



# The Wagner Society of Ireland

Founded 2002

President: Dr. Alexander Anissimov, Conductor



## Newsletter

September 2011

### CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Dear Member,

The Committee hopes you had an enjoyable summer. Some Members were in Bayreuth and Bruce Arnold, who was previously there in 1959, has kindly offered to give us the first talk after summer, comparing and contrasting his two visits. We have largely finalised our schedule of talks until next summer and hope you will find that at least some of them are of interest to you. Dates to the end of 2011 are now fixed, but further details are needed, and some possible changes may occur, for 2012. We will update the website as information becomes available and the next Newsletter will also provide more details. A key part of the year will be our continuing Study Days on Wagner's Operas with Derek Watson. We continue with *Lohengrin* in October and hope in spring to follow with *Tristan*. That we are having talks twice this year is following representations from Members.

This newsletter also contains a review of the trip to Karlsruhe by Mary Spollen and I contribute a short note on the Congress in Wrocław this year. Ian Fox kindly supplied a bibliography for those interested in following up some of the things discussed in his lecture last November, while Michael Marr reminds us of the website. Lastly, Chris McQuaid has offered some thoughts on the new production of *Tannhäuser* in Bayreuth this year.

We look forward to seeing you at meetings

Kind regards,

Anthony Linehan,  
Chairman

## SOCIETY PROGRAMME OF EVENTS 2011/ 2012

Our wide-ranging programme of lectures was very well attended over the past months and plans for the forthcoming season are well advanced. While the Committee issues invitations to possible speakers, we also welcome suggestions from Members who would like to give a talk on an aspect of Wagner that they find particularly interesting.

Some Members like to head homewards or elsewhere immediately after a lecture. Others gather downstairs for a chat in the Bar of the United Arts Club and any Members – particularly new Members – who wish to stay awhile should not hesitate to join us there over a glass of something or a cup of coffee.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Time</u>
<b>2011</b>			
<b>Thursday, 22 September</b>	Talk by Bruce Arnold: Bayreuth 1959 and 2011. My two visits.	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>Saturday, 15 October</b>	<i>Lohengrin</i> Study Day with Derek Watson	Herbert Park Hotel, Ailesbury Road, Dublin 4.	9.30 am.
<b>Thursday, 24 November</b>	Talk by Pdraig O'Rourke	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>Thursday, 15 December</b>	Christmas Event and Bayreuth Draw	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>2012</b>			
<b>Jan</b>	Talk by Paul McNamara: Singing Wagner	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>February</b>	Talk by John Allen	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>March</b>	Talk by Chris McQuaid: <i>Parsifal</i>	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.
<b>April</b>	<i>Tristan</i> Study Day with Derek Watson	Herbert Park Hotel, Ailesbury Road, Dublin 4.	9.30 a.m.
<b>May</b>	Trip to Wurzburg for <i>Tristan</i> with Paul McNamara as Tristan	Wurzburg	
<b>May 17– 20</b>	International Congress in Prague	Prague	
<b>May</b>	Talk by Ian Fox: Irish Visitors to Bayreuth	United Arts Club 3, Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2	8.00 p.m.

## Reports, Information, Reviews....

### Karlsruhe Easter 2011 (20, 21, 23, 25 April) – Report from Mary Spollen

On the evening of Wednesday 20 April 2011 a party of 14 (10 male, four female!) met in sunshine at the Badisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe for the opening opera in the Wagner Society's visit to *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Karlsruhe, a city in the Baden-Württemberg province of Germany, is an hour's train journey south of Frankfurt Airport. It is approaching its 300th birthday. It is laid out in a fan shape from the Schloss and is the seat of the Federal Constitutional Court and Germany's highest Court of Appeal. The Opera House was built in 1975 with seating for 1,000 and excellent sight lines. Our seats were superb, only a few rows from the stage, giving us the opportunity to observe at close range the singers' facial expressions.

The production by Denis Krief was conducted by Justin Brown. It was created over 2004-6 and this was its fourth full performance and the only one in 2011. It was simple rather than distracting and did much to illuminate the story. The stage machinery was used to great effect and video provided many of the stage effects such as the Rhine, fire, the ravens. Costumes were 'comfortable' and lighting was superb. The undoubted star of the production was the Canadian Heldentenor, Lance Ryan. He sang both Siegmund and Siegfried to great acclaim. He had previously been a permanent member of the Karlsruhe ensemble and was well known to the audience. He sang Siegfried in Bayreuth in 2010 and is due to return to the role there in 2013. He brought great energy and vitality to the role and was a wholly believable Siegfried.

