

The Raven

Newsletter of

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest

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In this issue

Bayreuth 2005: A Psychiatrist reacts to the Schlingensief production of Parsifal

William Fietzer: How I got started with Wagner

Wagner Performance Fund

Founder's Day 2005

and More

How I started with Wagner ...

William (Bill) Fietzer continues our tradition of members telling their stories of how they became interested with the works of Richard Wagner. Bill is a copy writer, librarian, and mystery/suspense writer who now resides in Minneapolis with his wife, family, and 15 year-old gray tabby, Dashiell. He has published short fiction, an award-winning play, *A Question of Benefit*, several articles, and two books. **Penal Fires** is his first novel; his second, **Metadata Murders**, is with his publisher.



My Introduction to Wagner
By William Fietzer

I must have been eight or, at the most, ten years old. This was in the mid-50's, when TV needed all the programming it could find, and Hollywood needed to find some other money stream from its cartoon archives since most cinemas were eliminating cartoons and newsreels to reduce costs and increase the number of times movie features could be shown. So, Warner Brothers struck a deal with the TV networks to show its old cartoon shorts during that period of time in the afternoon between the home economics programs and the evening news segments. American Bandstand appealed to teenagers; the Three Stooges to more juvenile tastes. To fill out those time slots, some stations showed the old Bugs Bunny/Elmer Fudd cartoons.

One of the cartoons they sometimes showed was the classic Chuck Jones Wagnerian spoof entitled "What's Opera, Doc?" I, whose only acquaintance with any kind of music approaching the sublime was my father's 45 compilation of Glen Miller hits that included "Stardust," immediately grew enchanted and amused by the story, and enraptured by the music, though I had no idea at the time whose music they had used for the basis of their cartoon.

Years later, after an obligatory college course in music appreciation and a TV viewing of Leonard Bernstein's "The Unanswered Question," my wife and I were on our grand tour of Europe during the spring and summer of 1976. After a full day of touring the grounds of

Schönbrunn, the Hapsburg Emperor's summer residence located at the outskirts of Vienna, we decided to supplement our cultural education by taking a chance on obtaining standing room only tickets to *Tristan und Isolde*, performed that evening by the Vienna Staatsoper. After waiting two hours in line for the tickets, we endured a five hour rendition of *Tristan*. Despite the agony in our feet (my wife endured the experience in high heels), we were transported, so much so, in fact, that I helped carry her back to our room after the performance with Wagner's sublime and transformative "Love and Death" theme running through my mind. My love and appreciation of Wagner and his music cemented after that eventful performance, and I have been a staunch devotee ever since.

If you would like to share your story, please let us know! Email Newsletter@wagnertc.org or contact the editor, Carol Thomas, at 763-442-9432.

A Note to Our Members:

Dear Members,

As some of you already know, our editor, Carol Thomas, has been seriously ill. While she is finally home from the hospital, she is taking a short leave from her editorial duties while she convalesces. I know you all join with me in wishing her a speedy recovery. Until then we will present you with a combined edition of *The Raven*.

I have some good news to report: we have just received word from Bayreuth that for the third year in a row our Society will be receiving Festspiel tickets. Next summer, eleven members will be making the pilgrimage to the Grünen Hügel.

It is also time to renew your memberships. Your memberships help support the activities and programs of the Society. Also, please consider giving an additional tax-deductible gift to our Performing Wagner fund. This fund will help support aspiring young Wagnerian performers such as Seth Keeton, whom we heard sing at our last Founder's Day Dinner.

Sincerely
David W. Cline, M.D.
President

Parsifal: A Personal Experience at the Wagner Festspiel

By David W. Cline, M.D.



JOURNAL ENTRY: 24 August 2005, Mittwoch 0330 Bayerischer Hof, Bayreuth, Germany

I have had a most extraordinary day! From 4:00 p.m. to 10:15 p.m. I attended the Wagner Festspiele presentation of *Parsifal* conducted by Pierre Boulez (his last performance at Bayreuth-he is 80 years old), and directed by Christoph Schlingensief. Amfortas was Alexander Marco-Buhrmester, Titurel – Kwangchul Youn, Gurnemanz – Robert Holl, Parsifal – Alfons Eberz, Klingsor – John Wegner, and Kundry – Michelle DeYoung.

