularly recall Astrid Varnay as a stunning Kundry, but I’m not sure I understood too well what the opera was about. Fifty years on and I’m still not too sure, though I know a lot more about it!”

From 1967 Kevin worked in music publishing. “It was a heady time, with Solti at Covent Garden and Goodall at Sadler’s Wells. One of my publishing mates had a partner who worked backstage at the Royal Opera House and every so often he wanted to watch a show from the theatre rather than the wings, so I was able to step into his shoes. They were high-heeled, with big golden buckles. The braided jacket, breeches and hose looked very dapper and it was all topped off with a rather smelly wig. Yes, I was a flunkey, and made my appearances on the Covent Garden stage presenting flowers to the leading ladies.”

Moving to the North East in 1970 Kevin became music officer for the regional arts association, working with Peter Hemmings, Thomson Smillie and Alexander Gibson. In due course he became a lecturer in music and a writer of articles in a variety of music and opera magazines. “My specialist area tended to be musical life in the North East and there was little Wagner here at this time, with one exception: an English National Opera *Ring* at the Sunderland Empire. I recall ferrying a car full of students to the performances through a blizzard. Our seats were next to the double basses (no pit) so I gained great insight into the richness and variety of Wagner’s bass lines. At this time I was also editor of a North East opera magazine called, prophetically, Opera North, which ran for about five years. One great bonus of my writing career was that I attended the Bayreuth Festival on press tickets in both 1980 and 1983.”

As part of one of the many Arts Council reorganisations the much-loved Scottish Opera was replaced as Newcastle’s regular touring opera company by the upstart Opera North. “We have learned to love this company as its standards have gradually risen over the years, and its concert *Ring* Cycle, which I see at The Sage Gateshead, is proving to be wonderful. For a few years I gave pre-performance talks for Opera North, often partnering a director, which was especially illuminating (though not always for the audience).”

Kevin was involved as a consultant in the setting up of The Sage Gateshead and became artistic director of the Hexham Abbey Festival in Northumberland. He has had a long and fruitful connection with the distance learning opera degree run by Rose Bruford College, both as a tutor and as a module author. He is currently working on a chapter for a book on Opera and the Media, his section being the influence of film techniques and language on the creation of opera.

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BRUSHING THE COBWEBS OFF WAGNER

The Sage, Gateshead: 10th November 2012

Report and Photography by Kevin Stephens

“The orchestral repertoire will disappear if we don’t have people who can play it,” says Andy Jackson. “The future has to be participatory, with large numbers of people taking part who can then support a small amount of orchestral music at the professional level.” It’s a radical view, but the track record of the man who holds this opinion speaks for itself. 18 years ago he founded the Cobweb Orchestra, to help amateur players in the North East to “brush the cobwebs off your music stand.”

Cobwebs is certainly participatory, with something over 300 people who are members (but a mailing list of over 1300) and participate in as many, or as few, events, rehearsals, workshops, composition try-outs, residential courses, foreign trips and even concerts, as they choose, on a pay-as-you-go basis. There are no auditions and no-one is ever left out. Thus it was that just under 60 players turned up at The Sage. The aim was to prepare six orchestral chunks in about four hours, then give an informal performance of them for friends and relatives.



It astonished me that the enthusiastic (but slightly scared) players of all ages and skill levels made up just about the right combination of instruments required. The strings were medium strength: 9 firsts, 8 seconds, 4 violas, 6 cellos and a solitary double bassist. The winds seemed about right at 3 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (one with a cor anglais), 4 clarinets and 3 bassoons, though the darker sounds of the heavy bass winds were missing – hardly surprising since few amateurs will own such instruments. The six horns were matched by 2 trumpets, 5 trombones and one tuba, the whole completed by timpani, a harp and one toddler. The latter cried only once. (“It’s because we’re not playing!” was the instant response from the conductor, Jackson himself.)

How does Cobwebs ensure, given the loose organisation, that for each project the right people turn up to make a decent orchestra? “Somehow the word seems to get around of what is needed for a particular project and people arrive with their instruments,” he says. Given that they have studied various Mahler Symphonies and, most recently *The Rite of Spring*, such optimism is heartening.

The first aim of the day was to get through all the pieces, highlighting any difficulties such as changes of speed or beat, and giving all the players sight of all the notes. Since there was a lot of sight-reading going on this was vitally important. The opening was the *Pilgrim's Chorus* from *Tannhäuser*, immediately followed by *O Star of Eve*. “Just enjoy holding that tune,” said Jackson to the cellos and bassoons, as if they didn’t get much of a chance of this. Next from *Tannhäuser* came the *Grand March*, one of Wagner’s most bombastic moments. Jackson dealt with problems with supreme flexibility. One of the trumpets hadn’t arrived yet. “Would one of the clarinets mind being

a trumpet for a while?” he asked. The resultant fanfare was a peculiar blend, but it did the job. Poorly printed copy? “Just guess the notes,” instructed the maestro.



The Ride of the Valkyries was a different level of challenge. The trombones came into their own of course, but the strings found the endless sextuplet arpeggios and racing scales a tough job, and some of the horns were frankly bamboozled by their persistent accompaniment figures. The prelude to *Die Meistersinger* followed and here the problem seemed to be that the intricate counterpoint meant that often

everybody had a tune, but few could hear the sophisticated blend as they were so busy concentrating on their own parts. “It’s supposed to be fun,” Jackson had to remind the players. The climax was crowned with a beautiful tuba solo.

The Flying Dutchman Overture (“an early version of *Pirates of the Caribbean*,” quipped Jackson) brought the selections to an end. Here the changes of speed and beat did cause problems and the blend of winds in the theme from *Senta’s Ballad* was a persistent headache, as well as the many fast and furious string figures. Yet somehow they all got through it with especially good contributions from trombones, tuba and oboes.

After the break it was time to start ironing out the textures, getting the balance right, and putting some character in the music. For the final performance *The Ride of the Valkyries* was dropped, much to the relief of many of the participants. They seemed to have had a terrific time for the most part. “This was a treat that I’ve been looking forward to for months,” said one player, newly hooked on Wagner and recently stunned by the Opera North *Walküre*. “I feel very lucky to have had the chance to play Wagner as part of a live orchestra.”

“I have never been particularly attracted to Wagner, probably because of an early brush with *The Ring*, and this has taken away some of those misgivings” said a clarinettist, “playing Wagner gave me a taste of his music in more detail than a passing familiarity with some of his tunes can allow.” This deeper knowledge, as well as intense enjoyment, was a common theme, as was the gratifying music Wagner gives to his players. For one trombonist “it was a great day for the brass section as we don’t always get the chance to practise the range of what we can do.”

The secret in running this kind of workshop, where everyone is at a different standards and some players can manage only some of the notes, is having a gentle and sympathetic approach from the conductor. In this Andy Jackson was terrific, coaxing rather than bullying his players into respectable performances that really approached the spirit of the music. Most of the players seemed to agree that “in the concert itself we played a lot of the notes, and some of them were definitely in the right order!” But just about everybody was thankful to avoid *The Ride of the Valkyries* – such a popular piece but so incredibly difficult to perform.

MICHELANGELO IN SONG

Sir John Tomlinson at the National Gallery 16th November 2012

David Edwards

Never one to rest (as well he might deserve to) on his magisterial Wagnerian laurels, and less than a month after four *Ring* cycles at Covent Garden, the indefatigable Sir John Tomlinson devised a brilliant recital programme of 20th Century songs to verses by Michelangelo Buonarotti. Accompanied at the piano by David Owen Norris – in superb form – these settings by Britten and Shostakovich (as well as Hugo Wolf's *Drei Gedichte von Michelangelo*) made for an arresting and original event in the National Gallery's Sainsbury Wing Theatre. It is a stunning recital which one hopes they will repeat on a regular basis.

In fact this was much more than a conventional *Liederabend*. Wearing a dark artist's robe atop his pinstriped waistcoat and trousers, Sir John became the figure of Michelangelo himself, singing the poems from parchment sheets while he moved with natural ease between a solid desk and a painter's easel. Behind him beautiful projections of Michelangelo's drawings changed subtly with each new verse. The combination of largely 20th Century music, the authoritative appearance of Sir John and the backdrop of Renaissance sketches worked to produce an extraordinarily atmospheric effect. We were somehow simultaneously transported to the artist's 15th Century Roman studio whilst remaining gripped by the music of our own time.

And what music it is. Britten's *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* date from 1940 and were the first music the composer wrote specially for Peter Pears, who premiered them at the Wigmore Hall. Sir John, singing these songs transposed down a fourth, made them very much his own and proved the versatility and genius of Britten's writing. Rather than love songs from a composer to his partner, Tomlinson presented us with the ageing poet Michelangelo, looking back on his earlier work and his past loves with a mixture of philosophical scrutiny and fond reminiscence. Fluctuating between the wistful memories of *Veggio co' bei vostri occhi* (Sonnet 30) and the failure to comprehend a crucial misunderstanding in *S'un casto amor* (Sonnet 32), Sir John delivered these songs with the passionate vigour of an older man reflecting on his younger life.

The Hugo Wolf group constituted the last songs that the composer wrote, and here, singing in German, Sir John became for me akin to the character of the aged Wotan. *Alles endet, was entstehet* had a sense of the acceptance and understanding that Wagner's god aspires to, and *Fühlt meine Seele*, in the hands of this remarkable artist, created a true sense of the peaceful resolution of a personal conflict.

After the interval Sir John and David Owen Norris threw themselves into Shostakovich's *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarotti* with incredible gusto. This is difficult music but both performers brought exemplary imagination and colour to their roles, bringing the Russian text vividly to life. *Tvorchestvo* – "Creativity" – in particular was extraordinary for the percussive hammering effect on the keyboard, powerfully played by Norris. In this cycle we experienced another aspect of Michelangelo's verse, interpreted through the music of an individual who felt himself controlled and expressively restricted by state censorship, much as Michelangelo had been by his patrons. This was a brilliant realisation of a fascinating theme and a reminder of the artistry of our foremost British bass. Don't miss him in Birtwistle's *The Minotaur* at Covent Garden next month.

SIR JOHN TOMLINSON AND LIONEL FRIEND IN EDINBURGH

St Mary's Cathedral, 19th November 2012

Roger Lee

This recital for the Wagner Society of Scotland comprised the first performance of “*Gurnemanz and the Temple*” and also “*Wotan's Journey*” which Wagner Society members were fortunate to experience at the RAM a few years ago, the pieces devised by David Syrus and Lionel Friend with linking narratives by Sir John. We started in *Parsifal* with Gurnemanz's narration of the story of Klingsor which he delivers to the Grail knights: “*Titurel, der fromme Held*” (*Titurel the pious hero*). With Sir John acting almost within touching distance he drew us in to the illusion that we were in the very roles of the company of knights and squires he was, as Gurnemanz, addressing. This is no mere device by Wagner to bring the audience up to date, but rather provides the powerful psychological process of generating among us the emotional essence of what he intended us to experience. We were not so much attending a recital as witnessing the artist who David Edwards describes (opposite) as “our foremost British bass” becoming Gurnemanz before us whilst Lionel Friend's alchemy at the piano provided Wagner's torrent of now anguished, now sinister musical phraseology.

