

WAGNER NEWS

Wagner News is published by the TORONTOWAGNER SOCIETY

TWS CALENDAR

Monday, September 15
8.00 p.m.

DVD showing: **'Wagner, A Genius in Exile'**. A biographical and musical film made by Antoine Wagner, great-great grandson of Richard.

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Thursday, October 30
8.00 p.m.

Gerald Finley talks about singing Wagner.

(Note the different day of the week which was Finley's only available date in Toronto).

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Monday, November 10
8.00 p.m.

Stephan Bonfield on **'Die Meistersinger today - 'The Artwork of the Future' and some past perspectives.'**

meetings at
ARTS AND LETTERS CLUB
14 ELM STREET



Wahnfried today and yesterday



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This issue is dedicated almost entirely to Bayreuth and the goings-on there.

Since it reaches you before we can include any first hand reports (beyond one preliminary one) from members of our society who were in attendance, we chose rather to glean through published reviews for comments about this year's version of past Bayreuth productions. There are no new productions this season, a rather uncommon decision perhaps due to changes in the management; in consequence, most reviewers focused on the differences in the productions between the past season and the current one.

Bayreuth today

Construction is in progress on all fronts and if we can trust the predictions, after previously failed target dates, the opening time is July 2015.

The Wagner Museum and Archives get a new building and a permanent exhibition at a cost of approximately 18 million euros. The renovation of the Festival house will cost 30 million euros shared with the Town Hall upgrade. Work has started this current year and included in this ambitious drive to modernization of not only the properties relating to Richard Wagner but also upscaling the Town Hall, and the Margrave Opera House, which will cost about 100 million euros. The Festival House will get a facelift on the outside; the interior will stay the way it is and has been - wooden seats and no air-conditioning; all this to preserve the existing acoustics. The financing will come from the Federal Government, the Bavarian State, the Upper Franconia Foundation and the Society of Friends of Bayreuth.



On the first floor of *Wahnfried*, where Winifred Wagner lived and Adolf Hitler visited, one is greeted

by a plaster bust of Wagner wearing a hard hat. According to the Museum and Archives director Sven Friedrich, by the time of the next Festival, 2015, there will be a thoroughly revised permanent exhibition of the life and work of the composer, including a treasure trove of original musical scores.

A new glass faced building will house the history of the Festival, and events and temporary exhibitions. Siegfried Wagner's house will deal with Richard Wagner and the Nazis, and exhibits relating to the ideology and performance history of Wagner's interpreters, such as Adorno, Bloch and Hans Mayer.

A cafeteria will be in a new building close to Wagner's tomb in the garden. Not all are happy with it; it is seen as a sacrilege. The now deceased granddaughter of Wagner, Iris, found it disrespectful, an opinion shared by many, acknowledged but not heeded. *Wahnfried* itself is in semi reconstruction. Only original furniture will be shown and what is lost will be replaced by white cover slip-on copies, as though Wagner was traveling. The original dining room of Winifred Wagner will be on view for the first time but not accessible - closed off by a cord. So we will not be able to sit down as if invited, awaiting to be greeted by the lady of the house.

THE TICKET SITUATION IN BAYREUTH REVEALED !

The Ideal Festival Customer Rarely Attends (*Der ideale Festspiel-Kunde geht selber rein*) * Interview with the Managing Director, Hans-Dieter Sense of the Bayreuth Festival, conducted by Monika Beer and published in 'InFranken.de' * (*loosely translated by Frances Henry*)

Managing Director Hans-Dieter Sense of the Bayreuth Festival, provides detailed information on the sale of tickets for the Festival. Some special contingents have been reduced or completely removed, so that there are more tickets for the regular applicant.

The Festival has not had much luck with their internet sales. Since its beginning in 2012, for tickets to the jubilee production its server - the Bayreuth company TMT - was fully overloaded. A worse breakdown in the October 2013 - was followed by the first regular online sales for the Festival in 2014 - also because of data security. Suddenly the following end of March and beginning April, online tickets became available to be purchased immediately. There were reasons therefore to ask Heinz-Dieter Sense, the manager of the Festival, some questions.

Q: How many tickets does the Festival have per season and performance?

By performance there are **1,925** places that we can sell. There are a few more, for Exempel for the entrance staff. All together for the 30 performances there are **57,750 tickets**. In the *Ring* years there are fewer tickets to sell because the four performances are sold as one ticket. One can dispute that but it is done for artistic reasons.

Q. How many tickets are reserved for special contingents?

At the moment from about 57,750 tickets, **19,326** are taken of which the Association of Friends of Bayreuth receives **14,000**. There are also smaller contingents every year who receive service tickets - sponsors, media and so forth. These contingents must be approved by management every year. For the open sale, **38,424** tickets remain.

Q. Since when is this so?

In 2008/2009 there were only **19,525** in the open sale. This means that the total in the open sale has doubled. In earlier times the Wagner societies had through a right of sale (or purchase option) **6,600** tickets which was reduced to **100**. Completely taken off were the travel agents with about **4,150** places and the **3,850** places of the two trade union performances and the number of free media tickets was more than halved.

Q. There are several tour operators on the internet who offer festival tickets. How did they get their tickets?

If I knew that, then I would also know how to deal with this problem. Because of several reasons a secondary market where tickets are traded - which don't come from the organizer - has been built. The danger is that on this market, ticket prices are very much higher which raises the pleasurable thought to politicians that our tickets could be much higher and therefore require less subsidy. And then there is also - but that is a development perhaps in the last five years - but in always stronger measure, the so called black market.

