

The Raven

Newsletter of

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest

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Summer 2010



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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 Amy Neeser.

Zukunftsmusik, Existentialism, and Electronica: How I Started with Wagner

by Amy Neeser



As I begin to reflect on my relationship with the genius Richard Wagner, I look around my office. My bookshelves contain a multitude of cultural theory and German literature ranging from Goethe to E.T.A. Hoffmann to Elfriede Jelinek; on top of my desk sits a scale model of the *Maschinenmensch* Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Kraftwerk CDs, DDR paraphernalia, and a Wagner action figure.

My relationship to German culture was accidental if not precarious. Being mostly of Danish heritage I had every intention of learning the Scandinavian languages but my choices were limited to German and Spanish as I attended a very small private high school. I planned to take German and use that as a jumping point into Danish once I went to college but instead fell in love with Germany's language, culture, art, and music. The summer after high school I studied in Leipzig, Wagner's birth place, and began to take interest in this fascinating man and his remarkable music. During that first trip to Germany I also visited the famous castles of Ludwig II and became fascinated with his obsession with Wagner. It was not only that he dedicated his walls to depicting the famous operas, but the castles themselves, from the groves to the artificial caves, to the theatrical architecture. The men's intimate relationship, the ornate opium dens, and the mysterious circumstances surrounding Ludwig II's death had me hooked and from that point on I began immersing myself in Wagner's legacy.

I pursued a degree in German studies shortly thereafter where I was able to connect with other German and Wagner enthusiasts; I enjoyed studying many of the core pieces of literature that make up Wagner's

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Madison Opera Performs *Der Fliegende Holländer*

On April 11, 13 members and guests of the RWSUM journeyed to Madison, Wisconsin to experience Madison Opera's first Wagner production. We began with a fascinating talk by John W. Barker, author of the book *Wagner and Venice*. Mr Barker surveyed Wagner's entire life, highlighting how Wagner's life experiences affect his dramas, particularly *Der Fliegende Holländer*. A lively discussion followed.

Madison Opera used sets and costumes originally from a 2001 New York City Opera, featuring a stage framed in a skewed box, hidden doors and massive ladders, producing a surreal, cartoonish character to the drama. Soprano Turid Karlsen's fine strong voice



The Spinning Chorus Act II. Photo: James Gill / Madison Opera.

made her character, Senta, come alive on stage. The Dutchman was sung by bass-baritone Bradley Garvin portrayed a tall menacing figure dominating the stage. The real stars were the 60 members of the chorus. The spinning chorus and the rousing drinking song of Act III were the highlights of the performance.

The stage direction, however, was often confusing. Senta and the Dutchman never touched during their love duet. During the

TWELTH ANNUAL FOUNDERS DAY DINNER

Saturday 11 September 2010
4 to 9 PM

Germanic-American Institute
301 Summit Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102

4:00 to 6:00 - Optional Discussion Group (see below)
6:00 to 6:30 - Wagner Society member gathering and business meeting
6:30 to 7:00 - Public social gathering
7:00 to 7:30 - Recital performance
7:30 to 9:00 - Dinner, dessert, and socializing

Cost: \$50 for RWSUM Members / \$65 for Non-members

Early Bird Discount: Deduct \$10 by reserving *before* 15 August 2010.

ALL Reservations must be received by 3 September 2010.

A formal invitation will be forthcoming, or you can reserve by credit card on our website at www.wagnertc.org and select Events from the menu on the left. Because this is a catered event, we cannot accept walk-ins for the dinner portion of the evening.

We are celebrating our twelfth Annual Founders Day anniversary. We gather to honor the music dramas of Richard Wagner and to become re-inspired by his Gesamtkunstwerk- total work of art toward love, peace and a world of harmony.

A special vocal presentation will be from Dr John DeHaan. He is Professor of Music at the University of Minnesota School of Music and is a Wagnerian. He sang for us at the 2nd Founders Day meeting several years ago. His presentation will be excerpts from various Wagner operas.

We are expanding the program to offer added value to your evening's enjoyment because we have had to raise the ticket price to more closely approach the actual cost of the event. There will be an optional discussion, from 4 to 6 PM, on "What Fascinates You About Wagner's Music Dramas?" I will lead off with questions about *Der Fliegende Holländer*. What was the Dutchman's sin that resulted in a curse to sail the seas until Judgment Day unless he found the undying love of a woman, and why was Senta so smitten with the Dutchman vis-à-vis his picture? Dr John Heefner and other notables will also make presentations. Bring your fascination about Wagner and/or his music dramas. I will ask for volunteers to make this a spirited discussion.