When Gurnemanz witnessed Parsifal's return to the Grail realm: “*Wer nahet dort dem heil'gen Quell?*” (*Who comes here towards the holy spring?*”) I had to resist a temptation to look around for this presence which Gurnemanz (sorry! – Sir John) was so convincingly addressing in our midst whilst the orchestra (sorry! – Maestro Friend) was developing the symphonic pattern of motifs which serves so effectively to reveal the meaning of the piece.

Wotan's Journey starts in the growing light of the dawning day as his gaze is arrested by the sight of his castle. “*Vollendet das ewige Werk*” (*The everlasting work is ended*) moves on (seamlessly, as with all of Lionel Friend's so convincing transitions) to the moment when the Rainbow Bridge finds Wotan and the other gods, according to Wagner: “lost in speechless astonishment at the glorious sight”: “*Abendlich strahl'*” (*In the evening light*).

The mood shifted dramatically to that of Wotan's narration to Brünnhilde that his son Siegfried is to be free of his influence: “*Nur Einer könnte was ich nicht darf*” (“*One man alone could do what I may not*”) How could any of those present not share Wotan's “*godly distress, hideous shame*” as those lines were delivered with such full-out personification by Sir John? After delivering his favourite daughter a chilling reprimand for defying him, Sir John/Wotan bade farewell to “that radiant pair of eyes” and kissed her godhead away, moving out of sight to allow Lionel Friend time exquisitely to perform his arrangement of the orchestral reprise of the Farewell up to the moment when Wotan calls for Loge, again demonstrating the art of transition, this time to the Erda scene from Act III of *Siegfried*.

As an encore Sir John presented his “party trick” with which he has delighted audiences at Mastersingers events: the opening scene from Act II of *Siegfried* in which John Tomlinson takes on all three characters himself. He took us to Fafner's cave as Alberich, as The Wanderer and as Fafner without any assistance other than that of the magician at the piano. Sir John morphed physically into the two visible characters of Alberich and The Wanderer. Then by venturing deep into the cavernous nave to exploit the building's “frozen music” (its architecture) he enclosed his audience in a foundation-shaking echo more chilling than in any theatre and with which he completed his transformation of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral Edinburgh into Neidhöhle itself.

WAGNER AT THIRTY? YOU DECIDE

Ken Sunshine



In March 1844 Richard Wagner was 30 and living in Dresden. In his autobiography, *Mein Leben*, he recounts “no recollections of any importance in [early] 1844 other than two enterprises: the first to Berlin early in the year, for the production of my fliegender Holländer, and the other in March to Hamburg for Rienzi”. Strangely, he doesn’t mention (although one imagines the experience, coupled with his passion for self promotion, would have been memorable) a session at the daguerreotype studio of Rudolph Turnau in Hamburg. The first successful portraits via this process had occurred only 5 years earlier and the procedure was still elaborate.

168 years later Mr Albert Kaplan, a member of the Daguerrean Society and a keen collector of early daguerreotype images publishes on his website the image above, reproduced here actual size. But, is it the young Richard Wagner? If it is then it’s a truly remarkable find and Wagner News is proud to be the first publication to display this image – a world-wide scoop!

Let us imagine Wagner taking away a fragile sixteenth-plate (1³/₈" x 1⁵/₈") image on silver; an image easily erased with a fingernail and therefore needing to be in a protective case. He takes it back to Dresden and perhaps brings it out occasionally as a talking point until in 1849 he flees to Zurich to avoid arrest for his part in the Dresden Revolution. The image is left behind, forgotten, lost, acquired by person unknown, turns up in a Munich bookshop and is purchased mid 2012 by Mr Kaplan for €100. Seeking some information about Wagner’s visit to London in 1855 Mr Kaplan wrote to the Wagner Society and mentioned the daguerreotype image which he, with the help of Mike Hager (owner of Museum Photographics Inc., Rochester, NY) and Grant Romer (former head Advanced Residency Program in Photograph Conservation, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY) had very recently restored.

Their work testifies that the image is not a fake but the crucial question of whether it is the young Wagner remains open. Albert Kaplan owns to having a rare ability to recognise faces. He is in no doubt about it being Wagner. There are techniques that can accurately identify images with a high degree of probability but unless there is a clear paper trail leading back to the actual session, provenance is difficult to establish with certainty.

There are at least four areas of concern:

1. Why didn't Wagner make any reference to having an image made? As mentioned above being daguerreotyped was much more complicated than a click on a mobile phone. It involved being perched high on a raised platform, remaining still for up to a

minute, coping with vapourised mercury fumes (see <http://www.photohistory-sussex.co.uk/dagprocess.htm>). Not an experience one would quickly forget but one to boast of and include in one's memoirs.

2. Is the dimple in his chin an issue? There is no sign of a chin dimple in the 1877 image. Either it has gone away (unusually) or it is a blemish on the early image (quite possible) or we have two different people. Mr Kaplan himself points out that a pencil drawing by Ernst Bendikt Kietz (1850) shows a dimple, as does a painting by Ernst August Becker (1843). See <http://www.kaplancollection.com/the-cased-collection/richard-wagner/>
3. Comparing the image with a known (1877) photo (opposite) Wagner's left ear seems to have disappeared. The left ear is much flatter to the head (or hidden by hair?)
4. Difference in head shapes. The head in the early image is broadly rectangular; more trapezoidal in 1877. Is that significant?

We would be delighted if provenance could be established; Mr Kaplan even more so. What is the trail? And how far can we follow it?

We know that Mr Kaplan bought the image from a Munich bookseller. We believe that the bookseller purchased it from a known source (Mr X) but attempts at identifying that source have so far been unsuccessful. Even if that next link could be established and Mr X knew how he had inherited it from Mr Y That would take us at best back to early 20th century with still at least 60 years unaccounted; a seemingly impossible task. We then would have to rely on expert analysis of the two images (1844, 1877) to try to establish beyond reasonable doubt that they are images of the same person.

What is your opinion? We would appreciate feedback either to Editor Roger Lee or to me via our website where further details may be found in the Forum section.



1877



1844

Albert Kaplan's website is at <http://www.kaplancollection.com/>

Andrea Buchanan

While in Cape Town recently I was fortunate enough to meet the legendary Herbert Glockner, President of the Richard Wagner Society of South Africa, and Dawn Goodman, Committee Member as well as Jilly Cohen, Secretary of the RWSSA. They were most welcoming and hospitable and it was fascinating to exchange views, discuss common problems and explore areas where we could work together in future.

Members may be interested to know that there is a flourishing classical music scene in Cape Town and that attendances at events are excellent. The Wagner Society puts on several events a year, focusing mainly on lectures and musical recitals, and these are well attended by enthusiastic audiences. They have close links with the South African Verdi Society, recognising that it is important to appeal to as wide a music-loving audience as possible. It was particularly interesting to learn that they rely heavily on private sponsorship to present many of their events as it is not possible to charge high prices for tickets.

South Africa is blessed with some extremely talented young singers, and the Society has been fortunate enough to hold events recently with Michelle Breedt, Johan Botha and Colin Lee, to name but a few. Two years ago Herbert presented a fully-staged version of *Der fliegende Holländer* for three sold-out nights in Cape Town using young South African singers. This was an extraordinary achievement, and the RSA is justifiably proud of its efforts. The opera was attended by several distinguished guests from Europe, notably Eva Mårtson, President of the Richard Wagner Verband International. I really wish I had been able to go and I tried urging Herbert to consider putting it on again. Alas, this is unlikely to happen!

We hope to continue the good relationship between our two societies by keeping in touch. They are really enthusiastic about Wagner News (there were several copies of former editions in Herbert's flat, proudly displayed). We will publicise each other's events and hope that members of both of our Societies will get in touch when visiting Cape Town or London.

Our members who find themselves in Cape Town are urged to get in touch with the Richard Wagner Society of South Africa and they will be assured a warm welcome. Herbert Glockner can be reached at herbo@iafrica.com, Dawn Goodman at dawn@goodman.co.za and Jilly Cohen at jillycohen@telkomsa.net. There is exciting news that Herbert has tickets for La Cenerentola at the Dresden Semper Oper on 23rd May and Halévy's La Juive at the same venue on 20th May. Please contact him by email if you are interested in obtaining any of these tickets.

Herbert is also putting together an excellent opera tour to Berlin which includes concerts by the Berlin Philharmonic and Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*, Dessau (Massenet's *Esclarmonde*) and Riga (*The Ring*) from 28th May to 10th June. If you would like further details, please get in touch with me or with Herbert.

WAGNER SOCIETY BIRTHDAY LUNCH: 22ND MAY 2013

Andrea Buchanan

We are delighted to announce that details are now available for the lunch that we will be holding on Wagner's 200th birthday. The lunch will take place at The Montague on the Gardens Hotel, 15 Montague Street, London WC1B 5BJ. This is located very close to the British Museum, just off Russell Square.

Guests should arrive at 12:00 for lunch at 12:45. There will be a welcome drink upon arrival and a three course set menu will be offered, to include tea, coffee and petit fours. The set menu features a chicken main course, and a vegetarian option will be available on prior request. The cost will be £48 per head. A selection of wines, beers and soft drinks will be available to purchase on the day. The room can accommodate up to 100 people, so we very much hope that as many of you as possible will join us in celebrating this great and unique event. Dame Gwyneth Jones, our President, has kindly accepted the invitation to attend as our guest of honour.

The lunch will finish at approximately 3pm, and, should there be sufficient interest, we will provide a bus to take guests to the Festival Hall for the exciting events taking place there organised by *Wagner 200*. Further details of these events will follow. The evening will continue with the gala concert featuring Susan Bullock and James Rutherford with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis, for which I am sure many of you have already obtained tickets. If you are interested in the bus option, please let me know as soon as possible. Tickets will be on sale from January 1st from Mike Morgan in the usual way. Please note that there will be no tickets sold on the door.

RWSSA OPERA AND CONCERT TOUR 2013

Some places remain available on the Richard Wagner Society of South Africa's 2013 opera and concert tour of Berlin, Dessau and Riga. The tour starts in Berlin on 28th May at the Deutsche Oper with Donald Runnicles conducting Brahms Symphony No 1 and Britten Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings.

The Berlin programme offers options A or B:

29th May: A) Berliner Philharmoniker, Sir Simon Rattle: Boulez and Bruckner.
B) Konzerthaus: Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Murray Perahia:
Beethoven and Haydn.

30th May: A) Konzerthaus: Sayako Kusaka, Telemann, Vivaldi, Biber, Bach.
B) Berliner Philharmoniker, Sir Simon Rattle: Boulez and Bruckner.

31st May: RSO: (Grieg, Britten, Mozart) Janowski, Lupu.

1st June: Komische Oper: Ligeti: *Le Grand Macabre*.

A night in Dessau on 2nd June for the opera *Esclarmonde* by Massenet at the Anhaltisches Theater is followed by the Riga section of the itinerary for *Der Ring*:

4th June: *Das Rheingold*

5th June: *Die Walküre*

7th June: *Siegfried*

9th June: *Götterdämmerung*

Tickets are €3,740 per person (double room) or €4,340 (single) from Andreas Gasterich: info@zentours.de or Stephen Dürre: info@inberlinreisen.de.



