



# The Wagner Society of Ireland

Founded 2002

President: Dr. Alexander Anissimov, Conductor



## Newsletter

June 2012

### CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Dear Member,

I am sorry it has taken some time to get the newsletter to you but every time we are ready to send it more information comes in and we have more to add. I trust you will find this newsletter particularly interesting.

One of the key items of news in this newsletter is the plans for next year, and what an interesting year it promises to be. Following representation from members, we have decided to have a dinner to celebrate the 10 anniversary of the founding of the Society. This will take place on the 20th September at Donnybrook Fair. The room can only accommodate 55 so we would appreciate it if members could inform us if they are going to attend. The cost will be €30 per head excluding wine.

It is great to think that in the year of our anniversary there will also be a performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in Dublin. We, as you read below, have tickets reserved for the first performance. I am also delighted that the Finnish Wagner Society will be organising a trip to attend and we will be using the opportunity to meet them and make them welcome.

Our schedule of events this year starts in October with a lecture marking the foundation of the Society by Chris McQuaid, the title being "Wagner Chöre und Umlaute". I trust the range of lectures will provide interesting variety. Next year also sees the production of *The Flying Dutchman* in Belfast and we will organise a trip to see the performance. We also have the Milan *Ring* to look forward to as a Society expedition in July 2013, which we relish after the highly enjoyable trip to Würzburg and Nürnberg last April.

As the Society regrettably no longer receives tickets for Bayreuth it is important that members apply individually. Some might also consider becoming friends of the Festival. Details of how to do both are provided in the newsletter. We have some interesting reports on the Verband meeting in Prague and news and reviews of Wagnerian performances in various cities. I would encourage members to continue to provide us with reviews or information for the newsletter.

On behalf of the Committee I wish you a very enjoyable summer.

Kind regards  
Anthony Linehan

## SOCIETY PROGRAMME OF EVENTS – 2012

The coming season's schedule has been taking shape – some events with more details than others. More details on dates and speakers will follow as they are confirmed.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Time</u>
<b>Thursday September 20, 2012</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner of the Wagner Society of Ireland. The room can only accommodate 55 so we would appreciate if members could inform us if they are going to attend. The cost will be €30 per head excluding wine.	Donnybrook Fair, 89, Morehampton Road, Donnybrook, Dublin 4.	7.30 pm for 8.00 p.m.
<b>Sunday September 30, Wednesday October 3, &amp; Saturday October 6 2012</b>	Fully Staged Performance of <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> . The Society has made a block booking of seats at €85 for the first night of Tristan und Isolde at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, Sunday 30th September at 5.00 p.m.	Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, Grand Canal Square, Dublin 2.	5.00 p.m.
<b>October</b>	Talk by Chris McQuaid: <b>‘Wagner: Chöre und Umlaute’</b>	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2.	8.00 p.m.
<b>November</b>	Talk by Jarlath Jennings: <b>‘Technology and Opera’</b>	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2.	8.00 p.m.
<b>January 25 - 31 2013</b>	Veronica Dunne Singing Competition – We will notify members in due course when and where singers competing for the Wagner Prize are scheduled to perform.		
<b>Some time January – April 2013</b>	Talk by Julian Horton: <b>Subject to be confirmed.</b>	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2.	8.00 p.m.
<b>Some time January – April 2013</b>	Talk by Anthony Linehan: <b>‘The Human in Verdi and Wagner’</b>	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2.	8.00 p.m.
<b>Some time January – April 2013</b>	<b>Subject and Speaker to be confirmed.</b>	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2.	8.00 p.m.
<b>Friday 15 and Sunday 17 February 2013</b>	Fully Staged Performance of <i>Der Fliegende Holländer</i> . The Society will arrange a trip	NI Opera, Grand Opera House, Great Victoria St., Belfast.	
<b>May 2013</b>	Talk by Deirdre Tinney: <b>‘Loyalty, Betrayal and their Consequences in Wagner’s Operas’</b>	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2.	8.00 p.m.

## Information on other forthcoming events

Repeat of the recent 'Live on HD from the Met Ring Cycle'

### THE RING – ENCORE

1 July to 8 July 2012

This re-run of the live series is preceded by a documentary on the genesis and execution of the Robert Lepage production. It will be shown at the following venues:

Cork	Omniplex, Mahon Point
Dublin	Screen Cinema
Galway	The Eye Cinema, Wellpark Centre
Limerick	Omniplex, Dooradoyle

More detail on each film can be obtained from the following links:

[\*Wagner's Dream' Sunday 1 July 7pm\*](#)

[\*Das Rheingold Tuesday 3rd July 7pm\*](#)

[\*Die Walküre Wednesday 4th July 7pm\*](#)

[\*Siegfried Friday 6th July 5.30pm \(?\)\*](#)

[\*Götterdämmerung Sun 8th July 3pm\*](#)

Booking started May 21 and we understand there is still plenty availability.

