



JOHN'S JOTTINGS

The Society's activities began a little earlier than usual this year, so that we could take advantage of the presence in Perth in February of Heath Lees, one of our favourite visitors. As usual we had an entertaining as well as informative illustrated presentation from Heath, on the topic of *The Ups and Downs of Wagner on Film*. After sketching the various approaches that film makers have taken to the subject of Wagner since he was first depicted on silent film in 1913 by the German film pioneer and director Carl Froelich, Heath gave some illuminating insights into some of the challenges and joys that he had in making his own four-part series of DVDs entitled *Wagner's Ring: A Tale Told in Music*. He brought some copies of the set and found some eager customers, and as well we appreciated the fact that he offered a set to be used as a door prize.

As our regular evenings are held in the David Tunley Lecture Theatre at UWA's School of Music – under the benevolent gaze of Emeritus Professor Tunley's portrait situated just inside the entrance door – it was a special privilege to have both David and his wife Paula present in person on this particular occasion.

At the annual general meeting in March there was one change in the membership of the Committee, with Michael Murphy stepping down after eight years' meritorious service as Treasurer. As Michael was unable to be present at the meeting, our Secretary and I have since had the opportunity of presenting him with a small gift in appreciation of his great service to the Society. I am especially grateful that he has kept the Society in the black in spite of the present President's predilection for pursuing projects requiring funding additional to that needed for maintaining our regular operations.

We are immensely grateful that Connie Chapman volunteered to succeed Michael as Treasurer, and it is already apparent that the Society's funds continue to be in very capable hands. Many thanks to both Michael and Connie for ensuring a smooth transition in the Treasury.

Following the annual general meeting we had a very interesting talk by Mandy Farmer, the production manager with WA Opera, about the time she spent at Covent Garden late last year working with the production team on the Royal Opera House's *Tristan und Isolde*. Her talk was very informative and we learnt about many of the things that go on behind the scenes in both large and smaller opera houses. This was followed by a screening of *Wagner: A Genius in Exile*, a documentary featuring Antoine Wagner, a New York based photographer who is also a great-grandson of Richard. The documentary is set in Switzerland, where the composer spent many of the most productive years of his life, especially working on the text and later the music of the *Ring*. This being a 'Ring year' for the Society, the film provided an excellent prelude to a full screening of the tetralogy, and since then we have been gradually working our way through the recent La Scala *Ring* conducted by Daniel Barenboim and featuring many of the leading Wagner singers of our time. This seems to have been a good choice, judging from the positive comments made by a number of our members.

At the June evening, prior to the screening of the third act of *Die Walküre*, Dr Sally Kester gave an illuminating talk on Wotan and his daughters – ten of whom appear in that act. Poor Wotan did not come out in a very good light in Sally's account of his attitudes and actions. In August Sally will again present a talk which will introduce the third act of *Siegfried*.

I recently returned from a most enjoyable European sojourn which included two *Ring* cycles (in Dessau and Vienna), the annual Congress of the International Association of Wagner Societies (also known as the Verband, to use the first word of the German title), and the celebration of Wagner's 202nd birthday in his home city of Leipzig. Elsewhere in this newsletter I share some thoughts about both the Congress and my stay in Leipzig. Mi Kyung Lee and Colin Binns, were also in Dessau for its second *Ring* cycle, and they have provided a comprehensive account of that production and some other highlights of their European trip. I am hoping that a report on the Vienna *Ring* will appear in our next newsletter.

John Meyer

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Although 2014 was a somewhat 'quieter' year for the Society following the bicentenary celebrations in 2013, a full schedule of activities was maintained with a number of special events.

Following the annual general meeting at the March evening, an opportunity was provided for a number of members to give their reflections on the Melbourne *Ring*. This included a presentation by John Pax, a UWA music student to whom tickets had been provided to attend the third cycle. Sarah Guilmartin gave a report on her attendance at the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School as the winner of the Society's Wagner Bicentenary scholarship, followed by a short performance in which she was accompanied by David Wickham. The evening concluded with the screening of an abridged version of Wagner's first completed opera, *Die Feen*, in a production from Vienna.

Peter Bassett came in April for a fascinating presentation on *The use of Buddhist and Hindu concepts in Wagner's stage works*, along with his own personal reaction to some of the visual elements of the Melbourne *Ring* production.

A special highlight was the visit in August by Asher Fisch, who in conversation with Annie Patrick provided a fascinating insight into his career as a pianist and conductor, and especially his experiences with the works of Wagner. As an unexpected bonus, he and his partner Stefanie Irányi performed two of Wagner's songs composed in Paris in the late 1830s as well as one of the *Wesendonck Lieder*.

In addition to the 1992 Berlin production of *Parsifal*, the other works screened during 2014 were the somewhat controversial recent Bayreuth production of *Lohengrin*, and *Tannhäuser* in the 2008 production from Baden-Baden. There was a departure from the Society's normal practice of showing a *Ring* in every alternate year, but this will be rectified in 2015 with the screening of the recent production from La Scala under the musical direction of Daniel Barenboim.

For a second year the Society awarded a scholarship for a young singer to attend the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School, and the winner was Fleuranne Brockway, a senior voice student at UWA. The Queensland Wagner Society were most helpful in arranging accommodation for Fleur while she was in Brisbane.

The Society's Bayreuth Scholar for 2011, Michael Grebla, was awarded the UWA Convocation's annual Bryant Stokes Matilda Award for Cultural Excellence by a student. The Society supported his nomination and the President represented it at the ceremony during which Michael was presented with the award.

Due to the fact that the Society no longer had a web page as a sub-set of the NSW Wagner Society's website, Dave Robartson of Red Kinetic Pty Ltd was commissioned to design and maintain a new independent website. Whilst still in embryonic form, it is now online at www.wagnerwa.org.au. Suggestions for any additions or improvements to the site are very welcome.

Thanks were expressed to Committee members for their hard work during the past year. Allison Fyfe has proved a valuable new committee member who volunteered to organise our suppers, maintaining the excellent standard which members have come to expect. A special tribute was paid to Michael Murphy, who worked most efficiently behind the scenes as Treasurer to ensure that the Society continues to remain solvent! Michael is standing down after eight years in the position, and Connie Chapman was welcomed to the position of Treasurer for 2015.

Thanks were also expressed to UWA's School of Music for continuing to provide the venue and its facilities for our evenings.