

WAGNER SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE CHAIR at BAYREUTH

Derek Williams

As diarised below, I managed to see seven operas this year at the Bayreuther Festspiele. After years of pandemic-induced isolation, eight members of the Wagner Society of Scotland finally made it back to the hallowed Festspielhaus.

Two of us, Jane Skinner and I as 'Auntie & Uncle' came to support our 2019 Stipendiat, Tomas Leakey and accompany him to *Tannhäuser* and *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

Jane and I also attended *Lohengrin* on the in-between night. Wagner Society Student Member, recently turned Full Member Ruaridh Bakke and I thereafter stayed on to see the new Valentin Schwarz production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.



WSoS Stipendiat 'Auntie & Uncle':
Jane Skinner, Derek Williams

17 August - Wahnfried Konzert

Six WSoS members pictured below attended a wonderful evening of piano duets performed on Wagner's own Steinway in the Wahnfried drawing room, earning three encores and a standing ovation:

Fantasien und Spiele - Werke von Mozart, Czerny, Schubert, Giesecking und Bizet
- Klavierduo Yaara Tal & Andreas Groethuysen

Wagner Society of Scotland members took drinks in the Wahnfried garden during the intermission!



Robert McCutcheon, Frances Brann,
Jane Skinner, Joy Millar, Sibylle
Zimmerman, Derek Williams



Audience entering Wahnfried
main entrance for
the evening concert



Wahnfried drawing room
piano duets concert

18 August - *Tannhäuser*

First show, *Tannhäuser*, with 7 members of the Wagner Society of Scotland present. The same controversial opening that had drawn boos at its premiere drew loud cheering this time around. During the intervals, we took Tomas to dinner at the Green Hill Kitchen Restaurant (formerly Steigenberger). This now features buffet presentation rather than table service.



Frances Brann, Derek Williams, Sibylle Zimmerman, Jane Skinner, Joy Millar, Robert McCutcheon



Derek Williams, Tomas Leakey, Jane Skinner, Frances Brann, Joy Millar



Joy Millar, Robert McCutcheon, Frances Brann, Jane Skinner, Derek Williams, Sibylle Zimmerman, Tomas Leakey

19 August - *Lohengrin*



On our second night at the Festspielhaus for the current season, seven of us from the WSoS attended *Lohengrin*.

I thought this a striking production with a vivid, modern design and blistering performances.

At the end, staff gave us plastic anoraks to protect our suits from the drought-breaking downpour!

20 August - *Der fliegende Holländer*

This was a weird evening - an entire opera about a ship with nary a ship or sailor in it. Instead, it was all set in contemporary suburbia with performers dressed in civvies, and a bizarre suicide-by-hanging early on in the show. Stunning performances, though.

21 August - Stipendiaten Gala Dinner and Concert



Derek Williams, Rainer Fineske, Jane Skinner



Derek Williams, Tomas Leakey, Jane Skinner

The following night Jane, Tomas and I attended a wonderful evening of entertainment provided by the Richard Wagner Verband International Stipendiaten, ending with delicious outdoor buffet dinner followed by brilliant impromptu performances back in the hall, “open mic” (ohne mic), and a singalong.

Photos can be accessed here:

<https://www.richard-wagner-stipendienstiftung.de/en/picture-gallery/picture-gallery-2022.html>

After another lovely couple of days were spent in Bayreuth, during which Ruaridh and I paid a visit to Wahnfried while we tuned in to another episode in David Nice’s Zoom course on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, hosted by the Wagner Society of Scotland.

THE SCHWARZ RING

25 August - *Das Rheingold*

We attended the first night of the final run this season of the Schwarz production of Der Ring des Nibelungen. Hardly less bizarre than the Castorf Ring, which metonymised gold as oil, this production represented gold as an abducted child, without magic and without nature. Hearty booing from the audience, as I recall for the Castorf interpretation of Wagner's epic, and reviews also trenchant.

After *Das Rheingold*, we attended a dinner hosted by the Californian Wagner Society with Cast and Conductor in the Green Hill Kitchen restaurant. The evening was MC'd by the Californian Chair, John Mastrogiovanni. At our table were Wotan (Eglis Silins), Woglinde (Lea-Ann Dunbar) and Fasolt (Jens-Erik Aasbø), and we had the opportunity for in-depth conversation. This is a wonderful idea. We also caught up with the conductor, Cornelius Meister, who recounted his early days as a Wagner Society Stipendiat, showing the ongoing importance of sponsorship by societies.



