



Wagneriana

Durch Sturm und bösen Wind verschlagen,
irr' auf den Wassern ich umher –
– *Der fliegende Holländer*

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From the President

While in New York for the *Ring Cycle*, I attended a lecture sponsored by the Wagner Society of New York. The speaker was Cori Ellison, a well-known dramaturg and writer whom you may have heard as a panelist on the Met Opera Quiz show. Ms. Ellison's topic was Erda. It was such a terrific talk that I immediately asked her to speak for our society. Ms. Ellison is now scheduled for Sunday, September 23, at the Brookline Public Library. The title of her talk is "Those Ill-Mannered Girls: Brünnhilde and the Valkyries" (see page 8).

The acclaimed Wagnerian soprano Jane Eaglen will also give a talk to our society, most likely in mid-October. As of this writing, we are waiting to hear from her about a specific date.

For the bicentennial, we will have the distinguished Wagnerian scholar Barry Millington give a lecture and sign copies of his book in March 2013 (*The Sorcerer of Bayreuth*, to be published by Oxford University Press).

Michelle DeYoung has graciously agreed to attend a reception hosted by the Boston Wagner Society in her honor. This event will take place at the College Club on March 24, 2013, during the run of her concert with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Maestro Daniele Gatti has also been invited to the reception; we are waiting to hear from his agent.

Sometime in 2013, Jay Hunter Morris, whose Siegfried at the Metropolitan Opera's recent run of the *Ring* was widely praised, will regale us with a brief concert followed by a question-and-answer session. Bass-baritone Greer Grimsley, Soprano Joanna Porackova, and Pianist Jeffrey Brody will join him.

As you know, the allocation of Bayreuth tickets to Wagner societies and tour companies has been discontinued. The International Association of the Wagner Societies (Richard Wagner Verband International) had their annual meeting in May. Andrea Buchanan, Secretary of the London Wagner Society, who attended the meeting, reports: "The Festival management had explained that they had no choice in making the decision to discontinue ticket allocations to Wagner Societies, as they were under pressure from both central and regional government (both of whom subsidise the Festival) to make the ticket system more democratic. . . . Approaches were now being made on a political level and the Verband would continue to lobby on behalf of its members. Professor Mårtson [President of the Verband] had written a letter to the German Minister of Culture, which all the delegates were asked to sign. This initiative was supported by all those present." We thank Jacques Bouffier for representing our interests at this crucial meeting.

–Dalia Geffen

Lepage and Gelb Speak Out about the Metropolitan Opera's *Ring*

On April 26 Robert Lepage and Peter Gelb gave a thought-provoking talk about the Metropolitan Opera's new production of the *Ring Cycle*. The talk was part of an award ceremony for Lepage, the 2012 recipient of the Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts at MIT.

Lepage said that the much-ballyhooed “machine,” which also serves as the set for this production, was inspired by the Icelandic landscape, with its craggy geology and unstable ground. “If you’ve been to Iceland, you have a different take on the *Ring*, and you believe there is a god of fire,” said Lepage, for whom storytelling is more important than any other aspect of opera. He claimed that the *Ring* reads like a film script, and that what Wagner asks of the stage designer is “as a movie. Wagner was a Freudian before Freud, a cinematographer before cinema.” Thus, by bringing film and opera together, Lepage aims to make opera more accessible to audiences. Nevertheless, he said he tried to be faithful to the story and to use today’s technology to illustrate it. An example is the descent into Nibelheim in *Das Rheingold*. Whereas in the past the curtain came down during this passage, current technology allowed the two principals, Wotan and Loge, to be seen while the machine pivoted to show more steps, as in an Escher drawing. “The audience likes to see fantasy,” said Lepage. And “technologies are to be an echo of what the performer does and not to draw attention to themselves.” For instance, some of the action in the video projection of this *Ring* is triggered by movement and sounds. In *Siegfried* Jay Hunter Morris noticed leaves on the ground during Brünnhilde’s awakening. He kicked one, and to his surprise the leaf got out of his way.

