



# The Wagner Society of Ireland

Founded 2002

President: Dr. Alexander Anissimov, Conductor



## Newsletter

September 2010

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter!

### CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Dear Member,

I hope you had an enjoyable summer. Those who were able to attend Bayreuth had an excellent time and it is always enjoyable to attend with other members of the Society. I had not been there for a number of years, but was lucky enough to get a ticket for Parsifal this year and really enjoyed the performance.

We are about to start our series of talks and events for members and in the Newsletter you will find details of the upcoming events. In the New Year we hope to continue our study days of Wagner's operas - this year tackling Tannhäuser.

Given our successful trip to Berlin this year your committee has been considering what trip we might make in 2011. In the event there are three trips we would like to consider. The first is the Ring Cycle in Karlsruhe and the Society there has offered to help us organise tickets and accommodation. Secondly there is the annual meeting of the Verband which this year takes place in Wrocław. The meeting of the Verband includes a meeting open to the Chairman as representative of the Society but for members there is an excellent programme of events and tours. The highlight is a performance of Parsifal. In addition, if members are interested, we are contemplating a visit to Zurich to see the new production of Parsifal and to visit the sights associated with Wagner's stay there and in Lucerne. More details of all these trips are in the newsletter.

Lastly we will as usual be applying for tickets for Bayreuth this year. We hope, if we are successful, to hold the ballot at the Christmas gathering. Ballot papers will be distributed in good time. As last year, the first 2 tickets will be for members who have never been to Bayreuth; second round tickets will be allocated to members who were not there this year, and lastly if more tickets are available all members can be in the draw. Again only members may apply for tickets.

I hope you find some of the lectures of interest to you and you will take the opportunity to attend some of the meetings and meet the other members of the Society.

Kind regards

Anthony Linehan  
Chairman

## SOCIETY PROGRAMME OF EVENTS Autumn/Winter 2010

The Society's days so far this year have been packed with a variety of events and engagements as various accounts and reports kindly produced by members for inclusion in the Newsletter will show.

Our lecture series continued apace right up until the summer break, and is about to resume shortly. Please check through the events listed below, and mark any that appeal to you in your diaries – whether a talk speaks to a special interest, whets the appetite for further knowledge about matters Wagnerian, or merely offers an opportunity for a further congenial get-together with fellow Members.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Time</u>
<b>Thursday, September 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	John Allen The Road to Valhalla - a survey of German opera before Wagner	United Arts Club 3 Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>Thursday, October 21<sup>st</sup></b>	Anthony Linehan Parsifal - the final evolution in Wagner's concept of "redemption"	United Arts Club 3 Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup></b>	Ian Fox: Wagner and Joyce (provisional title)	United Arts Club 3 Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>Thursday, December 16<sup>th</sup></b>	Christmas Event and Bayreuth Draw	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.

## POSSIBLE TRIPS

### Karlsruhe Easter 2011 (20, 21, 23, 25 April)

This Ring cycle produced by Denis Krief and which will be completed this year has garnered good reviews as it has proceeded. I note that Lance Ryan who made a major impact at Bayreuth this year is singing Siegfried. The Wagner Society in Karlsruhe has kindly offered to help us organize a trip recommending hotels etc. Karlsruhe is 76 miles southeast from Frankfurt Airport. The journey time is less than 1 hour 20 mins from Frankfurt (M), so it's easily accessed. Michael Marr has kindly offered to co ordinate members who might like to attend this Ring Cycle. He has set up the email address: [dublin.to.karlsruhe@gmail.com](mailto:dublin.to.karlsruhe@gmail.com) for all correspondence from possible travellers to the event. He asks interested members to contact him *before October 15<sup>th</sup>*, which is when the Karlsruhe Wagner Society need to know how many tickets they should hold for us. He is not looking for a firm commitment at this stage, because it should be possible to return tickets for some time after that. Please note that the performances run over the Easter Weekend 2011 (Rheingold Wednesday 20/4 - Götterdämmerung Easter Monday 25/4). If there is enough interest, he will advise members on transport and accommodation; but members will need to actually make their own arrangements.

