

WAGNER SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND NEWSLETTER

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BAYREUTH & OUR STIPENDIAT

Congratulations! Our Stipendiat for 2023 is Hanna de Bruin. The interview panel found her application impressive, and believe her attendance at Bayreuth will nurture her intended career as a singer of Wagner's music while furthering the aims of the Wagner Society of Scotland in supporting the cause of Wagner's music in Scotland. Her programme will be as follows:

Scholarship days: Sunday, August 13, 2023 to Friday, August 18, 2023. Scholarship holders have the opportunity to visit the following three performances of Bayreuther Festspiele:

- August 1: THE FLYING DUTCHMAN - Musical direction: Oksana Lyniv, director: Dmitri Tcherniakov
- August 15: PARSIFAL - Musical direction: Pablo Heras Casado Director: Jay Scheib (new production)
- August 16th: TANNHÄUSER - Musical direction: Nathalie Stutzmann Direction: Tobias Kratzer

The International Scholarship Concert will take place on Thursday, August 17th.

RECENT EVENTS reported by John Anderton

October 2022 Derek Clark: 'Scottish Opera Wagner Productions - A Personal View'

Derek gave an account of the various Scottish Opera Wagner events over the years and gave an insight into the running of an opera company, and what contributes to a good operatic performance. The musical examples from various Wagner operas were a joy to listen to. Derek was Born in Glasgow and is an Honours graduate of the RSAMD and Durham University. After post-graduate studies at the London Opera Centre, he joined the Music Staff of Welsh National Opera as a repetiteur, and, later, Staff Conductor, making his conducting debut with them in 1982 with Mozart's 'Cosi fan tutte' and, among many other operas, helped to prepare their Ring Cycle, directed by Goran Larvefelt, and their production of 'Parsifal' conducted by Anthony Negus. In 1997, he was appointed Head of Music at Scottish Opera.

November 2022 John Willmetts: 'Richard Wagner Die Meistersinger: Renunciation of Self and the World'

In his all-encompassing talk to the Society, John Willmetts attempted to throw some light on the attempts by Wagner in the text and music of Die Meistersinger to illustrate Christian and philosophical views held in Germany in the mid 19th century. He suggested that the development of 'the person' could be achieved by studying the arguments set out in the opera.

December 2022 Tomas Leakey: 'Experience of Bayreuth 2022'

Tomas began by thanking the WSS for choosing him as the Stipendiat for 2022 and initially gave an account of the various delays to the scholarship due to the pandemic (he had originally been offered it in 2020). He then gave an outline of the five days spent in Bayreuth in summer 2022, the three operas seen in the Festspielhaus (Tannhäuser, Lohengrin and Der fliegende Holländer) and the other activities that were organised for the Stipendiaten, all accompanied by photographs. He then gave some general comments on the experience, including the special and unique sound that is created in the Festspielhaus, how great it was to meet and make connections with the other Stipendiaten and some thoughts

on the productions. This was followed by some questions and then he continued to give a brief account of the concert performances of Tristan und Isolde Act 2 (and other sections) which he conducted with the Mahler Players in December, including playing a brief excerpt from the recording of the Act 1 Prelude. This tied back also to the talk he had given earlier in the year on Wagner in reduced orchestration. This was followed by questions and a general thank you to the society, mentioning how the Bayreuth experience had directly influenced and inspired his work on Tristan und Isolde.

January 2023 Mark Berry: 'Frank Castorf's Bayreuth Ring (2013-17)'

Professor Mark 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, *Boulezian*.

February 2023 Derek Williams (Chair): 'The Christianity of Richard Wagner'

Like Christianity, the redemptive power of Love is the central controlling idea in all of Wagner's operas, and he was one of the few composers versed in Philosophy and Theology. Yet some manifestations such as incest and adultery in *Die Walküre* remain shocking, even to contemporary audiences. Wagner was especially interested in German Idealism, and the thought of figures such as Schopenhauer, Feuerbach and Hegel, so he fits the mould of a socialist rather than that of a proto-Nazi, his notorious antisemitism notwithstanding.