The role of Wotan was taken by three different singers - Thomas Jesatko (*Das Rheingold*), Thomas Johannes Mayer (*Die Walküre*) and Albert Dohmen (*Siegfried*). The Brünnhilde was Caroline Whisnant, who gathered strength over her three operas and provided a very credible Immolation scene.

There were many interesting features in the production. While the dragon in *Das Rheingold* was conventional, in *Siegfried* the dragon emerged from his cave and removed his dragon costume to appear again as Fafner. An interesting variation was the close interaction between Siegfried and the Woodbird. When Siegfried seduces Brünnhilde on behalf of Gunter he was dressed exactly like him.

As with most Ring productions, the final scene was thought provoking. The entire cast were seen as exhibits in a museum around the perimeter of the revolving stage. For the burning of Valhalla, they all expired save one male figure, who was joined by the Rhine maidens at the curtain. This was Alberich. The Ring was given in the traditional manner with the four operas spread over six evenings. On the first free day (Good Friday), a most informative walking tour had been organised for us with an excellent English-speaking guide. That evening there was a Recital at the Opera House, which we all attended, given by Ewa Wolak (alto), who sang Erda and Barbara Dobrzanska (soprano), accompanied by Jochem Hochstenbach (piano). The programme consisted of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*, R. Strauss' *Four Last Songs* and Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*. At the end of the Recital the Intendant presented the two singers with the award of Kammersänger and read lengthy citations detailing their career achievements.

Some of us attended Mass on Easter Sunday morning in the “Unsere Liebe Frau” church. The celebration included a performance of Mozart’s Coronation Mass and concluded with the Hallelujah Chorus in English. There was plenty to do in Karlsruhe – museums, art galleries, zoo, botanical gardens, even shops! The very efficient (and economical) transport system gave access to the surrounding area and some members of the group visited Baden Baden and various Black Forest villages close by or went for walks along the Rhine river.

Our host for the trip was Prof. Hans-Michael Schneider, who had issued the invitation and secured superb tickets for us. He and his wife met us each evening at the Opera House. On the day of *Siegfried* we organised a lunch which was attended by Prof Schneider and his wife as well as Dr Eva Märtson, President of WVI (the International Association of Wagner Societies). Dr Märtson spoke briefly of her particular mission to interest young people in Wagner’s music, particularly at University level.

On behalf of all those who travelled, I wish to express our thanks to Michael Marr for his organisation both before and during the trip.

### Richard Wagner Verband International – Wrocław 2 - 5, June 2011: Report from Anthony Linehan

The Wagner Congress in Wrocław was again an opportunity to meet fellow Wagnerians and attend some interesting operas. Another aspect of the congresses is the opportunity to visit cities one otherwise might not have. Wrocław (formally Breslau) is directly accessible from Ireland and a most interesting and beautiful city. The city of Breslau was the third largest city in Germany at the time of German unification: it is now a Polish city populated by Poles who originated in Lvov. Walking around and reading its history reminds one of the turmoil in Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is hard for our island community to appreciate. The city in the centre is largely rebuilt and there is a particularly magnificent central square. The area around the cathedral island is also very interesting and personally I found the monument to the Katyn massacre, which I stumbled on in my walks, very moving. The congress also organise tours to interesting places outside Wrocław but unless there is a minimum of ten English speakers there is no tour in English which is a significant disadvantage. In future years we will communicate with the other English speaking societies to try to ensure that tours for English speakers are better organised.

Wrocław has a beautiful opera house. To my mind it was the perfect size house seating; I imagine less than a thousand. The stage was of a size on which large-scale works such as *Boris Godunov* and *Parsifal* could be produced, while one could equally imagine works like the *Marriage of Figaro* working well. I could not help but feel envious again that Dublin has no such opera house. In all, we saw three works and, being honest, the standard was of a high provincial level rather than of international standard. I was reminded how enjoyable works can be even if not of the Royal Opera or Met standard, and one very much appreciated the effort that had gone into producing the works. Not many companies could produce *Boris Godunov*, *Parsifal* and *King Roger* over three successive nights. Of the singers, the Marina in *Boris* was particularly impressive.

Next year the Congress will be in Prague where the operas will be *Parsifal*, *Così* in the beautiful Estates Theatre where *Don Giovanni* was first performed, and also *Rusalka*.

## Bibliography - Wagner and Joyce

Ian Fox kindly supplied the following bibliography for those interested in following up some of the things discussed in his lecture last November.

