

The Raven

Newsletter of

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest

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In this Issue ...

Twelfth Annual Founders Day Dinner Review

Minnesota Wagner History

Dennis Petersen Recital Announcement

Performance Reviews

And More...

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 members who share a common connection.

One of our first dates in college was attending a Wagner Party for approximately ten people in their early twenties hosted by Jon Bergerud in his home. The opera recording was *Das Rheingold* featuring Kirsten Flagstaad and George London with Georg Solti conducting. Jon introduced the opera and each scene with a brief description of the libretto followed by a playing of the recording. Jon enhanced the opera's enjoyment with lots of German beer, brats and pretzels. When we told this story to our children years later, they were aghast at the thought that as young people we could find this experience enjoyable. The following summer, Jon and I spent four months in Europe that included a three day stop at Bayreuth where we saw *Das Rheingold* and Jon saw *Siegfried*. Birgit Neilson sang the role of Brünnhilde. Karen and Mahlon Schneider

I was vaguely aware of Wagner's music before I went off to Yale at 17. Fortunately I had a roommate who had been a classmate at Blake school locally and a serious music lover, Jon Bergerud. Jon is also a member of our Society. With Jon I learned about a wide variety of serious music, from the hundreds of harpsichord sonatas of Scarlatti (Domenico) and Rameau to the masterpieces of Wagner. The latter I followed in our room with German-English libretti full of information, including identification of the leitmotifs. With Jon there was a modest tilt to opera and, within that genre, to Wagner. In the end, it was not Jon but the glory of the music that captured me.

David Bergerson

New Members

Arlene Alm, Patricia Barnes, Jim Salutz, and Karin Wendt

Our members are our best recruiters. So get out there and recruit.

2010 Founders Day Dinner Review

by David W. Cline, President

This annual program has developed into a successful and enjoyable event of our Wagner Society. It was attended by 39 of our 52 members on September 11, 2010, at the Germanic-American Institute in St. Paul. This year, we started at 4 PM with a discussion of “What fascinates you about Wagner’s music dramas?” My sister, Lyda Lea Cline Lanier, started off with a report of her experience as a first-time attendee at the Wagner Festspiele in Bayreuth, August 24th to 28th. She was impressed with the formality, dignity, and Gemutlichkeit of these total works of art.



Then, John De Haan, Professor of Music at the University of Minnesota, told us of his personal experiences singing Wagner. John is a personable artist - one of us. We felt common cause with him. I was most moved by the report of his experience in a *Tannhäuser* production. He was waiting to go on stage while the pilgrim chorus was being performed. Eighty men singing at full force, their neck



veins bulging and their faces flushed, singing that beautiful music. He couldn’t stand it; the hair of the back of his neck stood up, and he broke into tears, overwhelmed by it

all. But then he carried his passion into his part of the performance. We saw and heard this passion later that evening when John sang “Winterstürme” from Act I of *Die Walküre*, from *Siegfried*, the part where Siegfried has an identity crisis as he tries to figure out who his parents are and tries to make sounds like the birds, and a selection from *Parsifal*. We were charmed by his presentation.

I was the third presenter: “What wrong did the Flying Dutchman

(Continued on page 4)

Dinner

(Continued from page 3)

commit that he was cursed to sail the seas until Judgment Day unless he was redeemed by the love of a woman faithful unto death?" My answer: During the 15th century, when many still thought the world was flat and inhabited by sea monsters, it took enormous courage to sail beyond land's end. Nature, real or imagined, was a formidable force. For the Dutchman to pit himself against storming nature wind and wave as he rounded the Cape of Good Hope, there was formidable retribution. "Since you don't know your place in nature's scheme of things, you can sail on forever," was the mythic response. "If you mess with nature, it will turn on you" -- like the atomic bomb in our own time.

Wagner wrote this opera while he was failing to capture French opera. The Dutchman's journey was his journey until he discovered, like the prodigal son, his own place in nature: his German homeland - his Heimat - where he found redemption through the "angel" of his music.



The annual business meeting lasted 25 minutes. Jamie Andrews announced the bank account balance was \$11,454, with about \$9000+ of that in the former Tristan Fund, to be used for a special Wagner music drama production. He welcomed contributions to the general operating fund, now at around \$2000. He also announced upcoming programs. Carol Thomas discussed membership, the newsletter, and the book club. Kevin Edgar discussed the monthly video nights and alerted us to technical advances that he has made available for society members. We can now pay online, engage with Facebook and Twitter.

