

WAGNER SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND NEWSLETTER

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July 2025

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR - *Dr Derek Williams*

After many online meetings since our election at Deutsch Oper Berlin last year, the RWVI Präsidium had its first in-person meeting at a working weekend in Brussels 1 March, where the 2023 Congress had been held. RWVI President, Harry Leutscher laid out plans for events over the coming 5 years, which began with an Assembly, that took place this year in Bayreuth, 16-18 May.



L>R: RWVI board members Selma Guðmundsdóttir, Elizabeth Mollard (Secretary), Cyril Plante, Ada Vermeer-Janse (Treasurer), Derek Williams, Harry Leutscher (President), Esther Lobato (2nd Vice President), Michael Schmidt, Thomas Winiarski

Committee member Susan Vincent also attended in her own right as President of her newly formed Dorset Wagner Society. If any Wagner Society of Scotland members would like to accompany me next year to the RWVI Congress in Amsterdam, 19-22 February 2026, please let me know.

Individual RWVI boardmembers have been assigned responsibility for certain countries that are home to our 26,000 members. I shall be curating England (London, Dorset), Scotland, Ireland (Dublin), Cypress, Singapore, New Zealand, Australia (all states), Cape Town, Nairobi and Bangkok.

At the end of our Brussels stay, we saw *Götterdämmerung* at the stunning Theatre de la Monnaie. This was an outstanding production in every sense, and received a rare standing ovation. Afterwards, we were invited to a drinks and supper reception where we met the Conductor and cast members. The large number of young people in attendance was particularly encouraging.

Another highlight was the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra playing in open plan 'Immersive Surround XL', with audience members sitting right next to the players.



RWVI Board at work at Hotel Le Plaza



Brussels Philharmonic Immersive Surround XL



Derek Williams, Ada Vermeer-Janse, Elizabeth Mollard at Théâtre de la Monnaie



Stage and ceiling, Théâtre de la Monnaie



Götterdämmerung drinks reception: L>R
Back: Cyril, Thomas, Harry, Derek
Front: Selma, Ada, Elizabeth



L>R: Derek Williams
Conductor: Alain Altinoglu
RWVI Secretary: Elizabeth Mollard

'Discover The Ring'

In February, the Society was pleased to sponsor 'Discover the Ring', a week-long course created by cellist Clea Friend with her father, Conductor Lionel Friend. Featured during the week was Lionel Friend delivering four 60 minute talks, with musical illustrations at the piano and from recordings, opera director Keith Warner talked about his work and the challenges of working on a large scale with unusual themes. A recital by Susan Bullock and emerging star Laura Margaret Smith featured the *Wesendonck Lieder* and extracts from *Götterdämmerung*. The final day began with a talk by one of the great interpreters of the often misunderstood character, Wotan, Sir John Tomlinson. All four operas from the Ring tetralogy were played over the week. Robert McCutcheon's full report is in this Newsletter.

Monthly Zoom Chats

With her long experience of organising regular T.E. Lawrence Society's Zoom meetings, on Tuesday 15 April, Susan launched her new series of informal 'Tea With Wagner' Zoom meetings for the Wagner Society of Scotland, to which 9 showed up, with 17 more signed up for the next, and 20 more the following month. Please check the website for updates, and read Susan's note in this Newsletter.

Our Treasurer and Membership Secretary has reported that WSoS membership has increased 20 percent over the past year, however revenues remain a concern, and the Committee are currently looking at means of future-proofing the Society, and we will be in contact about this in due course.

David Nice online courses

'Opera in Depth with David Nice' for Summer 2025 was Wagner's *Die Walküre*, over 10 consecutive Mondays, from 28 April 2025: The fee was £150 for the whole term of ten two-hour Zoom classes.

Next course: *Tannhäuser* 13 August 2,30-4.30pm ending 24 September, email: david.nice@usa.net

BAYREUTH REPORT - Dr Gabriel Kuhn

After interviewing several fine applicants last December, the Society were pleased to award two scholarships in 2025:

Roisin Linehan: Roisin is a soprano who graduated MMus in vocal studies from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2024. She also has an interest in stage management.