According to Gelb, the down side of using all this technology is that “when something goes wrong, you feel hopeless. . . . The *Ring* has changed the culture at the Met. For the first time, two hundred stagehands manipulated” the equipment. “All art forms need to advance with the current generation of designers, like *Anna Bolena* is traditional, but there are no curtains with scene changes.” Gelb does not like “to see every inch of the proscenium stuffed with scenery,” as it’s hard to notice who is singing. “Directors have to draw on what’s available today.”

“When new tools come in, we’re always afraid of them,” said Lepage at the end of the talk. It seemed that he fully expects audiences to grow accustomed to the “machine” and perhaps to even enjoy it, as I did (see the review below).

–Dalia Geffen

The Magic of Lepage’s *Ring*

Ring Cycle, Metropolitan Opera; May 5–11, 2012, third cycle

My expectations weren’t terribly high in the weeks leading up to the third cycle of the Metropolitan Opera’s *Ring Cycle*. I had seen this production in the theaters, and because of the numerous close-ups, the grandeur of the “machine” and its ever-changing projections did not register with me adequately. What a difference it made to see this amazingly inventive production in-house! As Robert Lepage mentioned during his MIT talk in April 2012, audiences like to see fantasy. If that was his aim, then this new production succeeded on a grand scale—so much so that unlike many people, I found it deeply satisfying. In fact, I was awed by it. Here, for the first time, I saw a *Ring* that rendered every interaction between the characters, as well as their motivations, crystal clear. As Lepage saw it, the *Ring* is the complicated story of a family affair rather than a portrayal of mythical figures. As such, this production brought the story so much closer to reality. Here we saw the characters in all their vulnerabilities, as well as in their nobility and degradation. Everyone was incredibly human, as well as godlike and villainous.

I had always wanted to see the singers walk on the rainbow bridge and into Valhalla in *Das Rheingold*. Until now, this maneuver seemed impossible, and previous attempts at rendering this scene more realistically always looked awkward and ultimately failed. But now, thanks to Lepage, this magical feat occurred right in front of our eyes. What a thrill! The descent into Nibelheim was also sheer wizardry. The slow, deliberate steps that Wotan and Loge took in keeping with the tempi were a sight to behold. During the first half of this passage, the singers did not use doubles, which I appreciated.

Brünnhilde’s arrival at the beginning of Act 3 of *Die Walküre* was another spectacular treat. The machine’s 24 planks artfully arranged themselves into a large pair of undulating wings, simulating Grane’s flight. It was grand and magnificent. Throughout the *Ring*, the machine and the projections created many stunningly beautiful scenes, but the scene at the end of *Die Walküre* was a sight to behold. The fire surrounding the rock, in all its complexity, was like no other fire I had ever seen.

The set changes in the middle of scenes were another innovation, which I enjoyed very much. For instance, in *Götterdämmerung* it was wonderful to see the scenery transform gradually from a barren rock to a lush landscape as Siegfried descends from the mountaintop, through a forest, to his boat, and on to Gibi-

chung Hall. These midscene changes, which are impossible to effect in more traditional productions, amply compensated for the lack of conventional sets. Other marvels were mentioned by other reviewers in the previous issue of *Wagneriana*, such as the Forest Bird flitting about in *Siegfried*.

The view from my parterre box number 8 was partly obscured, but I could see most of the stage. My only gripe about this location is that seven chairs were crammed into this box (formerly there had been only five seats), leaving no room to move legs or arms. In addition, I could watch the stage or read the subtitles, but not both. I opted for the former. I don't think I will buy parterre seats again unless the Met reduces the number of chairs in the boxes.

Despite the poor seating, I enjoyed this *Ring* as much as I did the Schenck production. It was so magnificent, prepared with so much effort and care, that it is almost impossible to dissect and analyze each and every part of it. I wondered why so many people disliked the machine. Not only did it allow Lepage to remain true to Wagner's intentions, but by the third cycle, it was working wonderfully well (apart from some noise). Its stunning, larger-than-life portrayals immediately initiated the audience into a mythical world, where we saw with crystalline clarity all of our own foibles and self-delusions, as well as our heroism and courage—a microcosm of our inner world.

