

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 Marilyn Sandford, a long time member of the Society.

An Opera Lover's Story

By Marilyn Sandford

It all started with Milton Cross and his "Between Acts" stories of the opera of the day. I loved to listen to him on the radio and try to see if I could follow what was going on. I graduated to loving opera and looked forward to those programs.

In 1946 I came from Eastern Montana to go to college here, in the Twin Cities. My wonderful Dad (an opera lover) said, "See everything you can while you are there, because you may live in a place where these things are not available to you." This was before good recordings. I was 4 years away from my first 33 and 1/3 player.

I went to the Met and among other great moments, I heard Ezio Pinza sing Don Giovanni. I kept following opera and going to the Met every May, until they sent such second rate stars, that it became a poor experience.

During that time, the St. Paul Opera did *Walküre*, but it was not a thrilling performance. I also did the Santa Fe Opera for several years but the director at the time was hooked on the other Wagner, Richard Strauß, which I was NOT. Then PBS ran *The Ring* and I saw and heard some of the wonderful music, done well for the first time. This was *The Ring* that took place at a dam on a river, but even then, parts of it were thrilling.

Next I met Carol Meade, who worked with me and we found we both loved opera. We decided to go to New York City and see the Levine production, done in a traditional manner, with a young Hildegard Behrens as Brünnhilde. It was a life changing trip. Seeing Wagner in one of the best traditional productions with singers that were great, was so exciting. Even the intermissions were a treat because everyone there was a Wagner fan and was eager to converse about the productions. I was hooked.

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Parsifal: A Series of Personal Experiences

By David W. Cline, MD

[Editor's note: This is the second of two parts. The first part may be found in our Winter 2006 issue. Dr. Cline is President of the Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest.]

My third performance of *Parsifal* took place Sunday, August 10, 2003 in Seattle, Washington. It was produced by the Seattle Opera, celebrating the newly refurbished opera house. It was indeed a



Seattle Opera's 2003 *Parsifal* © Rozalii Lynch

Bühnenweihfestspiel. This performance was preceded by a symposium on August 9, in which Wagner scholars lectured about the opera, *Parsifal*. Presentations were: *Unlocking the Secrets of Parsifal* by Barry Millington. Dr. John H. Hale spoke on *The Grail, the Spear and the Castle: The Archeology of Wagner's Parsifal*. Ann Midgette's title was *Parsifal and the Wild Child*, and Patrick Carnegie's title was, *Which Way to the Grail? - A Brief Stage History*.

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Penelope Turing Makes A Second Visit

By Dr. David Cline

Members and guests of The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest were treated to second visit from Penelope Turing, April 28-30. Penelope, now age 82, has been a regular attendee at the Wagner Festspiele since it resumed in 1951 after World War II. She is an opera critique for an English newspaper and in the course of her many visits to Bayreuth, has become acquainted with the Wagner Family. She has witnessed several phases of Bayreuth productions, beginning with Wieland Wagner's staging and lighting creations. A second phase after Wieland's death in 1966 was the production/direction of Wolfgang Wagner, and finally the phase of outside directors that brought innovative and at times controversial productions.



Penelope sides with traditional minimalist productions that are true to the spirit of Richard Wagner's intentions. She rejects those productions that remake the opera into the directors ownership using Wagner's music and story for their own purposes.

I accompanied Penelope to Westminster Presbyterian Church service on Sunday morning, April 29th, then took her to brunch at the Minneapolis Woman's club. She preferred a simple European breakfast of cheese, cold meat, a breakfast roll, tuna fish salad and a cup of tea. We went to the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, took the three mile drive; she loved Minnesota countryside, the flowers and fauna.

John Heefner and John Lassila graciously hosted Penelope for her over night stay and her presentation Monday evening , April 30th. This occasion was a lovely experience. John Heefner and John Lassila set the ambience for the evening starting with a wine and hor'devours social hour, then a light buffet supper, a delicious home cooked casserole and salad. Then the attendees gathered around Penelope to hear her hold forth in her dignified, elegant English manner. From time to time others joined in with comments,

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Cline

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This was another classical presentation, although not as well done as the Metropolitan Opera production. Act I lacked oomph; however the orchestra played well. Act II and Act III were glorious in their own right. In fact, Act II was the best I have seen of the three times I have seen the opera at this point. I saw Speight Jenkins, the general director, of the Seattle Opera at the first intermission. I told him, "It worked, but just barely." After Act II, I told him, "The best I have ever seen", and after Act III, I wanted to hug him and everybody else to celebrate the glorious Good Friday redemption scene where Kundry followed carrying the spear of Longinus and Amfortas died after his wounds were healed. That ending really, really worked! I was ecstatic and demonstrative to everybody I knew and to some I did not know. After the production, all of my family who were in attendance repaired to a classy dining facility and each discussed the things they liked best and things they liked least, including a discussion around the phrase, "redemption for the redeemer" and "you see, my son, here time and space are one."

