

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 member Bruce Bisenz.

When I was a small boy of 8 growing up in Silver Springs, MD at the dawn of TV, I visited a friend's home to watch their "huge" 12" B&W console TV. My favorite program was a Dumont network kid's program "Captain Video and his Video Rangers."

We kids were the Video Rangers and the salute was an "OK" thumb and forefinger started from the right eye socket and extending to arms length while chanting "Zoom."

But this was only after we were inspired by the sign on music - an excerpt (unknown to me since I didn't know what an excerpt was) from the overture of "The Flying Dutchman". That got me hooked right there.



Bruce Bisenz with Wolfgang Wagner

Later, around the San Fernando Valley, my girlfriend's mom always listened to the classical FM station. Her special program had some really wonderful sign-on music. After some time I asked her "What's that music" and she replied, "That's the 'Magic Fire Music' from *Die Walküre*." Well I took good note of that (although I only knew that *Die Walküre* was an opera).

Later, I sought out Wagner's music on LP. I wound up with Eileen Farrell's version of the Immolation scene. I still remember my reaction today - I felt something unique, a deeply spiritual and emotional reaction. Then I was really REALLY hooked on the entire "Ring" and finally all of the Master's work.

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What is a Wagner Tuba?



Foster Beyers conducting *Siegfried Idyll*

By Jamie Andrews

On Tuesday, February 3, 2009 Foster Beyers lead a fascinating discussion about the history of the Wagner Tuba. He talked about Wagner's search for a unique sound while he was composing the *Ring* cycle and how commissioning instruments at that time in Germany was not out of the ordinary. To help illustrate his points, a quartet of horn players from Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra played excerpts from the *Ring* and Bruckner's *Eighth Symphony*. He concluded his lecture by sighting examples of the use of Wagner Tuba in post-Wagner times, such as Stravinsky scores, current Hollywood sound tracks and even a few Motown pop tunes. (*Continued on page 6*)

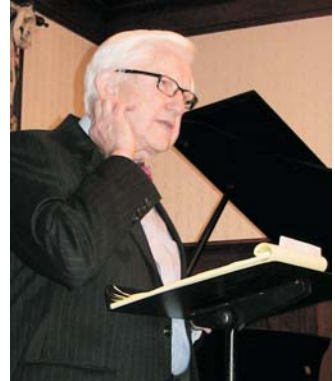
Following the Wagner Tuba discussion was a performance of the *Siegfried Idyll* played by University of Minnesota music students. The performance replicated the orchestration (one per part) as it was performed at its premiere, on the steps lead to Cosima's bedroom on her birthday.

The WSUM is very grateful to Foster Beyers for all the work coordinating the twenty plus musicians who performed at this event – it was one of the most enjoyable and interesting events the Society has held!

Tristan und Isolde Update

by David W. Cline, MD, President

Turbulent economic times are especially hard for the arts. The current troubles have claimed the American Ring of Washington National Opera as well as the Baltimore Lyric Opera Company. Numbered among the victims is unfortunately our Tristan Project.



Dr David W. cline, MD

As you know, over the past three years, the Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest has attempted to raise enough money to support The Minnesota Opera to present *Tristan und Isolde* during the 2010-2011 season. The Society's Board of Directors together with Minnesota Opera's CEO Kevin Smith worked hard to bring live Wagner Opera to the Twin Cities. We tried several options, but as the economy continued to decline, the projected deficits continued to grow to the point that Minnesota Opera determined that they are unable to produce a work of this magnitude at this time.

For those members who have submitted verbal or written pledges, they will be disregarded. For those members who have contributed funds, you should have already received this information along with a letter from Minnesota Opera as to your options for the collected gift. If you have made a payemnt on your pledge and have not yet received this letter, please contact Jamie Andrews at 612.342.9573 or by email at andrews@mnopera.org.

I want to thank you for your pledges and contributions to this fund and for your support of our Society. I hope we can look at supporting a similar project in the near future.

In Memoriam

We were saddened to learn of the recent losses of two of our valued members:

Tom McBurney

Yang Wang

We extend our heartfelt condolences to their families.

Madison Opera to Perform The Flying Dutchman

Member Tom Logeland alerted us to Madison Opera's first staging of a Wagner opera; a mere four hours from your doorstep.

Madison Opera promises that the legend of the wandering sailor will look and sound spectacular on the Overture Hall stage with Giles Cadle's stunning set designs and Maestro John DeMain at the helm of Wagner's magnificent score. Also promised are renowned artists Turid Karlsen and Bradley Garvin leading a stellar cast including Arnold Rawls, Julia Faulkner and Dean Peterson. Michael Scarola will direct the Madison Opera premiere.

Two performances only, April 9 and 11, 2010. More information at their website www.madisonopera.org or phone 608-238-8085.

Bisenz

(Continued from page 2)

I had a very active 37 year career as a TV/Film sound technician with little time to travel or even see local operas because I was so tired, working 50-60 hours a week. But in 1985 I went to see my first "Ring" in San Francisco.

I learned that there was a local Los Angeles Wagner Society. Upon my first visit, contrary to my friend's characterization of my active interest in Wagner, I found some real REAL Wagner nuts.

After that I was sure that I wanted to go to Bayreuth and asked someone there how to write to the box office. They said I was crazy and that it will take years to get into. I said I planned to live quite some more years and started writing. It only took me 6 years of writing (it takes a lot longer now!) and I was in Bayreuth.

I went up to the Festpielhaus to look around so I would be more familiar for my first opera - of course the place was deserted. The next day I rolled past crowds of spectators and lots of police guards (with ankle length green leather overcoats) on my way to the parking lot. Wow! I thought this is a big to-do for each opera!

After the astounding first act of *Lohengrin*, I watched a gauntlet of people glad hand the patrons out of the Loges. I mingled with the well dressed crowd wondering about an older man, dressed as a waiter, talking to an obviously high ranking German military man.

I edged around to see four stars on the cuff of his "Mess Jacket" and then the miniature medals that I recognized from my time in the Army. This was a full General talking to his NATO counterpart. Since the US Army was not well known for opera attendance I intuited the obvious - they were there to accompany German heads of State and Culture and other notables.

On my first visit I had blundered into the impossible - tickets to the opening of the 1991 Bayreuth Festival! Well it only got better over the years so I am hoping to see David Cline there, where I met him, next summer for my 12th season.

Founders Day Dinner

Our most popular event is our annual Founders Day Dinner. Held in the fall, it commemorates the founding of the Society when a few friends met for dinner in 1998. The response from last year was so positive that we have decided to use the same venue.

Reserve this date:

Saturday, Sept 12, 2009
Germanic – American Institute
301 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Good friends, good conversation, good food, and good entertainment.

Video Nights 7-9 PM

Second Tuesdays



Currently, we are viewing

Der Ring Des Nibelungen

(Complete Cycle recorded in 1990)

The Metropolitan Opera

James Levine, conducting

The current schedule is:

09 June 2009	<i>Siegfried</i> Act 3
14 July 2009	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Act 1
11 August 2009	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Act 2
08 September 2009	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Act 3

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.

Membership Renewals

A reminder to those who have not yet renewed their membership for 2009. Our year is on a calendar year basis. A membership form may be found at our website www.wagnertc.org.

If you have any questions about your membership status contact membership@wagnertc.org or call Carol Thomas at 612-559-6468.

New Members

Paul Straka Douglas Myhra

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

On the cover:

Wagner Tuba Quartet

From left, Paul Straka of the SPCO, Ellen Smith of MNOrch, Bernhard Scully of the SPCO, and Herbert Winslow of MNOrch.
Photo courtesy Jamie Andrews.

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