



A Wagner Honour for New Zealand



WSNZ President Chris Brodrick Awarded a 'Golden W'

A different kind of New Year's Honour was announced last month. From Bayreuth, the home of the Richard-Wagner-Verband, came the news that Chris Brodrick had been awarded the prestigious 'Golden W' – a coveted badge that is given to Presidents to mark ten years in office.



The award is the first to be made to this country. As well as honouring Chris's huge contribution it also recognizes New Zealand as an important Wagner centre, which must be a source of pride for every member.

Chris has many gifts that make him the ideal president. His enthusiasm for Wagner's legacy is second to none. His wide expertise in printing and publishing has contributed much to the onward spread of that legacy, and his affable but persuasive personality has regularly smoothed the decision-making of many committee meetings.

The Verband got it right. This is a 'Golden W' that marks a Golden Decade for Chris and for all of us in the Society.

A Wagner Travel Horizon for 2020

This will be a busy year on the road for WSNZ members! Twenty-eight of them will soon travel to the Lyric Opera of Chicago to see its new, all-star *Ring* cycle. The trip is fully booked, but tickets and packages are still available for two

important Wagner events in Brisbane towards the end of the year – Opera Queensland's semi-staged *Tristan und Isolde* with Simon O'Neill, and Opera Australia's excitingly new 'digital' *Ring* in November. Details below.



A new *Ring* cycle to be directed by the dynamic Chinese/American Shi-Zheng Chen, with Allison Oakes and Stefan Vinke in the cast. The Society's nine-night package is for the second cycle (19-26 November), with accommodation at Rydges Southbank, a welcome reception, a full-day symposium and a group lunch at the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art. Michael Sinclair will escort.

Prices start at AUD1,629.00 per person (share twin) plus the *Ring* tickets (choices between AUD900.00 to AUD1,980.00). Members can purchase *Ring* tickets only.

Packages and tickets are selling fast, so please contact Michael Sinclair at wsnz@theoperacritic.com, asap.

New Zealand's own golden-voiced tenor Simon O'Neill will sing *Tristan* here for the first time in the southern hemisphere. The Society has an allocation of Premium Reserve seats for Saturday, 31 October 2020 at a cost of AUD195.00 each. In addition, members can take advantage of a two-night accommodation package at Rydges Southbank (AUD264.00 per person, twin share).

Members have the option of buying opera tickets only or combining these with the accommodation package, This trip will not be escorted by a tour leader.

Space is now very limited so please contact Michael Sinclair at wsnz@theoperacritic.com, asap.

A Wagner Membership Still Growing for 2020

Heartiest Walküre-type welcome cries of 'Ho-jo-to-ho' to the following members who joined since our last Newsletter:

Anthony & Vivien CaughleyAuckland
Alex Ladyman.....Wellington
Rachel PayneAuckland

Michael Young.....Auckland
Michael ZaragozaWellington

WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND • 2020 PROGRAMME



Tribute to
Peter
Hofmann

March
Auckland



Siegfried
Twice Over

March and
October
Christchurch



NZ Baritone
Rodney
McCann
Looks Back

March
Wellington



*Götter-
dämmerung*
Act 2

October
Dunedin

Auckland

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

Sunday, 23 February at 7.00pm

Peter Hofman: Wagner Singer Extraordinary
Terence Dennis reviews the career of the memorable Siegmund in Chéreau's Centenary *Ring*.

Sunday, 5 April at 2.30pm (note afternoon time)

Once More Through the Ring

A four-hour session where **Heath Lees** guides us through *The Ring*, with extended excerpts from three different versions. This might be specially useful for those going to Chicago.

Sunday, 17 May at 7.00pm

Formals and Informals

The Wagner Society's AGM, and selected Wagner items.

Sunday, 12 July at 2.30pm

Return Visit of Antony Ernst

Following his hugely successful visit last year, **Antony Ernst** returns to NZ. His subject in Auckland is *Parsifal*.

Sunday, 20 September at 2.30pm

Parsifal

A full screening of the opera plus optional catered dinner.

Sunday, 6 December at 7.00pm

Christmas fare of Wagner items, plus cake and wine.

Wellington

Venue: *St Andrew's Hall, 30 The Terrace (except 10 May)*

Sunday, 29 March at 4.00pm

Great Wagnerian Singers and Conductors I have Worked With
A retrospective presentation by the well-known Wellington baritone Rodney McCann.

Sunday, 10 May at 11.00am

Venue: *Te Auaha: NZ Institute of Creativity, Dixon St.*

Prince Igor

Joint meeting with the Opera Society for a DVD screening of the 2002 Mariinsky Theatre production of Borodin's *magnum opus*.