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THE MASTERSINGERS exists to create opportunities for young singers to master their craft, particularly (but not exclusively) in Wagner and the German romantic repertoire.

Events in 2012 have been held as follows:

- FEBRUARY 4 & 5** *PUBLIC MASTERCLASS: PETRA LANG and ADRIAN BAIANU*
featuring Lee Bisset, Zoe South, Sarah Pring and Mark Le Brocq. Petra and Adrian also very generously worked in private with Kimberley Myers, Elaine McKrill, Sara Wallender-Ross, Miriam Sharrad, Magdalen Ashman, John Upperton and Stuart Pendred. Pianists: Kelvin Lim and Richard Black
- FEBRUARY 29** *FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE* A concert presenting music by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov featuring Ilona Domnič, Natalya Romaniw, Mariya Krywaniuk, Miriam Sharrad, Nazrin Rashidova, Tamara Sakvarelidze, Alice Turner, Adam Tunnicliffe, Charne Rochford, Nicholas Lester and Pauls Putnins. Pianist: Kelvin Lim
- APRIL 12** *DAS GEHEIMNIS DER LIEBE* A concert presenting music by Richard Strauss featuring Gweneth-Ann Jeffers, Mariya Krywaniuk, Elaine McKrill, Alison Roddy, Susan Young, Anne-Marie Owens, Charne Rochford and Pauls Putnins. Pianist: Stuart Wild. Presenter: Stefan Bednarczyk
- JUNE/JULY** *LONGBOROUGH FESTIVAL OPERA: GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG*
Artistic consultancy and coaching of soloists
- SEPTEMBER 21 – 23** *A WEEKEND IN PRESTEIGNE AND AT THE RODD*
Public masterclasses and private coachings with DAME ANNE EVANS and ANTHONY NEGUS, concerts and lecture-recitals with music by Mozart, Beethoven, Bizet, Wagner, Verdi, Saint-Saëns, Puccini, Stravinsky and Britten featuring Rachel Nicolls, Gweneth-Ann Jeffers, Antonia Sotgiu, Jonathan Stoughton, Mark Le Brocq, Nick Fowler, Stuart Pendred and Paul Haley. Pianists: Tamriko Sakvarelidze, Richard Black and Julian Black

- OCTOBER 21 *DIE WALKÜRE (Act 3) with THE REHEARSAL ORCHESTRA*
Public rehearsal and run-through conducted by DAVID SYRUS featuring Rachel Nicolls, Lee Bisset, Cara McHardy, Mariya Krywaniuk, Megan Llewellyn Dorke, Jaqueline Varsey, Marie Degodet, Emma Carrington, Rhonda Browne, Niamh Kelly, Constance Novis, Maria Jones, Sylvia Clarke and James Rutherford. Rehearsal Pianist: Kelvin Lim
- NOVEMBER 30 *BAYREUTH BURSARY CONTESTANTS* Private coaching of the finalists: Laura Wolk-Lewanowicz, Miriam Sharrad, Rhonda Browne, Oliver Hunt, Anando Mukherjee and Ben Woodward. LFO auditions & continuing sponsorship for 2013 coaching of soloists.

Forthcoming events currently planned for 2013:

- MAY 3 – 5 *A WEEKEND IN EASTBOURNE with SIR JOHN TOMLINSON*
Britain's foremost bass presides over a weekend of events to include masterclasses, lecture-recitals and concerts featuring outstanding new Wagnerian talent. Music by Wagner, Verdi and Britten
- MAY 22 *WAGNER'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION: ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL*
Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis in music by Wagner, including *Die Walküre (Act 3)* featuring Mastersingers Alumni Giselle Allen, James Rutherford, Kimberley Myers, Elaine McKrill, Miriam Sharrad, Antonia Sotgiu and Harriet Williams. Artistic consultant and semi-staging: David Edwards
- JUNE 17 – JULY 11 *INSIDE THE RING: ST. GEORGE'S HALL, BLOCKLEY*
A programme of events exploring aspects of Wagner's masterpiece alongside performances of *THE RING* at Longborough
Please refer to enclosed leaflet for further details
- OCTOBER 27 *THE REHEARSAL ORCHESTRA at HENRY WOOD HALL*
Conductor: DAVID SYRUS
Repertoire to be announced shortly

THE MASTERSINGERS receives no public funding and is entirely reliant on the generosity of its private sponsors for its continued activity. We are immensely grateful to our loyal sponsors:

Ludmilla Andrew, David & Frances Waters, Eric Adler, Lady Paddie Walters, Roger Lee, Ian and Freda Rickword, Mike Morgan, The Wagner Society, The Solti Foundation and The Music Club of London

as well as for the continuing support and energy of Dame Anne Evans and Sir John Tomlinson. If you are interested in our work and/or have enjoyed our events and would like to join our dedicated supporters in our programme of developing the next generation of Wagner singers then please contact The Mastersingers' Artistic Director

Malcolm Rivers on 0208 950 4651/ 07811 889 785

FROM ONE ISOLDE TO ANOTHER

Susan Bullock Masterclass with Helena Dix, Peregrine's Pianos, 17th November 2012

Katie Barnes

Photography by Richard Carter

There is always a special thrill in watching a singer of one generation passing on their accumulated wisdom to another, and I have reached the age of being able to recall the masterclasser at the start of her career. I had the privilege of seeing her as Pamina with ENO in 1986 when she took over the whole run of Jonathan Miller's "library production" at very short notice. It was clear even then that she was destined for the top, and that the great Wagner roles would be her eventual goal. After that meteoric beginning I watched her progress through small roles (First Lady, Echo in *Ariadne*, Hannah Kennedy in *Mary Stuart*) and through leading soprano roles in an astonishing variety of vocal disciplines (including Gilda, Butterfly, and a heartbreaking Tatiana) before she went abroad to further her craft, returning for, among other things, a well-remembered and glorious Isolde for ENO. Following her latest, triumphant return to London as Brünnhilde, it was an equal privilege to see her pass on the wisdom of her experience to a singer of the next generation. As always, it was utterly fascinating to witness how the song and the art of singing were taken apart, fine-tuned, and reassembled.



Helena Dix created a sensation when she won last year's Bayreuth Bursary competition with her stunning rendition of *Der Männer Sippe*, and her successes since have proved that her singing is already of an international standard, at a very high level. In this masterclass, I was much impressed by her very down-to earth approach to her craft and her sense of humour, as well as by her wonderful, creamy, seemingly limitless voice and by her willingness to absorb and implement Bullock's advice.

Most of the session was devoted to in-depth work on the *Liebsteod*. Bullock began by allowing Dix to sing the aria uninterrupted from start to finish. It sounded glorious, soaring and serene, except that the final F# was pinched, something Bullock instantly

seized upon to point out that that final note was the most important of the night, "so train yourself not to think about it!" But equally, it is vital for the singer to prepare for the beginning of the aria: "Hear the first note in your head... you're already singing in your head before you open your mouth." How the singer sings the first note, will tell the orchestra how she wants to play the aria, and singing "right through" the M of "*Mild*" will make sure that the voice is in the right groove on the first note.



She stressed the practical difficulties of singing the aria in performance, having to sing after several minutes' break during which the singer has to lie or sit motionless, having previously sung very energetic music to which the *Liebtestod* is a complete contrast. "It is hugely emotional music, but there is no need to do more than the music does." Isolde is already transfigured, floating above the people who are fighting and killing each other – "She's addressing the universe. You're astonished that they don't see what you see." But the singer must "stand back emotionally", not least because the role is so demanding.

Much of her advice centred around the need to make more of the text, and particularly the importance of consonants. "Consonants are not a crime. Singing through consonants engages the audience. They energise the legato line; they don't destroy it. You need closure of a word, as much as the start or middle." She encouraged Dix to "speak the words as an actress" while practising. "Sing every word as though you've just made it up. There must be a fresh reaction every time you do it."

Bullock made much of the importance of breath control. "When you breathe, emerge from the sound. Wagner sometimes wants voices to rise above the orchestra and at others to merge into the texture" – and of phrasing. It is tempting to sing a beautiful line, but better to let the voice ebb and flow, just like the waves which Isolde describes. "Sometimes you're rising, sometimes sinking. It's much more thrilling for the audience." The aria is a series of different thoughts, with a comma between each, and must be phrased as such. It is important not to hurry the music: Reginald Goodall taught her that "There's always time" – time for the music, the notes, the words. "Wagner is not all loud", but in the later stages of the aria the orchestra becomes so powerful that the singer can afford to be loose with the note values. She stressed the "amazing" difference that an orchestra makes to the amount of energy expended in singing.



Beautifully though Dix had sung the aria at the start of the session, the improvement when she took Bullock's advice on board was astonishing. In particular, the final F#, which had proved troublesome the first time around, soared exquisitely and seemed to go on for ever. Bullock admitted that she imagines herself singing a Handelian cadenza on the note!

The final half-hour of the session was devoted to *Dich, teure Halle*. On the first run-through, Dix sang it beautifully but very fast, and admitted that she felt that she had to concentrate so much on the consonants that she did not always feel that she had time to keep the beauty of the sound. Bullock advised her to take it more slowly: the song has terrific energy because Elizabeth is so young, but it can be made broader without making it sound older. "You can hear her heartbeat in the rhythm. You ride in on the crest of the wave and pick up where the orchestra leaves off." Once again, use of the text was of paramount importance: "I promise you that the consonants won't get in the way. Let them flow. They need more energy and more air, but it's worth it." In the interlude, Elizabeth needs to "remember all those fantastic song competitions, with Tannhäuser the coolest rock star of all!"



Helena Dix with Kelvin Lim

In conclusion Bullock announced, "Absolutely, this girl is amazing. Please, Wagner Society, wrap her in cotton wool, don't let anyone else exploit her!" Dix responded by thanking the Society for giving her so many opportunities this year, including the chance to meet and learn from one of her heroines. There could be no more heartfelt tributes to the invaluable work of the Society and the Mastersingers in developing and nurturing young artists. Long may it continue.

“WAGNER DIDN’T RUIN SINGING. SINGERS RUINED WAGNER”

Susan Bullock Masterclasses: Peregrine’s Pianos, 24th November 2012

Keith Richards

Photography by Richard Carter

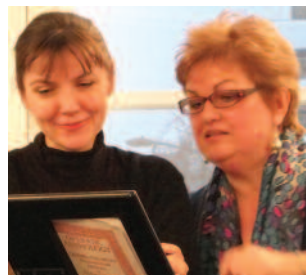
Susan Bullock came out with this “useful mantra” as she termed it, towards the end of this second thrilling masterclass. Once more her love and deep understanding of the music (and, more unusually, the texts) was evident throughout. Again and again the singers were urged to “enjoy” certain words and phrases and to relish consonants in particular. They “energise” the vocal line. The ever desirable legato must not be achieved at the expense of meaningful articulation. “Fortunately,” she asserted, “German is a most rewarding language to sing.”

I have attended many masterclasses over the years. They have mostly been devoted to Lieder. I just missed the legendary work of Lotte Lehmann, but I was present for Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Brigitte Fassbänder and Thomas Hampson. On every occasion it comes as a surprise that the beauty of the student voices seems to be taken for granted by the experienced singers (not by the audience, of course) and on a gloomy November afternoon the cheers rang out for each participant. All three were already experienced in the opera house although **Cara McHardy**, whom I spoke to briefly, told me that she was only beginning to explore the Wagner repertoire.