The audience gave warm applause and appreciation for the extensive work of these board members.

After 12 years of service, two board members resigned to pursue other interests. Dr John Heefner and Woody Andrews were presented with commemorative plaques in appreciation of their long and faithful service.

Renate Sharp was added to the slate of board members to be elected

Member Jack Sielaff has been doing some extensive research on Wagner operas in Minnesota. There was a time when Wagner was all the rage in St. Paul! This is part 1 of Jack's remarkable findings.

Early Wagner Stage Performances in Minnesota (Part 1)

by Jack Sielaff



In the 1880's Richard Wagner's music was well known in the Twin Cities through piano transcriptions and local performances of excerpts, however one had to travel to New York or Europe to see the music dramas fully staged. In 1889 the New York based German Grand Opera Company brought the Ring Cycle to audiences in Chicago, St. Louis and Milwaukee but after 1890 Italian Opera gained the upper hand and Wagner in German became rare even in New York. In the spring of 1895 the conductor and impresario Walter Damrosch initiated a resurgence of Wagner performance in New York by assembling a company devoted to performing German opera. After a successful 8 week run he took it on the road to Boston, Chicago, St. Louis and Kansas City. This went so well that at the end of the same year Damrosch ventured out again this time expanding the tour and making Minnesota their furthestmost western stop. During the week of January 6-11, 1896 the 170 member Damrosch Opera Company braved our frozen climes and, much to the pleasure of Twin Cities music lovers, presented a week of German opera. The exhausting schedule went like this: Monday, *Tannhäuser*, Minneapolis; Tuesday, *Tristan and Isolde*, Minneapolis; Wednesday, *Siegfried* (matinee) and *Lohengrin*, Minneapolis; Thursday, *Fidelio*, St. Paul; Friday, *Die Meistersinger*, St. Paul; Saturday, *Tannhäuser* (matinee) and *Die Walküre*, St. Paul; Sunday, Orchestral concert in Minneapolis of ten overtures and excerpts. An additional performance of *Lohengrin* announced for a Friday matinee in St. Paul was canceled due to illness of the tenor.

How could such a thing happen in the Twin Cities in 1896? At the turn of the 20th Century immigrants from German speaking countries comprised the largest foreign-born ethnic group in Minnesota, making the state a logical destination for the Damrosch Company. In 1900 28% of St. Paul's foreign born residents were German speaking. The St. Paul Schubert Club (1891), which sponsored

(Continued on page 8)

HAWAII OPERA THEATER PRESENTS *DIE WALKÜRE*

by David W. Cline, MD

I attended the matinee performance in Honolulu on February 14, 2010. I was prepared for a mediocre show because a friend of mine, a French horn player and a graduate from Julliard School of Music, knows what is going on with regional opera houses and told me that Hawaii, like other regional opera houses, is having financial constraints, and that many musicians were leaving the scene. It was a welcome surprise, then, to see the orchestra pit filled with players and a confident audience that almost filled the auditorium to capacity.



Die Walküre, Act III by Hawaii Opera Theatre

In Act 2, the relationships between Wotan and Fricka and Wotan and Brünnhilde were explicitly developed. The climax came with the battle between Hunding and Siegmund. Brünnhilde initially protected Siegmund, then Wotan intervened by raising his staff and thus shattering Nothung, Siegmund's sword. Hunding kills Siegmund, who falls dead at his father's feet as his father looks on, expressionless.

In order to make the opera production financially feasible, the opera had to be cut to 3½ hours, including two 15-minute intermissions, in order to avoid excessive overtime charges by the performers. I noticed with regret the absence of the love scene music between Siegmund and Sieglinde that occurs early in the first act, played on a solo cello. However, the acting and remaining music made a convincing case that Siegmund and Sieglinde really were in love then and there as they discovered their origins and their identity. "Winterstürme," followed by "Du bist der Lenz," were sung with enthusiasm, and I was swept along as they disappeared into their night of love.