Q. How do you want to challenge the fantasy prices offered on Ebay?

There is always a black market when there is high demand. Therefore I will give a spontaneous answer to the question in that I no longer have such a high demand. One should also understand that it is much simpler today to work with the black market. As well, other than the newspaper announcement, it does not cost one cent to place a ticket on Ebay. One should invest in nothing but the real ticket price. But it is for this reason that the black market for demand-driven events exists.

Q. How can you influence the demand?

There are several possibilities. One either increases the number of performances which, because the Festival does not have its own Ensemble is not possible, or the productions will become so bad that nobody would want to attend. I have been in the artistic field for such a long time that I say: they cannot be so bad that people would not want to come. There is demand when there is a top production and when there is a flop. When it is only so-so, there is lesser demand. Another possibility would be to play the productions for a longer time period. But would that be a solution in the minds of visitors if, for example, we extend the highly sought after '*Lohengrin*' until no one wants to see it?

Q. Wolfgang Wagner wanted to drive out the black market through personalized tickets

The tickets are personalized as before; the name of the first buyer is on the ticket. What Wolfgang Wagner wanted was that only the named person on the ticket would be allowed to enter. In my opinion, that is legally not possible and very difficult to organize administratively.

We must rather reflect on the quotas with the shareholders on these and other certain preemptive rights and build a new sales and service strategy. As long as I don't give tour operators tickets, what happens now will continue to happen.

Q. The problem persists that many people who have no interest in the Festival buy tickets.

These are the people who try it out on in a transitional period. Because they will no longer buy tickets if they have no hope for business I could live in a transitional period. There is also a second problem that happens to our visitors: when there are still seats vacant at the beginning of a performance - and this has nothing to do with black market speculation - that people drive to Bayreuth too late and given traffic on the highway, arrive too late. And then there is the so-called Public Events. Some people want to come to Bayreuth once and when they realize how uncomfortable it is here, they leave in the intermission. This means that as Wagner regulars were pushed out as a result of concerns about justice, a new problem has arisen.

Q. Hardcore Wagnerians then go somewhere else because they are addicts.

They have more choices than earlier and they have become more mobile. The large opera houses have more foreign audiences because these people simply travel to interesting productions and then drive away.

Q. And what happens to the fans who stand in front of the house with *suche karten* signs?

They search on Ebay and at the last moment.

Q. How many tickets were available in the first internet immediate sale in October, 2013 and how many as of March 25?

In principle, all tickets for these eleven performances in August, minus those for contingent groups, were in the internet sale: **14,175**. Since the system was overloaded and broke down, payment after a certain time did not go as planned. Therefore some tickets were left over. After painstaking research, **1,000** tickets went into the second sale. For us, naturally this was also an uncomfortable situation. The error in the operating system that is also in use everywhere else, even at the World Cup, is now eliminated. Nevertheless, we want to make changes in the process. We will go only to the Internet sale for next year when we can be as sure as humanly possible, that it is functioning properly.

Q. Will then all tickets go in the internet sale?

Only one third. We intend to sell all our tickets on the internet eventually. But to do that we must first create a proper basis.

Q. Do you actually know your customers ?

We have their name, address and their order; we don't know much else. From the direct internet sale we know that this order system attracts the middle and younger generation. We can't say however whether those who make the order or their relatives attend the performance. As well, we don't know those customers who order by mail every year. Friends and family members of some people who really want to come also do ordering on their behalf. Therefore nobody can say how much genuine demand there is.

Q. And foreigners?

The internet sale had more interest from abroad compared to the normal sale. This means if we want to be political, that more foreigners come here and we should sell all performances on the internet. The mailed orders from abroad have lessened.

Q. How do you explain that?

A large proportion of the foreigners up till now came from the Richard Wagner societies. The number of tickets reduced and these customers are not those who simply line up and order every year in the hope of sometime receiving tickets.

Q. Is the waiting period system still there?

Yes, for all the written orders which are mailed, faxed or sent online.

Q. In the meantime, has there been a market study of the Festival ?

That has not been done. It is true that the shareholders, prompted by questions in the Budget Committee of the Bundestag, want to have a market price study. I am sceptical whether that can solve the problem. If I am asked how can demand be prevented, as a sales person I would say that the prices are too low. If one were to do a survey on this, there are certainly people who say that they are ready to pay 1000 Euro for one ticket. Only we should not necessarily conclude from this that one can raise the price to 800 euros - and thus to exclude a large portion of today's visitors. Quite apart from that, it would be incompatible with Richard Wagner's opera festival.

Q. Are all Festival day the same or are there differences between weekdays and weekends?

Days of the week don't play a big role in the demand; the different price categories play a larger role. We are at the moment at a tenfold

overbooking (over requesting): there are days that have only an eight overbooking and days, which have a twelve, I think seven is the lowest this year. There are already differences, but that has more to do with the combination of the pieces in the repertoire. People love to book those days when single works are included within the *Ring*. And, of course, the opening day is the most popular.

Q. Still ten fold?

Last year, there were **361,747** ticket requests and in the open sale there were **35,665** tickets for sale. Over the years the number of desired tickets has been less high and went down, but the highest order was 2006 with **490,000** and the lowest was 2012 with about **300,000**. We have statistically reliable figures only since 2010,; before that the figures are estimates. This year there are approximately **360,000** ticket requests.