This was hard to believe as she launched the afternoon with a radiant account of Elsa’s *Einsam in trüben Tagen* from Act I of *Lohengrin*. Susan Bullock always allows a complete performance before, as she put it, merely commenting on what she hears. She claimed less expertise than some of the members of the Wagner Society listening. The aria is in two distinct parts: a memory and a vision. Much attention was paid to the first word and Cara was urged to “breathe in” the word during the brief orchestral introduction. The advice made an audible difference, as was the case in many other words: “*klagen*”, “*Gott*” leading to the climax of “*Lüfte*”. At one point we noted the memorable description: “*there is a wheel going around inside you. When it comes to the top, SING!*” As the aria came to its ecstatic end Susan Bullock sought to guide and control body movement and we heard for the first time in the afternoon the advice to ‘think downwards’ as the vocal line rises.

This became a vital theme in the work with **Lee Bisset** who, interestingly for those of us who attended on both afternoons, sang Isolde’s *Liebstd*. At the first sing-through the approaching final F \sharp proved too daunting and Susan Bullock immediately stepped in with sympathy (“we have all been there”) and advice. Like all good teachers she was quick to point out something really impressive. It was the singing of the consonant “n” on the first word and she immediately went on to say that in her view Lee had given too much voice to music which describes transfiguration.



We were reminded that at times the voice is part of the orchestral texture, is in fact another instrument and that the opening of the aria is very private. It is not a show piece for soprano. When Lee began again her singing of the word “*hold*” was described as “gorgeous” and we were soon into the technical problems of the section which lies in the *passaggio*. There was much attention to breathing and at one point there was a stimulating reference to “collective breathing” with the audience: “they don’t want to see someone conk out!”.

The common denominator in the *Liebestod* is the note E natural and the challenging final leap of an octave was certainly helped by more urging to “think down as if you are stroking a dog” and the final F# rang out to cheers from the audience. These were even louder as Lee was advised to “put a spin on it” and she did so with a hint of the imagined Handelian cadenza on the note which had been mentioned the previous week.



Megan Llewellyn Dorke began the final session with a spine-tingling account of *O Sachs! Mein Freund* from Act III of *Die Meistersinger* immediately described by Susan Bullock as “athletic – a real workout”. Megan, like Lee, had given rather too much in this first performance and once more the text was analysed in its depiction of Eva’s complex character and particular situation in the opera. It was important sometimes to forget the singing and, for example, to deal with an early octave leap

by thinking of the two notes as the same. The concentration on particular words: *Freund* (“roll the r’s”) and *du TEURER Mann* had an instant effect and Megan’s interpretation developed in a very short time. Eva became a more vulnerable, more feminine girl and the audience was visibly moved as we approached the Tristan quotation. “Taking more time” had made this deeply impressive voice warmer.

So the afternoon ended where the masterclasses had begun a week before with the *Tristan und Isolde* music played so impressively by **Kelvin Lim**. From beginning to end his contribution had transcended the notion of “accompaniment” just as the classes had moved from teaching into memorable performance. We moved out into the endless rain assured of the safety of the roles in these hands and grateful for the generosity of Susan Bullock. She sang a few of Brangäne’s lines to usher in the *Liebestod* and just occasionally sang in full voice to demonstrate the shape of a phrase.



Thrilling – and a small consolation for anyone like me who could not attend the recent *Ring* performances because of a bout of ‘flu.



PRESENTS

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WAGNER SOCIETY 2013 BAYREUTH BURSARY FINAL

London Welsh Centre, 1st December 2012

Katie Barnes

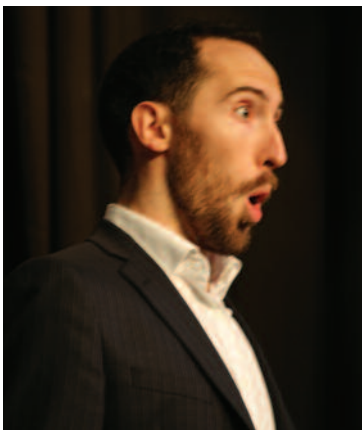
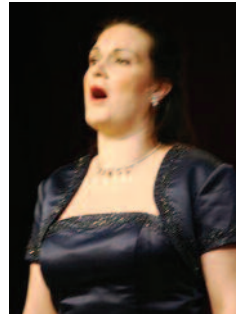
Photography by Daryl Lucas

The lineup for the Bayreuth Bursary was one of the strongest in years. In an interesting innovation, five of the finalists were singers, and the sixth was a pianist, who played one song for each of the singers, with the indefatigable Kelvin Lim playing the other pieces.



Anando Mukherjee opened his programme with Lohengrin's *In fernem Land*. The voice is a wonder, round and full, with most beautiful tones, and he seemed completely at home onstage. He began this long aria a little too *forte*, missing the impact which can be achieved by beginning *piano* and slowly progressing to a crescendo at the end, but he held the audience's interest with his use of the language and his lively eye contact. A couple of high notes sounded slightly hard. But in Walther's *Morgenlich leuchtend*, knowing that he had won the audience over, he was more relaxed, radiating charm and letting the audience see Walther's growing confidence. He sang with almost Tauber-like ease and grace. His performing experience to date is mainly in the Italian repertoire, and at this stage of his career I think that he is a heavy lyric tenor rather than a heldentenor, but his potential for the future is enormous.

Miriam Sharrad opened with Sieglinde's *Du bist der Lenz*, an unusual choice for a mezzo-soprano. Her voice sounded tight in the upper reaches, and her rigid posture probably did not help her vocal production. Brangane's Tower Warnings sounded a better fit for her voice, and as she relaxed into the music her voice sounded to better advantage. But whereas she simply stood there and sang, Oliver Hunt only had to step onstage, take a chair and sit down to establish himself completely into Hans Sachs' personality. His rendition of the *Fliedermonolog* perfectly reflected the cobbler-poet's swift changes of mood, and his response to the music was remarkable.



Rarely for so young a bass, his mellow voice sounded perfectly at ease with this demanding music, and his singing was deeply satisfying. At the end of the aria he stood, replaced the chair at the side of the stage, and marched back on as Fasolt, a total dramatic and vocal transformation. More than in his recent performances for Fulham Opera, he was able to trace the lovelorn giant's wide ranges of mood in his first scene: pride at a job well done, joy at anticipating his winning of Freia, disbelief at Wotan's perfidy, deep disappointment and menacing fury. He was so deeply immersed into his character that when he turned to react to a taunt from Fafner, I could have sworn that a second giant stood there – and once again, his singing was a marvel.



Laura Wolk-Lewanowicz's lovely, creamy, richly dramatic soprano seemed to me to be much better suited to *Du bist der Lenz* than Sharrad's, and although, unlike Hunt, she did not try to act or move about the stage, she was able to convey all Sieglinde's present joy and remembered pain in the shading of her voice and her great, pleading eyes. *Dich, teure Halle* was radiant, and again, she communicated Elisabeth's emotions through her expressive singing and her facial expressions.

Rhonda Browne simply had to step onto the stage, fix the audience with her eye, and sing Waltraute's opening *Höre mit Sinn* to grab our attention, and she never let it go. Pacing the stage, turning one way to evoke the absent Wotan and another to address Brünnhilde, she conjured up the doomed Valhalla for us. Her deep, forceful mezzo-contralto filled the hall, and her use of the language was most impressive. In Erda's warning from *Das Rheingold* she did not need to move at all: her stillness was more arresting than any movement. She tired slightly at the end, but she had enthralled us so much that it did not matter.



The sixth finalist, pianist Benjamin Woodward, showed his flair for the dramatic and his value as a repetiteur, especially in his thunderous accompaniment to Fasolt's entrance and his singing of Wotan's and Fafner's lines to accompany Hunt's performance. This is an accompanist who will be worth his weight in gold.

Following the deliberations by judges Dame Anne Evans, Anthony Negus and Neil Howlett, Negus stated that the contest had not been a walkover, and that all the contestants had something special of their own to offer, but that the winner was the one who held the audience, even if some things may not be quite right yet. Their choice of Rhonda Browne was clearly popular with the audience, as she also won the audience prize, with Hunt as runner-up.



The contest was followed by an absorbing presentation by Neil Howlett titled *Wann fährt der nächste Schwan?* The reason he gave it this title was that Leo Slezak, the tenor alleged to have spoken this line when Lohengrin's swan failed to materialise, sang all the major heldentenor roles but also had an extraordinarily wide repertoire outside of Wagner, ranging from Tamino to Otello. (The nearest modern analogy would be Jonas Kaufmann.) Musical illustrations were provided by no fewer than four tenors.

Both Neil Cooper and Jonathan Stoughton sang *Nothing!* from Siegfried Act I and Cooper also sang the *Schmiedlied*. Howlett pointed out how often names are important to Wagner's tenors: the plot of *Lohengrin* revolves around the title character's name,



Neil Cooper

It was interesting to compare and contrast Cooper's rendition with Stoughton's beautiful, free, bronzed tone in *Nothung!*. They were both tremendous, but very different. Stoughton also sang Walther's Prize Song, with a lovely, powerful, sunny sound and a sense of growing triumph. Howlett pointed out that, although Walther is Wagner's longest tenor role, it is more lyric than most. He spends most of the last act composing this song and singing it in different ways before presenting this final version in the festival meadow, both as his attempt to win the prize and as a statement of intent for Eva, who is the prize.



Jonathan Stoughton

Anando Mukherjee sang Siegmund's *Winterstürme* with a lovely lyric tone, but, as with his entries in the Bursary contest, I was not convinced that he could sing the rest of the role at this stage of his career. Howlett observed that this aria is unusual because most of Wagner's arias are narrations which are part of the story, whereas Siegmund spontaneously creates a poem which expresses the emotion he feels as his love for Sieglinde gradually overwhelms him.



The fourth tenor, Mike Bracegirdle, was in many ways the most interesting. He was allotted the two most dramatic arias, and responded to both magnificently. His rendition of Parsifal's *Amfortas! Die Wunde!* was incredibly powerful and passionate, if vocally a little wild, and the intensity with which he experienced and communicated Parsifal's emotions was almost frightening. Howlett observed that this aria, which again starts with a name, is the turning point of the opera for Parsifal, because from this moment he empathises with Amfortas's physical pain. "The emotional content is the most important part of the piece... the emotional intensity is greater than anywhere else in Wagner's music." Bracegirdle's second aria, *Vesti la giubba* from Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, was included in the programme because, as Howlett explained, tenors who sing Wagner have to make a living singing other roles too – and *verismo* opera, which deals with ordinary people, could scarcely be a greater contrast with Wagner's gods and heroes. Again, Bracegirdle gave the aria a huge emotional charge, but it was interesting to note how much more overtly *emotive* Leoncavallo's music is than Wagner's.

To borrow Howlett's own collective noun, this was truly "a fanfare of tenors".

