



Back in Business! (If Somewhat Shaky)

You could almost hear the unison sigh of relief when we learned that New Zealand's Level 4 lockdown period, which began at midnight on 25th March, was at an end.

On 9 June, the country officially moved to Level 1. Number restrictions on gatherings were removed and work is now going on to revive/re-schedule this year's cancelled and postponed WSNZ meetings.

Among the upsets that lockdown brought was the postponement of our usual May AGM which has now been moved to the 12 July meeting in Auckland. The Formal Notice of this meeting, with a list of nominated office-bearers and other committee members, appears on the right.

Other plans were not so easy to re-schedule. The cancelling of the April Chicago Ring was hugely disappointing and Michael Sinclair had to work mightily to unpick arrangements and recoup payments. All of this has been done now, and a very big thankyou goes to Michael from all of us.

In other swings of the Corona axe, Bayreuth cancelled its 2020 summer festival – the first time in its history that health concerns have closed its doors. Bryn Terfel's *Dutchman* in New York was sunk without trace, and several other, eagerly awaited Wagner productions simply disappeared off the global horizon.

Back in our own corner, future arrangements are still a bit shaky. Some venues have been reluctant to confirm meetings. The July visit of

Antony Ernst has been cancelled and replacement speakers can be hard to find. Latest arrangements are listed on p.2 of this newsletter, and the four Centre co-ordinators will keep in e-mail touch locally as changes dictate. We are keeping our fingers crossed that the Brisbane Ring will go ahead. (Our beleaguered Michael has written an update on this, also on p.2.)

Not everything was gloom and doom. With lockdown time on his hands, newsletter editor Heath Lees produced and posted six 'Corona Virus Newsletters' with plenty of Wagner nourishment during the lean months.

These newsletters went viral, so to speak, one of them appearing on the Wagner Verband internet front page, while some Australian societies reprinted them *in toto*.

In New Zealand, Heath had a total of eighty-six enthusiastic e-mail feedbacks from members who joined the big Wagner Watch of Opera North's internet Ring proving once again what history has often shown: you can cancel Wagner's music all you like, but you can never silence it.

Wagner Society AGM — 12 July (Postponed from 17 May) Formal Notice

THE SOCIETY'S AGM IS TO BE HELD ON SUNDAY 12 JULY IN
ST HELIERS COMMUNITY CENTRE,
100 ST HELIERS BAY ROAD, AUCKLAND, AT 2.30 PM.

Nominations for committee so far received:

PresidentTerence Dennis
Vice-PresidentKen Tomkins
Secretary.....Peter Rowe
Treasurer Jeanette Miller
PR/Liaison.....Cynthia Hawes

Other members::

John Davidson, Ashley Day, Juliet Rowe, Adrian Simcock
To make a nomination, phone Peter Rowe at 021 610 869, or e-mail to: info@wagnersociety.org.nz. Nominations can also be made from the floor at the meeting.
The President's Report will be available at the meeting, and is also printed in this newsletter, on page 3.

Illness Forces Katharina Wagner out of Bayreuth

In a shock announcement on 27 April, the management of the Bayreuth Festival revealed that Katharina Wagner had resigned as Festival director, owing to a long-term illness.

Katharina Wagner, 42, was appointed co-director of the festival in 2008 with her half-sister Eva Wagner-Pasquier. Since 2015, she has been in sole charge.

In an internet posting of 12 May, Rainer Fineske, chair

of the Wagner Verband board said 'the serious condition of her health has hit us all completely unexpectedly and our thoughts are with her . . . for her long road to recovery.'

In his blog *Slipped Disc*, Norman Lebrecht was less tranquil, noting that Katharina Wagner's absence would leave the event 'Wagner-free for the first time since the composer inaugurated it with *The Ring*

in 1876.' According to Lebrecht, Katharina and her father effectively removed all other members of the family from the Festival, leaving no eligible Wagner successor.

The appointment of an interim management duo of Heinz Dieter-Sense (81) and Holger von Berg (49) came to grief when von Berg resigned at the end of May.

In Lebrecht's ominous words 'There is a power vacuum at Bayreuth'.