Q. 7,000 requests for 2014.

This was an intermediate stage in the counting of processed orders at this time, when the *Ring* was not counted as four tickets. The demand continues unabated, no matter what production is on stage. As a businessman I would be glad if it was only once overbooked. (over requested) Then I would have much less hassle. I really admire the people who each year have the courage to order tickets again and still don't receive them. I wouldn't be able to do this for years.

Q. Why was the demand for tickets already questioned in the 2012 yearbook.

You will find a look into the future in every yearbook. Since I've been here for one year and I have come to know the two directors as very careful and frugal persons, and from my years of theatre experience, that *Ring* tickets for almost 1300 Euro are not as easily sold as single ticket for 300 Euros. There are simply fewer people who can afford a *Ring* who must deal with the further costs of travel, hotel and meals for an entire week. An entire *Ring* will always have less demand than a single *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* or *Holländer*.

Q. What is the ideal Festival customer like?

The ideal customer is one who orders tickets, attends the performance himself, remains for the entire performance and does not leave in the intermission. Then he can really say if he found it good or bad.

I don't want to evaluate the discussion which broke out last year about the *Ring*. I can only say that if a production is much discussed and written about, that is good. And when it polarizes, so much the better. The worst that can happen is when people leave and discuss what they want to eat tomorrow.

Monika Beer, In Franken.de

<http://www.infranken.de/ueberregional/kultur/Bayreuther-Festspiele-Wagner-Heinz-Dieter-Sense-Katharina-Wagner-Festspielkarten-Der-ideale-Festspiel-Kunde-geht-selber-rein;art182,739876#> published: Thursday, June 26, 2014 05:47, updated: Thursday, July 10, 2014 05:51

Crafty ladies on a mission...an exemplary *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* in Munich

Jim Warrington

We were fortunate to be able to drop by the opening of the Munich Opera Festival at the Bayerische Staatsoper on June 29th and catch their new production of *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. What a treat!

It was our first time seeing this opera, first time in the Munich house and first time hearing an international ensemble cast of such stature tackling Strauss. It all clicked, and was a most memorable evening.

This production debuted in Munich last November to strong positive reviews, and I can understand why. The renegade Polish creative team of Director Krzysztof Warlikowski and Designer Malgorzata Szczesniak can really hit or really miss (their Paris *Parsifal* with sinks in every scene, Space Odyssey 2001 characters and a Nazi war film still has me shaking my head). Here, they scored,



Deborah Polaski and Adrienne Pieczonka
Photo: Wilfried Hösl

big time. A simple, timeless setting of moving backdrops, mood video, subway tile walls, simple furnishings and strategic lighting highlights all allow the audience to focus on the characters and the evolving drama of the Empress' journey to find a shadow and humanity. Act I opens with scenes from Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad*, aptly setting the stage for the sometimes hopeless and often dreamlike scenarios to follow.

The setting is today, so the Dyer is now a laundryman, complete with Laundromat. Falcons and beasts are heads on children and adults, at appropriate times. The Nurse and Empress have Freudian couches to recline on and deliberate from. Sliding doors and grates divide spaces, scenes and concurrent action. Cocktail party and contemporary casual costumes complete the look and certainly don't detract. It was a pleasure to watch, and often, both striking and surprising. Inspired staging.

Where this *Frau* really shone was in the performances of the five principals. I was particularly taken with the powerful acting and singing of John Lundgren and Elena Pankratova as the Dyer and his Wife. Their simmering passion, frustration and on again, off again connection was very well-directed and brightly sung. Lundgren is a very powerful interpreter here; I felt he stole the show. The young soprano Pankratova has a bright Straussian future ahead, very strong voice and determined acting style. As the Nurse, Deborah Polaski nailed the, at times, difficult passages in the music while cutting a strong, muse-like figure every time she was on stage. She is seasoned in this role, and it showed.

Adrianne Pieczonka sang beautifully as the Empress; measured, excellent range and sharp top notes. If anything, hers was a restrained Empress; cautious and hesitant at times. It was an artful turn; just a bit under-performed given her dire and dramatic situation.

Johan Botha is a spectacular singer, and his Emperor was a joy to hear and watch.

But wait, there's more. I can't say enough about the children's chorus. Their stage presence, individual acting and signing and the pivotal hope for mankind future they portray in Act III had the audience on its feet with several, kids only, curtain calls. I think it's fair to say they stole Act III, and Warlikowski used their role to its full advantage...it was the best use of children I've ever seen on stage.

Sebastian Weigle first conducted *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* in 2003; he coaxed a rich and bright interpretation of this difficult score from the Staatsorchester. It was seamless and powerful, Strauss at its best.

All in all, I don't think this could have been better. Now if someone can just explain why the closing video montage included the famous Marilyn

Monroe billowing dress scene from *Some Like It Hot*...



Die Frau ohne Schatten; Adrianne Pieczonka with Johan Botha, Elena Pankratova and John Lundgren
Photo: Wilfried Hösl



Post performance; Adrianne Pieczonka with two TWS members, John Chiu, Joseph So, and a friend.

Muenchen

Opernfestspiele:

Die Frau ohne Schatten

Joseph So

One of the highlights of this year's Munich Opera Festival was the revival of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, in a production premiered last November to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the re-opening of the National-theater in 1963. It was also *Die Frau* that opened the rebuilt opera house back then. This new production was the centerpiece of the inaugural season of Bavarian State Opera's new music director, Kirill Petrenko. The July revival starred the same cast as the premiere with the exception of John Lundgren replacing Wolfgang Koch as Barak, and with conductor Sebastian Weigle in place of Petrenko. Polish director Krzysztof Warlikowski, whose gay themed *Eugene Onegin* raised eyebrows a few seasons ago, was at the directorial helm. Given its length, *Die Frau* is often performed cut, although this time around it was not complete.

