

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 member Tom Nichol.

In the film *Pretty Woman*, Edward says to Vivian, “People’s reaction to opera the first time they see it is very dramatic; they either love it or they hate it. If they love it, they will always love it. If they don’t, they may learn to appreciate it, but it will never become part of their soul.” I went to the opera for the first time when I was seventeen years old. Several friends invited me to join them for a whole season at the Chicago Lyric Opera, and I did. The season’s ticket in the nosebleed gallery cost \$17.50, then a princely sum which my father allowed me to take from my summer’s earnings. Like Vivian, I loved the opera from the very beginning, and I still remember the great voices I heard, Birgit Nilsson’s among them.

After two seasons in Chicago, I was rarely able to enjoy the opera again in person until I started attending performances at the Minnesota Opera in 2001. I am so grateful for our local company! But to come to the point at last, with the single exception of Minnesota’s *Flying Dutchman*, I still had not experienced Wagner live. That was to happen in one wonderful week in Berlin last spring when Bernt and I saw *Lohengrin* at the Deutsche Oper and *Tristan und Isolde* at the Staatsoper. *Lohengrin* was splendid, but I was absolutely transported by *Tristan und Isolde* with Waltraud Meier as Isolde, Ian Storey as Tristan and Matti Salminen as König Marke. What I will never forget is Meier’s presence on the stage, her beautiful voice, and the inexpressible extra reserves she brought to the “Liebestod” music. She set a very high standard for me.

Since those first performances in Berlin, I have seen *Tannhäuser*, *Die Meistersinger*, and *Parsifal* – the last two together with another performance of *Tristan* in Bayreuth – and will see the complete *Ring*, my first, at the Met in the spring. After those three performances in Bayreuth, a friend of ours observed that much other opera seems trivial. A good performance of *Aida* or *Fidelio* or *Norma* could never be trivial, but I have to admit I had the same thought myself. Also like Vivian, I’ve got opera, and now Wagner, in my soul.

Bayreuth 2010 Ticket Requests Due by 23 September 2009

Bayreuth has announced that a new production of *Lohengrin* by the controversial German stage director, Hans Neuenfels, will debut in 2010. At the 2000 Salzburg Festival Neuenfels'

Festival Neuenfels' production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, included huge insects and background videos (some of which were erotic) distracting attention from the singers. And were the singers pissed! During Fiordiligi's fiery aria, "Come scoglio," she arrived onstage walking two men, in leather and chains, as if they were dogs. Soprano



Karita Mattila called it her worst experience. Neuenfels' 2003 Deutsche Oper Berlin production of Mozart's *Idomeneo* included a scene in the epilog in which Idomeneo staggers on stage carrying the decapitated heads of Neptune, Jesus, Buddha, and Muhammad.

Clearly this will not be your father's *Lohengrin*. Annette Dasch is to sing Elsa, Evelyn Herlitzius is to sing Ortrud, and Jonas Kaufmann to sing Lohengrin. Sweating in the pit will be conductor Andris Nelsons.

In other news auf den Grünen Hügel, it is whispered that Sebastian Baumgarten will produce a new *Tannhäuser* in 2011 and in 2012 Christian Thielemann will conduct a new production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* with Adrienne Pieczonka as Senta. At this time, no one has fessed up to doing the staging. There will be no new *Ring* until 2013. Yep, 2013. Of course, according to the Mayan calendar, the world ends in December of 2012, so perhaps we will be spared after all.

As in past years, we will be ordering tickets to the third cycle of the 2009 Festspiel. The dates are *Ring*: Aug 20,21,23,25; *Parsifal* Aug 26,

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Eleventh Annual Founders Day Dinner

Saturday 12 September, 2009
6:00 – 9:00 PM

Germanic – American Institute
301 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55102

6:00-6:30 Wagner Society Private Gathering and Business Meeting
6:30-7:00 Public Social Gathering
7:00-7:30 Recital Performance
7:30-9:00 Dinner, Dessert & Socializing

Cost: \$10 RWSUM members; \$25 Non-members

Reservations must be received by 4 September 2009

We are celebrating our Eleventh Anniversary with special musical presentation from Obed Floan and his wife, Megan Wagner Floan. They will sing “Wintersturme” and “Du bist der Lenz” from Act I of *Die Walküre*. In these arias, Siegmund and Sieglinde express their love for each other. Obed will then sing the Prize Song from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Megan will follow with a solo from *Lohengrin* Act 1, Elsa’s dream. Also, there will be socializing, dinner, dessert and a short Annual Business Meeting.