Of all the books in Wagner's private library in Dresden, his copy of Luther's translation of the New Testament was the most heavily annotated, yet his preparatory study for an opera 'Jesus of Nazareth' never got beyond the stage of sketches. Nevertheless, despite his often hostile attitude towards the Catholic Church, Wagner pestered his Jewish friends to undergo baptism and convert to Christianity. However, he was unable to convince Hermann Levi to convert ahead of conducting the premiere of *Parsifal*.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

19th March Michael Downes: 'From Dresden to Bayreuth: tracing the creation of The Ring'

23rd April John Payne: 'Wagner and Revolution'

21st May Kirsten Paige: 'Richard Wagner as Ecocritic'

TRAVELLING WITH THEIR OPERA GLASSES

The Dresden 'Ring des Nibelungen' in January

Ian McLennan

After having endured Covid lockdowns and all the rest of it, it was an exciting prospect to see our first 'Ring' in a few years. We went with the excellent 'John Whibley Travel for the Arts' who organise the travel, accommodation, excursions, and the tickets. All you must do is turn up and we did.

This production is about 20 years old and was revived about five years ago. The exuberance and enthusiasm of the audience suggested that this was a popular production (without a crocodile in sight!). As is always the case, there were successes and failures in the productions of the four operas, but by the end there was a kind of logic to it and that was appreciated by the audience.

The band were in the very safe hands of Maestro Thielemann (who does not conduct Wagner slowly!) and the standout performers (as they should be) were the exuberant and energetic

Andreas Schager (Siegfried) - a proper Heldentenor in the Melchior class - and Ricarda Merbeth, a very, very late substitute as Brünnhilde. She sang with total assurance and at no time did she ever force the sound. It meant that the performance of *Gotterdammerung* was quite exceptional.

Andreas Schager was staying at our hotel and we had a couple of conversations with him. He seemed as fresh after a performance as he was at the beginning and we asked him how he managed to do this (he also sang Siegmund in this production!). He indicated that it was all due to the sympathetic conducting of Thielemann and the energy he, Schager, got from Thielemann's interpretation. It was a fascinating discussion.

There were other marvellous performances, but the most exciting thing was seeing a 'Ring' with singers and other musicians who feel the genius and challenge of this wonderful music.

A Birthday at Tribtschen

Robert McCutcheon

"Whenever I turn from my home, I am surrounded by a true wonder world. I don't know of a more beautiful place in this world, none more homely than this." Richard Wagner (1866)
Last August I returned to Bayreuth with some friends for the Wagner Festival (my seventh). That summer in Bavaria had been very, very hot and dry as a bone, I recall the sight of the Hofgarten grass carpeted by leaves, almost autumnal, except it was high summer! The drought had caused the trees to shed their leaves.

Before I move on to the subject of Switzerland and Tribtschen, I would like to briefly mention my visits to the Festspielhaus. I attended two operas at Bayreuth this year, the sea-less, ship-less *Hollander* and *Lohengrin* (I saw this production three years ago). It is my experience that there is an occasion while in the Festspielhaus that one has the feeling of 'being taken out of oneself' and that 'it is great to be alive'. This year's moment came when Klaus Florian Vogt, (THE *Lohengrin* of our time, in my opinion), sang 'In fernem Land' from the rear of the stage. You could have heard a pin drop. Quite wonderful.

On our journey south nearing the border at Basel, the skies opened, there was a mother and father of a downpour. Driving was almost impossible and we took refuge in a service station until the downpour passed. Our party was staying at a hotel at Sigriswil in the Bernese Oberland, situated high above Lake Thun (Thunersee), with majestic views over the lake. From my hotel room balcony I could see the magnificent sight of the Jungfrau range.

As well as the day to Lucerne and Tribtschen, I had a couple of trips by myself. One was the train journey from Interlaken (Ost) to the Jungfrauoch, at around 3,400 metres the highest railway terminal in Europe. On the way up I marvelled at the sight of the Eiger with its awesome north face. Another day, (which turned out to be the hottest of the year), I took the half-hour train journey from Thun to the federal capital, Bern. I strolled (or, rather, hobbled), along the beautiful streets of the Altstadt and its arcades, which run parallel to the streets - they provided a welcome shelter from the searing sun.

Although this was my first visit to the Richard Wagner Museum, Tribtschen. I had actually seen the house from a distance once before, when on a cruise on Lake Lucerne in 1990. I'm sure that I had taken a photograph of the house from the ship, but I can't find it!

Lake Lucerne is rather shapeless on the map, four fingers of water sprawling out over the landscape, with wide expanses of clear blue water and narrow bays framed in the south by majestic mountains. The view from the windows on the west side of the house, to the mountains across the water are quite breath-taking. On a hidden promontory across the

lake from Tribschen is Villa Sernar, the home of Sergei Rachmaninoff in the 1930s, and now a Rachmaninoff study centre.