Sometimes coined the *Die Zauberflöte* for adults, *Die Frau* is arguably the most challenging of all Strauss operas to stage, given its many of fantastical scenarios and abundant symbolism. The last Munich production was the visually dazzling, Japanese-motif version directed by Ennosuke Ichikawa over twenty years ago. Updated to the present time, the Warlikowski production has its moments but is overall disappointing. There are flashes of reason and theatricality, but overall the production relies too much on gimmickry and cliché, with little visual magic in an opera that cries out for it. There's the obligatory near-nudity, but it's so commonplace in opera now so who cares? Perhaps it's a sign of Warlikowski's theatre roots, he has added several minutes of video footage, as in a dream sequence, complete with muffled spoken

dialogue in German plus associated sound effects, before the opera starts. It's meant to illuminate the story, but frankly any attempt to improve on Strauss and Hofmannsthal comes across as quite superfluous. Warlikowski takes the theme of marriage and procreation very seriously, judging by the enormous number of children he has onstage at the very end. The series of projected images of Marilyn Monroe, King Kong, Buddha, Gandhi and assorted others at the very end implies that the Kaiserin's personal sacrifice makes possible the continuation of the human race and its cultural florescence, one of the few coherent touches in Warlikowski's vision.

Seen on July 3rd, the problematic production was redeemed by wonderful musical values. The cast was strong, backed by an exceptional orchestra and conductor. Canadian soprano Adrienne Pieczonka was a rich toned and sympathetic Kaiserin, at her best in the moving Judgement Scene in Act 3. Johan Botha (Kaiser) has a trumpet for a voice, and he sang beautifully if without much expression and was physically inert on stage. Now essentially a mezzo, Deborah Polaski brought committed, vivid acting to Amme, impressive for her stamina if not beauty of tone. (Incidentally, the role of the Nurse in an uncut version has more music to sing than the other two women.) In the very grateful role of Barak, John Lundgren sang well if somewhat generically, without the distinction of Wolfgang Koch in the video-streamed premiere. The big hit of the evening was Russian dramatic soprano Elena Pankratova as a sexually frustrated Farberin. In Act One Scene Two, she's costumed only in a flimsy black negligee, for once exposed flesh made dramatic sense. Sebastian Weigle conducted impressively, bringing forth torrents of thrilling and massive sounds from the orchestra, yet capable of delicacy when called for. This production will be revived in December 2014 with a slightly different cast conducted by Kirill Petrenko.

News and Comments

Bayreuth 2014 season has started with a botched performance of Sebastian Baumgarten's

Tannhäuser. The culprit was a malfunctioning machinery lifting a central stage element, the now infamous circular cage, only halfway to its correct position, with Venus (Michelle Breedt) and Tannhäuser (Torsten Kerl) bravely continuing to sing below the stage level and out of sight of the audience. The performance was halted for 40 minutes, the public asked to leave the auditorium for the duration. The performance proceeded afterwards with no more interruptions. Culture minister Monika Grütters declared that "if technology is the only thing that does not work, we can live with it".

This, for Bayreuth unusual occurrence, was an inauspicious beginning for a season that is different in many aspects. There was no press conference, just an informal meeting with the press spokesman, tickets were available on opening day both online and at the box office and the customary presence of Chancellor Angela Merkel, a Wagner fan who never missed an opening performance in ten years, was scheduled for another, less celebratory date. The official explanation was "conflict of agenda." However, there are murmurs that the real reason was her disaffection with Sebastian Baumgarten's *Tannhäuser* which opened the Festival.. This being Germany, *Frankfurter Allgemeine* declared that Bayreuth was suffering from "artistic arteriosclerosis" and became "almost as exciting as stale beer". Also, though customary in a year following a new staging of the *Ring*, there was no new production, apparently for budgetary reasons.

First reports from the stage tell about changes to the *Tannhäuser*. Gone are some gratuitous effects, such as recycling of excrement and the focus is on the protagonists. Wolfram is German baritone Marcus Eiche and Elisabeth is a Finnish soprano Camilla Nylund, both praised of outstanding singing and acting.



Katharina Wagner and Eva Pasquier Wagner

Katharina Wagner whose contract was scheduled to end in 2015 will remain as head of the Bayreuth Festival until 2020. The new contract was negotiated over several months since some of the shareholders and particularly both the Federal government as well as the state of Bavaria differed over some regulations. It is still not known whether their new Managing Director will remain in office. Co-director Eva Pasquier Wagner is leaving the Festival management in 2015. Katharina Wagner will be in charge of marketing of the Festival and staging some productions.

