

From the Back Verandah

Wagner's music has long been a favourite with movie directors seeking to enhance the dramatic effect. Trouble is, the same few pieces seem destined to be chosen over and over, like *The Ride of the Valkyries*, which has featured in at least six big-screen productions.

Here, to the best of my research on the Internet and elsewhere, are

two lists of movies (other than ones about the composer's life) that have enlisted Wagner's help. The first list is self-explanatory, and the second contains films for which as yet I am unable to specify the Wagner pieces involved. Readers are invited to clarify the position or to add any missed titles.

— Fizzgig

Götterdämmerung (Siegfried's Funeral Music): Excalibur
Lohengrin (Prelude to Act 1): E la Nave Va; Ludwig; One Hundred Men and a Girl
Die Meistersinger (Overture): Dracula (1931); Triumph of the Will
Tannhäuser (Overture and/or Pilgrim's Chorus): Counterpoint; Epidemic; Meeting Venus; Unfaithfully Yours
Tristan and Isolde (Love Death): Aria; Excalibur; Farewell to Arms
Die Walküre (Ride of the Valkyries): Apocalypse Now; The Blues Brothers; 8½ ; Excalibur; My Girl 2; One, Two, Three

Age of Gold
 Detective
 Highlander II

In Danger and Dire Distress . . .
 Stimulantia
 Wuthering Heights

Colophon

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BIKWIL

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Wagner Fest

When he died, over 10,000 books and articles on him had already been penned. By now, more has been written about Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813-1883) than any other figure in history except Jesus Christ. Naturally, *Bikwil* doesn't intend being left out of this never-ending scriptural endeavour, particularly in view of the current Adelaide staging of the first ever *Ring* by an Aussie opera company.

Ok, what's on offer here? In a large nutshell: reminiscences, trivia, advice to the agnostic, parodies — even some serious pieces. And true to form, our *QQQs* focus on the more jocular/sardonic side of 150 years of Wagnerian commentary.

Far from being able to wait 15 years for his bi-centenary, then, *Bikwil* forthwith pays its intrepid, though somewhat irreverent, homage to the music of you-know-who.

What's Inside?

Why All the Fuss?	2	Quintessential Quirky Quotes	35
The <i>Ring</i> in Australia	3	A French Connection	39
Gaudeat Auditor	6	A Word in Your Pink Shell-like	41
Enter an Archetypal Zealot	12	The Therapist Prescribes . . .	43
Detective Story	14	Is There a Believer in the House?	46
A Ring of Pilgrims	15	"A Gripping Drama . . ."	51
The Tin Voice Laughed	24	An Australian Brünnhilde	55
Wagner's Revolutionary Years	28	Where Three Ways Meet	60
Web Line	31	Wagner the Innovator	65
The Power of the Feminine	33	Ring-Barking Mad	71
Down Limerick Lane	34	From the Back Verandah	72

Why All the Fuss?

While he wrote over 50 overtures, marches, choral works, piano pieces, songs, etc., together with dozens of literary works, Wagner is remembered mainly for his ten operas. None is more important than his monumental music drama *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. For the benefit of any *Bikwil* readers who aren't familiar with the work, I have been challenged by the editor to sketch some sort of intro. But in one page? Fat chance! There's not room here to summarise even a tenth of its plot. (If you need a hint of what it's all about, just think lust for power, wealth and sex for openers, and universal murder, suicide and destruction for closers, with a bit of gratuitous redemption thrown in for good measure.)

So what I've decided to do is relate six fabulous "Guinness-Book-of-Records-type" facts about the work and then hope for the best as I scurry for cover.

The gargantuan *Ring* consists of not one but four operas — *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* — which require the audience to attend on four evenings for a total of 15 to 16 hours of music

Wagner worked on it over a period of more than 25 years (1848-74)

He wrote not only the music, but also the libretto (as he did for his other operas)

It required a special theatre to be built for it — the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth

The demands placed on the lead singers by Wagner (e.g. Brünnhilde and particularly Siegfried) are the most unmerciful in all opera

It has 27 principal singing roles, plus 40 extra parts, a chorus of over 80 and the voices of about a dozen children — to say nothing of an orchestra up to 110-strong.

Enough of the statistics, *mirabile dictu* though they may be. Let us now — to the reverberating strains of a passage from *The Cambridge Music Guide* (1985) — proceed over the rainbow bridge to *Bikwil's* own tribute:

The *Ring* is Wagner's greatest achievement; it has even been claimed, not unreasonably, as the greatest achievement of Western culture, so huge is its scale, so wide-ranging the issues it deals with, so profoundly unified is it on so many planes. It is based on ancient sagas: Wagner believed, as others have done too, that the truths embodied in myths have meanings far beyond any literal interpretation. The story of the *Ring* is about gods, dwarves (Nibelungs), giants and humans; it has been read (and performed) as a manifesto for socialism, as a plea for a Nazi-like racialism, as a study of the workings of the human psyche, as forecast of the fate of the world and humankind, as a parable about the new industrial society of Wagner's time. It is all of these, and much more too. It touches at some point on every kind of human relationship and on numerous moral and philosophical issues. It is inevitably the focus of all debate on Wagner's greatness and the meaning of his works.

— Spud Money

Ring-Barking Mad

I think that I shall never sing
An opera daft as Wagner's *Ring*.

A work whose vice-like jaws are gripped
Around a monstrous tale equipped

With swords and potions, horseback choirs,
And gods disguised and funeral pyres,

And dragons, dwarves, a hero's pecc —
Not to mention sibling sex.

You'd think all that would noise demand,
Yet most agree, the music's grand.

A parody ain't hard to swing,
But only Dick could make a *Ring*.

— TR

not downright failures, his librettos can be criticised on a number of counts (the words "turgid" and "tedious" come readily to mind), and readers are best encouraged to look into all that at their own pace.

In the meantime, I hope this little piece will have enhanced your understanding of and listening pleasure with Wagner's music. In case it hasn't, I'll leave you *Bikwilians* with this tasty morsel from Frank Muir:

An alp-horn is a very long round wooden instrument with a hole through the middle, sometimes having a bend towards the far end to support it. Laughing Swiss peasantry in leather knickers blow down it at dusk to call home the Gruyère cheeses.²⁰

— E. Roy Strong

¹ *Collins Encyclopedia of Music*, pp. 591-2. Lond., Collins, 1976.

² Quoted in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Lond., OUP, 1989), from *Composer & Conductor*, Aug. 1971.

^{3a} *Collins Encyclopedia of Music*, p. 319;

^{3b} Robert L. Jacobs, *Wagner*, p. 160. Lond., Dent, 1947

⁴ Barry Millington, *Richard Wagner, a Musical Appreciation*, in: Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *The Wagner Companion*, p. 8. Lond., W.H. Allen, 1977. ISBN 0 491 01856 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11

⁶ Aylmer Buesst, *The Nibelung's Ring*, 2nd ed. Lond. Newman Neame, 1952.

⁷ Deryck Cooke, *An Introduction to Der Ring des Nibelungen, being an Explanation and Analysis of Wagner's System of Leitmotifs*. Lond., Decca, 1968?

⁸ Anonymous musician, quoted in *The World of Music*, p. 2171. Lond., Waverley, 1954.

⁹ Richard Wagner, quoted in Mander and Mitchenson, *op. cit.*, p. 101-2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Edwin Evans and Mosco Carner, *German Music*, in Jethro Bithell, *Germany, a Companion to German Studies*, 5th ed., p. 480. Lond., Methuen, 1955.

¹² Millington, *op. cit.*, p. 8

¹³ Paul Grabbe, *The Story of Orchestral Music and Its Times*, pp. 66-7. N.Y., Grosset and Dunlap, 1942.

¹⁴ David D. Boyden, *An Introduction to Music*, 2nd ed., pp. 344-5. Lond., Faber, 1971. ISBN 0 571 091 19 0.

¹⁵ Grabbe, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Evans and Carner, *ibid.*

¹⁷ Boyden, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Adam Carse, *The History of Orchestration*, p. 280. N.Y., Dover, 1964 (reprint of the original 1925 edition).

¹⁹ John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*. Lond., Secker and Warburg, 1967.

²⁰ Steve Race, *My Music*, p. 130. Lond., Robson, 1979. ISBN 0 86051 072 7.

The *Ring* in Australia

Ok, the truth, please. Is the 1998 Adelaide production the first Aussie performance of Wagner's four-opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, or isn't it? Wasn't there one early this century? What about the Australian Opera's venture in the 1980s? And surely there've been concert performances?

Taking the last question first — yes, there have been numerous concert performances of parts of the *Ring*. In relatively recent times at the Sydney Opera House, for example, concert performances of *Götterdämmerung* were given in the late '70's conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras with Rita Hunter, Alberto Remedios and Bruce Martin. And in 1996 the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under Edo de Waart gave concert performances of *Das Rheingold*, followed by *Die Walküre* in 1997.

As for staged performances, Australia has seen very few of any of the four *Ring* music dramas, let alone a complete cycle. One I remember personally was the Carlo Felice Cillario/Rita Hunter performance of an Australian Opera cut-down version of *Die Walküre* in 1983. This was intended to lead eventually into a complete *Ring* by the Australian Opera. The idea

received a great boost when the German Ambassador to Australia announced that Germany would be donating \$1m towards a Bicentennial staging of the whole tetralogy. The AO subsequently did put on *Das Rheingold*, which is said to have been a terrible flop. From then on, the whole project was doomed and never surfaced again.

And, of course, over the years numerous *Ring* extracts have been performed in recital in Oz. The most celebrated of these marked the 1973 opening of the Sydney Opera House. I myself was in that audience, and have more to say about the occasion in *Is There a Believer in the House?*, page 46.

But for the definitive answer on whether there had ever been a full *Ring* on stage in Australia I just had to find out from the experts. Bill Gillespie (Artistic Director) and Stephen Phillips (General Director) from the South Australian Opera were both kind enough to email me with plenty of information to fill out the historical perspective.

Well, there *was* an earlier staging of the *Ring* in Australia. The British Quinlan company brought a production here in 1913. One cycle was staged in Melbourne, and two cycles in Sydney. The singing was

in English, not German. All of the scenery, costumes and props were imported, as were all the singers and the orchestra. There were no known Australians in the cast or in the touring company.

Now, when The State Opera of South Australia launched its \$8m *Ring* project at Adelaide's Festival Theatre, they were careful to state that this would be the first complete *Ring* produced by an Australian company, and that it was the first ever to be sung here in German.

But guess what? Some parts of the media failed to make these distinctions, and many people are still under the impression that this is the first production of any *Ring* in Oz.

There will be some "imports", though. The most prominent is Jeffrey Tate, who is currently principal guest conductor at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and the Orchestre National de France, as well as principal conductor of the English Chamber Orchestra. Others include Pierre Strosser, director (it was he who devised the original 1994 French production on which the Adelaide *Ring* is based), and three singers in the leading roles — Edward Cook (Siegfried), Janis Martin (Brünnhilde), and John Keyes (Siegmond).

Yes — the whole production (with its ten shipping containers of stage set) is that of the Théâtre du

Châtelet, in Paris. Despite the size of the set, Strosser's concept plays down the spectacle and avoids taking the traditional mythical symbols too literally — i.e. the Rhine, flying horses, giants, dwarves, dragon, etc.

Anyway, by now Australian *Ring* fever has reached its peak. In fact, as early as last March, when Bill and Stephen wrote to me, 95% of the \$1,000 seats had already been sold, two-thirds of them to overseas visitors. They have come from places like Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Finland, Fiji, France, Germany, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Some of them, I understand, are wealthy enough to do little else but peregrinate the planet watching the *Ring*. Not content with the once-in-a-lifetime dream of going to Bayreuth that you and I might entertain, their love of the work takes them on a perpetual pilgrimage wherever Alberich raises his ugly head. A Los Angeles ophthalmologist, Dr. Sherwin Sloan, for example, will attend his 47th *Ring* in Adelaide!

The usual glitterati will be present, like Leo Schofield, Margaret Whitlam, Donald McDonald and Elizabeth Evatt. I was interested to learn, too, that Bob Willis, former

trombone. Comparable expansion had taken place in the rest of the orchestra. The whole orchestra could furnish some seventeen choirs and about one hundred voice parts!¹⁴

Just as important as Wagner's use of new instruments and his expansion of the sheer size of the orchestra is the way he refrained from assailing our ears continuously with fortissimo tutti passages. Yes, I know everyone thinks of his music as deafening, and admittedly when it is loud there's nothing more incandescently exciting. But it does not blast all the time.

... the use that Wagner made of this potential volume was as skillful as it was new. For instance, instead of swelling or decreasing volume with the whole orchestra, he wove a complicated pattern of alternating crescendos and diminuendos by individual instruments. He also introduced tiny melodic fragments intended not so much to be heard separately as to add greater richness to the tonal texture. In his climaxes he made the violins move in an intricate network of figuration around the blaring brasses which he did not hesitate to use in unison.¹⁵

Evans and Carner¹⁶ describe Wagner's orchestral style as "multicoloured and immensely flexible", while Boyden¹⁷ notes:

With such variety and range of pitch and dynamics, magical effects related to the situation could be produced almost entirely by orchestral means. As in all great orchestrators, Wagner's demands from the orchestra were directly related to the orchestral effects he wished to

create. No one before or since has created such effects of brilliant light (*Lohengrin*) or dark cavernous sounds (*The Ring*). The opulence and variety of his instrumental colors are surely the most extraordinary in opera.

Perhaps the definitive discussion of Wagner's instrumentation and orchestration is to be found in Adam Carse's book. In this Carse devotes 14 pages to the topic, and it is well worth study for those interested in the awe-inspiring sound of Wagner's orchestra. On the point of Wagner's brass, for example, Carse was one of the first to show clearly that "the secret of their irresistible power of penetration"¹⁸ often lies in their use, not harmonised in open chords (as lesser composers might have done), but in majestic unison or octaves.

The Surface Merely Scratched

So there you have it: leitmotifs and orchestra, just two of Wagner's new methods. None of this of course has touched on his concept of "endless melody", nor on the more *outré* sounds he demanded for *The Ring*, such as 18 tuned anvils, the thunder machine, a pair of off-stage steer-horns, the alp-horn . . . For some impressive photos in the latter domain, check out John Culshaw's book on the making of the *Decca Ring*.¹⁹

Also ignored here is the issue of Wagner's notorious poetry. Though

So far, so good — a place for the musicians and the musicians in their place. But Wagner's theatrical innovations were matched — surpassed — by his skill as an orchestrator, and that is what we now turn our attention to. Indeed, for countless listeners his unwieldy political, philosophical and quasi-religious ideas as realised in his opera house design are of little import; what they hear clearest and love most is the sound of the orchestral writing.

It was not for nothing that he never tired of claiming his musical descent from Beethoven rather than from such operatic composers as Gluck, Mozart and Weber. For in Beethoven's symphonies Wagner saw the expression of poetic and dramatic ideas; and since this was precisely his aim in the music-drama, he took the decisive step of applying Beethoven's symphonic technique to the medium of opera.¹¹

In other words, his grand conception demanded a symphonic approach rather than a traditional operatic one, and with it a greatly enlarged orchestra. In this he was undoubtedly assisted by current improvements in instrument design and construction (e.g. horns, trumpets and tubas with valves), and in fact wrote specifications for several of them.

What follows are some relevant quotations from writings on Wagner's inventive orchestral dexterity.

Millington points out that, during the last two centuries,

. . . composers have drawn more specifically on tone-colour to articulate the language of emotion. Wagner participated in this process by exploiting timbres of instruments, both in families and individually. To some of the less familiar instruments — the bass clarinet and bass tuba, for example — he gave a respectability that has remained with them ever since. He even invented, for *The Ring*, an instrument to bridge the gap in tonal colour between the horns and trombones. The "Wagner tuba" [not a tuba really, more a horn-saxhorn hybrid] is played by each of four extra horn players who alternate between the two instruments, and gives a sombre dignity to such passages as the announcement of the Valhalla motif.¹²

Paul Grabbe says:

Where previously three harps had been considered ample, he called for six; instead of the traditional four horns, he wanted eight. Eventually he wound up with a body of 112 players capable of thunderous sound effects.¹³

According to David Boyden,

Wagner's orchestra was an instrument of fabulous power, and he was its absolute master. . . [In his hands] the orchestra had become complete in all divisions. The number of instruments had been vastly increased, the woodwinds greatly improved, and the brass made chromatic by the addition of valves. The *Ring* requires a complete family of tubas, eight horns, three trumpets, bass trumpet, and four trombones, including a contrabass

English test cricket captain, is here both for the Ashes and the Wagner.

