

The Raven

Newsletter of

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest

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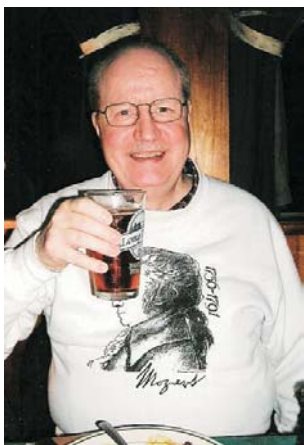
Membership Renewal

Events

How I started with Wagner ...

It is a tradition in our society for members to tell us how they became interested in Wagner. In this issue we continue with Jon Bergerud, a longtime member of the Society.

My Introduction to Wagner
By Jon B. Bergerud



I was introduced to Wagner by listening and later watching *The Voice of Firestone* and *The Bell Telephone Hour*. Conductors Howard Barlow and Donald Voorhees often featured a Wagner orchestral selection on those shows. I was hooked! I was starting a record collection and one of my first purchases was a two LP set called "Toscanini Conducts Wagner." The Maestro was a great Wagnerite and his thrilling interpretations increased my love for the music. Finally, my mother gave me Furtwängler's studio recording of *Die Walküre*. It was my first complete Wagner opera recording, and it was thrilling. I now

own 16 complete "Rings" and at least four versions of all the mature Wagner operas.

Bayreuth 2006

My third trip to Bayreuth was perhaps the hardest, especially the horrific, Torquemada designed seats. I was also hobbling about on a broken ankle. The *Ring* was a mixed bag. The conductor, Christian Thielemann, was simply magnificent and the orchestra and chorus were, as usual, superb.

Falk Struckmann and Hans-Peter Koenig, the Wotan and Hagen, were in great voice and gave fine performances. The Canadian soprano, Adrienne Pieczonka, the Sieglinde, was terrific. I think she will have a great career. Her Siegmund lost his voice and had to be replaced in mid opera.

Americans Stephen Gould and Linda Watson were Siegfried and Brunnhilde. Gould looked terrific, but he is not a true Heldentenor.

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Wagner Society Holds Fourth Annual Founder's Day Meeting

We are grateful to Betty Heefner for hosting at her home. We also want to thank John Heefner, Betty Heefner and Jon Lassila for preparing a grand meal for the fourth annual meeting of The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest. About thirty members attended this meeting. We were grandly entertained by soprano, Karin Wolverton and accompanist, Kathy Kraulik. Ms. Wolverton performed three selections, Senta's first act ballad from *Der Fliegende Holländer*, Elsa's Dream from *Lohengrin*, and from *Die Meistersinger*, Eva's Dream.



We were glad to hear Kevin Smith, President and CEO, Minnesota Opera, announce that he and Dale Johnson, artistic director, are committed to produce Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* in the spring of 2010 with the help of our society. We have set a goal of raising \$150,000 for this project.

There was excitement in the air as we discussed this challenging opportunity to contribute to the cultural life of the Upper Midwest with this most dramatic of Wagner's operas. Wagner himself said "Let there never be a perfect performance of *Tristan*, because if there is , no one will survive!" I take that to mean the opera is so powerful that the listener will either explode or implode upon hearing this opera performed perfectly. I know what he is talking about. Last summer at Bayreuth , I felt slightly unhinged as the prelude proceeded and by the time the second act finished, I had to take leave to take the air alone wondering if I could survive "das Ende". So, we are in for an exciting time with this endeavor. The pledge forms are in the mail ! Give as much as you can for this

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DvD Nights

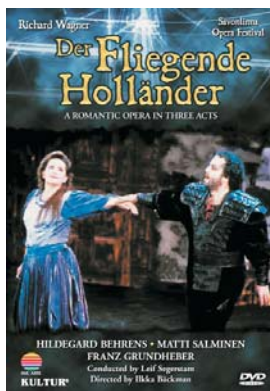
First Thursdays 7-9 PM

We meet approximately the first Thursday of every month to watch and discuss various productions of Wagner's dramas currently available on DvD. The schedule is

4 January 2007 *No Meeting*

1 February 2007 *Der Fliegende Holländer*

1 March 2007 TBA



Starring: Hildegard Behrens, Matti Salminen
Conductor: Leif Segerstam

Ilkka Backman's acclaimed production of Wagner's classic opera takes place outdoors in the huge courtyard of Finland's 500-year-old Olavinlinna Castle - a majestic and impressive setting, which gives the production an atmosphere and realism almost impossible to create in a conventional theatre. Hildegard Behrens, at the height of her career, is the tragic Senta, whose destiny is to redeem the Dutchman from his fate. The German bass-baritone, Franz Grundheber, sings the title role, and Finland's own Matti Salminen is the Norwegian sea captain, Daland. From the Savonlinna Opera Festival.