Information: <http://www.classicalartsireland.com/the-ring-encore/>

## Derek Watson Seminar on The Ring in Scotland July 2012

Some members are travelling to participate in the intensive Study Session being led by Derek Watson on the Ring in Scotland this year.

**Wagner Society of Scotland**  
Der Ring des Nibelungen

A residential Summer School at  
Carberry Tower, near Edinburgh

15-22 July 2012

For information email

[derek@lintonbooks.plus.com](mailto:derek@lintonbooks.plus.com)

If you are travelling for this and wish to make contact with other members who are going, just let us know, and we will put you in touch with each other.

## Reports

### Bayreuth Ticket D eb acle

#### Tickets

The system for applying for tickets for Bayreuth is evolving. One can now apply online but if one has not applied for tickets before one must first get an application form which must be applied for by post. So the first step is to request an application form at the following address:

Bayreuther Festspiele  
Kartenb uro  
Postfach 10 02 62  
95402 Bayreuth  
Germany

The completed form must be returned to the festival by **October**. In future years, having received an access code one can apply online. At present it can take over ten years to get tickets but one does succeed eventually. **It is important however to apply every year** as one break in applications means that one starts counting the years one has applied again from the start. For more information see:

[https://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/english/tickets\\_service/tickets/how\\_to\\_order\\_202.html](https://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/english/tickets_service/tickets/how_to_order_202.html)

#### Friends

Another possible source of tickets is to become a member of the Friends of Bayreuth. It is stated clearly that being a Friend does not mean one will have access to tickets but it clearly helps. Also the Friends, unlike the Societies, did not have their ticket allocation removed. The joining fee is currently  260 and Membership costs  205 annually.

Application forms and further information are to be found at the Friends' website:

[http://www.freunde-bayreuth.org/html/mitglied\\_en.html](http://www.freunde-bayreuth.org/html/mitglied_en.html)

## Reviews

### Review of Tannh user, Berlin, 6 May 2012 – by Stephen Mennell

Barbara and I came over to Berlin for what proved to be an absolutely stunning concert performance of *Tannh user* in the Philharmonie last night.

The main attraction for us – worth the journey – was the conductor, Marek Janowski, who is conducting and recording an entire cycle of Wagner's operas with his Berlin forces. We have long considered Janowski the greatest living Wagner conductor. But, sensible chap that he is, he refuses any longer to conduct in the pit, because of the nonsense that now normally unfolds onstage. It was not always thus. In about 1986 we drove over to Paris to hear his outstanding *Tristan* in the Palais Garnier – I can still hear Waltraud Meier's Brang ne in my head. (Interestingly, we also saw the same production in San Francisco in 1991 with a different conductor and mainly different cast, and it was a shadow of itself – literally too, because it was even lit less well.)

Janowski reminds me in one respect of Hans Knappertsbusch, not because of the slow tempi that the great Kna sometimes adopted – Janowski inclines towards the brisk – but because when he brings his baton down at the beginning of Act I, you know that he has in mind exactly how the last bars of Act III will be paced. He doesn't pull the score around and overemphasise particular details, as so many younger conductors do (witness Vladimir Jurowski's indifferent *Meistersinger* at Glyndebourne last year). For the last ten years he has been Chief Conductor of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, and has a lifetime contract with them. The Rundfunk orchestra is descended from the main East Berlin orchestra, and though not so internationally famous as Rattle's Berlin Philharmoniker nor even as Barenboim's Staatskapelle Berlin (aka orchestra of the Staatsoper), is still an exceptionally fine orchestra. The Rundfunk chorus sounded as good as one remembers those under Wilhelm Pitz in the 1960s.

Tannhäuser was to have been sung by Torsten Kerl, but he was indisposed and the part was in the event sung by Robert Dean Smith, a fine replacement with notably clear German diction. Our own Paul McNamara was to have sung the small part of Heinrich der Schreiber – but he too was indisposed.

The rest of the cast was outstanding too: the astonishingly fine Christian Gerhaher as Wolfram von Eschenbach, Nina Stemme as Elisabeth, Albert Dohmen as the Landgrave Hermann (we saw his outstanding Sachs in Geneva a few years ago), and someone new to me, the Russian mezzo Marina Prudenskaja – young, tall, slim and with enormous power, a very convincing Venus: we shall be hearing more of her, I think.

But above all, it was the pacing and sheer quality of the playing and the singing that amazed. What need of expensive, pretentious and distracting staging? There was plenty to watch – the singers acted with their voices even if they didn't move around or perform handstands as is now normally required onstage, the female chorus walked offstage at Tannhäuser's shocking revelation, and the impact of the eight trumpets playing from the organ loft could hardly have been equalled in any pit.