It was the most extraordinary production impacting the most profound meaning, the most moving of the four times I have seen *Parsifal* and, the best opera experience of my life. The audience also approved because, although there was booing, especially for the production by Christoph Schlingensief, those approving out-shouted, out-clapped, and out-stomped their feet on the wooden floor for 30 minutes after the music stopped with too many curtain calls to count. I shall tell you about this extraordinary experience.

It started on Tuesday, August 23, with a European buffet breakfast at Hotel Bayrischer Hof with two soft boiled eggs served in egg cups, ham, potatoes, wonderful German dark nut bread, croissant with marmalade preserve and delicious hot coffee. Then a swift walk to the Grünen Hügel (Green Hill) to the Festspielhaus Restaurant for an excellent symposium graciously sponsored by the New York Wagner Society and moderated by Verena Kossodo. Jeffrey Bullard, a classicist and dean at Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, Virginia, discussed the opera *Parsifal*. At the end of his presentation he made a poignant remark regarding the current production which began last year and is very controversial. At the end of the opera we see maggots eating a dead rabbit (which appeared alive throughout the

opera) on a video screen, and Klingsor, when banished by Parsifal in Act II, goes into the universe strapped to a rocket. At the end of his remarks Professor Bullard said, "Don't try to figure out what's going on, but just let your experience speak to you. This production is 'performance art' like 'The Gates' presented in Central Park, New York City by Christo and Jean-Claud in February 2005." So what spoke:

The prologue begins and is all lovely. This is the first time I have heard the Bayreuth sound starting with the Grail Theme; it mellowed me. The first scene with Gurnemanz awakening the pages is in a set with a lot of staging; multiple buildings, towers, high chain-link fences with razor wire on top, all on a rotating stage. In the back is a screen on which is projected various images; disco lights, movies of bacteria moving around, an anteater sucking up ants, a beautiful woman with clear satisfaction slowly sucking the tip of an index finger of a large hand. A rabbit in the form of a stuffed toy stage prop in various sizes appears off and on throughout the drama. The next to final scene, a dead rabbit is eaten by maggots – from death to new life. The final scene is of a single human form walking off in the distance toward the lighted doorway at the end of a tunnel. But, I get ahead of myself.

To say the least, there was a lot transpiring on this stage which many say distracted from the music. Besides the usual cast of characters there were doubles, and even triples, of certain characters. Parsifal had at least three doubles, and he himself would morph into an angel, a sinner, a seducer, a seducee, a contrite little boy, an angry aggressor, and a Christ figure in a white gown smeared with menstrual blood during the communion served at the end of the first act. For Kundry, there were at least 5 or 6 doubles: the young seductive teenager naked from the waist down who gets laid by Parsifal in a shack in the second act, a young black woman with large buttocks and an Afro hairdo who washes Parsifal's feet, a large fat brown Asian woman who looks like the Buddha is wheeled in legs astride. In a pagan primitive ritual she menstruates prodigiously while the Grail knights dip their fingers into her menstrual blood and then imprint it on Parsifal's white gown (her perineum faces towards the back of the stage, done moribundly, but not offensively). Then Klingsor, a black man, walks up a ladder (with his back to the ladder) and becomes a white devil, and then a poor suffering SOB.

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My first effort was to try to keep up with everything going on. However, this was impossible! How did I cope? I went to sleep midway through the First Act. When I aroused myself I tried again to take it all in. I couldn't. Then, I became frustrated and asked myself, "Are we having fun now?" "No", I responded. "How did I get myself into this unsavory mess. I'm never coming back here again, I am done with Wagner!" Then I got a headache, then I felt damn mad! As I squirmed in my seat, I remembered Jeff Bullard's directive, "not what does this mean, but what is your reaction?" I definitely was having a reaction! Then my training in psychodynamic psychiatry came to the fore. I was having a counter transference reaction to my patient who in this case was the opera production of Christoph Schlingensiefel. What I beheld pushed my buttons. I prefer, and try hard to see the human experience as noble, gallant efforts to do good, that people are by and large, good and make honorable efforts at behaving properly. Once more, I could never imagine the holy of holy communion be displayed as the communicants dipping their hands into vaginal menstrual blood then raising their hands on high and parading to Parsifal, now depicted as a Christ figure, and imprinting their hands on his snow white gown while the glorious music of the communion scene as the end of Act I comes forth! Shocking! But then my free association came in the words of the institution of Holy Communion of the Last Supper, "This is My body and My blood given to you, do this in remembrance of me."