Photo: Nicolas Armer

WSNZ 2020 Programme

Second Half-Year

Auckland

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

Sunday, 12 July at 2.30pm

'Once More Through The Ring'

Heath Lees walks us through *The Ring*.

A four-hour session featuring four different productions

Preceded at 2.30pm by the postponed AGM.

Sunday, 20 September at 2.30pm

Parsifal: Full screening of the opera and 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

Sunday, 5 July at 4.00pm

Rodney McCann:

Great Wagnerian singers and conductors I have worked with.

September/October

Date and programme to be confirmed later.

November/December

End of year party. Date TBA.

Christchurch

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

The meeting on Friday, 10 July has been cancelled.

It is hoped a replacement meeting in August/September can be arranged. Details TBA

October Afternoon Meeting, time TBA

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

Sunday, December: Details TBA

Christmas Function

Dunedin

All venues will be publicised locally

Sunday, 13 September at 2.00pm

Wagner on Wagner: A guided tour with **Terence Dennis** of Wagner's *Opera and Drama*, with 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

Our Christmas lunch date followed by goodies à la Wagner.

New Member

A hearty Wagnerian welcome to:

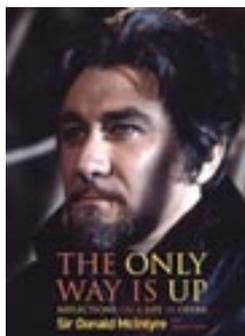
Alex Miller.....Dunedin

Sir Donald McIntyre Memoirs

The Only Way Is Up

A lifetime in opera by Kiwi legend Sir Donald McIntyre. The Wagner Society's 25th-birthday celebratory publication in 2019. Packed with fascinating insights and great photos.

To buy a copy please contact Liz Lees (ph: 022 163 0069) or email: handelees@xtra.co.nz.



Will the Brisbane Ring Go Ahead?



Here's hoping! . . . Queensland Performing Arts Centre (photo: Tourism and Events Queensland).

With three new *Ring* cycles (Chicago, Bayreuth and Paris) already cancelled this year, all eyes are on Opera Australia and whether their much anticipated new *Ring* cycle will go ahead in Brisbane in November/December.

Rehearsals for the production had already begun earlier this year when the coronavirus pandemic forced a halt — according to Opera Australia they are planned to recommence in August. While current social distancing and gathering rules would probably prevent this happening, there is a glimmer of hope that with the pandemic largely under control in Australia these rules may be relaxed.

However that still leaves a question mark over how the company can bring overseas artists into the country given that their borders are likely to remain closed to all but Australians (and hopefully New Zealanders) for the foreseeable future. Perhaps with some judicious cast changes it will become a 100% Australian *Ring*?

For WSNZ members planning to travel to Brisbane to see this *Ring* there is a reasonable chance that a Trans-Tasman travel bubble will be created in the coming months making travel possible. Our fingers are therefore firmly crossed that this 2020 *Ring* curse will not extend to Brisbane and that we will be able to bring this unprecedented year to a resounding Wagnerian close.

Michael Sinclair

Berlin has an Answer!



Deutsche Oper's dark, unpromising car-park was transformed into a floodlit open-air performance space for 'Das Rheingold'.

On the 12th of last month, Deutsche Oper Berlin had scheduled the premiere of Stefan Herheim's long-awaited *Das Rheingold* and the start of a whole new *Ring*.

When coronavirus cancellations summarily shut down the opera house, the company turned its darkly empty carpark into a floodlit Valhalla and the opera went ahead in the open air.

Not in its original conception to be sure. Instead, they used a reduced, 'semi-scenic' version for 12 singers and 22 players, as famously re-designed in 1990 by British director Graham Vick and composer Johathan Dove.

Five performances took place over ten evenings. Audiences had to book online for tickets that cost a mere 5 Euros plus the opportunity at the end to 'Pay what you want'. Latest news is that the company was well rewarded by the outgoing audiences — delighted to have their live opera famine broken at last!