Derek Williams, Cornelius Meister, Ruaridh Bakke



Derek Williams, Ruaridh Bakke, Lea-Ann Dunbar



John Mastrogiovanni, Nadine Weissmann, Derek Williams, Ruaridh Bakke, Elisabeth



Derek Williams, Esteban Insausti

All societies present were invited to introduce ourselves, and in addition to the Wagner Society of Scotland I was representing, it was great to meet friends from the London Wagner Society, and Esteban Insausti, Chair of the Sydney Wagner Society from Australia.

After everyone left, we stayed for drinks in the outdoor bar for a couple of hours with the President of the Californian Society (John Mastrogiovanni), and Bayreuth singer Nadine Weissman (*Erde* in the Castorf production) and Elisabeth, a Stipendiatin for drinks. It was great to meet new friends, and discuss the next three shows to see what further controversy they might bring!

26 August - *Die Walküre*

Day 2 of *The Ring*. Again, vociferous booing for the production, alternating with effusive applause for the performers, with almost dead silence when the curtain came down in-between. A problem with this production is its ersatz verismo, lacking gravitas. Anachronistically re-casting the Ring in a 1960's living room, with Wotan as angry Dad wandering about in torn tennis shorts, dealing with spoilt kids, alongside the removal of all supernatural and mythical elements, and the obfuscation of the Ring's central controlling idea of renunciation of love for wealth and power, led to profound disappointment in patrons we spoke to. Replacing the ring of fire surrounding Brunnhilde with a single battery-powered torch bulb was the last straw for most. This did not improve over the next two operas in the final run of the tetralogy, and I don't think patrons will be returning for a future run unless reviews significantly improve. Nevertheless, a lovely night socially, with drinks in-between, and a great bite afterwards in the Mediterranean Restaurant down the hill.

28 August - *Siegfried*

Yet another night of loud booing for this truly bizarre Ring cycle. Tonight, the third opera in the tetralogy, *Siegfried*, again presented primarily in a 1960's domestic dwelling, nevertheless equipped with an early model microwave oven into which the eponymous protagonist pushes the living head of Mime. To cool the cooked cranium of his hapless caregiver, Siegfried plunges Mime's head into an aquarium, conveniently located right next to the microwave. Despite just having had his brain nuked, Mime instantaneously makes a complete recovery - *Family Guy* style. Thereafter we see a blunt "sword"

inexpertly used to decapitate a few cloth puppets, whose nether limbs apparently need to be sawn off and flung about for dramaturgically obscure reasons. Many objects become projectiles in this production, including some carefully thrown school chairs. The gods manifest no godlike qualities whatsoever in this anachronism. The forest scene takes place in the same domestic living room, not a tree in sight, and the 'dragon' is an entirely human patient in a hospital bed that has mysteriously appeared in the same room. At the end of Act 3, a late model sedan drives on to the stage to transport Brunhilde and Siegfried to an unknown offstage location. By contrast, singing and orchestral playing were outstanding, and the audience made sure to loudly cheer them in between their boos for the production itself.

I had been warned not to read the reviews before seeing this, but fully intend to before returning for a future production of the Ring.

30 August - *Götterdämmerung*

The last night of Wagner's epic Ring cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, again featured prolonged, loud booing from an outraged audience after each act. Gone from the stage was the fiery destruction of Valhalla, while Alberich was portrayed as a superannuated biker, effete hitting a punching bag. The show ended with two suspended foetuses in floodlights, resembling the final scene of Kubrik's *2001 A Space Odyssey*. At one point during the curtain calls, Brunhilde defiantly 'gave the finger' to a few booing patrons, who immediately booed even louder; although to be fair, the vast majority applauded the performers themselves. The entire orchestra appeared on stage and was loudly applauded. The director Valentin Schwarz did not make an appearance at any of the performances we attended.

Steingraeber Factory Visit

Ruaridh and I enjoyed a lovely tour of the Steingraeber showroom with Alban Steingraeber, great-grandson of the company's founder. We got to play a few bars on Wagner's very own Steingraeber, and also that of Liszt. Both pianos are still used for public concerts. That weekend, we went to see a public talk in the Steingraeber lecture theatre given by the controversial director of the current Ring cycle, Valentin Schwarz. It wasn't the bloodbath we'd been expecting, and the audience seemed surprisingly warm to him. I returned later for a private tour of the Steingraeber factory with Alban.



