

# WAGNER SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND NEWSLETTER

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## Notes from the Chair

### 1. Bayreuth

From 10-18 August I shall be back in Bayreuth, once again as Wagner Society of Scotland 'Uncle', this time to our wonderful 2023 Stipendiatin, Hanna de Bruin. Joy Millar and Robert McCutcheon will also be there, so we are looking forward to catching up with Hanna. On 13 August, I shall be seeing the latest Bayreuth production of *Tristan und Isolde* for the first time and will report back in our next newsletter. The last time I saw *Tristan* was in 2016 in an English National Opera production, featuring Scottish mezzo soprano Karen Cargill as Brangaene. Karen is well known to the Society, having given us a fascinating interview with our former Chair, Dale Bilslund the year before at the Edinburgh Society of Musicians. 14 August is *Der Fliegende Holländer*, a controversial production without a ship, sailors or sea that was heartily booed when I saw it first last year. I will be joining the RWVI for a get-together earlier in the afternoon. 15 August is *Parsifal*, which I saw on a previous visit, and greatly enjoyed; this was by contrast well received by the audience. 16 August will be my third time seeing the current production of *Tannhäuser*, one that was likewise vociferously booed at its première, yet loudly applauded last year for its second run. I wonder whether the audience will warm to *Holländer* in the same way. 17 August features the RWVI Stipendiatenkoncert from member Wagner societies' scholarship winners. This is a most remarkable demonstration of outstanding international talent, presented in an informal concert atmosphere, with much singing along and general happiness.

### 2. *Parsifal* course

David Nice is preparing to deliver his online *Parsifal* course under the auspices of the Society commencing Wednesday 2 August 2:30pm, however he has been seriously unwell, and so we will keep you informed if there has to be any change to the current arrangements. I am sure you will all join with me in sending David our warmest wishes for a full recovery. There is still time to enrol for the course by emailing David directly, but please allow time for a reply. *There are more details of the course overleaf.*

### 3. AGM 17 December 2023

This year's Annual General Meeting will return to an in-person gathering at the Edinburgh Society of Musicians, and will feature a recital by Hanna de Bruin. I warmly encourage you to attend the event, which will be catered, and wine served. If you have an interest in standing for the Committee, please contact me: [chair@wagnerscotland.net](mailto:chair@wagnerscotland.net)

### 4. RWVI Congress

This is going ahead this year in Brussels November 2-6, and I shall be attending. Please contact me if you are planning to go, so we can organise a table for the Society. Details [on the website](#).

## Forthcoming Events

### Programme of talks 2023-24

22nd October Chris Walton: 'Richard Wagner and the Austro-German conducting tradition'

19th November Richard Austin: 'Karl Ritter - Wagner's contact in Zurich'

17th December AGM. Hanna de Bruin: 'Recollections of Bayreuth 2023' & recital of *Wesendonck Lieder*

21st January Katy Hamilton: 'The curious case of Brahms, Wagner and the Wesendoncks'

25th February Michael Downes: Creation of the Ring Part II

24th March Flora Willson: 'Wagner, Meyerbeer and the problem of Commercial Success'

April and May 2024 Speaker and topic to be confirmed

*With the exception of the AGM, a link to each Zoom meeting will be sent out in advance.*

## Discover Wagner's *Parsifal* with David Nice

- in association with the Wagner Society of Scotland

10 Wednesdays 2.30-4.30pm starting 2 August 2023

Join us for the transcendent apotheosis of a saga that began life in Gartmore House, Scotland, with *Das Rheingold* back in 2018, when I took over the courses at Gartmore following the death of Derek Watson. During the Pandemic, *Siegfried* saw us move to Zoom, and it's been working well ever since. *Parsifal* has some of the most sublime music ever composed, yet also some of the most anguished. Much more than a quasi-religious ritual, it underlines a very simple theme that Wagner may not have lived, but certainly believed in - the value of compassion.

After an introductory session for context, we will be following the course of the drama with excerpts from a wide range of recorded performances on CD, DVD and YouTube, watching the whole opera along the way. I am also hoping we will be able to welcome special guests as we have before; so far, we've welcomed Susan Bullock, Linda Esther Gray, Dame Anne Evans, Jay Hunter Morris, John Tomlinson, Mark Wigglesworth and Richard Jones. That's the beauty of Zoom!

Commendations include those from Susan Bullock CBE, Sir John Tomlinson, and Wagner Society Chair, Derek Williams.

The course fee is £150 for the whole term of ten two-hour classes on Zoom

Email: [david.nice@usa.net](mailto:david.nice@usa.net) to confirm a place

## Edinburgh Players Opera Group *Siegfried*, Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September

Our Society is again sponsoring the above event this year. The concert performance will take place at Portobello Town Hall and is from 11.00am to 17.30pm.

