



Wagneriana

Was frommt seine helle Schneide
ist der Stahl nicht hart und fest?
-Siegfried

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From the Editor

March 26 Recital

On March 26 the chapel at First Church of Boston resounded with magnificent music making. Contralto Marion Dry and pianist Jeffrey Brody performed a full and unusual program consisting of songs by Wagner father and son, as well as Wagnerian operatic excerpts and Elgar's *Sea Pictures*. Dry's excellent musicianship, coupled with her impressive range, terrific intonation, and colorful hues,

was enchanting. And Brody's expert accompaniment sounded more romantic than ever. The small audience of about 21 people (only 5 of whom were members of the BWS) was greatly appreciative of these talented musicians' generous outpouring. By the end of the concert, numerous smiling faces and satisfied expressions could be spotted.



Pianist Jeffrey Brody and Contralto Marion Dry at the March 26 recital

I have followed Marion Dry's career for many years now, having heard her sing Erda about 10 years ago. Even then I was delighted with her expertise and the ease with which she could sing Wagner. And ever since, I have been hungry for more. The March 26 recital was so satisfying that it surpassed all my expectations. Dry is a Boston treasure who

should be heard much more widely, particularly in the Wagnerian repertoire. She is a far better singer than anyone the BSO could conjure up in recent memory. Those who did not attend the March 26 recital may have another chance to hear her (stay tuned).

Wagner in Nietzsche's Historical Context

Last February brought Simon Williams's fascinating view of Wagner in the context of Nietzsche's theories of history. Titled "Coming to Terms with History: Wagner, Nietzsche, and *The Ring*," the lecture gave much food for thought. Despite the inclement

weather, we had a decent turnout. Professor Williams, who teaches at the University of California at Santa Barbara, spoke at the Union Club against the snowy backdrop of a fairy-tale landscape on the Boston Common.



Members of the audience and Professor Simon Williams at the Union Club on February 25

Survey Results

Thanks to all those who completed the questionnaire about BWS events. This was most helpful, and your comments are much appreciated. Of the three events listed – recitals, audiovisual presentations, and lectures – recitals seemed to be the most popular. About 90 percent of members would like to have more than one recital per year. An equal percentage reported that they would be interested in performances of works by composers who have been influenced by Wagner. Richard Strauss was mentioned in this context, as well as composers who have influenced Wagner – his "spiritual ancestors and descendants," as one member put it. Almost everyone prefers to have BWS events on the weekends (afternoons or

evenings), with a downtown location. The price of concert tickets seemed immaterial to a great majority of members.

Several people made helpful suggestions. One member expressed an interest in having a program of Wagner's non-operatic orchestral works. Another member suggested having an illustrated lecture in Boston a few days before Wagnerian performances at the Met. A third one wrote that he would drive to Boston on the weekends only for "the incarnation of Kirsten Flagstad and Lauritz Melchior." I wish we could make that a reality!

Many of you were complimentary, and I appreciate your words of encouragement.

New E-Mail Address

The Boston Wagner Society now has an e-mail address at our domain. The new address is Walhall@bostonwagnersociety.org. Please use this one when you are corresponding via e-mail.

BostonWagner@trovar.com, the previous one, will still work but has to be forwarded from the trovar.com domain.

Changing of the Guard

Our treasurer, Ralph Menapace has resigned due to time constraints. In his two-year tenure, Ralph Menapace has been most helpful with finding venues and making recommendations. We are grateful to him for the time and effort he invested. Our new

treasurer is Robert Reed, a member since August 2004. We are in the process of doing the legal work required for this transition. Until the work is done, Ralph Menapace is still nominally the treasurer.

-Dalia Geffen

Letters to the Editor

We are starting a new column for readers of *Wagneriana*. This column will be a forum for subscribers to discuss all issues relating to Wagner, his music, his ideas, and music in general. Please note that your letters may be abbreviated and lightly edited. Please e-mail us at Walhall@bostonwagnersociety.org and write "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line. You can also send the letters via postal mail. See our address on the back page.

Trivia Quiz

1. Who was the American conductor appointed by Wieland Wagner to conduct at the Bayreuth Festival?
2. What movie did George London appear in with Humphrey Bogart?
3. Who was the Austrian soprano who sang with George London? The BWS's music adviser, Jeffrey

Brody, was her accompanist in recitals.

(Answers are on page 4.)
Richard McShane-Gilmore

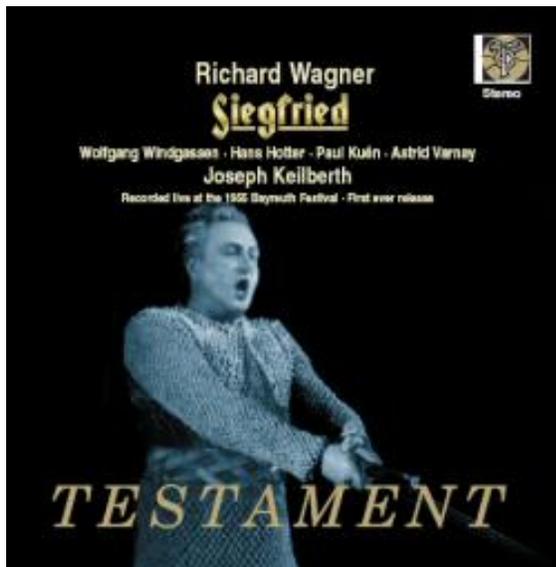
Reviewer Wanted

Stylus, an online magazine that reviews performance arts in the Boston area, is looking for a dependable classical music critic. As compensation, you will receive free admission to Boston's leading classical music groups, such as the Boston Philharmonic, the Chameleon Ensemble, and the Bank of Boston Celebrity Series. The only requirements are good writing and punctual submissions. (Lead time is generally four days.) Please contact pbates@batescommunications.net (www.stylus.batescommunications.net).