Interview with Katharina Wagner and Hans-Dieter Sense, Managing Director of the Bayreuth Festival (*Nordbayrischer Kurier*, 25th July 2015)

Much of this interview repeated what was said in the earlier interview of Mr. Sense so only new items of information are included

in this rough overview of their responses. Please note however that his reply to the Wagner societies question is the first indication - to my knowledge - of Bayreuth re-thinking its decision to stop ticket allocations to Wagner Societies. *Frances Henry*

The Wagner Societies. In response to the question of what impact did the abolition of ticket quotas for the Wagner Societies have, Mr. Sense, the managing director of the Festival said that financially it had no impact at all since the tickets were and are being sold. But he is not sure how long this will last. The members of the Wagner Societies were, so to speak, the subscription audience of the Festival. They were a complex and sophisticated audience. But many visitors to the Festival come only once and what will happen when, in ten years time, when all these people will already have visited the Festival. **Therefore, I am of the opinion that we should think again of how to re-integrate the Wagner Societies into the Festival.**

Other Items of Interest. Katharina Wagner says that her father would have allowed her to enter into any kind of career but naturally he hoped she would follow in his footsteps. But there is a difference: he was director for life whereas now there are five year terms and her term is until 2020 and she does not know what will happen afterwards. Her contract negotiation took more than a year mainly because there is a large bureaucracy that is involved. Artistic aims and considerations did not enter into the discussions and naturally the ability to work as an independent artist is a condition of signing a contract. She was, of course, asked what her plans were but there is a long space between ideas and actually implementing a plan.

She did say that the Festival will remain in this house which is fortunately being renovated but the interior will not be touched mainly because of the marvelous acoustics. Although it has been suggested that other operas should be performed at the Festival she maintains that is not possible because one needs foundation's financial support and that does not seem possible. She talked about other ideas about directors and concepts but we have very good directors here and we want to keep them but at the same time look for new ideas. The administrative director, Mr. Sense, also noted that one of their main complications is signing artists whom they would like to work with but who have already signed contracts with other houses; also because opera productions are planned so far in advance, an artistic director must be able to plan far in advance and even a five year contract may not be long enough. For example, there is a new *Meistersinger* planned for 2017 and renowned director Barrie Kosky has already been contracted for it.

She also notes that the charge that everything revolves around the ten pieces (ten operas) is not completely wrong and they want to put something else in place but this is not ready to be discussed yet.

With regard to the over-booking for tickets, written ticket requests will be dealt with before the online sale of tickets begins. In that way, people who requested tickets by mail and receive them will not also order tickets online. The online traffic therefore should be reduced. As well, the black market traffic might be somewhat curtailed. But the sooner the Festival develops a real strategy to deal with the black marketing of tickets, the better.

A detailed architectural project for the renovation of the *Festspielhaus* is also being planned.

The program for the next few years includes: a new *Tristan und Isolde* staged by Katharina Wagner and conducted by Christian Thielemann in 2015. The following year (2016) brings a new production of *Parsifal* staged by Jonathan Meese with Andris Nelsons conducting and Klaus Florian Vogt in the title role. A new *Lohengrin* follows in 2017 under Alvis Hermanis and a new *Ring* is to take place in 2020. A new *Meistersinger* will debut in 2017 to be staged by Barrie Kosky, director of the *Komische Oper Berlin*. Apparently this is good news since Kosky's stage was last year the "Opera House of the Year". To date, names of participants in other productions have not been provided.

The Dutchman. After a disappointing start the Festival audience celebrated the *Flying Dutchman*. In comparison with other stagings this year, the director Jan Phillip Gloger has not changed this 2012 production in any important way.

Among the rituals in Bayreuth, *Dutchman*, as *Rheingold*, begins symbolically exactly 2 minutes late, these two works running only two hours, or so, without an intermission. This *Dutchman* followed the tradition. Last year's Senta was our Adrienne Pieczonka. This year the role was taken by soprano Ricarda Merbeth.

The swastika scandal of 2012 forgotten, the audience loved this performance. Not even scattered boos marred the final applause. The principal reason for this love affair was the conductor, Christian Thielemann. To quote *Berliner Morgenpost*: "Thielemann demonstrates once again why he is considered the best of our time Wagner interpreters." The reviewer of *KulturRadio* considers this *Dutchman* to be "actually one of the strongest Wagner pieces I heard from him". In opinion of many, this *Dutchman*, and Hans Neuenfels' *Lohengrin*, are the most entertaining and compelling productions on offer by this Bayreuth Festival.



The Dutchman; Ricarda Merbeth - Senta; Photo: Enrico Nawrath



Lohengrin; Elsa - Edith Hallers and Ortrud - Petra Lang; Photo: Enrico Nawrath

Lohengrin. History repeats itself. Chéreau's *Ring* opened in 1976 to a nonstop booing only to close four years later with a nonstop standing ovation. Hans Neuenfels' current staging of *Lohengrin*, premiered in 2010, similarly, to sustained booing.

Now, in 2014, two feeble attempts at booing were drowned by extended cheering. What might have been taken as an outrage in its beginning turns into a celebration of love and harmony. It may be a preview of what might happen at the end of the run of the present *Ring*. At the moment there is a basic difference between Neuenfels' rats and Castorf's crocodiles - one is cheered, the other booed.

The rat infested *Lohengrin* is nearing a legendary status on the Green Hill. As was remarked here before, this *Lohengrin* production, together with the *Dutchman*, are two favorite productions of Bayreuth 2014. It is to everyone's satisfaction that it will be seen for the next two years (it was extended for another year, while by contrast, Sebastian Baumgarten's

Tannhäuser is exiting a year earlier than originally scheduled), when the two who made it what it is, Klaus Florian Vogt (Lohengrin) and Petra Lang (Ortrud), will take over the new *Parsifal*, as it is planned.

Vogt established himself as public's darling and ranked the world's premier Lohengrin, and, in addition to his new *Parsifal*, he is also scheduled for Walther von Stolzing in the coming summers.