See [http://www.staatstheater.karlsruhe.de/programm10\\_11/Spielzeitheft-2010\\_2011-Musiktheater.pdf](http://www.staatstheater.karlsruhe.de/programm10_11/Spielzeitheft-2010_2011-Musiktheater.pdf) for more details of the programme at Karlsruhe.

## Wroclaw 2 – 5 June 2011

<http://www.richard-wagner-verband.de/english/index.html>

The meeting in Lower Silesia is an opportunity to meet members from other Societies and also a chance to see a historically interesting part of Poland. The agenda for the days includes a number of organised tours. Opera performances include Tosca in three separate appropriate locations, Parsifal and a rare chance to see King Roger by Karol Szymanowski. There are also chamber concerts as part of the various tours. Please see the website for details which are in English. One can also book on the website. We would ask that members who are interested in attending to book online but inform the Society that you are attending so we can organise the Irish group.

## Zurich 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> July

Zurich is very much associated with Wagner and has a number of locations associated with him including the Wesendonck Villa. Only an hour away is Tribschen the house he lived in, in Lucerne, which is particularly beautiful and wonderfully located on the lake. I envy him that house.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> July the following operas are being performed in Zurich

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July – From the House of the Dead – Janacek

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July – Maria Stuarda – Donizetti (with Eva Mei and Elena Garanca) an excellent production I have seen before

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July – Parsifal – new production by Guth with Skelton, Salminen and Hampson in the cast.

See <http://www.opernhaus.ch/de/index.php> ?

*Zurich is a beautiful city at any time but particularly in early summer. However it is not a cheap city to visit – though flights there are quite reasonable. Tickets for the opera especially Parsifal will range from €150 to €250 for seats with good views. It is a beautiful theatre but you do not want to be seated at the back of a box. Tickets in the gods are not bad.*

If you are potentially interested in going please contact Anthony Linehan at [ritaandanthony@eircom.net](mailto:ritaandanthony@eircom.net)

## REPORT OF THE RICHARD WAGNER VERBAND INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

**Hanseatic City of Stralsund, Germany, 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2010.**

*“A tree has been planted in good ground. We are united by the ideals and music of Richard Wagner – we share our enthusiasm – it’s a learning process.” RWVI 14.5.2010.*

The Richard Wagner Verband International is a marvellous organisation. When in Congress, beauty, joy and friendship are close by .... and so in Stralsund this was the case.

The Congress formally commenced on May 13<sup>th</sup>, but it was preceded by cultural events in Stralsund Theatre, which is small but intimate. “Der Rosenkavalier” on May 12<sup>th</sup> followed by “Der Fliegende Holländer” next day. There was a “Wagner Gala” with overtures from “Rienzi”, “Tannhäuser” and “Lohengrin” and a concert performance of Act 1 of “Die Walküre”. Present at the Gala was the Mayor of Bayreuth, Dr. Hohl, and Frau Verrena Lafferentz Wagner, last surviving grand-daughter of Richard Wagner.

On Sunday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, the usual closing event took the shape of a symphonic concert by a young persons' orchestra from Northern Germany. Finalists from the 6<sup>th</sup> Wagner Voices competition were present. The usual Farewell Dinner ended the Congress. "Turandot" was performed that evening in Stralsund Theatre – a hectic week!

On this occasion, my report will focus on the meeting of delegates which took place on Friday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at 9.00 a.m. in Stralsund Theatre. I was seated in the front row with Maureen McIntosh (London) and Derek Watson / Will Scott (Edinburgh). I know all well from previous events. We were given translation radios so heard every word.

Prof. Eva Märtson, President, RWVI, welcomed all present, especially those from abroad.

She spoke about deceased members since the last Congress: Paris, Amsterdam, Saarland and Venice. Werner Herzog was remembered, as was beloved Dr. Wolfgang Wagner ("the freeing of a great soul who did so much for music in Germany"). She spoke also of the new production of "Lohengrin" and referred to Richard Wagner's "The Art Work of the Future".

The President advised that a questionnaire was sent to all Societies six months ago seeking feedback – 122 out of 139 (88%) were returned, which was very high. The Verband has 9% French speakers; 44% English speakers and 47% German speakers.

