

WAGNER NEWS OF VICTORIA



NEWSLETTER OF THE
RICHARD WAGNER SOCIETY INC.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking back and looking (just) ahead

Happy New Year to all members. In this column we look back on last year's highlights, celebrate 15 years' production of *Wagner News* and anticipate with great excitement this February's new productions of *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Parsifal*, to be performed in Melbourne.

Highlights of 2018

- Pre-Meistersinger Opera Talks, St John's Lutheran Church, Southgate, November: Four lectures by Professor Heath Lees with a total of 618 attendees, about 40 per cent of whom were from interstate or overseas.
- Inaugural Young Artist Award, August: Director Greg Eldridge was sponsored by an anonymous Society member to attend the 2018 Bayreuth Festival; this award is continuing in 2019. The Society also provided Bayreuth tickets to five other young Australian artists currently studying overseas.
- Bayreuth Festival 2018, August: attended by 11 members and six young artists.
- Support for Young Australian Soprano, Lee Abrahmsen, in her debut as Isolde in Melbourne Opera's *Tristan und Isolde*, February 2018: \$15,000 from fundraising provided funds for this project.
- Support for Young Australian Soprano,

Natalie Aroyan, in her debut Wagnerian role, Eva, and Young Australian Baritone, Michael Honeyman, in his debut as Hermann Ortel in Opera Australia's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, November: \$24,000 support was principally from the Society's Special Productions Fund.

- Members' special activities associated with the Society's support for Melbourne Opera's *Tristan und Isolde* and Opera Australia's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.
- A vibrant Members' Functions Program, where attendances were generally at record high levels.

● Continual improvements to the Society's website wagnermelb.org.au
Wagner News celebrates 15 years of production

Congratulations to Editor Stan O'Loughlin and Layout Designer Dawn Volz for their 15 years' production of *Wagner News* (Issue 1, February 2004). Not only is this an important members' communication, but also it is sent electronically to Australasian, and some international Wagner Societies and Verband, as well as to stakeholders, such as opera companies.

Melbourne Opera's *Der Fliegende Holländer*

Melbourne opera lovers have been spoiled by Melbourne Opera's (MO's)

major foray into Wagner productions, which also necessitated their move to the beautiful National Trust Regent Theatre in the City. Commencing in August 2016 with *Tannhäuser*, where the chorus sang in English, the productions have significantly improved over the less than four years. Choruses are now sung in German, while for this and last year we have the privilege of internationally renowned Maestro Antony Negus conducting.

Despite Melbourne Opera having neither state nor federal funding, the gifted producers and directors give opera audiences much to cherish. The beautiful ethereal swan visual effect in *Lohengrin* offered one such memory.

MO provides a significant platform for young Australian singers. Notably, the Society supported Helena Dix with her voluptuous voice in the role of Elsa in *Lohengrin* (2017); this year she is debuting at The Met as Alice Ford in *Falstaff*.

Lee Abrahmsen, who triumphed in her Wagnerian debut last year as Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde*, is again being supported by the Society. We wish Lee well in her role as Senta in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, the earliest of the 10 Wagner

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operas that are regularly performed, written in 1841, though considerably modified for 20 years.

Melbourne Opera's Parsifal

"The Vorspiel is finished. It sounds very nice." ~ Wagner, 1878 in letter to Edward Dannreuther

Parsifal is Wagner's 13th and final opera. Interestingly, the only time Wagner conducted publicly in the Bayreuth Festspielhaus was in 1882, at the last performance of *Parsifal* in its premiere season. When he died in Venice soon after on 13 February 1883, Liszt incorporated the *Parsifal* theme in an elegy for his son-in-law.

Members are very privileged to be having a pre-*Parsifal* private function (12 February) at St Kilda's Palais Theatre. Hosted by Victorian Opera, we will see

part of a dress rehearsal, followed by Artistic Director Richard Mills AM in conversation with young Australian baritone, Derek Welton.

The Society is supporting the role of Klingsor, which will be performed by Derek, who had wide acclaim last year in Bayreuth, when he debuted in this role. What a privilege it will be to experience his performances here. Derek must quietly smile when he contrasts the environs of the Palais with the Festspielhaus.

Another singer I am very excited to be hearing and seeing is the highly experienced Swedish dramatic soprano, Katarina Dalayman, in the role of Kundry. She has performed in all the world's leading opera houses and is described as having impeccable musicianship and dramatic ability.

Victorian Opera's 2019 *Parsifal* production is the first time a fully staged opera production of *Parsifal* is being performed in Australia. It will be interesting to compare this with Opera Australia's 2017 absolutely sublime concert version of *Parsifal* at the Sydney Opera House, with Jonas Kauffman in the role of *Parsifal*.

How fortunate we are with the increasing number of Wagner productions we are enjoying in Australia. A challenge for the Society is how we can continue to fund young singers in these productions.



~ Dr Susan Cumming
President

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Further to my opinion piece in the previous newsletter (Vol. 15, No. 3), I found it interesting reviewing the 1982 classic film of *Parsifal*, by Hans Jurgen Syberberg.

When kissed by Kundry, *Parsifal* assumes the form of a woman, whilst continuing to be sung by Reiner Goldberg, with a tenor voice. Syberberg gives no explanation for this physical change, but I think it reinforces the idea that *Parsifal* may have been de-sexed (castrated); or could this be a profound moment when the male takes on the characteristic of the female, namely feeling and compassion; or could

this be a fusion of male and female to produce a complete hero/heroine?? Food for thought.

Many thanks to the large number of interesting contributions to this newsletter from our members. There is so much material that 'Whispering Woodbird' has given way, and will return with a vengeance in the mid-year news.



~ Stan O'Loughlin

CALL FOR YVONNE MINTON CDs, DVDs OR RECORDS



YVONNE MINTON:
THE PERFECT WAGNERITE

Margot Costanzo is a long-standing member of this Society. She studied German at university, was an exchange student in Hannover and has a lifelong

interest in German language and German culture, including Wagner.

As a broadcaster for 3MBS most recently, some members may have heard her program on the 80th birthday of Yvonne Minton, broadcast on the last night of OA's *Meistersinger*, November 22 (on demand at www.3mbs.org.au). Or you might listen to her every Thursday 103.5FM on Daybreak from 6am.

Margot has been invited to visit Yvonne Minton in London next July to prepare a program on Yvonne's Wagner roles. In order to prepare for this program and the visit, she is calling for Wagner Society members to let her know what records DVDs and CDs you would permit

her to borrow for items to include in the program. Especially valued would be items not commercially available now. If you are willing to discuss with her what you have and the basis for the loan please ring her on 0417 353 454 or email her on margotc500@gmail.com. All assistance will be acknowledged in the program.