—Dalia Geffen

An Inspiring and Emotional *Lohengrin* in Tokyo

Lohengrin, New National Theater Tokyo, June 4, 7, 10, 2012; conductor: Peter Schneider; production: Matthias von Stegmann; scenery design and costume design: Rosalie; lighting design: Guido Petzold; chorus master: Hirofumi Misawa; chorus: New National Theater Chorus; orchestra: Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra; Heinrich der Vogler: Günther Groissböck; Lohengrin: Klaus Florian Vogt; Elsa von Brabant: Ricarda Merbeth; Friedrich von Telramund: Gerd Grochowski; Ortrud: Susanne Resmark; Heerrufer des Königs: Jun Hagiwara

A much-anticipated new production of *Lohengrin* ran for six performances in June 2012 at the New National Theater in Tokyo, Japan. I was fortunate enough to attend three performances (June 4, 7, and 10) with an international cast of principal singers, a hardworking orchestra led by veteran Wagnerian conductor Peter Schneider, and a magnificent chorus. From the quiet prelude, which with its subtle violin playing seemingly arises out of nowhere, to the moving rendition of “In fernem Land,” this was an inspiring and emotional experience for the largely Japanese audience. It also brought a ray of hope to a country battered by decades of economic recession and the recent triple tragedy of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident. As one Japanese newspaper (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun*) reviewer stated, “How fortunate and grateful we are to be able to experience a world-class performance right here in Tokyo.”

The venue could hardly have been better. The New National Theater (NNT), constructed about 15 years ago after many years of planning, reflects the fact that Japan was once a major economic power capable of building a first-rate theater dedicated to presenting operas and ballets produced in Japan. To this day, visiting opera companies (e.g., La Scala, the Metropolitan Opera, Munich Opera) must be content with various other theaters and concert halls that are not always optimal for operatic performances, as only Japanese companies can use the NNT. The NNT is an ideal venue (with an audience capacity of a little over 1800, it is less than half the size of the Met and is blessed with excellent acoustics). One can hear all the details of music making, with each in-



A scene from *Lohengrin*, performed in Tokyo. Klaus Florian Vogt is Lohengrin and Ricarda Merbeth is Elsa. Photos courtesy of New National Theater Tokyo.

strument clearly delineated. The orchestra pit is dug quite low, so the audience can barely see the conductor and musicians. This allows the singers to be heard clearly, without their having to turn up the volume to compete with the orchestra.

The production was reminiscent of Robert Wilson's minimalist and stylized *Lohengrin*, presented at the Metropolitan Opera in 1999 and revived twice since. The director Matthias von Stegmann (who for more than 15 years worked as an assistant to Wolfgang Wagner and Alfred Kirchner at the Bayreuth Festival Theater) states in his program note that he views *Lohengrin* as a "true" tragedy with no redemption for its characters. All the characters are left in despair at the end, having lost everything. He sees them as "static," with no possibility for change and development, trapped in their own ways of being. Von Stegmann is sympathetic to their predicament; for instance, Telramund was presented as an innocent pawn of his treacherous wife who truly believes her words about Elsa's guilt. And Ortrud's machinations fail because of her old-fashioned values, not necessarily because of her evil nature. The director portrayed Elsa as a burdened character. Although she may long for her knight in shining armor, she is the victim of her circumstances and has no choice but to accept Lohengrin as the leader and savior of Brabant. The second act centers on Elsa and her predicament. Here the forces that oppress her were represented by a huge spiraling triangular object that enveloped her as she was hoisted on a pedestal. Later, Lohengrin signaled the women to place a veil on Elsa, a veil made of similar-looking steel, again representing her oppressive fate. Elsa was uncharacteristically alone as she marched on the red carpet toward the "church," with Lohengrin not accompanying her but watching from the sideline among the crowd.

