

The Raven

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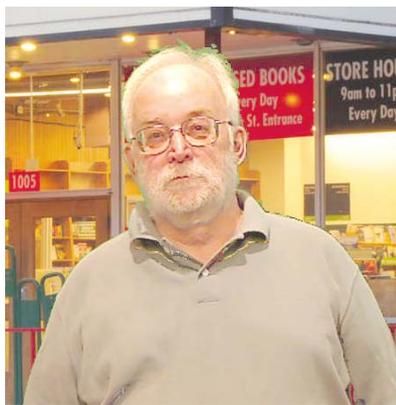
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And More...

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 Tom Logeland.

I resisted and ignored Wagner for many years. There were two reasons. I vaguely knew of the Nazi/Hitler associations having come of age shortly after WWII and I had a good friend who often suffered bouts of mental illness. These days it is called bipolar, but before lithium, he was just having breakdowns. His soundtrack for the breakdowns was Wagner, especially *Götterdämmerung*. I vaguely concluded that Wagner might be dangerous music and I wasn't always all that stable.



In 2004, I attended a family reunion in Oregon and as is my habit, I looked for some opera to see. Seattle was staging *Lohengrin* at the right time for me (simply one of their regular summer Wagner operas). I was transfixed. The size and sound of the orchestra along with Jane Eaglen stayed with me for a long time. I knew that more Wagner was necessary and then attended the Chicago *Ring* the next spring. I didn't study much for the *Ring*. I just sat there awash in the music trying to figure out what was going on. Domingo will always be my Siegmund and Morris my Wotan. Since then, Wagner has been my chief reason to travel.

New Members

Jerry Swenson, John Elsing, Christopher Schout, Louis Wendling, and Patti Wendling

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

Review of Nancy Thompson's Presentation *Wotan: The Original Helicopter Parent*

by David W. Cline, MD

Twenty-five people interested in the philosophy and works of Richard Wagner sat down in the main assembly hall at the Germanic-American Institute on April 7, 2011, to hear Nancy Thompson, a longtime musician, teacher and Wagner aficionado, present on the topic *Wotan: The Original Helicopter Parent*.

Do you know what a helicopter parent is? Answer: A parent who hovers over his children excessively to make sure they get admitted to Harvard, Yale, or Stanford. That Wagner was such is a striking contrast to the epitaph of misogynist (woman-hater) given him by others.

Ms Thompson could have dwelt on the writings and personal life of Richard Wagner, but she chose to address this topic by describing Wagner's views through the characters in his longest artistic production, *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*. She demonstrated her points with photographic pictures of various characters and scenes from those four operas. Some of these were of the comic variety, including Barbie doll lookalikes and large breast-plated Brünnhilde costumes. The serious message that I received from Ms Thompson's presentation was through the characters of Fricka, Wotan's wife; Erda, the Earth goddess; Freia, the goddess of youth and beauty; Sieglinde and Brünnhilde. These women are all portrayed as being on the side of the angels, of seeing the greater truth of the situation and sensing the correct pathway. He gave these women the role of the virtuous, the kind who were reality based.

Ms Thompson's presentation was in concert with Alec Ross's article in the April 25, 2011, edition of The New Yorker. Ross pointed out that Fricka changed the plot-line in *Der Ring*. In her last scene, Act II of the *Die Walküre*, she puts her foot down on Wotan and demands he uphold the laws of marriage, chastity and against incest. Thus, his illegitimate son, Siegmund, must lose to Hunding and die. In *Das Rheingold*, Fricka cries to her husband, "What is still sacred and good to your hearts when men lust for power?", and later in *Die Walküre*, "We gods would go to our ruin were my rights not avenged, nobly and gloriously."

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Review of Chicago's *Lohengrin*

by Carol Thomas



Entire ensemble from Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*, Act III, at Lyric Opera Chicago. Photo by Dan Rest.

Lohengrin is one of Wagner's most beautiful lyrical operas. I got the chance to see it live for the first time since I became a bonafide Wagnerian at the Chicago Lyric Opera this past February. The orchestral moments from this opera were what drew me to Wagner at a very early age, and then into my 40s pulled me in even deeper.



Johan Botha and Greer Grimsley in Lyric Opera Chicago's *Lohengrin*. photo by Dan Rest

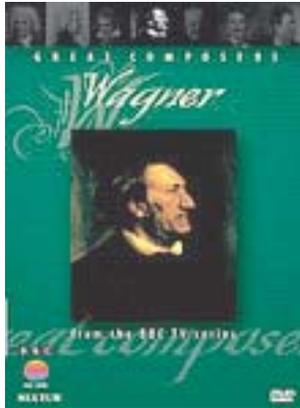
As the Prelude to Act I started, I had tears forming knowing I was about to finally see this production, right in front of me - the Swan Knight, Elsa's procession, the evil glances of Ortrud and Telramund! I watched for traditional stage elements such as the Swan boat, and the appearance of Elsa's brother. In this performance, I was disappointed by the Swan, a small outline on a foreground scrim. However the overall production made up for it. Lohengrin's entrance was interesting as he came out in front of the scrim, then his back was to the audience. The appearance

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Video Nights 7-9 PM

Second Wednesdays

The season ends June 08 with an Italian documentary, The Great Composers: Wagner. Filmed in Switzerland, Italy and the Bavaria of King Ludwig II, this documentary explores Wagner's techniques



and features performers such as Daniel Barenboim, Roger Norrington, Siegfried Jerusalem, and Deborah Polaski, among others.