RHONDA BROWNE: WINNER OF THE 2013 BAYREUTH BURSARY

Roger Lee



Having worked on her two test pieces for six months (see: Katie Barnes' report on pages 36 to 38) New Zealand born Rhonda revelled in the opportunity to share her insights into what she felt that Erda and Waltraute had to say. "I just hope that the audience felt drawn in and were left wanting to know more about these two wonderful women." The Final had not felt like a competition for Rhonda: "It was such a pleasure for each of us to have the chance to a chance for each of us to sing this repertoire and enjoy ourselves. I thoroughly enjoyed

my preliminary audition and my coaching session with Malcolm Rivers the previous day was very helpful. I love getting insights from people who have lived, performed and breathed Wagner throughout their careers." She describes herself as having been "blown away" by the support she was shown by the audience and the judges.

After a three year stint in the New Zealand Opera chorus her coaches suggested that she should explore the training options available in Europe and, after seven years in Britain, she is now training with the English National Opera *Opera Works* programme. With Rhonda's unusual dramatic voice now maturing and starting to get noticed by conductors, coaches and agents she feels that she is just coming into her own as a low mezzo-soprano. "I have been expertly guided and supported by my teacher Jacqueline Bremar and my coaches, Ludmila Andrew, David Harper, Jane Robinson and Kelvin Lim. I am eternally grateful for their patience, wisdom, knowledge, time and energy and I am looking forward to taking the next steps in my career with their support.

"About two years ago my teacher suggested that look at some of the Wagner repertoire just to see if it suited me and to find out whether I had a connection with it. The connection was almost instant. Of course there was much to be done in terms of vocal, musical and dramatic preparation and growth, (there still is much to be done!) but it felt as if this music and these characters were already very much a part of who I am. We started with the Wesendonck Lieder and Erda's Aria from *Das Rheingold* and I instantly fell in love with the music."

Rhonda has recently had some coaching at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich. "This gave me amazing insights to the Wagnerian repertoire. My teacher Jacqueline Bremar is half Bavarian and she has such an understanding of and passion for the German repertoire. Her encouragement has played a huge part in my getting to grips with and developing a love of Wagner's music. I can't wait to take up the opportunity which winning the Wagner Society Bursary has given me to go to Bavaria next year and further explore the work of Richard Wagner there."

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DVD: GLYNDEBOURNE *DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG*

Chris Argent



After launching its first very successful venture into the world of Richard Wagner with its 2008 staging of *Tristan und Isolde*, Glyndebourne turned its attention in 2011 to Wagner's essay into comedy – a work with a serious and ultimately challenging objective. The two music dramas could not be more different, the former focused on the delusions of two characters in search of an ending while the latter, seemingly so suave, good tempered, rejoicing in the vagaries of human nature and yet setting out to demonstrate that the practice and appreciation of music, in the sense understood by those who populate the concert hall and opera house (not the sort used as a category for the tv Eggheads quiz programme), is a civilising mission designed, *inter alia* to enhance the life of the *Volk* (the masses).

Wagner's intention to prove that high-end music equals a civilised society which recognises cultural, historical and even nationalistic values that are worth defending and preserving was ultimately defeated by his own countrymen of a later generation who

completely misread the seemingly xenophobic codes voiced by Sachs in Act III and loosed the most horrendous assault on civilised values and civil order the world has ever experienced. It seems unlikely that David McVicar as the director of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, consciously reacted to the utter simplicity of Glyndebourne's setting for *Tristan und Isolde*, but the net result of an elaborate set with an overwhelming stage population of extras conveyed the impression that he had deliberately set out to provide a startling visual contrast. Perhaps in itself there was nothing wrong with that, but certainly in the third Act, the masses of extras on stage, all palpably preoccupied with carrying out their assigned tasks, made for a very confused stage picture – although it was certainly bright and beautiful. With the stage literally packed to bursting with 'characters' it was not easy to locate the principals or even to register visually the high points announced by the orchestra such as the arrival of the guilds on the festival meadow.

While some might criticise what was in essence a unitary set provided by Vicki Mortimer, its conception as the *crossing* of a Gothic-style cathedral was satisfying visually with its overtones of ecclesiastical fan vaulting and it provided a splendid location for the subsequent shifts of locale. Aided by the admirably subtle changes of lighting designed by Paule Constable, the sequence of scenes from the opening one of worshippers in their Sunday best in St Catherine's Church in Nuremburg seamlessly proceeded using the same space for Walter's trial song, the market square in Nuremburg where Sachs sets out his cobbling stall, Sachs' overstuffed den where Beckmesser alights on a song he assumes to

be by Sachs, and the Festival Meadow. This latter happening seemed totally over the top and must have made the ghost of John Christie wince at the unnecessary expense of marshalling so many (highly talented) extras to provide the feeling of a medieval fair, especially as it was always his ambition to stage Wagner at Glyndebourne.

Sleepy head that I must be, never before had I realized that Veit Pogner's explanation of why he was offering the hand of his daughter in marriage to the winner of the Mastersinger competition on *Johannestag* was set by Wagner to music with a similar cadence and emotional impact as Hans Sachs' monologue in praise of Holy German art. What is more, the rationale for both seems utterly logical as art in any form is a paradigmatic expression of the culture that Wagner wished to see promoted and defended. In the days of the Human Rights Convention, Wagner would have been up before the beak in double-quick time for expressing ideas that were contrary to the holy grail of multiculturalism, but back in the 19th century (never mind the 16th century), the idea of a community with shared cultural aspirations was politically correct and entirely acceptable as being socially cohesive. We have come a long way since those distant days, but one can see the other side of the coin in the way that multiculturalism is spreading throughout the world, what with a *Ring* cycle being mounted in Bangkok, opera houses being built in China and western opera being given on a regular basis in Japan – a country with a fierce history of protecting its famously individualistic culture.

Translating the opera to the early years of the 19th century did not obviate the need for costumes that probably cost as much as ones for the 16th century of Sachs' Nuremberg, but equating the innate wisdom of Wagner with a like asset assigned to Sachs was a nice touch. Sadly not all the production touches were so successful. Having Walter dressed up as a Ruritanian chocolate soldier seemed crass and his behaviour in the opening scene seemed quite inappropriate for the 19th century (never mind the 16th) so forward and presumptuous was he. No wonder Magdalena expressed shock at such ungallant behaviour. Even so, Eva is bowled over, giving the impression that just as Senta dreamed about her hero so had Eva – even without a portrait as a talisman. It has always seemed odd that Pogner, a wise old bird, should have been prepared to lumber his daughter with a pedantic braggart like Beckmesser, but perhaps he had the welfare of the Mastersingers more in mind than the happiness of his daughter whom we have to assume he did actually treasure.

By casting Gerald Finley as Sachs the Glyndebourne team set up an intriguing resonance in that, although Sachs comments that he carried Eva as a baby, he would indeed have made a very suitable marriage partner for her – a consideration that Eva herself recognized in Act III as she tumbled to the fact that her father could easily hand her over to Beckmesser. Her rage at Sachs' demurring at the idea demonstrates just how firmly implanted that idea was in her mind even after she had been clumsily courted by Walter, she in turn having all but proposed to Sachs.

Before we reached Act II there were some delightful moments, as when Kothner launches his roll-call which is answered with such sly enthusiasm and humour by the Mastersingers that a scene which sometimes dragged was a treasure of idiosyncratic responses (be it said, as envisaged by the composer). Yet more dramatic counterpoint emerges in this Act consequent on David making a great song and dance about how extremely difficult it was to become a Mastersinger and yet Pogner, a Mastersinger himself, proposes that Walter (a Franconian knight, not a singer and not even knowing what a poet was) should submit himself to the company in the expectation of being graded a Mastersinger "on this very day".



That Beckmesser should not regard Walter as a serious rival (even if his vigorous marking gives the lie to that idea) seemed an acceptable proposition as Marco Jentzsch gave a good impression of being out of his depth and rather gauche. Maybe that was wished on him by David McVicar. And that Beckmesser should ask the company “have you ever heard such nonsense?” chimes deliciously with the nonsense that Beckmesser was to make of Walter’s Prize song in Act III.

Sachs’ *Wahn* monologue is strikingly relevant today in the 21st when Syrians are torturing and killing each other, and ferocious wars are the norm. And yet it seems as though Wagner’s belief that madness is a prerequisite for evolution and development could have been endorsed by Darwin even if the idea of the survival of the fittest has singularly uncomfortable overtones in the context of the Nazi concentration camps. The ironies abound in this opera even if Wagner himself could not have anticipated the eventual significance of Nuremburg (a haven of peace to Sachs) such as the rallies of the 1930s, the Nuremburg anti-Jewish laws and the Nuremburg trials of some of those who had committed or were responsible for ‘crimes against humanity’ between 1933 and 1945.



It was a pity that reconciliation should not have been a feature of this production: Beckmesser having been shamed by Walter’s rendering of the words on the parchment he had purloined from Sachs was to be seen in tears and not willing to rejoin the merry-making throng. But the production, though somewhat too busy, is so joyful, the performances by all the leading characters so zestful that it does bear repeated viewings. Particularly impressive were the performances of Gerald Finley as Sachs who seemed to live the part, ditto Johannes Martin Kränzle as Beckmesser, Michaela Selinger as Magdalena and Henry Waddington as Kothner. The other principals were fine, thoroughly inhabiting their individual roles with confidence, and Jentzsch rendered the Prize Song with clarity, confidence and beauty of tone.

In this opera so much depends for effect on the bed of orchestral sound arising from the pit and in this respect there can be no criticism: the orchestral framework never overwhelmed the singers, but still served as an essential element in the emerging drama. Even allowing for the small size of the Glyndebourne auditorium, Vladimir Jurowski presided over the LPO that provided an appropriately accented yet unobtrusive forward momentum without any sentimental lingering over the orchestral highlights nor indeed any xenophobic bombast.

WHAT A CHOICE!

Ken Sunshine explores Chris Argent's directory of Wagner performances worldwide

Amsterdam to Zurich and over 100 other cities in between will host one or more Wagner performances during the Big Year. I haven't done the check, but there won't be many Wagner-free days in 2013 (although there are more than enough new CDs and DVDs to give you a fix). It will not be quite possible to see *what* you want, *when* you want and *where* you want but although the choices are not limitless the options are staggeringly wide:

See *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in 41 cities, *Der fliegende Holländer* in 35, *Parsifal* 34, *Tristan und Isolde* 34, *Lohengrin* 18, *Tannhäuser* 17, *Rienzi* 9, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* 7, *Die Feen* in Bayreuth, Frankfurt, Leipzig or London; *Das Liebesverbot* in Bayreuth or Meiningen. What a choice!

Over 100 conductors include Thielemann, Barenboim, Runnicles, Gergiev, Simon Rattle, Nelsons, Negus – again: what a choice! Think of a favourite singer and he or she will be on the list. Do a search on Chris Argent's comprehensive detailed compilation: **Hark The Helden Tenors Sing In Music Dramas and Der Ring**, accessible via our website www.wagnersociety.org and follow *Events, On the Horizon* on the sidebar menu: 14 pages to drool over. I found Matti Salminen, Rachel Nicholls, Bryn Terfel, Petra Lang, Susan Bullock, René Pape – they're all there.

After that, via the *About Us, Library* on the sidebar, why not browse the audio, DVD, video and literary catalogues and take a look at what's available to borrow, either to supplement your operatic experience or, if money, time, distance are prohibitive then to substitute it. Again, lots more choice – and cheaper than flying to Riga, booking the hotels and buying the tickets!