By the sound of it, Adelaide is making the whole thing a real Wagner Festival, with a special rose being grown ("Magic Fire"), and a special exhibition of jewellery being arranged (the "Ring Collection"). Adelaide's Lord Mayor has even given permission for Meeting House Lane, behind the Town Hall, to be renamed Richard Wagner Gasse (= Lane) for the duration of the Festival. This will be a central meeting-place for *Ring* lovers.

In keeping with the Bayreuth tradition, the last three operas of the *Ring* are having one-hour intervals, during which much gourmet dining and wining will take place, presumably at a gourmet price.

Naturally, the media coverage has been proceeding apace ever since the venture was announced in 1995. This has included numerous performances of the *Ring* on radio, mainly in excerpts, but also in full, such as on Sydney's 2MBS-FM.

Inescapably, there's been academic interest too, with a flurry of seminars, art installations, book exhibitions, etc. One 1997 conference was *A Glimmer of Gold*, a three-day affair at Adelaide Uni. Speakers included Leo Schofield, English critic Barry Millington, Wagner singers Lauris Elms and Rita Hunter, and Roger Parker, who

worked on the historic Decca Solti *Ring* recordings. The conference was later covered by Julie Copeland on ABC Radio National, with Millington giving insight into how you can actually detect musical evidence in the *Ring* of Wagner's anti-Semitism.

Later in 1997 a half-day seminar entitled *Wagner on the Couch* was held in Sydney. Its purpose was to provide a "critical, historical and psychoanalytical perspective" on the mind of Wagner. Speakers were John Milfull, Professor of European Studies at the University of N.S.W., music critic John Carmody, OA director Elke Neidhardt and psychiatrist Robert Kaplan.

Another talk show (also running for three days at Adelaide Uni) is this month's *International Wagner Symposium*. The keynote speakers are Professor John Deathridge from London, Barry Millington again, Professor Dietrich Borchmeyer from Heidelberg and Dr. Georg Oswald Bauer from Munich.

Another shrink-rapt lecture (this time featuring Dr. Ronnie Taylor and Robert Gibson) is *The "Madness" of Richard Wagner*, to be held by the RANZCP Section of Psychotherapy at the State Library of NSW, 10 December, 7.30 p.m. Book via (02) 9684 0888. \$10.

So much for the setting. On with *Bikwil's* response to the music.

Gaudeat Auditor

Classic CD magazine in 1992 described him thus:

Richard Wagner is the most awesome artistic phenomenon of the last two centuries. He remains a subject of bitter controversy in a way that no other genius of the front rank ever has.

No doubt some readers have their reservations about Wagner (if not scepticism towards or even dislike of him), and this introductory essay is by way of some restorative advice to them.

Let's begin with Wagner the man, and ask the question on every lip: how could such an unmitigated cad have written music worth wasting our time on? For, as you know,

- ◇ Wagner stole other people's wives (e.g. Jessie Laussot, Mathilde Wesendonck, Cosima von Bülow)
- ◇ He borrowed money recklessly (didn't his genius deserve it?) and, except when he couldn't get away with it, never repaid a debt
- ◇ He mistreated even his closest friends and supporters
- ◇ He hated Jews, though never declined to use them to his own financial or musical advantage
- ◇ He had a big head (in both senses), to say nothing of the

mightiest mouth of the 19th century, the most luxurious tastes and the longest pen (e.g. on top of everything else, he wrote 230 books and 10,000 letters)

- ◇ He saw himself not just as the greatest musician who ever drew breath, but also as the world's finest living poet, playwright, polemicist and philosopher.

Who will defend this contemptible scoundrel and overweening egotist? Let's see what our trusty mahogany-covered *World of Music* (1954) has to say. On the matter in question it quotes from a famous radio talk, entitled *A Monster*, given by American musician and critic Deems Taylor. (You may remember Deems Taylor as the face and voice linking the various musical items in Walt Disney's 1946 film *Fantasia*.)

[Wagner] . . . was one of the world's greatest dramatists; he was a great thinker; he was one of the most stupendous musical geniuses that, up to now, the world has ever seen. The world did owe him a living . . . What if he was faithful to his friends and to his wives? He had one mistress to whom he was faithful to the day of his death: Music . . . There is not a line of his music that could have been conceived by a little mind . . . There is greatness about his worst mistakes . . . The miracle is that what he

same time. The only possible question arising is this: is the Cooke recorded commentary available separately? I'm not sure, but then, doesn't *everyone* need a Solti/Vienna PO *Ring* anyway?

New Sounds for Old

Coming now to the implications of the music drama concept for the use of the orchestra, I want to first clarify the acoustic importance of the design of the Bayreuth building itself. Modelling his auditorium on the sloping fan shape of an ancient amphitheatre, so that the lines of sight would be democratically favourable from all seats, Wagner did away with the private side boxes hitherto so valued by the European upper classes. Nor would he permit pillars or multi-storey galleries.

At the same time he had the orchestra repositioned from its customary place into a sunken area in front of and partly beneath the proscenium. Orchestra and audience were separated by a low wall, and the source of the opera's music was now essentially invisible to the spectators. In this respect the Bayreuth Festspielhaus has had an abiding influence on all musical theatres subsequently built, with most theatre-goers today, however, blithely unaware that the orchestra pit they take for granted was Richard Wagner's invention.

In addition, the hall was built entirely of timber. Gottfried Semper, Wagner's architect, believed wood to be the best possible building material for acoustic purposes.

Musicians of the day loved the sound properties of the theatre, as the following observation attests:

In this hall brass is transformed into gold.⁸

Acoustically, then, Bayreuth in 1876 offered a completely new experience. Yet these innovations were not purely for the purpose of better listening, but all arose rather from the *Gesamtkunstwerk* objective. Wagner, in characteristic language, actually called the space between the front row seats and the stage action the "mystic abyss",

. . . because it is intended to separate reality from idealism . . . [it] has the effect of producing . . . [the perception] that the figures in the scene appear to be of enlarged, superhuman dimensions.⁹

As important to Wagner as that larger-than-life impression was the advantage that the pit prevented the distractions caused by

. . . the mechanical movements attendant on the musicians' and their conductor's performance . . . [distractions to be avoided] almost as carefully as the strings, ropes, and boards of the scenery, which, when viewed from the wings, have a notoriously destructive effect on any illusion.¹⁰

invented by Wagner. His word was “Grundthema” (= basic theme). The coinage of the word “leitmotiv” has sometimes been attributed to Friedrich Wilhelm Jähns,² who was applying it, not to Wagner, but to Weber. Most commentators,³ however, confer the credit on H. von Wolzogen, the editor of *Bayreuther Blätter*, who employed it 1887 when discussing *Götterdämmerung*, and who gave the leitmotivs their well-known names.

So what exactly is a leitmotiv? Simply put, in the words of the indestructible Anna Russell, “it merely means a signature tune” for persons, events, emotions and physical objects — a sort of motto chiefly used as a “device of presentiments and reminiscences”.⁴ In a way, it resembles Berlioz’ *idée fixe* in his *Symphonie Fantastique* of 1830, although Wagner made far more elaborate and consistent use of it, particularly in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The fascinating thing in that work is that, though each leitmotiv has its own easily remembered melodic characteristic (often harmonic and/or rhythmic as well), almost every one grows out of another previously heard.

Sometimes the connections only become apparent in retrospect, but it is the symphonist’s art to integrate large-scale structures, linking backward and

forward to create a continuous text, rich in associative ideas.⁵

The effect of this back-and-forth association of leitmotivs is thus an unbroken thematic development that ultimately binds the four dramas together into a cohesive, organic musical edifice, and helps give it its unity.

These days there are many references available for the *Ring* student to explore in detail the meaning and interplay of the work’s melodic fragments. One is a now out-of-print book by Aylmer Buesst,⁶ which narrates the full plot of the tetralogy, at the same time naming, numbering and notating each leitmotiv, original or derived, as it appears. Another is the magnificent *Ring Disc* CD-Rom, which allows you to search by leitmotiv, then hear it in context.

For my money the most useful resource, however, is the recording made by Deryck Cooke⁷ as part of the Decca re-release as an integrated set of its world’s-first complete *Ring* recording. Cooke’s masterly explanation consists of commentary and nearly 200 examples extracted from the Decca recordings, plus a printed version of both, the leitmotiv examples in musical notation.

The advantage here, of course, is that you can look and listen at the

did in the little space of 70 years could have been done at all, even by a great genius. Is it any wonder that he had no time to be a man?

And here’s Milton Cross in his *Encyclopedia of the Great Composers and Their Music* (1962 ed.):

Without that abnormal vanity and self-glorification, he would never have dared to conceive a musical structure . . . [unparalleled] for immensity of design and vastness of scope; or conceiving it, he would never have found the strength to bring it into existence; or bringing it to life, he would never have had the selling power to interest a skeptical world in it.

But what about the music? Surely the credentials of the nightingale or cuckoo will lie in its singing, no matter what it steals or dreams of? So what we need to do now is seek out some suitable examples of Wagner’s work and put him to the test.

A small point before we switch on the CD player. Some people have difficulties with the feelings Wagner’s music evokes, so for them let us quote from a 1992 book by psychiatrist Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind*:

I think that people who are repelled by Wagner’s music might well come to appreciate its power and beauty if they realized more clearly what was disturbing them. I believe that listeners to Wagner have to allow themselves to be temporarily overwhelmed if they are fully to appreciate the music. But many people are fearful of

‘letting go’ to this extent, and consequently shy away from the intense emotional experience which Wagner offers us.

With that encouragement, let’s recall the two cardinal rules for Wagner listening. Yes, I know you normally enthuse *quietly* in whatever you enjoy, but just this once

1. Turn up the volume; and
2. Repeat Rule 1.

Now some pieces to listen to.

For various reasons, the vocal parts can seem very fatiguing, and it’s the singing that puts most newcomers off. You’ll be relieved to hear, therefore, that you may delay that sort of gratification till later, and rely on orchestral excerpts to begin with. There is an abundance of dazzling pieces to choose from.

Colossally daunting it may be, but the tetralogy of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung*) is not as bad place to start as you might first think. Here’s what George Bernard Shaw wrote a century ago this year in *The Perfect Wagnerite*:

. . . *The Ring* is full of extraordinarily attractive episodes, both orchestral and dramatic. The nature music alone — music of river and rainbow, fire and forest — is enough to bribe people with any love of the country in them to endure the passages of political philosophy in the sure hope of a

prettier page to come. Everybody, too, can enjoy the love music, the hammer and anvil music, the clumping of the giants, the tune of the young woodsman's horn, the trilling of the bird, the dragon music and nightmare music and thunder and lightning music, the profusion of simple melody, the sensuous charm of the orchestration: in short, the vast extent of common ground between *The Ring* and the ordinary music we use for play and pleasure.

Do you like the *Ride of the Valkyries*? (It introduces Act III of *Die Walküre*.) Don't know it well? Give it another try, then, and listen to its wonderful galloping progress. I reckon that, like me, you'll also grow to savour the contrast between the heavy deep bass and the rushing runs and trills higher up in the orchestra.

Incidentally, below (Ex. 1) is a little ditty you can sing full-throttle to the tune of the *Ride*. I found it in John Culshaw's *Ring Resounding* (1967), the story of how the Decca *Ring* recordings were made, written by the producer in charge of that long project.

Oh, you can't stand the *Ride* because of its hackneyed movie associations? Fair enough. Well try

[Ex. 1: Die Walküre]



I'm sick on a see-saw, sick on a see-saw, sick on a see-saw, sick on a train.

some of these instead. Most are around ten minutes or less in length, with the longest, the *Siegfried Idyll*, being just over 22 minutes. A few were arranged for the concert hall by Wagner himself from the full scores. As you listen, you're sure to become aware of what an untold debt many of Hollywood's derivative composers owe to Our Man in Bayreuth.

- ◇ *Der Fliegende Holländer: Overture* — a marvellous, atmospheric tone-poem
- ◇ *Götterdämmerung: Immolation of the Gods* — the magnificent and eminently satisfying orchestral culmination of the whole *Ring* is built up almost entirely from seven leitmotifs used throughout the tetralogy
- ◇ *Götterdämmerung: Siegfried's Death and Funeral March* — a splendid death march, worthy of the hero it laments — was played at Wagner's own funeral
- ◇ *Götterdämmerung: Siegfried's Rhine Journey* — the intermezzo heard just before the Act I curtain goes up — exultant, but full of foreboding hints
- ◇ *Lohengrin: Prelude* — exquisite

Wagner the Innovator

It has fallen to me to be one of the less frivolous contributors to this *Bikwil* Wagner issue. What follows, however, is something which only on a charitable day might just pass for an "academic" or "formal" paper. This short article will thus not be particularly learned, and certainly it isn't boldly original. What it may be, though, is interesting enough to motivate further explorations by the new Wagner buff into a couple of the more technical aspects of the composer's art. To that end, as we proceed I'll provide references to the literature I found most illuminating while researching this topic.

The Vision Thing

Before we can talk about Wagner's craft (at least that of his mature works *Tristan*, the *Ring*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*) we must first address his *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept (= unified art form). In opera the method had long been to have the various scenes sung by isolated arias or choruses which rarely bore any musical relationship to each other. As a rule, operas set throughout to music (whether arias, recitatives, ensembles or choruses) were called "grand operas", while those with

dialogue came to be known as "comic operas".

Wagner's intention, by contrast, was to create a new kind of dramatic work, in which music, poetry, drama, acting, scenery and spectacle could be combined in a meaningful and expressive whole, and which was to be called, not "opera", but "music drama". The *Collins Encyclopedia of Music*¹ offers a deft summary of all the stipulations Wagner attached to the idea, which included legends as subject matter, verse written by the composer, the abandonment of conventions like the operatic ensemble, the orchestra as equally expressive partner to the voices, and symphonic continuity.

From here on, however, I will be able to focus on just two design implications of the concept: melodic and orchestrational. I realise that this will omit a number of other important topics, but space limitations dictate such exclusions.

Catchphrases Galore

One device Wagner developed to help actualize his vision is known as the "leitmotiv".

Contrary to a widespread misconception, neither the term "leitmotiv" nor the device itself was

Wagner's death, he was in the middle of a choral rehearsal, which he cancelled, saying, "A master is dead. Today we sing no more."

In November 1988, actor and comedian Stephen Fry was the willing shipwrecked guest on the long-running BBC radio programme *Desert Island Discs*. Of the eight musical pieces he selected as his only companions, two were Mozart, one was Verdi, two were rock numbers, one was Cole Porter (Sinatra and Basie), and . . . two were Wagner.

Introducing the *Magic Fire Music*, Fry confessed, "I'm insanely in love with the master, the great Richard Wagner." As for *Mild und Leise, Wie Er Lächelt*, Isolde's "dying song" from the final scene of *Tristan*, Fry enthusiastically described it as "the most supreme piece of romantic, indeed erotic music", adding, "This particular climactic piece of music is something one couldn't live without."

When it was prolific sci-fi comedy novelist Terry Pratchett's turn on the show, one track he chose was *The Race for the Rheingold Stakes*, and he said of it,

I heard this record when I was about 11 or 12 and it is probably in a sense one of the ancestors of *Discworld*. It is just a beautifully drawn out joke, which initially appears to be going on for too long and then, merely because it is going on for so long, becomes even

funnier. It is *The Ride of the Valkyries* with horse racing commentary.

The race-caller was none other than Bernard Miles, distinguished actor and long-time close friend of chief Valkyrie Kirsten Flagstad.

In 1886 the 74-year-old Franz Liszt made sure he attended the Bayreuth Festival once more. Despite doctor's orders, he went to *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde*, but collapsed during the third act of *Tristan*. Afflicted by pneumonia, within two days he was dead. The last word he uttered was "Tristan".

Neither Clara Schumann nor Joseph Joachim, the Hungarian violinist, were much in sympathy with Wagner's music. At concerts, whenever the sound of a leitmotiv occurred, Joseph used to raise his hat to Clara in an exaggerated manner and murmur "Guten Tag".

Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944), militant English suffragette and prolific author, was in her day widely regarded as the sole woman composer of a quality equal to that of the men. Not everyone was so complimentary, however. Sir Osbert Sitwell, for example (himself no stranger to insult), once remarked, "She would be like Richard Wagner if only she looked a bit more feminine."