Chloe Lu Ye Miller: Chloe is currently studying conducting on the postgraduate Masters course at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Our two award winners will attend performances at Bayreuth of *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*, and *Parsifal*. In addition the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation will arrange lectures, a tour of the Festival Theatre, visits to the Wagner and Liszt museums and other sightseeing and social events.

Congratulations to Hanna de Bruin

Our 2023 Scholarship winner Hanna de Bruin has been chosen to join the Bayreuth Festival Chorus this year. This is the dream of every singer to perform in such hallowed grounds, and we are confident you will join the Committee in sending our warmest congratulations to Hanna.

NEW MONTHLY AFTERNOON ZOOMS 'Tea With Wagner' - Susan Vincent

The Wagner Society of Scotland were pleased to announce a first amongst Wagner Societies world-wide in offering members a monthly Zoom to discuss all things Richard Wagner from new productions of his operas to new books on Richard and the family and his music as well as members favourite pieces of Wagner's music and their interests in the world of Wagner. This can include visits to Bayreuth and activities of other Wagner Societies worldwide.

The first Zoom was held in April, with 7 present, and 15 signed up for May. For June there were 20 expressions of interest with 15 attending, and we will aim for the third Tuesday in every month from now onwards at 3:30pm over a virtual cup of tea. The first meeting lasted an hour, however those attending can decide how long they wish the meetings to be and confirm future dates and times, which can always be amended.

From time to time members will be able to volunteer to speak for 10 minutes on their favourite aspect of the Richard Wagner World which will then set the tone for that meeting!

There is no requirement to commit every month, but if you are able to join, or at least want to be on the mailing list with details of these Zooms, please email me at susan@susanvincent.org

TREASURER'S REPORT - Alberto Massimo

As we enter this new year 2025 I can report that our accounts are now stable. we are not experiencing a massive deficit as in past years. This is due to not overspending our income on too many outside events. Luckily our membership is buoyant, with an increase of almost 20%. However some of the membership have not paid the new subscriptions at £30 and are being chased up about this.

At our last Committee meeting I was pleased to announce a balance of more than £7000, remaining after paying our stipendiaten, who each received their £1000 grants. With our watchword STABILITY, I can foresee a bright future for our Wagner Society of Scotland.

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER: Robert Brady

Die Walküre- Covent Garden - 11th May 2025

This new production of *Die Walküre* at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, follows the acclaimed production of *Das Rheingold* in 2023 by Australian theatre director Barrie Kosky and conductor Antonio Pappano. Unfortunately, I missed *Das Rheingold* in 2023, but I had heard about Kosky's daring and evocative new staging. With his return as theatre director for this year's *Die Walküre*, he did not disappoint. Once we were seated, the curtain was slowly raised to reveal a frail, naked elderly lady standing on the stage.



The silence among the audience in the Royal Opera House was palpable. Slowly, she raised her hands in front of her face to cover her eyes. With a downbeat gesture from Pappano, Wagner's frenzied Prelude began to ring through the Opera House. This was not, however, yet another abstract postmodern interpretation of Wagner's Ring, for the naked elderly lady was Erda, the goddess of wisdom and Earth, and appears in her nude state throughout the opera, reminding the audience, along with the charred tree at the

centre of the stage, of the world's impending doom. This production's interpretation of the Ring as an environmental apocalypse was effective and subtly made its point.

The theme was cleverly woven into the narrative, without being too explicit. All the performances were strong, but for many, Natalya Romaniw's performance as



Sieglinde stole the show. Clever and stylish postmodern

productions of Wagner's operas like these can draw in new audiences while providing fresh experiences for seasoned Wagnerites. I anticipate Barrie Kosky and Antonio Pappano's next instalments of the Ring in the coming years, and hope they continue to introduce Wagner's oeuvre to new audiences.