Margot has also offered to adapt this program for a Society presentation in 2020.

Please include in emails, or be prepared to discuss on the phone, the catalogue numbers, record labels, orchestra, conductor and fellow singers to help Margot compare versions so that she does not double up on borrowings.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ~ 1 NOVEMBER 2018

Insights from the sponsored artists of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*



At the 1 November AGM, we were fortunate to have guest artists Natalie Aroyand and Michael Honeyman joining us to talk about their careers and their involvement in Opera Australia's *Meistersinger*. The Society has sponsored these two through our special productions fund. Our new president, Susan Cumming, led the discussion, interviewing Natalie and Michael before opening the floor to audience questions.

Natalie, a wonderful young Armenian-Australian soprano, was seen earlier this year in *Aida*, and in *Meistersinger*, her first Wagner opera, sang the role of Eva with great success. Michael, the baritone who we saw reaching great heights in *King Roger*, sang the role of Hermann Ortel in *Meistersinger*. In his previous life Michael worked as a banker in the financial sector.

Susan asked about his transition to his operatic career, and whether he missed the corporate life. The answer to the latter was: no. He had studied singing as a young person, but only after turning 30 did he have a sea change, encouraged by Jonathon Welch of the Choir of Hard Knocks, to leave his corporate job and dedicate himself to his singing studies. He feels that, although he had a late start as a singer, his life experience and work ethic has helped with developing his craft.

Natalie believes that things always happen for a reason. She had an opportunity to attend an opera course in LA, but, after becoming sick and being unable to sing, she stayed in Australia—only to then win three competi-

tions here. This allowed her to study in Tel Aviv, New York and finally back in Sydney where she joined Opera Australia.

Asked how the two learned a new role, both placed an emphasis on first learning the words and their meaning as this gives the singers insight into who the characters are and what the composer's intentions were. They spend time with a language coach to polish the diction; and it takes up to a year to learn the role well and to bring it into one's body.

Questions were asked about how these singers looked after their voices. Natalie's response was: no karaoke, no drinking before the show, no loud bars! It is important to look after oneself and one's instrument, the voice, as it is very delicate and the smallest thing can affect the vocal execution. Allergy can cause issues: Natalie is allergic to dust and takes anti-histamines; Michael was here when the asthma storm hit at the opening of *Rheingold* but was lucky to have reached the theatre early and thus missed the storm. Fortunately for both, their singing load is not too heavy for them in *Meistersinger* in spite of the length of the opera. Michael felt the challenge was more about keeping the focus, especially as there is one break of two and a half hours for him between sings.

With regard to Kasper's production, Natalie said that as it has been done previously they know what works and what doesn't, allowing them to find new ways to do something in the staging or movement, and making something new that is their own. The original Assistant Director, Dan Dooner, remounted the production with OA's resident director, Matthew Barclay, assisting. Dan was able to respond to the many questions the singers had regarding their roles. Both singers like directors who help them find the inner essence of their roles, and who help them develop their own characters. Pietari Inkinen had also been a delightful conductor to work

with, giving lots of direction and insight.

To the question of what Wagner role they would like to sing in the future, Natalie responded that, as this is her first Wagner and her first German opera, she enjoyed the experience much more than she expected and thinks this is something to look forward to more in the future. Michael said he doesn't know *Lohengrin* well, but has been told that Telramund may be a good role for him.

Susan mentioned that she doesn't like the audience applauding in the middle of an act. Natalie doesn't mind the clapping, as she gets so involved in the role she is playing that she hardly notices. Michael also said the singers don't want to restrict the audience if they are so moved by the singing they are compelled to applaud.

Kasper's *Meistersinger* is set in gentlemen's club in London and, while not quite an avant-garde production, it touches on the topic of tension between tradition and innovation, and the role of women. Natalie told us that in this opera Eva initially wants to please her father by being the prize of the song competition, but has regrets immediately after making that decision. She doesn't want to have anything to do with competition, nor does she want Walther to be part of that world. We see Eva growing during opera and taking the power back. Her decisions make this opera interesting (which we observed in seeing the production on stage!).

The discussion concluded with Susan thanking the singers and Catherine McElhone from OA for making this evening happen, and wishing them a great production. The singers in turn thanked the Society for the sponsorship. Natalie and Michael then rushed off to rest their voices, but the members stayed for drinks and nibbles with much excitement building around the upcoming shows where we would see these singers live in action.

~ Miki Oikawa



President Dr Susan Cumming with Michael Honeyman and Natalie Aroyand



New executive: Miki Oikawa (Secretary), Susan Cumming (President) and Tom O'Dea (Treasurer)



Revellers at the Annual General Meeting

DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG

~ REFLECTION ON TWO INTERPRETATIONS



The Panel: Janice Carpenter, Libby Smith, Miki Oikawa and Susan Cumming

It was a pleasure to hear a thoughtful and interesting panel discussion on Sunday 2 December, focused on two recent and significant productions of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. In a structured, yet relaxed "compare and contrast" session interlaced with interesting research and personal reflections, the panel was able to uncover and clarify some of the intentions of directors, Barrie Kosky and Kasper Holten. Both highly acclaimed directors, with a proven ability to challenge and surprise, created very different interpretations of Wagner's great comic masterpiece, and in so doing provided much to contemplate.

The panel was able to point to European medieval history for the origins of traditional interpretations of the Wagner Opera, and to more recent history for new social and cultural interpretations. The discussion commenced with a brief summary of each director's life and career thus far, then proceeded to compare the production details of each interpretation. They provided an overview of each production, the treatment of the characters, a critique of the costumes, a description of the set and its function, an appraisal of the acting, and to some extent considered the possible meaning and significance of each interpretation. Each panelist in turn provided insightful information as the discussion moved sequentially through the opera. Miki Oikawa led the discussion, and was joined on the panel by Libby Smith and Janice Carpenter.

MEDIEVAL GERMANY AND THE ROMANTIC IMAGINATION

Libby provided the setting, and overview, of a traditional production. She explained how the opera is set in a European medieval German town, appealing to a profound German romantic imagination. The setting is an idyllic fairytale world of the past where

art and music are accorded a high position in the community. Wagner saw it as depicting a view of medieval Germany, symbolic of the celebration of art and life. *Die Meistersinger* is set on the eve of Johannstag, June 24, a Christian festival that coincides with a pagan festival of the summer solstice.

Wagner's intention was to uncover the tension between traditional and innovative. In his view, political systems come and go, but a community's art provides the truest measure of its essential nature, and should therefore be treasured. In Wagner's view, it was about originality and creativity triumphing over conservatism and rigidity, as well as expressing what it means to be German.

