

WAGNER SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND NEWSLETTER

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December 2023

FROM THE CHAIR

Bayreuth Festival 13-17 August

Day 1 - 13 August



L>R Andy, Derek Williams, Joy Millar, Robert McCutcheon

It was great to kick off the first day in the excellent company of WSoS stalwarts, Joy Millar and Robert McCutcheon with their US friend Andy in the Friends section of the Festspielhaus. In the evening, an innovative new *Tristan und Isolde*, featuring the Cor Anglais soloist on stage. Tumultuous reception with many curtain calls.

Day 2 - 14 August

A brilliant Bayreuth day; starting with Joy and Robert guesting me to a Friends viewing of the Festspielhaus costumery; thence to afternoon tea ('mit vielen Wespen') at Haus Wahnfried with Wagner Society of Scotland members and friends and our Stipendiatin Hanna de Bruin, then back to the Festspielhaus for the Richard-Wagner-Verband International e.V. Reception where I was warmly welcomed as the delegate for Scotland. Great to finally meet London Society President, Alan Ridgewell and the Secretary, Jo Cousins.



Bayreuth Festspielhaus
Costume Dept



Robert McCutcheon, Joy Millar,
Dean, Stefano Boccacci, Hanna de
Bruin, Derek Williams



L>R: Derek Williams, Alan Ridgewell,
Selma Guðmundsdóttir, an RWVI
member, Rainer Fineske, Jo Cousins

This was followed by a second look at the still controversial *Der fliegende Holländer*. A lot less booing this time, though nary a story about either ship at sea nor sailors nor ship nor sea!

Day 3 - 15 August

Taking our winner of the Wagner Society of Scotland scholarship, Hanna de Bruin out to dinner at the Green Hill Kitchen during *Parsifal*. You can read Robert McCutcheon's account of the experience. Several other delightful Stipendiaten joined us afterwards for drinks! The new *Parsifal* was very well received by

the capacity audience, despite having received unfavourable reviews. Very striking set, which had some of us guessing as to whether its intention was military or agricultural.



Derek Williams, Robert McCutcheon, Dean (NYWS), Joy Millar, Hanna de Bruin



Bows: set of *Parsifal*



Derek Williams, Hanna de Bruin, Marie Cayeux (RCS) Alexander de Jong and Jordan (Netherlands), Stefano Boccaccio (It.), Dean (NY)

Day 4 16 August



Derek Williams at Wahnfried

Another super day at the Richard-Wagner-Festspiele Bayreuth, beginning with visits to Haus Wahnfried, Siegfried Wagner Haus and the Franz-Liszt-Museum Bayreuth Also saw Siegfried's House.



Siegfriedhaus Dining Room



Hanna de Bruin

The same evening we saw the once controversial production of *Tannhäuser* - the third time seeing this production for me. Rapturous applause and endless curtain calls, at several points joining in synchronised clapping. Finally, after it became a standing ovation, the Festspielhaus turned on the lights! As you'll read in Robert McCutcheon's comments below, it is remarkable how this production has endeared itself to audiences; I recall long and vociferous booing after every act at the première. Our Wagner Society of Scotland Stipendiatin, Hanna can be seen waving with other Stipendiaten from the rows behind us.

Day 5 - 17 August

Richard-Wagner-Stipendienstiftung.

And so, my last night at the wonderful Richard-Wagner-Festspiele Bayreuth, ending again with the Stipendiatenkoncert. I arrived absolutely soaked after a torrential downpour - 'Regen ohne Regenschirm mit Donner und Blitzen' and spent most of the evening drying off in several towels, kindly provided by staff. Trombone solo at the start played by Madrid Wagner Society Stipendiat Alexis Pelayo. Such brilliant performances of great diversity, with drinks throughout and a nice meal at the end. Great also to catch up again with our Wagner Society of Scotland 2023 Stipendiatin, Hanna de Bruin and her fellow RCS graduate Marie Cayeux from France (who performed in the chorus), Jo Cousins from The London Society, and with so many friends from previous years, especially out of the blue, to bump into my good friend, Alban Steingraeber! It is Steingraeber & Söhne Pianos who provide the beautiful piano for the concert. My exhortation, "Eins, zwei, drei, vier, Raise your Steins und drink your Bier" got quite a laugh.