FROM THE EDITOR - Federico Ginzburg Natalucci

Comments on Richard Bell's Lecture

As soon as I heard the topic of Richard Bell's lecture – *The Theology of Tristan und Isolde* – I was deeply pleased that our Wagnerian society gave space to what may be one of the most important and yet overlooked concepts in Wagner's legacy. In my recent undergraduate thesis, which our dear Wagnerian society accompanied with honorary sponsorship, I carried out research that dealt largely with this very topic. The theology within Wagner's works is, in many ways, a hidden paradise for our time.

Bell conveyed with great clarity how, in Wagner's era, other composers experienced a phenomenon of "illumination" – one that we might, in some cases, define as mystical. Wagner's universality, expressed through redemption by love or transfiguration as an insatiable pursuit embedded in his music by all technical means, reveals the composer's oeuvre as a true theological phenomenology – something Bell illustrated brilliantly in his detailed analysis of the love duet in *Tristan und Isolde*, Act II.

Returning to the sources of classical thought, Plato, in his *Symposium*, explores the transcendence of love by placing in Diotima's final speech the idea that Eros is not a god but a mediator – one who leads souls toward Beauty itself. This concept of epiphany seems to have been known to Wagner, as Bell demonstrated through Wagner's engagement with Christianity and Schopenhauer's philosophy.

However, as a final reflective thought, we should not forget that Plato already proposed in *The Republic* that theology is the highest form of philosophy – that which, in its discourse, like Tristan and Isolde's mutual entanglement, elevates lovers toward theology and illumination itself.

It may be necessary, then, to understand Wagner's work as a body of art intended to be redemptive on a theological level – one that still feels hidden to us, but which has much yet to be revealed. Perhaps this could restore the original meaning of these works in our age of such deep spiritual and artistic confusion.

EVENTS SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER

The Flying Dutchman

March 2025 - Dublin

The Dutchman's mysterious ghost ship is doomed to roam the seas until he finds true love on land. The young Senta dreams of the mythical Dutchman and longs to break his curse. But a chance to do so only occurs every seven years.

Irish National Opera's first Wagner opera, *The Flying Dutchman* starred soprano Giselle Allen (*Elektra* 2021) as Senta and bass-baritone Alfred Walker as the cursed Dutchman fated to continually sail the seas. Bass James Creswell played Senta's father Daland, with tenor Toby Spence as Eric, mezzo-soprano Carolyn Dobbin as her nurse Mary, and tenor Gavan Ring as the steersman.

Wagner's epic score brilliantly captures the vast scale of the story, from the stormy overture to the final scene of tragedy and redemption. *The Flying Dutchman* was directed by Rachael Hower and Irish National Opera's artistic director, Fergus Sheil, conducted the Irish National Opera orchestra and chorus.

The Spire Concert Series

Glasgow - March



Renfield Centre and Classical Musicians Scotland were pleased to present *The Spire Concert Series* at 260 Bath Street, Glasgow on **Saturday, 22 March 2025** for a special performance featuring mezzo-soprano **Laura Margaret Smith** with pianist **Liivi Arder**. The program included selections from **Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder***, **Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn***, and a collection of Scots and English folk songs.

For information about future such events, visit www.facebook.com/thespireconcertseries or contact daisy@classicalmusiciansscotland.com.

Teatro alla Scala, Milan - March 2026

In March 2026, Teatro alla Scala staged a new production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, with two complete cycles of the tetralogy performed over two weeks, just as Richard Wagner originally envisioned.

Thus, La Scala joins the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the world premiere of *The Ring* (1876), facing again the greatest undertaking in the history of musical theater almost 15 years after the last full production (which was in 2013, the year of the Wagner centenary).

The stage direction was entrusted to David McVicar, who drew inspiration from Norse mythological atmospheres for a highly impactful production, conceived to fully exploit the technological possibilities of our unique stage.

An ideal passing of the baton from the previous Scala cycle in 2013, conducted by Daniel Barenboim, for which Simone Young was an assistant at Bayreuth, much like Alexander Soddy studied under Simone Young's guidance.

The cast featured some of the most important Wagnerian voices of our time.

Michael Volle as Wotan/Der Wanderer, completing his long career that has established him as one of the great bass-baritones for this repertoire.