—Peter Bates

A Superb *Siegfried*: Keilberth in Bayreuth, 1955

Siegfried: Wolfgang Windgassen; Brünnhilde: Astrid Varnay; Wanderer: Hans Hotter; Alberich: Gustav Neidlinger; Mime: Paul Kuen; Erda: Maria von Ilosvay; Fafner: Joseph Greindl; Waldvogel: Ilse Hollweg; Bayreuth 1955; cond. Joseph Keilberth; Testament SBT4 1392 (4 compact discs): CD1: 51.24; CD2: 57.03; CD3: 57.11; CD4: 63.51; stereo; ****



The first installment of a new release of the entire *Ring Cycle*, this version of *Siegfried*, recorded live at Bayreuth in 1955, is so immediate that we can almost reach out and touch the singers. Touted as the first stereo recording (preceding the famed studio recording conducted by Solti) of Wagner's monumental work, the four-CD set is in fantastic sound. The singers' every breath and sibilant is clearly audible as though they are standing three feet away. The Decca team that achieved this miracle 50 years ago placed three microphones in the pit and hung another three

from a lighting bridge above the stage. Although Decca was fully prepared to release this recording, the project was vetoed by John Culshaw, who planned to record the Solti version instead. The three other operas in this (so far) exciting *Ring Cycle* will be released later in the year.

In addition to the superb sound, this set offers many musical delights. Keilberth conducts at a terrifically exciting pace and with an impeccable sense of drama. Further, he is wonderfully supportive of the singers. This is inspired conducting at its best. During the overture, the brass sounds emanating from the orchestra pit (the dragon music) are particularly impressive. And in Act 3 when Siegfried wakes the slumbering Brünnhilde, the strings section swoops and swirls in great arcs of extensive phrases.

Windgassen's Siegfried is somewhat of a drawback. He sounds weak-willed, with a thin voice. Kuen as Mime often sounds more heroic than Windgassen, but the Forging Song is quite adequate, impetuous and energetic. But compare Windgassen with Bernd Aldenhoff, the heldentenor on Keilberth's 1952 Bayreuth recording (in mono). Although Aldenhoff's intonation is none too precise, he is quite the hero in that earlier recording.

Hotter as the Wanderer is in great voice. He is both powerful and full of humanity. The wobble that plagued him in his later years is nowhere in evidence; all we hear is a clear, noble, and irresistible

sound with wonderfully sonorous overtones—a dream come true. Neidlinger is a powerful and angry Alberich. The contrast between his raw ambition and the Wanderer’s nobility and restraint is a marvel. Hollweg’s Woodbird has the most birdlike sound I have ever heard. Her syncopated twittering is a joy to hear. In the Wotan-Erda exchange (Act 3) Hotter sounds stormy and windy like a god. Von Ilosvay, by contrast, is dark, grounded, solid, and calm—a satisfying Erda.

Varnay’s intonation is a bit dicey in the beginning of “Heil dir, Sonne” (Hail, you sunshine), but it soon rights itself. After a few bars, her tones sound gilded and luminous. Although Varnay’s voice is much bigger than Windgassen’s, she never overpowers him, and the final duet is both inspired and ardent. Seasoned Wagnerians will delight in this recording, and those who are new to this music will find much to enjoy.

–Dalia Geffen

Historical Singers: Herbert Janssen (1892–1965)

A Swede born in Germany, Herbert Janssen began his vocal studies in Berlin. His success came with the role of Wolfram (*Tannhäuser*), which he sang for the first time at the festival of Waldoper in Zoppot (now Sopot, Poland). He also sang Gunther (*Götterdämmerung*), Amfortas (*Parsifal*), Kothner (*Meistersinger*), and Telramund (*Lohengrin*) there. Between 1926 and 1939, he was one of the principal singers at Covent Garden, focusing on baritonal roles.

In 1937 Janssen left Germany for the United States, where he began learning the heavier Wagnerian roles. He sang Wotan and Hans Sachs, succeeding Friedrich Schorr at the Met. However, these roles did not come naturally to him, as this range was too low. After about a decade, his voice grew noticeably strained. Consequently, in 1950 he returned to his earlier roles. His last per-



formance took place in 1952 in Boston, where he appeared with the touring Met company as Kothner (*Meistersinger*).

Endowed with a gorgeous, fully rounded tone, Janssen was the quintessential Wagnerian baritone. His was the best interpretation of Wolfram in recorded history, and listening to him sing “Abendstern” (Evening Star) is a delightful experience. His Amfortas is also to be commended for its sensitivity. Janssen’s timbre is so similar to Melchior’s that when he sings Kurwenal, with the Great Dane as Tristan, their voices are almost indistinguishable. Fortunately, Janssen can be heard

on several recordings, the last of which was issued by Preiser on their *Lebendige Vergangenheit* (Living Past, or Historic Recordings) series.

–Dalia Geffen

Answers to Trivia Quiz

(from page 3)

1. Lorin Maazel;
2. London was in the chorus of *Casablanca*;
3. Leonie Rysanek.

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