Communication by the world-wide web is now the principal means used by the Verband. The website has been modernised. It currently receives c.2000 hits each month, which can be analysed by country. Ireland had 8 hits last month. While the importance is well-known "Nothing beats meeting people in person"! One person cannot run the organisation, therefore the RWVI has an Executive Committee with:

- 4 Vice Presidents
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- 8 Others

Each person has a job. The four Vice-Presidents have been assigned a number of Societies to form links with. In our case - Dublin, London and Edinburgh - our Vice-President is Prof. Dr. Hans-Michael Schneider of Karlsruhe - a very friendly gentleman, whom I met in Copenhagen in 2003.

The Annual Report still issues each year but the main communication medium is the Internet. Indeed pictures from this Congress are posted to the website – much can be sourced by going to our website links <http://www.wagnersociety.ie>. Go to the Useful Links page, and key into International Congresses. The Executive Committee recognises the importance of pictures, given that we are visual beings!

Money matters are also important so we received an excellent briefing by the Treasurer in an oral and visual presentation of the Verband's financial position. Now that we are one organisation, equal treatment is desired as regards members' subscriptions. Following a

proposal from the Treasurer, supported by the majority of the Executive Committee, and several speeches from the floor, the meeting voted for a per capita criteria whereby all Societies should pay €2 per member, subject to a ceiling at high membership levels c.1,200 – 2,500!

The Executive Committee is progressing matters in the following areas:

- Stage design competition 2011
- Annual Scholarships – 247
- Networking
- RWVI Archive – Bayreuth
- Website – continuous development

The RWVI has 139 Societies with a membership of 26,000.

Important future events:

- Frankfurt 100 Anniversary
- Congresses
- 2011 Wroclaw
- 2012 Praha
- 2013 Leipzig

Associations in formation:

- Cambridge University
- Singapore
- Baltimore
- Oxford University
- Bodrum
- Normandy

Reaching out to youth remains a principal goal of the Verband.

The Mayor of Bayreuth, Dr. Hohl exhorted members to visit the city. He recognises the beautiful work being done by the RWVI. He spoke of the restoration of the Baroque Synagogue in Bayreuth, the only such Synagogue in Germany which wasn't destroyed during "Kristallnacht". He spoke of cruelty and barbarism. Bayreuth is a city of culture and joy as in "Schiller" – he invited members to come and celebrate the anniversary of Franz Liszt and Jean Paul, and if possible, to become involved!

My concluding comments concern the Leipzig Congress – the Wagner event of the century. The RWVI Congress is on May 18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. The City is marking the occasion from May 12<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The City, RWVI and Bayreuther Festspiele together with music schools are all co-operating to make this a memorable event – already the Wagner Society of New York has linked with Leipzig!!

Applications for the next Congress in Wroclaw, Poland, June 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011 can be made on line on the RWVI website. The programme includes a new production of "Parsifal". Ryanair and Lufthansa fly there.

**Christopher McQuaid, Hon. Vice-President**

## NEWS, REVIEWS and MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

### **SOCIETY TRIP TO BERLIN – 10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2010**

Berlin in February welcomed a large group from our Society to enjoy many nights of Wagner at the Deutsche Oper.

Our Chair, Anthony Linehan, had done a great job of organising the tickets as well as a comfortable, well-situated and reasonably priced hotel, the Steigenberger (near the Kurfürstendamm).

Alas, even Anthony couldn't organise the Berlin local authority to clear the footpaths of snow - shortage of money we heard. (That made us feel at home). It didn't stop the hardy Society members from exploring the fine city of Berlin, enjoying its museums, restaurants, the Reichstag, a little shopping....

A very fine production of Rienzi opened the proceedings. We saw Lohengrin, Tannhäuser, Flying Dutchman and Meistersinger. All of them worked well - except that some of us had reservations about 'Dutchman' taking place in a stock exchange and a women's hairdressers....the discerning audience cheered the great singers and the fine orchestra - and booed the production.

