

WAGNER SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND NEWSLETTER

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2024

AGM 2024

Live Meeting followed by Supper

Includes lecture by Professor Laurence Dreyfus:

'Wagner and the Erotic Impulse in Munich'

Admission: free to Members, £5 to Guests

Please come!

8 December at the Edinburgh Society of Musicians 6:30pm

** To help us with catering, please also [enrol via Eventbrite](#) **

FROM THE CHAIR - *Dr Derek Williams*

This is the Society's last Newsletter before the AGM Sunday 8 December, to be held live again this year at the Edinburgh Society of Musicians, 6:30pm. This is also the last Newsletter created by our outgoing Editor, Dr David Graham, who I am sure you will agree has done a sterling job.

From our incoming Newsletter Editor, Fede Ginzburg:

Ludwig Prize, [the Wagnerian Research Award](#). La Voce Wagneriana Associazione Richard Wagner di Avellino, in collaboration with Le Musée Virtuel Richard Wagner, are pleased to announce the first edition of the international competition *Ludwig Prize. The Wagnerian Research Award*.

Participants are invited to submit a research article on a Wagnerian topic of their choice. Special consideration will be given to explorations of new or lesser-known themes. There are no age restrictions. Articles must be submitted by December 31, 2024. For more information, please contact us at: ludwigprize@gmail.com

I very much hope you will be able to come for the AGM and complimentary supper, as well as to hear Professor Laurence Dreyfus' lecture - 'Wagner and the Erotic Impulse in Munich' Non-members may attend this part of the event. As our Catering Supervisor, Christine Proudfoot is unexpectedly unavailable this year, we are seeking volunteers to assist with the supper. Please email me at chair@wagnerscotland.net if you are able to help.

As you will see from John Anderton's Report below, the Interview/Recital with the Society's Patron, Sir Donald Runnicles and Baritone Thomas Lehmann went extremely well, was favourably reviewed by Brian Bannatyne-Scott in [Edinburgh Music Review](#). I will give more detail in my Annual Report at the AGM. The positive feedback about the Runnicles event has encouraged us to pursue public events going forward. The next such event we are sponsoring will be a week-long course, 'Discover The Ring', 22 February to 1 March 2025, featuring conductor Lionel Friend, bass Sir John Tomlinson, writer Michael Downes and opera director Keith Warner. I very much encourage you to attend. Information may be found on the [RWVI website](#), where there is also a link to book your desired sessions through Eventbrite.

Michael Downes Book Launch

On 19 November, three members of the Committee accepted an invitation by Topping booksellers to attend the launch of conductor, writer and lecturer Dr Michael Downes' new book, 'Story of the Century - Wagner and the Creation of *The Ring*'. You will recall Michael's fascinating talk to the Society 19 March 2023, 'From Dresden to Bayreuth: tracing the creation of *The Ring*'. I very much encourage you to buy this fascinating book, currently [on sale via Amazon](#) at an introductory price of only £15.89.

Bulgaria Ring, Sofia Opera Wagner Festival 2025

As you will recall from Susi Liles' favourable recollection in the July 2024 Newsletter, the Sofia Opera performance, both the Ring itself and the travel and accommodation are of excellent quality, and affordable. Note Bulgarian Leva are approximately [half a Euro](#) in value. Link to buy tickets for the 2025 Ring: <https://www.operasofia.bg/en/subscription/14>

RWVI 2024 and 2025

In 2025, the Assembly of Delegates will be held separately from Congress 16-18 May in Bayreuth. Please visit the website for updates. If any members would like to accompany me, please get in contact via email to derek.williams@richard-wagner.org

BAYREUTH REPORT - Dr Gabriele Kuhn (Bayreuth Convenor)

Bayreuth Tickets: A couple of members got in touch but only after the deadline. Members may still book directly via the [Bayreuter Festspiel](#). Please note, *Lohengrin* is already sold out and there are only a few tickets remaining for *Meistersinger*, so early purchase is recommended.

Bayreuth Scholarship: Information was sent to all members and to all Music Departments. We have received one application so far and two enquiries. We will circulate again and conduct interviews early in the New Year before our submission deadline 15 January 2025.

DAVID NICE: WAGNER COURSES ON ZOOM - Robert McCutcheon (Courses Organiser)

During August and September David Nice again produced a Zoom course (in association with the Wagner Society of Scotland), consisting of eight presentations: five devoted to *Der fliegende Holländer* and one each to the early operas - *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* and Wagner's longest opera, *Rienzi*. David gave us his usual insightful, eloquent, high level of enthusiasm which provided his audience with a new depth of knowledge about these operas. Included in the course were excerpts from a wide range of recorded performances on CD, DVD and YouTube. Those taking part in the course were encouraged to share their own thoughts on particular aspects of the operas studied.