**Timothy Martin**, *Joyce and Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) which contains an extensive bibliography

**Richard Ellmann**, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959)

**Mason and Ellmann**, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959)

**Friedrich Nietzsche** *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (first translation 1896, and numerous subsequent editions)

**Joseph Bédier** *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult* (New York: Random House, 1945)

**Clive Hart and David Hayman** (eds) *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977).

**John Bishop** *Joyce's Book of the Dark* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986)

**Stuart Gilbert** *James Joyce's Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1955)

**Clive Hart** *A Concordance to Finnegans Wake* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1963)

**Clive Hart** *Structures and Motifs in Finnegans Wake* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1962)

**Zack Bowen** *Musical Allusions in the works of James Joyce* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1975)

## Your Website – An Informative Guide from Michael Marr

Have you looked at the [www.wagnersociety.ie](http://www.wagnersociety.ie) website recently? We try to keep it up-to-date for you with the latest information.

On the first page you can usually read about our upcoming Wagner Society events and other news.

To navigate through the rest of the site, use the links at the top of the page. Of particular interest:

- **Events** – a list of our upcoming events, as well as those from previous years, and some interesting reports
- **Useful links** to other websites, including
  - Other Wagner Societies worldwide – have a look to see what they are up to.
  - Travel sites – airlines, ticket and music tour agencies, German Railways (useful for booking your train ticket to Bayreuth)
  - Other websites where you can find out about future presentations of Wagner operas world-wide; databases of Wagner performances in Bayreuth and New York's Metropolitan Opera; a site showing an excellent video of a concert performance of Parsifal; other Wagner-related sites.
- **Newsletters** – an archive of your Society's newsletters.

We try to make the website as interesting and relevant as we can. If you have any suggestions for improvements, alterations or additions to the website, please do contact me at [michael@wagnersociety.ie](mailto:michael@wagnersociety.ie) and I'll do my best to incorporate them

## Bayreuth Festival August 2011

A number of lucky Members who secured tickets in last December's ballot travelled to Bayreuth in the second half of August to attend a range of works in Wagner's magnificent Festspielhaus. *Die Meistersinger*, *Lohengrin*, *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde* were attended as planned. And some even managed to secure tickets separately for the new production of *Tannhäuser*. All performances led to lively debate and discussion, and we believe it is safe to say that a very good time was had by all our Members who attended this unique Festival. Bruce Arnold will give a comparative account of his two visits – in 1959 and 2011 – to the Festival, to our September Meeting. Chris McQuaid's reaction to the new *Tannhäuser* production follows:

### *TANNHÄUSER AT BAYREUTH 2011 – Review by Christopher McQuaid*

This was a complex and unusual yet musically satisfying production. To understand it at a deeper level I have started to read Friedrich Nietzsche, wherein I hope to find an explanation for this production, which was shocking at first sight. I have purchased "The Birth of Tragedy" to assist - not light reading, you will agree. I fear that one needs a minimum of a Master's Degree in Philosophy to get to the root of meaning in this striking production. It is set in a plant (Venusberg) where excrement is processed to yield biogas, of which a by-product is ethyl alcohol, which the workers consume in large gulps from large red mugs. At a more intellectual level the struggle is, I quote from the notes: "...about choosing between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. At the end Tannhäuser is not able to find either of them."

The curtain is already open when one enters the Festspielhaus and the workers are working. There are no set changes per se. However, a Charles Darwin prop rises from the centre of the stage with evolving beings in a circular cage in which Tannhäuser has been cavorting with a very pregnant Venus. The shepherd is clearly intoxicated and having lots of fun. The pilgrims (workers) are sweeping and dusting their paths to Rome. In Act II during the singing contest the workers (guests) bop along, swaying from side to side with the music. Tannhäuser smokes an occasional cheroot using a lighter. Venus is a spectator. There are video images behind the plant with strange goings on, not unlike the breeding rabbits in a previous production of *Parsifal*. There are notices and screened statements such as "Mann gegen Mann" (Man against Man). In Act III a video of Elizabeth being assumed into Heaven is shown as Wolfram sings "O du, mein holder Abendstern.". At the choral conclusion Venus' new-born baby is passed around by the chorus.

In this, and all other productions at Bayreuth, the music shines through the fog. After all, the Bayreuther Festspiele is an experimental theatre where the crowning glories are the acoustics, the chorus and the orchestra. The soloists are variable, but they are mere mortals who work very hard at their art. The choral singing was heavenly, and of course the Ensemble in Act I was brilliant, as ever, as was the wonderful concluding passage in Act II: "Nach Rome!"

The music was marvellous and it was a privilege to be there at the 100th Bayreuther Festspiele.

## 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. See above for Michael Marr's guided tour to the website.

### *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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