



## Many Streams of Parsifals

A question overheard last year at a dinner party (remember dinner parties?) with some dedicated Wagnerians: ‘How long is it to drive from Brisbane to Adelaide?’ The answer shot back: ‘Three-and-a-half *Parsifals*’.

Quite right too. A typical theatre performance of *Parsifal*, including intervals, is just over 6 hours, so 3.5 x 6 = 21 hours and a bit. Turn to Google and you’ll find that they clock the Brisbane-Adelaide drive at 21’27”. Pretty close.

*Parsifal* is not Wagner’s longest opera; that palm goes to *Die Meistersinger*. But *Parsifal* does seem like the longest — not a jibe, but a comment on the fact that it is less of a story set to music, and more of a ritual embedded within music, a new kind of stage event that Wagner called a ‘deed of music’.

There is action of course, but that’s mostly to place and punctuate the musical unrolling of meaning. Time becomes space. The clock stands still and the music transports you elsewhere.

### *Parsifal, Easter, and Lockdown*

During our current lockdown, when Time threatens to hang heavy, the internet streams of *Parsifal* have joined to become a river because our coronaviral confinement is coinciding with Easter, the season of *Parsifal*. And with Easter comes the promise of the re-birth of Nature and humanity.

*Parsifal* holds out that promise as well. It is all about new life out of old. The wearily fractured society in which

it is set has split men from women and old from young, leaving attitudes that miss the heart of things and see only trappings and seductive appearances (think Flower Maidens).

But the age of *Parsifal* is our age too. His Flower Maidens re-appear in our continuous, sexy adverts, and his early lack of personal knowledge is paralleled



*Parsifal returns to bring new birth to his dying community*

by the way our ideas come second-hand through a media that packages and dresses everything — ‘fakes’ it, as a certain US president would say.

But when something dramatic happens, like when *Parsifal* suddenly grasps what human compassion means, then a new spirit breaks out and people re-discover themselves and their world.

### *Coronaviral Parsifal*

Can *Parsifal* teach us something today? This current terrible virus might well be the ‘something dramatic’ that can re-open our eyes and re-orientate our minds.

It’s happening already. People can still be awful of course, but have you noticed how much nicer many are, out of their hectic work routines? That they enjoy waving to others who move over to give them their two metres? When they walk out on their daily exercise *en famille* or as we say now *en bubble*, they go down streets they haven’t visited for years, and discover parks they didn’t know existed. Like *Parsifal*, they’re re-discovering Nature, also re-discovering other people, and yes, re-discovering themselves. They enjoy reading more, conversing more with others, and — above all — listening more to music, especially Wagner’s.

### *The Music*

And what music that is to listen to! *Parsifal* was the work that Debussy described as ‘one of the loveliest monuments of sound ever raised to the serene glory of music’. It positively throbs with community chants, processional marches and the repeated, soaring uplift of the ‘Dresden Amen’, to say nothing of the great quasi-Mass at the end of Act I.

Wagner chose the Christian/Catholic Mass as the basic ground for his ritual, but it could have been any religious ritual, not exclusively Christian, a point that poor old Nietzsche missed entirely when he dismissed the composer as ‘breaking down at the foot of the cross’.

In fact, Wagner always intended that *Parsifal* should be not sectarian but all-embracing, with a message of re-birth for all human beings, whatever their culture or creed.

## Some Online Parsifals for Easter

- **Now on Demand:** Two YouTube *Parsifals* — 1) Bayreuth/cond. Stein, and 2) Salzburg/cond. Thielemann (Subtitled).
- **Now on Demand till 11 April:** Bavarian State Opera. Nina Stemme, Jonas Kaufmann, René Pape, cond. Kirill Petrenko <https://www.staatsoper.de/en/news/online-schedule-until-19-april.html> (Subtitled).
- **9 April for 24 hours:** Met Opera—a *Parsifal* with Dalayman, Kaufmann and René Pape, cond. Daniele Gatti. [www.metopera.org/user-information/nightly-met-opera-streams](http://www.metopera.org/user-information/nightly-met-opera-streams) (Subtitled).
- **9 April: Vienna State: DVD of 2015 performance.** Volle, Milling, Denoke/cond. Adam Fischer. Go to [www.staatsoperlive.com](http://www.staatsoperlive.com) to create a password and get more details. (Subtitled).
- **10 April: Berlin Staatsoper:** (Good Friday) Andreas Schager, Anja Kampe and René Pape, cond. Barenboim. [www.staatsoper-berlin.de/en/staatsoper/news/our-daily-video-on-demand-programme.142/](http://www.staatsoper-berlin.de/en/staatsoper/news/our-daily-video-on-demand-programme.142/)
- **13 April : Berlin Staatsoper:** (Easter Monday) Same details as above.

If you would like to read about *Parsifal* go to <http://www.wagneropera.net/wagner-links.htm>. Go down a few lines to the **Monsalvat** link, which opens up a list of opera venues, Wagner groups (including WSNZ) and many *Parsifal*-linked articles. It reveals a whole horizon that’s not just a plenitude but a paradise of *Parsifals*!