Von Stegmann credited Wieland Wagner as his inspiration for this rather stark production, which had minimal props. The use of open space was seen as essential to the unencumbered emotional expression of the characters. Lighting (on a background of wood-framed glass squares that covered the back of the stage from top to bottom) was liberally used to reflect the shifting moods of the characters. The colors were predominantly blue in the first act, red/black in the second, white and back to blue in the third. Some touches struck me as silly and unnecessary, such as firework displays at the end of the first act as Lohengrin and Elsa celebrate with the crowds. The costumes, mostly black and white with splashes of blue and red, looked Western, with vague Asian references; many characters, except for Lohengrin, wore headpieces. The German artist Rosalie, who designed the scenery and costumes, was largely successful in creating a minimalist and at times visually stunning staging.

Musically, the three performances I attended were somewhat varied. In the earlier performances, the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra had some unfortunate problems, mostly in the brass and woodwind sections. By the third performance I attended, on June 10, however, many of the kinks had been ironed out. One might have liked slightly more varied tempi, especially in the second act, which seemed to drag on at times. (At one of the performances, Peter Schneider was booed at the beginning of the second act, an unthinkable act of rudeness by an otherwise polite Japanese audience.) Overall, however, the orchestra did a splendid job, especially the strings. The New National Theater Chorus, led by Hirofumi Misawa, was one of the highlights of the whole experience; the chorus members were well rehearsed and sang as one massive voice. Their moves were highly choreographed, and their gestures and almost identical costumes reinforced their characterization as "the masses" blindly following their leader. Some audience members found the chorus too "militaristic," but they seemed rather ritualized.

A great deal of emphasis was placed on the ensemble work. Schneider elicited nuanced, complex, and sensitive playing from the orchestra, and the singers sang in beautiful harmony, so that the ensemble scenes in Acts 1 and 2 often seemed like an intimate chamber music concert. Each principal was equally present and involved in the unfolding drama. In an interview (in German, www.nntt.jac.go.jp/release/updata/30000061.html), Klaus Florian Vogt mentioned that his background as a horn player in an orchestra as well as in chamber music helps him listen to other singers and modulate his own singing if necessary. It was nice to discover a facet of the opera that is otherwise dominated by loud orchestra, chorus, and heroic singing.

The NNT assembled an exceptional cast of soloists. (Four of the singers perform in the newly released recording of *Lohengrin*, recorded in Berlin in the fall of 2011 and conducted by Marek Janowski; Vogt, Groissböck, Grochowski, and Anette Dasch are the principals.) Of the six NNT soloists, only one was Japanese. The baritone Jun Hagiwara was a strong-voiced and overall excellent king's herald. The young Austrian bass Günther Groissböck (Heinrich), whom I first encountered as Wasserman in Munich's *Rusalka* in the fall of

2010 and who also sang at the Met in *La bohème* and *Macbeth* the last couple of seasons, is a singer to watch. Although his voice is light for the role of the king (it sometimes seemed higher than Gerd Grochowski's



Klaus Florian Vogt as Lohengrin in Tokyo

Telramund in ensemble), he nevertheless mustered all the authority and gravitas required of the role. His clear voice was always on pitch, and his German diction was a pleasure to the ear.

The German baritone Grochowski as Telramund and the Swedish mezzo-soprano Susanne Resmark as Ortrud were a bit more problematic. Grochowski is an experienced Wagnerian singer (his roles include Kurwenal, Amfortas, and Gunther, according to his biography), but his timbre tended to be grainy, and he was often overpowered by the orchestra. He successfully portrayed Telramund as a sympathetic character manipulated by his wife. His performance grew stronger as the run went on, and his June 10 portrayal was quite respectable. Resmark as Ortrud was perhaps the weak link of the overall excellent cast. Although she was able to hit all the notes, her voice tended to turn thin and shrill, especially in the high end of the range. She also lacked the menace needed for the role. Her "Gott?" in the second-act duet with Grochowski did not inspire the fear and loathing in Telramund that it should have. One wished to have a stronger-voiced singer capable of producing a solid chest voice.