For 2025, David will be presenting two Wagner courses: *Die Walküre*, which the Royal Opera House will be staging a new production of in May, directed by Barrie Kosky. The other course studied will be *Tannhäuser*, presumably in August.

MEMBERSHIP - Maestro Alberto Massimo (Membership Secretary)

Membership is growing steadily, having dipped somewhat during Covid but now back up to 124, with 18 new members joining since the start of the Runnicles event. The Society now has a record number of Student Members, 14 as of the time of writing, and we very much hope of course that you will remain members after graduation and become part of Committee over the coming years.

Susan Vincent convened a recruitment sub-committee including Robert Brady and Tim Gould, charged with contacting former members and this has provided useful feedback.

TREASURER

Some thoughts from the outgoing Treasurer of the Society

I am standing down as the Treasurer of our Society after a tenure of about five years. I was on the Committee for several years before that when Dale Bilsland was our Chair. It has been a privilege to look after the finances of the Society for this period and I like to think that I leave the Society's finances in satisfactory order.

The situation I have had to deal with is a continuing decline in our finances which is due to several factors, namely, the reduction in numbers and the increasing age of the membership, the Covid epidemic and the changing and unpredictable situation in Bayreuth.

Wagner's music still seems to have a great appeal to opera lovers. This is shown repeatedly in ticket sales wherever his operas are produced. The great change is that more and more opera houses are tackling the mature operas and are responding to the challenges of producing these large-scale works. Longborough has proved (twice!) that his operas can be put on brilliantly in a very modest theatre with reduced orchestral forces. Added to this is the fact that Bayreuth tickets are now available online and Bayreuth's position as the premier location for Wagner's work is no longer unassailable. There was even

a call from what turned out to be a lone-voice politician for other works to be put on at the 'dear green hill', however 'Rienzi' is being produced there.

It seems we are in a time of real change and the position of all Wagner Societies is affected by all this. For a while, the attraction of Bayreuth appeared to be waning post-Covid, moreover, we found the logistics of getting to Bayreuth from the UK never easy!

So, I wish my successor Alberto all the best in what may prove to be a challenging time for all Wagner Societies worldwide.

IFMcL

MAHLER PLAYERS - 2ND NOVEMBER 2024 - Christine Proudfoot

Our Society sponsored the Mahler Players again this year, as did the London Society, and Tomas Leakey again offered complimentary tickets by way of thanks. Our Society was also given a full page entry in the programme. Richard and I travelled to Inverness on Saturday 2nd November to represent our Society at their concert at the Cathedral, the programme for which was Parsifal Prelude to Act 1, and Act 3 (complete), conducted by Tomas Leakey.



Photo from Mahler Players Facebook page

A second concert took place on Sunday 3rd November at Strathpeffer Pavilion, with the same programme conducted by Antony Negus. The version for chamber orchestra was re-orchestrated by Matthew King. Four singers joined the orchestra, namely Sir John Tomlinson as Gurnemantz, Barbara Scott as Kundry, Julian Hubbard as Parsifal, and Paul Carey Jones as Amfortas, as well as choral singers. Sitting in the front row of the audience, only a few feet away from the action, we greatly enjoyed the excellent singing and orchestral playing of this powerful and moving work.

RECENT EVENTS - Dr John Anderton (Secretary)

On Saturday afternoon, 24th August 2024, the Wagner Society of Scotland hosted an Interview and Recital involving our Patron, Sir Donald Runnicles and Thomas Lehman, baritone. This was held at Greenbank Parish Church as a Fringe event and was attended by 90 people. The venue was serendipitous as it was the church which Sir Donald attended as a boy.

Alberto Massimo, the Society's Membership Secretary and organist at Greenbank Parish Church played an introductory voluntary of Wagner's music, and this was followed by two arias from Tannhäuser sung by Thomas Lehman accompanied by Sir Donald on piano, which were warmly received by the audience. Sir Donald and Thomas then answered questions put to them by a panel of Committee members, followed by questions from the audience. Their responses gave great insight into the performance of opera both locally in the United Kingdom and abroad in Germany and the USA.