THE DIRECTORS

Kosky and Holten are very extraordinary directors—both were to some extent regarded as prodigies, and both started in theatre and opera production at a very early age. Barrie Kosky attended Melbourne Grammar and directed his first shows at school. In his 20s Kosky directed opera for Victorian Opera and for Opera Australia, and at the age of 29 he became the youngest director of the Adelaide festival. He worked in London at the Gielgud theatre, producing a number of successful Jewish plays, and in 1998 directed a controversial version of *King Lear*.

Kasper Holten is not as well known in Australia. Holten was born and educated in Copenhagen, and has focused his creative energies entirely towards opera. He started as a director's assistant, but by age 27 he was artistic director of the Copenhagen Royal Danish opera, and from 2011 to 2017 artistic director at Covent Garden. A significant highlight was his Copenhagen production of *The Ring of the Nibelung*. In Australia he directed *King Roger* and *Eugene Onegin* for Opera Australia. His production of

William Tell included a controversial gang rape scene, and his production of *Eugene Onegin* for Opera Australia included characters followed by dancing shadows, and a character that plays dead for an entire act. Both directors have remarkable careers, and are arguably at the top of their profession.

THE OPERA

Miki described the opening sequence of the production where Kosky uses the overture to introduce the characters. He also introduces the concept that this opera production is all about Wagner himself. As the overture begins Wagner enters Wahnfried with his two favourite dogs. Cosima Wagner is there, suffering from a migraine, and her father Franz Liszt is also there with conductor Levi Hermann. Friends come bustling around with gifts of significance—boots, perfume, art etc.—a reference to how much Wagner enjoyed having his friends visit, and performing his latest creation. It was thrilling to hear how Kosky imagined Wagner creating the opera and its characters by transforming those in the room. Liszt becomes Pogner, Wagner becomes Sachs and Walter, Cosima becomes Eva, and Levi becomes Beckmesser.

Holten took a more traditional approach to the overture, followed by the first scene in an English gentleman's club. Holten has a strong "gender politics" theme in his interpretation. He saw this opera as being about populism, about change, about fear of "the new". Libby added the point that Holten saw the nationalistic tendencies of Hans Sachs as far less shocking than those of Pogner, the father, who offers his own daughter as a prize.

THE CHARACTERS

Janice felt the greatest character difference was between the two Beckmesser representations. Just as Kosky has often claimed the mantle of "the outsider" in European culture, so he sees "the outsider" in Beckmesser's character. Kosky interprets Beckmesser as a Frankenstein creature made up of all the things Wagner hated—the French, the Italians, the Jews and the critics.

The Holten Beckmesser appears as a more formal character, but is mistreated by the others. He first appears on stage as a person of good standing, but as the opera develops he becomes increasingly mistreated. It was thought that Warwick Fyfe's performance may have taken the character further than Holten had imagined.

Warwick strongly played Beckmesser as a buffoon, and Janice pondered the similarities

with other roles Warwick has played.

Janice didn't see Holten's Beckmesser encapsulating any of the anti-Jewish stereotypes present in Kosky's interpretation. Beckmesser simply seems to encapsulate a misfit in the community. Added to this, Beckmesser didn't seem to fit into Kasper Holten's gender politics theme, apart from the element of removing the old in favour of the new.

All felt the costume and long hair of Kasper Holten's Walther increased the uncertainty of how his presentation fitted with the overall scheme and Walther's role. In contrast, Barrie Kosky's Walther was more traditional and romantic in conception—he is well dressed and rejects the Meistersingers in favour of Eva.

Janice felt Eva's character was a bit odd in both productions. Kosky's Eva wasn't very important, portrayed as a traditional character, compliant and accepting of everything. Contrasting with Kosky's important theme and outcast characters, Eva simply plays her part, sings her songs and goes off with Walther.

The opposite is true of Holten, where Eva is pivotal and important. Natalie Aroyan tried to portray Eva's increasing mistrust of the situation throughout her performance. However, Janice found that many audience members were unaware of the change in Eva's attitude: "One moment Eva is a willing sacrifice, then, she walks offstage!" Janice also felt the costumes distracted from general continuity and the communication of a character's purpose.

Alternatively, Libby thought Anne Schwanewilms, Kosky's Eva, seemed to have trouble inhabiting the dual characters, Cosima and Eva. "Switching between both meant she wasn't either of them, and was unable to develop either role."

On the contrary, Miki thought Eva did have significance in Kosky's production. Eva is Cosima and perhaps Mathilde Wesendonk as well. She is the treasure that Wagner was seeking, and all relationships are measured against her. Does he win her or does he lose her? While Hans Sachs realises he is too old for Eva, there is an inescapable resonance with Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonk's relationship.

Wagner is Kosky's Hans Sachs, but Holten takes a more traditional approach with a younger, handsome, soft-spoken and thoughtful character. Holten's traditional Sachs speaks of upholding German traditions during his efforts to influence Walther. Kosky's Sachs is much more expressive of his political views—his final speech is delivered alone on stage, in the stand and on trial.

THE SETS AND STAGING

Libby compared the Kosky and Holten sets. Both successfully used a single set format, where pieces are added or subtracted, but it essentially remains on stage for the entire opera. However, in Act 2, the set did not function convincingly in either production. Kosky places furniture from Wahnfried into a Nuremberg courtroom, while Holten unconvincingly moves a tablecloth to create space for Sachs to start hammering. Places for hiding lovers, the town square, a window serenade, all seem misplaced.

The sets for the riot scene were both considered very successful, albeit very different. Kosky uses the set to further explore the theme of anti-Semitism. Beckmesser is fitted with a huge caricature of a Wagner puppet-head. Moments later a huge balloon character of a Jewish ogre fills the stage. Alternatively, Holten's riot scene develops gradually from the noise of Beckmesser's insensitive singing and Sachs' equally insensitive hammering. The townsfolk wake, all elements combine and proceed to a riot.

"Holten's set is a dense tableaux, an eruption of a Bacchanalia at the front of the stage, at the rear a rotating ring complete with aerial artists provides a backdrop for David to take his revenge on Beckmesser. Is it a collective community hallucination, or is it a projection of Hans Sachs' imagination?"

THE SONG COMPETITION

Janice thought Holten's song competition sounded beautiful, and presented a fitting spectacle, even though Walther was dressed in a terrible down-at-heel suit. The chorus of villagers beautifully presented folk songs for St. Crispin, and the entrance of the Meistersingers with over-the-top big hats added to the spectacle.

Kosky's version was more traditional, emphasising the song to a greater extent. The contest remained in the Nuremberg trial area, but the cast was crowded in without space or atmosphere for the folk songs. Hans Sachs projected his opinions from a lectern later used by Walther, on this occasion "dressed in a beautiful suit". Following the contest, Walther and Eva go off hand in hand followed by some Meistersingers. Sachs/Wagner is left alone to make his passionate speech. As the speech concludes, the back stage comes forward with an orchestra and chorus. Cosima comes back, and the story returns to Wagner, the musicians and conducting.

