

Report on RWVI Kongress, Dessau-Roßlau 13 – 17 May 2015

The International Association of Wagner Societies (RWVI) unites some 130 Associations around the world. As a German-based Organisation it was founded in 1909 but “internationalised” in 1991 to render all Wagner Societies around the world eligible for membership. The Wagner Society of Scotland is rightly proud to be a member. While many Composers have Societies dedicated to their works these are locally or nationally based and I cannot think of any other Composer who has inspired such a world-wide network of supporting Societies. There is much pleasure to be gained from being part of that world-wide family of Wagner lovers.

The purpose of the RWVI mirrors our own, namely to promote and deepen the understanding of Richard Wagner's works and provides support for the next generation of artists through the Richard-Wagner-Stipendienstiftung (Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation) founded at the Composer's behest, to which this Society sends a Scholar every year. The RWVI also works to ensure the continued success of the Bayreuth Festival.

The Verband also promotes a Triennial Singing Competition for Wagner Voices next to be held in Karlsruhe in October this year and the annual Giornate Wagneriane in Venice. Future events which it will be supporting include a production of *der Fliegende Holländer* in Singapore and “Tanzhäuser”(!) in Cuba.

The Annual RWVI Kongress was held this year in the City of Dessau-Roßlau. The official function of the Kongress is the Delegates' Meeting at which Verband matters are discussed which representatives of 70 Societies attended and at which I represented the Wagner Society of Scotland.

A new Präsidium (Committee) was elected in at Graz in 2014 to serve for a five year term amid great optimism for the future development of the Verband. Regrettably this optimism was not fulfilled and considerable tensions emerged within the Präsidium culminating in 10 of the 14 members expressing no confidence in the President. After losing a vote of confidence at the Delegates' Meeting Thomas Krakow resigned as President and Horst Eggers was elected in his place. Finn Elkjaer was replaced as Secretary by Gunther Cicek from Wurzburg.

Herr Eggers is a leading member of the Bayreuth Society with a close association to the Festival and the Wagner sisters. At the conclusion of the Meeting he expressed optimism that ticket allocations to Societies would be restored. Limited numbers of tickets were briefly made available to Societies this year and it is to be hoped that this will continue in future years.

The difficulties surrounding the Meeting do no credit to the RWVI itself, and from conversations afterwards with representatives of other Societies it is clear that the Präsidium must work hard to secure the long-term future of the Verband. The representatives from Amsterdam and Bonn who had previously proposed to host Kongress in 2017 and 2020 (to co-incide with the 250th Beethoven Anniversary) announced that they were placing these proposals on “hold”.

On a positive note the Meeting agreed to institute Proxy Voting which had been a matter of concern particularly to those Societies geographically distant.

The Delegates' Meeting occupies only one day and the five-day Kongress is well supported by various other events. The heart this year was a stunning Ring Cycle in the Anhaltisches Theater. Dessau has been called the Bayreuth of the North and boasts a 150 year pedigree of Wagner performances. The city also was the home of the Bauhaus Foundation and there was much of the art and architecture of this Movement to visit and absorb.

Like most modern Rings this cycle raised many questions about the work and this production. It was firmly rooted in Dessau's Bauhaus past and technological present with the thrust being how we engage with art and technology in the modern age. Much use was made of CGI projection including a CAD forging of *Notung* (technically accurate, I am told!) all of which integrated seamlessly into the action and music. It was stimulating to talk with others at the intervals to exchange views of the significance of the images and share interpretations. It has been some time since I have attended a Ring which provoked such positively vigorous engagement and lively discussion, so filling the intervals that one scarcely had time to drink!

The four operas were performed over five nights, with the “break” night filled by a wonderful concert by Dessau-Roßlau's Stipendiatin in the beautiful Schloss Mosigau Festsaal.

During the days a range of excursions were on offer the highlight of which was undoubtedly the tour of the “Dessau-Wörlitz Garden Kingdom” a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Strasbourg will host Kongress from 5th to 8th May 2016 which will include a performance of *das Liebesverbot* by the Opera National du Rhin.