The German soprano Ricarda Merbeth is another veteran Wagnerian singer, who most recently sang Elsa in this spring's new production of *Lohengrin* in Berlin, which also featured Klaus Florian Vogt as a last-minute replacement for Marco Jentsch. Merbeth has an attractive,

if not a beautiful, voice, and portrayed Elsa as a naive and sheltered girl at the mercy of fate, who then slowly gains the confidence to question Lohengrin about his name and origin, signaling a more equal relationship. The occasional wobble and heavy vibrato that sometimes crept into her voice detracted from her image as an innocent heroine; her strongest showing was on June 10.

As wonderful as the orchestra, chorus, and other principal singers were, at the center of the entire experience and receiving a well-deserved standing ovation and repeated curtain calls was Klaus Florian Vogt in his most complete and complex assumption of his signature role to date.

Vogt was already well known among opera fans in Japan, many of whom had heard him sing in Bayreuth and other European theaters. (Oddly, his only other previous appearance in Japan, in *Les contes d'Hoffman* at NNT in 2005, is not remembered by many.) His *Lohengrin* in Tokyo was eagerly awaited, and he did not disappoint.

Since his first *Lohengrin* on DVD, recorded live in Baden Baden in 2006, through several live performances I attended from 2008 to 2011 in Vienna, Dresden, Berlin, Hamburg, and Bayreuth, this German tenor has made enormous strides. Back then his was a straightforward, honest, and clean singing, showcasing his light, ethereal, and yet powerful voice, which can cut through the loud Wagnerian orchestra, but with limited coloring. Today the voice is a little heavier but retains its ethereal quality. The only difference is the enormous variation in the way the voice is produced and projected, from soft pianissimo to powerful outbursts, which perfectly suit his *Lohengrin* as an otherworldly knight in shining armor in the first act, a budding leader in the second act, and finally a frustrated and ultimately resigned noble figure in the third act.

From his first utterance of gratitude to the swan, which he conveyed while standing with his back toward the audience high up on a winged gondola that was lowered from the ceiling (three quarters of his body was concealed), to his last words to the people of Brabant, Vogt was in complete command of his singing and character. When he lightly floated his voice in a mezza voce as he called to the swan in the first and third acts, as well as in his greeting to Elsa in "Heil dir, Elsa" at the end of the second act, he sounded weightless, and yet the next moment he injected enormous power and volume into his voice. "In fernem Land," coming at the end of a long day, was sung wonderfully well. Atypically, he began to sing softly and tenderly with Elsa in his arms, almost whispering to her, pointing out to her a faraway castle that is his home. After the first few lines, he started to move away from her to the center of the stage to end the grail narrative strong-

ly. In between there was some amazing singing: tender, then firm and emphatic – and yet the word “Taube” was sung with such gentle and extended sweetness that I was not alone in shedding tears.

As he mentioned in his interview with the Japanese press, he is now so comfortable with and confident in the role that he is beginning to deepen its characterization as well as experimenting with different ways of singing it (*Asahi Shibun*). I overheard audience members commenting on this “almost strange light voice,” which they had never heard before; some likened it to the voice of a young René Kollo. Unlike European and American audiences, whose opinions are somewhat divided on a light “Mozartian” tenor singing a Wagnerian part, Japanese audiences are unanimously enthusiastic about him. They seemed touched by this tenor’s generosity and sincerity as a performer and colleague.

Klaus Florian Vogt is scheduled to return to Tokyo next April for two concert performances of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, an eagerly awaited event.

–Atsuko Imamura

Atsuko (Ako) Imamura, a member of the Boston Wagner Society, is a native of Tokyo and has lived in the United States for over 35 years.

A Fascist-Era *Rienzi*

***Rienzi*, Deutsche Oper Berlin, April 26, 2012; conductor: Sebastian Lang-Lessing; director: Philip Stölzl; co-regie: Mara Kurotschka; stage design: Ulrike Siegrist; *Rienzi*: Torsten Kerl; *Irene*: Manuela Uhl; *Adriano*: Daniela Sidram; *Steffano Colonna*: Ante Jerkunica**



A scene from *Rienzi* in Berlin

Part 1

Rienzi isn't Wagner's best piece, and I can understand comments about its being “Meyerbeer's worst opera.” It really didn't help that the performance was so brutally cut: Acts 1–3 ran for just 90 minutes, with the ballet sequence being cut in its entirety.