The Ring. Frank Castorf in the news

again. Although it is customary to fine tune Bayreuth productions in the years following the premiere, Frank Castorf's *Ring*, which is in its second year, apparently repeats without any changes, excepting perhaps the presence of three crocodiles this year in lieu of the original two. Unchanged is also the reaction of the audience to Castorf's *Ring*. The booing continues, ranging from mild in *Die Walküre*, to a veritable hurricane in *Siegfried*. However, the *Ring* ended in a surprise - the audience divided almost equally in vociferous protest and a standing ovation. How is it going to end in two years' time?

It is interesting to read Lance Ryan's rather sympathetic words about the relationship of the audience to Castorf, (and perhaps to himself, in view of the booing to which he was subjected), taken out of his interview with Germany's news agency *dap* before the performance of *Siegfried*:

"I have never come across an audience with so much hatred, so much anger, such thirst for revenge. They take everything personally. It makes you a little bit scared, and it's really quite terrifying." Speaking further on Castorf's vision of the *Ring*: "It's not a story, not an idea, not a concept. You always have to ask what he thinks... He wants a fantasy."

On the other side of this conflict of strong opinions, we have comments of numerous reviewers and music critics on the same relationship. Some saw "a lack of synergy between what we see on stage and what we hear in the pit".

A blog opines that Aleksander Denic's stage set is impressive and overpowering. "But Castorf's direction rarely, if ever, engages with the location, let alone with the work. Too often they seem merely to be backdrops, just as the score is reduced to a level of an inappropriate - and one suspects, for Castorf a tiresome soundtrack."

And, in another's words, perhaps being a consequence of his presumed resentment at not being permitted to rearrange the text, "Castorf's apparent total lack of interest in the score may be his greatest weakness of all. Stefan Herheim has said that when words and music come into conflict, he will listen to the music. Castorf seems to have no interest in either."

Another says Castorf "seemingly never listens to the score", and then there is one who "sensed Castorf's impatience with the narrative."

Berliner Zeitung attempts to resume it all; its reviewer found the performance perfectly bearable as long as one kept one's eyes closed.

In a conversation with a newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, Frank Castorf, a week before the opening, threatens litigation while comparing the Bayreuth Festival to the communist regime in

East Germany. He has even appointed a lawyer - Gregor Gysi, leader of German party *Die Linke* (The Left).

Castorf complaints? "The storms have subsided; boredom prevails", referring to this year's rehearsals. He describes the atmosphere here at the Green Hill as one of: "fear, caution and obsequious obedience. ...I know this from the East (Germany). It attaches great importance to the principle of hierarchy."

Frank Castorf



The Festival's directors treat him, in his words, "like an idiot" and are reducing his production to the level of a "minor city theatre".

With all this criticism heaped upon Castorf, the audience found its favorite in the conductor, Kirill Petrenko. The moment he steps on stage all the booing metamorphoses into frenzied applause. This evident enchantment is not shared by some reviewers. In the opinion of most he conducted too fast. The comments vary from "unexpectedly rapid but not hectic" to "tempi were uniformly, excessively fast". Still, the alleged nickname given to him, "Penetrenko", says a lot.

Christine Goerke at Glimmerglass, 2014.

Frances Henry

Opera fans and especially Wagnerians will be treated to a very special event when the COC mounts *Die Walküre* next year where Christine Goerke will sing her first staged Brünnhilde. (She first sang it in a concert version in New Zealand) At Glimmerglass she, accompanied by members of their young ensemble, put on an entertaining and varied program of arias, duets, and songs. She started the program with a fantastic Ho-Yo-To-Ho, presumably in preparation for *Walker*; and I was immediately entranced by the power and beauty of her voice. She sang Ortrud in the second act 'duet' with Elsa and displayed not only the breadth of her range and voice but also a venomous quality that is a hallmark of this nasty character. She is equally at home in cross-over songs from musicals and all told she reminded me of that other great American dramatic soprano Helen Traubel.

The production of *Ariadne in Naxos* was cleverly staged by Francesca Zambello, well sung by the large cast but dominated by the Miss Goerke's huge presence both vocally and dramatically. She is a true dramatic soprano who possesses a huge and very powerful voice and is thus able to sing Wagner and Strauss with ease. In chatting with her after the recital, she told me she was thrilled to come to Toronto and is very much looking forward to being in this production. She is also a lovely, engaging person with an open expressive personality and a great comedic flair. When I invited her to attend one of our meetings she replied saying apart from rehearsals and performances "I am all yours!"

SOME NOTES ON THE STATE OF OPERA; fees!

Richard Rosenman

The German speaking countries, Germany and Austria, and the non-German speaking part of Switzerland, hold records in the number of opera houses and theaters, and the number of opera and music performances. According to *Newsweek*, Germany has 83 publicly funded opera houses, 130 orchestras, 200 privately funded theaters and 70 music festivals. Austria boasts of 67 theaters-opera houses included- and Switzerland 30.

Operabase website indicates 7,230 opera performances in Germany, one third of world's total. By comparison, US came second with 1,730. Measured in performances per million inhabitants, Austria gains a first place with 149.8, with Switzerland, a second, at 102.1, and Germany a third at 88.1.

German opera houses employ 1,270 soloists and 2,870 choir members, all these with full contracts. German opera houses and theatres receive Euro 2.4 billion in public funding and just Euro 400 million in private contributions. In contrast, in Italy opera houses suffer acute money problems. As *Newsweek* reported last year, "Italy's houses are Euro 300 million in red". "I sang at the *Maggio Musicale* (Florence) two years ago, and I had to hire a lawyer in order to get paid", reported Jennifer O'Loughlin, an American soprano now at St.Gallen opera, in Switzerland.