For those who haven't had enough, there will be an optional discussion (from 5:00 to 6:00 PM, preceding the business meeting) on “What fascinates you about Wagner’s Music Dramas?” I will lead off with “The Look! Why didn’t Isolde kill Tristan when she had the chance?” I am sure this will be a spirited discussion.

I hope all of you will join us.

David W. Cline
President



Obed Floan performed the role of Judge Gray in the Philadelphia staged debut of the fledgling opera *Vanqui*, written by composer Leslie Burrs. He also performed the role of Florestan for The Other Company's production of Beethoven's *Fidelio* in association with the Philly Fringe Festival that same year. In March 2007, Obed enjoyed performing the roles of Arturo and Normanno in Center Stage Opera Company's performances of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and the title role of Tito in Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* with The Susquehanna Symphony Orchestra in Bel Air, Maryland. Shortly after, Mr. Floan also performed the role of Arrigo in Verdi's *La Battaglia di Legnano* in April of 2007. Locally, he has performed with The Minnesota Chorale, Voce Magna, and The Dale Warland Singers. Obed immensely enjoys, and finds great fulfillment in teaching his vocal studio, M.O.Studio, at home in a joint effort with his wife, Megan Wagner Floan.

Megan Wagner Floan followed her vocal path to the east coast where she studied with David Jones, William Neill and the late Dixie Ross-Neill in New York City. Her east coast performances include



Puccini's *Messa De Gloria*, Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and Leslie Burrs' opera *Vanqui*. As a soprano soloist, Ms. Wagner Floan has performed Schubert's *Mass in A Flat*, Schubert's *Mass in G* and Handel's *Messiah*. Returning to Minnesota to study with John De Haan, she was accepted into the Master's Degree program at the University of Minnesota. While there, Megan performed the role of *Kostelnicka* in the University of Minnesota Opera Theatre's Spring 2008 production of *Jenùfa* and has performed *Sieglinde* in *Die Walküre* and the 2nd Lady in *The Magic Flute* at the U of MN's Opera Workshop scene performances. Megan enjoys sharing what she has learned throughout her years of vocal study by teaching a private voice studio with her husband, Obed Floan.

Book Club

Back from hiatus!

It has been nearly a year since our last book club meet up. I am pleased to announce several books to cover over the course of next year, continuing our discussions on a quarterly basis. Our next selected book is:

Bayreuth - the Early Years (by Robert Hartford, ed.)

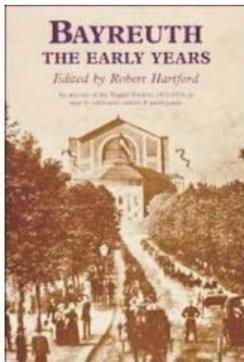
Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: Cambridge University Press (January 31, 1981)

Language: English

#ISBN-10: 0521238226

This book is currently out of print but reasonably priced used copies are available at Amazon (amazon.com) and the used book seller ABE Books (abebooks.com). It is also available the Hennepin County Public Library.



This book intelligently presents the most important and interesting eye-witness accounts of the early Bayreuth festivals, by such musical luminaries as Tchaikovsky and Grieg, and a host of other interested observers. These documents, while often quoted, are hard to find, and are impossible to find in any other single source.

Be sure to check out Mark Twain's superbly satiric "At the Shrine of Saint Wagner," on his attempts to enjoy Parsifal in the hot, dusty town with few restaurants and fewer hotel rooms!

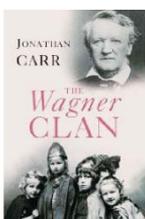
Some of the other writers you'll meet in this book are:

Angelo Neumann Felix Weingartner
Sir George Grove Bernard Shaw
Richard Strauss

The book discussion will be held on

Thursday 5th November
7-9 PM
Common Roots Cafe
2558 Lyndale Avenue South
Minneapolis MN

The Common Roots Cafe offers beverages, including wine and beer, and food appears to very good. The Cafe also offers a nice back room that is private and able to seat 20 people ready for a great discussion. The other books we will examine in the coming year are:



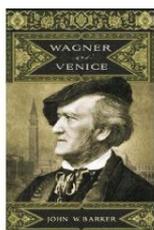
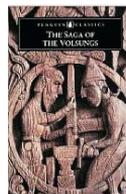
THE WAGNER CLAN by Jonathan Carr

An Economist Best Book of 2007, Jonathan Carr's The Wagner Clan proves, with the sweeping scope of a Wagnerian opera, that the history of Europe and that of the infamous composer's family are inextricably intertwined.

Das Nibelungenlied: Song of the Nibelungs by Burton Raffel, translator

together with

The Saga of the Volsungs (Penguin Classics) by Jesse L Byock, translator *Background for The Ring.*



WAGNER AND VENICE by John W. Barker

Richard Wagner had a longstanding love affair with the city of Venice. His sudden death there in 1883 also initiated a process through which Wagner and his reputation were integrated into Venice's own cumulative cultural image. In Wagner and Venice, John Barker examines the connections between the great composer and the great city.