The overture was played with a pantomime of a dictator imagining himself conducting the piece in a room in his villa overlooking the mountains. No prizes for guessing who was being singled out for judgment in this production.

Rome was transformed into a thirties Berlin with the populace wearing masks reminiscent of the propaganda caricatures of the age; the cardinal, for example, was an almost Rasputin-like character. The rebellion itself was dreadfully abrupt, although the mournful sound of the lone trumpet was chillingly atmospheric. The relationship between *Rienzi* and *Irene* was

decidedly incestuous, with a long-held kiss between the two after he addressed the Romans.

The voices did not project particularly well into the auditorium, though this may be an issue with the hall itself. They sounded as if they were coming from the back of a cave.

The orchestra was fine and understated, but the singers were not exceptional and shouldn't be used as a basis of deciding whether this opera could rejoin the repertoire. Torsten Kerl as *Rienzi* was his usual campy boyish self, much like the dull characterization of Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung* at Opera Bastille. Manuela Uhl as *Irene* seemed vocally undersupported in many places, and on several occasions she was overpowered by the orchestra. Daniela Sidram as *Adriano* was the most interesting and pleasing singer, though it was interesting to see Wagner use a travesti role for this most noble knight.

Following the overthrow of the nobles, the populace turned into uniform-wearing fascisti, the references to an unpleasant period in history made even clearer toward the end of the first part of this evening when 1930/40s Nazi-style propaganda movies were played over the rear of the stage, extolling the nation's greatness and portraying lots of healthy, blond children kissing the new tribune. While this was happening, the nobles were led to the back of the stage after swearing allegiance to the new state, where they were summari-

ly executed by point-blank range gunshot. This was not at all convincing dramatically, and I couldn't help wonder whether Philip Stölzl, the director, was wallowing in self-loathing for the events of the Second World War or whether this scene was meant as a singularly pointed insult to the German audience.

Part 2

The dramaturgy was even more confused in the second half of this evening, with nonsensical action conflicting with the sung text. One of the glaring errors came toward the end as Adriano joined the crowd, which was beating Irene to death as Rienzi was led out to be lynched. He then returned to the corpse of his lover and died in the bunker where and Rienzi had spent the entire second part.

Daniela Sidram, to her credit, sang Adriano's major aria "Gerechter Gott" wonderfully well, and she received the loudest applause of the evening, both after the aria and during the final curtain call. Meanwhile, Torsten Kerl continued the pantomimic villainlike portrayal of the tribune. He was in better voice in this part, and "Allmacht'ger Vater" was very affecting. However, his posturing on stage after being stabbed by Adriano (more dramatic silliness) put me in mind of those useless henchmen in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, not really what one wishes for in a Wagner opera, or any other opera, for that matter, and certainly not appropriate for the rise and fall of the last Roman tribune.

In summary, this performance reinforced my extreme dislike of director-led concept productions that seem to try to be more intelligent than the audience. I understood the concept, but the details were so at odds with the text and sentiment of the composer in many places that it rapidly became a very tedious evening, and I was left longing for a decent performance of the work.

-Llyr Carvana

Llyr Carvana, a member of the Boston Wagner Society, lives in London.

Does Wagner's Music "Contaminate the Air" in Israel?

The music of Wagner has been performed in Israel only twice, and both times in an impromptu way as encores, in concerts conducted by Daniel Barenboim and Zubin Mehta. Recently, the Israeli conductor Asher Fisch put together an all-Wagner program and rented a hall at Tel Aviv University for a June performance. (Maestro Fisch is scheduled to conduct a splendid all-Wagner concert at Tanglewood on July 21.) This would have been the first organized performance of Wagner's music in Israel. However, when protests erupted, the university canceled the performance. Maestro Fisch then rented a hall at the Tel Aviv Hilton, which the hotel subsequently canceled. The concert never took place.

Below is an interview with Jonathan Livny, the president of the Israel Wagner Society.

