

The Raven

Newsletter of

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest

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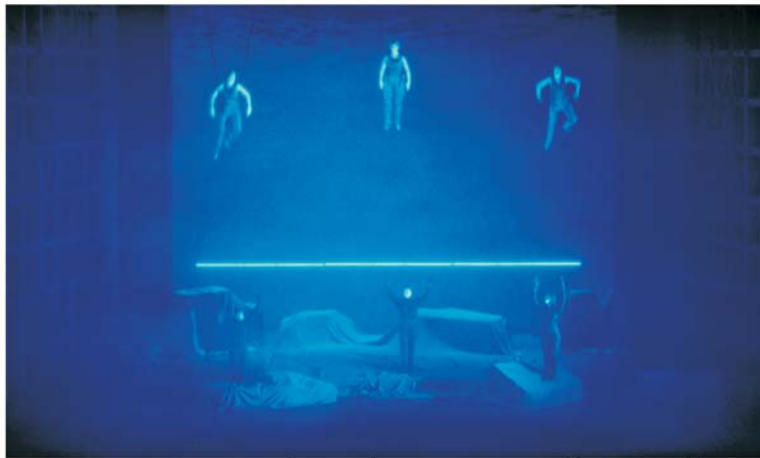
Welcome to the Newsletter!

As President of the Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest, I would like to welcome you to our first newsletter. Our society is one of over one hundred Wagner Societies throughout the world. We now join other societies in publishing our own newsletter. We thank Carol Thomas and Kevin Edgar for putting it together.

Enjoy!

David W. Cline, MD, President

Inside



**Bayreuth News
and More**

How Our Organization Came to Be...



BEGINNINGS

By David W. Cline, M.D.

There is one initiation rite for those who wish to become members of the Richard Wagner Society Of The Upper Midwest. The applicant must tell us how they became interested in Wagner's music dramas at the time of a society meeting. For this first issue of our newsletter, and as president of the society, I will tell my story and invite other members to do likewise in subsequent issues.

Dr. David W. Cline, M.D. I grew up in rural west central Wisconsin in a community of German Lutherans, and first heard Wagner at church weddings where the wedding march from *Lohengrin* was played. I knew nothing of the opera or anything else about Richard Wagner.

However, when I was 19 years old, the summer of 1954, I visited New York City and found my way to Louchow's German/American restaurant in the lower east side of Manhattan. On the upper interior walls were dramatic murals that caught my attention. Because I did not understand them, I asked a waiter who briskly said, "What! You don't know what stories they tell? They are from Wagner's operas!" Then he glared at me and said, "Those operas started two world wars and they will start a third!" That music dramas could start world wars was astounding to me coming as it did shortly after World War II. I determined that day to try to understand the veracity of his pronouncement. Forty-two years went by before I heard *Lohengrin* in Dessau, Germany directed by Gottfried Wagner, Richard Wagner's great grandson. It made a profound impression.

Come join us and have an experience too. If you would like to share your "How I got into Wagner" story, please let us know! Email newsletter@wagnertc.org or contact Carol Thomas at 763-442-9432.

Dr. Haymes Discusses Wagner and Tolkien

By Jamie Andrews



On April 30th, Dr. Edward R. Haymes, professor of German and Comparative Literature from Cleveland State University, gave a lecture entitled, "The Two Rings: Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and Wagner's Ring Cycle." It was a lively look comparing the popular Tolkien trilogy and Wagner's operas. This was the same lecture that he has given in Washington, New York, and Iceland for their respective Wagner Societies.

To illustrate points of similarity, Dr. Haymes used a clip from the current Peter Jackson films. For example, with a bit of simple editing, he showed a scene from the second movie, *The Two Towers*,



Society Directors with the Speaker, Left to Right: Carol Thomas, Dr. Haymes, Jamie Andrews, David Cline, Kevin Edgar

overplayed with Wagner's music from the beginning of the third scene in *Das Rheingold*. This was a very interesting and compelling example as there was no editing done by Haymes, yet this excerpt seemed to fit perfectly. In addition he made many other connections between characters, motives, and settings to show how these two works are similar. Professor Haymes also discussed Tolkien's response (or lack there of) to these charges made during his lifetime.