The most beautiful and emotionally meaningful way I have ever seen this scene done was at our society DVD nights several years ago when we watched the Stuttgart production. Wotan, facing Siegmund, raises his staff, thus shattering Nothung, to Siegmund's amazement. Then, in a telling moment, Siegmund comes to understand what is going to happen

(Continued on page 11)

Dennis Petersen performs excerpts from Wagner's Ring Cycle

Renowned tenor Dennis Petersen will present music from Wagner's Ring Cycle. Included will be from *Das Rheingold*, Loge's *Immer ist Undank*, Siegmund's *Winterstürme* from *Die Walküre*, and from *Siegfried*, Mime's *Zwang volle Plage* and Siegfried's *Nothung and Schmieding Lied*.



Following the performance will be a conversation with Mr Petersen about the vocal and dramatic requirements of each character followed by a question-and-answer period. The audience is invited to attend a reception immediately following the program.

Noted for his innate sense of style and superior acting abilities, Petersen's recent portrayal of Mime in the Seattle Opera's Ring Cycle was described as "...one of the handful of superb character tenors, ... masterful." He has been seen frequently at the Metropolitan Opera including their new production of *Boris Godunov*. He also received rave reviews as King Herod in Minnesota Opera's production of *Salome* last April.

When:

Thursday
18 November 2010
7:00 PM

Where:

Germanic-American Institute
301 Summit Ave
St. Paul MN 55102

Tickets:

\$15 – General public (\$20 at the door)
\$10 – Wagner Society & GAI members (\$15 at the door)
\$5 – students (valid ID required) (\$10 at the door)

To Purchase:

Go to: www.wagnertc.org/Events.htm

Or send a check (made payable to "RWSUM") to:

The Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest
PO Box 3804
Minneapolis MN 55403

History

(Continued from page 5)

morning lectures by Damrosch on the days of the Wagner operas, grew out of earlier German musical organizations and the city contained many sacred and secular choral groups. These demographics, however, did not guarantee that the best musical entertainment came to Minnesota. The appearance of world-class music here was apparently the doing of primarily one woman: Anna Eugenie Schoen-Rene.

Schoen-Rene arrived in Minnesota in 1893 at the age of 29 already a seasoned opera singer in Germany. Trying to recover from a throat ailment she came to spend some time with her sister who taught at the University. She stayed until 1909 and worked tirelessly to raise musical standards while maintaining her artistic connections by retuning to Germany most summers. In a short time she founded the University Choral Union and began sponsoring large choral festivals featuring big name opera stars of the day - all her friends. By giving free lectures on music history and teaching voice she laid the foundation for the music department at the U of M which was finally founded officially in 1902. When Louis Scott, the manager of the St. Paul and Minneapolis Metropolitan Opera Houses, wanted to upgrade the quality of his entertainment he went to Schoen-Rene, who knew Walter Damrosch and many of his singers, for help.

Although Walter Damrosch was not considered one of the best Wagner interpreters of his day he had superior abilities in raising money from wealthy backers and recruiting excellent vocalists. The company included an orchestra of 65, a chorus, and at least 22 singers to cover all the roles. Max Avary (he sang Tristan and Tannhäuser here) was known for his Siegfried the world over and had sung Tristan and Tannhäuser at Bayreuth in 1891. Emil Fischer (Sachs) was a star of the Met in New York during the 1885-91 seasons. Louise Mulder (Eva, Sieglinde), Demeter Popovici (Wotan, Kervanal), and Wilhelm Gruning (Siegfried, Walter) were also Bayreuth veterans. Czech-born Kathrina Lohse-Klafsky (Isolde, Brünnhilde, Leonora) had made her career in London singing Isolde and Brünnhilde. Her husband, Otto Lohse, shared conductor duties with Damrosch and led the *Tannhäuser* performance here. The couple were on their first visit to America. Kathrina returned to Europe and tragically died of a brain tumor in September of the same year. Younger singers included Gerhard Stehmann (Landgraf,

(Continued on page 11)

Member News

Member Paul Straka, a horn player with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, performed in Chicago last summer. Paul played horn and Wagner Tuba with the Chicago Symphony in excerpts from *Siegfried* (Act 3, scene 3) and *Götterdämmerung* (Prologue, Act 3 scenes 2 & 3). Christine Brewer sang Brünnhilde and John Treleaven sang Siegfried. Paul found it to be an amazing performance, “Thrilling and moving.”



Paul Straka (front, left) with the horns and Wagner Tubas from the CSO.

Dinner

(Continued from page 4)

with a motion that passed unanimously. A sixth board position remains open, with an invitation to the membership to nominate someone.