**Saturday
9 October 2010**

Pre-Broadcast
Continental Breakfast &
Discussion

before

The Metropolitan Opera's
Highly Anticipated new
production of
Das Rheingold
in
High Definition



Set model from Robert
Legage's production of *Das Rheingold*.
Photo: The Metropolitan Opera



Daniel Freeman

The discussion will be led by popular musicologist Daniel E. Freeman. He has taught music history at the University of Illinois, the University of Southern California, and the University of Minnesota, where he now holds a position as lecturer. He also offers annual lecture series in music history at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. A specialist in eighteenth-century European music, he is the author of two books and numerous scholarly essays. His third book, Mozart in Prague, is in preparation.

9:30 AM: Continental Breakfast
10 :00 AM: Lecture and Discussion
We will end in time to drive to the Theater

Kenwood Gables Apartments
Kenwood Room
700 Douglas Ave, Minneapolis

Cost: (Note: cost does NOT include theater admission, which must be purchased individually. Theater tickets go on sale in September.)

\$10 Members / \$15 Non-members

Register before
15 September 2010 and save:

\$5 Members / \$10 Non-members
until 15 September

\$15 at the Door

You may register online with a credit card at www.wagnertc.org and select Events from the menu on the left.. or send a check by mail before Wednesday 6 September 2010 to

The Richard Wagner Society
of the Upper Mideast
P O Box 3804
Minneapolis MN 55403.

Book Club

Several members met at the Common Roots Cafe in Minneapolis last June to discuss some of the background material for the *Ring: Das Nibelungenlied: Song of the Nibelungs* and *The Saga of the Volsungs*. We compared and contrasted these two epics and compared them to Wagner's version. This led members to recall their own special moments in the *Ring*.

Next Meeting

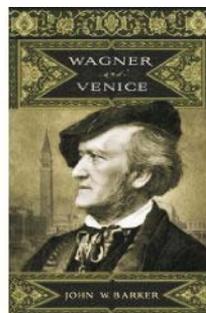
Wednesday 20 October 2010
(Tentative)

7-9 PM

Common Roots Cafe
2558 Lyndale Avenue South
Minneapolis MN

At our next meeting we will discuss *Wagner and Venice* by Wisconsin author 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*, the book examines the connections between the great composer and the great city.

Wagner in Venice
by John W. Barker
University of Rochester Press (2008)
ISBN-13: 978-1580462884



The Common Roots Cafe offers beverages, including wine and beer, and food appears to be good. The Cafe also offers a nice back room that is private and able to seat 20 people ready for a great discussion.

If you plan to attend you MUST RSVP to Carol Thomas, by email or call 612-559-6468 NO LATER THAN Thursday 14th October, so you can be informed of any changes.

Amy Neeser

(Continued from page 2)

works such as the Friedrich Nietzsche *Zukunftsmusik* of his art and enjoy his legacy in contemporary culture such as the industrial band and electronica artists Kraftwerk and Klaus Schulze. It is through the celebration of Wagner's art and all that it touches and inspires that truly keeps his legacy alive today.

Madison Opera

(Continued from page 3)



The Drinking Song Act III.
Photo: James Gill / Madison Opera.

During the final measures from the orchestra, the curtain fell, and the Dutchman and Senta walked on from opposite sides and embraced as the music came to its conclusion.

Dinner

(Continued from page 4)

In the year 2013, we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Richard Wagner. What are your ideas about how to celebrate throughout this year?

I hope you will all join us. Reserve early to get the Early Bird discount!

David W. Cline, MD
President

Video Nights 7-9 PM

Second Wednesdays (Note New Day)

Video Nights resume in September 2010 with

Parsifal

Recorded live at the Festspielhaus Baden-

Baden, 2004

The current schedule is:

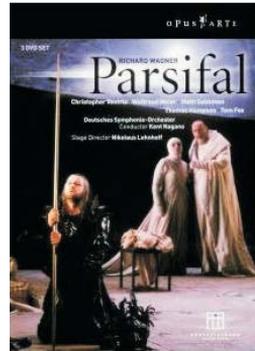
July and August

Summer Hiatus

8 September, 2010 *Parsifal Act 1*

13 October, 2010 *Parsifal Act 2*

10 November, 2010 *Parsifal Act 3*



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 612-467-9786.

On the cover:

Members and guests before Madison Opera's production of *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Author John W. Barker is standing second from right in back.

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