L>R: Committee members Robert Brady, Christine Proudfoot, Tim Gould, John Anderton, Derek Williams, Susi Liles with Sir Donald Runnicles, Thomas Lehmann

After a formal 'thank you' to Sir Donald and Thomas by the Society's Chair, Derek Williams, an organ voluntary of a Wagner transcription was given by Alberto's son, virtuoso Carlo Massimo. Then, WSoS members retired for the Drinks Reception with Sir Donald, during which members of the Society mixed with the artists and enjoyed exchanging views on various aspects of the performance of opera around the world.

Information about the event was published over the preceding month in *The Scotsman*, and highly favourable mention was made the following day in an *Edinburgh Music Review* article by Brian Bannatyne-Scott.



L>R: Guest, Carlo Massimo, Guest, David Townhill, Robert Brady, Guest, Alberto Massimo, Pete Warburton, Thomas Lehmann, Susi Liles, Lesley & Jim Martin, Guest, Keiko Ishimaru, John Anderton, Lorraine, Robert McCutcheon, Sir Donald Runnicles, Christine Proudfoot, Richard Proudfoot, Guest, Brian Bannatyne-Scott, Guest. (PS if you can identify the missing 'Guest' names please contact us!)

The occasion was deemed by all present to have been a success, with considerable enjoyment of the performances and the responses to questions from the Committee panel and members of the audience. It has been encouraging to note that new members of the Society were enrolled during the days leading up to the event, and more expressed interest on the day.

Special thanks are due to Susi Liles as Event Organiser, Alberto Massimo for curating the venue, Robert Brady for designing the advertising and distributing flyers, Christine Proudfoot for managing the website, also to the members of the Committee who helped out on the day and who distributed flyers before the event. We are extremely grateful to our Chair, Derek Williams for the enormous contribution he made to the organisation of this important event in the Society's Calendar.

Rachel Nicholls interview - 24th November 2024

Derek Williams introduced Rachel Nicholls as an established Wagnerian singer with multiple roles over the years in a variety of operatic roles. She graduated from the University of York and concentrated on baroque works early in her career. One of her earliest Wagnerian roles was as Brünnhilde in 2012 under Dame Anne Evans tuition, and subsequently Isolde in 2015, and in many Ring cycles and Wagner operas. Rachel described the importance of 'managing the voice' and played an example from Bach's B minor mass and Korngold's Marietta's song from *Die tote stadt*.



Rachel has performed under a range of conductors, and described their various techniques, and in a range of concert halls and opera houses round the world. She has made a number of recordings and DVDs including *Wesendonck Lieder* and *Tristan und Isolde*. She has fond memories of singing with Scottish Opera from village halls to the Theatre Royal. She also described various controversial roles and emphasised her acting technique, diction and command of the German language in Wagner operas. She described the distress and hardship of experiencing a severe illness and the need to keep fit by diet and regular exercise.

Rachel took part in a vigorous discussion and answered a number of questions, and was warmly thanked for an interesting, very enjoyable and informative talk to the Society.

BAYREUTH 2024 - Robert McCutcheon

This year Joy Millar and I again travelled by car from Calais to Bavaria. There was no problem until the car's satnav decided to misbehave on entering Belgium. Instead of road maps showing up on the screen there was just a grey green mass. Thankfully when we entered Germany the satnav showed the route map again. For this holiday our usual guesthouse, the Brandenberger was fully booked, However, we were lucky to acquire rooms at the Hotel Rheingold, which we had heard good reports about. This year at the Festspielhaus we would attend the new Tristan, a farewell to the superb, much-loved *Tannhäuser* and a concert at the Margrave Opera House.



Robert at Margravia Opera House



Stage at Margravia Opera House

Tristan und Isolde: Some people found it curious why Bayreuth did not continue with the fascinating and enjoyable production by Roland Schwab staged the two previous years. Contractual obligations perhaps? The new Tristan was directed by Icelandic theatre director Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson. It was conducted by the 71-year-old Semyon Bychkov, who gave a masterly interpretation which although occasionally took its time, never dragged. The ill-starred lovers were sung by Andreas Schager and Camilla Nylund. The Austrian tenor also sang Parsifal during this festival, a herculean task, which may have strained some of his singing in Act 3. Christa Mayer impressed as Brangäne; there was a richness to her voice that was sublime to hear. Günther Groissböck, singing King Marke, added the essential sad gravitas which this role requires, while baritone Olafur Sigurdarson, as Kurwenal, was impressive with his quite beautiful voice. The problem with this Tristan was the set, which was quite frankly a mess at times. There were ropes hanging down onto the rather dimly lit stage, which was covered with an excess of dry ice. In Act 1 Isolde wore what must be the most voluminous wedding dress ever seen! In Act 2 the set resembled the engine room of a wrecked ship, but to this observer looked more like a junk shop, In the final act this collection of artefacts (or junk) were piled into a mound. Poor Isolde had to crawl across the stage to sing the *Liebestod*, leaning up against a cracked ship beam, Oh, and yet again in a Bayreuth Tristan the pair do not partake of the love potion (which is contained in a small bottle instead of a goblet).