"Eins, zwei, drei, vier, raise your Steins und drink your Bier!"



Bows, Stipendiatenkonzert



Derek Williams, Alban Steingraeber

Edinburgh Usher Hall 25 August



Committee: Derek Williams (front), Robert McCutcheon (right rear), David Graham (right), Christine Proudfoot (middle centre) with other Wagner Society of Scotland members at Usher Hall

More *Tannhäuser*! Perhaps needless to say, Wagner Society of Scotland aficionados were to be found in-house, and some of us met on the steps for a quick photo beforehand. The Deutsche Oper Berlin conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles, with Clay Hilley as Tannhäuser, Emma Bell as Elisabeth, Thomas Lehman as Wolfram and Irene Roberts as Venus was rapturously received.

Richard Wagner Verband International - Brussels

Day 1 - 2 November

This was the first RWVI Congress in 4 years that hadn't been cancelled because of Covid or insufficient registrations as was the case with Madrid last year. Prior to that, Bonn, Berlin had also been shelved. Brussels proved a superbly organised return to tradition, with talks, tours, concerts, a Wagner opera, and of course, the main business of the RWVI at its AGM. To conclude the day, members were entertained by an excellent concert at the beautiful Brussels Town Hall. Earlier in the day we went on a panoramic tour of the city. Great to catch up again with Jo Cousins, Secretary of the London Wagner Society.



RWVI Congress welcome



RWVI AGM 2023



RWVI Concert Brussels Town Hall

Day 2 - AGM

Motions from the Frankfurt Society to reduce the number of Committee positions to 9 and the tenure of the President to 3 years were defeated after lengthy debate, however the motion to reduce the Committee from 15 to 11 was approved, with only 11 of the Committee actually in attendance.

Heated debates over the cancellation of the London bid in favour of Madrid, but a happy ending that evening, with a striking performance of *Das Rheingold*, with excellent singing and playing at the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie (opéra national), followed by a drinks reception with the wonderful cast.



Theatre Royal de la Monnaie



Das Rheingold bows



Das Rheingold reception

Day 3 - Theatre Tour

Fascinating guided tour of the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie (opéra national) backstage, where we saw *Das Rheingold* the night before) followed by Gala Dinner at Hotel de Plaza theatre, after some great musicians played Wagner extracts.



Orchestra pit



View from stage



Costumery tour



Elizabeth Mollard, RWVI organisatrice par excellence, receives flowers in appreciation



Derek Williams, Rainer Fineske, Ulrich Jagels, Jo Cousins (London WS), Harry (Netherlands), Susan Vincent (London WS)



Impromptu meeting discussing implications of AGM



Derek Williams, Rainer (RWVI President) & Torsten Fineske



2-3 December - Mahler Players with Tomas Leakey at Strathpeffer

Since Tomas Leakey won our 2019 Scholarship, the Wagner Society of Scotland has been pleased to sponsor his Mahler Players enterprise, as have the London Society. Christine and Richard Proudfoot travelled from Edinburgh to represent the Scotland Wagner Society, and witness first hand a performance of Act III of *Siegfried* with Tomas conducting on the Saturday at Inverness Cathedral in the Scottish Highlands. And it was wonderful for me to spend Sunday night under our friend Anthony Negus's direction in beautiful Strathpeffer. What a fine orchestra, and outstanding singers, one of whom had to be flown up at the last minute when Sir John Tomlinson caught a nasty cold, as he explained to us just before the performance started. Capacity house and roaring ovation at the end. At the reception afterwards, I had a chance to catch up with Tomas, and Anthony Negus and his wife Carmen, as well as Matthew King, who had brilliantly re-orchestrated the music for the Mahler Players orchestra.



Sir John Tomlinson addressing the audience



Mahler Players ready to go!



Derek Williams, Anthony Negus, Tomas Leakey, Matthew King

After the reception, I retired to my lovely rooms at the Ben Wyvis Hotel, and in the morning paid a quick return visit to the famous Leakey's Bookshop in Inverness, owned by Tomas's parents. Well done to all, and very much looking forward to a continuing future together.