Valentin Schwarz explains his interpretation of The Ring at the Steingraeber Hall



Richard Wagner's own Steingraeber



Franz Liszt's own Steingraeber



Ruaridh Bakke, Derek Williams, Alban Steingraeber

BAYREUTH & OUR STIPENDIAT

Tomas Leakey

After two years of cancellations I was excited to finally make it to Bayreuth this year as the Stipendiat representing the Wagner Society of Scotland. The main focus of the days there, hearing *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *Die fliegende Holländer* in the famous Festspielhaus, was truly special. Plenty has been written about the famous acoustic but it has to be heard to be believed. The orchestral sound has a remarkable combination of clarity and warmth so you can hear every detail but it never feels clinical. The very deep positioning of the brass allows (indeed requires!) them to play with full power in the fortissimos, but without their sound consequently overwhelming the rest of the orchestra, as would happen if they played like that in any other pit. And one can hear every word from the singers - soloists and chorus (who incidentally were without doubt the finest chorus I've ever heard). Additionally, without the "distractions" of surtitles and not being able to see the movements of the conductor and orchestral players it was notable the degree of focus on the stage which one was able to attain as an audience member compared to in other houses, where one's eyes are often darting around from stage to surtitles to orchestra. The productions were all thought-provoking, if at times perhaps too much so to

fully convey the immediacy and rawness of the emotions expressed by Wagner's music and text. Overall, a truly remarkable experience in a place to which I hope to return.

In addition to the performances I met many new friends and colleagues from around the world amongst the well over 200 other Stipendiaten, with many opportunities for interaction during the various activities which were organised during the days. It was a unique and probably once-in-a-lifetime chance to be surrounded by so many young people for whom Wagner is of importance and felt at times like being back at university (in a good way!). On the last evening there was a fine series of performances from some of the Stipendiaten - instrumentalists and singers - and, after the formal part of the evening had ended and delicious food had been served, some excellent impromptu singing and playing.

I'm very grateful to the Wagner Society Scotland for sending me, and it was a particular pleasure to meet Derek, Jane, Joy and others from the Society. To anyone considering applying in future years I would wholeheartedly recommend it.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF BAYREUTH FROM A MEMBER'S PERSPECTIVE

By Ruaridh Bakke

My experience attending the Ring Cycle at the Bayreuth Festival I think can only be described as "distinct". I don't want to talk too much about the production, first of all because having spent the entire cycle with Derek by my side, I know he will have a lot to say about it, and I have no doubt that it will make for quite the read! Second, whilst I of course value the visual aspect of opera, that is the stage craft and live action singing-actors that provide context to the music, I was mainly very eager to hear how the score sounded in an acoustic conceived by the composer himself, having heard many accounts of how distinct, clean and perfectly balanced the music sounds in the theatre.

Still, I went in with an open mind and kept my expectations cautiously realistic, having already seen live performances of Wagner's works many times. I feel like the theatre begins as soon as you take your seat in the Festspielhaus, as bells ring to signal that the start of the cycle is imminent, and then all of the doors into the theatre hall close in sync. The lights then fade out into complete blackness, so that all you can see is the immediately recognisable dimly lit stage curtain. Going back to my comment about keeping my expectations realistic, it was around thirty minutes into Das Rheingold when I had already concluded that the sound of Wagner's music in this hall does in fact live up to its reputation. The sound is soft but not quiet, the balance between the cast and the orchestra is superb, and the clarity of sound is so unbelievably crisp that, were I a fluent German speaker, I don't doubt that I would be able to understand every single word. However, I'm sure this is also helped along by an outstanding level of singing like nothing I've heard live before. Notably, Wotan was almost deafening, despite our seats being at the very back of the hall up in the balcony area.

Due to the production, negative reception peaked during Siegfried, with Acts 1 and 2 finishing with a sea of boos, which initially overwhelmed the sound of anyone applauding. This didn't bother me as I was content with just being at the festival itself, plus I feel it was another element on top of the above comments that made the Bayreuth experience distinct and unique.



Ruaridh Bakke (centre) on balcony



View from the Festspielhaus balcony



Ruaridh Bakke, Fasolt (Jens-Erik Aasbø), Derek Williams

PROGRAMME of SPEAKERS 2022-2023, 6.30pm to 8.00pm, delivered on Zoom

23 October 2022

Derek Clark: 'Scottish Opera Wagner Productions - A Personal View'

Derek was born in Glasgow and is an Honours graduate of the RSAMD and Durham University. After postgraduate studies at the London Opera Centre, he joined the music staff of Welsh National Opera as a répétiteur and, later, as Staff Conductor, making his conducting debut with them in 1982 with Mozart's 'Cosi fan tutte'. Among many other operas, he helped to prepare their Ring Cycle, directed by Goran Jarvefelt, and their production of 'Parsifal' conducted by Anthony Negus. In 1997 he was appointed Head of Music at Scottish Opera, and has since conducted a wide variety of operas for them by composers ranging from Handel and Mozart through Rossini, Verdi and Puccini to James MacMillan and, most recently, Arthur Sullivan. He assisted Sir Richard Armstrong on Scottish Opera's 2004 Ring Cycle, and has been involved in several other Wagner productions for the company. He also works as an accompanist, coach and arranger (his re-orchestration of Humperdinck's 'Hansel and Gretel' has been used by opera companies and colleges throughout the UK and America). Since 2011 he has been Music Director of Dundee Choral Union, and since 2014, Organist and Director of Music at Helensburgh Parish Church.