The fourth presentation occurred on August 23, 2005, in Bayreuth, Germany, at the Bayreuther Festspiele. It was conducted by Pierre Boulez, which was his last performance at Bayreuth (he is 80 years old) and directed by Christoph Schlingensiefel. I have written about my experience with that opera in an earlier newsletter and will not repeat it again here, except to say that it still holds the place as the most moving opera experience that I have ever had. It should be said, however, that the production somewhat overshadowed the music and was primary with the music as accompaniment. However, it all came together as a profound and meaningful experience about the human condition in its most intimate, private and beautiful form.

The fifth experience occurred at the Metropolitan Opera on May 13, 2006. It was the same production that we had seen in April 2003. Two problems occurred that I hope never happen to you when you go to the Met. Do not get seats on the main floor under the mezzanine rows Z, AA, BB, CC, etc. because the sound is so poor. I could barely hear the children's chorus singing at the end of Act I! This was confirmed by people who sat around me who I spoke with in the Belmont Room at intermission.

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Events

Annual Founders Day Dinner

Mark your calendars for Friday, 14 September, 2007. We gather each year to celebrate the founding of the Society. As always, there will be food, drink, entertainment, and the fellowship of fellow Wagnerians.

This is also our annual business meeting. Brief reports from the current officers will be presented and the election of the 2007-2008 Board of Directors will be held.

Time and location will be announced shortly.

DvD Nights 7-9 PM

We meet approximately the first Thursday of every month to watch and discuss various productions of Wagner's dramas currently available. The schedule is:

5 July 2007 *Parsifal*, Act III

2 August 2007 Odds and Ends, an evening of excerpts

There will be no meetings during September and October.

We resume in November on a new night, the second Tuesday of the month

13 November Richard Burton as Wagner, Part 1 of 9

11 December Richard Burton as Wagner Part 2 of 9

This event is hosted by Kevin Edgar. Coffee and tea are provided. The address is 700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis. (Which is located 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.

A Lecture by Dr. Sven Friedrich

Director of the Richard Wagner Museum & Haus Wahnfried

Thursday, 25 October 2007

7:00 PM

Minnesota Opera Center

620 N. 1st St.

Minneapolis MN

Further details to follow



Bayreuth 2008

By B. Kevin Edgar, Bayreuth Ticket Coordinator

No, that is not a misprint. If you want to attend in 2008, start thinking now. Bayreuth announced that the young Norwegian opera director Stefan Herheim has been chosen to stage a new production of Richard Wagner's final opera *Parsifal* at the legendary Bayreuth Festival in 2008. Other productions will include Durst's *Ring*, and Katharina Wagner's *Meistersinger*. One other production will be reprised, but not known at this time. Exact dates have not yet been announced, but we expect to order tickets for the third cycle, which is typically the last week of August. *The Board of Directors has established 20 September 2007 as the deadline for members to submit requests and deposits.* This allows us sufficient time to determine our order and get it to Bayreuth by their deadline. ***If you have not submitted a request by the deadline, you will not receive tickets.***

Members will receive a mailing later this summer giving the exact performances available, as well as an application form. As in the past, a deposit of \$150 per set will be required. Also note, our rules limit ticket requests to one set per member. If you wish an additional set to accommodate a partner, both must be members.

Please address any questions or concerns to Kevin Edgar at 612-381-9429 or wagner@bke.org.

Cline

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I had seat BB117. These were not off-set such that you could see between the two people in front. I sat behind a man with a large cranium that obstructed about a Central third of the stage. I spent most of the time shifting back and forth so I could see the stage where the action was. The next time, I will get seats that are either orchestra front, family circle, first or second balcony, or mezzanine. In spite of the problems I experienced from my situation in the audience, the opera turned out to be stunning. It really worked.

The last production that I saw was again at the Bayreuther



Parsifal – Act III. Amfortas: Marco-Buhrmester,
Parsifal: Eberz, Gurnemanz: Holl
Photo: Bayreuther Festspiele/Jörg Schulze

World War II, the Iraqi War, Russians, Germans, Chinese, Americans, and all other army personnel all in attendance.

Festspiele on August 19, 2006.

It was the same production directed by Christoph Schlingensief. However, it ended in a way that was unpalatable. The final scene in Act III, the Knights of the Grail, were represented by military officers from all countries and ages, that is, World War I,

Parsifal and Kundry took the holy sword that was represented as a shepherd's crook and thrust it into Amfortas killing him. Then they kill themselves doing the same maneuver and all three were dead. Klingsor returned. He was supposed to be dead in Act II. He grabs the staff and shows the audience that evil is still among us. The dead rabbit is eaten by maggots as it appears on the screen. Finally, there are three figures walking down a tunnel with the light at the end of it. One is Parsifal and I do not know who the others are. Perhaps Kundry, Amfortas, and maybe Kingsor. The last scene

Cline

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is a picture of Christ carrying a cross uphill. What does it all mean? It appears that the only way out is death and there is a possible redemption in life hereafter. It seems to say there is no chance for happiness and joy in this life and I just do not believe that. Thus, I was disappointed and discouraged.