Then came an amusing association - it was from the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical "South Pacific" in the person of Bloody Mary. The association was to the song the sailors sing "Bloody Mary is the Girl I Love!" Oh my God! Shocking! Is this "love" a deeper, primitive, tribal manifestation of both affection and redemption? Is this "communion" a gross, hideous primal means by which we restore, rejuvenate and recreate ourselves into a higher calling? My answer was "maybe."

But what struck me was the horrible pathetic state of mankind. I hadn't realized that we were so deprived! Schlingensiefel was confronting me with the hideous, derived, god awful aspects of the human experience. So by the end of the first act the anger and headache was gone; I felt sad and wanted to cry. I didn't then, but I did later in the third act when the redemption scene took place.

Amfortas washed Kundry's feet, Kundry washed Amfortas' feet, Parsifal washed Kundry's feet, and she his. Then all three joined hands which were tied together with a red ribbon by somebody's double (I don't know whose) and the three paraded around slowly in a circle of muted delight and I cried, sobbed as quietly as I could, for the gruesome, horrible, pathetic, wholesome, beauty of the redemption there before my weeping eyes. More associations, this time from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "The Song of Hiawatha." In the introduction he bids us "listen to this Indian legend, to this song of Hiawatha!" reminding us that we are related through our humanity.

*Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,
Who have faith in God and Nature,
Who believe, that in all ages,
Every human heart is human,
That in every savage bosom,
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,
For the good they comprehend not,
That the feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness
And are lifted up and strengthened;
Listen to this simple story,
To the song of Hiawatha.*

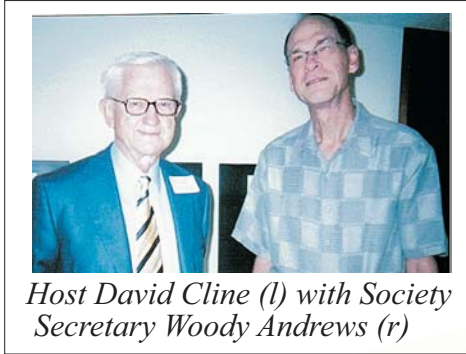
And finally, from the Whippenpoof:

*We are poor little lambs who have lost our way,
We are poor little sheep who have gone astray,
Gentlemen long go off on a spree,
damned from here to Eternity,
God have mercy on such as we,
baa, baa, baa.*

"Redemption to the Redeemer" is the final line that the opera chorus sings. Yes indeed, each of the central characters of this opera has been redeemed through their forgiveness/redemption of another.

I have experienced a new level of "Gesamtkunstwerk."

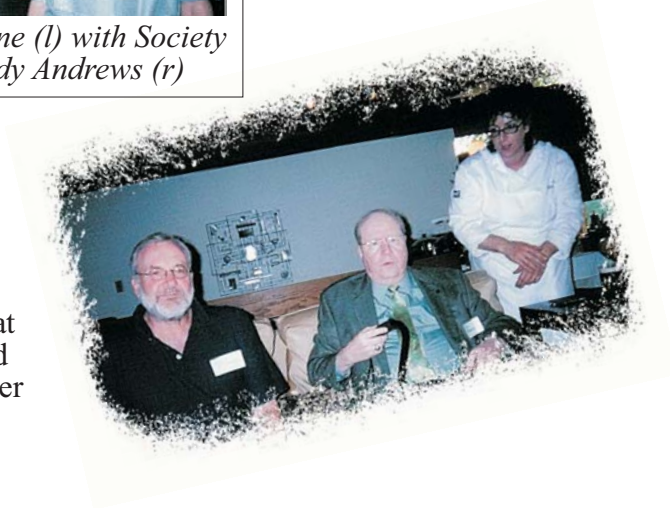
2005 Founder's Day Dinner



Host David Cline (l) with Society Secretary Woody Andrews (r)



The Founder's Day dinner and annual business meeting was held at the home of David Cline on September 9, 2005.