This event is hosted by Kevin Edgar. Coffee and tea are provided. If you like, bring some snacks to share. (A kitchen is available.) The address is 700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis. (Which is located 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 (wagner@bke.org) or phone 612-381-9429.

New Members

Thomas McBurney Barbara McBurney Nobuyoshi Yasuda

Our Best recruiters are our members. If you know of anyone with an interest in Wagner or his music, please tell them about us.

Bergerud

(Continued from page 2)

He had to husband his resources carefully for his marathon role. He has a most pleasant voice but lacks the heft to soar over the orchestra even in this singer friendly venue. Ms Watson had no such problems, but her voice tends to wobble under stress.

As far as the staging went, the opening scene of *Das hinegold* actually looked like the bottom of the Rhine. The magic fire scene of *Die Walküre* was breathtaking. On the negative side, Valhalla appeared to be more like one of the late Chicago Mayor Daley's decrepit housing projects. No self respecting god would be living in Cabrini-Green. Of course, I prefer the staging of the '80's Met production, so color me reactionary.

Bayreuth, as always, is a great EVENT and should not missed, but be prepared to forgo almost all creature comfort. Despite this, I look forward to another trip. You should as well.

If you would like to share your story, please let us know! Email Newsletter@wagnertc.org or contact the editor, Carol Thomas, at 763-232-6413.

Bayreuth News

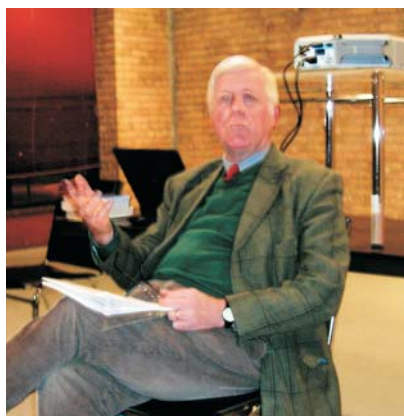


We have just learned that for the fourth year in a row, our Society has been allocated tickets to the annual Bayreuther Festspiele. Next summer, seven members will be making the pilgrimage 'auf den grünen Hügel.' In addition to the *Der*

Ring des Nibelungen, performances include *Tannhäuser*, *Parsifal*, and a new production of the lengthy *Meistersinger*.

Tom Sutcliffe

On Wednesday Nov 1st, noted critic and author, Tom Sutcliffe gave a lecture entitled, *Is Wagner the cause or the victim of Eurotrash?* Mr Sutcliffe was in town as a part of a research trip he is currently on. His talk focused on various operatic productions that he attended over the years as opera critic of London's The Guardian. He also told the story of how he developed his interest in the performance practice of opera. Following the talk, a dozen members joined Mr Sutcliffe for dinner.



Also, thanks to Tom, we have a signed copy of his book *Believing in Opera* in the RWSUM library.

Donald Arthur



Donald Arthur, editor and the English translator of Hans Hotter's *Memoirs*, lead a delightful talk on November 9th. Mr Arthur was a former student of Hotter's and long time friend who felt the need to make the story of the great Wagnerian bass available to an English speaking audience. Over the course of his talk, he told many stories of this unique man and his remarkable career, along with a number of rare musical excerpts of Hotter's singing.

A signed copy of *Memoirs* is now available in the RWSUM library.

Dinner

(Continued from page 3)

worthwhile project.

The meeting closed with all present telling us of their experiences with Wagner over the last year with new members Karen Ashe and Nabuyoshi Yasuda introducing themselves.

Your President, David Cline MD

Election Results

The annual meeting of the members was held pursuant to notice at the home of Betty Heefner in Minneapolis, Minnesota at approximately 7:00 p.m. on Friday, September 15, 2006. David Cline announced that the principal order of business was the election of six directors of the Society. The following were duly nominated: Jamie Andrews, Woody Andrews, David Cline, Kevin Edgar, John Heefner and Carol Thomas. There being no other nominations, the six persons named were unanimously elected as the directors of the Society on motion duly made and seconded.

Woody Andrews, Secretary

Membership Renewals

It is that time of year again, time to renew your membership! Our membership year is on a calendar year basis. In order to retain your Bayreuth ticket priority, we must receive your renewal by **15 March 2007**. A form and envelope are included for your convenience. Please make any necessary corrections. If you have any questions about your membership status contact membership@wagnertc.org or call Kevin Edgar at 612-381-9429.

Special Guest: 'R'



This plaster bust of Richard Wagner was a gift from Michael W. Smith. Mr Smith writes, "It is very old. It belonged to my great, great grandmother Harvey, and probably was cast in the late 1800's, and has been handed down in my family for over 100 years. "

We are very grateful to Mr Smith for his kind gift.

On the cover: Soprano Karin Wolverton as Antonia in Minnesota Opera's recent *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Ms Wolverton provided the musical entertainment at the recent Founder's Day Dinner. She may be seen next in Minnesota Opera's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Photo courtesy Minnesota Opera

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