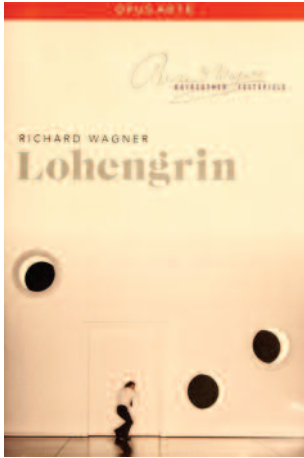
Ignoring these financial restraints I have drawn up my itinerary for the first eight months of 2013. We start with *Das Rheingold* in Palermo 29th January, then to Paris for *Die Walküre* on 17th February with Stuart Skelton (Siegfried) and Martina Serafina (Sieglinde). In March for *Das Liebesverbot* we go to Meiningen (3rd or 13th) conducted by Philippe Bach. This is followed by Lepage's complete Ring cycle on 26th, 28th, 30th April (plus 3rd May) at the Met with James Levine (hopefully), Bryn Terfel (Wotan), Stephanie Blyth (Fricka), Deborah Voigt/Katarina Dalayman (Brünnhilde) to name but a few. In May we shall be in Darmstadt for another complete Cycle before proceeding to another highlight: The Longborough *Ring* on 16th, 18th, 20th, 22nd June – conducted by Anthony Negus with Tati Turi (Siegfried), Rachel Nicolls (Brünnhilde), Eddie Wade (Gunther), Lee Bissett (Gutrune), Malcolm Rivers (Alberich), Alison Kettlewell (Waltraute). Must go to Bayreuth to see *Die Feen* 9th July and then to Helsinki for *Tristan* on 21st August. Why not invent your own dream year? All the information you need is on the website.

NEW MEMBERSHIP FEES

Annual membership fees for new members joining from 2013 will rise by £5 per individual / £10 per couple. Fees for existing members who renew by 31 December 2012 will be held at 2012 levels. Membership makes an ideal Christmas present for anyone who loves Wagner (or would like to know more). If members know anyone who would be interested, the Bicentennial year is an ideal time to join, with a number of stimulating events planned. We are already seeing a good level of interest from new members for 2013. Please contact the Membership Secretary, Margaret Murphy (see: page 55) for details.

DVD: *LOHENGRIN* FROM BAYREUTH

Christian Hoskins



This Opus Arte DVD preserves a performance of Hans Neuenfels' production of *Lohengrin* given at the Bayreuth Festival on the 14th August 2011. The production has generated a fair amount of controversy since its premiere in 2010 and there are indeed times when the staging verges on the grotesque. However, this is also a visually striking *Lohengrin*, and with mesmerizing singing and conducting this result is worth a place in any Wagnerian's collection.

The main reason for the controversy surrounding the production is the presentation of the Brabantines as laboratory rats. For Neuenfels, the citizens of Brabant are subjects of an experiment in which they are exposed to the actions and emotions of the main characters who are mostly seen as human. Neuenfels explains that the rat image was chosen because it is "a highly intelligent animal, as repellent as it is comical. They are the ultimate survivalists."

Such a singular interpretation works up to a point, but there are times when the concept conflicts with the meaning conveyed by Wagner's music. During the Prelude to Act I for instance, we see an animated drawing of a man's head, then a pink rat, then lots of rats, then one rat killing another. No doubt the discord between sound and image here is supposed to be clever or ironic, but for anyone who feels the luminosity and serenity of the music at a deeper level, such visuals can be obtuse and jarring. Two similar animations, subtitled *Wahrheit* (truth), are seen at beginning of Acts II and III, and on a screen at the back of the stage at certain points during the action.

In keeping with the concept of the laboratory rat, Reinhard von der Thannen's stage designs are clean and clinical: a black floor, white walls and simple podium structures that slide back and forth as required. The lighting design by Franck Evin complements this approach. The curtains open to reveal Lohengrin, dressed in a white shirt and black trousers, pushing against a closed door at the rear of the stage. Eventually the door opens and Lohengrin passed through.

The Brabantines then enter from doors along the sides. Von der Thannen also designed the costumes, and it is here that we first see his rat outfits, consisting of dark overalls, gauze masks, glowing red eyes, and rubbery hands, feet and tails. Later we see white and pink rats, and in Act II the Brabantines don evening wear for the wedding celebrations, but even here the men still have their rubbery hands and feet and the women their tails. From time to time, laboratory orderlies with facemasks and blue protective suits appear and usher the rats back and forth.

When Elsa first appears she is wearing a white double-breasted coat with arrows protruding from it, a metaphor for the accusations made against her. Similarly, the stranded stagecoach and dead horse at the start of Act II suggest the foiled getaway of Friedrich and Ortrud. But other elements are more obscure, such as the scene in Act II where two rats are given injections by the laboratory orderlies. And why does Friedrich suddenly appear as a rat during his attempted attack on Lohengrin during Act III?

The end of Lohengrin and Elsa's happiness is signalled by a black coffin full of swan feathers rising out of the bridal bed, a good example of the sophisticated stagecraft practised at Bayreuth. However, the return of Elsa's brother Gottfried is depicted by an egg that rotates to reveal a foetus with a bloated belly and a long umbilical cord, an image that is even more unappealing than it sounds. The opera ends with Gottfried throwing sections of his umbilical cord among the crowd while Lohengrin slowly walks to the front of the stage.

The audience is seen giving a huge ovation for Klaus Florian Vogt, and with good reason. He is an outstanding Lohengrin, not only looking the part, but also singing with a mellifluousness and musicality that illuminates phrase after phrase. There are occasional moments when one notices a lack of sheer vocal heft, such as during Lohengrin's exchanges with Friedrich in Act II, but otherwise he maintains his form throughout, and his performance of the Act III narration: *In fernem Land* is sublime.

Annette Dasch, singing with a touching purity and warmth, portrays Elsa as wide-eyed and otherworldly. She gives a lovely performance of *Einsam in trüben Tagen* in Act I and handles well the abrupt change of mood in Act III when Elsa starts to question Lohengrin's origins. With her striking looks, one can see why Lohengrin was keen to stay in Brabant.

King Heinrich, eloquently voiced by Georg Zeppenfeld, is portrayed here as exhausted and slightly unbalanced (the end of Act I finds him startled by the sudden appearance of Lohengrin's swan and cowering behind a chair). Jukka Rasilainen is superb as Friedrich, projecting both the strength and weakness inherent the character and singing with great intensity. Petra Lang is also excellent as Ortrud, conveying a real sense of malevolence in Act II. The Herald, wearing morning dress and extraordinarily large hair, receives a steadfast performance from Samuel Youn.

Possibly the most impressive performance of all comes from Andris Nelsons in the pit. This is Wagner conducting at a very high level. The Grail music receives ethereally beautifully playing, climaxes are built to towering heights of intensity, and the singers are provided with an orchestral accompaniment that is fluent and expressive but never overpowering. I particularly like the feeling of menace and foreboding that he brings to the start of Act II. The Bayreuth Festival Orchestra is on top form, with splendid fanfares from the brass, and Eberhard Friedrich's chorus is excellent.

The DVD presentation benefits from a clear picture and vivid colours, although it uses the American NTSC format rather than the slightly more detailed European PAL standard, presumably in expectation of American and Japanese sales. Fortunately, most modern European DVD players and televisions will happily play NTSC discs. There is also a Blu-ray option available for those preferring their visuals in high definition. The video direction by Michael Beyer is pleasingly subtle and maintains a good balance between the crowd scenes and individual performances. Sound quality is excellent in both the stereo and DTS surround options, although I felt more could have been done to make use of the additional channels in the latter.

The DVD includes brief interviews (in German) with Katharina Wagner, Hans Neuenfels, Klaus Florian Vogt and Annette Dasch. As with the main opera, subtitles are available in English, French, German and Spanish. There is also the opportunity to see the three *Wahrheit* rat animations separate from the main presentation. In addition, there is a booklet note provided by the opera director and critic Mike Ashman.

TRANSLATING WAGNER

Katherine Wren

In July's *Wagner News* I introduced my MA dissertation on translating Wagner's *Oper und Drama* and invited members to take part in the questionnaire. The project is now nearing its close so I'd like to take this opportunity to give a quick summary of my work and to thank those who took part.

My first task was to determine the extent to which Ellis' translation of *Oper und Drama* needed to be updated. Several readers defended it on the grounds that it is closer in time to the original and stays faithful to Wagner's own style. However, the vast majority found Ellis' translation difficult to engage with due to its complex and archaic language. Several academics said that a clearer version would be very much welcomed.

The aim of my new translation was first and foremost to increase accessibility to Wagner's theories. However, the work should be respected as literature, too, so where possible I tried to maintain Wagner's style. The main difference in comparison to Ellis was that, instead of translating word-for-word, I translated whole clause units. That meant that I wasn't bound so closely to the German syntax, producing a more natural English sentence structure. I also split many of the longer sentences. Wagner's key terms were retained in German and explained in footnotes. The new translation was well received by questionnaire respondents: all but one preferred the new translation on the grounds that it was clearer and easier to grasp the content of the text.

I received a lot of help from the Wagner Societies around the UK and Ireland through the questionnaires and also in interpreting the more difficult sections of the text and I would very much like to thank you all for your help. More details can be found at: <http://katherinewrentranslator.wordpress.com/>

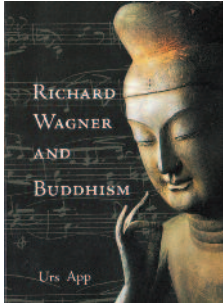
THE 2012 COVENT GARDEN RING ON BBC RADIO 3

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<i>Das Rheingold</i>	Monday	24 th December
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<i>Die Walküre Act III</i>	Thursday	27 th December
<i>Siegfried Act I</i>	Friday	28 th December
<i>Siegfried Act II</i>	Monday	31 st December
<i>Siegfried Act III</i>	Tuesday	1 st January
<i>Götterdämmerung Act I</i>	Wednesday	2 nd January
<i>Götterdämmerung Act II</i>	Thursday	3 rd January
<i>Götterdämmerung Act III</i>	Friday	4 th January

DURS APP: *RICHARD WAGNER AND BUDDHISM*

Roger Lee



In 1849 Wagner was given a booklet by Ludwig Feuerbach titled: *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*. Having dedicated *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (The Art form of the Future) to Feuerbach Wagner met the poet Georg Herwegh who was a friend of the philosopher. In 1854 Herwegh introduced Wagner to Schopenhauer's main work: *The World as Will and Representation*. Wagner wrote that it was Schopenhauer who had clarified his *Ring* poem to him so that he concluded it with "salvation through the most severe renunciation." Schopenhauer hailed Buddhism as "the best of all religions" and his view influenced that of Richard Wagner for the rest of his life.

In just 49 pages (plus another 40 of notes) Urs App writes of Wagner as an avid reader of Schopenhauer with the result that the pairing of enlightened wisdom (*prajñā*) with compassion (*karuna*) became the centrepiece of his Buddhist-inspired opera project: *Die Sieger* (The Victors) which occupied him for two and a half decades and later also of *Parsifal*'s key phrase: *enlightened knowledge via compassion*. This concept, according to App, also forms the vanishing point of a revised ending of the *Ring* poem.