The urban area approaching Tribschen is rather unprepossessing: just before the turn-off into the park one can admire the 'S. Tribschen Kebab & Pizzahaus'. From the car park we walked up the winding path, through the trees to this one-time country manor, resplendent in the mid-day sunshine. In the area before the villa is the Sommercafé, with its welcome cool drinks and ices. The music emerging from the café was not the Siegfried Idyll but instead some foot-tapping funk music. It was here on 25 August 1938 that Toscanini conducted the inaugural concert of the Lucerne Festival which included the Siegfried Idyll and the prelude to Meistersinger. A commemorative stone marks the event. There is also a bust of Wagner, created in 2006 by Thomas Hunziker. I found it more human, a lot less severe than Breker's bust of the Master in the Festspielhaus gardens.

After treading the steps on which not only Wagner and his family trod, but also luminaries such as Liszt, Nietzsche and Ludwig II, we entered the house, standing below the famous staircase which rises to the first floor (the top floor is closed to the public). At the foot of the stairs, in front of a mirror there is a small wooden statuette of Toscanini conducting. The exhibition highlighting the life and work of Wagner is on the ground floor. Going into the salon, what struck me so far was the spaciousness of the rooms. Of course it was largely devoid of furniture, a sofa here and a table there, also the ornate marble fireplace (which was originally on the first floor), but there is a wealth of display cabinets and the magnificent Erard grand piano from Paris about which Wagner wrote to Minna in 1858, "Only the person playing such an instrument can rightly say what a joy it is to play it: the lightest pressure, hardly a touch, immediately starts the gentle ringing which, when you press a little harder, becomes a bright and full, but always soft, warm ring." It was on this piano in Tribschen he completed Meistersinger on October 24, 1867. A year later he began sketches for *Götterdämmerung*. The house will be always associated with the Siegfried Idyll, which was scored on the December 1870, just in time for Cosima's birthday! The walls are lined with a white wallpaper with gold-coloured stripes, the curtains are of a pale yellow.

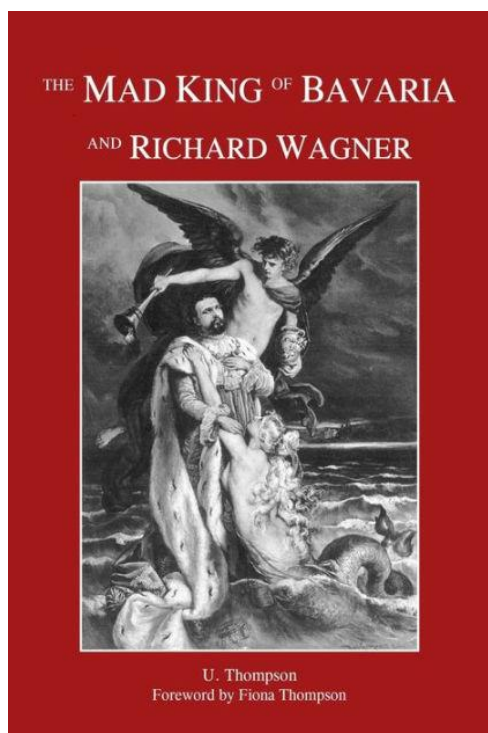
Among the 1,600 objects of the museum are the book of Meistersinger, (with dedications by Wagner), the sketch for Act One of Meistersinger, a first edition of *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, copies of Wagner's death masks, busts of not only Wagner but of Cosima and Mathilde Wesendonck. Of paintings there are plenty, my own particular favourites include Walter Beckman's portrait of Wagner at Wahnfried, surrounded by Cosima, Liszt and Paul von Wolzogen, Add to that Franz Stassen's oil painting of Wagner's birthplace in Leipzig, and his triptych of *Tristan und Isolde*, Hans Thoma's watercolours of the Norns, and of Siegfried slaying the dragon. Amongst the other portraits hanging from the walls are ones of Ludwig II, Goethe, Schiller and the composer's stepfather, Ludwig Geyer.

Up the stairs, which had a luxuriant red carpet, one can't help tread these steps without realizing that this is where the Siegfried Idyll (or Tribschen Idyll as it was first titled) had its premier. Onto the second floor, what the upstairs rooms lack in furniture is made up by plentiful information boards on the walls. This was the last of the present Tribschen exhibition, which is nigh on forty years old, will be redesigned this winter, and re-opened in April.

Before we made the return journey to our hotel, I had a stroll around the Tribschen park and on the lakeside path, there were quite a few sun-worshippers lounging on the grass, admiring the wonderful vista. There is also a pier at Tribschen, visited by the five vintage steamships which travel on the lake. I'd have like to dipped my aching feet in the crystal clear water, but the banks were too steep.