Borodin (1833-1887) was very contemporary with Wagner (1813-1883). This unfinished work was revised and completed by Rimsky Korsakov and Glazunov.

Sunday, 21 June at 4.00pm

Documentary screening. Details to follow.

Sunday, 5 July at 4.00pm

Antony Ernst will be touring most NZ centres again this year and arrives in Wellington on this date, with a lecture on *Parsifal*. This event is not to be missed if his last year's presentation is anything to go by!

September/October/Date TBA

Date and programme to be confirmed later.

November/December/Date TBA

End of year party.

Christchurch

Venue: *The Music Centre, St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Manchester St.*

Friday, 13 March at 7.30pm (NB new date)

John Pattinson: Sword-swallowing: Is Act 1 Sc.3 of *Siegfried* a load of hocus-pocus, or did Wagner really know a thing or two about making a sword?

In this presentation, John will take a closer look at our hero's semi-convincing demonstration of the Schwertschmied's craft in Act I:3 of *Siegfried*; is this demonstration a product of Wagner's long fascination with the art of the blacksmith?

Friday, 15 May at 7.30pm

Cities That Have Championed Wagner

Michael Sinclair looks at cities, large and small, that have gone the extra mile to perform Wagner's operas.

Friday, 10 July at 7.30pm

Antony Ernst and The Ring

Antony Ernst, Australian Wagnerite and artistic director of the Royal Danish Orchestra, returns with a lecture on *The Ring*.

October Afternoon Meeting

Date and Time TBA

Siegfried: DVD screening, with a meal between the acts.

Sunday, December: Date, Evening Time and Venue TBA

Christmas Function

Dunedin

All venues from May onwards are to be confirmed later

Sunday, 15 March at 2.00pm

Venue: *Black-Sale House Lecture Room, cnr. St. David and Leith Streets*
The Wagnerian Reach

Terence Dennis introduces Korngold's *The Miracle of Heliane* and Strauss's *The Egyptian Helen*, two 1920s masterpieces, written under Wagner's powerful influence.

Sunday, 3 May at 2.00pm

Reforming the Reformer

John Drummond discusses Wagner's revision of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* for the German stage. A fascinating re-thinking of one great operatic reformer by another.

Sunday, 14 June, time TBA

Venue: *Te Rangi Hiroa Viewing Room, 192 Castle Street*

Wagner on Film: Das Liebesverbot

Wagner's second opera, based on *Measure for Measure*. A lively, colourful production from Madrid's Teatro Real.

Sunday, 13 September at 2.00pm

Wagner on Wagner

A guided tour with **Terence Dennis** through Wagner's *Opera and Drama*, with supporting film and sound examples.

Sunday, 4 October, time TBA

Götterdämmerung, Act 2

The complete act from The Met, introduced by **Terence Dennis**.

Sunday, 29 November, 12 noon

Venue: *Carrington College, 57 Heriot Row (Turn right off Pitt Street)*

Our Christmas lunch date followed by goodies à la Wagner.

Leb' wohl

Harry Kupfer, Theatre Director, 1935-2019

an invited obituary notice from Michael Ashdown

Harry Kupfer, one of the greatest of modern-day Wagner stage directors, died on the very threshold of the new decade on 30 December last year. Born in Berlin, he studied at the University of Leipzig, working primarily in former East Germany for the first twenty years. From 1981, he was director of Komische Oper Berlin.



Kupfer's directing approach was strongly influenced by Bertolt Brecht and Walter Felsenstein; he was attuned to opera as realistic music-drama rather than as a vehicle for singers. This influenced his characteristically elaborate and energetic direction of the singer-actors on stark, heavily stylised stage sets, with an emphasis on projecting character, motivation and immediacy. His most notable stagings included *Fidelio*, *Elektra* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*, but the Wagner productions were especially memorable.

His groundbreaking *Der fliegende Holländer* appeared at Bayreuth 38 times at 7 festivals between 1978 and 1985, earning him worldwide praise. In this early example of German *Regietheater* ('director's theatre'), Kupfer fastened on aspects already inherent in the drama and presented them in a radically new light. Wagner's story of the accursed Dutchman who seeks redemption is retained but presented as an obsessional fantasy of an emotionally disturbed Senta. There is no redemption; Erik is unable to prevent her suicide, and the final outdoor tableau, with the Nordic town's window shutters noisily slammed closed, is devastating.

Several years later, in Bayreuth, Kupfer went on to direct a *Ring* that is regarded as one of the finest latter-day stagings of the work, integrating mythological and environmental concerns yet leaving the work's timeless universality intact. There was also a second *Ring* and an immaculate *Parsifal* — fascinating and beautiful.