20 November 2022

John Willmetts: 'Richard Wagner Die Meistersinger: Renunciation of Self and the World'

John was born in Dunfermline and educated at Truro School and Bristol University. After a career as a teacher of music in schools, latterly at Daniel Stewart's and Melville College, he studied at Edinburgh University, gaining degrees in German, European History, Organology and Divinity, and has doctorates in Music and Religious Studies. John, one-time President of the Edinburgh Society of Musicians, is now organist at St Michael's Kirk Linlithgow, gives piano recitals and is writing a book on C. J. Jung's pupil, Scottish analytical psychologist Maurice Nicoll.

11 December 2022

AGM. Speaker Tomas Leakey: 'Experience of Bayreuth 2022'

Tomas is the Music Director of the Mahler Players, a chamber orchestra based in the Highlands which he founded in 2013. With this orchestra he has conducted many performances of works by Mahler, including Symphonies 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, Adagio from 10, Das Lied von der Erde and most of the other song cycles.

Tomas has also commissioned and given the world premieres of several new works, including by leading Scottish composer Stuart MacRae and Richard Wagner in Venice: A Symphony by Matthew King. This piece brings to life for the first time some of Wagner's late unfinished symphonic sketches. Tomas conducted the premiere performance with the Mahler Players in 2021, and the Symphony was also recorded in the studio and released as part of an album on the orchestra's own label. Richard Wagner in Venice is part of the Mahler Players' long running "Wagner Project", which included three concert performances of Act 1 from Die Walküre in 2019, in a new specially-commissioned chamber orchestra version by Matthew King and Peter Longworth, with soloists Peter Wedd and Claire Rutter. The project will continue in December 2022. He began his musical life as a trombonist and studied conducting with George Hurst at the Sherborne Summer School of Music and then with Denise Ham at the London Conducting Academy. He undertook post-graduate study in orchestral conducting at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and has taken part in a wide variety of masterclasses, including the Orkney Conductors' Course and the Järvi Winter Academy.

He was selected as the 2020 Bayreuth Stipendiat by the Wagner Society Scotland and was delighted to visit the Bayreuth Festival in 2022 following two years' of postponements due to Covid-19.

15 January 2023

Mark Berry: 'Frank Castorf's Bayreuth Ring (2013-17)'

Professor Berry is Head of Music at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is the author of 'Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire: Politics and Religion in Wagner's Ring'; 'After Wagner: Histories of Modernist Music Drama from Parsifal to Nono', and 'Arnold Schoenberg', as well as co-editor of the recent 'Cambridge Companion to Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen'. He regularly writes about opera and concert performances and productions on his blog, *Boulezeian*.

19 February 2023

Derek Williams: 'The Wagner Clan'

As well as being Chair of the Wagner Society of Scotland, Derek Williams is on the associated Staff of the University of Edinburgh as a Lecturer and Tutor in Music. He has been orchestrator, composer, conductor and a freelance musician with 27 IMDb credits for feature films, television documentaries and mini-series, and 33 Discogs recording credits, and he has been a frequent conductor of orchestras such as Victoria Philharmonic Orchestra, East Lothian Festival Orchestra and many others. Many of the media to which he has contributed have gone on to critical and popular acclaim, including Los Angeles Film Festival, Indiefilms, BAFTA, Best Film Score (NZ), an Oscar, Platinum sales and Australian Aria Award nomination.

Derek's range of international clients have included Torvill and Dean, Sir Robert Helpmann, Cameron Mackintosh and Caroline O'Connor, and his work has been performed at London's Royal Albert Hall and Garrick Theatre, and Sydney Opera House. As a young chorister he performed in Westminster Abbey, Kings College Cambridge, the White House, and Lincoln Centre, New York. The world premiere of his full-length opera about Oscar Wilde is expected to take place early next year with full orchestra and chorus at Edinburgh University's McEwan Hall.

