

The Raven

Newsletter of

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest

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In this issue

Reports from Copenhagen and Pittsburgh

Founders Day Dinner

Bayreuth 2007 Info

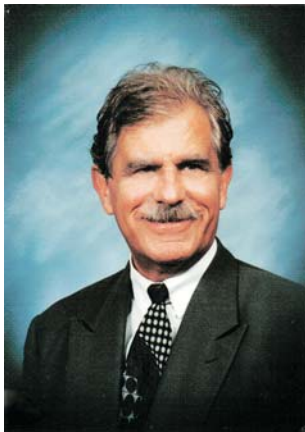
Events

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 John Heefner, longtime member and a member of our board of directors.

My Introduction to Wagner
By John Heefner

My introduction to the music of Richard Wagner occurred at the time of my graduation from medical school. Before I tell this story, however, let me antedate it with how I was introduced to opera. During my growing up years in rural Iowa we were fortunate to be visited occasionally by my great Aunt Emily who was from Kansas City. She was a very special lady and unlike anyone I had met in our little farming community. Well, at the tender age of ten my great aunt took me to the movie, *The Great Caruso*, with Mario Lanza. I was enthralled and from then on sought out every opportunity to listen to opera. Thus began my Saturday afternoons at the Metropolitan Opera in front of the family radio.



For reasons For reasons For reasons that evade me even today, I became fascinated with the soprano voice, the bigger and louder, the better. Richard Strauss' *Elektra* began my venture into German opera and the dramatic soprano repertory.

Upon my graduation from med school, I received the 1966 live recording from the Bayreuth Festival of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with the incomparable Birgit Nilsson. I was transported into a world I had not known before. I remember listening to the "Liebestod" over and over again.

Since that time almost forty years ago Wagner has become my operatic muse. Studying his life, his music, and seeing his operas on the stage have filled many marvelous and unforgettable hours. Highlights have included a San Francisco Opera performance of *Tristan* with Nilsson and Windgassen, a Birgit Nilsson recital, a recent tribute to Nilsson: *A Force of Nature*, and four marvelous and magical summers at Bayreuth. The "Liebestod" remains for me the most incredible piece of music ever written. It has always transformed me in ways I did not understand until recently. Very interestingly, following bouts with two life-threatening illnesses, the music and the words have crystallized for me and, I believe, reveal something

(Continued on page 9)

Reports from Copenhagen

Feminist Themes

By Robert Baumer and Debbie Done

The 2006 Danish Ring used a modern social/cultural/political setting to express the universality of Wagner's Ring. By injecting feminist themes and a rebirth of a more hopeful future, this production represented a change from the less optimistic genre of Rings produced in Germany, especially after 1945.



*Royal Danish Opera
Season 2005/06 Götterdämmerung
Tina Kiberg
Photo: Martin Mydtskov Rønne*

The twisting of the primary force of change from the Hero (the masculine: Wotan/Siegfried) into the Heroine (the feminine: Brünnhilde/Sieglinde) was a prominent political statement. The implication was that this is what might be needed in order to rescue a sometimes seemingly doomed world striving toward a worldwide civil society.

The Danes were struck with the symbolism of the last act of *Götterdämmerung*. Perhaps it took the Danish interpretation of this mythical story of man and his relationship to his gods to achieve the final triumph. Brünnhilde bids farewell to her father Wotan with the deceased Siegfried at

her side. Walhall burns and moves away as Brünnhilde re-emerges holding her new born son, born of the love and commitment that would not be separated by the deceitful Wotan and the evil of Alberich. As she presents the child; Walhall, still being consumed by flame, recedes into the background. Thus perhaps signifying an end to an era that had its beginning in the garden of Eden, the original son of which, the masculine, has been the prominent participant.

The setting was stunning. A new opera house built by Architect Henning Larson and benefactor Mr. Muller of Maersk Shipping. The opera house was a gift from Mr. Muller to the Danes. The visual sets were

(Continued on page 4)

Copenhagen

(Continued from page 3)

always interesting, while the orchestra played in a physical space where the acoustics were full and rich throughout. The orchestra was as compelling to us as we have ever experienced it. However both of us have only heard the Ring in mechanically reproduced versions. The ambience was enhanced by the placement of the opera house in the harbour across from the Amalienburg Palace.