Kupfer held that opera could not be taken seriously as art if it only presented an idealised, prettified world. In a 1993 interview with Germany's *Focus* magazine, he said: 'If opera can take the ideas of its creators and bridge the gap between their time and ours, it will have achieved much. Opera cannot change the world, but it can provoke thought and discourse.'



Jessye Norman, 1945-2019

Apart from her myriad performances of widely varied works, **Jessye Norman** had a voice that positively shone in Wagner, where her interpretations were thrilling and beautiful.

Her roles included Elsa, in the Solti *Lohengrin*, and Sieglinde in the Met Opera's *Walküre*, gloriously preserved on CD and DVD. As Kundry, again at the Met, she was unforgettable, and her famous, Salzburg Festival *Liebstock* in live performance with Karajan has been described as one of the most moving *Liebstock*s ever recorded.

John Wegner, Baritone, d.17 November, 2019

John Wegner was born in Germany but grew up in Melbourne. As a young man, his fine voice and vibrant stage personality brought him many major opera roles in Australia, then in the early 1990s he went back to Germany as a freelance performer



His Wagner roles were specially memorable, with his Bayreuth debut as Donner in *Das Rheingold* in 1997. In 2001, he appeared there as Bitterolf in *Tannhäuser*, as Telramund in *Lohengrin* two years later, and as Klingsor in Christoph Schlingensiefel's notorious *Parsifal*, which John reckoned was one of the highest points in his career.

Although John was kept very busy in Europe, he often returned to sing in the southern hemisphere, and many New Zealanders will remember his sadly resigned Wotan/Wanderer in the 1998 Adelaide *Ring* and in direct contrast, as a black-leather Alberich in the 2004 staging. Increasingly affected by Parkinson's, he eventually had to withdraw from the 2013 Melbourne *Ring*.

George Risk, Wellington Member and Office-Bearer, d.29 September, 2019

Seen here being awarded a Royal Society science medal, **George Risk**, a geophysicist, joined the WSNZ in late 1995 — just in time to be part of the society's first group tour to Bayreuth. He and his wife Julia also went on Wagner Society trips to Adelaide, Sydney and Seattle.

From the mid 1990s George assisted on the Wellington committee and proved specially valuable as the National Membership Secretary from 2004 until 2010. His wide knowledge and supportive involvement in the Society will be much missed.

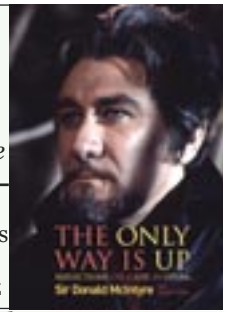


Book Sales

The Only Way Is Up

Sir Donald McIntyre

To purchase a copy please contact Liz Lees 022 163 0069 or handelees@xtra.co.nz



Bank Changes

Now that Kiwibank has dispensed with cheques, Treasurer Jeanette Miller recommends that:

1. Subs can be paid in cash to the local organiser of your group during meetings. Members should also give to the local organiser the renewal form they will have received by post. The local organiser will bank the payments and send the details to our membership secretary. The local organiser will also have spare membership forms for any new members.

2. If you prefer, take cash to your local Kiwibank and ask them to deposit it into our account:

The Wagner Society of NZ
38-9015-0531788-00

You can give up to three reference items with your deposit. Please insert:

[a] **YOUR LAST NAME — this is most important**

[b] the word 'sub'

[c] 'gift \$xxx' if you'd like to make a donation to the Foundation Fund. Or leave blank.

3. Another option is for you to give cash to someone you trust, who does internet banking, and ask them to deposit it for you. Be sure to give them the above reference items.

Sometimes an event — such as a group meal — will require prepayment. In this case you should do as for 2 or 3 above, but change what you put in the reference spaces.

CD Award

The recent 'Distant Beloved' CD featuring Simon O'Neill and Terence Dennis (and some Wagner items!) won the Classical Award in the NZ Music Awards at the end of last year.

Wagner Murmurs

Vladimir Jurowski will conduct two concert *Ring* cycles with the London Philharmonic in January/February 2021.

- The Bayreuth Festival's new *Ring* cycle in 2020 will be directed by Valentin Schwarz, conducted by Pietari Inkinen, plus three Brünnhildes and two Siegfrieds.
- Katharina Wagner's contract at the Bayreuth Festival has been extended for another five years, until 2025.