Camilla Nylund took on the role of Brünnhilde after her successful debut in the *Ring* at the Zurich Opera House, continuing the tradition of Scandinavian sopranos.

Klaus Florian Vogt lent his crystalline voice to Siegfried, a milestone for any *Heldentenor*.

Fondazione Teatro alla Scala

RECENT TALKS

29 October 2024

(jointly with London, Manchester and Dorset Wagner societies)

"View Behind the Scenes at the Bayreuther Festspiele"

Ulrich Jagels, Chief Financial Officer of the Bayreuth Festival: covering the changing Audience, Sales and Marketing initiatives, Finance, and Building renovations.

24 November 2024

"Rachel Nicholls (Soprano) in conversation with Derek Williams"

Rachel Nicholls has sung a number of Wagnerian roles including a flower maiden, Senta and Brunhilde. and she is widely recognized as one of the most exciting dramatic sopranos of her generation.

8th December 2024

Annual General Meeting

This was an in-person event at Edinburgh Society of Musicians, followed by a lecture by Oxford University Emeritus Professor Laurence Dreyfus - "Wagner and the Erotic Impulse in Munich". Professor Dreyfus is the author of the award-winning book 'Wagner and the Erotic Impulse'.

26 January 2025 - report by Dr John Anderton (Secretary)

"Wagner's Theatre - In search of a legacy"

Patrick Carnegy (PC) on Zoom, Derek Williams (DW) Chair.

DW announced the recent death of Dale Bilsland a long standing past Chair of the WSoS and this was noted with regret. DW welcomed PC and drew attention to his book 'Wagner's Theatre' and a recent book 'Richard Wagner; in Search of Legacy'. Illustrations by Hoffman added life to the text.

PC drew attention to the influence of Shakespeare on Wagner's operas, and the particular role of conductors Toscanini, Karajan, Solti, Mahler, and Boulez, and the Directors Chereau and Roller on his works. He stressed that it is important for conductors and directors to work closely together. PC described the tensions which have arisen at ENO due to a crisis in funding and lack of 'culture' in management.

There were a series of questions on for example Tippett's dramaturgy, alterations to the production directions versus none to the musical directions in the score. PC finished by describing his role as editor of religious matters in the Times.

2 February 2025

"Wagner's Anti-Semitism and its Relevance to his Music Dramas"

Marc Weiner, Professor Emeritus, Department of Germanic Studies, Indiana University, and Editor of German Quarterly from 1997 to 2004.

30 March 2025

In-person event at Edinburgh Society of Musicians

"Es Lebe Amerika!" Richard Wagner and the New World

Professor Hans Rudolf Vaegeli, Emeritus Helen and Laura Shedd Professor of German Studies and Comparative Literature and founding editor of Wagner Spectrum (the German Wagner Journal).

20th April 2025

"The theology of Tristan und Isolde"

Richard Bell, Professor of Theology at Nottingham University, where he previously ran a course entitled 'Doing theology with Richard Wagner'.

18th May 2025

"Wagner from a Queer Perspective"

Reverend Professor Patrick S Cheng, visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Episcopal priest, lawyer and Wagner lover. Professor Cheng has published three books on queer theology including 'Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology'. He holds a BA from Yale, a JD from Harvard and a PhD from Union Theological Seminary.

TALKS COMING IN THE NEW SEASON

Speakers: Paul Dawson-Bowling (AGM) Edward Primrose, Michael Downes, Susan Vincent, Joshua Borths, Nicholas Vazsonyi. Watch the website for details of talks, and updates.

DISCOVER THE RING - Robert McCutcheon



Clea Friend at the sound desk



Sir John Tomlinson, Lionel Friend (piano)

This series of lectures held at Stockbridge Parish Church, Edinburgh between 22nd February and 1st March, had been keenly anticipated and, it did not disappoint. It was supported by the Society.

Day 1. In the morning there was a fascinating talk given by Michael Downes, who is director of Music at the University of St Andrews, on his recently published book, *Story of the Century : Wagner and the Creation of the Ring*. Dr. Downes described how Wagner was such a great storyteller. The story of and how he created his masterpiece.