The Edinburgh Players Opera Group ('EPOG') was founded in 2000 by Mike Thorne and Philip Taylor. They together believed it would be possible for an enthusiastic group of professional, semi-professional and talented amateur musicians including a cast of adventurous professional singers to come together over the course of a single weekend in Edinburgh to rehearse and play through the operas of Richard Wagner (that is, conclude the weekend with a final play through without stopping to rehearse). These are significant works, which even the professional opera houses see as daunting undertakings. They started with the first of the Ring Cycle of operas, *Das Rheingold*, in 2001 and have since completed two complete Cycles plus performances of *Tristan*, *Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* (interspersed between the cycles for light relief). In 2014 the group branched out into Strauss (*Der Rosenkavalier*) to replenish the batteries and have successfully completed performances of *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* (2015); *Tannhäuser* (2016); *Elektra* (2017); *Salome* (2018) and they embarked on a third Ring cycle in 2019. After successfully completing *Rheingold* and *Walküre*, they are moving on to *Siegfried* this year. The standard of singing and playing is excellent and we encourage all members to come along (for a very minimal ticket cost) and enjoy the experience!

## Recent Talks (notes from our Secretary)

**19th March Michael Downes, lecturer in music at the University of St Andrews**

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

The speaker outlined his plan to write a book on the creation of *The Ring* which would throw light on the sources and thought processes which had gone through Wagner's mind when he created the work. It all started in 1848 in Dresden when he was Kapellmeister, through Zurich, and used the *Nibelungenlied* legend as a starting point. There were various influences, including Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, and Buddhism.

**23rd April John Payne, the Chair of the Manchester Wagner Society**

**'Wagner and Revolution'**

A comprehensive account of Wagner's involvement in the revolutionary movement in the mid 19th century. The talk covered four aspects of revolution:

1. Wagner's concepts of revolution and the influence of Hegel, Feuerbach, Bakunin and Rockel
2. Wagner's personal engagement in revolutionary activity particularly in Dresden.
3. The involvement of revolution in his operas particularly *The Ring*.
4. Wagner's impact in other revolutionary movements including left wing politics in the twentieth century.

John was thanked for his contribution to the knowledge of Richard Wagner's creative achievements.

**21st May 2023: Kirsten Paige (Assistant Teaching Professor of Musicology at North Carolina University): 'Richard Wagner as Ecocritic'**

The topic 'Richard Wagner as Ecocritic', is not usually covered by conventional Wagner talks, and she threw considerable insight and scholarship into the subject of Wagner as environmentalist. There is no denying that the topic is not easy, but, with suitable musical examples, Kirsten was able to convince us of Wagner's interest and influence in the subject of nature and its relationship with the human race, as exemplified in his operas. Kirsten's talk was followed by an interesting discussion.

An interesting and lively discussion followed each presentation.

## **"Meeting my Hero"**

*An anecdote from Jan Conway*

Earlier this year I had an accident to my knee and it was difficult to walk. I had already booked for the Dresden *Ring Cycle* and was determined to go despite using crutches.

At the interval of the *Rheingold* performance I was taken to the disabled lift, and there, sitting in a wheelchair, was a familiar face.

I said, "Golly, you do look like Jonas Kauffman". He replied, "A lot of people tell me that". The lift was so small it only took the two of us, so I travelled up and down between floors with my hero over four performances. I was very careful to keep the conversation general, and so was he. He told me that his favourite opera was *Götterdämmerung* and I invited him to come to Edinburgh if he had time.

Members will wish to be aware of the death in February, at the age of 96, of Ruth Stroud, one of the founder members of the Society when it was [formed in 1984](#) as the Scottish Branch of the Wagner Society of London. Ruth served as Treasurer for a time in the Society's early days, and was a staunch member of the Committee until 2013, standing down when Derek Watson retired as chairman. Her flat in Marchmont acted as the venue for numerous committee meetings, as well as providing accommodation for many of the young Society's guest speakers. Ruth took part in the first residential study weekend on *Das Rheingold* at Whithorn in 1987, and most of the subsequent weekends. As an enthusiastic traveller, she greatly enjoyed trips organised by the Society to performances in places such as Bayreuth, Helsinki and San Francisco.

*Will Scott*



The Society's aim is to promote the knowledge and appreciation of the life & works of Richard Wagner  
The Wagner Society of Scotland is registered as a Scottish Charity No. SC028209  
Find out more at <https://wagnerscotland.net>

## **Committee**

Chair: Derek Williams

Acting Secretary: John Anderton

Treasurer & Membership Secretary: Ian McLennan

Newsletter Editor: David Graham

Bayreuth Tickets and Scholarship: Gabriele Kuhn

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