That brings us to how and how much opera singers are paid.

Joseph So, a music critic and a member of Toronto Wagner Society, writes:

"In the past, singers were paid with cash, often in two installments - before they start and then during the intermission. Singers in more recent times are paid by certified cheque. Now by bank deposit, if the opera house is well known and likely not to default! Plenty of stories of singers of the past (Caruso era) of them sewing the wads of cash into their clothing before leaving the theatre.

There is a famous story, recounted by publicist/author Lanfranco Rasponi in his 1982 book 'The Last Prima Donnas'. He singled out an incident involving a 1979 performance of *Tosca* in Teatro Municipal in Rio with Italian soprano Orianna Santunione and baritone Nuzio Tedesco. In the middle of Act 2, Tosca and Scarpia stopped singing, came to the footlights, asked the conductor to stop, and spoke to the audience, saying they would not finish the performance

because they had not been paid in full, and calmly walked off stage!

There's also the story of Jennifer Larmore singing in Argentina and who was stopped at the airport when they discovered the cash on her. They thought she was a drug runner. Argentina had currency control at that time. She convinced the authorities she was indeed an opera singer by singing an aria right then and there at passport control!"

As for how much they are paid, it is difficult to know more than some isolated cases.

In an article published in *Huffpost Arts & Culture*, Jennifer Rivera, a singer, writes that fees are "a hugely taboo subject, and not one that is easy to get people to discuss." She continues to say that income varies widely from year to year, and performance fee varies from gig to gig. Then, some singers make their living exclusively from singing, others add teaching to survive, and still others hold permanent jobs and do gigs when they can. The reported income of a member of chorus at the Metropolitan Opera at between \$100,000 and \$200,00 a year, (according to *New York Times*), sounds extremely generous, until you acknowledge that it includes overtime, pensions, health insurance, etc. Still, it offers stability with an ongoing contract, something that independent, itinerant singers do not count with.

The singers who make their entire living from singing opera have to contend with expenses that may devour up to 50% of their fees. It is before taxes, temporary rent of an apartment while paying already for an apartment where they live when not on the road, before agent's fee, travel costs, before role preparation, coaching fees and health insurance.

She took a poll among her friends on Facebook and most shared her guesstimate that less than 10% of working solo opera singers make more than \$100,000 a year. It is more critical in America where, in her words, "We have absolutely no government funding for the arts, so our arts organizations must rely almost exclusively on the kindness of wealthy patrons to keep their doors open". This she compares with France, which "actually pays artists unemployment for the times when they are between jobs."

She ends with some examples provided by others: "-One international singer singing in all the major international opera houses wrote to let me know that they barely clear \$100,000 a year after all expenses and they have even resorted to sleeping on friends' couches while working at an A house in order to save money.

-Another singer, who is now studying medicine, wrote to tell me that for a statistics class they took a survey of 100 solo singers and found that the median income was \$17,500."

From Route 66 to New York Stock Exchange; Bayreuth 2014

Pierre Couture

The following account is of the Second Cycle of the *Ring* and it describes a crowd reaction quite different from that for the First Cycle as covered by press reviews here under *News and Comments*.

To start with, the fairly cool weather cooperated for the beginning of the week - we "sweated" only during the first few minutes of *Rheingold*. But, when it came to *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, we had heavy rain falling and had to carry umbrellas everywhere.

Now, apparently, this year, because of the 65% (or so) of the tickets having gone on sale on the internet last October, it was not a traditional Bayreuth attendance but more of an international audience. Some people explained the fact that *Rheingold* and *Walküre*, which were strongly booed last year, received overwhelming bravos and thunderous applause (of course, with the odd barely detectable contrarian boo) this year because of this new crowd. Now, the first two acts of *Siegfried* were quite well received as well and everything degenerated with the third act which received strong booing. Although it was not directed at Catherine Foster's Brünnhilde who completely missed the very last climactic high note at the very end of the act and Lance Ryan's Siegfried who graciously did not attempt his final note at that point.

The crowd reacted to some rather gratuitous acts such as the scene when Wotan received oral sex right on the middle of the stage from a blond sex worker as a relief after his confrontation with Erda. This is not a feminist *Ring* and not always politically correct: witness Brünnhilde feeding a large umbrella completely through the mouth of a crocodile at the very end of the last act of *Siegfried*. Personally, I thought that it was a fairly conventional staging until the third act of *Siegfried* and the superb musical direction of Kirill Petrenko was winning the game; but sadly, in that last act, the balance between music and staging went all wrong.

Based on the comments received - and this is by no means a scientific conclusion - all the foreign visitors that we spoke to

booed strongly the whole *Ring* cycle. The Germans and other Europeans just suggested that we close our eyes and focus on the superb orchestra playing and singing; they might be somewhat more seasoned to this type of *regietheater*.

We met with a couple from Vancouver - and they mentioned that this year, their fourth visit in a row at the Bayreuth Festival, they experienced the best well balanced overall singing and best orchestra playing... but they booed the staging at every single performance ! We were all surprised to hear the strong booing aimed at Lance Ryan in *Götterdämmerung*; agreed that his singing was somewhat "barking" in the first act duet *Zu Neuen Taten...* , but his dying scene was most moving and he sang gloriously. Catherine Foster certainly exceeded my expectations on that *Götterdämmerung* night; she sang so well with all the power required from a top notch Brünnhilde that I mentioned to my friend that she had nothing to envy Nina Stemme's performance in San Francisco a few years back. Lance Ryan, who sang very beautifully in *Siegfried* on Wednesday evening, mentioned that she was not feeling well at the *Siegfried* performance; she cancelled the scheduled autograph signing at the Book Store on Thursday morning to rest for her performance last night, and it paid off.