Information about the cast etc is here: <https://mahlerplayers.co.uk/wagner-siegfried-act-3/>

RECENT and FORTHCOMING EVENTS (delivered via Zoom except the AGM)

24th September: Several members of the Society attended the play-through of *Siegfried* by the Edinburgh Players Opera Group at Portobello Town Hall at the end of September, an event which was sponsored by our Society and included two Committee members, Ian McLennan and Gabriel Kuhn playing in the orchestra. It is thrilling to hear the orchestra and fine singing cast at such close quarters, and the enthusiasm of the players in undertaking performances of these works is to be applauded. Next September they will be doing *Gotterdammerung* to complete their Ring Cycle, and all members are encouraged to go along to enjoy and support this.

- Christine Proudfoot

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

Chris Walton is an honorary professor at Stellenbosch University in South Africa and lectures in music history at the Basel University of Music. He has published widely on the Austro-German late-Romantics, including two books on Richard Wagner.

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

In a letter of 1855, Wagner said of his friend Karl Ritter: "His intellect is vast, and I do not know another young man like him." German scholar and Cultural historian Richard Austin has been researching a book on Karl Ritter and will offer a number of insights into the life of the long forgotten writer.

17th December: AGM, with Hanna de Bruin - 'Recollections of Bayreuth 2023' and AGM, recital of Wesendonck Lieder

Hanna will share her experiences from attending the Bayreuther Festspiele as the Bayreuth Stipendiatin 2023 of the Wagner Society of Scotland. In addition she will present the Wesendonck lieder by R. Wagner, the song cycle she has conducted research on this past year. Hanna is a mezzo soprano and graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

After Hanna's recital, the Annual Christmas Party will follow, with complimentary food and wine. For catering purposes, please register on Evenbrite by clicking [here](#). The event is free to members. Documents for the AGM may be downloaded by clicking [here](#).

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

Dr. Katy Hamilton is one of the UK's most sought-after speakers on music, providing talks for a host of organisations including the Southbank Centre, BBC Proms, Garsington Opera and Edinburgh International Festival. In addition, she regularly writes programme notes for the Salzburg Festival, Wigmore Hall and Philharmonia Orchestra, and is a frequent contributor to BBC Radio 3. Katy is an editor and contributor to several scholarly books on the music of Johannes Brahms, and has also published widely on the music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

25th February: Michael Downes - 'Further reflections on The Ring'

Michael is Director of Music at the University of St Andrews. He is currently working on an introductory book on Wagner's Ring, to be published by Faber and Faber.

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

The talk will revisit the ever-contentious question of Wagner's relationship to Meyerbeer. In particular I'll discuss their attitudes and approaches to commercial success - both in theory and in practice. Dr Flora Willson is a musicologist, writer and broadcaster. She is one of the Guardian's classical music critics and a Senior Lecturer in the Music department at King's College London. Her academic research and teaching focus on nineteenth-century music - vocal music and opera above all - and she is currently finishing a book about operatic culture in 1890s Paris, London and New York. Flora regularly presents live events and gives talks for organisations including BBC Proms, English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Oxford Lieder Festival, Southbank Centre and Royal Opera House. She is also a frequent contributor to broadcasts on BBC Radio 3 and 4 and to ROH Live cinema relays.

28th April: Dr Katherine Fry - 'An exploration of Wagner's London journeys'

Dr Fry will describe the impact of the environment of the City of London on Wagner's operas and his impact on British intellectuals and musicians. Katherine (Kathy) is the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellow in the Department of Music, King's College London, and is Affiliated with the University of California, Berkeley for academic year 2022-2023'

26th May: Professor David Trippett - 'Wagner's Melodies, Bellini's Sinnlichkeit'

This talk will focus on Wagner's relation to Italy and Italian culture, and sets out from the myth that (unlike Rossini) Wagner was unable to compose true melody, despite placing this at the centre of his ideal for expression in Opera and Drama. In particular, I will discuss a little-known insertion aria Wagner composed for Norma, comparing its musical ideas with Bellini's original, and placing this in the context of musical freedoms that could extend across national outlooks. Arising from this, the talk considers the wider influence of Italianità on Wagner's concept of sensuality (Sinnlichkeit), and it places this in the context of debates that continue to this day about Wagner's cultural identity, asking why national categories of Italian / German continue to provoke divergent responses from scholars. David Trippett is Professor of Music at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow at Christ's College. His research awards include the Alfred Einstein and Lewis Lockwood Prizes (American Musicological Society), and the Bruno Nettl Prize (Society for Ethnomusicology). Most recently, his edited volume Wagner in Context is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

BAYREUTH 2023 AND BEYOND

Robert McCutcheon

Another August another Bayreuth Festival. As is our practice we drove down to Bayreuth from Calais, through three countries - viva Schengen! - and what was the same as in recent years was the seemingly endless Autobahn roadworks through Franconia (most with not a workman in sight).