Yes, it is true that Wagner's vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideally requires staging for its completion. But it is not essential, and a concert performance of this quality is far superior to 90 per cent of staged performances one is likely to see. Let us sack all the overpaid visionary producers, who appear to be bored with opera and who condescend to their audiences, whom they obviously regard as unimaginative idiots. Let the words and the music provide all the necessary inspiration. Bring back minimalist staging in the style of Wieland Wagner!

Recordings of *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* from earlier in this series have already been issued to great acclaim. The *Ring* will be performed, again in the Philharmonie, on 22 and 24 November 2012 and 1 and 15 March 2013. The spacing of the performances will make it difficult and expensive to attend the whole cycle, but it is strongly recommended.

### The Ring Live – in New York!

Many of you will have seen the *Met Live in HD* Ring of the Nibelungen production from New York in your local cinema. Having enjoyed that experience very much, I decided to take the plunge and travelled to New York in April this year to see the second of the three 2012 Ring cycles – really live!

While live operas shown in the cinema have their particular advantages – singers in close-up, behind-the-scenes interviews, weaker voices sometimes enhanced electronically, nothing compares to actually being there in person.

It was not my first visit to the Metropolitan Opera, but it was undoubtedly the most enjoyable one. Firstly, the New York Wagner Society has arranged a number of special functions, to which I was lucky enough to be invited. There I met many of their members as well as Wagner fans from all over the world, the majority of them seemingly from Australia! I was interviewed by the New York Times, told them about the Irish Wagner Society and even appeared for a few seconds in a video on the NYT website!

But of course the most important part of the trip was attending the Ring itself. It was a fantastic event. My seat was in the front row of the Family Circle, slightly to one side. It was high up but I was told by the local Society members that the acoustics there were the best in the house, and they were right.

The cast was slightly different from what we saw in the cinema – having seen Stefan Margita as Loge in *Das Rheingold* in San Francisco, I was looking forward to his singing and especially to his acting, but he was ill. Instead of Deborah Voight we had Katarina Dalayman as Brünnhilde – a great improvement, in my opinion. But the greatest disappointment was not having Jonas Kaufmann as Siegmund. He was ill and is at this moment (June 2012) still recovering. Having been lucky enough to hear and see him as Lohengrin in Bayreuth, his Siegmund was to be the highlight of my New York visit. Sieglinde was sung by the Dutch Soprano Eva-Maria Westbroek. Her husband, Frank van Aken, on his first visit to New York, had planned to be in the audience to hear/see his wife sing. Due to Kaufmann's sudden illness, and because the scheduled cover had been excused to go to Paris to give a recital, and also because van Aken was a tenor who had sung in the role opposite his wife before, he was drafted as a last-minute Siegmund replacement. He gave a competent performance but unfortunately he is no Kaufmann and does not really have a Metropolitan voice.

But overall it was a great experience, an enjoyable production. Robert Lepage's "Machine" (if you've seen the production, you'll know what I'm referring to) has been much criticised, but to me it made sense and fitted in perfectly. The Met Orchestra performed brilliantly, especially the wind section. The singing was enjoyable. Especially memorable were Hans-Peter König's deep bass voice and his portrayal of Fafner and Hagen. Dalayman was a great Brünnhilde. Jay Hunter Morris is growing into the role of Siegfried. Bryn Terfel's appearance had changed from that in the cinema production but his voice was the same as ever.

In summary – a tremendous experience – both for the eyes and the ears.

The production is being repeated in 2013 and I would urge you to attend if you get a chance.

*Michael Marr*

June 2012

## Reflection on Parsifal – by Chris McQuaid

### THE MUSIC SHINES THROUGH THE FOG

“Montsalvat” is the place where the action in Wagner's final work, Parsifal is laid, set in the Northern Mountains of Gothic Spain. Montsalvat is "inaccessible to your steps", (Lohengrin "in fernam land"), which is, I like to think, a Parallel Universe under the protection of the Holy Spirit as manifested by its physical presence, a Dove, that comes each year to strengthen the Grail, the vessel into which Christ's blood flowed at the foot of the Cross. To gain access to the Kingdom of the Grail, one has to be chosen; to be chosen, one has to be pure of heart, or have the potential so to become e.g., Amfortas and Kundry. Access, therefore is granted through a Portal, if you like. Access is controlled by a spiritual power, but egress is not! In earlier times, after the Flood, the Dove presented Noah with a sprig from an olive tree. Then again, after Christ's Baptism in the River Jordan, the Dove is present. Parsifal, in chasing a sacred swan, blunders into the Kingdom of the Grail in pursuit of his victim. Gurnemanz, earlier, in a long narrative, brings the story up to date. We meet him and some boys and knights and learn of the King's distress. He awaits a "pure fool made wise through compassion."