Conversely, Holten's finale displays a mixture of outcomes. Walther accepts the accolades from the Meistersingers following Sachs' encouragement, and he appears quite happy, laden with medals and robes.

However, Eva clearly disapproves, climbs to the top of the stairs, throws her arms in the air and departs. Beckmesser, stripped of his robes, collapses at the side of stage, a dejected, lonely and defeated figure.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

An audience member commented, "I thought that, as David, Nicholas Jones was brilliant!" All agreed vociferously. Janice thought Kosky's David wasn't given much relevance in the anti-Jewish theme or Nuremberg trials, but thought Holten's David, played by Nicholas Jones, acted brilliantly and admirably expressed the character.

The treatment of Beckmesser's character stirred interest from the audience. One audience member speculated on the sexual inadequacy of Beckmesser trying to sing words that don't work or make sense. However, he thought Warwick Fyfe performed well, especially the final collapse, which communicated a great sense of humiliation.

Another audience member thought Beckmesser was treated viciously, citing the stripping of his apparel and remaining on stage dressed only in a singlet and trousers. He also thought the surtitles overstated the alterations Beckmesser made to his song. Another audience member recalled the Katharina Wagner Meistersinger, where the singing competition was in fact a Eurovision song contest, and Beckmesser is cast as a rocker with "Beck back in town" across his T-shirt.

Janice emphasised how the prize song involves the misuse of words leading to the problem that Beckmesser has with the song. The surtitles prove the difficulty in translating the misuse of words: "Some things are simply lost in translation." Miki thought that surtitles should not take on a "life of their own", but they should simply assist with understanding. She noted, "Some productions have tried to be witty and clever with surtitles, but it often seems to take away from their function."

IN CLOSING

In closing the panel discussion, Libby described the Kosky and Holten productions as brilliant and creative in terms of staging and set design. She noted that both productions had fabulous crowd tableaux and very busy stages, which some might find distracting, but both directors gave us quite a lot to think about and cogitate on. From them, we can certainly appreciate the value of good expressive theatre.

Although other people may feel differently, neither production had the emotional impact that a traditional setting usually has. "I came away thinking and appreciative, but I didn't come away filled with joy."

~ Gavin Cornish

OPERA AUSTRALIA'S THE MASTERSINGERS OF NUREMBERG ~ KASPER HOLTEN REVIVAL



We have vivid memories of our only live production for this opera from 2010 at Bayreuth. Not good, but vivid. I can still recall Katharina Wagner's infamous Bayreuth study in irrelevance, recasting Sachs as a journalist, introducing us to great exponents of German art and philosophy in the form of macroheads atop paunchy chorus members capable only of dad dancing, and the presentation of Walther as a guitar-breaking dreadlocked rock star. Safe to say we had neither story nor music at our fingertips as a result of seeing this production.

On the morning of the Melbourne performance we engaged supermarket trolleys in the artisanal goods aisle at Leo's Fine Foods with a fellow Bayreuth sufferer from 2010. No, she said, they would not be going to the Melbourne production. Her husband had seen the Holten production in London.

Fortunately, by then we had attended Heath Lees' marvellous lecture which gave us confidence in what to listen for, otherwise we might have quietly given the tickets away.

Musically the opera was exhilarating. Pietari Inkinen worked his magic and from the prelude onwards the orchestra was stunningly good and with great individual performances. Of the featured performers, Michael Kupfer-Radecky was in superb voice and is a fine actor. His Hans Sachs was the compassionate, thoughtful and proud artisan of two great traditions. Daniel Sumegi was a suitably dim dad as Veit Pogner, a role that does not lend itself to the same splendours of voice as his great Hagen. Nicholas Jones has to be singled out for special mention. His golden and youthful tenor voice I am sure will keep developing. He moves like a dancer and brings a wide range of vocal and dramatic expression to the character of David. Both Natalie Aroyan and Domenica Matthews were as good in every way as we have come to expect. They brought the kind of girlish freshness needed.

Visually, it was lavish, provocative, evocative and well-realised. Well, you can quibble about details like the inevitable confusion created by transposing times and costumes which means that sometimes your mind is on overdrive. Where are the apprentices? What kind of

building does this opening set represent? Why is there a Victorian maid style in black holding a silver salver in the middle of the stairs? And that's just Act 1. I regarded that introspection as engagement with the production rather than criticism of it. Both the Bacchanale/riot and the Third Act were lavishly costumed and appointed in ways that helped the story.

Narratively, the singers seemed to have had very good direction and they created many moments of interaction which were funny, moving or insightful. The story was recognisably the synopsis in Grove, with the references to shoes, lasts, pitch, waxen thread and hammers accompanied with the right props. Which in my opinion makes the many comparisons between singing and artisanship meaningful. Warwick Fyfe brought his particular brand of humour to the hapless Beckmesser. I have never seen an opera singer with such an ability for sight gags (that I normally hate). From his facial expressions, to his walking, to the use of the mock harpsichord and the pages of the prize song, he still delivered a superbly realised and funny vocal performance that was a tour de force.

An innovation of this production is the end for Eva. Eva is appalled by Walther agreeing to accept the role of Meistersinger and gestures at him, desperately shaking her head. When Walther accepts the role of Meistersinger Eva rushes off in the opposite direction in tears. I have pondered for days over whether it was intended Eva ultimately refuse Walther. Was she going to be the only Zerlina who was going to refuse the Don when he had actually proposed, now having also added a respectable calling to his noble rank? And if that was the case, what did it mean? If she was no longer attracted to Walther because he was no longer an underdog, had her fear of Beckmesser turned to love? Was she really going to go for the underdog in the Bond's greasy wife-beater singlet cowering on the bench? (Full marks to Warwick for his willingness to go along with the Bond's moment a second time.) Whatever else might be said, this feminist line was not sufficiently conveyed early enough in the production and was therefore a distraction to the ending.

As we climbed the long, long staircase from the stalls to St Kilda Road, rather squashed, a bit too slow and definitely hot, there was quiet consensus in our part of the crowd without too much being said. Yes, the orchestra was terrific. The chorus was magnificent. The spectacle of Act 3 leavened with comedy had been very enjoyable. At this point I imagine in other productions there would have been a discussion of the performance of The Prize Song. How it compared to the preliminary performances, how the singer kept up his voice after so many hours on stage, marvelling at Wagner's ability to write melody you can never tire of etc. etc. On 22 November 2018 at 10:33pm, not mentioned. Not a word. Maybe the humanity and compassion of Hans Sachs had affected us all.