The social hour, program presented by John DeHaan, accompanied by Kathy Kraulik, and dinner served in an exemplary manner by the staff of the GAI, made an evening of *Gemutlichkeit* imbued with some essence of Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Let us repeat it next year.

Don't forget, 2013 is Richard Wagner's 200th birthday. We would like your suggestions. How would you like to celebrate this event?

Wagner on the Silver Screen

Die Walküre (La Scala), Richard Wagner
From Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Italy. 270 minutes plus 2 intermissions.
Second opera in the Ring Cycle. Sung in German with English subtitles.
Starring Simon O'Neill, John Tomlinson, René Pape, Waltraud Meier,
Nina Stemme, Ekaterina Gubanova, Danielle Halbwachs.

Live: 7 December 2010
Carmike Oakdale 20
1188 Helmo Ave North
Oakdale, MN 55128
Phone: 651-714-4800

4 January 2011
The Heights Theater
3951 Central Ave NE
Columbia Heights, MN 55421
Phone: 763-788-9079

Election Results

The annual meeting of the members was held pursuant to notice at the Germanic-American Institute in St. Paul, Minnesota at approximately 6 PM on Saturday, 11 September 2010. David Cline announced that the principal order of business was the election of directors of the Society. The following were duly nominated: Jamie Andrews, David Cline, B. Kevin Edgar, Carol Thomas, and Renate Sharp. There being no other nominations, the persons named were unanimously elected as the directors of the Society on motion duly made and seconded. With the retiring of John Heefner and Woody Andrews, one position remains vacant.

At a meeting of the board of directors held at the Minneapolis Club Thursday, October 7, 2010, the following were elected as officers: David Cline, President; Jamie Andrews, Treasurer; and Renate Sharp, Secretary. The resignation of B. Kevin Edgar from the board of directors was unanimously accepted. It was agreed that he would remain as Senior Technical Advisor.

History

(Continued from page 8)

Beckmesser) who returned to Vienna to sing under Mahler at the Hofoper from 1899 to 1907. Riza Eibenschuetz (Venus, Ortrud) later became famous for her Brünnhilde and Senta in Europe and sang in the premiers of several Richard Strauss operas. Johanna Gadski (Elsa, Elizabeth), though already established in Europe, was only 24 and at the beginning of a long career. She went on to sing at the Met and returned to Minnesota many times for recitals and in touring companies. She last appeared here in 1930 as Brünnhilde and 1931 as Isolde. But that's another story.

(Continued Next Time, Editor.)

Hawaii

(Continued from page 6)

as Wotan approaches him, puts his arms around him, and physically supports him as they both watch Hunding drive his sword into Siegmund. Then Wotan gently lowers his son to the ground, holding him as he dies in his father's arms.

The next passionate moment in HOT's production comes in the long dialog at the end of Act 3 between Wotan and Brünnhilde. In this production, this scene was sensitively done. One could feel the painful agony of Wotan as he ambivalently sentenced his beloved daughter to sleep on a rock surrounded by a ring of fire. Brünnhilde's impassioned response, "War es so schmähhlich" only added to the pathos. "What was so terrible that I did, when I carried out your true heart's desire?" Yet she accepts her sentence as Wotan kisses away her godhead.

This is a tragedy in the way the ancient Greeks described it. The outcome had to be this way; it was beyond anyone's control to change it. Hawaii Opera highlighted this scene superbly with their sensitive musical interpretation.

I left with a renewed and deeper understanding of the human condition: beautiful sadness, melancholy hopefulness, respect, and motivation to again start anew and to do better.

Video Nights 7-9 PM

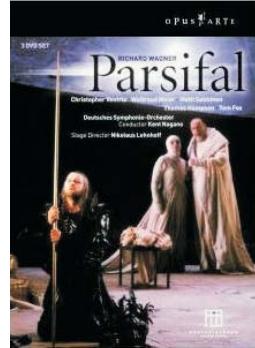
Second Wednesdays

Parsifal

Recorded live at the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, 2004

The current schedule is:

10 November, 2010	<i>Parsifal Act 3</i>
December, 2010	<i>Holiday Break No Meeting</i>
January, 2011	<i>Holiday Break No Meeting</i>



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:
Tenor John DeHaan and pianist Kathy Kraulik provided the
musical program for our Founders Day Dinner.**

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