Some aspects of the week stood out: the surprise of the excellent Rienzi, and the especially superb Tannhäuser. Some great voices - this writer notes Hans Peter König (Daland) Stephen Gould (Tannhäuser) Waltraud Meier (Ortrud). Others will have their own favorites. A particularly welcome aspect of the week was the friendly atmosphere and great sociability among members.

The Irish Ambassador, Dan Mulhall, kindly entertained the Society along with the Berlin Wagner Society for a very hospitable and friendly reception.

This was the first major outing for the Society (apart from the pilgrimages to Bayreuth) and your Committee were more than satisfied that it was a great success. Renewed thanks and congratulations to Anthony.

*Gemma Hussey*

### **COMMEMORATION SERVICE FOR DR. WOLFGANG WAGNER - FESTSPIELHAUS – 11th April, 2010**

I attended the Commemoration Service for Dr. Wagner on my own behalf, on behalf of our Society, and on behalf of the Wagner Society of Scotland of which I am a member. It was a very dignified event with speeches interspersed with music.

Artists came from all over the World. I saw Peter Schneider and Sir John Tomlinson in Bayerischer Hof. Waltraud Meier was there, as was Siegfried Jerusalem. One could go on

with a very long list. I met members of the Richard Wagner Verband, including Hon. President Josef Lienhart. The co-directors of the Bayreuther Festspiele, Katharina and Eva Wagner-Pasquier, daughters of Wolfgang, were there. In attendance was the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Angela Merkel, who attended in a private capacity. Speeches were given by Bavarian Ministerpresident, Horst Seehofer, Christian Thielemann and Professor Joachim Thiery (Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Leipzig, and a life-long friend). The music was conducted by Christian Thielemann, with members of the Festspiele orchestra and choir, with chorus master Eberhard Friedrich.

The music programme was the Prelude from Act I of Lohengrin; Siegfried's Rhine Journey from *Götterdämmerung*; Motet "Denn er hat seinen Engeln befohlen" (Psalm 91) by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy; concluding with the Prelude to *Meistersinger* with Choral.

Wolfgang Wagner was deeply loved by all staff, artists and those who love what is the miracle of Bayreuth. He devoted his whole working life (57 years) to the work of his grandfather. I was privileged to meet him in Venice 2006, at the RWVI Competition for Wagner Voices, and grateful to attend this service of farewell.

*Christopher McQuaid*

#### **THE RING IN LOS ANGELES – June 2010**

In June this year I attended the new production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Los Angeles. This was originally supposed to be the "Star Wars" Ring, produced with the assistance of George Lucas, but this did not happen due to the downturn in the computer industry and in the end this production cost "only" \$32m.

This Ring was directed by Achim Freyer, the famous German theatre director, and has received mixed reviews. There was little scenery, just a very steeply angled stage with a circular section which rotated frequently, requiring a lot of agility from the performers. Light sabres (ex-Star Wars) were used in abundance. A huge, strange eye (Wotan's?) appeared occasionally on the set.

The conductor was James Conlon, and to me the highlight of each evening was his appearance exactly 1 hour before the performance to give an excellent, detailed 45-minute exposition of that evening's opera, explaining the leitmotiv which he played from his ipod!

The singing by the international cast was splendid, with many impressive performances, including Arnold Bezuyen (Loge), Eric Halfvarson (Fafner / Hunding / Hagen), Graham Clarke (Mime), Michelle deYoung (Fricka / Sieglinde / Waltraute / 2<sup>nd</sup> Norn). The main roles were sung by Vitalij Kowaljow, who was a remarkable Wotan; Linda Watson impressed as Brünnhilde; John Treleaven was an average Siegfried. The role Siegmund was sung, to great acclaim from the audience, by Placido Domingo, who is also General Director of the LA Opera.

Overall it was a very enjoyable experience and well worth the trip.

*Michael Marr*

## **OUR TRIP TO THE WAGNER FESTSPIEL – August, 2010**

To our great amazement and delight we got tickets for Bayreuth in our first ballot and immediately booked our flights and blocked out a week in the diary. Before we knew it, the time had come and we were off to Munich, where we picked up a rental car to Bayreuth. Our tickets were for Parsifal and Meistersinger and we planned to stay two nights.