19 March 2023

Michael Downes: 'From Dresden to Bayreuth: tracing the creation of The Ring'

Michael Downes, MA, MPhil, DPhil, is a conductor, writer and lecturer with a particular interest in opera. He studied English and Music at King's College, Cambridge and completed a doctorate on the music and ideas of Debussy at the University of Sussex. He has lectured for most of the UK's leading opera companies and writes programme notes for organisations including Wigmore Hall and Snape Maltings. He collaborated with Nike Wagner, great-granddaughter of Richard, on the English version of her book about her family's history, and has written books with, and also about, the British composer Jonathan Harvey. His current writing projects include books about Wagner and Elgar. Following two years as Director of Music at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, Michael has occupied the same post at the University of St Andrews since 2008. The following year he became musical director of St Andrews Chorus, now Scotland's largest choral society. He founded Byre Opera, with whom he has conducted operas by composers including Britten, Janacek, Tchaikovsky, Handel and Debussy. He recently led the University's project to build the £15m Laidlaw Music Centre, which opened this year.

23 April 2023

John Payne: 'Wagner and Revolution'

John has been passionate about Wagner's music dramas for over 50 years since seeing them for the first time in the early 1970's in Bayreuth and London. He was the Secretary of the Cambridge University Wagner Society, where had dinner with Friedland Wagner. After spending 40 years working for the British Council mainly in South Asia and Africa, he is now able to indulge his enthusiasm fully, and has been the Chair of the Wagner Society of Manchester since 2019.

21 May 2023

Kirsten Paige: 'Richard Wagner as Ecocritic'

Kirsten Paige is an Assistant Teaching Professor of Musicology at North Carolina State University. She was previously a Postdoctoral Fellow in Music at Stanford University and earned her Ph.D. in Music History from UC Berkeley in 2018. Kirsten's work asks how forms of scientific knowledge shaped musical practices and aural cultures in the long nineteenth century, with a special focus on global cultural and scientific exchanges. Her first book, *'Richard Wagner's Political Ecology'* (under contract, University of Chicago Press), explores the influence of nineteenth-century environmental and climatic theories on Wagner's artistic and political regimes of knowledge. Her work has also appeared in *The Cambridge Opera Journal*, *Opera Quarterly*, *19th-Century Music*, and the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*.

MEMBERSHIP and FINANCE NEWS

Iain McLennan

The Membership Secretary has brought all his records completely up to date following the pandemic. The Society has 97 Members; in 2018, we had 128 members. This slow steady, decline in the Society's numbers is currently being addressed by the Committee.

The Chair has put forward several suggestions regarding possible improvement of this situation and has invited the Committee to give their thoughts on this important matter.

Once all the suggestions have been considered by the Committee, the findings will be reported to the membership through the Newsletter. It is hoped that this exercise will be completed prior to the Annual General Meeting in December. The finances of the Society are in good order and are sufficient to cover all the activities of the Society for the foreseeable future. It is not anticipated that there will be an increase in the subscription for the coming year, but the Society must be careful not to undertake any activity that could result in a substantial loss. All current invoices have been paid and there is nothing currently outstanding from a financial point of view.

The Treasurer/Membership Secretary wishes to retire from the Committee but given the challenges facing the Society will remain in post for the time being and will offer to continue as the Treasurer at the Society AGM in December.

A HIDDEN GEM IN BAYREUTH

Frances Brann

On our visit to Bayreuth this year we were delighted to find a small museum of Natural History, the Urwelt-Museum - Oberfrankisches Erdhistorisches Museum Bayreuth. The Urwelt Museum exhibits the history of palaeontology and the geology and mineralogy found in Upper Franconia, covering roughly the last 500 million years. In its long history the region has changed its ecosystems several times, from being a shallow tropical sea, tropical forest, cold tundra and finally lush mixed forests. Exhibits on display include shell calcareous dinosaurs, a world-rare *Capitosaurus arenaceus* skull and other fossils, rare minerals and a walk in model of a gold crystal. I was particularly impressed with the variety and quality of palaeontology fossils as good plant fossils are often difficult to find.

A skull and numerous vertebrae of the fish dinosaur *Temnodontosaurus* is also on display, the skull itself measures over a metre long. There is also a representation of a tropical flat sea which covered the region 180 million years ago along with the associated fossils which would have been found there. Outside in the garden area at the back of the museum there are full size models of the dinosaurs, some up to 10 metres high, that would have been found in the region. There is also another model in the pedestrian area not far from the entrance to the museum. We were also lucky to see a special exhibition of Agate specimens. These crystals were truly spectacular in the arrangements of patterns and colours found in the specimens on display. They were displayed according to the countries where they were found and these included Mexico, China and Africa. I am very interested in crystals and have never seen such an impressive collection of Agate on display together anywhere else.