As usual with our time at Bayreuth we visited Wahnfried and the accompanying museum, and paid quiet homage to the Master and Cosima at their tomb in the garden. A few minutes walk from Wahnfried, in fact sharing the same street as the Franz Liszt Museum, is a small museum dedicated to the Romantic writer and poet, Jean Paul (Johann Paul Friedrich Richter) who lived the last two decades of his life (1763-1825) in Bayreuth, a town he grew to love. Richard Wagner is said to have admired Jean Paul but his work was not influenced by the poet. Unlike Robert Schumann who was said to have been 'absolutely besotted with the literature of Jean Paul'. Gustav Mahler named his First Symphony 'Titan' after the John Paul novel of the same name.



Main entrance to Wahnfried



Richard and Cosima Wagner graves

Tannhäuser: Saying adieu to a much-loved production, so popular that Tobias Kratzer's interpretation was revived for this year's festival. As I wrote last year, this interpretation should be all that a traditionalist hates - what have a drag artist, a dwarf, a nightclub femme fatale, and the eponymous hero dressed as a travelling clown have to with this medieval tale? On the surface nothing but Kratzer's portrayal is clever, intelligent and entertaining. Once

again Natalie Stutzmann was both magisterial and subtle in her conducting of the orchestra. Klaus Florian Vogt sang the title role beautifully. As Venus, Irene Roberts replaced Ekaterina Gubanova for the performance we saw, and impressed us with her energy and mischief, The singing of Elisabeth Teige, as her namesake was as enchanting as it had been the previous year. Günther Groissböck returning to the Festspielhaus stage for the second night in a row, was excellent as Landgraf Hermann, Markus Eiche again brought his fine baritone voice to the role of Wolfram, particularly in his rendition of Abendstern. And of course we must not forget the wonderful Bayreuth chorus!

A nice touch happened during the filmed prelude for Act 1, when Oskar (the dwarf), tearful, raised a toast to a photograph of the late Stephen Gould, the production's first *Tannhäuser*. The tribute was warmly applauded by the audience. Another tribute to this production came from an elderly gentleman we chatted to in the restaurant during the interval. He told us he first went to the Bayreuth Festival in 1952, the second of Wieland Wagner's 'New Bayreuth' post-war festivals. The gentleman was entranced by Wieland's avant-garde stagings. However after Wieland died in 1966 the gentleman attended the festival less and less, disapproving of what was on offer at the Festspielhaus, and twenty-five years ago he stopped going altogether. Friends who had seen the current *Tannhäuser* were so impressed by it that they urged him to go and see this *Tannhäuser* for himself. He told us that he thought it was truly excellent. and was glad that he had made the journey from Munich to Bayreuth.

Society of the Friends of Bayreuth gala concert. This concert was staged in the Markgraviat Opera House to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Freunde, Before the concert there was a gathering of the Freunde in the Opernplatz outside for drinks and conversation, as well as music provided by a horn quartet. Next to the gathering a small (and peaceful) anti-government protest took place, all this while cyclists, taxis and the occasional bus travelled up the Opernstraße. In this beautiful baroque opera house (the reason why Wagner was drawn to Bayreuth) we were treated to a variety of music. Christa Mayer, accompanied by pianist Jobst Schneiderat, gave a gorgeous rendition of three of the *Wesendonck Lieder*, ('Im Treibhaus', 'Schmerzen' and 'Träume') and a trio of Debussy melodies. Markus Eiche sang the *Wahn Monologue* with his rich baritone tone, as well as a trio of lieder composed by Liszt. A string sextet played Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, which was partly inspired by *Tristan*. I'm not familiar with this Schönberg' work but I found it quite beautiful.

GERMAN INDOLOGY AND RICHARD WAGNER - Dilip Roy (FRAS)

One of the lesser known sources of Richard Wagner's aesthetic and philosophical ideas was his interest in ancient India. Among his many accomplishments, he was undeniably an Indologist, that is a student of ancient Indian texts, literature and philosophy.

