



GALA CELEBRATION OF THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Well over one hundred members and friends filled the Callaway Music Auditorium in the UWA School of Music on Sunday 24 July for a gala celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Richard Wagner Society of Western Australia.

Following a welcome from immediate Past President John Meyer, a greeting was read from Horst Eggers, the President of the Richard Wagner Verband International (RWVI), the international association of Wagner societies. His message read, in part: 'As President of the RWVI whose member you are, I congratulate you on behalf of the RWVI and personally on your 30-years jubilee and your successful history...The RWVI and I personally wish your society further successful development. Our best wishes will accompany you in your meritorious work'.

The audience then enjoyed a performance of the final scene of Act I of *Die Walküre* (from 'Winterstürme' to the end of the act), wonderfully sung by Harriet O'Shannessy as Sieglinde and Jun Zhang as Siegmund, with Christopher van Tuinen bravely stepping in at short notice to skilfully play the orchestral part on the Steinway piano.

As both a foundation member and honorary life member, as well as a frequent speaker at our meetings, Dr Sally Kester was well placed to provide an entertaining and enlightening account of the early days of the Society. She drew upon her own experience as well as quoting from *A Backward Glance*, the history of the Society's first twenty years which was written by another life member, Chris Fyfe.

Sally's description of 'Wagner mania' as being what some might think should be classified as a personality disorder provided a perfect lead-in to the presentation by Simone Young, AM, the renowned Australian opera and orchestral conductor whom the Society is extremely fortunate and proud to have as its Patron. Simone admitted that she too suffers from Wagner mania, which particularly manifested itself over a three-week period of 2013 during which she conducted all ten of the Master's mature operas and music dramas at the Hamburg Opera. She started planning this project about ten years earlier, even

before she had officially taken up her dual positions of intendant and music director at Hamburg. It was imperative to have productions already in the company's repertoire prior to 2013, with a new *Ring* being mounted over four seasons in such a way that it actually took less than three years to bring the complete cycle to the stage. There were some tricky situations that had to be negotiated and Simone gave a hilarious account of the search for a last-minute replacement for the Senta in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, with Anje Kampe having to take a circuitous route from Bayreuth in order to arrive at the opera house in Hamburg literally minutes before the curtain was due to go up.

Simone went on to talk about how young singers can be trained to become Wagnerians, and illustrated how they can come from varying backgrounds. For example, Klaus Florian Vogt began his professional career as a horn player while Siegfried Jerusalem was a bassoonist before becoming the leading Heldentenor of his generation. Catherine Foster, the Brünnhilde in the most recent production of *The Ring* at Bayreuth, initially made her name as a lyric soprano in Mozart operas. So there is no one route that singers must take into the Wagnerian repertoire, Simone explained.

On the Society's behalf, Simone presented tickets for this year's Melbourne *Ring* to Kate Milligan, a UWA music student who has shown outstanding promise in her studies to date.

Judy Flower, another foundation member and honorary life member, was given the honour of cutting the special anniversary cake, after which the assembled company joined together in enjoying the celebratory supper.

Amongst special guests at the celebration, the Society was honoured with the presence of Torsten Ketelsen, the Honorary Consul for the Federal Republic of Germany (appropriately his home city is Hamburg), and Janet Homes à Court, AC, Chair of the Board of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Simone Young was in Perth to conduct a series of concerts with the orchestra, and in 2017 she will celebrate the 20th anniversary of her first engagement with WASO.

Michael Grebla (Bayreuth Scholar 2011) has been awarded a prestigious General Sir John Monash Foundation Scholarship for 2016. These national postgraduate scholarships are awarded to outstanding young Australians with leadership potential who wish to study overseas. Michael is using his scholarship to embark on a two-year masters degree course at the New England Conservatory in Boston, having completed his Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering and Bachelor of Music in composition with First Class Honours from UWA. As his graduation concert for the latter degree, he presented *Portraits of UWA* which combined musical and photographic compositions inspired by the art, grounds and wildlife of UWA's Crawley campus. Michael has made a significant impact as Music Director at St George's College, which included the founding and direction of a concert series which has expanded to provide performance opportunities for emerging musicians by engaging with both the college and the wider community. His work as an outstanding undergraduate was recognised by UWA Convocation with the Bryant Stokes Matilda Award for Cultural Excellence for 2014. This is an annual award given to a student who has achieved excellence and outstanding achievement in any form of cultural pursuits such as music, literature, public speaking, dance, visual arts or drama. Because of Michael's leading role in helping to organise our Wagner 200th Birthday Gala at St George's College in May 2013, the Society was very pleased to support his nomination for this award, along with the College and the School of Music.



Michael Grebla shows his Bryant Stokes Matilda Award for Cultural Excellence trophy and certificate to Alex Cohen, a former Chancellor of UWA and a member of the Wagner Society.

Alessandro Pittorino (who made a stunning impact with his organ transcription of 'The Ride of the Valkyries' at our Wagner 200th Birthday Gala in 2013) has completed his first year of study with Paul Jacobs in the Master of Music program at the Juilliard School of Music in New York, where he was the first Australian organist to be accepted into that leading music school. In June he was one of ten organists (only three of whom were from outside the US) chosen to compete in the second Longwood Gardens International Organ Competition. Along with works by Bach and Widor, Alessandro also played an edited transcription of the Overture to *The Flying Dutchman*, thus continuing to develop his Wagner repertoire. During a return visit to Perth in July, Alessandro included this piece in a recital that he gave at the Church of St Mary the Virgin in South Perth.

CONGRATULATIONS TO DR PETER BASSETT

Talking about Adelaide having passed the baton to Melbourne as far as Wagner productions is concerned (as we were earlier in this Newsletter), it was shortly after Peter Bassett had visited our Society in June that we heard that he had been awarded a PhD from Griffith University for his thesis entitled 'Playing with Fire: The pursuit of a Wagner performance tradition in Adelaide in the decade 1995-2005 and factors impeding its realisation'. That decade covered two *Ring* cycles and a production of *Parsifal*, and Peter was well placed from his own involvement, and with additional access being provided to relevant documents, to write the story of what happened. He hopes that in due course his dissertation will be turned into a published book. Congratulations have been sent to Peter on behalf of our Society.