The museum is beautifully laid out, is fully accessible and also offers activities for children and I would highly recommend it as a place to visit when in Bayreuth.

MY VISIT TO BAYREUTH 2022

Joy Millar

I have been visiting Bayreuth for more years than I can remember, but each visit brings huge excitement and a new understanding of Richard Wagner's importance in the development of music, drama and the theatre. It seems to me that what Wagner achieved in the building of the Festspielhaus has never again been reached let alone surpassed.

My visit to Bayreuth is something of a ritual always ensuring that I visit certain places and meet old friends. My first port of call is always the *Grüner Hügel*, and I was particularly interested in seeing the changes after last year's covid visit. I was pleased to find the additional seating, cover and street food traders remained while normality had returned to the rest of the green hill, even the weather this year had changed - very hot as is usual, not wet and cold as last year (during our visit at least). My next call is always to the Friends office to get my tickets and hear the latest news and views (they were extremely careful in their response to my questions concerning the new Ring 'It poses many questions' was their comment). Of more importance to me was the fact that there would only be two performances of Tristan in 2023 as it was put together hastily for last year's festival and there will be a new production in 2024. The main eating areas had new caterers with both the usual self-service cafeteria and the lovely new restaurant in which we joined Scottish Wagner Society members in a wonderful meal of the highest quality. It was a delight to meet Derek Williams, Jane Skinner and Tomas Leakey our scholarship winner at Haus Wahnfried for drinks together and a most enjoyable concert of piano duets given by Yaura Tal and Andreas Groethuysen on Wagner's piano. I had already visited Wahnfried earlier in the day to visit Wagner's grave (for once unadorned by flowers or wreaths), buy merchandise in the museum and eat delicious snacks at the small cafe!

During our stay we visited Margrave Opera House - the sole remaining large Baroque opera house in existence, the Hermitage, Sanpareil and of course in St Georgen the Ordenskirche or church of the Order - the loveliest church in Bayreuth where the funeral service for Cosima Wagner took place. We also dined in the Eule - Wagner's favourite hostelry and the Wolfenzacher - which is mine.

So to the magic of the Festspielhaus to hear the wonder of Tannhauser and Lohengrin. I have long dismissed the 'new' productions. I have grown tired of trying to interpret directors' ideas and reading copious notes to justify their ideas. I now visit to enjoy the wonderful chorus, orchestra, conductors and singers extolling the magnificent music in a Festival house with the most wonderful acoustics. The acoustics are like nothing you have ever heard before and makes the singers sound many times better than in the conventional opera house. The prelude to Parsifal written for the Festspielhaus and played there is a profound experience which cannot be expressed in words. I also greatly appreciate the technical quality of the works produced and the dedication of the staff to costumes, wigs, scenery, special effects etc. Wagner realised a theatre with backstage facilities to manage his grandiose idea particularly in the 'Ring'. As a bonus this year we were fortunate enough to hear Thielemann conduct Lohengrin. Like other great conductors he brought something special to the performance and the audience we ecstatic about both him and the wonderful tenor Klaus Florian Vogt.

This year however Bayreuth was not the end of our Wagner pilgrimage. My shooting club were holding their Silver Jubilee celebration in Switzerland so we decided to join them then go on to Lucerne to visit Wagner's house on Lake Lucerne, Tribschen- the happiest abode of Wagner according to his own Testament. I have visited the house - now a museum - many times but never in August so it was lovely to see the cafe open and some Wagnerian tourists. This was a house in which Wagner was happy, fulfilled and in which he created or finished some of his greatest works. It is a small house but the ground floor contains his piano, many of his letters, manuscripts and portraits and even the clothes he wore. It is a delightful exhibition enhanced by an additional one on the first floor, 'Proud Walls' - showing Wagner sites in Zurich, Lucerne, Tribschen and Venice. While visiting I made the acquaintance of three elderly Indians who were attending the Lucerne Festival of which I had never heard. This festival lasts over a month with concerts at various venues. Conductors included Daniel Barenboim, Kirill Petrenko, Ivan Fischer, soloists: Klaus Florian Vogt, Cecilia Bartoli, Juan Diego Florez, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Sheku Kanneh-Mason among many others. Perhaps something for the future. So after 14 days of excitement, over 2000 miles of driving at 86 - home - exhausted but elated.