German Indology has a distinct history and traditions, that sets it apart from other forms of research into India. In Germany the term "Indology" (Indologie) has been used to identify a subfield of "Oriental Sciences" specifically that part of it concerned with the study of ancient India. Richard Wagner and German thinkers of early 19th century were of strong belief that their cultural origin stems from India and that the language and mythology is one and the same.

The surge of Indology In the late 18th century took Germany by storm and the romance with Indian literature and philosophy blossomed and by the end of 19th century Germany produced more Sanskrit scholars than the whole of Europe put together. One of the leading authority of Sanskrit at Leipzig university, was professor Hermann Brockhaus (1806-1877) who happened to be a brother in law of Richard Wagner. Both of them would meet on occasions to discuss various aspects of Indian philosophy. By 1903 in Germany there were forty full time professors of Aryan studies the major component being Indology (study of ancient Indian texts, literature and philosophy) during this period Wagner came across the German translations of Indian epic Mahabharata and Panchatantra (Indian folk tales) According to Wagner Mahabharata was and is the greatest poem ever composed.

Wagner in his prose works states Bhagvad Gita is the most advanced philosophy in comparison to the Greeks who sees things materialistically. Wagner in many of his prose works cites India as the cradle of civilization, origin of the Nibelungs and mother of all languages. He even attributes Greek and Roman origins to India. Wagner also says that Indian Kshatrias are actually ancient Germans (Cosima Wagner Diaries volume one). Wagner also writes to his friend August Roeckel published 1897 states that Christianity has its origins in India.

Wagner in his epic *The Ring Cycle* he makes use of Hindu concept called Rasa an aesthetic which derives from Natyashastra a Sanskrit treatise on Dance, Drama and Music (2nd century BCE) which has eight different emotions and this also inspired his writings of Gesamtkunstwerk (Total Work of Art) Wagner has used many Hindu concepts in his operas such as Lohengrin and Tristan and Isolde particularly the philosophy of Upanishad (1500 BC)

Richard Wagner's fascination with Indian classical literature and philosophy began long before he came under the spell of Schopenhauer. However, in his autobiography "My Life" Wagner states that the book which inspired him most was Schopenhauer's Vedantic philosophical epic work *The World as Will and Idea*. He read it four times in its entirety and wrote to his friend Franz Liszt saying it came to him as gift from heaven and it is the philosophical concept that he has used in his last three operas including *Tristan*, *Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*.

Richard Wagner was also greatest admirer of the work of India's greatest classical Sanskrit poet and dramatist KALIDASA (first century BCE) Richard Wagner was undeniably a thorough Indologist and his last opera *Parsifal* is considered fifth and final opera of the Ring Cycle the view held by some Wagnerian scholars.

A noted 19th century German Indologist Adolf Holtzmann (1810-1870) also the author of *Indische Sagen*. A three volume publication on Indian legends articulated his thesis on German epic *The Nibelungelied* in which he claimed that, just as the three epic people we know of, Indians, Greek and the Germans were originally one people so were the language and mythologies the same he also looked for concrete parallels between the Indo-Germanic traditions. Setting from his ideas of a common Indo-Germanic heroic tradition.

POSTSCRIPT: Richard Wagner, besides being a composer, librettist and a poet, was also a prolific writer of essays and prose works and a philosopher in his own right. He remains the most discussed and written about artist to date. Unless someone else of his stature comes along to change, Wagner's status as a supreme European artist and a polymath will remain paramount on the cultural map of the world. Of additional interest there is a programme booklet Bayreuther Festspiele 1994 it has a fourteen page article on Wagner's India which would be of great interest to Wagner enthusiasts.

"If I were asked under what sky the human has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life and has found solutions, I should point to INDIA"

Friedrich Max-Muller (1823-1900) German Indologist and interpretor of Rig Veda.

As a regular contributor to this Newsletter, Dilip Roy is an ardent Wagner enthusiast and avid admirer of Wagner's operas and prose works. He is also a Fellow of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Dilip is also an Indo-German cultural enthusiast and like most Germans he also admires India's classical culture and its contribution to the world.

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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>

The Wagner Society of Scotland is a member of the International Association of Wagner Societies (*Richard-Wagner-Verband International*, RWVI). Our Chair, Dr Derek Williams, serves as a board member of the RWVI Präsidium, having been elected at the 2024 Deutsche Oper Berlin Congress for a 5-year term.