Following the lecture, a small group enjoyed further discussion over dinner with Professor Haymes and his wife.

The Ring at the Lyric Opera of Chicago

By Carol Thomas & B. Kevin Edgar

This production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was a revival of the 1996 production by August Everding, who died in 1999, with modifications by stage director Herbert Kellner. A fine production overall, with an impressive cast, but not without a few



Erinn Wall (Freia), Mark Baker (Froh), James Morris (Wotan), Larissa Diadkova (Fricka) and James Rutherford (Donner) in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of *Das Rheingold*. Photo by Dan Rest/Lyric Opera of Chicago.

confusing interpretations and misgivings. It was an interesting mixture of realism with the abstract using several repeated images to tie the production together. Neon circles and lines evoked thoughts of the Ring, Wotan's spear, and Nothung at key points. The inevitability of Fate was symbolized by a projection of Erda's face on the curtains and scenery, as well as opening each opera with the three Norns. This got *Rheingold* off to a slightly confusing start, the three Norns holding a blue fluorescent rope swaying with the music of the prelude. Then the Rheinmaidens appear as darting acrobats miming to the words sung by three singers on stage. Lights and shadows cast on the multiple scrims in front of the action produced a watery effect.

One less successful element in this production, was the *Rheingold* itself. Rather than matching the music and appearing slowly as the Sun's rays reach the depths of the river, a giant gold lump descends from the ceiling. The lump is as large as Alberich himself, and he steals it by climbing atop it and riding it up out of sight.

Alberich's transformation into a dragon was a masterful bit of stagecraft. An irregular shape suddenly appears, accomplished by having stagehands (in black) carrying black cards with fluorescent paint on one side which they flip over. As the transformation music grows, one piece becomes two, then four, etc. The pieces dance around randomly until they come together as a glowing dragon with snapping jaws threatening Loge.

The theft of the Ring was bloody and violent. Alberich, tied

helpless, has his hand pierced and pinned to the ground by the point of Wotan's spear. His hand remains pinned as Wotan admires the ring. After Loge retrieves the spear for Wotan, it is clearly covered in blood. So the spear, the source of Wotan's power, had been contaminated by the theft, and will eventually be destroyed.

In the final scene, the Gods make their way to Walhalla up a neon red staircase. Mid-way up blood red rods come out from the sides of the staircase at random orientations trapping the Gods. Has Walhalla now become a prison?

The main attraction of *Die Walküre* was Plácido Domingo playing Siegmund, although a bit long in the tooth for the part. The stage of Act I was dominated by a large tree branch, rather than a tree growing through the middle of the room. The effect was that of a giant branch reaching through a window, its tip just resting on the table at the center of the room. Through the window at the back, can be seen a winter storm raging, and glimpses of people chasing something in the forest. Siegmund enters with a wolf's skin draped over his shoulder.

between Hunding and Sieglinde (beautifully sung by Michelle DeYoung) is loveless. Hunding demonstrates his dominance by brutally twisting Sieglinde's arm and pushing her about. This is a Hunding one loves to hate.



Michelle DeYoung (Sieglinde) and Plácido Domingo (Siegmund) in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of *Die Walküre*. Photo by Dan Rest/Lyric Opera of Chicago.

In Act II, we see a happy and energetic Wotan as 'Father of Battles' sending the Walküre to various battlefields. His mood changes with the appearance of Fricka. During their confrontation, she continually blocks Wotan's path, restricting him to an ever smaller area of the stage trapping him with her body as well as her logic.