President's Report 2019/20

As I write this President's report, we are in the middle of the Covid-19 lockdown and thoughts of Wagner Society activities over the last twelve months seem not only light-years away but somewhat surreal. Still, while the future is murky, we can at least reflect on the past.

At the end of the WSNZ 2019/20 year we saw some significant changes in the membership of the national committee, and I would like to take some space in recognising the work of a couple of long-standing members who have both offered tireless service to the Society. Late last year Lesley Kendall informed us that she was stepping down from her role as the co-ordinator of our Dunedin branch. Lesley's association with the Society can be traced back to around 1996 when she joined the Auckland branch. Two years later she was appointed minutes secretary to the Auckland based national committee, however, after she left Auckland for Dunedin in 2005, she swapped her national role to become instrumental in setting up the Dunedin branch in 2008 where she has co-ordinated their activities.

Gloria Streat has been similarly involved. In 1999, she was a founding member of the Christchurch branch before taking on the role of co-ordinator, alongside her late husband, Garth, around 2000/2001. On stepping down, Gloria will have been at the helm of the Christchurch branch for almost two decades. Without the likes of Lesley and Gloria, there would be no Society, so we are eternally grateful to both of them for all their work in ensuring the Society's success over the last two decades.



Replacing long-standing organisers can be difficult, however, I am pleased to report that, in a sign of the Society's strength, replacements have been found. We are, therefore, delighted that Ashley Day has stepped up to replace Lesley in Dunedin, while in Christchurch, Cynthia Hawes and Andy Buchanan have agreed to take on Gloria's co-ordinator role, with Cynthia also standing for the national committee. During the year we were thrilled to welcome Adrian Simcock who agreed to join the national committee as the second Wellington representative. These are significant changes to the society but, in my opinion, they are a sign of our good health. After all, new minds bring in new ideas to take us forward.

Apart from the changes to the membership, the committee ran with its usual efficiency thanks to the tireless work of our secretary Peter Rowe who somehow makes it all appear easy. However, over and above the day to day administration, there were, and continue to be, several issues that have absorbed Peter's time. For example, his work with Michael Sinclair, another society gem who should be thanked for co-ordinating the overseas trips, including the Chicago *Ring* and the Wagner events in Brisbane, scheduled for the end of the year. After all the meticulous planning, thanks to the current state, all the Chicago work had to be undone. However, we are still hoping that the Brisbane *Ring* events will go ahead.



Christopher Brodrick
Outgoing WSNZ President

In yet more challenges, the Society had to find a solution to the phasing out of cheques by the banks and also plan for the transition of the newsletter from the printed version to an on-line only edition in 2021.

In addition to his role as our secretary, Peter also fulfils the position of WSNZ Honorary Solicitor and, through Minter Ellison Rudd Watts, provides the committee with conference call facilities for our committee meetings that have enabled the national committee to hold its meetings four times a year. If that was not enough, another task that Peter has taken on is the review of the Society rules to ensure they comply with new legislation which is due to come into effect some time in the next two years. The committee is scheduled to consider any required changes later this year and plans to have them adopted by the Society at the 2021 AGM.

Thanks also to Heath and Liz Lees for taking on responsibility for the editing and production of the newsletter and for proactively developing the idea of the Covid-19 newsletter sheets. These have led many of our members using the lockdown to take in, via the internet, opera performances from all over the world.

During the year, the Wagner New Zealand Foundation was led by Peter Rowe who, with members, Sir Michael Hardie Boys, Heather Simpson and Terence Dennis, oversaw the Society's charitable arm. The finances of both the Society and the Foundation were tended to by Treasurer Jeanette Miller, with the support of our auditor John Hambling.



Supporting Peter and Jeanette on the national committee this year were Ken Tomkins (Vice President), Juliet Rowe (Minutes Secretary), John Davidson (Wellington), plus the aforementioned Adrian Simcock (Wellington), Gloria Streat (Christchurch), Lesley Kendall and Ashley Day (Dunedin). The national committee was supported by its branches where the real activity takes place. Acknowledgement for this work must go to Ken Tomkins, John Davidson, Gloria Streat and Lesley Kendall who were supported by Juliet & Peter Rowe, Jeanette Miller, Richard Green, David Colemore-Williams, the late Helen Kirkman, Heath and Liz Lees, Tibby and Adrian Simcock, Anne Mallinson, Michael Ashdown, Helena Hawke, John Pattinson, Jenny Lee, Elizabeth Cooch, Terence Dennis, Louise Kilby and Judy Wilson.