~ Margot Costanzo

HEATH LEES: WAGNER'S MASTERSINGERS: HARMONY OUT OF DISCORD

Heath Lees' pre-opera talks "Wagner's Mastersingers: Harmony out of Discord" were held in St John's Lutheran Church Southgate on the morning of each of the four performances of Opera Australia's production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* that was staged in the State Theatre Melbourne in November 2018.

The talks were hosted by The Richard Wagner Society with financial support from Renaissance Tours who engaged Heath as their tour leader.

The following 'staccato' point-by-point account belies Heath's smoothly flowing presentation.

HISTORY

Wagner discovered his mastersingers in Johann Wagenseil's *History of Nuremberg* (1697). Their names and practices are tucked away in an appendix titled "The Mastersingers' Gracious Art".

Wagner added to their guild a poet, Hans Sachs, who in earlier times had written the Marseillaise of the Lutheran Reformation: *The Wittenberg Nightingale*.

Hans Sachs' poem is an allegory of a nightingale (Martin Luther) who sings "Wacht auf, a new day is dawning" to warn against a deceptive lion (Pope Leo) that snares the flock (Christians) by moonlight (sophistry).

Wagnerians will immediately notice that Sachs' Lutheran metaphor for Truth and Falsehood is the complete opposite of Wagner's Schopenhauerian metaphor in *Tristan*.

MASTER SONG

A master song has three verses: stanza-stanza-aftersong. The stanzas establish the narrative and the aftersong ties up its loose ends. The stanzas possess the same poetical metre and rhyme and are set to the same music, but the aftersong varies both the poetical form and the music.

Wagner turns Fritz Kothner's formal recitation of these rules into a glorification of academic complexity. But, as Heath shows, they describe little more than the simple ternary shape of folk-song, such as the old Welsh song "All Through the Night".

On the other hand, Wagner turns Sachs' words of encouragement to Walther into something genuinely inspiring: think of the two stanzas as the parents of the aftersong.

Heath draws attention to the overall triplet pattern of the opera's three acts (perhaps, one of affirmation-negation-reconciliation). On such grounds, Alfred Lorenz long ago characterised the Mastersingers as a master song about a master song.

MUSICAL METAPHORS

Heath identifies two musical metaphors that are missed by most commentators. Wagner is using the two traditions of renaissance music to create metaphors for town and country, art and inspiration, mastersingers and folk.

The formal musical tradition of church and state, to which the mastersingers were aligned, was dominated by the scale (do-ray-me-fa-so-la-te-do)—the bedrock of formal Western music—and its fourth interval, the half scale of four steps do-ray-me-fa or the leap do-fa.

On the other hand, the informal musical tradition of folk-song and country-dance was dominated by the third interval of



the scale, like the three steps do-ray-me or the leap do-me.

An example of these musical metaphors of fourths and thirds at work may be glimpsed in the musical excerpt accompanying this article.

The first four bars of the overture and chorale are dominated by fourths apart from a solitary third. Wagner may already be hinting that the mastersingers (fourths) stand in need of the folk and nature (thirds) which, for his Hans Sachs, are the true sources of inspiration.

MUSICAL EXPERTISE

Wagner begins the overture appropriately in 16th-century style by drawing upon renaissance counterpoint: the "clever" patterns of imitation (a tune repeating itself), inversion (a tune repeating itself upside down) and augmentation (a tune repeating itself with altered duration, etc.) But, after four bars, he ventures into 19th-century territory.

Wagner incorporates throughout the opera a wide range of historical musical styles and subtle musical references—Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, etc.—owing to the opportunity given by *Mastersingers* for him to demonstrate his formal musical expertise in the face of his numerous carping critics, Beckmessers the lot of them, who bemoaned his lack of it.

It is reasonably clear that Wagner respected the principles of renaissance counterpoint and bar form as, in their historical time, rational ways of unifying music and song. Hans Sachs' admonition "Honour your masters" cannot be the bombast that some opinion makes it out to be.

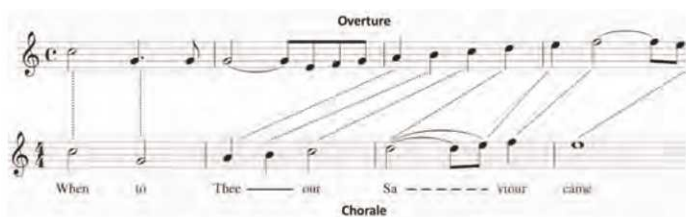
WONDER

The opera proper opens upon the eve of John the Baptist—midsummer's day, midsummer madness and a midsummer night's dream. It also heralds a "name day" for celebrating anyone named Johannes or Hans, including the Hans who will baptise Walther's prize song.

We hear a hymn to John the Baptist, a wonderful baroque chorale, whose tune seems familiar to us though we remain unconscious of how we could ever have come to know it. Heath explains that it is nothing other than the opening of the overture, augmented by Wagner for its church setting.

In the musical example, I reproduce Heath's demonstration in a single image, just as he did in his talk. It is a pairing of the first four bars of the overture and chorale, reproduced in

simplified piano score. The dotted lines pick out the notes of the common tune.



RESOLUTION

I stop short here at Heath's analysis of the *Mastersingers* into the musical elements that most distinguish it from Wagner's other operas. To venture forth into Heath's presentation of Wagner's synthesis of these musical elements into his music drama is an enormous task.

It remains to report on Wagner's democratic use of his musical metaphors in the opera's master song—Walther's prize song. Heath's scorecard of fourths and thirds tallies out at: mastersingers, 11; folk, 10.

The once divided mastersingers and folk have finally embraced each other in common art. This is Wagner's mastersingers: harmony out of discord!

AFTERSONG

A great talk inspires otherwise unbidden thoughts...

Flieger Monologue

Here we observe Hans Sachs working his way through a major crisis in art in much the same way that scientists have to work their way through a major crisis in science when their

world view appears terminally threatened ("Structure of Scientific Revolutions", Thomas Kuhn).

Sachs is struggling to distil out of Walther's wonderful rule-breaking theme—which Wagner keeps beating through his head—a broader musical principle on which to raise a new musical worldview that transcends but simultaneously preserves much of the old. This incomparable episode captures, as no other, the existential crisis occasioned by a shattered world view and vividly takes us through the rational means of accomplishing its resolution.

Bar Form

Although the analogy of stanza-stanza-aftersong with husband-wife-offspring is a poetic one, Hans Sachs might well be expounding Hegel's dialectic when he describes bar form in genetic triplets as the reconciliation of two complementary principles in a transcendent third.

Perhaps Lorenz was closer to the mark than he imagined when he perceived *Mastersingers* as having a recursive (quasi-fractal) triplet structure.