Queen Margaret II graced us with her attendance at *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*. She apparently arrived just before the opening act by water motorcoach. Queen Margaret enjoys a thunderous 86% approval by the populace. She is seen as a strong feminist and embodies nurturing qualities in her rule. This fosters the Danes' values of social justice and a civil society. The government speaks openly about its 'Social Contract' with all its citizens.

But that's not what Wagner wrote!"

By B. Kevin Edgar

That was a comment frequently heard during lobby conversations at the 2006 Copenhagen Ring presented by the Royal Danish Opera. It was a well-crafted and internally consistent production, but at times it left me with the feeling I was experiencing two Rings at once. The backdrop for the



Den Kongelige Opera/ Royal Danish Opera
Season 2005/2006

Wagner: Valkyrien: Die Walküre
James Johnson - Tina Kiberg
Photo: Martin Mydtskov Rønne

Ring was Brünnhilde reminiscing over scrapbooks and trinkets, one of which is a severed arm which we later learn was Alberich's. These items are taken down from huge bookshelves during the *Rheingold* prelude, somewhat spoiling the effectiveness of the music.

The bookshelves appeared throughout the remaining operas, until consumed by the fires of *Götterdämmerung*. In this production the rheingold starts out not as gold, but as a living man, appearing first as a naked swimming man seemingly kept as a pet by the Rheinmaidens. Alberich steals the gold by cutting out his heart; the tank clouds with blood as the body sinks lifeless to the bottom. Fittingly,

Pittsburg Opera Theater

And now for something completely different

By B. Kevin Edgar

My 14th *Ring* was certainly different. On the weekend of July 21-23, 2006 I attended the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh's condensed *Ring*. They presented an English version by Jonathan Dove in which the operas are greatly abridged. *Rhinegold*, for example, was only 90 minutes long, while the remaining operas were less than three hours, including one intermission each. Such an undertaking requires the elimination of entire roles - Froh and Mime are gone from *Rhinegold*, the Norns were not to be seen in *Twilight*, and there were only three Valkyries. The orchestration was also trimmed, but still Anthony



Opera Theater of Pittsburgh
Wagner: *Twilight of the Gods*
Suzan Hanson / Dan Snyder
Photo: Patti Brahim

Negus was able to fill the intimate Byham theater with a glorious sound from his 22 piece orchestra.

On the whole it was a success, although it would have been more enjoyable as a first or second *Ring*. It was a delight to see and hear the impressive Siegmund of Gary Lehman, but it really hurt to not be able to hear his rendition of "Ein Schwert" or rather "A sword". The love duet at the end of Siegfried was heavily cut. Dan Snyder as Siegfried and Suzan

Hanson as Brünnhilde sang (and acted) their parts so well, it was a crime not to have the entire piece.

The staging was very reminiscent of the Kirov *Ring* currently making its way around the world. This is perhaps not coincidence as the scenic designer, Danila Korogodsky, is from St. Petersburg, where he studied at Leningrad Theater Institute. The sets featured artistic fossilized creations meant to convey a sense of antiquity. The stage was dominated by a circular ring, suggesting the 'big-bang' beginning and 'big-crunch' ending of the Universe. Rather than borrowing from Norse mythology, the costumes blended European and Oriental elements, ancient and modern, to create a universalised mythology, but without the heavy handedness of the Kirov *Ring*.