'Life is short . . . Opera is long . . . Wagner is forever' (Richard Wagner)

Cancellation of the 6-11 October 2022 International Richard Wagner Congress in Madrid

Berlin, 07.09.2022

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends,

It is with great regret that I have to inform you that the International Richard Wagner Congress in Madrid from 06.10-11.10.2022 has been cancelled. The current cancellation is particularly painful for us because the board of the Madrid Association with its chairwoman Clara Baneros had twice taken great pains and sacrificed a lot of time for all of us to spend pleasant days in their capital. Whether with or without an opera by Wagner, which, as some of my fellow board members and I also find, was not a compelling option, as demanded by some members. The problematic circumstances we are facing again this year, now with the additional challenges with the Russia-Ukraine war and the upcoming inflationary problems and drastic increases in energy and heating costs have obviously contributed to the fact, that many of our members were not willing to sign up for Madrid.

With kind regards
Rainer Fineske

President, Richard Wagner Verband International (RWVI)

TAGORE: Impact on European Composers and Alexander VON Zemlinsky

By Dilip Roy FRAS

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in many ways was the embodiment and manifestation of India's greatest classical poet KALIDASA (First Century BCE) Tagore's stature as 20th century's most esteemed and revered poet of the world remains unrivalled to date.

Tagore's poetry *Geetanjali* (Song offerings) published in English by the author in 1912 made Tagore famous in Europe almost overnight and went on to win the Nobel prize in literature in 1913. The book was published in most of major European languages and his admirers included fellow Nobel laureates such as Albert Einstein, Andre Gide, Herman Hesse, Thomas Mann, Boris Pasternak, Romain Rolland, GB Shaw and WB Yeats (wrote the introduction to *Geetanjali* when first published in 1912.)

Most significantly Tagore's poetry struck a chord with a number European composers among them Franco Alfano, Leos Janacek, Nino Rota, Arnold Schoenberg, Wilhelm (Wagnerian) Stenhammar, Karol Szymnowsky and Alexander Zemlinsky to name but a few. The two poems that really impacted these composers are the award winning (*Song offerings*) and the most popular poem *The Gardner*. Tagore developed a special interest for German language and was reading Goethe and Schiller in its original and the same time went on to translate the German poems of Heinrich Hein. Tagore was an avid admirer of the works of German Indologists Friedrich Max Muller and Friedrich Von Schlegel. The Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871-1927) who describes himself as Wagnerian, was commissioned to write incidental music for Tagore's play *Chitra* based on the legends of *Mahabharata* which was completed in 1921 and had its premier on March 1921 in Sweden.

However, the major work was done by a staunch Wagnerian Alexander VON Zemlinsky (1871-1942) the Austrian born Zemlinsky was first and foremost a composer of operas and Schoenberg thought highly of him as such: I do not know of any other composer after Wagner who could satisfy the demands of the theatre with better musical substance than Zemlinsky. *Lyrische symphonie* now famously known as (The Lyric Symphony) in seven songs after the poems by Tagore from *The Gardner* for orchestra, Soprano and Baritone was composed in 1922 and it was premiered in Prague on 4th June 1924. In Zemlinsky's own Krollwords - belongs to the tradition of the *Song of the Earth*. The Song Symphony with an exotic choice of text the poems of Tagore combine Indian traditions with elements of European poetry of the turn of the century - a syncretism that won him the Nobel prize for literature in 1913. The inner affinity of the

seven songs, with their preludes and interludes it's a kind of a love drama, from the first stirrings ground of the desire to the agony of farewell. His music is often Wagnerian, with recitatives punctuated by *Lohengrin* inspired orchestral interjections figures similar to those which adorn the melodic lines of *Tannhauser*, softly pulsating figures for solo timpani as in the *Ring Cycle*. The most famous recording of *Lyric Symphony* was performed, produced and recorded in Germany in 1981 for the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of the legendary maestro Lorin Maazel and sung in a Wagnerian style by German Baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Soprano Julia Varady. (This work remains Zemlinsky's greatest tribute to Richard Wagner.)

Tagore greatly admired the works of Scottish poet Robert Burns and the German poet Heinrich Heine whose poems he has interpreted in many of his works.

Tagore, the Goethe of India, gives expression to his personal experience that this is the truth (life affirmation) in a manner more profound, more powerful and more charming than any man has ever done before him. This completely noble and harmonious belongs not only to his people but to the entire humanity.
(Albert Schweitzer 1959)

India's only World renowned European classical music conductor maestro Zubin Mehta was conferred the most prestigious Tagore Award on the eve of Tagore's Nobel centenary in 2013 for cultural harmony instituted by Govt. of India on the 150th anniversary of the poet.