I discussed this presentation with other people who had a Buddhist philosophy who pointed out that the end-stage of Nirvana can only occur in the next life. They noticed that Schlingensiefel had proclivity for Buddhist thinking. I will see the Schlingensiefel *Parsifal* one more time on August 26, 2007 at the Bayreuther Festspiele. This is the final presentation of his production.

With all of the experiences of this opera, I feel a broadened enlightenment with many realities and many different ways of looking at the Parsifal story. The journey has been well worth it.

TRISTAN PROJECT UPDATE

By David W. Cline, MD, President

I am happy to report that the pledges for a Spring 2010 Minnesota Opera Production of Wagner's Opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, total just over \$125,000, with a goal of \$150,000.

That means we have just \$25,000 to go! If you have not done so already, pledge now using the enclosed form. Even if you are planning your gift for a later year, it is important to submit your pledge form now. That will help Minnesota Opera in planning its production. And to those of you who have made a verbal pledge, it is important that you formalize your pledge by completing a written form and returning it to the Minnesota Opera. Let us finish the drive, by the date of the Founders Day meeting, September 14, 2007. We will have another cause to celebrate!

Turing

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experiences and questions. There were no slides, nor lectures; just simple, relaxed informal discussion, the likes of which I have seldom experienced. I have read about European salons: sophisticated people gathering in a comfortable setting to discuss an interesting subject. I think that is what we experienced. It left me with a new appreciation for the fine art of conversation - something I would like to do again soon.

I wish to thank those who were in attendance for their company, our wonderful hosts John Heefner and John Lassila, and especially our guest, Penelope Turing for sharing her experiences with us.

Ms Turing, in association with David Stannard, will be presenting a course on "The Best of Bayreuth", a discussion of some of the finest performances given at Bayreuth, during the 57 years since the Festival's revival in 1951. This course will be held 27th August - 3rd September, 2007 at the Lodge Hill Centre in West Sussex, England. If you would like more information please contact Carol Thomas at 612-559-6468.

Dennis Petersen Recital

By Jamie Andrews



On April 18th the RWSUM was fortunate to join with the Germanic-American Institute to present local Wagnerian, Dennis Petersen in recital. Mr Petersen beautifully performed Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin* and ended the concert with excerpts from *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *The Merry Widow* among others. Following the recital, the audience enjoyed coffee and cake with Mr Petersen and his accompanist, Sonja Thompson.

We were very lucky to have found a spot in Mr Petersen's very busy schedule. He was able to fit us in between *Die Fledermaus* and *Dialogue of the Carmelites* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. You can also see him in *War and Peace* at the Met in December of 2007 and the next Seattle *Ring*.



Membership News

New Members

David Bergerson Nancy Bergeson Tom Logeland
Don Notvik Renate Sharp Bernt von Ohlen

A special that you to these members who upgraded their memberships to Contributors and Sponsors. We greatly appreciate your support and generosity.

John Heefner Paul Lowe Yang Wang
Irene Kirsten Walt McCarthy Helen Wang
Irene Posalaky Marilyn Sandford

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

Up-Dates



Soprano Karin Wolverson, who had performed at our Founders Day meetings in 2004 and 2006, has recently been offered the role of Manon in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* in Chile. She has also accepted an unannounced role in Hong Kong. Both of these jobs are a major step forward for Ms Wolverson.

Seth Keeton, the bass baritone who performed for us at our 2005 Founders Day meeting has been offered a three year contract in Bremen, Germany. As a house singer, he will perform roles by Puccini, Verdi, and most interestingly Wagner. The Bremen artistic staff were very excited when he auditioned as they think he has real Wagnerian potential.



Sandford

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At home I joined the Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest, which has been fun and rewarding ever since. I have found that to be with people who love opera, and can appreciate Richard Wagner is a real plus. You do not need to explain yourself, you can cut right to the music or review a scene of the moment. What a joy!! It also is a help that Wagner's music is something that you can grow with. Each time you can pick up a new theme, or use of instrumentation, that expands your knowledge and joy in the music.

As my 80th year nears, it is great to be able to continue to learn. It's wunderbar!!

If you would like to share your story, please let us know! Email Newsletter@wagnertc.org or contact the editor, Carol Thomas, at 612-559-6468

On the cover:

Guest speaker Penelope Turing (third from right) with members of the Board of Directors

Photo courtesy John Lassila

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