Bayreuth 2007 Ticket Requests Due by 25 September 2006

Bayreuth has officially announced a new production *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* for 2007, the first production from heir apparent Katharina Wagner. Also announced is a new production of *Parsifal* for 2008, meaning that 2007 will be the last chance to experience the controversial Schlingensiefel *Parsifal*. Most likely, *Tristan und Isolde* will be repeated, and of course, the Dorst *Ring*. As in past years, we will be ordering tickets to the third cycle, approximately August 20-26, 2006. Again, the number of tickets requested will reflect the interest expressed by our members *before* we order. Therefore, to meet the anticipated Bayreuth deadline of 15 October, members wishing to attend Bayreuth in 2007 must submit requests by the 25th of September 2006. Exact dates and costs will not be known until we receive our order form in September, but based on past years we anticipate that the price of a ticket to *The Ring* would range from \$600 - \$900, and \$450 to 750 for the other three. Tickets to individual operas are not available. The exact price will depend on the specific tickets allocated (if any) and the exchange rate. This year, members may request Ring tickets, a set of non-Ring tickets, or both. If you intend to request both, please indicate whether or not you would be willing to accept only Ring tickets or non-Ring tickets, as well as your preference. The rules are:

- 1) Current membership is a prerequisite.
- 2) Only one ticket request per membership.
- 3) All ticket requests must be specific and in writing. A form is enclosed.
- 4) Members should indicate a general price range: high, medium, or low.
- 5) A deposit of \$150 per request is required. Requests without deposits cannot be accepted.
- 6) After our order is submitted in early October, these deposits become non-refundable except in the event we receive fewer tickets than requested. (See below.)
- 7) When Bayreuth provides us with the number and prices of tickets, we will inform members. Upon notification of ticket availability, full payment to the society is required within two weeks.
- 8) Ticket invoices include a 10% surcharge to cover expenses.
- 9) If a ticket holder is unable to attend, the Society must be informed and the tickets returned immediately. A refund (less the deposit)

will be made once the tickets have been reassigned. This requirement is imposed on the Society by the Bayreuther Festspiele Kartenbüro.

- 10) Travel and hotel accommodations are the responsibility of the member.

Should we receive fewer tickets than requested, then these additional rules apply:

- 1) Tickets will be offered first to those with highest Bayreuth priority. Bayreuth priority is based on a rotating system affording every member a chance to attend the Festival. A list is maintained, initially constructed by listing members in the order of joining the society. When new members join, their names are added to the end. As members accept Bayreuth tickets, their names are placed at the end of the list, after those joining that year.
- 2) Members not receiving tickets will have the option of a full refund (including deposit) or a place on the waiting list.
- 3) Members on the waiting list may withdraw for a full refund at any time before they are notified of ticket availability.
- 4) After notification of ticket availability, the deposit is non-refundable.

Founders Day Dinner

ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS OF THE WAGNER SOCIETY OF THE UPPER MIDWEST!

You are cordially invited to the annual Founders Day meeting on Friday, September 15th, 2006, beginning at 6 pm. This year it will be held at the home of Betty Heefner:

210 W. Grant St
Apartment 114
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403
Phone: 612-317-8962
6 PM

The complex is called Loring Way and is located just across the street from the Berger Fountain in Loring Park. Parking is adequate in the parking lot at Loring Way or at street parking. Buzz 095 to get into the building and to sign in your car.

Please RSVP to John Heefner by Friday, Sept.8th. at 612 377-6551 or by email heefnerjohn@yahoo.com

We gather this day to celebrate the founding of the Society which occurred August 1998. We are planning some surprises that, of course,

-7- (Continued on page 8)

Dinner

(Continued from page 7)

will consist of performances of Wagner's music--but which ones and who will perform? All attending are asked to tell the rest of us about their Wagner experiences during the past year. The members who attended the Bayreuth Festival will report their impressions of the new *Ring* and other experiences of their pilgrimage. A sumptuous dinner is planned and will be prepared by John Heefner.

Thus inspired, we will discuss and ask for pledges for the Tristan Wagner Performance Fund which has already raised \$35,000 from the Board of Directors toward a goal of \$150,000. This money will go to the Minnesota Opera to support a production of *Tristan und Isolde* or other performances of Wagner's works.

Please come to this party and join in this noble effort to bring the joy and inspiration of Wagner's music dramas to our community.

Annual Business Meeting

Election of 2006-2007 Board of Directors Reports of 2005-2006 Officers.