We stayed in our usual residence in Bayreuth, the Gasthof Brandenberger in the St Georg district. What can be described as a budget hotel, it not only has festivalgoers as guests but on occasion members of the orchestra and choir. The Brandenberger is a dog-friendly guesthouse, several of the guests, including Wagnerians had dogs with them. It is also the venue for the Bayreuth Skat club, and this is attended by

the local card sharks. Along the cobbled street from the Gasthof is this splendid Lutheran church, Ordenskirche St. Georgen which I've visited several times over the years. Cosima Wagner's funeral service was held there in 1930.

Our first opera was what could be called the interregnum *Tristan und Isolde*. This Tristan conducted by Markus Poschner and directed by Roland Schwab, was not supposed to happen, but because of coronavirus it happened two years in succession. Tristan was to be sung by Stephen Gould, but Mr Gould had to withdraw due to health reasons and sadly he passed away in September. He was replaced by the American tenor Clay Hilley (who some of us in the Society heard sing Tannhäuser at the Usher Hall in September), Isolde was majestically sung by Catherine Foster and the ever-reliable Georg Zeppenfeld impressed as King Marke. The set for Schwab's Tristan resembled the rear deck of an ocean liner with an oval-shaped pool which mirrored a ceiling recess. Blue skies would appear in the recess then the night sky (obviously!) Quite magical.

Parsifal. Due to its special status at the Festspielhaus a new *Parsifal* is always eagerly awaited. The curiosity regarding this production, directed by MIT professor Jay Scheib' increased with the news that it would incorporate cutting edge technology in the form of 'augmented reality'. This was tempered by the fact that only a certain number of goggles (let's not mince words here!) needed to appreciate AR would leave 83% of the audience reliant solely on their own natural vision. From what I was told wearers regarded the goggles as a distraction and found them rather heavy. . I tried on a pair of these goggles across at the Friends pavilion, and while I found the swirling lines that I saw intriguing, I thought them far too bulky to wear.

Our third opera was Tobias Kratzer's popular and controversial (it's Bayreuth, after all!) *Tannhäuser*. By rights it should be all that a traditionalist hates - what have a drag artist a dwarf and a femme fatale have to with this medieval tale? But it works, the humour, originality and intelligent use of multi-media won over the doubters so much so that it has been decided to include Kratzer's *Tannhäuser* in the 2024 festival. The singers, the superb lyrical tenor Klaus Florian Vogt who stood in for the unfortunate Stephen Gould, Ekaterina Gubanova was fantastic as Venus and Elisabeth Teige who had the unenviable task of following in the footsteps of last year's Elizabeth, her fellow Norwegian soprano Lise Davidson, but Ms Teige has a powerful dark voice and carried the role off with aplomb.

Aside from attending the three operas/dramas there was visiting some of Bayreuth's sights such as Wahnfried and the Hofgarten. I didn't go inside the Haus itself this year as we were meeting Derek Williams, Hanna de Bruin and a couple of other Wagnerians at the Wahnfried cafe. Another regular meeting place is the Eule restaurant, located in a lane off Maxstraße. Richard Wagner himself dined and drank in the Eule, so it's another place of pilgrimage for Wagnerians. Including the opera singers and musicians. In the Eule we nearly always we dine in the Richard Wagner Room. There is also the Cosima Wagner Room as well tables in the restaurant garden (which were packed on the occasion we dined there.