We resume in September with an imaginative 2010 Deutsche Oper Berlin production of the rarely performed *Rienzi*.

While popular in his lifetime, Wagner eventually dismissed it

as a youthful indiscretion. This renders it non-canonical to purists. Of course, it also comes with some baggage, reportedly being one of Hitler's favorites. Its relentless parades, rallies and marchpasts may have affected Nazi aesthetics. Stage Director Philipp Stölzl reimagines *Rienzi* in terms of a 20th-century dictatorship. Torsten Kerl is Rienzi, with Camilla Nylund as his fanatical sister Irene. Kate Aldrich sings Adriano.



This production is cut to a total of 152 minutes, and will be shown in two parts, September 14 and October 12.

After *Rienzi*, we return to *Lohengrin* in a 1982 Bayreuth production, a time when Bayreuth was still capable of staging acceptable productions.

Director: Götz Friedrich. Bayreuth 1982 (production from 1979).
Cast: Peter Hofmann (*Lohengrin*), Karan Armstrong (*Elsa*), Elizabeth Connell (*Ortrud*), Leif Roar (*Telramund*), Siegfried Vogel (*Heinrich*).

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Video Nights

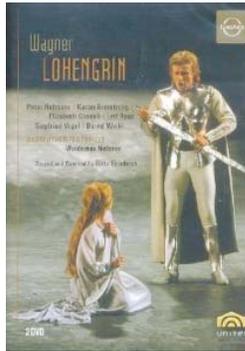
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Conductor: Woldemar Nelsson.

From <http://mostlyopera.blogspot.com>:

Götz Friedrich's vision of Lohengrin is dark and static, shifting between reality and Utopia - reality being the power-obsessed people of Brabant, Utopia being the land of Elsa's dreams where Lohengrin lives. A golden disc mediates between these two worlds, reality and fantasy, thus replacing the traditional swan.

That Elsa is a sensitive, but not overly naive woman dreaming of an alternative to her power-obsessed compatriots is obvious from the moment she appears in misty light during the prelude. She conjures up the imaginary Lohengrin, appropriately dressed in white. However, when he returns in Act 3 as a black knight returning a miniature warrior brother to Elsa, we realize that there really is no hope.



The staging is simple, square, dark and unfortunately very static as well. While it may offend no-one, I doubt many will find it exciting. What however works well, austere surroundings apart, is the core romantic drama, mainly thanks to Peter Hofmann.

Peter Hofmann is the ideal romantic Lohengrin. He looks the part. He is the real romantic hero. He sings well. He is very moving. What more can anyone want? That Peter Hofmann in the last part of his career (end-80s) may have performed less well, may quite possibly be attributed to the well-known incipient onset of the invalidating Parkinson disease he officially was diagnosed with in 1994, and which has resulted in him apparently struggling economically as well being virtually crippled today. But in 1982 he was on top of his game.

We will view *Lohengrin* in three parts, November 09, December 14 and January 14.

Lohengrin

(Continued from page 4)

of Elsa's brother was sudden, almost magical and cleverly done as he came out from behind Lohengrin who was standing center stage.

I felt both Michaela Schuster and Greer Grimsley were outstanding as Ortrud and Telramund. Though known for singing the part of Elsa across the country, I found at times Emily Magee was stretching her voice. As for Lohengrin, Johan Botha gave a fine performance.



Michaela Schuster and Emily Magee in Lyric Opera Chicago's *Lohengrin*. photo by Dan Rest.

Very few stage props were used. An effective piece being in Act III, the wedding bed wasn't even there - just a red silky like covering on the floor. It worked though, and better yet one concentrated on the singers.

Overall this was an enjoyable production. Not like the Domingo and Hoffmann productions I have seen on DVD, but it delivered what Wagner intended it to be. Excellent.

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 612-564-0253.

Save This Date: **13th Annual Founders Day Dinner**

Mark your calendars for this popular event!

Saturday 10 September 2011

Directions, map, and program details will follow at a later date.

Review

(Continued from page 3)

The helicopter parent in Wagner comes out in Wotan's display of love and affection when he puts Brünnhilde to sleep on a rock and encircles her with a protective ring of fire and kisses her godhead away. At the end of *Götterdämmerung*, it is Brünnhilde who proclaims, "Everything, everything I know, all is now clear to me." Ms Thompson ended her presentation with the quote from Brünnhilde, "Alles wertist, wenn wissend wuerde ein weib." "Everything is worthwhile if woman gained wisdom."

Thank you, Nancy Thompson.

On the cover:

Members of the RWSUM Board met with Minnesota Opera Leadership on May 4th for dinner and discussion of the possibility of a Wagner opera in Minnesota. The Board's intention was to introduce the newly appointed Minnesota Opera President to our Society, as well as form a social connection and present our goals. The meeting was a delightful success with a follow-up meeting later in the year. (left to right) Carol Thomas, President David Cline, Renate Sharp, Allan Naplan (President and General Director, Minnesota Opera), David Bergerson, Bernt von Ohlen, and Dale Johnson (Artistic Director, Minnesota Opera)

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P.O. Box 3804
Minneapolis, MN 55403
612-467-9786
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