Reading his first book about the subject in 1856 when he was in the prime of his creativity, Wagner became one of the first westerners to gain a sound understanding of a number of the essential doctrines of Buddhism. These included the view of existence as suffering, craving as the root of suffering, egoism as a basic form of ignorance and of the ethical dimensions of Buddhism. In Urs App's view he thus became the first major European artist to be inspired by this religion.

In *Tristan und Isolde* Schopenhauer's "desire that is continually reborn" found its expression in music: the medium which, according to Schopenhauer, embodies cosmic will in a much less mediated way than all other arts. "The *Leitmotif* of longing – the famous tension-filled 'Tristan chord' – expresses the wound from which Tristan suffers and in *Parsifal* that very wound will torment Amfortas. The world of tormented transmigration in an endless cycle of life-and-death *saṃsāra*) turns the voluptuous woman's world upside down and leads straight to monastic vows. Life-and-death had already been at the heart of the curse in *The Flying Dutchman* and it haunts Kundry in *Parsifal*."

Urs App points out that the theme of the transmigration of souls which was to be so prominent in *The Victors* was perfectly suited to musical expression in the form of Wagner's *Leitmotif* technique where recognisable musical themes are constantly reborn with subtle changes and in different modes. In *Mein Leben* Wagner wrote of the legend of Ananda and Prakriti on which he was to base his scenario for *The Victors*: "The story gained its significance through the fact that the past life of the suffering protagonists is weaved into the actual life as something that is totally present. I recognised right away that this could be brought home emotionally through the musical reminiscence of the former life that continuously resonates in the actual one. This made me look forward with particular fondness to the task of creating this work."

App concludes: "Renunciation asserted itself as the vanishing point of his works of art. In *Parsifal* with its Indian motifs and its story line which so much resembles that of *The Victors*, this tendency was to reach its apex."

BARRY MILLINGTON: *THE SORCERER OF BAYREUTH*

Professor Hans Rudolph Veget

If you are tired of seeing Wagner branded as an egomaniacal jerk, indeed, as an altogether monstrous and odious human being, then you will find solace in Barry Millington's book in which the distinguished Wagner expert refutes many misconceptions and sets the record straight. In the venerable tradition of Ernest Newman, Millington here adroitly manages to restore balance and sanity and sharp focus to the endless debate about the most controversial artist of the last two centuries.

Was Wagner really a ruthless exploiter of his many benefactors? He was not, Millington tells us, if you consider what his donors received in return. As a matter of principle, Millington tends to take the side of the composer who had to fend for himself and his work without the benefit of modern copyright laws. To clinch his point, he cites Wagner's amusing and disarming confession, in a letter to Franz Liszt: "when you see the second act of *Tristan*, you'll admit that I need a lot of money. I'm a great spendthrift; but, really, it does produce results" That it did!

Was Wagner really an irredeemable philanderer? He was not, Millington tells us: "the reality is more complex and far more interesting". In fact, the number of Wagner's affairs has been greatly exaggerated, no doubt partly because, in his operas, the institution of marriage does not fare well. Wagner's marriage to Minna Planer was initially testosterone-driven; it inevitably faltered as soon as their incompatibility became apparent. With balanced good reason, Millington thus refrains from blaming Wagner for his marital Wanderlust. As for Mathilde Wesendonck, the great love of Wagner's life, Millington is all but certain that Wagner did not have sexual relations with that woman. And about Wagner's second marriage, to Cosima, Millington again pleads for understanding: "What, after all, was a passionate and excitable man to do when his wife, having produced Siegfried, then proceeded to withdraw her sexual favours from the progenitor of the heir apparent?" Wagner's dalliance with the brilliant and exotic Judith Gautier at the time of the first Bayreuth Festival almost has Millington's benediction.

But what about Wagner's infamous hatred of Jews? For the past quarter century Millington has been in the forefront of the heated debate over this, the thorniest of Wagnerian issues. He is adamant, and rightly so, in rejecting the position of the apologists, or rather, "protectionists" who argue that Wagner's operatic works are untainted by the composer's anti-Semitism. On the other hand, he does not want to throw out the baby with the bathwater either, and thus takes the plausible position that "it is that often murky ideological subtext that makes the operas the fascinating, perplexing and endlessly thought-provoking works they are".

For many people it is indeed his anti-Semitism that makes Wagner unpalatable as man, artist, and thinker. The matter greatly troubles Millington, but not to the point of lessening his appreciation and enjoyment of the operas. Proof of this can be found for instance in the strong words of admiration that he has for *The Ring* ("simply one of the enduring pillars of Western civilization;"), for *Tristan* ("a profound meditation on the nature of the material world, on the metaphysics of subjectivity and on the mysteries of human existence itself;"), and for *Parsifal* ("a work whose glory will always be shrouded in its dark ambiguities;"). This kind of nuanced admiration, which remains mindful of the "murky ideological subtext," places Millington in the company of that most eminent Wagnerian, Thomas Mann, excerpts from whose writings serve as epigraphs for five

chapters. Mann's celebrated "enthusiastic ambivalence" is also Millington's.

The book has a somewhat unusual format. Instead of covering the life and works as well as their afterlife in a strictly chronological order, Millington opts for a thematic arrangement in 30 concise chapters devoted to a theme or complex of themes. The chapters explore a given topic through the analysis of texts, illustrations, and relevant documents. Particular points are buttressed by citations from recent scholarship by, among others, Chris Walton, Barry Emslie, Laurence Dreyfus, Patrick Carnegy, Nicholas Vazsonyi, and Ingrid Kapsamer. This procedure makes for a pleasingly fleet presentation free of ponderousness and fussiness.

In a book of modest proportions certain themes inevitably had to be glossed over or omitted. It is still somewhat surprising that Millington hardly deals with the Paris years and the formative influence on Wagner of French culture, although he does add Rousseau to the established mix of "influences" on *The Ring*. The relationship between Wagner and Berlioz is left unexamined, something all the more regrettable since Millington's chapter on Liszt is one that is particularly fine and enlightening.

Another omission concerns the memorable attempt by Franz W. Beidler, commissioned by the American Military Government to organize a truly de-Nazified Bayreuth Festival. This attempt failed for legal reasons and thus paved the way for Wieland and Wolfgang (neither of whom was untainted) to take the reins of the Festival. A distinguished scholar and arts administrator; Beidler was the son (born in 1901) of Isolde Wagner and Wagner's first-born grandson. He had been an opponent of Nazism from the start and was the first Wagner descendant to marry a woman who was Jewish. Beidler's name is nowhere to be found in this book, even though his existence led to Isolde's attempt in 1914 to secure his hereditary rights in the courts. In an infamous legal farce masterminded by Cosima and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Beidler was stripped of his connection to Wagner – a sadly brutal but by no means atypical episode in the colourful history of the Wagner clan.

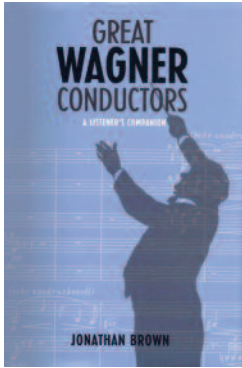
As I see it, Millington's blind spot as regards the Beidler matter leaves him all the more susceptible to the myth of Neu-Bayreuth, according to which the Festival of 1951 marked a complete break with the Nazi past and, aesthetically and politically speaking, a fresh start. He does not ignore Wieland's Nazi associations, but he appears strangely sanguine about the highly questionable efforts of Hitler's favourite little Wagner to decontaminate Bayreuth from its Nazi connections. Sanguine, however, does not even begin to describe Millington's surprisingly gushing comments about the "breathtaking stagecraft" (p.299) of Katharina Wagner's 2007 production of *Die Meistersinger*, or his praise for Katharina and Eva Wagner-Pasquier's "impressive" directorship of the Festival. Surely it is premature to speak of triumph when dark clouds seem now to be gathering around the Green Hill from various sides. But Millington – optimist at heart that he appears to be – concludes his book with an observation that is perfectly reasonable: "In the meantime, the world will be watching events on the Green Hill with no less fascination than in the past, as bemused by the still unfolding saga of the Wagner dynasty as it is impressed by the calibre of its unique achievements".

My cavils aside, Millington's new book is an admirably succinct and thoughtful treatment of Wagner "and all that." It also quite auspiciously opens the gates for what promises to be a flood of publications occasioned by the impending bicentenary.

Reprinted from *Wagner Notes* Oct 2012 with permission of the New York Wagner Society.

JONATHAN BROWN: *GREAT WAGNER CONDUCTORS*

Chris Argent



The avalanche of books pertaining to Wagner – the man and his works – continues unabated even before the start of his bicentenary. The puff for this book, published by the Parrot Press in Australia, asserts that it is “an essential source for opera lovers, Wagner enthusiasts, students of historical performances, conductors and their pupils, cultural historians and collectors of recordings”. For once, a publicity blurb seems to be thoroughly justified.

The author, seemingly an aficionado but not a musical scholar, has invested a prodigious amount of time and energy in consulting a variety of sources, most of them reviews in newspapers of the day, both English and foreign (principally German). His rationale for that investment, apart from the general interest in the attributes of the many legendary conductors who were pre-eminent in the Wagnerian oeuvre, emerges from a quotation in the author’s preface from no less an authority than Richard Strauss: “If an audience is bored with Wagner, it is the conductors who are to blame”. It is the inverse of this observation, namely of the centrality of the conductor in any performance of any composition (by Wagner, Strauss or any other composer for that matter) that is the motor for the book and for Jonathan Brown’s dedication to his self-inflicted task. At first, it comes as a slight shock that Goodall and Solti are not examined, until one discovers that the author has limited himself to the conductors who were born in the 19th century which, when you think about it, probably covers almost all the all-time greats in the field of Wagnerian music-drama.

By any reckoning a heavyweight at 1.7 kg, the book comprises 593 pages of text dealing with assessments essentially based on critics’ reviews of a panoply of Wagner conductors running from Wagner himself through to Fritz Reiner via Hans Richter and Hermann Levi among the early birds and the four Ks (Kleiber, Knappertsbusch, Krauss and Klemperer) whose performances and recordings are more familiar to the current generation of Wagnerites, together with seemingly comprehensive discographies spanning 170 pages starting with performances conducted by Hans von Bulow (a recording made in 1889 of the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger* in New York – lost, or rather yet to be found – probably the first Wagner composition ever to be recorded). A piquant appendix devotes 13 pages to a summary of the timings for various Wagner works though Jonathan Brown uses as his prologue to this a quotation from Karl Muck to the effect that he pitied those who sat in the Festspielhaus with a stopwatch in their hands. And a (very) select bibliography more or less brings up the rear (pages 783 and 784).