— TR

radiant musical depiction of a vision of the Holy Grail

- ◇ *Lohengrin: Introduction to Act III* — joyful music, evoking the pageantry of preparations for a mediaeval courtly wedding

◇ *Die Meis-*

[Ex. 2: Tannhäuser]



tersinger: Overture — and they said that Wagner was couldn't write counterpoint — with the *Ride of the Valkyries* and the *Siegfried Idyll*, the most accessible of all Wagner's orchestral pieces — sumptuous

- ◇ *Parsifal: Prelude to Act I* — introduces Wagner's last opera, one even more religious than *Lohengrin* — features four themes: Last Supper, Holy Grail (different from that in *Lohengrin*), Faith and Suffering
- ◇ *Das Rheingold: Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla across their Rainbow Bridge* — a majestic conclusion to the opera
- ◇ *Rienzi: Overture* — written in Wagner's "older" style (the then prevailing grand manner of Meyerbeer) — the overture is still worth hearing, even if the opera is rarely performed today

- ◇ *Siegfried: Forest Murmurs* — the definitive Wagnerian nature sound-poem, depicting the peaceful beauty of the forest with its many twittering birds
- ◇ *Siegfried Idyll* — despite its length, in every respect a miniature by Wagnerian standards,

particularly its modest orchestration — weaves together several motives from *Siegfried* and a folksong-like lullaby, but is also derived from sketches Wagner had made for a string quartet — if you don't know already, we leave you to your own devices to find out the special story of its first performance

- ◇ *Tannhäuser: Overture* — Wagner wrote two versions of this, the (longer) concert piece probably the more satisfying one — as far as I'm concerned, the point where the brass re-enter with the solemn Pilgrims' Chorus (shown above, Ex. 2) towards the overture's end is just overpowering
- ◇ *Tristan und Isolde: Prelude to Act I and Isolde's Love Death* — two pieces, one from the beginning of the opera which, at its fourth note, contains one of the most famous chords in all music

(see Ex. 3), the other from the stunning conclusion to the tragedy, often performed in the concert hall as one seamless work — but how to describe in mere words the emotional effect as wave after wave of passion surges higher and higher towards the tranquil conclusion of Isolde's death? — just listen and be swept away

◇ *Die Walküre: Wotan's Farewell*



and *Magic Fire Music* — to the accompaniment of some heart-rending music, the god Wotan takes leave of his favourite daughter, the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, before surrounding her with the fiery glow of her temporary prison sleep.

By now, perhaps, you want to buy some representative discs. To begin with, invest in some compact discs on the Naxos label, that admirable boon to the impecunious music lover. Its “Super Bargain Twin” album *Wagner Orchestral Highlights* (8.520018) contains eight of the pieces just described, and more. Another Naxos CD of

Wagner orchestral music is *Wagner, The Ring* (8.550211), with six items from our inventory above and no duplications with the double album.

Having enjoyed the orchestral pieces, you're now ready at last for some vocal selections.

How about these three for starters?

◇ *Das Rheingold: Final part of*

Scene Four — listen for Donner's unforgettable "Heda! Heda! Hedo!", as he calls up a storm (see Ex. 4, next page) — complete with the sounds of his hammer struck on a rock, lightning flashes and a thunderclap — leads directly into the orchestral *Entrance of the Gods*

◇ *Tristan und Isolde: Prelude and Love Death* — the same transcendent music as above, here with Isolde's song of sublimated passion — for me there's unquestionably only one version to get: Kirsten Flagstad's from the early 1950s — what a voice!

◇ *Die Walküre: Wotan's Farewell*

After he signed it, by the way, he added the following remarkable postscript:

I shall not include my address, since you might then think that I had some favour to ask of you.

French musicians? Alexis Chabrier (he of later *España* fame) was once a passionate Wagnerian. Indeed, when he first heard the opening of the *Tristan* Prelude he burst into tears. Not quite as delirious a response, perhaps, as another French muso, one Guillaume Lekeu, who had to be carried out of the same performance fainting.

Wagner seemed to have a forceful effect on the French whenever their paths crossed. In 1861 Wagner took *Tannhäuser* to Paris for its French première. A big performance was planned, including a special bacchanalian Venusberg ballet, but the occasion was ruined, not by critics, but by the inebriated members of the trendy and snooty Paris Jockey Club.

It was their custom not to arrive at any opera before Act II, which was where an opera's ballet traditionally was danced. Wagner, however, had written it into Act I, and ignored entreaties to move it. The Club contingent duly arrived just in time for Act II, and when the lads found that they'd missed the erotic dancing girls (some of whom

were their mistresses) they began to hiss and boo. Stamping of feet followed, and ultimately a riot. The event was an out-and-out fiasco.

Oh, yes, Wagner has had his detractors, none more vituperative than English art critic and would-be social reformer John Ruskin. Over the last hundred years, *Die Meistersinger* has proved to be the most popular of Wagner's operas by far, yet Ruskin (in a letter in 1882 to Lady Burne-Jones) made no bones whatsoever about his own opinion:

. . . of all the bête, clumsy, blundering, boggling, baboon-blooded stuff I ever saw on a human stage that thing last night beat [all] as far as the story and acting went; and of all the affected, sapless, soulless, beginningless, endless, topless, bottomless, topsiterviest, tuneless, scrannelpiest, tongs-and-boniest doggerel of sounds I ever endured the deadliest of, that eternity of nothing was the deadliest, as the sound went. I was never so relieved . . . in my life, by the stopping of any sound — not . . . [excepting] railway whistles — as I was by the cessation of the cobbler's bellowing; even the serenader's caricatured twangle was a rest after it. As for the great "*lied*" I never made out where it began or where it ended — except by the fellow's coming off the horse-block.

Much has been said on the fierce enmity between the fans of Wagner and those of Brahms. Brahms, however, seems to have more magnanimous than his supporters. For example: when he heard of

of all manner of human experience — laughter, for starters, patently. Another obvious beneficiary is the movie industry. Likewise police work (albeit fictional). The music has revolutionary applicability, also, to say nothing of sexual uses.

How about the following, though, as an occasion for Wagnerian assistance?

According to W.S. Brooks of Elizabeth Bay (letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9/2/98), you can always be guaranteed of making your transport connection at Central Railway by taking advantage of our universal dislike of the headphone music of others. Ever been blocked by people standing on the right of the escalator? Well,

. . . if one marches steadily upwards while listening to Wagner via headphones, these people step aside with alacrity . . . Verdi was born in the same year as Wagner and composed many wonderful tunes, but his music does not have the same effect.

Best known for his Bach interpretations, Canadian pianist Glenn Gould probably wasn't your typical Wagner enthusiast. Yet he made a sympathetic record (Sony SMK 52650) of Wagner's music that includes performances of Gould's own piano transcriptions of *Dawn and Siegfried's Rhine Journey* (from *Götterdämmerung*), plus a rare

example of Gould as conductor — in this case a 13-piece orchestra playing the *Siegfried Idyll*.

The Ride of the Valkyries is harder in rhythmic terms to play than it might seem. According to George Bernard Shaw, there were so many poor performances that you could be forgiven for thinking that *Walkürenritt*, the German title, meant "cruelty to animals".

Although some eventually repudiated his music, for a while even the fastidious French were caught up in the Wagner craze — particularly poets, as Bet Briggs' *A French Connection* (page 39) reveals.

In 1859, for example, Charles Baudelaire attended a concert of Wagner's music. "It's been easily fifteen years since I felt such exhilaration", he said, and wrote a long, passionate letter to Wagner, from which this is a brief extract:

Above all, I want to tell you that you have given me *the greatest musical pleasure I have ever experienced*. I am past the age at which one enjoys writing to famous men, and I would have waited even longer before expressing my admiration in a letter, did not my eyes light every day upon outrageous and ridiculous articles in which no effort is spared to malign your genius. You are not the first, Monsieur, to make me ashamed of my country. Indignation finally spurred me to express my gratitude, as I thought: "I wish to distinguish myself from all those imbeciles."

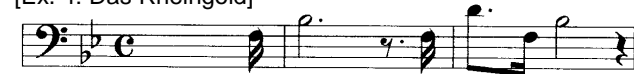
and *Magic Fire Music* — again, the same music already referred to, but with the added poignancy of the voice of Wotan.

Should you buy more expensive versions?

Here is not the place to argue the case for or against the innumerable Wagner performances available on disc — Abbado, Barenboim, Bernstein, Böhm, Boulez, Challender, Furtwängler, Haitink, Janowski, von Karajan, Klemperer, Knappertsbusch, Krauss, Levine, Maazel, Mackerras, Munch, Ormandy, Reiner, Sinopoli, Solti, Szell, Tate, Toscanini, Tuckwell, Simone Young . . . (to name *but a few* who've conducted Wagner).

But if you want to explore the

[Ex. 4: Das Rheingold]



He- da!

He- da! He-do!

possibilities further, I suggest you first sign up for the Internet and make straight for the P. Zazz site referred to in our *Web Line* column, where many CD reviews are to be had for the clicking.

Failing that, a current annotated discography of the "Classical Music on CD" type will assist.

In our *Web Line* column we refer also to a site called *A Beginner's Guide to "Der Ring des Nibelungen"*. This offers further reliable suggestions for the *Ring* neophyte, and is well worth a look. One piece of advice it gives is to read synopses of the operas and then hire a video. To that we might add "or buy a complete recording of an opera that has gripped you".

Regarding a short *Ring* synopsis, by the way, you can do a lot worse than the irrepressible, irreplaceable source Olive Conduit honours in our later article *The Tin Voice Laughed* (p. 24).

All right, yes, his music may be an acquired taste, but why not give the utter bastard one more chance?

Sneak up on him cunningly, choosing your pieces carefully, and then get ready to luxuriate in some of the most staggeringly gorgeous music ever written.

Let yourself go.

Listener rejoice.

Enter an Archetypal Zealot

I am the very model of a modern Wagner devotee,
 For fun I shout the names of all nine Valkyries with clarity,
 At parties I'm the star with my quick leit-motivic repartee,
 And *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal* I listen to with gravity.
 I've memorised *The Flying Dutchman* upside down and inside out,
 I'm just as well au fait with cobbler poets and their singing bout.
 Just ask me what I know regarding Tristan and Isolde's case —
 Of any hesitation in my answer there will be no trace.

Of any hesitation in his answer there will be no trace.

I make the Bayreuth journey every year quite automatical,
 I've even been to see the *Ring* in venues cinematal.
 Indeed, in matters Nibelung I make this solemn guarantee:
 I am the very model of a modern Wagner devotee.

Indeed, in matters Nibelung he makes this solemn guarantee:
 He is the very model of a modern Wagner devotee.

For Wagner, *Siegfried* was the opera which he called his own first choice,
 Except that he demanded just a bit too much from Siegfried's voice.
 For me, the work has many parts that always leave me fully floored,
 In one of these that youthful fellow manages to forge a sword;
 Another happens when the tranquil forest murmurs soft and mild
 Give way to dwarf and dragon slaying, both of which just drive me wild;
 But if there's one event in all the *Ring* that gets me to perspire —
 It's when our Siegfried wakes Brünnhilde from her father's magic fire.

It's when our Siegfried wakes Brünnhilde from her father's magic fire.

collective title *The Savoyard Ring; or A Tetralogy in Patter Song*. There are eight of them, and here, to whet your appetite for seeking out these masterpieces (they appeared in 1971, in *Opera News*), is the last stanza of *Brünnhilde's Immolation* (to the tune of *The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring*).

The hours that take up the *Ring*,
 tra la,
 Are finished, kaput and all done!
 While the audience sits sound
 asleep, tra la,
 We singers have all had to keep,
 tra la,
 On our feet till a quarter past one!
 And that's what we mean when we
 say, or we sing,
 Our arches are glad it's the end of
 the *Ring!*
 Tra la la la la la, etc.

You can find Wagnerian obsessive-compulsives just about anywhere. One such addict worthy of our awe-struck admiration is Roger North. In 1996 he self-published the most thorough analytic study imaginable of the music of *Tristan und Isolde*. Bar by bar he goes through the work, with 16 pull-out summary diagrams and 500 musical examples. For you like-minded fanatics, seven hundred irresistible pages! (*Wagner's Most Subtle Art*, ISBN 0 95279750 X, available from the author for a total of £48.25, airmail to Oz.)

For the first *Ring* festival in 1876, Wagner went to great trouble

and expense to get a dragon manufactured in England and shipped to Bayreuth. Although mechanical, it was made from paper-mâché. But it arrived in pieces — the tail first, then the body and eventually the head, but no neck. On stage, with head attached directly to body, the dragon looked even more grotesque than intended. The long neck had been sent by mistake to Beirut.

Present at that première, apart from opera fans, music critics and miscellaneous royalty, was a remarkable gathering of composers — Bruckner . . . Gounod . . . Grieg . . . Liszt . . . Mahler . . . Saint-Saëns . . . Tchaikovsky . . .

It is believed that the very first recording made of Wagner's music was of the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, conducted by Hans von Bülow. The year was 1889, the medium an Edison cylinder.

Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria, Wagner's patron, is remembered for many deranged things. None is more bizarre than having himself ferried about a mountain lake in a water chariot drawn by trained swans, all to the accompaniment of the sounds of Wagner's music.

Mind you, royal swan-powered water-skiing aside, as *Bikwil's* various contributors herein cogently demonstrate, Wagner's operas can be harnessed in the service

Where Three Ways Meet

(Out there in Wagner-land is to be found a veritable treasure-trove of trivia. Here, in no particular order, is a tiny representative miscellany — partly droll, partly sedate. Many thanks to the *Bikwilians* who submitted some of these fascinating bits and pieces.)

For Wagner the boy his first love was literature, not music. When he was eleven, steeped in Shakespeare and the Homeric epics, he wrote an intense poetic drama he called *Leubold und Adelaide*. Wagner himself later said of this work (a sort of cross between *Hamlet* and *King Lear*), "I had murdered forty-two in the course of my piece and I was obliged to have most of them reappear as ghosts in the last acts for want of living characters".

Wagner hated his first piano lessons, but while still at school he heard Weber's *Freischütz* and Beethoven's *Fidelio* and symphonies, and right away became bitten by the composing bug. With difficulty he taught himself the rudiments of music theory from a book he borrowed from Friedrich Wieck, Clara Schumann's father.

As his musical skills developed, young Richard made transcriptions of his favourite composers. One was a piano arrangement he did aged 16 of something by his hero,

Beethoven. The massive 9th Symphony, of all things.

Because he concentrated all his energies on composing rather than performing, Wagner never got to be a good pianist. When friends teased him, he'd say, "I play a deal better than Berlioz". All were well aware, of course, that Berlioz couldn't play the piano at all.

As you may have already gathered, it has been impossible for me in this special issue to resist the temptation of contributing a couple of burlesques on the Wagner theme. I seem to be in good company with this idea. Anna Russell and Bugs Bunny aside, there's been a huge number of Wagnerian send-ups written over the past years, and at least one scholarly essay written on the subject of Wagnerian parodies and caricatures.

One of my efforts here (page 12) is based on a well-loved Gilbert and Sullivan *Pirates of Penzance* song. (Funny how G&S have Wagner connections, isn't it? At last count, I found four other such references sprinkled throughout these pages.) For my money, some of the most successful Wagner send-ups in a G&S style were written by Robert Zeschin under the

I'm very good at imitating Fafner's awful dragon roar,
I know why Wotan fears so much the sound of Fricka's naggin' jaw.
In short, in matters Nibelung I make this solemn guarantee:
I am the very model of a modern Wagner devotee.

In short, in matters Nibelung he makes this solemn guarantee:
He is the very model of a modern Wagner devotee.

I'm very well acquainted too with matters orchestrational,
I understand why strings up high can sound most inspirational.
About the role of harps and tubas I'm the connoisseur to beat,
With many cheerful facts regarding anvils and the thunder sheet.
And with a firm assurance I reply to any question trick
On Freia, Hunding, Gunther, Hagen and especially Alberich.
Of course, I've learnt *Rienzi's* tunes, but don't forget my pet routine —
I challenge anyone to fault me on Brünnhilde's final scene.

We challenge anyone to fault him on Brünnhilde's final scene.

I know the *Ring* is not renowned for any kind of brevity,
But just the same, for me it is my favourite music cup o' tea;
And so in matters Nibelung I make this solemn guarantee:
I am the very model of a modern Wagner devotee.

And so in matters Nibelung he makes this solemn guarantee:
He is the very model of a modern Wagner devotee.

Detective Story

Many popular authors have their fervent faithful followers — Terry Pratchett, Stephen King, Collen McCullough, Tom Sharpe, Agatha Christie, Colin Dexter, for example — especially on the Internet.

Colin Dexter. Hmm . . . Doesn't he write those Inspector Morse novels? And isn't Morse always mentioning the magic "W" word?