The Founders Day Dinner will conclude with a short business meeting. Following reports from the current officers, election of the Board of Directors for 2006-2007 will be held. The Directors submits the following slate for the Board of Directors. Nominations may also be made from the floor, with prior consent of the nominee. Nominees must be members in good standing and willing to serve. Directors are elected for one year and may be re-elected, per the By-laws. In conformity with our By-laws, officers of the society are elected by the Board of Directors after the Annual Business Meeting, but the list of proposed officers is given below.

NOMINATIONS -- 2006-2007 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jamie Andrews	Woody Andrews	David W. Cline
B. Kevin Edgar	John Heefner	Carol Thomas

PROPOSED 2006-2007 OFFICERS

President: David W. Cline	Secretary: Woody Andrews
Treasurer: Jamie Andrews	

DvD Nights

First Thursdays 7-9 PM

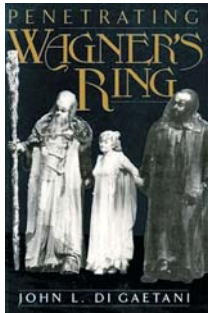
We meet approximately the first Thursday of every month to watch and discuss various productions of Wagner's dramas currently available on DvD. The schedule is

5 October *Lohengrin* Act III

2 November Cartoon Night: *What's Opera Doc?* + Highlights
(No Meetings in September, December, and January 2007)

WSUM Book Club

Sunday, 22 October 3 - 5 PM



Penetrating Wagner's Ring: An Anthology
Publisher: Da Capo Pr; 456 pages
ISBN: 0306804379

We are beginning a collection of essays compiled by John Louis DiGaetani. For this meeting, please read the first two sections covering Wagner's intention and theory. This will take us to page 85. Please look through the remaining essays, so that we may establish a future schedule.

Both events are hosted by Kevin Edgar. Coffee and tee 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.

John Heefner

(Continued from page 2)

of what eternal life is all about. Isolde's experience of Tristan following his death gives us a glimpse of a life force which is part of life and death and of which we are a part eternally. She sees Tristan as a part of this life force and "in the surging swell, in the ringing sound, in the vast wave of the world's breath" she joins him forever. The music says it all no matter the language you speak.

If you would like to share your story, please let us know! Email Newsletter@wagnertc.org or contact the editor, Carol Thomas, at 763-442-9432.

Hans Hotter: Memoirs

**A Lecture by
Donald Arthur**

Thursday, 9 November, 2006
6:00 - 7:00 PM
Minnesota Opera Center
620 N. 1st St.
Minneapolis MN



Hans Hotter

Translated and edited by Donald Arthur
Forewords by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Zubin Mehta
Coming in September from Northeastern University Press
ISBN 1-55553-661-1

An expanded and updated translation of the memoirs of the great German bass-baritone

Hans Hotter (1909-2003) was one of opera's most influential and profoundly moving artists of the twentieth century. His imposing frame and austere, high-browed profile made him an ideal figure of tragic dignity, unequalled in his era as Wotan, Amfortas, the Dutchman, Scarpia and the Grand Inquisitor in Don Carlo, and several Strauss roles, including three world premieres of that composer's works. Hotter made his debut at age twenty-one in Troppau, Germany (now Oppava, Czech Republic), and by the age of thirty was a leading artist at the prestigious Bavarian State Opera in Munich. Although he never joined the Nazi party and avoided appearances at Bayreuth while under Nazi control, Hotter remained active in German theaters throughout the war. He achieved his vocal prime after the war and was a featured performer in Munich, Vienna, Bayreuth, New York, San Francisco, London's Covent Garden, and Salzburg. In addition to his long and acclaimed opera career, Hotter was also a distinguished stage director, teacher, and an incomparable lieder singer, celebrated for his mastery of Schubert's song cycle *Die Winterreise*.

Donald Arthur is a former opera singer, actor, screenwriter, and author. A native of New York City, he now divides his time between Munich and Malta.