Addendum: A Scottish centre of Tagore studies (ScoTs) was established under the auspices of Edinburgh university in May 2012 to promote (Indian culture, education, philosophy and literature as Tagore's legacy) the first of its kind in the United Kingdom. A Scottish scientist and architect Sir Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) spent a lot of time in India planning some fifty cities. Geddes is also responsible for the planning and designing of Tagore's world famous International university the *Visva-Bharati* in West Bengal, India. Also a huge bust of TAGORE was erected at Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespeare's birth place in May 2014.

Dilip Roy is an ardent Wagner enthusiast also an avid admirer of Wagner's operas and prose works including the works of Rabindranath Tagore. Dilip is an elected Fellow of Royal Asiatic Society of United Kingdom and Ireland. He is also a keen Indo-German cultural enthusiast. Dilip Roy's major article on 19th century musicologist Sir S M Tagore (1840-1914) was commissioned by the Royal College of Music London for its Annual Review of 1996/97.

A FINAL WORD

After years of stalwart service, our Secretary, John Anderton, is retiring. Our Treasurer, Ian McLennan has also stated his intention to retire, but as noted in his report, until a new Treasurer can be found, Ian will stand for re-election at the 2022 AGM. Both these roles are essential to the smooth running of the Society, so I would very much like to hear from members interested in standing for these positions.

If you would like to stand for either of these positions, please contact me directly via email at chair@wagnerscotland.net or by phone 07857602004. To contact for more information, John's email is john.anderton4@btinternet.com and Ian's is wsstreas3@gmail.com

FROM THE EDITOR

This is a bumper issue, and also one with colour photographs! Apologies that it is slightly later than planned, but I wanted to include reports from Bayreuth and also our programme of speakers this winter season. Once again, thanks to our Secretary, we have a first class line up of speakers who will inform and also entertain us on things Wagnerian. I hope you can join us on 'Zoom'. After considering the options, it was felt this would give the best opportunity for the maximum number of people to attend in these (post?) Covid days. The invitation links will be sent out later, but if you have any difficulty, please contact us. Using Zoom is not set in stone, but if our meeting format changes at a later date, we'll keep you informed in good time.

My visit to Bayreuth in July was memorable as ever, not least because of the heatwave! With temperatures some days touching 40 Celsius, an evening in the Festspielhaus was a night to remember. I was fortunate to see two operas, but I won't repeat the insightful remarks of others above. Suffice to say that whether you loved or loathed a particular production (and I loved them), the whole experience is unforgettable.

Future (and some past) events

The first concert of this year's *Lammermuir Festival* included Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*, in the beautiful surroundings of Holy Trinity Church, Haddington. Mezzo-soprano Jennifer Johnston was accompanied by Malcolm Martineau.

Perhaps we'll have more Wagner in next year's programme of this superb Festival of 'Beautiful Music in Beautiful Places'? Next September's artist in residence will be Steven Osborne.

I had been looking forward to the *Philadelphia Orchestra* and *EIF Chorus's* performance of *Beethoven's Ninth (Choral) Symphony* in the Usher Hall, part of the Edinburgh international Festival. This was a piece very close to Wagner's heart, and is traditionally included in each year's programme. At short notice, however, the Festival programme was changed due to the orchestra's covid protocols, so instead we were treated to an uplifting performance of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, with Rachmaninov's '*Isle of the Dead*', a hauntingly beautiful piece. As a surprise, the evening started with an unprogrammed performance of Dvořák's thrilling *Carnival Overture*. Yannick Nézet-Séguin certainly brought out the best in the orchestra with his very animated style of conducting, but all without the EIF Chorus of course. A great evening, but not the 'Choral'!

The *BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra* is giving a production of 'Wagner's *Twilight Of The Gods*' in Glasgow and Edinburgh in November. Arranged by the conductor Ryan Wigglesworth, and with soprano Katherine Broderick, it will be interesting to see their interpretation of *Götterdämmerung*.

THE SSO website describes it thus:

'Get ready for a thrilling ride as we distil the final part of Wagner's 'Ring' cycle into a single musical journey. The flickering light of dawn, the overwhelming passion of love, the ebb and flow of the majestic Rhine, a jawdropping funeral march, and the world consumed by fire and water: this is storytelling at its most dramatic. Chief Conductor Ryan Wigglesworth unleashes the full force of the orchestra in his own adaptation of this music and Katherine Broderick sings Brünnhilde's triumphant closing scene.'

(Am I alone in thinking that programme notes sometimes use too many superlatives?) The programme also includes '*Vers le silence*' by the SSO's Composer-In-Association Hans Abrahamsen. It can be seen on Thursday 17th November at 7.30pm in Glasgow City Halls, and on Sunday 20th November at 3pm in Edinburgh's Usher Hall.

David Graham

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