In the afternoon the renowned conductor, Lionel Friend gave the first of four lectures about Wagner's tetralogy. Mr Friend had worked with directors such as Jonathan Miller, Joachim Herz, Götz Friedrich, Harry Kupfer, Richard Jones, Keith Warner and Graham Vick. While at ENO he assisted conductors, Charles Mackerras and Reginald Goodall. Mr Friend gave insightful talk emphasising and playing the major themes from the four operas.

Day 2: In the evening we were treated to a wonderful rendition of the *Wesendonck Lieder* by Susan Bullock. Ms Bullock was then joined by mezzo-soprano Laura Margaret Smith (who some of us will remember singing Waltraute in the Edinburgh Players Opera Group performance of *Götterdämmerung* last September).. They sang the duet between Brünnhilde and Waltraute from *Götterdämmerung*. The audience was entranced.

Day 3: A screening of *Das Rheingold* from the 1988 production of the Ring, directed by Harry Kupfer and conducted by Daniel Barenboim (assisted by Lionel Friend). The acting in this Ring was quite visceral and physical. It is sometimes referred to as the 'English Ring' due the presence of Sir John Tomlinson (Wotan), Dame Anne Evans (Brünnhilde) and the late Graham Clark (Loge in *Rheingold* and Mime in *Siegfried*).

Day 4: 'Directing Wagner', a quite fascinating talk by Keith Warner and Barry Millington about the challenges and rewards of directing the Ring, Mr Warner emphasised the importance of the text for the actors. He also directed a couple of audience members acting a passage from *Die Walküre*, to give us an insight in what was involved.

Day 5: a screening of *Die Walküre*.

Day 6: a screening of *Siegfried*, with Siegfried Jerusalem in the title role.



Sir John Tomlinson, Lionel Friend (piano)

Day 8: In the morning was a personal reading of Wotan's life by Sir John Tomlinson, which he wrote during his time at Bayreuth. One hopes that he gets the manuscript published or even read on the radio. As well as entertaining us with his life in opera, he gave a superb rendition of Wotan's monologue from Act 2 of *Die Walküre*.

In the evening a screening of *Götterdämmerung*. An enjoyable week was had ! The tireless work of the organiser, Clea Friend, who in recognition of her efforts was presented with a bouquet on behalf of the Wagner Society of Scotland by our Bayreuth Convenor, Gabriel Kuhn.

Mark your calendar:

- WAGNER DAYS in ICELAND - from 23rd to 27th October 2025: Celebrating 30 years of the Wagner Society in co-operation with Icelandic Symphony Orchestra and Reykjavik Opera Days. Contact Selma at selma.gudmundsdottir@richard-wagner.org
- *Tristan und Isolde* Scottish Opera 7-11 March 2026 www.scottishopera.org.uk/shows/tristan-und-isolde

RWVI Assembly of Delegates 2025 - Dr Derek Williams



Festspielhaus Chorsaal: Left rear, RWVI Präsidium member, Cyrile Plante (France), about to perform piano transcriptions from Wagner operas to welcome delegates.



Harry & Ulrich jointly welcome delegates

As noted in the opening page of this newsletter, this has been my first year as a board member of the RWVI since my election last Congress at Deutsche Oper, Berlin, as well as for its new President Harry Leutscher (Netherlands WS) and most of the Praesidium. In order to reduce outgoing costs this year, instead of a full-blown Congress, we instead held only the Assembly at the Chorsaal at the Bayreuther Festspielhaus, 15-18 June. Below is my précis taken from the RWVI website Newsletter:

More than 60 delegates attended the RWVI Assembly Weekend, which kicked off with a Fränkische Abend at Hotel Lohmühle – an evening of regional dishes, wines, and beers.

