

The Raven

Newsletter of

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest

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Meistersinger*

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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 Michael Barna.

How I Became Interested in Wagner

By Michael A. Barna

I don't know whether I should pat him on the back or track him down and give him a punch in the nose! I suppose the latter would be difficult since it's been over twenty-five years since I've seen him and I've moved half a country away. But still! Who knew that in the time of one college class period, a music history class, that my life would be changed forever?



David, (left) and Michael, (right), intermission of Der Fliegende Holländer, Semperoper, Dresden, June, 2007

At that time, I was a voice student at a small college in New Jersey and though I had dreams of once singing on the operatic stage, I soon realized that it was not to be. So, taking the advice from my father, who in his eyes was “more practical,” I earned a degree in Music Education. Up until this time, my only encounter with Wagner had been trying to sing the aria “O, du mein holder Abendstern” from

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Katharina Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*: Outrage or New Beginning?

By Dr. David W. Cline

On August 28, 2007, I saw the final performance of a new production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* directed by Katharina Wagner - her debut to the Bayreuth Festival. Ms Wagner is in line to be heir apparent to take over after her father, Wolfgang Wagner, as his 57-year tenure as festival director ends.

She is to be congratulated for her courage to present the production that has outraged many.

This opera was Richard Wagner's only comedy and Ms Wagner turned it on its head. Walther von Stolzing, the young knight, new to Nürnberg, who falls in love with Eva,

attempts to win the song contest and Eva's hand in marriage by transforming his song into a crowd-pleaser, but loses his artistic integrity. He morphs from an artiste wearing sneakers and sunglasses perched on his long blonde locks into a stuffy conservative wearing a buttoned-down shirt, tie, and pin-striped business suit. Hans Sachs, who initially is detected as an outsider going barefoot, also ends up a conservative with formal shoes and business attire.



*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg - 3. Aufzug, 5. Szene. David: Ernst, Magdalene: Guber
Photo: Bayreuther Festspiele*

At the beginning of the opera, the uptight, prune-faced snob, Beckmesser becomes enlightened, escaping the bonds of traditional conformity. By the end of the opera, he is the real hero of this production. He wears a T-shirt on which is printed, "Beck in Town" which seems to imply, "Let's throw off restraints and have a ball!"

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Saturday, 22 March 2008

Tristan und Isolde

Join us for a sumptuous brunch and tantalizing discussion before the Metropolitan Opera broadcast! The discussion will be led by Daniel E. Freeman. He has taught music history at the University of Illinois, the University of Southern California, and the University of Minnesota, where he now holds a position as lecturer. He also offers annual lecture series in music history at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. A specialist in eighteenth-century European music, he is the author of two books and numerous scholarly essays. His third book, *Mozart in Prague*, is in preparation.



8:30 AM: Brunch

9:00 AM: Discussion

*Kenwood Gables Apartments
Kenwood Room
700 Douglas Ave
Minneapolis*

Cost: \$ 5 members / \$ 10 non-members

*RSVP by Thursday 20 to Kevin Edgar
612-381-9429 or wagner@bke.org*

11:00 AM: Regal Brooklyn Center 20

*6420 Camden Ave N
Minneapolis, MN 55430
763-566-3456*

Cost: \$22 per person

Theater doors open at 11 AM; show starts at 11:30 AM. Tickets sell out fast, and phone orders are not accepted. Order your tickets in advance using one of the follow options:

In person at the Box Office
or

Onlinethrough Fandango at
www.fandango.com/themetropolitanopera:tristanundisolde_111319/movietimes

If you need assistance, contact Carol Thomas at 612-559-6468.

A Nazi at the Opera: Wagner's Myth and Music as Propaganda in Nazi Germany

**A Lecture by
Robert Brittain**

Thursday, 21 February 2008
6:00 - 9:00 PM

The Minneapolis Club
729 South 2nd Ave
Minneapolis



Adolf Hitler was convinced that Wagner expressed and shared his own worldview. Likewise, Wagner's life and work have a long-standing association with the Nazis and their terrible legacy of hatred. Was Wagner a "proto-Nazi"? Only you can decide after listening to this lecture based on the history of the period.

Mr. Brittain's lecture will discuss the development of the Volkisch movement in nineteenth and twentieth century Germany and its connections to Richard Wagner and the Wagner family. He will also discuss the specific links between the Wagners, Bayreuth and National Socialism during the Nazi regime.

6:00-cocktails / 6:30-lecture / 7:30-dinner

Please Note: Dinner and cocktails at member's own expense.

Video Nights 7-9 PM Second Tuesdays

Wagner - The Complete Epic (1983)
Starring: Richard Burton, Vanessa Redgrave

The current schedule is:

Tuesday, 12 February 2008 Richard Burton as Wagner, Part 4
Tuesday, 11 March 2008 Richard Burton as Wagner, Part 5

This event is hosted by Kevin Edgar at 700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis. If you are planning to attend please let Kevin know by email (wagner@bke.org) or phone 612-381-9429.