DG: You were instrumental in organizing Maestro Asher Fisch's daring all-Wagner concert in June, which was canceled. If this had taken place, it would have been the first time that a scheduled performance of Wagner's music would have occurred. What was your role in this effort?

JL: It is a loaded question. The concert was first discussed when I met Asher in Dresden. He was called in as a last-minute replacement for Maestro Luisi to conduct the *Ring Cycle*. I had never met Asher, but Israelis have chutzpa, so I got his email [address] from a friend and wrote to him that I would like to meet him in Dresden. After the performance, we met and begun to plan the concert. It took almost two years to bring the idea to fruition. I formed the Wagner Society in Israel in order to promote an open discussion of playing Wagner in Israel and to start playing his music in public. What was my role? It was supposed to be a concert sponsored by our society, which meant it was going to be the Israel Wagner Society Orchestra. Was I involved? In every effort of the concert.

DG: Your society is about a year and a half old now. What prompted you to start a Wagner society in Israel, of all places?

JL: Wagner was part of my "father's milk," so to speak. My father was a refugee from Germany who escaped with picture albums, documents from his youth, and 78 [rpm] records of the *Die Meistersinger*. My father taught me to love the music — "this godly music," he called it — and to dislike Wagner the anti-Semite. . . . I maintain that music should be separated from the man who wrote it and from the man who loved it — Hitler. If Hitler had loved Mozart, should we have refrained from listening to it? I am against any boycott of any culture regardless of who and what. Politics should be separated from art. When the Israel Chamber Orches-

tra was invited to Bayreuth and accepted the invitation but announced that it would not rehearse the “Siegfried Idyll” on Israeli soil, I felt I had to act – was the music contaminating the air? I maintain that the time has come to destroy the last remaining “fetish” of anti-German feeling in Israel. The Holocaust cannot be remembered just through the Wagner boycott.

DG: What were Israelis’ reactions to the formation of a Wagner society in their country?

JL: Many said it’s about time, and they immediately joined our society. A few, mainly “professional” Holocaust survivors, raised hell.

DG: How many members does your society have, and what are your activities?

JL: We have over 150 members. We travel as a group to hear Wagner all over the world. We hold lectures on Wagner’s music, and we tried and will continue until we succeed to stage a concert in Israel.

DG: Did you get any attention from the Bayreuth Festival when you founded the Israel Wagner Society? If yes, what was their reaction?

JL: No, not really. I expected some attention but got none. No letters of congratulations – nothing.

DG: Do you think it will ever be possible to separate Wagner’s music from his tainted ideological views?

JL: That is my hope. Once music is written, it belongs to the world and should be judged by its merits alone.

DG: Do you agree with some commentators’ views that several characters in Wagner’s operas, say Mime or Beckmesser, are caricatures of Jews?

JL: They probably are, or at least for the people who lived in his time, these were anti-Semitic codes. But it’s all in the staging. *The Merchant of Venice* is a most popular play done by the best theaters in Israel. Does this mean they perform an anti-Semitic play? I saw a production in Berlin of *The Flying Dutchman*, which showed the ship as *Exodus* in 1947, and the sailors as Jewish refugees from Europe. Did Wagner see this? He probably turned in his grave. One also might read into the text what we think of as his anti-Semitism because of what we know of his beliefs. It’s all in our minds, and it is all in the way the director produces it. Bayreuth showed last year the killing of Elisabeth [Camilla Nylund, in *Tannhäuser*] in a gas chamber [a new production by Sebastian Baumgarten]. What does that mean today?

DG: Do you ever foresee a time when Wagner’s music will not be so politically charged in Israel and will be performed in the same way as other composers’ music?

JL: I have a dream that one day people in Israel will like or dislike Wagner for the music, not because of politics and not because of memories of the past. I have a dream.

–Dalia Geffen

Upcoming Events

Sunday, September 23, 2 p.m.

“Those Ill-Mannered Girls”: Brünnhilde and the Valkyries

Lecture and demonstration by Cori Ellison

Dramaturg and Met Opera Quiz Panelist

Brookline Public Library

Hunnemann Hall

361 Washington Street, Brookline, MA 02445

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