Wagner conceived his *Mastersingers* in the 1840s, "the fair seed time" of Young Hegelianism, around whose edges Wagner hovered without directly participating.

Is *Mastersingers* a midsummer's dream of Wagner's wild formative years when anything seemed possible but whose realisation, unlike that for Hans Sachs' dream, died on the ashes of a revolution? Is *Mastersingers* the phoenix song of an aging Young Hegelian?

~ Trevor Clarke

THE BAYREUTH EXPERIENCE

What preconceptions did I take to Bayreuth? Not much; I was far too busy with my day job and assisting on *Rosenkavalier* before I boarded the plane, having packed my suitcase only that morning. Armed with information kindly provided to me by fellow Society ladies, my love for Wagner's operas and a novice-level knowledge of the man himself, I found myself in the Wagnerian mecca.

It was tremendous. A total immersion in all things Wagner without it being a Disneyland. Words fail me when I try to describe just how much I enjoyed the experience.

Not everything went as planned. The first day in Bayreuth, I arrived with my ex-mother-in-law Dorothea who lives near Mannheim. A hot day, the heat and the drive proved to be too much for poor Dorothea who apparently got heat stroke after Act 1 of *Tristan und Isolde* and had to miss the rest (and *Meistersinger*!).

But our prize recipient Greg Eldridge was there, and we became good Wagner buddies during that week, attending the performances, enjoying watching the people and having great discussions about Wagner,

opera, life and German food. The other young artists were there, too, and it was great to see them wide-eyed and enjoying the spectacle.

Then there were the other Wagnerians, both from Australian societies and from the rest of the world—all with shared passion or curiosity about Wagner and his music.

There was something almost ceremonial about going to the theatre. The hotel organised taxi pools, you arrived and walked up the hill with everyone dressed in their finest. You prepped yourself with a glass of champagne, grabbed a seat cushion (I succumbed to comfort), took your seat and—in my case—held my breath as it all unfolded before me.

Bravo Wagner! What an achievement, having this theatre built. The acoustics were incredible. The sound from the orchestra floated from the hidden pit, at just the right balance with the singers. During the few days there I sat in a variety of seats, from the stalls to the balcony—and no matter where I sat I had a great view of the stage and the sound was perfect.

All the operas had excellent singing. Not

having done my homework, I was wowed to see names of favourite artists such as Thielemann, Vogt, Pape, Magee and Groissböck. With the direction, I had my favourites. *Meistersinger* topped my list, followed by *Parsifal* (which musically is the Wagner opera I love the most). I think I sat there stunned and moved by these two productions. *Tristan* I thought was rather strange. *Holländer* was conceptually interesting. *Walküre*, I wasn't too sure—I probably needed to see the whole cycle to fully appreciate it in context of the other operas.

But the whole experience was magical. Not just at the Festspielhaus, but walking around "Wagner-town" visiting Wahnfried, the Margravian opera house, the Neues Schloss, the Liszt museum... It's not a big place, but still plenty to see, much atmosphere to take in.

I am so happy that I went. And so glad that I decided to take advantage of my time there to see five operas. I met wonderful people, saw wonderful things, submerged myself in opera that I adore. I can't wait to go back again, and I shall.

~ Miki Oikawa

As Victorian Opera commences rehearsals for their new production of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, the Company's Executive Producer and *Parsifal* Choreographer Elizabeth Hill has given The Richard Wagner Society the opportunity to hear firsthand about the production in an exclusive interview.

Elizabeth openly reflects on the Company's biggest undertaking to date in terms of size and scale in staging this operatic masterpiece for Victorian Opera.

Can you describe the scale of the production?

It is a very large-scale work, and must be so, simply to house the numerous participants. There are 72 people in the chorus and over 12 soloists. The cast is extraordinary and, with more than 82 orchestral players from the Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO) in the pit, as well as the off-stage brass comprising six trombones, it is indeed large-scale.

In addition, the set construction is the biggest that we've ever undertaken. The actual set itself is a very stark box design with a fissure in the middle and window boxes positioned to house the chorus to clearly demonstrate their ethereal and heavenly role within the opera.

Of course, as you would imagine, the orchestration is enormous and the scale of the orchestration means that the work needs to be presented in a theatre that has the capacity to house all of these elements.

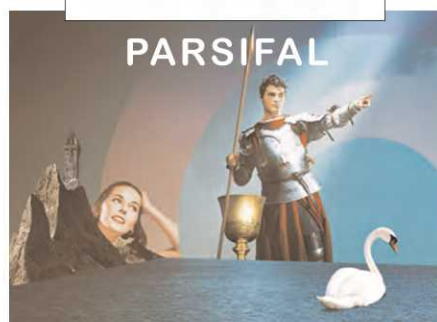
Needless to say, it is one of the most exciting and challenging projects I have ever worked on.

Given the length of the opera, how many hours of rehearsal does this require?

As the opera is four and a half hours in length, we are currently dedicating a week of rehearsal for each hour of the opera. This means that we have a four-week rehearsal period in total. We're then moving onto the stage at the Palais Theatre early to combat some of the challenging staging requirements and to commence running the production accordingly.

Currently here at Horti Hall, our home and main rehearsal studio, we have installed only half of the set due to size restrictions in our building. Therefore, to ensure that we manage the logistics of set movements and to accommodate the actual real size, the entire set will be

VICTORIAN OPERA



moved onto the Palais Theatre stage three days earlier than we would normally do for any other opera.

Why does the company choose the Palais Theatre, St Kilda for productions like Parsifal?

Housing the large-scale nature of the orchestra is probably the first reason. The orchestra pit in the Palais Theatre is one of the best and largest in the country and is one of the few, if not the only, pits that can accommodate a Wagnerian orchestra.

It's also very much an open-style pit, which means the music is not covered or muted by the walls of an orchestra pit. You can see the players relatively easily, therefore the sound that is generated from that pit is quite incredible.

The venue is, in Victorian Opera's Artistic Director and *Parsifal* Conductor Richard Mills' opinion, the best acoustic venue in Australia.

What can we expect from the design?

A very elegant, clean, and simplistic design. However, the set deteriorates as the story develops and you will clearly witness how its deterioration is representative and reflective of the story as it unfolds. To ensure that we honour the sanctity of the grail sections, a simplistic, beautiful natural wooden set is a key component of the set design.

The costume designs are very simple, non-period specific. The costumes for Klingsor and his Flower Maidens are, however, very garish.

The Richard Wagner Society of Victoria is supporting Derek Welton in his appearance as Klingsor. How important is this financial support for the company?

It is imperative. We can't do these types of works without the assistance of

amazing supporters, like The Richard Wagner Society of Victoria.