Meistersinger

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This might be tolerable for spring break on Miami beaches, but life cannot be lived like that.

There are subplots within the opera; great German artists of the past are parody; Bach is sitting on a chamber pot, Beethoven is showing inappropriate attention to a child, Albrecht Dürer admiring a self-portrait, Wagner himself caressing the neck of a swan - they end up dancing with each other in their undergarments.

This is sacrilege!

In the final scene in the meadow, the audience is also mocked. The chorus is dressed like the audience. Men are wearing look-alike tuxedos and women are wearing look-alike formal gowns with identical hairdos. We are also cookie-cutter clones! The message seems to be: loosen up, relax, do not be tradition-bound, think creatively, let art open you up to new experiences.

It has its points, and we should listen to our young if we can overcome our ruffled feathers.

Book Club

Thursday 14 February 2008

7 - 9 PM

Graciously hosted by

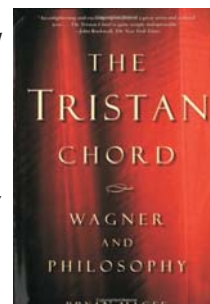
David Bergerson

16215 Holdridge Road West

Wayzata MN

Our next book is: *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* By Bryan Magee. If you plan to attend, please contact the event coordinator, Carol Thomas, at 612-559-6468 or info@wagnertc.org.

"A carefully researched account of a fiery personality who transmuted daunting ideas into compelling art."
-Booklist



Barna

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Tannhäuser. But what happened in that music history class opened a realm of Wagner's music that I never knew. That day, we were listening to a lecture about Wagner. That day, we learned about stretching the boundaries of opera. That day, I heard about "Der Ring" for the very first time!

I remember the enthusiasm of my professor as he recounted the story of *Das Rheingold*. I remember how he created the characters right before our very eyes and even jumped onto a chair to mimic the height of one of the giants! I remember him playing the final moments of the opera as the gods entered Valhalla and at that moment, at that most bombastic finale, I was hooked! Later, I would use that final scene from *Rheingold* to create a lesson plan to teach a middle school music appreciation class, and at the very same time, I started teaching myself about this monumental work.

"Der Ring" was like a musical jigsaw puzzle for me. Hearing all the leitmotifs and how they were incorporated into the fabric of the rest of the work was something I could not stop trying to put together. First came the vocal scores, then my first "Ring" recording (the Wilhelm Furtwängler La Scala LPs). Next I bought the Dover orchestral scores, and by then I couldn't stop. I bought books about the "Ring," books about Wagner and his life, books about interpretations and stagings of the "Ring." And later, with the advancement of technology, I purchased CD recordings, and DVDs. But wait! There are more Wagner operas to explore!! What about *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal*, and *Tannhäuser*?

Yes, I had to admit that by now I was a true Wagner addict; a junkie for any new book about Wagner and his music, albeit, mainly about the tetralogy (I have over 120 books in my collection now). And then I started to attend live performances! And despite seven "Ring" cycles notched on my belt, (having traveled to San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago and New York), I feel like somewhat of a neophyte, but deep down I know that really isn't true. Certainly to my partner, David, of eight years, who has learned to appreciate Wagner's music over the years, he thinks that I should be writing my own books about Wagner!

This past summer, I had the pleasure of taking my adult church

Barna

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choir to Germany on a concert tour. While on our trip, I attended my first Wagner operas produced by German companies. I was literally in tears at a performance of *Tannhäuser* at the Oper Frankfurt, and enjoyed the Semperoper's production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* in Dresden. Upon our return to the Frankfurt area, the bus driver took a different route which literally took us a stone's throw away from Bayreuth. We didn't have the opportunity to stop as we were on our way to a choir performance that evening, but I certainly wanted to hijack the bus so I could just walk around the city! My goal is to attend performances at Bayreuth one of these years and I suspect it will undoubtedly happen. But as we were driving past the exit on the Autobahn, I did think back to my college professor. Yes, I'm obsessed with Wagner's music. Yes, I have spent thousands of dollars on Wagner opera tickets, books, CDs, DVDs. Yes, I have dragged my partner to three "Ring" cycles (sometimes unwillingly but eventually, gratefully). But punch my college professor in the nose? I don't think so. How can you be angry with someone who has introduced you to a world of music that continues to delight, inspire and bring so much satisfaction? A world of music that demands more exploration? A world of music that intoxicates the senses? An obsession? Absolutely! But, oh, what an obsession!

On the cover:

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg - 1. Aufzug, 3. Szene. Stolzing: Vogt, die Meister Photo: Bayreuther Festspiele

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