Ok, you can see where all this is heading. I've come here explicitly to congratulate a certain Morse enthusiast. "Dr. Who" is the pseudonym of an unidentified hypermaniac who has applied assiduous detective work to document on his Internet site every last reference to Wagner, not only in the Morse novels (including page numbers), but also in the TV series based on them.

For the list of Morse stories that refer to Wagner's music, see below.

The site in question, *The Music from the Inspector Morse Novels*, is http://users.accessus.net/~dr_who/html/music.html. What follow are a few examples of what's on offer.

<p>The Daughters of Cain The Inside Story The Jewel That Was Ours The Last Bus To Woodstock Last Seen Wearing</p>	<p>The Riddle of the Third Mile The Secret Of Annexe Three The Secret World of Nicholas Quinn The Way though the Woods The Wench Is Dead</p>
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Here's Morse on the *Ring* in *The Daughters of Cain*: "It should be ranked as one of the seven great wonders of the modern world."

The only Wagner piece mentioned in both the novel and its TV adaptation is the *Götterdämmerung* Immolation Scene. That novel is *The Way though the Woods*, the corresponding TV episode, *Twilight of the Gods*. According to Dr. Who, it's also the only music piece spoken of the novels actually to make it on to the soundtrack of the series.

Which isn't to say you don't hear the occasional bit of Wagner — especially in scenes where Morse is sitting at home thinking while listening to a record.

Dr. Who doesn't mention it, but the TV episode *Inspector Morse in Australia* (aka *Promised Land*) has, sad to say, no Wagner allusion whatsoever. Its final scene is set, however, at the Sydney Opera House. Inevitable, of course, and that'll have to do us opera-wise.

— The Wanderer

about a country's and its people's neglect of its artists: at the end of *The Mastersingers* there's a relevant passage sung by Mastersinger Hans Sachs. When Walther has won the song contest but at first refuses to take the golden chain that will make him a Mastersinger, Hans reads him a grave homily on the respect due to art: "Disaster overtakes the land that forgets its songs and singers", he says. (Stephen Williams, *Come to the Opera!*) Grave words, indeed, even in translation! But a notion not to be ignored. We are the better for knowing about our great artists and nurturing their memory. Their contribution to our cultural well-being is invaluable. We are the better for honouring Florence Austral and her gift.

James Moffat's final comment on Austral is interesting and perceptive:

Above all, we are left with a highly creative — a Wagnerian — force, which made its mark on the operatic and concert stage in a way which opera buffs of a later generation associate with Kirsten Flagstad and Birgit Nilsson. Though an Australian by birth, the quirky fact of her father being a Scandinavian, and her voice being a typical exemplification of the "Scandinavian" powerhouse voice, gives her the additional claim to being regarded as having a direct link to the outstanding crop of Scandinavian Wagnerian singers who have dominated so much of the 20th century. But she is also a figure who oddly resembles her most famous creation, Brünnhilde.

Like the Valkyrie goddess, she was born to an immortality of which she was ultimately deprived by fate! Like Brünnhilde, she did not take to the role of goddess easily. Within her were too many warring elements that made it difficult to play the role of diva. But, again, like Brünnhilde, she did not relinquish her greatness as easily as she had imagined.

Back in the 1950s Florence Austral was someone I knew of in name only. I wish I had known then that I know now about her, thanks to James Moffat's book and those 2 CDs. For during the years in the 50s when Austral was teaching at Newcastle Conservatorium, I was there studying piano and theory. I don't ever remember seeing her. I'm not even sure I was aware that she was member of staff. For those years from 1952 to 1955 I went in and out of that early, temporary building that was the Con in Civic Park. I went for my lessons without ever realising I was in the unseen presence of a once great diva.

I cannot do justice to her memory in this small tribute. But I can recommend both the book and the CDs which will, I hope, restore her to prominence. The one describes, the other expresses accurately and beautifully their subject: Florence Austral, One of the Wonder Voices of the World!

— Bet Briggs

libretto — much more than was the custom at the time. Wagner himself would have been impressed, for it was his contention that: “A singer who is not able to recite his part according to the intention of the poet cannot possibly sing it according to the intention of the composer”. Austral’s ability to integrate and express the intentions of both by vocal nuances, inflection and accent so well in evidence on her recordings.

As well as her opera, concert and recital performances on stage, Austral became a prolific recording artist in days of acoustic and early electrical recordings. Her repertoire ranged from the Wagnerian roles through the dramatic and lyrical Italian ones of Verdi’s Leonora, Acuzena and Aida to English oratorio and song.

In 1923 conductor Albert Coates chose Austral to sing Brünnhilde on the HMV recordings *Wagner at Home*. She recorded the Brünnhilde from Act II of *Siegfried*, singing the love duet with tenor Tudor Davies as Siegfried. She also sang the Forest Bird because the coloratura soprano Bessie Jones did not turn up for the recording session. Austral was not the first singer to sing both roles — German soprano Lilli Lehmann did both in the 19th century. But Austral was, according to Moffat, the first to record them both.

Her Australian tours with her husband John Amadio, particularly the 1934-1936 tour, were highlights for both performers. Their concerts in capital cities and larger country towns were well received by the public and critics. In September 1934 Austral joined the Benjamin Fuller Opera Company for the 1934-1935 season of Grand Opera with long-term associate, tenor Walter Widdop. For the first time Australians saw her in her famous operatic roles.

She was the first Wagnerian soprano to win widespread public support in Australia and first to put the dramatic soprano into the same league as the lyric/coloratura sopranos who had monopolised the attention and affection of the Australian public. (Moffat)

When the Fuller company season ended in 1935, Austral and Amadio continued to tour Australia and also made several successful broadcast recitals on the ABC. They returned to London by the end of 1936.

With the onset of World War II and the worsening of the multiple sclerosis, Austral appeared only at occasional concerts. Her last appearance on stage was in 1940 in a performance of Vaughan Williams’ *Serenade to Music*.

It is gratifying to know Austral has finally achieved greater recognition. Had she not, it would have been to her loss and to ours. Wagner made some comments

A Ring of Pilgrims

1: Mark Twain

In 1891 American writer Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910), better known as Mark Twain, attended the Bayreuth Festival. He recounted his experience in an article for the *New York Times* 6 December 1891, entitled *At The Shrine of St. Wagner*. At one point he described the audience of which he was part, witnessing *Tristan and Isolde*:

I have seen all sorts of audiences — at theaters, operas, concerts, lectures, sermons, funerals — but none which was twin to the Wagner audience of Bayreuth for fixed and reverential attention.

The Wagner audience, he remarked, “dress as they please and sit in the dark and worship in silence”. In contrast New York’s Metropolitan opera-goers “sit in a glare, and wear their showiest harness; they hum airs, they squeak fans, they titter and the gabble all the time”. The Met, he considered, was “a showcase for rich fashionables who are not trained in Wagnerian music and have no reverence for it, but who like to promote art and their clothes”.

In a cascade of sparkling prose he continued his observations:

Can that be an agreeable atmosphere to persons in whom this music produces a sort of divine ecstasy and to whom its creator is a very deity, his stage a temple, the works of his brain and hands consecrated things, and the partaking of them with eye and ear a sacred solemnity? Manifestly, no. Then, perhaps the temporary expatriation, the tedious traversing of seas and continents, the pilgrimage to Bayreuth stands explained. These devotees would worship in an atmosphere of devotion. It is only here that they can find it without fleck of blemish or any worldly pollution. In this remote village there are no sights to see, there is no newspaper to intrude the worries of the distant world, there is nothing going on, it is always Sunday. The pilgrim wends to his temple out of town, sits out his moving service, returns to his bed with his heart and soul and his body exhausted by long hours of tremendous emotion, and he is in no fit condition to do anything but to lie torpid and slowly gather back life and strength for the next service. This opera of *Tristan and Isolde* last night broke the hearts of all witnesses who were of the faith, and I know of some who have heard of many who could not sleep after it, but cried the night away.

I feel strongly out of place here. Sometimes I feel like the sane person in a community of the mad; sometimes I feel like the one blind man where all the others see; the one groping savage in the college of the learned, and always during service, I feel like a heretic in heaven.

But by no means do I ever overlook or minify the fact that this is one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life. I have never seen anything like this before. I have never seen anything so great and fine and real as this devotion.

2: Anton Bruckner

By an extraordinary coincidence, before reading Twain's scintillating account of his Wagner experience, I had been reflecting on the human capacity for being impressed or moved profoundly by some happening. How exhilarating it is, I thought, to be able to isolate an event, one moment of magic, joy or wonder and know it as a defining experience in one's life, to be able to exclaim with conviction: "It changed my life!"

Wagner's contemporary, Austrian composer and organist, Anton Bruckner (1824-1896) knew such a moment when, at the age of 39 he first heard Wagner's music. Bruckner was a deeply religious man, very modest too, for years doubting his own talent. From childhood he had studied and composed music. In 1861, after tuition with Simon Sechter, he qualified to teach harmony and counterpoint. Deciding he wanted to advance in symphonic form and orchestration he chose to study with a practical musician, a cellist and conductor at

Linz Municipal Theatre, Otto Kitzler, whose teaching was based principally on Beethoven, but also on Mendelssohn.

Towards the end of 1862, their first year together, Kitzler arranged to mount the first Linz performance of Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*. In preparation he and Bruckner studied the score. On February 13 1863 Bruckner attended that performance and was overwhelmed. He heard music that showed him he could break away from the rigid harmonic rules Sechter had taught. From then on his own composition and orchestration were influenced by Wagner.

Bruckner began to correspond with Wagner and eventually met him when he was invited to Munich for the first triumphant performance of *Tristan and Isolde* in 1865. So lovely did he find this work, that he always kept the score open on his music stand.

To champion the Master's cause, and with his permission, Bruckner conducted the first performance of the closing section of his new opera *The Mastersingers* in Linz in 1868 before its première in Munich two months later under the baton of Hans von Bülow.

In 1873 he showed Wagner the scores of his 2nd and 3rd Symphonies. Wagner was so

born to sing this music above all others".

Austral proved to have the courage of her own and her teacher's convictions and lived up to both their expectations. At her farewell concert in 1919 on 22 September, before leaving Australia for America, she sang Brünnhilde's *Battle Cry* from Act II of *The Valkyries*.

Although a Met début did not happen, in 1921 after a successful audition at Covent Garden, Austral was scheduled to make her London début in May. But the season that year was cancelled, so she took the opportunity to go the Berlin and there she heard Wagner's *Ring* for the first time.

Finally on 16 May 1922 she did make her début as Brünnhilde and it was, as Moffat writes,

. . . one of the most remarkable in operatic history . . . She sang as a last-minute replacement for an ailing soprano . . . who'd been contracted for four performances but had withdrawn after one . . . Austral sang, not for the last time in her career, without the benefit of an orchestral rehearsal and only the barest of stage rehearsals and the 3rd Act was not rehearsed at all.

What an achievement! For *The Valkyries* Brünnhilde is particularly arduous. The singer has to wait until Act II to make her entrance singing the famous *Battle Cry* and that is "preceded by some of the most energetic, expectant music ever

written . . . It is a tortuously difficult scene . . ."

A standing ovation and eleven solo curtain calls ensured next day the most favourable reviews, one critic describing Austral's singing as "the most sumptuous of this generation", and another saying: "If there is a greater Brünnhilde in the world she has not sung in London".

A few months after this triumph, on 20 January 1923, again at Covent Garden, Austral shared a gala performance of operatic excerpts with Nellie Melba. A truly historic occasion! Austral at 31, the rising star, the splendid new diva sharing the platform with the great Dame, now 62 and nearing retirement. Melba, magnanimous in praise of the young singer dubbed Austral "one of the wonder voices of the world". Melba herself had long been one though she had once jeopardised herself when she attempted the role of Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*. Instead of just singing the role of the Forest Bird for which her voice was more suited, she sang Brünnhilde. In doing so she learned a severe lesson, namely to keep her great voice intact for those roles which were her real triumphs and for which she is remembered.

Another of Austral's accomplishments was her attention to the

tremendously successful. Austral was regarded as one of the finest Wagnerian singers of her time. Between the two world wars she was acclaimed internationally and at home.

In the prime of her life and career in 1930 during her début, again as Brünnhilde at the Berlin State Opera, she suffered the onset of multiple sclerosis. She continued singing for more than a decade after but the disease finally brought her career to an end during the war.

Her marriage eventually broke up and in 1946 she returned to Australia. She took up teaching, first in Melbourne, then at Newcastle Conservatorium from 1952 until 1959 when her health worsened and brought that career to an end, too. She died penniless in a Newcastle nursing home in 1968 and was virtually forgotten.

Her obscurity and neglect have been redressed with the publication in 1995 of James Moffat's excellent biography, *Florence Austral: One of the Wonder Voices of the World* (Currency Press). A companion to the book followed in 1996 with the issue of Larrikin/Festival Records' 2-CD set of a selection from Austral's early 20s recordings of opera, oratorio and song (LRH 453).

Both the book and the CDs have been mind, eye and ear openers for

me. Moffat tells Austral's dramatic story with perception and compassion. The singer herself, through the remarkable reproduction of the recordings, reveals the quality of her voice, the huge range and power, the superb vocal technique behind the richness, evenness and beauty of sound. It leaves me in no doubt of her artistry and, because of it, championing the accolades that were and still are her due.

Having read her story and listened to her song I can flesh out some aspects of her fascinating career, particularly her role as Brünnhilde. For it is acknowledged by most commentators that of all the roles in which she excelled, including those of Senta, Isolde, Aida, Tosca and the Marschallin, her Brünnhilde was her most famous.

The early influence and encouragement and skill of her teacher Elise Wiedermann ought not to be underestimated. She recognised her student's great talent when she said in 1919: "I consider hers the very best and the most wonderful soprano voice I have heard in my long career as Prima Donna . . . [and] the first Brünnhilde I have heard in Australia." Though Florence at the time knew nothing of the demands of Wagner's music and the role of Brünnhilde, Wiedermann did, and considered her young protégée "was

impressed with No. 3, the D Minor, that Bruckner wanted to dedicate it to him and to his delight Wagner accepted.

The relationship between them became closer from the time of Bruckner's visits to Bayreuth, first in 1876 on August 16 for the première of the *Ring Cycle* and later in 1882 for that of *Parsifal*. Bruckner, however, suffered for his devotion. Because he found direction artistically from Wagner's daring innovations in harmonic progression and orchestration and applied it in his symphonies, he was automatically caught in the controversy that raged at the time over Wagner's revolutionary music and ideas. The anti-Wagnerites were Bruckner's enemies, too. One critic, Edward Hanslick, whom Wagner caricatured in the character of Beckmesser, the town clerk in *The Mastersingers*, was so disparaging of Bruckner that for several years performances of his works in Vienna were failures. The première of his "Wagner Symphony", as he called it (No. 3 in D Minor), on December 16 1877, four years after its composition, was a fiasco! Bruckner had to conduct, as no other conductor would; the orchestra were unwilling and most of the audience deserted! Though some of his loyal students

tried to comfort him, Bruckner was devastated. However, the noted Viennese publisher, Theodor Rattig, was so impressed with the work that he persuaded Bruckner to allow him to publish it.

Bruckner achieved wider success on March 10 1881 when Hans Richter, who had conducted the first *Ring Cycle* at Bayreuth in 1876, ignored the conductors' boycott and performed Bruckner's 4th Symphony in Eb, "The Romantic".

Between 1881 and 1883, the year of Wagner's death, Bruckner composed his 7th Symphony in E. He dedicated it to King Ludwig II, Wagner's patron. But the Adagio was an elegy in homage to Wagner. Completed just before his death, Bruckner said of it: "At one time I came home and was very sad. I thought to myself it is impossible the Master can live long and then the Adagio in C Minor came into my head".

In both the Adagio and the Finale of the Symphony Bruckner used Wagner tubas, those brass instruments which Wagner had devised to give special tone-colour in the orchestration of the *Ring*.

The 7th Symphony was performed for the first time in 1884 in Leipzig, conducted by Kappelmeister Arthur Nikisch (1855-

1902). This performance, despite some criticism from the usual Wagner-Bruckner opponents, established Bruckner's world reputation.

Though he was a courageous disciple of Wagner he was no mere imitator. Wagner himself would surely have approved and applauded.

3: John and Ethel

In 1883 when Bruckner completed his elegy to Wagner, his 7th Symphony, just before the Master died on 13 February, a 16-year-old Scotsman, John George Robertson, born in Glasgow in 1867, was in his second year studying arts and science at Glasgow University. Though John intended to become a scientist and teacher, he was developing a passion for European literature and language, especially German, after reading Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and Goethe's *Faust*. Music, too, was an abiding interest.