Derek Welton is such an important singer and performer for us to bring to Australia. We're thrilled to bring him home to perform one of his most internationally acclaimed roles, particularly following his most recent success in the role in Bayreuth in 2018.

How exciting is it for Victorian Opera to bring someone locally raised, whose career is hugely significant in Europe, back to Australia for the first time?

Well, it's pretty special. There are two amazing Australians in this production who have been away from Australia for a very long time—Derek and James Roser. Derek, in particular, is a megastar.

I understand you also have a number of younger performers in the production.

Yes, we have a number of young singers in the opera and it is a wonderful opportunity for these performers from the Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) to participate in this production. For them to stand on stage next to artists such as Derek and James, who have benefited from similar programs in Australia, and to see where their experiences have taken them on the world stage, is an extraordinary opportunity for these young singers and really very special to witness.

Can you give us one fun fact about the production?

In the very first scene in Act I we are immersed in a forest and, to give the impact required to set the scene accordingly, you will see 60,000 leaves spread across the stage. Eventually they will all be swept away, and I will let you discover how, when you see the opera.

Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* will be performed at the Palais Theatre, St Kilda on 20, 22, 24 February.

Victorian Opera has invited Dr Peter Bassett to deliver a fascinating and in-depth talk about the opera. The Pre-Show Insights will take place at Victorian Opera's home at Horti Hall on Tuesday 19 and Thursday 21 February at 6.30pm and on Saturday 23 February at 10.30am.

For more information and to book, visit: victorianopera.com.au/season/Parsifal

DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE 26 OCTOBER TO 2 NOVEMBER 2018

Oh joy and hurrah! I was privileged to land a last-minute, excellent seat for the last of four consecutive performances of this production directed by Keith Warner and conducted by Antonio Pappano. I saw it new in 2007 with Lisa Gasteen and John Tomlinson. It was revived in 2012 with Bryn Terfel, Susan Bullock and Stefan Vinke, but I missed that. It will not be revived again.

My excitement faded rapidly during the course of *Das Rheingold*. The orchestra was often weak and untidy. There was some excellent singing from John Lundgren (Wotan), Johannes Martin Kranzle (Alberich) and Gerald Siegel (Mime), each of whom thrilled throughout the entire *Ring*. And Gunther Groissbock outshone everyone with his superb Fasolt. The other singers were adequate but not exciting.

The production was tedious. My OED defines “gimmick” as “a trick or device, esp. to attract attention, publicity or trade”. Warner seemed to provide a gimmick every few bars. I applaud directors whose new material contributions, outside Wagner’s directions, illuminate something in the words or the music, but as it proved throughout the whole *Ring*, Warner seemed unable, except on a few occasions, to provide any guidance as to Wagner’s intended meaning of certain important scenes.

If something new appears in a *Ring* production and I have not thought it apt within a very short space of time, having to think about it provides only a distraction from the glories of the music and irritates or even angers me.

Unfortunately, by the end of *Rheingold*, I was angry. In Scene 1, thin unused ladders hung down from the surface of the Rhine to its bottom where the Rhinedaughters and Alberich were already located, with an adjacent ruined wooden rowing boat. What sense can you make of that? Scene 2 took place in Wotan’s library

or study, lined with books and featuring, among lots of clutter, a telescope, an early camera, a model of an aeroplane (thus foreshadowing the wrecked plane over Mime’s hut in Act 1 of *Siegfried*), and a red cord being knitted or woven by Fricka.

Does this fit in with Wotan’s character as revealed to be a man willing to barter falsely with others, to suborn love, to seek to grasp even more power and to be shown as unfaithful to his spouse? No. And so on. I did however approve of Alberich’s hurriedly glimpsed very nasty experiments on women, in Scene 3.



All the clutter left little room for the activities of Scene 4. Thus the gold was not brought up to the surface. Instead, Freia took up a position below the floor so that just her head could be seen.

Musical matters improved immediately in *Die Walküre*. Stuart Skelton gave his best as a really great Siegmund, partnered unfortunately with a Sieglinde who was adequate but not his equal. Act 3 was quite a triumph for Lundgren and brought the usual tear to the eye.

Which brings me to the Brünnhilde du jour, Nina Stemme. She has indeed a wonderful and powerful voice used with almost too much care. I wanted her in this opera of her youth to be more youthful. In the Todesverkündigung, I wanted more stage presence.

Musically and dramatically Act 1 of *Siegfried* topped the bill so far and

indeed *Siegfried* proved the most enjoyable of the four nights. Vinke’s performance was less intoxicating than his transcendental Melbourne effort but he was still very fine and Siegel also shone. But it was Lundgren who, having given us a marvellous Wotan, was quite outstanding as the Wanderer.

And I approved of Warner’s Romantic idea of a few full-scale wild animals wandering slowly over the set during the Forest Murmurs. By now some of the clutter had disappeared and a huge white slab, whether used upright or on the floor or spinning around as the Wanderer threw his books away before summoning Erda, proved a much more effective and restful bit of a set. (But why did he only then throw them away?—irritating!)

What century were we in? The *Götterdämmerung* Norms were well up with the latest (2007) communicative technology, using the red cord (why?), and we had seen a plane shot down during the Wotan/Alberich wars, yet the Gibichung

Hall was decorated with life-size wooden golden statues of the gods, which were all set on fire by Brünnhilde in her very hot Immolation scene, prior to the appearance of an extraordinary huge Ring with one unknown standing figure balanced on the rim as though proposing the beginning of a new society—rubbishy, old-hat this—and again with the aforesaid fire a meaningless distraction from the music, superbly played by the orchestra which had returned to top form from the beginning of Act 3 of *Die Walküre*.

Stephen Milling’s Hagen was another stand-out. And Stemme really produced the goods for her great final scene and was rewarded with a huge ovation.

Somewhat disappointing on the whole, but I wouldn’t have missed it for quids.

~ Aubrey Schrader

THE RING AT ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN



In late October 2018 I saw the third and final revival of Keith Warner's *Ring Cycle* at Covent Garden, the previous productions having taken place in 2007 and 2012.

As with many modern productions some elements of the staging bemused me, some confused me, and some I considered to be wonderfully clever. But it is not the staging and direction that will stay in my mind, it is the quality of the music. From a vocal and orchestral point of view this was, for me, a magnificent *Ring Cycle*. A sensational cast delivered stellar acting and vocal performances, while Antonio Pappano directed the orchestra to mesmerising effect.

It is not possible here to comment on all the outstanding performances across the four operas; every major role was well cast and minor roles also saw excellent performances. I will single out just a few who I found particularly memorable.