The prelude to Act I is sublime. It is played with the curtain closed, hence eyes closed, so that we open our minds to listen to the music and contemplate what is to follow. A tone poem or symphonic introduction perhaps? "Kobbe" describes it beautifully. Gurnemanz describes how the Grail and Spear were brought down to earth by angels and presented to Titurel. In Act I then, we meet Gurnemanz, Amfortas, Parsifal and Kundry. We hear Titurel, and note the "the Grail shines more brightly today" - yes! Parsifal is present, and the Grail recognises his presence. Parsifal does not partake in the "Love Feast"; had he done so then he would have marched off the stage with the knights, singing his head off! In order for Act II to work, Parsifal had to be a witness to the "Love Feast" and to have been affected by it. The action in the third part of Act II is pivotal so care must be taken here to be alert to hear it. Bernard Levin describes this perfectly in a review of a Royal Opera House production, published many years ago in The Times. Hence, productions that are too slow or too fast can lead to either boredom or absence of concentration, which can lead to a failure to understand. And/or sleep! Act I can come in at 1.45; 1.50, 1.55 or, God help us, 2 hours. At Bayreuth, 2 hours will be roundly booed.

Now back to Act II where we meet Klingsor, Parsifal and Kundry. Kundry is a witch; she can fly through the air with her horse. She saw the gaze of Christ as she mocked him on the Via Dolorosa; he saw her essence and was compassionate even though he was in great pain and anguish. I reckon that she is 1,937 years of age when she confronts Parsifal, a youth of 18 years. She was present at his birth and at the death of his mother. She saw his father slain. She knew him when he was in the womb. She has waited for him over the years. Her interest in him is sexual love not pure love. She is under the spell of Klingsor, a powerful and evil magician. He has the Holy Spear, which he gained with the fall of Amfortas. Amfortas fell under Kundry's charm and was seduced by her. The wielding of the Holy Spear in battle was to profane it. Parsifal, we will learn, does not repeat this error of insight. In Act II, Kundry's attempted seduction of Parsifal fails, despite her using every trick in the book available to womanly charms - even his love of his mother.

After the Kiss, Parsifal is metamorphosed; he is Amfortas and the Grail. He feels the pain of the Saviour running through his veins. He feels emptiness and despair and the desolation of

this. We understand then what "erlösung dem erlöser" means, if alert to it! Parsifal regains the Holy Spear through the intercession of the Holy Spirit; he destroys Klingsor and his Magic Garden. Kundry curses him and he leaves the stage..... to return 25 years later, perhaps?

Act III is set on Good Friday. Gurnemanz is aged yet still vigorous, Kundry is in a death-like sleep. She is awakened by Gurnemanz and hears that she is repentant. Parsifal arrives, armed as a knight, and is greeted by Gurnemanz, who recognises him and the Holy Spear. Parsifal is anointed King by Gurnemanz and Kundry is baptised; she dries Parsifal's feet with her hair. The obsequies for Titurel leads to the appearance of Parsifal, as Amfortas cries out in his terrible pain and anguish to be slain by the knights, demanding that he perform his office. Amfortas is cured of his wound by the Holy spear; Parsifal, the newly anointed King performs the ritual of the Love Feast; the Grail glows in ever brightening light; Kundry is granted eternal rest, while the Dove returns and shines it's light of approval on the ceremony. The Chorus of knights give benediction to all assembled, all on stage and the audience; Redemption to the Redeemer, redemption to all! "Erlösung dem Erlöser".

## Wagner Society Website

We would remind members to keep an eye on the [www.wagnersociety.ie](http://www.wagnersociety.ie) website. Michael Marr keeps it as up-to-date as possible, and fresh information often appears there in advance of circulation in the newsletter or by special communication.

We try to make the website as interesting and relevant as we can, Michael published an informative guide in the Newsletter of September 2011. If you have any suggestions for improvements, alterations or additions to the website, please do contact him at [michael@wagnersociety.ie](mailto:michael@wagnersociety.ie) and he'll do his best to incorporate them

## NEWSLETTER

### *Circulation and Interim Updates*

The Newsletter is circulated by email unless members do not have an email address, in which case it is sent by ordinary post. Updates or reminders are also sent by email from time to time.

### *Contributions*

The Committee welcomes contributions members themselves might like to send us, whether brief reports on performances or recordings of Wagner's works, or thoughts on aspects of his work that they would like to share with other members of the Society. Contributions can be sent by email to: [info@wagnersociety.ie](mailto:info@wagnersociety.ie)

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