Wagner loved Tribschen and the magnificent panorama across Lake Lucerne. He wrote to Liszt; "You know how much I love Lake Lucerne: Rigi, Pilatus etc. have become a vital source of healing for me and my blood." For what it's worth, I found Tribschen more homely than Wahnfried, and while the Hofgarten is quite beautiful few scenes can compare with the view across Lake Lucerne.

NEW PUBLICATION '*The Mad King of Bavaria and Richard Wagner*' by Ursula Thompson. Second edition revised by Fiona Lee Thompson. New Generation Publishing, 413 pages, 2022.



The preface describes it as 'A study of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, including some extracts from Richard Wagner's writings not hitherto done into English, with a few reflections of wider issues'.

The book is a study of the life, death and mental capacity of King Ludwig II of Bavaria and the complex, love-hate relationship between himself and the composer Richard Wagner. Fiona Lee Thompson has edited and published this classic book. The original author, Ursula Thompson, was born in Penarth, South Wales, in 1887.

Extract from the Foreword (quoted with the editor's permission).

While pursuing studies for a diploma, Ursula Thompson became interested in the dynasty of Bavarian kings and the relationship with Richard Wagner, the birth of Wagner's musical skills, the maestro himself, and his introduction into the life of King Ludwig II.

Nine years of research followed and the manuscript was originally completed around 1930. It was at first privately printed twenty years ago in proof form, and in three volumes. Fiona Thomson has edited and published it in its new edition.



The Foreword states: 'There are a few controversial issues which will have the reader both intrigued and perplexed'.

NEWS FROM THE RWVI

Lohengrin at the Metropolitan Opera in New York

ON STAGE FEBRUARY 26-APRIL 1

Wagner's soaring masterpiece makes its triumphant return to the Met stage after 17 years. In a sequel to his revelatory production of Parsifal, director François Girard unveils an atmospheric staging that once again weds his striking visual style and keen dramatic insight to Wagner's breathtaking music, with Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin on the podium to conduct a supreme cast led by tenor Piotr Beczala in the title role of the mysterious swan knight. Soprano Tamara Wilson is the virtuous duchess Elsa, falsely accused of murder, going head-to-head with soprano Christine Goerke as the cunning sorceress Ortrud, who seeks to lay her low. Bass-baritone Evgeny Nikitin is Ortrud's power-hungry husband, Telramund, and bass Günther Groissböck is King Heinrich.

The live cinema transmission is part of the Met's award-winning Live in HD series, bringing opera to movie theatres across the globe.

Petition: Save the historical-critical edition of the Wagner letters

Dr. Sven Friedrich, Director, Richard Wagner Museum and Archive Director

The publication of the historical-critical edition of Richard Wagner's complete letters is currently hanging in the balance. The Richard-Wagner-Verband International supports the petition and asks you to sign it. Here is the appeal by Dr. Friedrich with information and the link to the petition:

Richard Wagner's letters are not only central documents for the life and work of the important composer, but also highly significant sources in terms of cultural history in view of his considerable and multi-layered history of reception and impact. The historical-critical edition was already begun in 1967 and has now reached volume 26 with the letters of the year 1874. After the end of the funding of the office at the University of Würzburg by the DFG, however, the issue is now on the verge of collapse.

Thus, of all things, the significant and particularly momentous last decade of Richard Wagner's life, the chapter "Bayreuth" would be almost completely missing. It includes the construction of the Festspielhaus, the Bayreuth Festival during Wagner's lifetime with the premiere of the incommensurable tetralogy "Der Ring des Nibelungen" in 1876 and "Parsifal" in 1882, Wagner's everyday life in Haus Wahnfried and Italy as well as the emergence of his late so-called "regeneration writings", which connect his momentous racial anti-Semitism with his aesthetics of art religion and cultural theory.

The text constitution of the remaining 5 volumes has already been completed, so that only their editing, commenting and production would have to be done. The discontinuation of the edition at this point in time would therefore be a declaration of cultural bankruptcy!

Help by signing a completion of the Richard Wagner letter edition - Online petition (openpetition.de). With as many well-known signatures as possible, this could help to enable the remaining financing of the issue. You are also welcome to forward this letter to interested parties in your area.

With thanks for your support and kind regards, Sven Friedrich. *You can find the link to the petition here:* <https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/vollendung-der-richard-wagner-briefausgabe>



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