The book is peppered with an apt selection of images, sepia-toned photographs and many pen and ink line drawings (but, rather disappointingly, no cartoons). Each chapter provides a brief portrait of its subject, of his (no female conductors tackled major Wagner compositions until Simone Young) background, his induction into the Wagnerian canon and subsequent emergence into the Wagnerian uplands as demonstrated by the conductor’s achievements, both at home (most often, Germany) and abroad (principally, England and the USA), that justified the appellation ‘great’ as judged by published

criticisms. Adding spice to the whole concoction, each conductor (apart from Wagner himself) is assigned a descriptive and charming nutshell of an epithet that characterizes the individual: for example, Hans von Bülow is named as “His Master’s Ideal”, Hermann Levi as “Keeper of the Grail”, Albert Coates as “Bacchus in Valhalla” (which moniker demands some thought) and Hans Knappertsbusch as “Heavy-weight of Bayreuth” (and who would quarrel with that).

It must have seemed only natural (and proper) that the survey should start with the master himself who might be regarded as having set the gold standard, though it is evident from the author’s selection of comments from the critics of the day that he failed to do that even by his own admission, preferring instead that his favourite acolytes – Hans von Bülow, Hans Richter and (for *Parsifal*) Hermann Levi – should take possession of the rostrum. Wagner is categorized as a great conductor (particularly of Beethoven), but not of his own music. It is perhaps a little surprising that nothing is said of the innovations instituted by Wagner at Bayreuth (eg, the dowsing of lights in the auditorium, the hidden orchestra) subsequently copied in opera houses around the world, but the author is entirely focused on how the conductor directs his orchestra and singers.

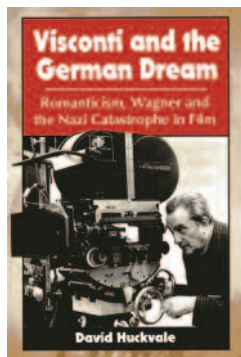
For the record, the survey awards the palm for ‘greatness’, in addition to those mentioned above, to the following: Anton Seidl, Felix Mottl, Karl Muck, Arthur Nikisch, Albert Coates, Gustav Mahler, Felix Weingartner, Bruno Walter, Arturo Toscanini, Artur Bodanzkyi, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Clemens Krauss, Karl Böhm and Richard Strauss. The author quotes Max Graf (an Austrian music critic) who in 1903 assigned to late 19th century conductors distinctive labels that do summarize their temperaments quite neatly. Thus Nikisch is described as “a pale salon gypsy”, Mahler “a bundle of nerves with high intelligence”, Weingartner “elegant and formally impressive”, Toscanini “a firebrand and volcano”, and Richter “full of naturalness and simple strength”.

Given Wagner’s own literary prolixity, it is a striking fact that so many of the great Wagner conductors were notably reluctant to write about their methods or their experiences, and it emerges quite plainly that all were of the view that conductors are born and can never really be trained into the mysterious art of successfully guiding an orchestra in the pit or on the platform and the singers on the stage. It emerges from the author’s selection of critics’ reviews that in the early days conductors quite wilfully excised passages from Wagner’s scores for no apparent reasons except perhaps to shoehorn a longer work (of which Wagner wrote many!) into an evening of circumscribed length, something that nowadays would be quite unacceptable even in Katarina and Eva’s Bayreuth.

The book is priced at \$55 (presumably Australian), equivalent to £35. Although listed by Amazon, it is as yet (mid-October 2012) without a price from that source. A criticism must be voiced: the font used is 10 point Bembo, with the quotations in a smaller point size of the same font (9 point) and the footnotes, which are in themselves fascinating and deserving to be read, even smaller still at 8 point. This is not conducive to an easy read, though it has to be acknowledged that the use of a larger (clearer) font would have driven up the overall size (and cost) of the book by perhaps another 100 pages (and, say, another \$10 or \$15) at least. The text is, for the average enthusiast, mercifully free of scholastic terminology and musical examples, though doubtless musicologists will regret that omission (which, had it been otherwise, would have enlarged the book even more). Having said that, the book is thoroughly to be recommended as an indispensable addition to the library of any self-respecting lover of Wagner’s music dramas.

DAVID HUCKVALE: *VISCONTI AND THE GERMAN DREAM*

Kevin Stephens



Any book that can include successively in its index *Thunderbirds* (television series), *To Damascus* (Strindberg) and Tom and Jerry cartoons must be counted as eclectic. David Huckvale's subject is, ostensibly, the film maker Luchino Visconti (1906-1976) and his theme is the decadence of German Romanticism and how this is reflected in three of the director's films: *The Damned*, *Death in Venice* (with Dirk Bogarde playing the composer von Aschenbach) and *Ludwig*, a biographical film about Wagner's patron, Ludwig II. They were released in 1969, 1971 and 1972 respectively and, according to Huckvale, reflected the director's lifelong fascination with German romantic culture and Thomas Mann's critique of it.

The films are dealt with not in the order Visconti made them but in a more historical order, beginning with *Ludwig* and exploring the romantic cult of death, continuing with detailed examination of both Thomas Mann's short novel, *Death in Venice*, and Visconti's film of it (with an aside on Britten's opera) and concluding with *The Damned* and its *Götterdämmerung*-like cataclysm of the Third Reich. Mann's central character, Aschenbach, is variously a writer, a composer (in Visconti's film, loosely based on Mahler, whose music so graced it) a writer again (in Britten's version) and finally a Nazi SS officer in *The Damned*. Here he is so named in order to establish a link which allowed Visconti "to suggest that the hideous degeneracy of Hitlerism in Germany had deep and distant sources in the culture that bred it, and to which it constantly referred."

The structure is rather like that of an opera, with seven chapters (scenes?) divided by three "intermissions" or chapters which stand a little aside from the main trajectory. These sometimes inhabit weird territory, for example the worlds of Algernon Blackwood, Dennis Wheatley and Aleister Crowley, all purveyors of the demonic occult, in an intermission on *Pan*, *Paganism and Arcadia*. The final intermission: *The Cinema of the Future*, explores in great detail Wagner's (and others') anticipations of cinema technique and one is left with the feeling that if, say, Peter Jackson had applied the computer-generated imagery of his *Lord of the Rings* films to *Der Ring* and Wagner had, by some mysterious means of time travel, seen it, the master would have been delighted.

Nietzsche's aphorism that "Wagner's art is sick" has never been put to better use as Huckvale romps through "the teachings of that bible of decadence, *Tristan und Isolde*" and explores "the sickness that began with Wagner and ended with Hitler; the sickness that seems necessary to heighten the senses at the expense of destroying the soul." The cultural references are wide and deep, as in the section which explores Wagner's (and Liszt's) pretty appalling taste in pictures by artists such as Ary Scheffer, Jakob von Steinle and Paul Joukowsky (invited by Wagner to make the designs for Parsifal). Now, by the magic of the internet, we can see these pictures and judge for ourselves.

By the time we get to Chapter 6, *The Damned*, Huckvale's narrative becomes mostly a blow by blow account of Visconti's film, designed to show that "Visconti did not think that fascism was dead, and he intended his film to be a warning about what could easily happen again." Huckvale is unsympathetic to Richard Strauss' position during the

Nazi years (his daughter-in-law was Jewish, so he had to compromise with officialdom to try to protect her). Chapter 7, *Alternative Visions*, runs through the filmography of Wagner, Liszt, Ludwig and Hitler starting with the 1913 biopic of Wagner directed by Carl Froelich and spending inordinate amounts of time with the irreverent Ken Russell (*Mahler, Dance of the Seven Veils* – a biopic of Richard Strauss – and Lisztomania) and Hans-Jurgen Syberberg (*Ludwig, Requiem for a Virgin King, Hitler, a Film from Germany* and the film of *Parsifal* set on Wagner's death mask). There's even an epilogue which explores Wagner's influence on the art of film music.

It all makes for a fascinating, if sometimes irritating read. You begin to think that Huckvale is following the tired old line that Wagner led to Hitlerism, then suddenly you find him denying this. Despite the wealth of reference his complicated argument is not always easily followed. I finished the book not entirely sure what the author did think.

WAGNER RING APPLICATION FOR APPLE HANDHELD DEVICES

Edward Hewitt



Wagner Ring is an app developed by Richard Fackenthal for Apple iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad which comprises a database of 153 leitmotifs from *The Ring* played by Fackenthal on the piano. The app is clear and easy to navigate. The larger, central button gives access to the database. A “Share” button opens a template email with which one can tell fellow Wagnerians about the app. The “Review” button takes the user to the page on the Apple Store on which reviews of the app can be posted, whilst the “About” button reveals information about the app version and updates and includes the facility to email its creator.

Richard Fackenthal's renditions of the leitmotifs are really rather good. Of course it is arguably impossible to recreate the magic of some of the *Ring* music accurately on a piano. The glory of the *Valhalla* music, the dark, threatening atmosphere of the Giants' theme or the jaw-dropping beauty of *Heil dir Sonne* simply cannot be fully captured and conveyed by a lonesome keyboard. This is not, however, a criticism of Mr Fackenthal's valiant efforts. The Rheinmaidens' music, the *Walkürenritt* and the *Forest Murmurs* are just a few of the motifs to which great justice is done by his renditions.

The leitmotifs are grouped by opera and arranged in the order in which they appear. A useful search function makes it quick and easy to locate a particular motif. This app is a helpful point of reference for *Ring* fans who wish to have a portable collection of leitmotifs in their pockets at all times.

SEATTLE RING 2013

New Zealand Wagner Society members David and Sue Gibbs write: “We are keen to attend the Seattle Ring cycle in August. We wonder if you have a group of your members planning to attend, and if so if you have any ticket purchasing arrangements and/or other ancillary events planned. If you do have plans to attend this event we would be delighted if we could participate in some way with the group that may be attending from London.” If you are planning to go to Seattle contact them on davidgibbs@actrix.co.nz



Painting by Jenny Jones: jennypaintio@yahoo.co.uk

the wagner society

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Vice President: Sir John Tomlinson

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**24th April: The Dame Eva Turner Lecture: “Wagner in Practice”
To be given by Keith Warner**

Queen’s College, 43-49 Harley Street London W1G 8BT

7pm for 7:30 Tickets: £10/£5 students – to include a glass of wine

Keith Warner has directed all of Wagner's mature works with the exception of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* including *Lohengrin* at Bayreuth and, most recently, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the Royal Opera House. He will examine Wagner’s own instructions about performing his music dramas and discuss their relevance today

**22nd May: The Wagner Society Bicentenary Lunch
Guest of honour: Dame Gwyneth Jones**

Montague at the Gardens Hotel, 15 Montague Street, London WC1 5BJ

12:00 for 12:45 until 15:00

Tickets £48 to include a three course meal, coffee etc. and a welcome drink

NO TICKETS ON THE DOOR

(See page 27 for further details.)

**27th October: The Rehearsal Orchestra and Mastersingers present
Scenes from *Der Ring des Nibelungen***

Supported by the Wagner Society

Henry Wood Hall, Trinity Church Square, London SE1 4HO

Details in the April issue of Wagner News

7th December

The Wagner Society Annual Singing Competition

To be held in Collaboration with the Mastersingers

Further details to follow

TICKETS

Tickets for Wagner Society events are available from Mike Morgan: 9 West Court, Downley, High Wycombe, HP13 5TG. Please send SAE and make cheques out to **The Wagner Society**. Tickets for most events should be available on the door, but please check for availability with: ticketsecretary@wagnersociety.org

Web enabled booking with debit/credit cards and/or Paypal will be available later in 2013