During the evening, we were treated to a short program of Wagner's music performed by Seth Keeton, Minnesota Opera Resident Artist, and John De Haan, Voice Faculty at the University of Minnesota. We heard excerpts from *Siegfried* (Siegfried, Mr De Haan)

Das Rheingold s iv (Wotan,

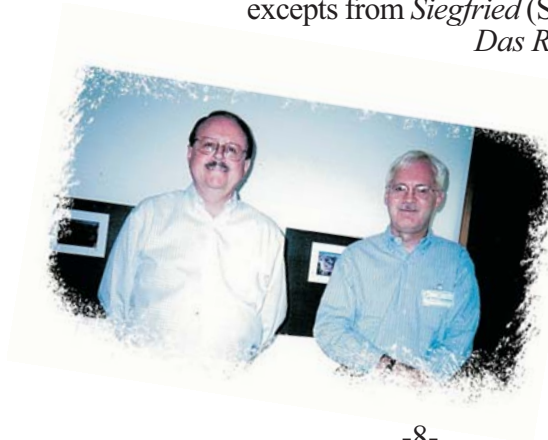
Mr Keeton), and

Parsifal Act III

(Parsifal,

Mr De Haan). In

addition, we heard reports from members who had attended the festival in Bayreuth.



*Program
Director
Jamie
Andrews
Introduces the
performers.
Accompanist
Tim Lovelace
is at the piano*



The Wagner Society is very grateful to Dr. Cline for opening up his lovely home for our meeting.



Photos courtesy David W. Cline

Internationally acclaimed tenor John De Haan will be performing at Glimmerglass Opera next summer in a new work by Stephan Hartke called, *The Greater Good*. He recently sang the title role in the world premiere studio recording of *Willie the Weeper* by Jerome Moross for Naxos Records. He also

John De Haan



sang the role of King Arthur in the first ever performance of *Merlin* by Albeniz with the Teatro Real Opera Orchestra in Madrid, and in Randall Snyder's *Divine Madness* in Lincoln, Nebraska. Other recent appearances have been in *Elijah* in Tokyo, in *Der Fliegende Hollander* at Opera Carolina and L'Opera Montreal, and with the Latvian National Symphony in an all-Wagner program with David Milnes. As a principal artist with the Deutsche Oper Berlin for four years, De Haan sang Florestan in *Fidelio*, Erik in *Der Fliegende Hollander*, Macduff in *Macbeth*, Hans Schwalb in *Mathis der Maler*, and as the tenor soloist in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Elsewhere in Europe, he has performed in Lubeck as Jimmy Mahoney in *Mahagonny*, with the Netherlands Opera as Arbace in *Idomeneo*, with the Scottish Opera as Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, and in Mannheim as Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* and Florestan in *Fidelio*.

De Haan may be heard in the leading role of "der Fremde" in Decca's recording of Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane* conducted by John Mauceri, and in Goldschmidt's *Beatrice Cenci* for Sony Records. He performed the Korngold in concert at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam under the baton of Edo de Waart in 1995. Currently he has a recording out of songs with Dave Brubeck at the piano.

Prior to undertaking the heroic tenor repertory, De Haan appeared with leading opera companies in lyric roles, including *Romeo et Juliette*, *Faust*, Andres in *Wozzeck* and Melot in *Tristan und Isolde* with the San Francisco Opera, Arbace in *Idomeneo* and Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* at the Greater Miami Opera, in *Cherubin* and *A Night at the Chinese Opera* at the Santa Fe Opera, as Werther and as Anatole in *Vanessa* at the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and as Alfredo in *La Traviata* at Tulsa Opera and New Orleans Opera. He has also appeared with the Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Memphis, Indianapolis Opera, Seattle Opera, and the Lyric Opera of Kansas City.

In concert, De Haan has performed Siegmund in *Die Walküre* with

the Louisiana Philharmonic, as tenor soloist in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony, in L'Opera de Montreal's gala concert, as the Evangelist in the *St. John Passion* with the Detroit Symphony, in the Mozart Requiem with Midsummer Mozart in San Francisco in a concert performance of *The Nose* with Sinfonia San Francisco and in an evening of music theatre with the San Francisco Symphony. He was also presented in recital on the prestigious Schwabacher Debut Recital series of the San Francisco Opera.

De Haan is a native of Kansas and a graduate of Union College and of the University of Nebraska where he earned his Master of Music degree. He is a winner of the Eleanor Steber Music Foundation Mozart Award and a former Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera. He is currently teaching voice and diction at the University Of Minnesota School Of Music.