Copenhagen

(Continued from page 4)

the ring is forged in a Niebelheim resembling Frankenstein's laboratory with half-human bodies hanging about.

Often the action did not match the words. In *Die Walküre*, it is Sieglinde who pulls out the sword. Later, during the exchange between Siegmund and Brünnhilde, Sieglinde is wide-awake, clearly aware of what is happening, even though Siegmund cautions Brünnhilde not to disturb the sleeping woman (Schweig, und schrecke die Schlummernde nicht!) When Siegmund resolved to kill Sieglinde, she offers herself as a willing sacrifice.

I found the final scene of *Die Walküre* to be confusing. It apparently takes place on the roof of Copenhagen's Glyptotek museum. Wotan arrives with a suitcase and demands Brünnhilde. The Walküre defend her, but Wotan's threats drive them away. Brünnhilde steps forward and picks up the suitcase as the stage rotates to reveal the interior of a cupola outfitted as an ordinary, everyday room with plain wooden furniture. Brünnhilde stands holding the suitcase as she looks dismayingly around, envisioning her new life as a mortal. Wotan dramatically grabs her wings and rips them off. After the kiss, Brünnhilde collapses then she gets up and goes to the suitcase and produces a white dove, which she releases through a rear opening, perhaps to symbolize her godhead leaving. Yet another kiss, and she finally lies down and Wotan covers her with her wings. Fire springs up on either side of cupola with flames dramatically projected onto a screen forming the backdrop.

Siegfried is portrayed sympathetically; not as a buffoon, but as a troubled teen of the 1960's. He has an attic bedroom filled with posters, musical instruments, and piles of dirty clothes. Fafner lives in an underground laboratory in the middle of a wasteland. The white dove appears (apparently the same live bird Brünnhilde released) to lead Siegfried away.



Den Kongelige Opera/ Royal Danish Opera
Season 2005/2006 Wagner: Siegfried
James Johnson - Susanne Resmark
Photo: Martin Mydtskov Rønne

Act III opens with a powerful scene between Wotan and Erda. Erda is asleep in bed, her nightstand covered with bottles of medicine and a clock. An IV drip stands at the side of bed. Wotan arrives, well dressed, with a bouquet of Roses and a bottle of Champaign. (Erda is an old flame, after all.) He pounds on the door, demanding entry. A Servant rushes in and helps Erda into a robe and

(Continued on page 12)

Copenhagen

(Continued from page 11)

to a chair, while Wotan is still pounding on the door. As the servant lets Wotan in, Erda picks up clock, looks at it, shrugs, and sets it back. It is 3:40 am. During their discussion, it slowly dawns on Wotan that she has grown old and feeble. He picks up one of many medicine bottles, glancing at Erda in surprise. At one point during the exchange, Erda holds a mirror up to Wotan's face to show him that he too has grown old. He angrily thrusts it aside. He now tells Erda that he not only accepts the end but also wills it and leaves. It is a powerful scene of two people confronting and accepting their own mortality.

In the final scene, Siegfried is at first shy when he wakens Brünnhilde, but the hormones soon takeover and they start removing each other's clothing as they sink down in an embrace.

In *Götterdämmerung*, we see the Gibichungs depicted as decadent dictators and Hagen is a ruthless gunman, creating an atmosphere in which Siegfried is quickly corrupted. In one brutal scene, Hagen assassinates several men to the cheers of a crowd egged on by a vast supply of booze and drugs. The wives of the murdered men are then led away by the henchmen to be raped.

After Siegfried is killed, Brünnhilde returns and tries to understand her fate. She takes Siegfried's body back to her childhood home Valhalla, and sets it afire. An old corrupt world ends in flames, and a new one must begin. As the flames die, Brünnhilde reappears holding her newborn child.

On the cover: RWagner:Rhinguldet/ Das Rheingold
Royal Danish Opera - Season 2003/04
Ylva Kihlberg, Hanne Fischer, Djina Mai-Mai
Photo: Martin Mydtskov Rønne
Photos courtesy Den Kongelige Opera

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