This year we planned to spend a few days after the festival south of Bayreuth in the company of a friend (non-Wagnerian) who lives near Stuttgart. We drove south to a charming little walled town called Wolframs-Eschenbach, which is roughly fifty-five kilometres south-west of Nuremberg. The town was renamed after its famous son, Wolfram von Eschenbach, who of course wrote the medieval poem *Parzival*. Our stay in Wolframs-Eschenbach just so happened to coincide with the town's gala week (including its very own mini-Oktoberfest). During our first evening, relaxing in the hotel we were entertained by a uniformed oompah band in the town square across from the hotel.

My initial port of call in the town was the local museum, which had an exhibition dedicated to Wolfram and *Parzival*. The exhibition text was in German, but I was familiar with the poem anyway. I had taken with me my well-leafed copy of the Penguin translation of *Parzival*. I first read it almost thirty years ago, and to be honest, couldn't get the hang of it, bearing in mind that it had been translated from medieval German. This wasn't like any other Grail legend I had previously studied. I have re-read it since, the story and *Parzival*'s quest is centred on a question he is to ask his wounded uncle, Amfortas, the Fisher King (which *Parzival* first fails to ask) "What ails thee, uncle?" Only after the question is asked can *Parzival* achieve the Grail (Gaal), which is a stone which fell from heaven as opposed to the usual cup/chalice. Our first excursion into the Franconian hinterland was to the city of Ansbach. A city forever associated with that mysterious individual, Kaspar Hauser, the so-called Child of Europe. I visited the Markgrafen

Museum, with its Kaspar Hauser exhibition. We enjoyed ices in the Hofgarten cafe, not far from the memorial where Kaspar was stabbed in the Hofgarten by a person unknown, Kaspar died a few days later.

Another attraction in Ansbach is the superb Lutheran church of St Gumbertus the organ of the church was built from 1736 to 1739 by Johann Christoph Wiegleb; the original choir had 47 different sounds, was the largest and most prestigious organ in Franconia. It was rebuilt in 1884 by Georg Friedrich Steinmeyer of the firm Steinmeyer in romantic style, utilising materials of the older organ, praised by Albert Schweitzer, and again by the same firm in 1961 in neo-Baroque style. In 2004 the church council decided to get the historic organ restored. The restoration work was carried out by a Dutch organ making company at a cost of euro 1.5 million euro, with funds raised from private donations and the association "Friends of the Ansbach Bach Week"). It was recommissioned on 17 June 2007 during the Bach week. I was fascinated to find out that the church had a chapel dedicated to Swan Knights the Order of the Swan was a sodality whose goal was to further devotion to the Virgin Mary and to promote charity; originally membership was confined to princes, knights, and noble personages. This order was founded by Elector Frederick II of Brandenburg in 1440.

The next excursion was to the town of Nördlingen. Quite an extraordinary town in more ways than one. A free imperial city and formerly the seat of the Bishop of Regensburg, Nördlingen is situated in a meteorite impact crater - Nördlinger Ries - fifteen million years old and twenty-five kilometres in diameter. The area is riddled my micro-diamonds due to the impact. Indeed, the steeple of the church of St Georg contains quartz caused by the meteor impact. Interesting that we were staying in Wolframs-Eschenbach, as Parsifal mentions that the Grail (Graal), was not a chalice or cup, Instead, it was a stone which fell from Heaven - a meteorite? The current Parsifal at Bayreuth features the Grail as a sort of gemstone - (which is smashed to the ground by Parsifal!) As part of the geological training of Apollo 14 astronauts Al Shepard and Ed Mitchell, as well as 14's back-up crew Gene Cernan and Joe Engle took place in the Ries so that they would be able to determine lunar impact structures and related rocks. A highlight in the Ries Crater Museum is the moon rock that was brought to Earth by the Apollo 16 mission, a gift to Nördlingen from NASA.

Our final excursion was to the town of Ellingen, where we met up with a friend from near Nuremberg. For four centuries Ellingen was once the headquarters of the Teutonic Order of knights. Where their castle was is now dominated by an exquisite Baroque schloss called the Ellingen Residence. We left Wolframs-Eschenbach about 7am and reached Calais late in the evening. On our journey to the French port we had been caught up in no fewer than three lengthy traffic jams (not mention the dreaded Brussels ring). The worst being just outside Dunkerque within sight of Calais. Despite all this we thoroughly enjoyed our days in Franconia.



Please direct any newsletter correspondence to newsletter@wagnerscotland.net.

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>