Michael Sinclair



WAGNER AND BEETHOVEN

The year 2020 sees the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven, a lifelong inspiration for Wagner's ideas about music, a figure of epic achievement for his conception of the German nation, and a shining beacon for his dream of uniting music with drama.

*In this Backpage article, the first of a series of four, **Heath Lees** reflects on the many connections between these two composers.*

In 1813, Richard Wagner was born, and Beethoven was forty-three years of age. When Beethoven died (1827), Wagner was in his early teens and had already fallen under his spell. In his autobiography *My Life* he tells us that this came about through the popular pictures of Beethoven, all of them emphasising his strikingly forceful features, despite his known condition of deafness and isolation. In Wagner's boyhood experience, the man and his music made a formidable combination, and in *My Life* he linked Beethoven's powerful look with the overpowering effect of his music, brought alive at his first encounter with a Beethoven symphony:

'At last, at a concert in the Gewandhaus, I heard one of the master's symphonies for the first time; it was the Symphony [no.7] in A major. The effect on me was indescribable. To this must be added the impression produced on me by Beethoven's features . . . I soon conceived an image of him in my mind as a sublime and unique supernatural being, with whom none could compare.'

(Wagner: *My Life* — Vol. 1, Apple Books.)

Beethoven Becomes Wagner's Model

Fired up by the experience, Wagner began to compose works that modelled themselves on the music of his new musical hero. He also began to arrange Beethoven's orchestral music for the piano, even though he himself was no great pianist. Yet the youthful piano arrangement that he made of the Ninth Symphony is still with us today, and CDs continue to appear from front-line pianists, such as the one by Noriko Ogawa in 1998, illustrated by the CD cover-picture on the right. Interestingly, the CD artist's photoshop collage presents an apparent reality of Wagner's later claim that Beethoven had actually been born again in him.

Another of Wagner's early reactions to Beethoven can be found in the opera-based works he began to write. In 1829, under the heady influence of

the master's opera *Fidelio* — the overture in particular — the sixteen-year-old Wagner began to compose overtures of his own, such as the King Enzo overture which was performed in Leipzig in 1832. Just like Beethoven's *Fidelio* the overture outlines the opera's story. Just like Beethoven's *Florestan*, King Enzo languishes in a dungeon for much of the time, and just like Beethoven's *Leonora/Fidelio*, the king's daughter Lucia sets out to free him by entering the prison in disguise.

Other overtures followed that were similarly inspired by Beethoven. Wagner was freely to admit that his *D-minor* overture was modelled on the *Coriolanus* overture while his C-major one was patterned on *Egmont*. In an unusual burst of honesty, he acknowledged these as 'plagiarisms from my youth . . . I would not have been able to compose as I did if it had not been for Beethoven.'

During Wagner's first, ill-fated visit to Paris (1839-42), his increasing devotion to Beethoven became vital to his career. Paris was acknowledged as the world's opera-centre, and Richard was desperate for a chance to have his new opera *Rienzi* performed there, which he thought would bring the city to his feet. Instead, the horrible reality of ignominy, starvation and poverty

forced him to scratch the barest living through musical journalism. But being a wily and resourceful human being, Wagner found a way of turning even this to his advantage, and it was the ongoing reputation of Beethoven that allowed him to do so.

Beethoven a Symbol of Music's Spirit

As an exile in Paris, Wagner had begun to re-appraise his German roots, and his articles shrewdly depicted the French music business as showy and money-centred, in stark contrast to the German approach to music that prized and loved the art for its own sake — less professionally polished perhaps, but certainly more genuine and more 'spiritual'.

The figure of Beethoven fitted this German mould perfectly. Beethoven had scorned recognition and rewards, yet he composed mighty scores that seemed as though they had been directly inspired by Heaven itself. Ironically, while Wagner was languishing unrecognised in Paris, Beethoven was fast becoming the city's most famous composer. Seizing his chance, Wagner hitched his wagon to Beethoven's star, and smoothly painted himself as the natural successor to the Bonn composer, and thus to Haydn and Mozart as well, creating what became the famous, Vienna-based trinity. From now on, and with astonishing success, Wagner was to increase the famous Austro-German musical gallery of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven by one — himself.

The most obvious instance of this comes in a journalistic *novella* that he published in 1841 and entitled *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*, a book that shows how successfully he grafted himself onto the Beethoven myth, and then projected it into a Wagner myth that lasted all his life, and beyond. The next article in this series will begin with this 'pilgrimage' to Beethoven and the spiritual lustre that it beamed over the career of Richard Wagner, now nearly thirty years old.



Armed with the wonders of Photoshop, the artist for this BIS CD shows Beethoven morphing into Wagner — who would have loved it!
(Image used by kind permission)