Seth Keeton

Bass-baritone, Seth Keeton, spent this past summer at Glimmerglass Opera for performances in *Death in Venice* and *Lucie de Lammermoor*. Last year he completed an apprenticeship at Chautauqua Opera, where he sang both Colline in *La bohème* and the Duke of Verona in *Roméo et Juliette*, as well as covering Leporello in *Don Giovanni*. For Austin Lyric Opera he has performed Benoit/Alcindoro in *La bohème*, the Warden in *Dead Man Walking* and Dr. Grenvil in *La traviata*. In Central City he appeared as Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and this past summer sang the role of Polyphemus in the New Breath Production of *Acis and Galatea*. In December 2004, he sang Balthazar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* with the Minnesota Orchestra, and in February 2005, he was a national semi-finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Mr. Keeton received his Bachelor of Music from Illinois Wesleyan University and his Master of Music from Indiana University, where he appeared in productions of *The Bartered Bride* as Kecal, *Le nozze di Figaro* as Dr. Bartolo, *Orfeo* as Plutone, *Così fan tutte* as Don Alfonso, *The Rake's Progress* as Father Trulove, *La bohème* as Colline and *La Cenerentola* as Alidoro. On The Minnesota Opera's stage he has been seen as Monterone in *Rigoletto*, Petrucci in *Lucrezia Borgia*, Sergeant Lombardi in *Passion*, Der Sprecher in *The Magic Flute*, the

continued on page 12

continued from page 11

Bonze in *Madame Butterfly*, Don Alfonso in *Maria Padilla* and Zuniga in *Carmen* For his third season with The Minnesota Opera he performs in *Tosca* as the Sacristan, in *Don Giovanni* as Leporello, in *Orazi & Curiazi* as Vecchio Orazio and in *Joseph Merrick, the Elephant Man* as Hospital Administrator Carr-Gomm.

Tim Lovelace



Our accompanist holds the Ethel Alice Hitchcock Chair in Collaborative Piano at the University of Minnesota. He is a former Assistant Professor of Accompanying at The University of Texas at Austin. His own studies were principally with Gilbert Kalish, Donna Loewy, and Frank Weinstock. Active as an ensemble pianist, soloist, continuo

player, and conductor, Lovelace most often concertizes as a collaborative pianist, having appeared with such distinguished artists as Miriam Fried, Alban Gerhardt, Emma Johnson, Pekka Kuusisto, Joe Lovano, Paul Neubauer, the Pacifica String Quartet, and Paquito D'Rivera. For eleven summers, he has been a staff pianist at the Ravinia Festival's Steans Institute, where he has played in the classes of Barbara Bonney, Christoph Eschenbach, Thomas Hampson, Christa Ludwig, and Yo-Yo Ma, among others.

Lovelace's concert appearances have included performances at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Columbia University's Miller Theatre, and Philadelphia's Trinity Center, and on Chicago's Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts series and on chamber music series sponsored by the Chicago, Cincinnati, and Detroit Symphony Orchestras and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. An advocate for new music, Lovelace has given premieres of compositions by Osvaldo Golijov and others and has recorded for the Albany and Boston Records labels.

New Members

William Burckhardt

Helen Wang

Paul Lowe

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

Membership Renewals:

For those who have not already renewed, now is the time! Our membership year is on a calendar year basis. In order to retain your Bayreuth ticket priority, we must receive your renewal by 15 March 2006. A form and envelope are included for the convenience of those needing to renew. If you have any questions about your membership status contact

membership@wagnertc.org or call Kevin Edgar at 612-381-9429.

Ongoing Events:

Book Club

Sunday 5 March 2006, 3-5 PM

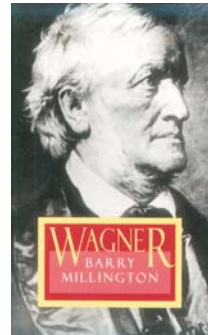
The WSUM Book Club is a quarterly event. Each person is asked to read the selected book, prior to the meeting, to aide the discussion of the book.

Coffee and Tea will be provided by host Kevin Edgar. If you like, you may bring some snacks to share. (A kitchen is available.) We will meet at 700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis. (Two blocks south of the Walker Art Center on the Corner of Douglas and Hennepin. The apartment building is called Kenwood Gables.)

*If you are planning to attend please let Kevin know:
Email wagner@bke.org or phone
612-381-9429.*

The next book we will read is:

Wagner (revised edition)
by Barry Millington
Princeton University Press, 1992.
ISBN: 0-691-02722-6

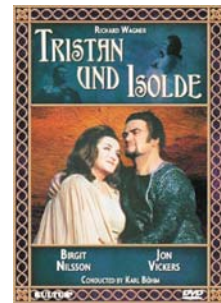


Note: We will be discussing only the biographical portion of the book, the first nine chapters.

