

The Raven

Newsletter of

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest

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How I started with Wagner ...

It is a tradition in our society for members to tell us how they became interested in Wagner. This issue we feature Robert Brittain..



Wagner by way of Puccini

By Robert Brittain

Looking back, it's pretty clear that my first opera experience prepared the way for my current appreciation of Wagner's music. In 1987, my mother took me to see a La Scala production of *Turandot* with the soprano Ghenia Dimitrova singing the title role and with Niccola Martinucci as Calaf. I'd never seen such a spectacle or heard such an ear-splitting voice—Dimitrova's iron-clad larynx slapped you in the face and made the swelling orchestra sound distant.

A friend that I met shortly after told me that if I thought Dimitrova was loud, I should listen to Birgit Nilsson singing *Turandot*. He had grown up in New York and had heard Nilsson sing at the Met. I promptly devoured his 78 recording of the opera with Nilsson, making comparisons between my memory of Dimitrova and my "new" discovery. I asked for more of Nilsson, and my friend produced excerpts of Nilsson singing Strauß, Verdi and Wagner. Somewhere in the mix of recordings was Nilsson's remarkable Immolation Scene from *Die Götterdämmerung*. As soon as I heard her powerful, laser-beam high notes, I was hooked. I had no idea what she was singing about, but the sheer athletics of her singing was electrifying!

They say that every gay opera fan has a diva, and lucky for me, my friend's diva was Madame Nilsson. An outpouring of recordings, books and video followed, including a number of "pirated recordings" and videos ranging from the movie of Wagner's life starring Richard Burton, to old German and Japanese television recordings of Nilsson. While I can't claim to share Nilsson as my diva, she made a huge impression on me as a listener who was then new to opera.

I went to my first of three *Ring* cycles in 1999, twelve years after my "discovery." In between, I wrote my Master's thesis on Wagner and National Socialism and I've read innumerable articles about Wagner and his music. To date, I've enjoyed productions of *Lohengrin* (Met), *Die Meistersinger* (Deutsche Staatsoper), *Der Fliegende Holländer* (Chicago), and *Tristan und Isolde* (Chicago) and am looking forward to my Bayreuth *Ring* this year and my first *Tannhäuser* in 2008. As unsavory as he was

Founders Day Dinner

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

I am pleased to invite you to the annual Founders Day meeting on Friday, September 14, 2007, 6 to 9 PM, at the home of Betty Heefner:

210 Grant Street, Apartment 114
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403
Phone: 612-317-8962

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. 7 at 612-377-6551 or by e-mail: heefnerjohn@yahoo.com.

With this Founders Day meeting, we enter the 10th year since the beginning of our current Wagner Society. Our society, we claim, had its origins in the early 1870's when St. Paul businessmen corresponded with Wagner inviting him to erect his Festspiele House and Music Academy on the banks of the Mississippi River.

The evening program will be replete with a social hour at 6:00 p.m., a sumptuous dinner prepared by Betty Heefner, John Lassila, and John Heefner. We will be treated to a performance of Wagner's music by Andrea Coleman, Resident Artist from the Minnesota Opera. She perform Wagner's **Wesendonck Lieder**. This song cycle, with poems by Mathilde von Wesendonck, was written by Wagner while he was composing *Die Walkure* and shows his first uses of chromatic-harmonic style that he would use in *Tristan and Isolde*. We will have the usual roll call of members who are asked to briefly tell us of their Wagner experiences in the last year. New members are asked to tell us how they became interested in Wagner, and from those who attended the Wagner Festspiel in Bayreuth this year, a report about the *Meistersinger von Nuremberg* directed by Katherina Wagner, the heir apparent for the Festspiel.

(Continued on page 8)

Bayreuth 2008 Ticket Requests Due by 20 September 2007

Bayreuth has announced the selection of the young Norwegian opera director, Stefan Herheim, to stage a new production of Richard Wagner's final opera *Parsifal* in 2008. The 37 year old Herheim is currently based in Berlin and will team up with Italian maestro Daniele Gatti for the new staging. The team will include Austrian set designer Reinhard von der Thannen and German costumer designer Gesine Voellm.

Herheim has already attracted attention with controversial productions of operas such as Mozart's *Die Entfuhrung aus dem Serail* in Salzburg, Handel's *Giulio Cesare* in Oslo and Verdi's *La forza del destino* at the Deutsche Staatsoper in Berlin. One of his most recent productions, which reportedly sharply divided critics and audiences alike, was Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Essen.

Originally a cellist by training, Herheim studied theatre direction under the German director and theatre manager Goetz Friedrich in Hamburg in 1994. Upcoming projects include a new staging of Wagner's *Tannhaeuser* in Oslo and another Wagner opera *Lohengrin* in Berlin.

Other works scheduled at the Festspiel Haus include Katharina Wagner's production of *Die Meistersinger von Nuernberg*, Tankred Dorst's *Ring* and Christoph Marthaler's *Tristan und Isolde*.

As in past years, we will be ordering tickets to the third cycle, approximately August 20-26, 2007. 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 2008 must submit requests by the 20th of September 2007. 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.

Events

(Check our website at www.wagnertc.org for updates on these and other events)

A Lecture by Dr. Sven Friedrich

*Director of the Richard Wagner Museum
& Haus Wahnfried*

*Thursday, 25 October 2007
7:00 PM*

*Minnesota Opera Center
620 N. 1st St.
Minneapolis MN*



Book Club

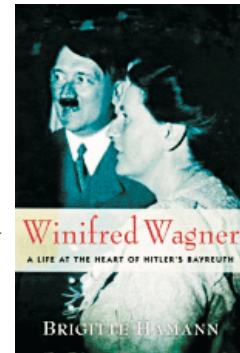
Thursday 20 September 2007, 6:30-8:30pm

Upon a few inquisitive members questioning what happened to the WSUM Book Club, we decided to resume! This will be a quarterly event. Each person is asked to read the selected book prior to the meeting, to aid in the discussion. Meetings can vary in location, and will be decided along with selecting the next book during each session. Meetings will include assorted beverages (coffee, tea, soda). If you wish, you may bring snacks to share.

Our first book is: *Winifred Wagner: A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth*
By Brigitte Hamann (Author), Alan Bance (Translator)
Harcourt; 1 edition (December 4, 2006)
10: 015101308X **ISBN-13:** 978-0151013081
WSUM Member Robert Brittain has graciously offered his place for our first meeting. This address is:

4570 Edmund Blvd, Minneapolis

Should you need assistance, or have any questions, contact the event coordinator, Carol Thomas, at 612-559-6468.



DvD Nights 7-9 PM

The current schedule is:

Thursday, 2 August 2007 Odds and Ends, an evening of excerpts

(There will be no meetings during September and October.)

Tuesday, 13 November Richard Burton as Wagner, Part 1

Tuesday, 11 December Richard Burton as Wagner Part 2

This event is hosted by Kevin Edgar. Coffee and tea are provided. 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.

Brittain

(Continued from page 2)

personally, Wagner was a creative force of nature and his fascinating work and times have become a significant part of my life.

I often wonder if I had heard *La Boheme* as my first opera, if Mimi would have led me down the same path as did Madame Dimitrova and her searing impression as *Turandot*. Probably not!

If you would like to share your story, please let us know! Email Newsletter@wagnertc.org or contact the editor, Carol Thomas, at 612-559-6468

On the cover:

Andrea Coleman, Resident Artist from the Minnesota Opera
Photo courtesy Minnesota Opera

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