We arrived at the hotel with lots of time in hand and set off on foot to have a look at the town. Our first feel-good experience happened as we were perusing the map. A local lady stopped to ask where we were heading, and then guided us to the pedestrian zone. Before she continued on her way, she mentioned that as it was a Wednesday during the Festspiel, we might like to listen to an organ concert in the Spitalkirche starting at 12 noon. It was a most enjoyable concert: Toccatas by Buxtehude, Dubois, Bach and a modern composer, Jürgen Essl, and the church was packed.

Our hotel organised transport to The Hill and at 15:15 we were on our way in our best bib and tucker. The style was wonderfully elegant and we particularly enjoyed admiring the exquisite traditional Tracht outfits worn by many of the Bavarian and Austrian ladies. There was a good mix of young and old but we have to say that the majority of the participants were middle-aged plus.

There are many wine bars set up around the opera house, as well as fully-fledged dining opportunities. We opted for a glass of wine at each of the intervals giving us time to interiorize the music and watch the world go by. We met up with some of the members of our Society and that was a great pleasure.

About the operas: Parsifal was a classical production, beautifully performed and sung with a truly wondrous staging. Everything worked to perfection with just one tiny blot – the throwing of the spear! At that point the otherwise excellent timing of the lighting effects went horribly wrong. That's live opera for you, never a dull moment! The 180-strong chorus was most impressive, producing a wave of glorious, opulent sound in a beautiful blend of voices that swept into the house like a tsunami. We thought the Guernamanz of Kwangchul Youn (South Korea) was magnificently sung, a real Germanic sound, even if one might like a more imposing stage presence, while the Titirel of the Brazilian Diogenes Randes made one think of Hotter (though this was not the impression he gave in Meistersinger)! The other cast members were all beautifully prepared and executed their roles in a way that enhanced this remarkable production. The house is very interesting – because of the seats, the more experienced members of the audience took along some cushions – varying from patio type to beautiful silk-covered ones. Of course the sight lines are good and the sound superb. (Incidentally, our seats were excellently positioned.) Our second opera was Meistersinger – a very modern production by Katarina Wagner - with some provocative moments. One was left wondering “Why?” for long periods. The music was, of course, beautiful and the audience applauded very enthusiastically as the singers took their bows. However, when Katarina Wagner appeared in front of the curtain, the audience booed. And how they booed!!! She simply gave a shrug of her shoulder and smiled!

Sorry to say that the Hans Sachs of James Rutherford was not a sympathetic portrayal. The man has huge vocal resources but tends to “overblow” when he clearly doesn't need to. Adrian Eröd was a fine Beckmesser and Klaus Florian Vogt predictably won the affection of the audience with his singing of Walther. But what an awful production!

A word about the orchestral playing – just one – fabulous!

We enjoyed very good Bavarian dishes for dinner - the first evening at the restaurant Weiherstefan in the Bahnhofstrasse. All the restaurants stay open to cater for the Festival guests. It is the most important time of the year for hospitality business in the town. On the second evening we joined some of the Irish crowd in the Goldener Löwe restaurant and we had a very enjoyable time – until after 2am!

We hope to have another opportunity to return to Bayreuth – not sure about bringing a cushion or two. We'll think about it!

*Elaine Girard and Padraig O'Rourke*

## FILM PRODUCTIONS

**Live in HD in many cinemas, from the Metropolitan Opera in New York**

**Reminder: New productions coming up:**

**DAS RHEINGOLD** (9 October 2010 – includes Patricia Bardon as Erda)

**DIE WALKÜRE** (14 May 2011)

Tickets on sale from September 13: Check <http://www.operaireland.ie/> for more information.

## 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. The Committee would urge all members to check the Society Website: [www.wagnersociety.ie](http://www.wagnersociety.ie) on a regular basis to check for updates. The Committee will also try to update Members who don't have email addresses by texting mobile phones or leaving a phone message, but this is a less convenient and reliable method given the way the Committee is set up and operates.

### *Contributions*

In addition to seeking contributions from members, 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)