DvD Nights First Wednesdays 7-9 PM

We meet approximately the first Wednesday of every month to watch and discuss various productions of Wagner's dramas available on DvD. Coffee and Tea will be provided by host Kevin Edgar. If you like, bring some snacks to share. (A kitchen is available.) The address is 700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis. (Two blocks south of the Walker Art Center on the Corner of Douglas and Hennepin. The apartment building is called Kenwood Gables. *If you are planning to attend please let Kevin know by email (wagner@bke.org) or phone 612-381-9429.*

We will start 2006 with an oldie, but a goodie!. A 1973 production of Tristan und Isolde starring the great Birgit Nilsson in her signature role of Isolde. Jon Vickers co-stars as Tristan in an historic performance filmed live at the Theatre Antique d'Orange in France, under the musical direction of the legendary conductor Karl Böhm. This film has been restored and digitally re-mastered.



The schedule is

4 January	Act I
1 February	Act II
1 March	Act III

Wagner Performance Fund

As a part of the Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest's mission, the Wagner Performance Fund has been established to encourage the local performance of Wagner's music. There are two goals for this fund. The first will support efforts to mount productions of Wagner's operas. The second is to provide assistance for young artists to continue their musical studies.

The impetus behind the first goal is to encourage and work with The Minnesota Opera to stage Wagner operas at the Ordway Center. Many

opera companies the size of The Minnesota Opera would stage Wagner operas more frequently but are hindered by the additional cost. As you probably know, opera is the most expensive art form to produce, but when you include a very large orchestra, chorus, and other significant technical elements, Wagner becomes even more costly to stage. (I would be happy to explain in greater detail what it takes to mount an opera if anyone is interested.) The Minnesota Opera is interested in mounting any number of Wagner's operas and with our support it can be possible. For example, our support can help offset overtime costs incurred by the orchestra, stage hands, and ushers.

The second goal of our Wagner Performance Fund is to encourage and support young artists in their training as Wagnerian singers. Like producing opera, training to be an opera singer is also very costly and labor intensive. It takes years of voice lessons, language study, acting lessons, and more. Many of you met Seth Keeton at the last Annual Founder's Day dinner hosted by David Cline. Seth is a young singer in the opera world. He just turned 30 and still has a number of years to go to be able to sustain a professional career. This has to do with sheer physical age more than basic vocal training. He's in Minnesota as a member of The Minnesota Opera's Young Artist Program which is a training program for singers who, after graduating from college, need more time to hone their skills. Even though Seth gets paid for nine months for his time in Minnesota, he has further costs due to additional coaching and voice lessons, travel for auditions, and the three months over the summer he doesn't have a job! There are many other singers who are in similar situations. This is where our role of providing financial support comes into play. Through our fund, we can offer scholarship money for deserving young Wagnerian's singers.

An easy way to support the Wagner Performance Fund is to add a tax-deductible donation when you renew your membership. You can also encourage new members to join. For those of you who are really keen, we are looking for people interested in fund-raising to help us develop and execute a strategy for raising significant funds from individuals and organizations.

If you are interested, please to call or email anytime. Thanks!

Jamie Andrews 612.342.9573, andrews@mnopera.org

Election of Directors and Officers

The annual meeting of the members was held pursuant to notice at the home of David Cline in Golden Valley, Minnesota at approximately 7:00 p.m. on Friday, September 9, 2005. David Cline announced that the principal order of business was the election of six directors of the Society. The following were duly nominated: Jamie Andrews, Woody Andrews, David Cline, Kevin Edgar, John Heefner and Carol Thomas. There being no other nominations, the six persons named were unanimously elected as the directors of the Society on motion duly made and seconded.

At a meeting of the board of directors held at the Minneapolis Club on Wednesday, October 12, 2005, the following were elected as officers: David Cline, President; Jamie Andrews, Treasurer; and Woody Andrews, Secretary. It was agreed that Kevin Edgar will continue to be in charge of Bayreuth tickets, he and Carol Thomas will be in charge of membership, and Carol will edit the newsletter.

Woody Andrews, Secretary

On the cover: Tenor John De Haan, left, and bass-baritone Seth Keeton, right, at the 2005 Founder's Day Dinner.
Photo courtesy David W. Cline

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The Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest
P.O. Box 300014
Minneapolis, MN 55403
612-863-4319
Fax: 612-863-4384
General Email: Info@wagnertc.org
Newsletter Email: newsletter@wagnertc.org

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STAFF
Carol Thomas – Editor
B. Kevin Edgar – Production Design