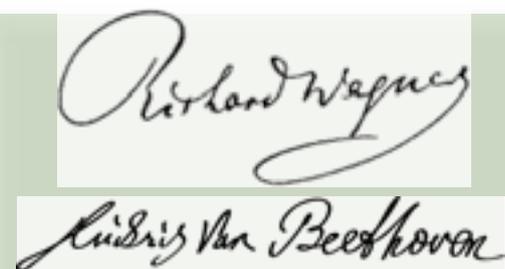
We also recognise the work of everyone who has presented to the Society, both local and international speakers, and we hope that it will not be too long before we can once again enjoy the insights that you bring. A big thank you to all of you.

Finally, as I am stepping down as your President after eleven years and this will be my last report, I'd like to express my gratitude to all of you for not only your friendships but, as a society, for providing me with the inspiration to enrol at university in my seventh decade. I know that it was, in part, the stimulus provided by the Wagner Society presentations that fuelled my desire to seek higher education. With a Bachelor of Arts now under my belt, I am pursuing Honours this year and, if successful, will move higher up the food chain after that. But, while I am stepping back, I am not out. Indeed, I take great delight in finding ways in which to include Richard Wagner in all my assignments. Whether it is Cinema Studies, Art History or English, Wagner's influence can usually be found. So, thank you.

Christopher Brodrick

WAGNER AND BEETHOVEN

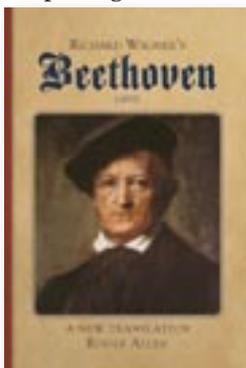
This year marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven. In the third article in our series of four, **Heath Lees** reflects on Wagner's last written thoughts about his forerunner.



In 1869, the year before the centenary of Beethoven's birth, a high-powered planning group called 'The Beethoven Committee of Vienna' came up with what seemed like a wonderful idea. They invited four musical stars of the day – Wagner, Liszt, Joachim, and Clara Schumann – to appear together onstage and address their individual Beethoven tributes to a large, invited audience.

In fact, the idea went nowhere, thanks to the animosity that all four musicians harboured against each other. One valuable consequence did emerge though: Wagner was inspired to write a long essay, which has since become the best-known of his writings on Beethoven.

When the essay came out, it was immediately ridiculed as another example of the author's lust for self-serving publicity. Wagner, said the gleeful critics of the 1870s, was simply interpreting Beethoven in terms of his own ideas. The same spirit of accusation clings to today's writing. Look, for example, at the Oxford scholar Roger Allen's excellent new translation of 2014, with a preface that says 'Wagner's book-length essay on Beethoven, written to celebrate the centenary of Beethoven's birth in 1870, is really about Wagner himself rather than Beethoven.'



Roger Allen's new translation. All page numbers are taken from this version.

Well we all knew that. But it surprises some to learn that Wagner himself made no bones about this. In his essay's 1870 preface he admits that he intends to present his own view of Beethoven within the widest horizon (p.45):

'the author . . . chose a written exposition of his thoughts on the significance of Beethoven's music as it presented itself to him. . . . In this way [the author] could guide the reader through a deeper investigation of the nature of music and make a contribution to the philosophy of music . . . [my italics].

Wagner's Reasons for Writing

Wagner had further reasons for writing the essay. Broadly, they fall into two groups, the first of these relates to the wider world of culture, events and ideas, and the second relates to Beethoven's musical legacy. In this newsletter we'll concentrate on the first, and in the September newsletter we'll pursue some of the musical aspects.

We can simplify the large issues covered in Wagner's first group of concerns by narrowing them down to three basic motives: personal, national and cultural.