Johannes Martin Kränzle's Alberich was magnificent both vocally and dramatically, transforming from a comic figure at the beginning of *Das Rheingold* to a single-minded pursuer of power in the later operas. John Lundgren as Wotan and the Wanderer made a convincing transition from God to humanised Wanderer, his voice rich and dark throughout, and he had both the physical and vocal gravitas for the role.

Stuart Skelton, making his debut at Covent Garden as Siegmund, gave a compelling performance and was accorded the acclaim he deserved by the audience. He handled the pianissimo passages beautifully and his voice tonally expressed emotion from anguish to fury to tenderness and passion.

Nina Stemme demonstrated her

vocal stamina, musical understanding and dramatic ability in her portrayal of Brünnhilde. Her ability to be both lyrical and dramatic, and warm in tone, is unequalled. Stefan Vinke brought the confidence of long experience to the role of Siegfried—he has sung some 100 Siegfrieds in the last decade, including in Melbourne. His bright and vigorous voice, boundless energy, tonal richness and outstanding acting make him unrivalled as Siegfried.

Particularly memorable and moving for me in this *Ring Cycle* were some of the duets. The duet between Wotan and Fricka in *Das Rheingold*, between Brünnhilde and Siegmund, Sieglinde and Brünnhilde, Wotan and Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* and between Siegfried and Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung* stood out for their emotional expression and capacity to thrill musically.

Keith Warner states that he sought in his production to reflect his belief that the *Ring Cycle* concerns the end of one great arc of history—during which man believed that the world was governed by God/gods—to the birth of a god-free age.

Set designer, the late Stefanos Lazaridis, used the visual leitmotif of a spiral which translates into everything from a symbolic double helix, to a ceiling fan, to the propeller of a crashed aeroplane. Despite the fact that Warner stated he had reduced the number of props on stage for the 2012 cycles, the stage in 2018 continued to appear cluttered with symbolic items/apparatus, which sometimes revealed their meaning, sometimes not. The staging was visually interesting and included lots of theatrical effects, but sometimes seemed like an obstacle course that the singers had to negotiate.

Across the four operas there was a multitude of themes and ideas and I decided not to worry too much about their meaning but to allow myself to focus on and be swept away by the vocal and orchestral performances.

At the very end of *Götterdämmerung* there is a single female figure surmounting the finally complete circle that has been warped and fragmented throughout the Cycle. Keith Warner explains this symbol: "I think

the end of the *Ring* is actually saying that the only possible redemption is to be found not through Brünnhilde's love or anything on stage, but in those of us who have gone through the last 16 hours together, in what we do next.

"We have joined in the artwork, and if we have learned anything, it's about what we do when we leave the opera house, about how we want to live. We have the choice to do something or not to, but if we do, we just might change the world."

A message for us all.

~ Libby Smith

The following articles by Peter Bassett can be accessed on the website at wagnermelb.org.au.



ENLIGHTENMENT, LOVE
AND COMPASSION: FROM
THE RING TO PARSIFAL



THE UNRAVELLING OF
WAGNER'S PARSIFAL

VALE

RICHARD GILL

(4 November 1941 - 28 October 2018)



Richard Gill AO, was an Australian conductor of choral, orchestral and operatic works. He was known best as a music educator, and for his advocacy of musical education of children. In August 2005, he founded, and was inaugural artistic director of, Victorian Opera.

MARY DAVID

Mary David (nee Buxton), was a member of The Richard Wagner Society member for almost 10 years. She died on 20 November 2018.

Director's Notes: Victorian Opera's *The Flying Dutchman*



Suzanne Chaundy

In my mind I am subtitled the production "Longing for peace from the storm within". Both Senta and the Dutchman are complex souls, in a society that thinks things are simple. I think they are very modern characters.

The approach will feel modern/mythical—like Angela Carter's take on traditional stories. Playing the drama truthfully, but letting it be a "tale". Stylistically, I'd call it "symbolist"—events are presented very strongly.

I wanted to stage the work in a way that reflects the turbulence of the inner lives of the chief protagonists and works with the whirling, surging music. Also, I am performing without an interval to keep the energy of the work flowing through to its dramatic conclusion.

The staging is quite minimal but grand. There is a stage-within-a-stage aspect to this design and it is an iconic platform, the engine by which the story is told.

The platform revolves, manipulated by chorus in various scene changes (and at times by costumed mechs). The chorus are both in the story and enabling the story in this way. The movement of the set is a mirror to the transitional aspects of the story.

There is a shadowy gauze recess with an infinite perspective inspired by the look of this oil painting.

The costume look is quite folkloric to add to the "storybook" feel.

The Dutchman comes from the shadows, from the deep recesses of the psyche, as suggested by him being an ancient archetype dating back to The Wandering Jew.

He is a physical manifestation that comes through the shadow world—from "the other side"—if you will. The ghosts will be shadows-like characters that reach.

I want to avoid my trademark video-heavy Wagner productions and explore something new (Vic Opera recently produced a 3D video-heavy production).

Also I cannot support a "redemption through love" story in this day and age that involves a woman dying to rescue a man she doesn't even know. She loves the "idea" and the story. She empathises with the Dutchman, but, in my reading, what he provides her with is an escape from a repressive society.

In my preparation (as well as learning the opera) I have been concentrating on the psychology of Senta and what has brought her to become the woman we discover. I think it arises from a number of things:

- * I believe her mother died when she was young, perhaps even in childbirth.
- * Her father is largely absent and disengaged. There is no judgment in this statement—it is the way this society is.
- * She is intelligent, bookish and artistic. She painted the Dutchman. She is a romantic but has been raised in a simple society. Mary has to be strict with her.

Men sail the world and have adventures while women stay home and spin, cook and wait for them to return. Simple people—the goal is to marry and procreate. Ours will be an imagined world, not one that exactly exists, but easily could.

The female society is very structured where the older women pass on traditional values to the younger. Mary is a powerful woman who has learnt how to navigate her power in a man's world to survive.

This painting of the Dutchman suggests adventure, subversion and freedom to Senta. She has interpreted the story to create this man. She feels akin with him, as he is as trapped as she is. Her death is like a suicide for personal freedom from her demons and serves to wake up the young women of the community to the fact that there has to be more to their

lives—maybe this is the redemption.

It is a sudden inspiration that brings Senta to declare "Ich sei's, die dich durch ihre Treuerlöser". From then on she is on a mission. When she and the Dutchman meet, when her dream is realised, she is moved by him and he by her. Their love comes from their needs. They fulfil one another.

Senta simply does not love Erik the way he loves her. I believe they grew up together, he maybe a bit older and she has always been kind to him when no-one else has. They've gone on adventures together.

He is emotionally needy and, without realising it, quite emotionally abusive of Senta, making her life even more difficult. She does not want to hurt him but she certainly does not want to marry him.

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