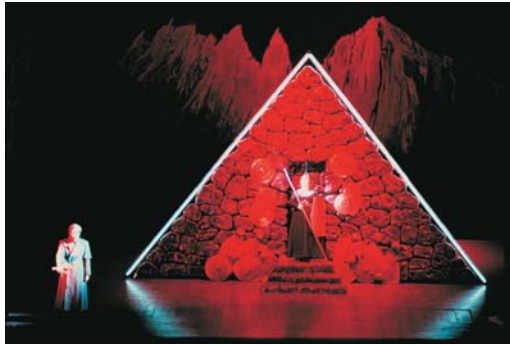
During the battle between Siegmund and Hunding, both Wotan and Brünnhilde are visible behind and above the action, on opposite sides of the stage. When Wotan points his spear, Siegmund drops the sword as he is stabbed by Hunding. While Wotan slowly descends, Brünnhilde quickly gathers up the sword and Sieglinde and hurries offstage. Wotan kneels and cradles his mortally wounded son in his arms, while Hunding stands watching, arms crossed. Dispatching

Hunding with a coarsely whispered 'Geh,' Wotan covers his dead son with the wolf skin. After a backwards glance at the body, he charges after Brünnhilde.

Act III opens on a stone pyramid shaped hut, bathed in reddish light. The Walküre first enter the scene as acrobats jumping and flipping across the back of the stage, apparently on trampolines. The real Walküre then appear popping up on top of hut then climbing down forming a group on stage. When Brünnhilde enters with Sieglinde, Sieglinde is regarded with surprise and disgust by the other Walküre - after all she is a mere mortal woman, something to be scorned.

The Walküre form a group to shield Brünnhilde and Sieglinde when Wotan appears at the peak of the hut. The Walküre are frightened away by Wotan's threats, although there is a nice touch when one quickly returns to bid

Brünnhilde farewell, embraces her, and rushes off, threatened by Wotan's spear. There is obvious affection between father and daughter, played to perfection by James Morris and Jane Eaglen. Morris delivers a powerful "*Leb wohl*" as the scene is bathed in red. The scene ends as a giant red neon circle slowly descends to the peak of the hut and a red neon shaft pierces it diagonally. The only disturbing note in this scene is the positioning of Brünnhilde. Rather than left laying on a rock, she is left standing in the doorway of the hut.



James Morris & Jane Eaglen Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of *Die Walküre*. Photo by Robert Kusel/Lyric Opera of Chicago.

In *Siegfried*, the curtain rises on Mime's hut, raised slightly, surrounded by a circle created by the Norns' rope. The three norns are present, who rise and leave the stage. The hut is filled with animal toys, including a rocking dragon. An agitated Mime, finely portrayed by David Cangelosi, waking from a dream goes to check on Nothung hidden under the hut. John Treleaven portrays Siegfried as a klutzy, fearless adolescent. Vocally, Treleaven fell just short of the role, expressing more through his facial expressions.

The comic elements in this opera were played to the hilt, illustrated by the scene with the Forest Bird, here a large hand puppet with

gracefully flapping wings. The humorous interaction with Siegfried as he tried to imitate its sound made the audience forget the presence of the puppeteer. After the bird flees, Fafner slowly appears. First, the audience sees two giant claws parting the back curtains behind the unaware Siegfried. Sung by Raymond Aceto, the dragon resembled a Chinese



John Treleaven (Siegfried) battles the dragon in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of Siegfried. Photo by Dan Rest/Lyric Opera

parade dragon, with fluorescent body parts. At one point, Siegfried cuts off the dragon's tail, so a few of the stage hands holding the pieces of the tail fall to the floor. A fantastic effect that was wonderfully choreographed.

Brünnhilde was one of the glaring inconsistencies in this production. Everyone in the audience was acutely aware that she had been left standing in the doorway of the hut. Now, she is laying with her shield covering her. Evidently, she sleep walks. While well sung, the staging of the love duet kept the two lovers apart, perhaps to lessen the impact of the disparity in size between Eaglen and Treleaven. This Siegfried never seemed a proper match for Brünnhilde.

Götterdämmerung brings us back to the world of man. The Gibichung siblings, while well sung by Alan Held and Jennifer Wilson but acted too confident to be the timorous nobles betrayed by Hagen sung by a returning Eric Halvarson.