The AGM began with a piano transcription of *Meistersinger* played by Cyril Plante, Presidium member and Chair of the Paris Wagner Society. President Harry Leutscher and Bayreuth Finance Director Ulrich



Welcome dinner at Lohmühle Restaurant
Front L: Jona Heise, R: Derek Williams



Ulrich Jagels, Susan Vincent, Harry Leutscher



Ulrich Jagels, Derek Williams, Harry Leutscher

Jagels then welcomed everyone to the weekend, and Oberbürgermeister Thomas Ebersberger extended a welcome to the international guests on behalf of the city.



From RWVI board: L>R: Cyril Plante, Harry Leutscher (President), Christian Stürzl-Moitz (1st Vice President), Karin Colpan, Derek Williams, Michael Schmidt, Elizabeth Mollard (Secretary), Ada Vermeer-Janse (Treasurer), Thomas Winiarski

On Saturday, the Assembly of Delegates took place in the Chorsaal of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. The venue was made possible thanks to Ulrich Jagels, Chief Financial Officer of the Bayreuth Festival. Ulrich then delivered the opening speech, presenting the financial statements, and reflecting on making RWVI future-proof, both as an umbrella organization and as a community. These ideas were further developed in the afternoon through interactive workshops, one of which I curated.

Three local chairs - Arabella Hellmann (Ammersee), Klaus Weinhold (Dresden) and Cyril Plante (Paris) - were honoured with the Golden W for their more than ten years of service. The day ended with the festive Assembly Dinner at restaurant Bürgerreuth.

The RWVI Assembly concluded with a stunning farewell concert by 20-year-old pianist (and scholarship recipient) Simon Haje, who performed works by Beethoven, Schubert, and Chopin, leaving the audience utterly spellbound. He ended with Liszt's transcription of *Liebestod*, which moved everyone to tears. In the afternoon, those who were interested had the opportunity to join a guided tour of the Steingraeber factory, led by Fanny Steingraeber, who with her brother Alban now jointly manages the family business.



Simon Haje at Steingraeber Pianos



Standing ovation for Simon's performance



Historic entrance to Steingraeber Pianos



R: Fanny Steingraeber addressing delegates,
next to Franz Liszt's own Steingraeber



Derek Williams with Marianne von Hartmannsdorff
(Chair: Swedish WS) outside the deserted Festspielhaus



Last night dinner at "green hill" Bürgerreuth: L>R Stephanie Kollmer (Managing Director: Stipendiatenstiftung), Simon Haje (Pianist), Dr Harry Leutscher (President: RWVI), Susan Vincent (President: RWV Dorset), Dr Danièle Perrier (Koblenz), Ulrich Jagels (Financial Director: Bayreuth Festival), Dr Derek Williams (Chair: RWV Scotland and Member RWVI Presidium), Ina Besser-Eichler (Managing Director: Society of Friends of Bayreuth), Rien Spies (Chair: RWV Netherlands)

NEXT RWVI CONGRESS: Amsterdam 19-22 February 2026

Keep an eye on the website: <http://www.richard-wagner.org/rwvi/en/events/wagner-congress/>

RETURNED TICKETS AVAILABLE FOR Bayreuth Festival August to October

Tristan 10/8 (€331) & 23/8 (€225x3); *Parsifal* 8/8 (€197) & 24/8 (€225x3); 2x *Ring* 27/9 to 3/10 = €2,216

CALL FOR 'AUNTY & UNCLE' stipendiaten chaperones for 2025 Bayreuth Festival

This year, the Society is sending two scholars to Bayreuth 14-18 August. If you will be attending the Festival and would like to take on one or both of these roles as a duo, please contact Derek Williams.

CALL FOR Talks Organiser 2025-2026

This involves contacting prospective speakers, and arranging a programme of topics of interest to our audience. If you would like to consider joining the Committee to take this on, please contact Derek Williams.

BAVARIAN MINISTER INVITATION TO STATE RECEPTION 25 July 2025

If you will be attending the *Die Meistersinger* premiere and would like to receive an invitation to attend the Reception, please contact Derek Williams asap.



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>

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The Wagner Society of Scotland is proud to be a member of the International Association of Wagner Societies (*Richard-Wagner-Verband International*, RWVI).