During six years of study in which he gained an M.A. in 1886 and a B.Sc. in 1889, he continued to read literature and went to the theatre, concerts and opera. He even studied the scores of operas before seeing them in performance.

After graduation he celebrated by learning Norwegian and

translating Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *The Lady from the Sea*. Finally he told his parents that he preferred literature and language to science and, with their consent and financial support, in autumn 1889 he enrolled in philological studies at Leipzig University.

Leipzig was one of the great cultural centres of Europe and the birthplace of Wagner. For John, already erudite, but young and eager, it was a fine opportunity for further learning. Because of his passion for language and literature and now Wagner and the theatre, he chose as his subject for his doctoral thesis a study of the criticism of dramatist Jacob Ayer of Nuremberg, analysing its impact on travelling troupes of English actors, and on the Nuremberg cobbler, poet and Mastersinger Hans Sachs (1494-1576). Sachs had been restored to prominence by Goethe's poem *Hans Sachsen Poetische Sendung* (1776) and ultimately converted to legend as the champion of the art of song and German culture in Wagner's *The Mastersingers*. John, no doubt, was familiar with both the poem and the opera.

Apart from his thesis work, John's passion for studying the scores of opera now centred on Wagner's music dramas. But he was hampered by lack of practical

An Australian Brünnhilde

The oldest, truest, most beautiful organ of music, the origin to which alone our music owes its being is the human voice.

— Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama* (1851)

Wagner knew what he was writing about. To sing at all is an accomplishment. To sing well is a joy to one's self. To sing so well and so beautifully that others are entranced is a joy to the world. When a good singer is a great singer and the voice can be heard on record long after the singer is dead, how fortunate for us, the dedicated listeners. For it remains a delight and an inspiration.

Great singers are rare and great Wagnerian singers rarer. Florence Austral (her professional name) was both. To ask "Who was she?" is not unreasonable. Until recently she was almost forgotten in her own country. Apart from entries on her in standard reference books, there was little information readily available to the average music lover and opera buff.

The bare bones of her story are these: she was born Florence Mary Wilson in Richmond Victoria in 1892. Her father was a Norwegian carpenter who died in 1895. Her mother, a dressmaker, then married a Syrian bookkeeper and Florence became known by her stepfather's name of Fawaz. She began to study

singing when she was 17. For ten years she studied with two Melbourne teachers, George Andrews (1908-1913) and Elise Wiedermann (1914-1919). After a farewell concert she left for New York to study Italian opera with Gabriele Sibella. She auditioned for the Met but due to an argument over the contract she did not make her debut there. Disappointed, she intended coming home to Australia but on reaching London decided to stay. There she made her debut on 16 May 1922 with the British National Opera Company at Covent Garden as Brünnhilde in *The Valkyries*. By the end of the season she had appeared in the complete *Ring* in this role. It established her career.

In the 1920s she started a prolific recording career with HMV, revealing a broad repertoire, from Wagner, Verdi, Strauss to oratorio and folksong and Lied. She married eminent flautist John Amadio in 1925 and they became regular concert partners. Interspersed with her opera performances, tours to North America, Holland and Australia throughout the 20s and 30s were

"Not in the least. Can you sing A's?"

"Certainly. Can you?"

"I can sing B's."

"Really! I can sing C sharp, if I want to. Let's see how long we can keep on at it? I'm a little out of practice, though. Why, I've been sleeping here since long before you were born!"

"How strange! Never mind. Come on!"

Advice to those who want to hear the Grand Vocal Competition: Go outside. Use your own judgment as to coming in again.

There is one excellent thing about the *Götterdämmerung* — it is the last of the series.

Advice to those who go to hear the *Götterdämmerung* (which begins at half-past six):— See the Prologue; go and dine quietly at your Club; come back and ask a friend to tell you all about *Gunter* without the ices — and his relations. Here are *Siegfried* and *Brünnhilde*. He gives her the ring, she gives him her horse. To the "*Trifle-weak-in-the-forelegs,-but-otherwise-sound-enough Motive*," *Brünnhilde* tells her husband to "uphold him well" (see Mr. Alfred Forman's ingenious translation of the book). Unfortunately, however, *Siegfried*, having got a good deal mixed up

with all the conjuring business, forgets that he is married, commits bigamy, and is stuck in the back, when he isn't looking, by his brother-in-law, *Hagen*, who is probably rehearsing Clown's business for Christmas, as he waggishly directs *Siegfried's* attention to a couple of birds up in the air, and then sticks him. The "*Dirty-mean-trick Motive*" expresses natural abhorrence. Out of forty-five characters, forty-one are now dead, so the vocalists give in, and with a triumphant flourish in the orchestra it's all over.

Honourable mention: Herr Niemann, voice a good deal worn, but good artist all round. Herr Heinrich Vogl, good singer, good actor. Herr Schlosser, very admirable performance of *Panto-Mime*.

If Herr Wagner's music is in advance of his age (is he twelve?), his *mise en scène* is very far behind it.

(This satirical review of the first complete performance in England of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was written by Alfred E. Watson, and was originally published in *Punch* 20 May 1882 under the title *The Prize Ring des Nibelungen; or, Panto-Mime and the Three Merry Maidens of the Rhino*.)

And how very Victorian it is, too, with its nervous discretion regarding Siegfried's brother-sister parentage.

The *Bikwil* title is taken from U.S. humorist Harry Leon Wilson's 1919 novel *Ma Pettengill*.)

musical training to study the scores by himself. But not for long.

In 1890 he met Ethel Florence Lindsey Richardson (1870-1946), a 20-year-old Australian music student who had come to Leipzig in 1888 to further her piano study at the Conservatorium. For Ethel, living and studying in Leipzig was "a full life", as she recalled years later in her posthumously published autobiography *Myself When Young* (1948). She described herself as "an indefatigable concert-goer" running "from one performance to another, intent on missing nothing that might be of help to me". She was rarely able to go to the opera, however, until she met John Robertson.

Their first acquaintance was unremarkable, until John, learning that she was going to Norway for the summer vacation, asked her to try to get a rare copy of Ibsen's first play, *Cataline*, for him. He had been collecting Norwegian editions of Ibsen's plays and had all of them except for it. Ethel tried but was unsuccessful and let John know by note on her return to Leipzig. He, in gratitude for her attempt, invited her to accompany him to the series of Wagner operas at the Neues Theater. Ethel, also a Wagner lover, responded thus:

I jumped at the offer. For it meant not only hearing all the operas, and in the order in which they were written, but from a comfortable reserved seat on the ground-floor! Myself I couldn't have afforded to go to more than one or two of them, after a fight for a place in the top gallery . . .

Here, then, throughout the autumn, I sat twice weekly at my new friend's side, drinking in one after another of the great works from *Die Feen* on. With the exception of *Parsifal* which Frau Cosima still jealously guarded as Bayreuth's sole property.

Here, too, it can be said that my musical education really began.

Ethel wrote, too, of John's earlier attempts at score reading and of their shared discovery of Wagner's music:

Of opera he had made a special study; even as a lad spending his pocket-money on Boosey's cheap piano-scores to get some light on its development. These he managed to struggle through, although nothing of a pianist, but Wagner was beyond him, dearly as he would have liked to know more of the works before hearing them. At this I ventured to suggest that I might be of use to him. He hailed the proposal, I lugged the weighty volumes from Klemm's Lending Library, and, on those evenings when we weren't at the theatre, we sat together at my piano, poring over *Tristan* or the *Ring*, tracking down "motives" and digging out connexions.

This "comradeship", as she called it, did not end with the Wagner cycle; as she said: "A further

bond between us was the discovery that I too loved books". "Sometimes," she admitted, she "practised her scales and exercises with a volume of Renan or Tolstoi propped open on the music stand!"

Their mutual love of Wagner and literature did change their lives. For Ethel it was a move from music to literature, something like John's change from science to literature. John, however, had completed his science degree before moving on to higher academic study in the field he more passionately desired. Ethel abandoned her formal music study even though she had considerable talent in piano performance and in composition. But writing and literature became her life.

John graduated in 1892 at the age of 25, after ten years of university life at home and here in Leipzig. Even with his doctorate he found it difficult at first to find a university post. Until he and Ethel married in 1895, they both earned a meagre living by journalism and translation. Then a year later John got a lectureship at the University of Strasbourg. There he began his book *A History of German Literature*, still highly regarded as one of the best introductions to the subject.

Ethel, too, in 1897 began her first novel, *Maurice Guest*. Based

on her own student days in Leipzig, it was a study of an aspiring musician who lacks the talent to achieve his ambition, falls victim of an obsessive love and commits suicide. The love theme of Maurice and Louise is told with compassion and irony and is imbued with reference to Wagner's music, particularly to *Tristan and Isolde*. That's not surprising, for of all Wagner's operas Ethel loved *Tristan and Isolde* most: she described it through the character Krafft's comment as "the most emotional music conceived in the human brain". In truth the spirit of Wagner pervades the novel and her writing is as richly orchestrated as the music drama itself. The critic Dorothy Green says: "*Maurice Guest* in the last analysis is best understood as a literary variation upon a theme by Wagner in the realistic mode".

The novel was not completed and published until 1908 under Ethel's chosen pseudonym Henry Handel Richardson. By then she and John had been living in London for five years. What brought them there was John's success with his *History*, published in 1902. It so reflected his scholarship and intellectual breadth that it established his reputation as a scholar. On the strength of it he was offered the new chair of German at the

that's the way it happens when Herr Wagner is to the fore. The Prize Ring they are all fighting about is not really the least good to anybody, and the all-conquering sword is smashed at the first go off.

Wotan then proceeds to have it out with *Brünnhilde*, who has run away to her sisters, and finds them playing at horses, mounted on little wooden animals, to the "*Six-to-four-on-the-field,-two-to-one-bar-one Motive*." Up comes *Wotan* and condemns *Brünnhilde* to go to sleep for an indefinite period, only permitting her to have a fire lighted to prevent the bad effects of the night air, lest, when she does wake up, influenza should prevent her from expressing her gratitude to the gallant knight who rescues her. The fire is shown by much vapour with light thrown on it, but it is not very effective here, and can scarcely be called a *succès de steam*.

This Knight is to be *Siegfried*, who is living in the forest with *Panto-Mime*, and, indulging in a good deal of bear-play — brings a bear in with him to help; but though the bear is evidently connected with *Panto-Mime*, that dwarf does not like it. *Wotan* is prowling about, and as he can't get anyone else to listen to him, and *Panto-Mime* is rather small, he

keeps on obliging him with another stave, till *Siegfried* returns, joins together the fragments of the sword his father, *Siegmund*, made such a mess of, and goes for the giant *Fafner*, who is living in a cave hidden in a second-hand "property" dragon — that's the way he enjoys the Rhino he has got possession of. *Fafner* has caught a dreadful cold in his head, and greets *Siegfried* with the "*Aren't-you-frightened? Motive*," but *Siegfried* isn't in the least, and before *Fafner* can get out of the "property," he is pierced by the sword, and perishes to the "*Just-about-under-the-fifth-rib,-I-fancy? Motive*."

Here is some graceful and melodious music. The ill-used strings have an innings, and make the most of it, and the flutes, brass, oboes, and clarinets take advantage of the opportunity. *Siegfried's* general appreciation of larks has taught him to understand the language of the birds, and one of them, to the "*Second-turning-to-the-right-and-then-keep-straight-on Motive*", tells him where *Brünnhilde* is sleeping. He goes, wakes her up, falls in love with her, and then begins the Grand Vocal Competition.

"Nice voice you have," says *Siegfried*.

"Oh, do you think so? That's very kind of you," says *Brünnhilde*.

Wotan, the King of the Gods, is in a very low state of mind, because the Giants have built him a palace and are coming to ask for their money. The "*Can't-pay-the-Rent-and-don't-know-what-I-shall-do-about-the-Taxes Motive*" expresses Wotan's sorrow, after which, to some good old pantomime music, in come the giants *Fafner* and *Fasolt*. You know they are giants directly, because it is stated so in the bill; though, as a matter of fact, dwarfs, giants, and gods are all the same size. To their "*Now-tben,-Gov'nor,-are-you-going-to-weigbin? Motive*," Wotan replies that he really shall be very much obliged if they will kindly make it convenient to call again, and off they go, taking with them the goddess *Fry-a*, so named because she acts as a sort of plain cook and bakes the apples, which is all that keeps the gods young.

For these gods are in a very bad way altogether. *Wotan*, who is a disreputable old man, then goes off on an expedition to steal the Rhino from *Panto-Mime's* brother, who is very good at conjuring tricks; and, at the bad old man's request, transforms himself into a crocodile, which makes the god very nervous, and he hits at him with his spear to the "*I-say,-you-know,-no-larks Motive*." The performer then changes himself into a toad, and to the

"*Halloa!-now-I've-got-you Motive*," *Wotan* treads on him and steals the ring and the money. The Giants call again, *Wotan* settles their little account, and then, to the "*Schlog-him-on-the-kop Motive*", *Fafner* settles his brother.

Parts of the *Walküre* had better not be talked about; but it may be said that *Siegmund*, having been engaged in mortal combat for some hours with the brother of *Hunting* (a great sportsman), runs away, and takes refuge in *Hunting's* hut. *Hunting* asks him to supper, *but doesn't give him any*, and *Siegmund*, who hates being chaffed, accepts a challenge to settle it next morning after breakfast — that is to say, after *Hunting's* breakfast, for *Siegmund's* chances of getting any are remote.

Wotan's wife drives in on her chariot drawn by rams to the "*Baa,-baa,-black-sheep Motive*," and after letting the poor old god have it right and left, insists upon his seconding *Hunting*; and his daughter *Brünnhilde* backs up *Siegmund*, though her father distinctly tells her not to do so. Neither of the combatants has the least idea of fighting, and they both die apparently of fright, in spite of the fact that *Siegmund* has found a sword sticking in a tree which he has been assured will render him invincible; but

University of London. There he carved a very creative career, writing numerous works on German and other writers and becoming prominent in making London a centre for German studies.

Like Ethel's, John's passion for Wagner never waned. A few months before he died in 1933 he gave a series of lectures at London University: *Richard Wagner as Poet and Thinker*. In these lectures, as Dorothy Green remarks:

. . . he saw Wagner as a dramatic poet who called in the aid of music. He also saw him as a revolutionary, a poet who did not stand aside from the social and political movements of his time; a critic of capital, of "the curse of gold", which was to find its transfiguration in the curse on the Nibelung's treasure.

When John died Ethel was working on *The Young Cosima*. Published finally in 1939, this, her last novel, was about the complex relationship between Wagner, Liszt (Cosima's father), Cosima and Hans von Bülow whom she marries and later deserts for love of Wagner, and an attempt to understand the motives that sustained their relationship. Ethel, writing as Henry Handel Richardson, said: "It is not a music novel. Only about people whose trade music was . . . and it was the relationship of these people that interested me most . . ."

She also re-examined some of the problems of art and life and genius that pre-occupied her in *Maurice Guest*. Wagner's music again underlies the *Cosima* novel. This time his struggle with the composition of *Tristan and Isolde* and *The Mastersingers* from their conception to performance are counterpoint to the human drama and the emotional conflict between the players.

Just like the Wagnerian music drama, the lifelong pilgrimage John and Ethel (Henry) shared was a complex and dramatic journey. Their adventure in discovery on that same philosophical journey was by way of scholarship and art, two different modes ultimately for the same end — to understand the art and genius of Wagner and his music.

4: Jim

The last pilgrim in this small ring was a man called Jim. He was the youngest, his pilgrimage was the shortest, his Wagner experience without controversy or complication.

He shared some similarities with the others. Like Anton Bruckner, Jim was in his thirties when he first saw a Wagner opera. Like John Robertson, Jim was a quiet,

reserved, unassuming Scot, born in Glasgow, too, 50 years after the Professor, during the Great War in 1916 and he married an Australian. And as it was for Maurice Guest, Henry Handel Richardson's creation, Jim's first experience of Wagner was *The Valkyries*. There the similarities end.

Jim wasn't a composer or a professor or a writer. He was a man of the sea and loved it, and for most of his working life he was more exposed to the sea's moods, its unpredictable changes and discipline than to the sounds of music. But he loved music, too. As a boy he had learned to play the piano, as a youth he discovered dancing, loved that too, and became an excellent dancer. As a young merchant navy seaman — one of the unsung heroes of the Second World War — Jim went dancing whenever he could get home on leave. Glasgow catered well for servicemen: there were dance halls in plenty where he danced to big-band renditions of tunes popular at the time. None of this though prepared him for Wagner. That encounter didn't and couldn't come till after the war.