Oleg Bryjak returned as a wonderfully weary old Alberich suspended in midair above Hagen as he spoke in his son's dreams. Michelle DeYoung appeared as Waltraute, decked out in a chic red leather greatcoat and black leather pants which seemed out of place in this production.



The staging of the final scene was less than successful, featuring a couple of gratuitous and distracting

Jane Eaglen (Brünnhilde) in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of Götterdämmerung. Photo by Dan Rest/Lyric Opera of Chicago.

images. During the Immolation scene, an image of the horse Grane appears. This sudden appearance was confusing as Grane had never appeared at any of the earlier points in the production. The very final scene, that of a boy and girl playing with blocks, symbolizing the renewal of the world, was both clumsy and unnecessary, distracting the audience from the magnificent closing music.

Andrew Davis, who is the Lyric of Opera Chicago's music director, led the performance with steady focus and intensity to provide a brilliant finale to the company's 50th anniversary season. He and the orchestra, polished by five years under his directorship, fully deserved the vocal enthusiasm shown by the audience.

Society Events

Founders Day Dinner

Thursday 9 September 2005

Our annual Founder's Day Dinner will be held at the home of David and Wanda Cline. Please mark your calendars. A small portion of this event will also serve as our annual business meeting. Further details will follow.

Book Club

Sunday 11 September 2005, 3 - 5 PM

The WSUM Book Club is a quarterly event. Each person is asked to read the selected book, prior to the meeting, to aide the discussion of the book.

Coffee and Tea will be provided by host Kevin Edgar. Please bring some snacks to share. (A kitchen is available.) We will meet at 700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis. (Two blocks south of the Walker Art Center on the Corner of Douglas and Hennepin. The apartment building is called Kenwood Gables.) If you are planning to attend please let Kevin know: Email info@wagnertc.org or phone 612-381-9429.

We will be selecting books from the list of recommended readings suggested by Seattle Opera. The next book we will read is:

Wagner Nights: An American History
by Joseph Horowitz
University of California Press, 1994. ISBN: 0520083946

“As an account of Wagner idolatry in America, this is one of the most readable social histories ever penned. Horowitz is a polemicist and his agenda reaches to the development of our country’s musical taste (or non-development, if you will). And I don’t just include this book because it waxes poetical about Seattle Opera’s post-modern Rochaix Ring. It’s just a real page-turner.”

-Stephanie von Buchau, Art Critic

DvD Nights **7-9 PM**

We are continuing to meet once a month to watch and discuss various productions of Wagner's dramas available on DvD. They will be shown on a large screen plasma TV. Coffee and Tea will be provided by host Kevin Edgar. If you like, bring some snacks to share. (A kitchen is available.) The address is 700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis. (Two blocks south of the Walker Art Center on the Corner of Douglas and Hennepin. The apartment building is called Kenwood Gables. *If you are planning to attend please let Kevin know by email (info@wagnertc.org) or phone (612-381-9429).*

Currently, we are watching the newly released DvD recording of the 2002-2003 Ring in Stuttgart. This production was designed and directed by four individual production teams, with no coordination between them. The intent was to present them as four separate operas and not as a unified whole.

We meet on approximately the first Wednesday of every month. The current schedule is

1 June 2005, Siegfried Act II
6 July 2005, Siegfried Act III
August - No meeting
7 September Götterdämmerung Act I
6 October Götterdämmerung Act II
2 November Götterdämmerung Act III

Events and performances of note

Seattle USA The Seattle Opera is reprising its 2001 "Green" Ring. Three cycles will be presented in August. It is reported to be sold out, but tickets occasionally become available: 800-426-1619 or www.seattleopera.com. In addition, Kevin Edgar has one set available for Cycle I, August 7-12. If interested, contact him at bayreuth@wagnertc.org



The Canadian Opera Company (Toronto, Canada) is offering a Ring cycle in September 2006. It is reported to be 75% sold at this time. Stick-in-the-muds beware, this is supposed to be avant-garde. Tickets 1-800-250-4653 or at their website www.ringcycle.ca/tickets/tickets.htm. Kevin Edgar is planning to attend. Contact him if you would like to coordinate.