We can discuss these titles and descriptions as we meet with each book. There is so much out there and it all sounds truly exciting! One of our

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Special Event

Monday 23 November 2009

7 PM

Further Details to be Announced

Dennis Peterson will lead a master class on the Wagner Repertory with Seth Keeton and Obed Floan, It should be a fun evening with quite a bit of singing and plenty of time to pick the brain of a current Wagnerian singer.



Obed Floan



Dennis Peterson



Seth Keeton

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Bayreuth

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Lohengrin Aug 27, and *Meistersinger* Aug 28. Again, the number of tickets requested will reflect the interest expressed by our members



before we order. Therefore, to meet the anticipated Bayreuth deadline of 15 October, members wishing to attend Bayreuth in 2010 must submit requests by the 23rd of September 2009. Exact costs will not be known until we receive our order form in September, but based on past years we anticipate that the price of a ticket to *The Ring* would range from \$600 - \$900, and \$450 to

\$750 for the other three. Tickets to individual operas are not available. The exact price will depend on the specific tickets allocated (if any) and the exchange rate. This year, members may request Ring tickets, a set of non-Ring tickets, or both. If you intend to request both, please indicate whether or not you would be willing to accept only Ring tickets or non-Ring tickets, as well as your preference.

The rules

- 1) Current membership is a prerequisite.
- 2) Only one ticket request per membership.
- 3) All ticket requests must be specific and in writing. (A form is enclosed.)
- 4) Members should indicate a general price range: high, medium, or low.
- 5) A deposit of \$150 per request is required. Requests without deposits cannot be accepted.
- 6) After our order is submitted in early October, these deposits become non-refundable



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Bayreuth

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except in the event we receive fewer tickets than requested. (See below.)

7) When Bayreuth provides us with the number and prices of tickets, we will inform members. Upon notification of ticket availability, full payment to the society is required within two weeks.



8) Ticket invoices include a 10% surcharge to cover expenses.

9) If a ticket holder is unable to attend, the Society must be informed and the tickets returned immediately. A refund (less the deposit) will be

made once the tickets have been reassigned. This requirement is imposed on the Society by the Bayreuther Festspiele Kartenbüro.

10) Travel and hotel accommodations are the responsibility of the member.

Should we receive fewer tickets than requested, then these additional rules apply:

1) Tickets will be offered first to those with highest Bayreuth priority. Bayreuth priority is based on a rotating system affording every member a chance to attend the Festival. A list is maintained, initially constructed by listing members in the order of joining the society. When new members join, their names are added to the end. As members accept Bayreuth tickets, their names are placed at the end of the list, after those joining that year.



2) Members not receiving tickets will have the option of a full refund (including deposit) or place on the waiting list.

3) Members on the waiting list may withdraw for a full refund at any time before they are notified of ticket availability.

4) After notification of ticket availability, the deposit is non-refundable.

Video Nights 7-9 PM

Second Tuesdays



Currently, we are finishing
Der Ring Des Nibelungen

(Complete Cycle recorded in 1990)

The Metropolitan Opera

James Levin, conducting

Next, we will view “Parsifal,” the definitive documentary about Wagner’s final opera hosted by Plácido Domingo who also performs many excerpts from the opera, with Violeta Urmana, Matti Salminen, and Nikolai Putilin. Music conducted by Valery Gergiev and directed by Tony Palmer. Filmed on location in St. Petersburg, Ravello, Siena, and Bayreuth.



Future videos have yet to be determined. If there is one you would like to see, please contact us.

The current schedule is:

08 September 2009	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Act 3
13 October 2009	<i>Parsifal</i> Documentary
10 November 2009	TBA

This event is hosted by Kevin Edgar at 700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis. If you are planning to attend please let Kevin know by email (wagner@bke.org) or phone 612-381-9429.

Book Club

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members is a great source of book information as he has many books on Wagner and much to recommend.

If you plan to attend you **MUST** RSVP to me, Carol Thomas, at <info@wagnertc.org> or call me 612-559-6468 NO LATER THAN Thursday 15th October.

Hope to see you at the book club meet up!

New Members

Craig Goodwin
Lyda Lanier
Katherine Mewn
Sharon Woods

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

**On the cover:
Soprano Megan Wagner Floan (left) and Tenor Obed Floan
who will perform at the Eleventh Annual Founders Day Dinner**

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P.O. Box 3804
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612-863-4319
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STAFF
Carol Thomas – Editor
B. Kevin Edgar – Production/Design