His last tour of duty was bringing Australian troops home and here in Sydney in 1945 Jim, the quiet bachelor of 29 suddenly

found love. In a whirlwind romance, literally, he met and married a young 20-year-old Australian and took her home to Scotland.

With the terror of those wartime Atlantic, Mediterranean and Far East voyages behind him, with the love of his new bride and his own love of the sea undiminished, he transferred to cruise ships. In 1948 several months after the birth of his first child, a daughter, Jim was assigned to the newly-built, 40,000-ton Cunard liner, *Caronia*, for her maiden voyage. He was the youngest man to get his rating as Chief Plumber.

On a cruise in the Mediterranean in the early 1950s the *Caronia*, with wealthy American tourists aboard, visited the Riviera seaport and resort of Nice at the time of Mardi Gras just before Lent. There on a golden summer day Jim, as expected of a ship's officer, accompanied a party of passengers ashore. They arrived in time for the procession of flower-decorated floats, and experienced the full colour and ceremony of the flower-throwing contest, "The Battle of the Flowers". In the evening they attended the Opéra Municipal de Nice and there Jim for the first time saw and heard Wagner's *The Valkyries*.

"A Gripping Drama, Replete with Punch"

Few men have made more noise in the world than Herr Richard Wagner, and if anybody doubt it, let him try the *Ring des Nibelungen; or, Panto-Mime and the Three Merry Maidens of the Rhino*. *The Nibelungen* is made up of "motives," but Herr Wagner's motives are often hard to understand. "Blow it all!" says Herr Wagner (they have trombones, *and they all do it*), "here goes!"

Herr Wagner's rule is, "When in doubt, play the drum." This raises a spirit of emulation in the bosom of the gentleman who has been entrusted with the cymbals. Bang they go! The violins tremble with indignation. Herr Seidl waves his arms to the ophicleides; at it go the horns, and the singers yell in another key, to show that they are not to be put down by the odds against them. Half-a-dozen "motives" have been going on — if one could only have picked them out.

The Nibelungen opens with a view of some queer fish in an Aquarium. Here are the Rhine Maidens with Our New Patent Self-instructing Swimming Apparatus fitted on them trying to remember

that pretty little thing they heard last night. They don't recollect the proper words, so *Woglinde* sings the tune, which seems to be badly recollected from Mendelssohn, to the thrilling words:

"Weia! Waga! Waga la Weia!
Wallala, weiala weia!"

Then "Gin a body meet a body coming through the Rhine." Everybody joins in chorus.

These bodies are taking care of the Rheingold, or Rhino, as it is generally called, and a bad young man, *Panto-Mime's* brother, comes and walks about in the water; to which these bold young minxes do not object until he goes up the ladder, which has been incautiously left, from the bottom of the Rhine to the shelf on which the Rhino rests, and walks off with the treasure. Then they let off the steam which, by the way, they do on every possible occasion.

Before the steam has quite evaporated, and while there is still a good deal of Hot-bathy smell about the place, the gauze rises, and discovers about as coarsely a painted scene as we ever remember. Here

Siegfried's Rhine Journey
 Siegfried's Funeral March
 Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene.

I know what a cliché it is to talk about long standing ovations, so I'll just say this about the audience response at the end of that very special concert. In the case of 29 September, 1973 in the Concert Hall at Sydney Opera House, I swear there were people in that audience, not just clapping, not just standing, not just cheering — yes, there were one or two there weeping.

The following week there were predictably enthusiastic reviews in the media, for the music, for its performance and for the Concert Hall. As complimentary as they were, none seemed to capture the essence of my own overwhelming emotions. These things, I realise, are very personal, and I wish I had better words to describe the dual impact of music and architecture on me on that unique occasion.

Since that year, of course, a great part of Sydney's mythology (to say nothing of its pride) is now inextricably intertwined with the sublime poetic mystery that rose from Goossens' dream. Please allow me a couple of quotations that bear admirable witness to this idea.

First, Peter Smark in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (29/8/92):

The most important thing about Utzon, surely, is how clearly he showed that a modern building could be, not just striking and suitable, but noble. He showed, as the very best architects do, that to create a building which lifts the spirit it's not necessary to reach back into the Victorian era to recreate the structures loved by our grandfathers. But of how many other buildings in Sydney can it be said that one's heart rises when you look at them?

Here is another evocative quote about our iconic building, this time from one Kimberly A. Clark at the *Sydney! Travel Guide* web site (sydney.simplenet.com/index.htm):

No building on earth looks like the Sydney Opera House . . . it is a presence, a part of the landscape that seems to have been there forever, and it is impossible to imagine the Harbour without it. Each time the sun shines on it just a little different than the moment before, each time the blue Harbour waters reflect off the tile and glass exterior, it seems to change personality, to change moods. Even Sydneysiders who have seen it for years are awestruck when they catch a glimpse of it through the corner of their eye.

What can I add to that?

Simply this: thank you Richard Wagner, thank you SSO, Sir Charles, Miss Nilsson. And thank you, thank you, thank you, Mr Utzon — may you and your sail-roofed masterpiece be celebrated for a thousand years and beyond.

How overwhelming it must have been for the tall, good-looking, quiet man to hear the first tempestuous sounds! For the opera begins with a storm. Then there follows the delicious love music of Sieglinde and Siegmund; in Act II Brünnhilde's powerful war-cry and the electrifying *Ride of the Valkyries* which opens the Third Act and all that follows to the final scene of Wotan's impassioned farewell to Brünnhilde and the *Magic Fire Music*, where she sleeps within a circle of fire, the music of which brings the drama to a close.

Jim could well have said: "It changed my life". Certainly on his return home to Southampton where his wife and now two little daughters were living, he declared that his night at the opera was "a magic night".

Now over 40 years later, recently his widow recalled her impressions of how he felt: "He was completely entranced and was never the same again. For the remainder of his short life he spoke of the magic of that night and hoped so much to see the rest of the *Ring*, as a whole musical world had opened up for him, however briefly".

Jim's hope never was fulfilled. He and his young family came to

Australia to live and he had not been settled long before he became seriously ill and he died in 1958. He was only 42.

What Jim's response to the complete *Ring* would have been can only be imagined. Perhaps it is presumptuous to speculate — after all, he did have his moment of magic, wholesome and pure, received like a child, without censure and a gift in itself. Yet, if he *were* living today, just think, he would be 82, perhaps strong and well and eager enough to find himself in Adelaide, sometime between November and December 1998 at the Festival Theatre for one of the three cycles of the complete *Ring*. On that historic occasion he could be part of an audience of old and new pilgrims, prepared, perhaps, like Twain's Bayreuth audience "to sit in the dark and worship in silence", an audience prepared to be open-minded, receptive, to feel able, like the fully open-hearted person with a fine sense of wonder, like the Jims of this world, to be swept up in something bigger than themselves, to carry that joy of discovery and sharing with them into the next millennium.

— Bet Briggs

The Tin Voice Laughed

As far as I am concerned, it is fitting, in this special *Bikwil* issue devoted to Rings and things, to pay tribute to a Wagner fan who, to her eternal credit, instead of retreating into obscurity as a failed opera soprano, chose to devote her life to showing us the funny side of music.

Now, there've been several entertainers this century with whom we associate the idea of musical jokes. Perhaps the best known are Victor Borge ("Why are the keys on my piano so yellow? The elephant smoked too much") and the immortal Gerard Hoffnung, whose cartoons inspired concert works like Malcolm Arnold's *Grand Festival Overture for Hoovers and Optional Floor Polisher*. And you'll be familiar, no doubt, with the Dudley Moore parodies *Little Miss Muffett* and *Die Flabbergast*. In similar vein are the works of P.D.Q. Bach, like *The Civilian Barber*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Ted and Alice (an Opera in One Unnatural Act)* and *Fanfare for the Common Cold*.

Animated Hollywood stars, too, have lampooned music. Have you ever seen Tom and Jerry doing Bizet's *Carmen*? Or Bugs Bunny doing Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*? And who could forget Bugs' *What's Opera, Doc?* That cartoon

won an Oscar, and guess whose music it had a go at most?

Wagner, of course, has been the butt of satire since at least the 1870s. None came any funnier than the 1882 review (*A Gripping Drama, Replete with Punch*) we have reproduced on pages 51-5.

As well, there were scads of 19th century press cartoons, most directed at Wagner's personal arrogance and lavish orchestration — swelled-headedness, fancy clothes, gigantic tubas and drums, harps played by garden rakes . . .

And to this day a caricature of Brünnhilde's horned headgear is the universal symbol for grand opera or large sopranos, as that couple of Wagnerian camp vamps Lorenzo Jordan and Claude Arias demonstrated in Australia recently.

Which brings me back nicely (dare I say "full cycle"?) to our heroine of the moment — Anna Claudia Russell-Brown, born in England 88 years ago into an upper middle-class musical family. Her father was an accomplished amateur classical pianist, and extremely fond of Gilbert and Sullivan. Her great-aunt was an opera singer, and indeed was so impressed by the young Anna's voice, she insisted

created the ballet *Pineapple Poll* from the latter's tunes. In recent times he has conducted the Welsh National Opera in several G&S operas on the Telarc CD label — *Mikado*, *Pirates*, *Pinafore*, *Yeomen*, *Trial*.

Incredible as it now seems, even in 1955 the musical Mackerras family had not yet invested in one of those new-fangled microgroove radiograms, so all their Wagner bits and pieces were on 78s. Pushing their luck, there, I'd say.

Back to the Opera House opening concert.

Time seemed to drag, but eight-fifteen did arrive and the members of the orchestra began assembling on the platform, multiple harpists and all, and French horn players complete with Wagner tubas. You beauty, this band really means business tonight. After they had tuned up, concertmaster Donald Hazelwood came in, followed by Charles Mackerras, baton in hand. The applause was rapturous and long, and we hadn't heard a single note yet. We reluctantly but expectantly settled down, Mackerras raised his baton, the orchestra launched into the National Anthem, and we were away. All the promises about the Concert Hall acoustics were coming true. This was going to sound quite different to the old Town Hall, for sure.

As conductor and orchestra prepared themselves for the first item and the most electric hush I'd ever experienced at the start of a music performance descended over the Concert Hall, my mother's prophetic words echoed in my head. "This is history."

It still sends shivers up my spine, when I think of that beautiful rounded sound Mackerras and the orchestra (plus the Concert Hall acoustics) greeted us, as the first C major chord of the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger* rolled out towards us. A magic moment of music for me that will never be equalled. At the end of it, after the applause had subsided, my friend remarked, "It just shows what a great conductor can do. I haven't ever heard the SSO sound better."

So this is what we heard in the first half of that inspiring night:

Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*

Elisabeth's Greeting, *Dich Teure Halle*, from the start of Act II of *Tannhäuser* (always a fitting song of praise for a new music theatre), with much, much thunderous applause for Birgit Nilsson the second she entered on to the platform

Prelude and *Liebostod* from *Tristan and Isolde* (ravishing).

If that weren't enough, after the interval, we were treated to three of the "big" numbers from *Götterdämmerung*:

advance booking, I'd say. I'd love to know the full story — about whose idea it was to feature Wagner, about who approached whom, and so on.

A quarter of a century ago this year, it was. Nineteen seventy-three, September 29. The Gala Opening Concert. The souvenir program I bought that night is one of my most cherished possessions. The paper it is printed on is discolouring now, but what visceral memories it conjures up for me:

. . . the gleaming white temple all lit up at night like some down-under Taj Mahal, the waters of the Harbour lapping at its feet on three sides (the fourth side always but a temporary mooring, waiting to cast off whenever the sails catch the right breeze and decide to float the whole thing out to sea), the first walk up those oddly but deliberately spaced exterior stairs, the wonderful, knockout John Olsen mural *Five Bells* in the northern Concert Hall foyer, the bright purple colour of the seats in the Concert Hall itself, the organ pipes, the 18 acoustic rings above the orchestra platform . . .

While the audience was gathering — some in their best finery, but most in modest gear — I remember in particular seeing the whole extended Mackerras family file in, about ten rows in front of

us. They had nearly the whole row to themselves. I'd known the twins Colin and Malcom (Charles' younger brothers) at high school, and it was good to see them once more, even if not to talk.

A vivid recollection from 1955 came into my mind, that any time I walked into a class, as like as not there would be Colin lustily singing the *Ride of the Valkyries* or the *Meistersinger* Overture. I guarantee, the Mackerras must have been Wagner buffs from birth. I, of course, was still in my Chopin/Grieg/Tchaikovsky/Puccini years.

"Oh, yes, we've got quite a lot of Wagner on record at home," Colin used to say. "Charles loves him."

In a biography of Charles Mackerras the conductor described the family home during his childhood as being filled with music that was almost entirely Wagner and Gilbert and Sullivan. Odd that combination, perhaps, but not unique among the faithful, it would appear, since the illustrious Wagnerian soprano Kirsten Flagstad spent many hours of her last illness listening to G&S.

Since then that twofold love has abided in the Mackerras breast. As you probably know, it was Charles who in 1950, when copyright on Sullivan's music expired,

that one day she too become an opera singer. In the meantime, she took Anna, aged twelve, to the première performance in 1923 of Walton's *Façade*, and the latter immediately fell in love with Edith Sitwell's nonsense poems.

When the time for serious music study arrived, Anna put in five hard years at the London Royal College of Music doing singing, as well as piano, composition and cello. Her composition teachers included Vaughan Williams, who used to say things like, "Well, that's a very nice piece of Debussy you've brought me this week. What are you going to do next week — Handel?"

But her voice had already been damaged on the playing field at boarding school, where she was

. . . whacked over the face with a hockey stick (quite by accident) . . . [it] broke my nose and my cheekbone, and it all had to be reconditioned from the inside, and it ruined my acoustics . . .

So, after several unrewarding years as a soprano on the concert circuit, she reluctantly came to accept something important about her studies at the Royal College: that "if you go there with a tin voice, you'll come out with a loud tin voice".

So, what to do? Keep performing? Teach? Well, yes and no.

Her first foray into musical parody was a pair of songs she wrote

for radio while she was stuck in Toronto during World War II. They were entitled *Don Bonzo Alfonso the Matador* (with castanets) and *I'd Be a Red-Hot Mama If I Hadn't Got These Varicose Veins*. But it was Canadian conductor, Sir Ernest MacMillan who really set her off on a career as a "musical cartoonist", when he invited her to take part in his annual burlesque-style Christmas Box Symphony Concerts.

Soon she was on tour of North America, with such originals as *Anaemia's Death Scene* and *I Gave My Love a Cherry without Any Pit*. The latter was a folksong in which she accompanied herself on Irish harp, which instrument she'd learnt especially. For obscure reasons the harp was impounded by customs in Detroit, so she mimed the harp part on that occasion. The new version was an immediate hit, becoming a regular part of the show.

Later she decided to develop a routine on how to play the bagpipes. First she had to learn the instrument (with some difficulty and much merriment), then,

. . . [h]aving got this far I had to write the talk, so I looked up *bagpipes* in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and there it all was . . . In the nearly forty years I have done this routine, I have always announced my source, but no one seems to believe me, and yet I have yet to meet anyone who has checked on it . . . I've given the *Encyclopedia Britannica*

so much free advertising they ought really to have presented me with a complimentary set.

Of course, Anna Russell's most famous routine and her masterpiece — and this is her relevance in these particular pages — is her "analysis" of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, a work she described as "the only grand opera that comes in the giant economy size", and whose singers she characterised this way:

To be a dramatic soprano, requires not so much the attributes of a singer as those of a successful auctioneer or hog caller. I mean, to blast your way through a Wagnerian orchestra . . . a beautiful tone is an absolute waste of time. You're much better off with the factory whistle or buzz saw type of voice — with a good cutting edge.

Anna Russell took great pains while preparing her *Ring* routine:

I read every book I could find on Wagner, went through the analysis of the music and the translation of the libretto, and pared it all down to a twenty-minute routine . . . I often think I could do another talk about all the things I had to leave out, like the Tarnhelm, the Treasure, the Spear, Nothung the sword. I don't mention Donner, Loge, or Froh, or that Wotan lost the same eye on three occasions. There was Mime, Alberich's brother who brought Siegfried up, and all the cries, by the Valkyries, the Rhine Maidens, and Hagen, who is the only fellow with a downward cry and the only one among all these people wearing a helmet with horns turning down . . . Some people were shocked that I would send up this august piece of music, but I don't con-

sider it a sendup. I merely tell the story as accurately as possible and play the bits of music exactly as written. I can't help it if the story is absurd.