This fall, LA Opera is presenting avant-garde director Robert Wilson's production of Parsifal, seven performances Nov 26- Dec. 17 2005. www.losangelesopera.com. Kevin Edgar will be attending.

Next spring, the Metropolitan Opera (New York) is doing both Lohengrin and Parsifal.

Canton Ohio Wagner Symposium II

Out of town member Rachel Schneider reports that the symposium is planned for November 4, 5, and 6, 2005. Speakers are : Jonathan Dean, Education Associate of The Seattle Opera; Iain Scott of Toronto, who lectures on opera, conducts opera tours, and is a frequent guest on CBC radio's "Saturday Afternoon at the Opera" and the Metropolitan Opera's Opera Quiz; Edward Haymes of Cleveland State University talking on the Two Rings : Wagner and Tolkien; and Craig Russell whose illustrations of The Ring were well-received at The Lyric Opera of Chicago's recent Ring cycles. On Sunday evening, November 6, there will be an all-Wagner concert by The Canton Symphony Orchestra with Susan Marie Pierson, soprano, and Charles R. Austin, bass-baritone.

Bayreuth News

The 2006 Ring at Bayreuth

For those interested in the comings and going on the Grünen Hügel, there was a change in directors for the 2006 Bayreuth Ring Cycle. Tankred Dorst, a highly acclaimed German theatre director, dramatist, and writer takes over after the withdrawal of Lars von Trier. Like von Trier, Dorst, 79, has never before produced an opera. One of Germany's leading playwrights, Dorst enjoyed critical acclaim as both a writer and librettist. Among his many accomplishments, is co-founding the internationally acclaimed contemporary dramatic festival, the Bonn Biennale. His most successful work, *Merlin*, a vast 6 hour epic based upon the wizard of medieval saga, shows he is no stranger to dealing with mythic and epic subject matter in an unconventional yet highly relevant way. For him, "Stage directions are not sacrosanct. Wagner is more than the music." Working along with his wife, Ursula Ehler, a frequent collaborator, Dorst will also be supported by a talented team of professionals: Set Designer - Frank Philipp Schlößmann, Costume Designer - Bernd Skodzig. Christian Thielemann conducts.

Bayreuth Tickets 2006

Too early to start thinking about next summer? *No it is not!* Our rules and policies for requesting Festival tickets will be changing, beginning with the next festival year (2006). In the past, we ordered tickets first, then waited until notified by Bayreuth of the number of tickets we would receive before we began polling members.

However, payment for the total order was due within two weeks of our receiving this notification. In the past, this payment was covered by the officers of the Society, who were reimbursed as tickets were purchased over the ensuing months. The total bill for this year (2005) was approximately \$9000. This financial burden can no longer be sustained. Therefore, future orders will reflect the interest expressed by members BEFORE we submit it in the fall.

As noted above, 2006 will feature a new ring. Exact dates are not available, but based on past history, expect the last week of August. Orders are due in Bayreuth on approximately 15 October 2005. **Members interested in attending in 2006 must contact us**

BEFORE 1 October 2005. Furthermore, a deposit of \$150 per set of four operas will be required. Requests without deposits will not be considered. After our order is submitted (1 October) these deposits become **non-refundable**, except in the event that we receive fewer tickets than requested. Tickets will then be distributed based on the member's Bayreuth priority. Members may no longer assume that the Society will have extra tickets in the spring. Full rules and order forms will accompany our Summer newsletter.

Please address and questions or concerns to Kevin Edgar at bayreuth@wagnertc.org.

On the cover: Lip-synching aerialist Rhinemaidens soar above singing Rhinemaidens Lauren McNeese (Wellgunde), Guang Yang (Flosshilde), and Stacey Tappan (Woglinde) in Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of Das Rheingold. Photo by Robert Kusel/Lyric Opera of Chicago.

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