Pierre Couture in good company



In this Frank Castoff production we learn that Mime, in *Rheingold*, is now a gay character freed from the post where he was attached - and from his sexuality - and his brother Alberich, Oleg Bryjak, another superb singer unknown to most North Americans, raises the gay flag which becomes very prominent at the end of the opera. The rainbow colors are the only physical reminder of the imminent passage to *Valhalla*. It is hard to imagine how, in the conservative Texas Route 66 of the 1960's, the gay flag can be so prominently raised. It is also strange to observe a sign " free wi-fi " in the 1960's, as displayed on the set. Instead of a luxury new Mercedes, an old Cadillac would also have been more appropriate.

Too often in the past, I noticed that *Die Walküre* was not always a part of the theme of the entire *Ring* cycle; to me, it constituted a different opera all together. This time in Bayreuth, we noticed definitely that the first day of the music drama is part of a comprehensive theme. The pursuit of oil wealth is evident in this performance. It is a very theatrical *Ring* where, as alluded earlier, the music and singing wins the

day over some imaginative gimmicks of the Director. It is increasingly becoming the Kirill Petrenko *Ring*; perhaps, it was so in the very beginning.

Herr Esser, a friend, mentioned to me that he is observing now the same evolution as with the 1976 Chéreau - Boulez *Ring*; it was badly booed and extremely controversial at the beginning, and is now being considered a classic.

This same Herr Esser, was also sitting in row 4 of the Gallery, near us, and believes that, after 20 years of different seats, the sound is best in the Gallery: it was indeed impressive. From the first few bars of *Das Rheingold*, conducted so lyrically by Petrenko, "...sounding truly like deep from down under ", as suggested by a friend, until the final note of the immolation scene, it was a magnificent sound. And, yes, I am now fully addicted to Wagner and Bayreuth. I will try to be there again next year, if there is as rumored a new *Tristan* with Stephen Gould and Eva-Maria Westbroek. In 2016 we also hope to see a new production of *Parsifal*, which should be a must to fully experience the Bayreuth magic. And, guess what: a new *Lohengrin* in 2017 with Anna Netrebko (will she sing Elsa or Ortrud ???) and Roberto Alagna in the title role.



Signing in Bayreuth

Photos: Pierre Couture

Lance Ryan - *Siegfried*



Alejandro Marco Buhrmester - *Gunther*

WAGNER ON STAGE

SEPTEMBER 2014 - DECEMBER 2014. Listings correct to SEPTEMBER 2014. For further information check with opera companies via: www.operabase.com

Der fliegende Holländer

Vienna; 3 - 12 Sept.
Lyon; 11 - 26 Oct. NP
Duisburg; 17 Oct. - 2 Nov.
Milwaukee; 24 - 26 Oct.
Saarbrücken; 30 Nov. NP
Brno; 9 Dec.

Lohengrin

Magdeburg; 18 Sept. - 23 Nov. NP
Zurich; 21 Sept. - 18 Oct. NP
Augsburg; 2 Nov.
Amsterdam; 10 - 29 Nov.
Warsaw; 19 - 28 Dec.
Berlin (DO); 21 - 25 Dec.

Tannhäuser

Eisenach; 12 - 26 Sept. CP
Meiningen; 12 - 26 Sept.
Dresden; 21 Sept. - 31 Oct.
Vienna; 22 Oct. - 2 Nov.
Budapest; 25 Nov. - 2 Dec.
Tallinn; 4 - 6 Dec.
Berlin (DO); 7 - 13 Dec.
Hamburg; 21 - 28 Dec.

Das Rheingold

Victoria; 16 - 26 Oct.

Die Walküre

Dessau; 27 Sept.

Siegfried

Besancon; 11 Dec.

The Ring

Halle; 1 - 8 Nov.

Der Ring für Kinder

Leipzig; 31 Oct. - 26 Dec.

Die Meistersinger

Bremen; 21 Sept.
New York (Met); 2 - 23 Dec.

Tristan und Isolde

Regensburg; 27 Sept. NP
Stuttgart; 28 Sept. - 21 Dec.
Berlin (UDL); 11 Oct. - 28 Dec.
London (RO); 5 - 21 Dec.

Parsifal

Wrocław; 27 Sept.
Tokyo (NNT); 2 - 14 Oct.

NP - new production

CP - concert performance

LATEST BAYREUTH TICKET INFORMATION

It has been announced
that one half of all
available tickets to the
2015 Bayreuth Festival
will be sold online
beginning

Feb. 1, 2015

Please renew your TWS membership for 2014-2015.

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MEMBERSHIP FEE REMINDER

The members whose fees are in arrears will find a **RED** or **YELLOW** dot on their address label.

RED dot - your last payment was in either 2012 or early 2013.
Unless your membership is brought up to date you
will be deleted from our membership list.

YELLOW dot - your sole payment was in early 2013, during the
COC's *Tristan and Isolde*. With more Wagner on
COC's schedule, we hope you will renew your
Wagner interest to ensure access to our
upcoming *Die Walküre* events.



Lohengrin: Klaus Florian Vogt - Lohengrin
Edith Haller - Elsa



Götterdämmerung: Catherine Foster - Brünnhilde,
Lance Ryan - Siegfried

Bayreuth 2014

Photos: Enrico Nawrath

Tannhäuser