Later Ernest Newman (a prominent Wagner expert) commented on her accuracy, and from then on

. . . the routine became respectable, and it is now in the curriculum of a number of universities where *The Ring* is studied.

The whole routine lasts about 22 minutes on CD. After a short intro about the need for *Ring* information for ordinary people, she goes on:

The scene opens in the River Rhine — *in it*. If it were in New York, it would be like the Hudson. And swimming around there are the three Rhine-maidens, a sort of aquatic Andrews Sisters.

For all the fun she brings to it, it's obvious just how much affection Anna Russell has for the *Ring*. But the real feature of her performance is that it serves two audiences at once. Those unacquainted with the *Ring* do receive, in the words of the CD liner notes, "an accurate musical and dramatic analysis". On the other hand, the more you know about the *Ring*, the more hilarious her treatment appears.

Either way, you can't lose.

Not only does she succinctly narrate the whole tortured story, she also explains the leitmotifs, and sings in her unique voice some of

Sydney. Premier J.J. Cahill finally agreed to make available the Benelong Point tram depot site just as soon as trams were abolished from Sydney's streets. Goossens, for his part, had long been convinced that this breathtaking harbourside position was an ideal spot for the opera house Sydney sorely needed.

To older Sydneysiders the history of the difficult birth of Australia's most famous building is well known.

First, there was the excitement of the 1955 international competition for its design. I clearly remember sitting with my mother in the kitchen of our flat pouring over the short-listed designs as announced in the newspapers the following year. She took an instant liking to one — originally rejected by the judges, mind you — that had been submitted by some Danish architect with a strange name. Mainly, though, she wanted me to be there on the first night, whatever the shape of the building:

"When the opera house is opened, make sure you go to the first opera there. And tell your children and grandchildren — this is history."

Then there were the interminable problems with costs and egos and technical delays. It was 1959

when construction belatedly began on the Jørn Utzon creation, and not until 1973 (20 October — the official "birthday") when our "splendid winged folly" was eventually opened by the Queen. In those intervening 14 years friends and I often went down to Benelong Point to watch its progress from the observation deck they'd erected opposite, along the Botanical Gardens fence.

At long last (\$100 million later), tickets for the first performances became available. If you wanted to attend a première, you had to decide between a real live opera on 28 September (Prokofiev's *War and Peace*) — it *was* an opera house, after all — and a concert the following night.

Well, for some reason the ABC had decided to make the first Concert Hall performance an all-Wagner affair, so my own choice wasn't too difficult at all. I got two tickets early on the first day they went on sale, and went with one of those mad friends I mentioned.

Fancy the ABC being able to get for the opening of our beautiful new music auditorium, not only a great expatriate Aussie conductor, Charles Mackerras, who happened to treasure Wagner with all his heart, but also the foremost Wagnerian soprano of her day, Birgit Nilsson. Amazing piece of

Is There a Believer in the House?

Enthusiasm for Wagner with me began innocently enough, in the late 1940s. Perhaps it was the theme to a Saturday afternoon racing programme on the radio, perhaps some other show (a radio serial?) — the exact memory is gone now. I was eight or nine years of age, already learning the piano, and the music sounded quite exciting. In those days many a piece of classical music was used as the signature tune for radio programmes, ABC and commercial alike, such as extracts from composers such as Tchaikovsky, Suppé, Weber, Johann Strauss, etc.

In this case, despite the '40s aversion to all things Teutonic among the Australian community, the radio was playing *Rienzi* — the tutti passage about five minutes into the overture. Of course I didn't know it was Wagner then, but I liked it and tucked the vague recollection away.

I suppose I became a confirmed Wagner addict about ten years after that, when I was at University, and so over the last 40 years there have been several Wagnerian experiences that I'll never forget. Such as the following:

My purchase in the 60s of *Klemperer Conducts Wagner*, the LP set of the best orchestral excerpts played by the Philharmonia Orchestra . . .

My purchase in 1970 of the Decca *Ring* (Solti et al.) — 21 LPs . . .

The weekend later that year when I listened to same in its entirety with a couple of equally insane friends . . .

The performance of *Die Walküre* with Rita Hunter I went to in 1983 at the Sydney Opera House . . .

The showing at the State Theatre a couple of years later of the Richard Burton TV epic on Wagner's life . . .

My surprise 60th birthday present of the fabulous *Ring Disc* . . .

But what I want to relate here is none of those episodes, but another one — the most significant and memorable live musical event in my life, after which most have been anti-climactic. This issue of *Bikwil* has at last afforded me a fitting opportunity to revisit my enduring memory of a certain Saturday night in 1973.

My laudatory narrative is of a building as much as of Wagner's music. It too starts in the 1940s, when the director of the Conservatorium and later the conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Eugene Goossens, began trying to persuade the NSW Government to build a dedicated opera house in

the more energetic vocal numbers, accompanying herself all the while at the piano. Particularly telling is her 13-second "duet" between Siegfried and Brünnhilde (from *Siegfried*), where she manages to give the impression of both a male and a female voice. And her Alberich is simply marvellous. Her timing for her gags is superb, too, as is her tone of voice when she wants to accentuate some especially preposterous aspect of the *Ring*.

The recording in question is a live performance, in New York, dating from 1953. It's obviously an audience not fully conversant with Wagner, as you can hear from their rather bemused giggles at the start, then their more involved response as they warm to Anna Russell, and finally their unbridled hysteria.

The CD is called *The Anna Russell Album* (Sony MDK 47252), and includes seven other shorter pieces of satire, plus another long skit, *How to Write Your Own Gilbert and Sullivan Opera*. A mere \$16, this CD, and a joy to own. A second Anna Russell album entitled *Encore?* (Sony SFK 60316) is also available

And what do you know? There's a 47-minute video too, for those whose VCRs can playback in NTSC VHS format: *Anna Russell, the Clown Princess of Comedy*. US\$30 + postage from Barnes and Noble.

Anna Russell in Australia?

Well, her paternal great-grandfather Andrew Russell was an early colonist from Glasgow, who in 1840 published a diary called *A Tour of the Australian Colonies*, so she was always keen to visit. Her first tour took place in 1955-6, then another in the 1960s, during which she installed herself in a house on one of the artificial islands in Sylvania Waters.

In spite of its charming aspect, [it] . . . was suburbia, and there is nothing more suburban than the suburbs of Sydney. It was dullsville incarnate.

She later sold up at a handsome profit, and moved to an apartment in North Sydney overlooking the harbour. In all, she lived in Australia eight and a half years.

In 1985 she published her autobiography, aptly entitled *I'm Not Making This Up, You Know* (ISBN 0 8264 0364 6).

These days Anna Russell lives in a retirement complex in Ontario, inside which there is a street named after her — Anna Russell Way. But despite her age her mind is as sharp as ever, and she still travels now and then. Last March she was in Australia again, where she proudly told the ABC's Margaret Throsby that she is at present learning Cantonese.

— Olive Conduit

Wagner's Revolutionary Years

Even before Richard Wagner was born in 1813, most of Europe was smouldering with discontent. The Napoleonic Wars and the defeat of Imperial Germany in 1806 heralded the end of the old German aristocracy and the Holy Roman Church. Germany was now hundreds of States loosely connected, the main forces being Prussia and Austria. Class barriers were breaking down, social reforms were being introduced. Inspired by the French Revolution, the Greeks' successful struggle against Turkish oppression and the uprisings in Poland, hungry workers and landless peasants were listening to students, writers and teachers quoting the French thinkers Voltaire, Rousseau and Victor Hugo, English writers like Tom Paine and Charles Dickens, America's *Declaration of Independence* issued by Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, and in Germany their own Goethe, Schiller and Heine. With the establishment of people's assemblies, liberal politicians like Karl von Rötbeck and Karl Theodor Welcker, helped to formulate demands for press freedom and other democratic rights.

Artists and musicians were also involved in constructing this new era. In Prussia, Hungary, Silesia, Austria, Italy and other parts of Eastern Europe, oppression and hunger were driving those who could flee to emigrate to England, America and other countries. Australia was enriched by the arrival of many European singers and performers such as the Hungarian violinist, Miska Hauser, the Tyrolese Singers, the Rainer Family, the brilliant zither player Viet Rahm, and many other talented Europeans. Many brought not only their music to Australia, but also their love of freedom. The Tyrolese Singers were friends of Jenny Lind and Mendelssohn. Like Beethoven, Wagner, Schumann, Liszt, Berlioz, Chopin and Verdi, to name just a few great talents, Mendelssohn before he died in 1847 also supported the new freedoms.

In the early part of the 19th century there were revolts in many German cities. In 1817 the students of Jena University called on other German students to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Reformation. When 500 students responded by marching to Wartburg to demand constitutional changes and a united fatherland and the rally was marred by soldiers burning books, one student summed up the situation saying that the German people had had great hopes for change but remained disappointed.

But there were important developments in Frankfurt when the early parliamentary Assembly met. While German States shared the same language and culture, their demands now were for political unity. In that period there were festivals and meetings to promote the nationalist movement which must have

therapy based on the 'flooding' technique, whereby you involve yourself in so much whimsical indulgence that you become satiated, and so eventually the response is extinguished.

To this end, you must attend the current production of *Tannhäuser*. Since the opera itself is only three hours long, you must additionally put in many months, even years in practising all the roles — Heldentenor, dramatic soprano, baritone and chorus — whilst accompanying yourself on the piano. You will understand that all the singing must be performed at the top of your voice, for Wagnerian opera is not *bel canto* so much as *can bello*. By the end of these endeavours, you will find that your whimsy has deserted you, ditto your wife and daughter.

Should you not wish to change, as I half suspect, but rather take pride in flaunting your symptoms, then I have this proposal to offer: Lord Peter, in the course of your celebrated detective work, you have investigated the *bel canto* singing of Farinelli, Vivaldi's *Gloria* and Fauré's *Requiem*, and to your surprise and credit, you enjoyed those experiences. I now urge you to go to the current production of *Tannhäuser*, which you are sure to enjoy. You may dispense with the homework I outlined in the previous paragraph, and just wallow in whimsy, but at a different level of sophistication. It is a dramatic *coup de théâtre*, a masterpiece. If you boggle at this proposal, then like *Tannhäuser* himself, you are damned, and it will be Grunt Grunt for you, my boy!

I hope this answers my query.

I.Q. Lowe
Psychologist

Lord Peter Wimsey,

Good lord!

In reply to your professional enquiry, I would unhesitatingly diagnose you as an advanced case of WPD (Whimsical Personality Disorder). Luckily I am conducting a therapy group for cases such as yours at my rural retreat at Grunt Grunt. This is conveniently situated only two days easy ride by camel from Tibooburra.

The principle of the therapy is that of 'negative practice' that is, the whimsical response is extinguished by dint of practice of antagonistic responses. This principle will become apparent when I outline our program:

All participants will take part in the annual Grunt Grunt Roo Gutting and Sheep Knackering competitions, which are the main cultural events in this part of the country. Other entertainments are the sack races, in which the sacks are placed over the head (instead of the more usual over-the-feet procedure), so that the participants stumble blindly over the dunes, tripping over rocks and running into patches of prickly pear. Great fun! Or you may soak yourself in the sheep-dip pond while you meditate on the meaning of life, of which the sack races are but a metaphor. After meals of damper and bunghole (mains) followed by spotted slut (sweets), all washed down with pannikins of rum, we relax around the campfire, smoking our camel-dung cigarettes and singing such family favourites as: *The One-Eyed Reilly*, *The Ball at Kerrymuir* and *The Old Red Flannel Drawers that Maggie Wore*.

In the unlikely event that this program does not appeal, there is, I'm afraid, only one other course open to you. This is

influenced a very young Wagner. There were the Karlsbad Decrees of 1819, the Frankfurt Decrees of 1831-32, and the Viennese Decrees of 1834. In Offenburg in 1847 the German people of Baden drew up a statement demanding restoration of their "violated constitution". It included freedom of speech and belief, with no interference "in matter concerning teachers and pupils". In addition the statement called for the military to swear an oath of allegiance to the Constitution with representation in the German Confederation. There were other demands, political and economic. Under pressure the German sovereigns granted changes, promising more liberal constitutions and a German Parliament.

During the latter months of 1848 there were stormy disagreements between the Prussian and Austrian leaders not always without bloodshed, as when the cavalry attacked men, women and children clamouring for food. In July 1848 Archduke Johann issued a statement to the German people announcing that he had been elected their Imperial Administrator and promised total freedom for the fatherland. By August-September a Berlin Workers' Congress had issued its decrees. With Liberals, Socialists, Conservatives and even Communists all drawing up their programs, the struggle for power in the National Assembly continued — and so did the fighting. In Berlin the Civil Militia fired at revolutionary workers whose weapons were shovels and sticks. In November the Prussian National Assembly was forced to dissolve.

Like many of Europe's musicians, Wagner welcomed the new freedoms. In his Dresden home he had often entertained August Röckel, his musical director and editor of Dresden's radical paper, the *Volksblätter*. Also a regular guest at his house was the Russian anarchist, Bakunin, who had joined the Czech and Polish uprisings against Austrian oppression. When in May 1849 the Saxon Government rejected the new constitution the people presented to it, Wagner and his colleagues realised that they had to act quickly. Wagner's first reaction was to take his family to stay with relatives in Chemnitz, not far from Leipzig. The Revolutionaries had already called on the people to "Hurry swiftly with weapons and ammunition. Now is the time!" It certainly was. In Berlin when the workers stormed the Armoury, the King left.

On May 9, when Wagner returned to Dresden, he sought out his friend Bakunin who was resting in the Town Hall. In his memoirs Wagner described what he found: "With a cigar in his mouth, Bakunin received me, seated on one of the mattresses distributed over the floor of the Town Hall. At his side was a very young Pole (a Galician) named Haimberger, a violinist whom he had once asked me to recommend to Lipinsky." (Karl Lipinsky was a well-known violinist who

had been leader of the Dresden orchestra.) Wagner goes on to describe Haimberger as “a raw and inexperienced boy”, who had become attached to Bakunin and had joined him on the barricades. Barely a week later warrants were issued for the arrest of many of the “revolutionaries”, including Wagner, Röckel and Bakunin. Wagner went to Leipzig to see Liszt who procured for him a false passport to help him cross the Swiss border and get to Zurich. When he went to say goodbye to his wife Minna in Chemnitz, he learned that Bakunin and Röckel were already in prison.

Wagner managed to escape to Zurich and soon after arriving there he received a request from young Julius Haimberger who was also seeking refuge, for a warrant had been issued by the new Emperor Franz Josef for his arrest. The young rebel’s father was an Imperial Councillor at the Viennese Court but the family had disowned the young violinist and had cut him off without money. Wagner immediately wrote to August Röckel’s brother, Eduard, who had already escaped to England. By 1853 Haimberger was playing at the St James Theatre in London.

Australia was to benefit from Haimberger’s misfortune, for in 1855 he was performing in Coppin’s theatre in Melbourne with the Tyrolese Singers with whom he travelled and performed on the goldfields and in all the eastern States of Australia. Having married one of the Tyrolese Singers, in 1867 he and his family left Sydney for America.

He was not in Australia when in 1877 William Lyster with his opera company from New York gave Melbourne a theatrical treat by producing Wagner’s *Lo-hengrin*. This opera which had stirred such interest in Europe, particularly Germany, had never been produced in the colony. To sing the lead of Elsa, Lyster had brought out one of Germany’s greatest sopranos, Antonietta Link. The Melbourne papers were full of praise for the production at the Prince of Wales Opera House. It was a sensational success. A proud German resident of Melbourne decided to report its reception to Wagner. The letter was accompanied by photos of Melbourne (“a marvellous city”), with the suggestion that Wagner should visit here. Wagner rejected the invitation, but sent his compliments to Lyster and hoped that any of his works produced in Australia would be given in English.

Within a very few years both Lyster and Wagner were dead. As for that talented young violinist whom Wagner had befriended, he never returned to Australia or, apparently, to his family and Fatherland.

— Joan Clarke

The Therapist Prescribes . . .

(The following letters have come into *Bikwil*’s possession via an anonymous hand. They are reproduced here without comment, save to note that it is difficult to tell which of the two correspondents is more urgently in need of assistance — the Billy-Bunter-loving tango man, or his egocentric psychologist from hell, who by the time he runs out of self-indulgent steam apparently cannot remember who the real client is.)

Dr I.Q. Lowe, Psychologist

Dear Dr Lowe,

I seek your advice re recent disturbances in my life.

For forty years I toiled faithfully as a public servant. Apart from devotion to Work and to my wife and daughter, my only indulgence was an excessive absorption in a stamp collection.