Personal Motives

With this book, Wagner wanted to settle a score against himself. Twenty years earlier, in *Opera and Drama*, as a young revolutionary firebrand, he had accused Beethoven – and just about every other Western composer – of diverting instrumental music's proper development by trying to force it into expressing a specific meaning 'all by itself'. This, Wagner had proclaimed loudly, was 'Beethoven's Mistake'. Music, said Wagner, needed to be 'fertilized' by the words of a drama.

But by 1868, a more mature Wagner knew that he needed to explain his early salvoes better, and *Beethoven* can be seen as his first step in this process. It now points triumphantly to the Ninth Symphony, the work where Wagner claims that Beethoven 'corrects his mistake' by breaking through into words in the Finale, and so becomes music-drama, with words and music appearing to be spontaneously fused together.

This was vital to Wagner, not just to emphasize his reverence for Beethoven's memory, but also to give a pedigree for the birth of his own music-drama. Thus, the concert of the Ninth Symphony in 1874, to mark the laying of Bayreuth's foundation-stone, was also intended to symbolize Beethoven's foundation of music-drama.

National Motives

In a striking coincidence, the day Wagner began work on *Beethoven* was also the day that France declared war on Germany. Of course patriotism was the order of the day and Wagner, still smarting from the brutal French expulsion of *Tannhäuser* a decade earlier, seized the opportunity to fire off cheap potshots at so-called French superiority, especially in the world of fashion (p.169).

By contrast, he praises the musical achievement of his own nation by hailing the mighty Beethoven as a German icon. The original title of his essay's first draft was: *Beethoven and the German Nation*, and those who have accused Wagner of appropriating Beethoven for his own glory have forgotten how much he credited that glory not to himself, but to his country during wartime.

Cultural Motives

Just as Beethoven's titanic figure shone cultural glory upon Germany, so too did Wagner see it as bestowing great importance on music as a subject. Nothing frustrated him more than the fact that

music's invisibility and intangibility meant that its contribution to art and culture was often dismissed as insignificant. Similarly, Wagner found that discussing music was hugely difficult since it could not be pinned down in words.

Beethoven's New Idea of Music

But by 1870, in the figure of Beethoven, Wagner could proclaim a musician whose enormous genius was acknowledged by all, across all the arts, and with an artistic message that was not hampered by its embodiment in music. On the contrary, music was being liberated in a society where it had become the recreational pastime of the age. So in this book, Wagner announces Beethoven's greatest contribution as a move away from the idea of music as beautiful sound for a detached observer, to the idea of music as an emotional revelation for an engaged listener. With Beethoven, says Wagner, music broke through the boundaries of beauty to become *sublime* (p.75).

To provide real substance to his claim, Wagner regularly invokes the thinker dearest to his heart— Schopenhauer, who had described music's power to communicate directly to a listener's heart and mind without explanation and so give rise to this experience of the sublime. In addition, Wagner also turns to another world-recognized figure – Shakespeare. Using Schopenhauerian language, he finds the same direct, Beethoven-like appeal to heart and mind: '[Shakespeare's] dramas seem to be such a direct copy of the world, that we cannot find in them any artistic mediation in their representation of the idea' (p.145).

Later he says 'Beethoven is exactly like Shakespeare in his relationship to the formal laws of his art and in his liberating mastery of them . . . (p.151).

Earlier in his essay, Wagner had made a direct equation of the inter-reactions of Shakespeare's characters with the activity of Beethoven's musical motives – 'we must be aware that these worlds are congruent in such a way that each is contained within the other even if they appear to inhabit different spheres.' (p.147).

Cosima's Diaries confirm the link: 'The passing mention of a line in Hamlet brings him to a comparison between Shakespeare and Beethoven; as in Shakespeare the characters, so in Beethoven the melodies – unmistakable, incomparable . . .' (31 July, 1870.)

Which brings us at last to Wagner's unique understanding of Beethoven's music, the aspect that we'll focus on in the next newsletter, to finish off the series.

Version used during this article:
Roger Allen: *Richard Wagner's Beethoven (1870)*.
Boydell Press, Woodbridge Suffolk, 2014.