*On my recent retirement I unfortunately came across the publication *Bikwil* which I rightly thought facetious. Whilst waiting impatiently for the next silly issue I frittered away Time searching second-hand shops for *Beano* comics and literature devoted to the life of the “Owl of the Fifth Remove” — Billy Bunter.*

*Becoming less and less responsible I hooted with mirth when I discovered silverfish had devoured my precious “penny-browns”. My daughter’s collection of Wagnerian CDs I buried in the kitchen garden promising to replace them with versions by *The Spice Girls*. I have taken up tango lessons and I attempt to write amusing pieces for *Bikwil*.*

*When my daughter was practising a series of shrieks from *The Valkyries* I shook my maracas at her and demonstrated my tango steps.*

Edna won't speak to me. Tra la la!

*The Police make me turn off my music at two am. Cha cha cha!
Is something the matter?*

Peter Wimsey

not forgetting my all-time favourite "the best things in life are free", which spawns the hard-to-be-believed, but magnificently genuine "nail-biting refreshes the feet".

Enough of this preparatory stuff, fellow Wagnerians. On to our main game here, which is anagrams for an embryonic *Ring* crossword to test yourselves on. But first a few quick pointers.

- ◇ The numbers in brackets behave in the standard cryptic crossword manner. Thus, clue 7 generates a phrase consisting of three words of ten, five and seven letters, respectively.
- ◇ All answers are spelt the English way, though you might want to quibble about one of them if you

were follow some old-time Anglo authors on Wagner. Nevertheless, according to both the *OED* and *Macquarie Dictionary*, even that one, despite its German look, is now also the preferred English spelling.

- ◇ A bias towards the Decca *Ring* recording is patently obvious.
- ◇ One or two clues manage to be quite apposite, in the sense discussed above.
- ◇ If you're any sort of Ring Cyclist, most clues are childishly simple to pedal through. Who needs interlocking words, anyway?

— Harlish Goop

Cruel theme echoes "Here come the clues"

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Gross couple make ardent offal fans. (6,3,6) | 8. Confused hat buyer puts it on the map. (8) |
| 2. Satan's power? (6,5) | 9. I bring tonsils for soprano. (6,7) |
| 3. A nudge is single-minded when it comes to incest. (8,3,9) | 10. Battle birds in the saddle derisively ko father. (4,2,3,8) |
| 4. Morse turfs rum for whispering grove. (6,7) | 11. Will audio vigil bar waif in lunatic kingdom? (6,2,2,7) |
| 5. Vote limit on signature tune. (9) | 12. Magyar with tiger's logo. (5,5) |
| 6. John Culshaw's unerring doings. (4,10) | 13. Does an ugly Nibelung ever belch air? (8) |
| 7. Eerie red furnishings joy for river cruise hero. (10,5,7) | 14. Rug tune creates false bride. (7) |
| | 15. Blame the whole bloody lot on this rewarding arch. (7,6) |

Web Line

As is to be expected, Richard Wagner and his works are more than adequately represented on the Internet. Here are just a few of the web sites I've discovered.

I'll start with one appropriately called *Wagner on the Web*, set up Joe Erbacher and the P. Zazz Marketing Corporation. When I last had a look-in, the main page was featuring a discussion about whether you should buy the Solti original or the Solti remastered *Ring* recording.

Apart from that, there are many subpages, such as performance reviews, CD reviews, books for sale, details on all Wagner's works and links to other sites.

Useful stuff, especially the reviews. And if you're really keen, you can add your name to their Internet mailing list and be automatically informed of site updates.

Next, very helpful for the utter *Ring Cycle* novice is *A Beginner's Guide to Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which opens as follows:

If you've never heard the *Ring* before, and your experience of Wagner's music is restricted to the *Ride of the Valkyries* with helicopters in *Apocalypse Now* and some bits of *Siegfried's Funeral March*, approach it very, very cautiously or you will be

unjustly disappointed. Here are some suggestions.

Then follows some really good advice on how to ease yourself into the *Ring*, from reading a synopsis to listening to some "bleeding chunks". After that, you are advised to expand into longer and longer scenes, followed by a video of any of the four parts, until, lo and behold, one day you find yourself wanting to settle down with a libretto and hear the entire thing. Common sense, really.

A third site I recommend is the *Richard Wagner Archive*, maintained (in English) by Hannu Salmi at the University of Turku, Finland. You'll find information on his operas, his other works, his aesthetic and political writings, his letters, and even a section on the memorabilia and popular culture inspired by his character. There is also a built-in search engine. By the look of it this site is quite popular, having been visited over 60,000 times since November 1995.

It's good to see the Adelaide *Ring* with its own web site, or more strictly a subpage of the South Australian Opera's site. Here we are reminded that the *Ring* is "the Olympics of the arts world", and the current Aussie performances have required 36 solo vocal roles together with a considerably

enlarged Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and State Opera Chorus (plus children), and, yes, three months' rehearsal. Over 90% of the production's cast, including all understudies, is drawn from Australia and New Zealand.

I like the Quoteable Quotes the site offers. Here are two:

Is there anything, in all the realm of art, to set beside *Der Ring des Nibelungen*? This cycle of four immense music dramas, the vastest piece of music ever conceived by the mind of man — what an experience it is [to] discover, and then to spend a lifetime exploring, those four parts, tracing their connective links, puzzling their meanings and listening through in wonder and awe to their shattering conclusion! (M. Owen Lee)

No work of art has stirred the imagination of Western men and women more widely or more profoundly than *The Ring of the Nibelung* . . . what has [been] written or composed in the last hundred years is likely to bear in some degree — can hardly have escaped — the influence of the most influential drama ever created. (Andrew Porter)

It was at this site that I first became aware of “the ultimate toy,

the *Ring Disc* . . . An Interactive Guide to Wagner's *Ring Cycle* . . . a product unprecedented in the CD-Rom industry”. If you get past the hype you'll realise that this CD-Rom (for a true Intel Pentium running Windows 95 or later, with a four-speed CD-Rom drive) is a real pearl. It features the complete Vienna Philharmonic recording conducted by Sir Georg Solti, 14½ hours of digitised sound synchronised to the full piano-vocal score, the German libretto with English translation, plus a running analytical commentary. Comprehensive analyses, hypertext links and powerful search functions (“find that leitmotiv”) are provided, together with over 100 essays and a colour image database of rare archival photos. More information may be found at the dedicated *Ring Disc* site, or better still by ringing State of the Art Publications on (02) 9630 7755. The all-inclusive price is \$A175. I love it.

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

<http://www.zazz.com/wagner/index.html>
<http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/Strasse/2906/ring.html>
<http://www.utu.fi/~hansalmi/wagner.spml>
<http://www.stateart.com.au/saopera/thering/thering.htm>
<http://www.ringdisc.com/news.html>



A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

As you know, an anagram is a word or phrase created by rearranging the letters of other words and phrases, provided that all letters of the original appear in the new formation (hyphens and apostrophes are ignored). Originally discovered by the ancient Greeks, anagrams were used in the Middle Ages for mystical purposes — to reveal significant information about a person's character or future. No wonder then that in due course anagrams became known as "Ars Magna", a Latin rearrangement meaning "The Great Art".

In 17th century France the power of anagrams still held sway over people's minds, Louis XIII going so far as to appoint his own Royal Anagrammatist. Some brave contemporaries actually poured scorn on the superstition, and a century later Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* would be ridiculing the natives of Tribnia (= Britain) for uncovering plots using anagrams.

A recent echo of that book (made into the successful TV series our *Back Verandah* columnist Fizzgig referred to so glowingly in *Bikwil No. 2*) is *Oliver's Travels*. This time anagrams are not despised, but

revered — for the challenges they offer the trivia-driven hero as he solves cryptic crosswords by the dozen. For it is in the modern crossword that the anagram now chiefly resides.

If perchance you're new to anagrams, start by rearranging the letters of your own name. Surprises may well await. My appellation Harlish Goop, for example, generates "is holograph", "high rap solo" and "hog hair slop", while the name of our editor Tony Rogers may be anagrammatized into "gory tenors", "negro story" and "go snort rye".

(Indeed, I have it on the editor's word that at least three contributors to this very Wagner issue in your hands have signed their pieces with anagrams. Can you pick 'em?)

Not often possible, but always worth aiming for, is to achieve a anagram that somehow relates to the meaning of the original phrase — like "moon starers" (i.e. astronomers). Others of this ideal anagrammatic ilk I've seen on my own trivia travels include:

a telephone girl	repeating "hello"
Clint Eastwood	Old West action
Ronald Reagan	a darn long era
slot machines	cash lost in 'em
sweetheart	there we sat
the Morse code	here come dots
Tom Cruise	so I'm cuter,

Other contributors were novelist Joris Karl Huysmans, who wrote on the overture to *Tannhäuser*, English poet and critic Algernon Charles Swinburne on the death of Wagner, and Wyzewa on Wagnerian painting, supposedly inspired by the ideals of Bayreuth, by such painters as Edgar Degas and Gustave Moreau.

Wyzewa's essay in the *Revue* June 1886 was an example of the journal's eclectic approach to its subject matter. His *Littérature wagnérienne* drew together such diverse novelists and poets as Huysman, Émile Zola, Paul Bourget, Auguste, Comte de Villiers de L'Isle-Aidain, Verlaine and Mallarmé. In 1895 a collection of Wyzewa's *Revue* articles was published under the title *Nos Maîtres*.

Another erudite contributor to the *Revue* was Victor Wilder, Belgian music critic and translator and passionate Wagnerian. He wrote on the ritual of the Meistersinger for the *Revue* and acted as adviser on the first Paris staging of *Lohengrin*. Wilder also translated all of Wagner's operas from *Lohengrin* on. Cosima Wagner preferred his translation to those of Charles-Louis-Étienne Nutter (an anagram of his surname Truinet), one of the first Frenchmen to appreciate Wagner. He, too, translated *Tannhäuser*, *Rienzi*, *Lohengrin* and *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Wilder's librettos were rejected by the fanatics of the *Revue* who wanted those of French music writer, Alfred Ernst to be used. Ernst, another prominent champion of Wagner, translated *Die Meistersinger*, *Parsifal* and the *Ring* for French singing and wrote books on Wagner and contemporary drama, Wagner's poetical works and a study of *Tannhäuser*.

The young founder and editor of the *Revue*, Dujardin, was a man of distinction, too. Described as "a dandy given to wearing Lohengrin's swan as an insignia on his vests", he was, however, a versatile writer. He published verse, *Poésies* and *Mari Magno*, two volumes of *Théâtre* (landmark plays in Symbolism), lectured and wrote on the history of religious belief and wrote novels. Probably his most notable achievement was his correlation of Wagner's use of leitmotif and the introduction of *monologue intérieur* into narrative prose. His novel, *Les lauriers sont coupés* (1888) is an early example of its use, and was a direct influence on the young James Joyce who later honoured Dujardin as the discoverer of the stream of consciousness technique which he developed to its ultimate in his own novel *Ulysses* (1922).

Whatever *La revue wagnérienne* may have done for Wagner in its three years of existence, it did much to encourage public perception of the Symbolist movement. It also provided a stimulating environment and lively forum for the exchange of literary, philosophical and musical ideas that Wagner inspired.

— Bet Briggs

The Power of the Feminine

When I hear Wagnerian music, I hear rampant masculinity and surging power. I also hear luscious eroticism. Wagner's ideal of music and drama combined to create something on a plane far above the normal level of artistic experience. Was Wagner's ideal of Woman his Muse on this spiritual plane? Two quotations illustrate the power of the feminine in Wagner's creative process.

Music is a woman . . . She must be loved by the poet, must surrender herself to him, in order that the new artwork of the future may be born . . . the begetter must be the artist. (Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 1851)

Women, indeed, are the music of life; they absorb everything more openly and unconditionally, in order to embellish it by means of their sympathy. (Richard Wagner, letter to Theodor Uhlig, December 27 1849)

Such outpourings on the importance of Woman to his creative spirit preceded Wagner's conception of *Tristan und Isolde* in 1857. It was inevitable, then, that he would attribute the artistic flow of this work to a woman — Mathilde Wesendonck — whose loving care and profound understanding of his nature was inspirational to the work. When *Tristan und Isolde* finally had its première in 1865, Wagner's musical imagery in the

prelude drew on sexual longing he had himself experienced. Audiences who have experienced similar feelings are swept along with the soaring sexuality of intervals demanding resolution, or the aching chromaticism of desire. With *Isolde* achieving transcendence in the climax, it could be said that the opera has a sustained feminine ending.

Another profoundly influential female in Wagner's life was the daughter of Franz Lizst, Cosima von Bülow, a self-sacrificing and congenial friend. She later became Wagner's second wife.

Wagner's music springs from both his deep, personal experience with women and his power to awaken the feminine within his own essential nature. He preferred softness in all its forms during the process of artistic creation. From conception to the birth of his poetic and musical ideas, the feminine was woven into the finest threads of his musical fabric.

In point of fact, two days before his death in February 1883, Wagner began writing a treatise — *On the Feminine in Human Nature*.

— Clare Hansson

Down Limerick Lane

“What’s this?” I said to my gardener.
 “That there’s a bust of R. Wagner.”
 “I say, just the job,
 I’ll give you ten bob.”
 “Righto, I bain’t much of a bargainer.”

— NonesuCH

The amateur diva Matilda
 Was wife to a musical builder.
 He made her a booth
 Her penchant to soothe
 For screeching the part of Brünnhilde.

Next door lived a vexatious gilder,
 And hate of the *Ring* had long filled ‘er:
 So she sprayed that soprano
 With gold-plated guano,
 And then on the barbecue grilled ‘er.

— TR

A French Connection

So appreciated was Wagner in literary France, that a monthly journal devoted entirely to him, *La revue wagnérienne*, was founded in Paris in February 1885. Its aim was to promote Wagner not only as a composer but also as a poet and the creator of a new form of art. The journal included translations of his essays and libretti, studies of him, book reviews, poems, press clippings, occasional lithographs by painters Henri Fantin-Latour and Odilon Redon and also a bulletin of performances of Wagner’s works throughout Europe.

Issued 1885-1888, *La revue wagnérienne* was founded by Edouard Dujardin, poet, novelist and disciple of Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé. Dujardin shared editorial duties with co-founder Théodore de Wyzewa, French musicologist born in Russia of Polish descent, and English aristocrat and Germanophile, Houston Stewart Chamberlain who married Wagner’s daughter Eva in 1908.

The journal was closely associated with the Symbolists, for Dujardin was also founder and editor of the Symbolist magazine, *La revue indépendante*. Mallarmé and other symbolists contributed to both journals.

Of Mallarmé’s essay *Richard Wagner, rêveries d’un poète français* in *La revue wagnérienne* August 1885 it has been suggested that it was “more the *idea* of Wagner that inspired his reverie rather than any specific work”. For Mallarmé had had very little experience of Wagner’s music until Dujardin took him to a Sunday concert.

A special tribute to Wagner in the *Revue* January 1886 included sonnets by Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Charles Morice, René Ghil and Stuart Merrill. Of these Symbolist poets Mallarmé and Verlaine are the better known. But Morice and Ghil were important theorists of the movement. Morice theorised in *La littérature de tout à l’heure* (1889) “on the need for vagueness in poetry, for great thoughts to be veiled rather than clearly expressed”.

Ghil, impressed by Wagner’s ideas of the integration of poetry and music, propounded “a theory by application of which poetry was to become indistinguishable from music“. In his essays *La traité du verbe* and *De la poésie scientifique* he expounded “the doctrine of *l’instrumentation verbale*”, namely that the musical quality of a poem could be intensified and the theme orchestrated by the conscious use of certain groups of vowels and consonants as if parts of an orchestra. Merrill’s poems *Les gammes* and *Les fastes* were experiments in versification and in orchestration of verse, very likely in response to Ghil’s theory.

'Parsifal' is the kind of opera that starts at six o'clock. After it has been going three hours, you look at your watch and it says 6.20.

David Randolph

Wagner used to read the libretti of his operas to his friends; I am glad I was not there.

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

What were Woglande, Wellgunde and Flosshilde doing in the water? They were performing Gene Kelly's 'I'm Singing in the Rhine.'

Herr Wagner is a composer who has beautiful moments but awful quarter hours.

I grant you that the 'Nibelungen Ring' is funny, although mythical, but it is not a patch on the story of the coming into being of the Sydney Opera House.

Anna Russell

I have been told that Wagner's music is better than it sounds.

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

'Lobengrin' to us ordinary mortals seemed something like the whistling of the wind through the keyholes of a cathedral, which has a dreamy charm for a little while, but by and by you long for the sound even of a street organ to rush in and break the monotony.

George Eliot

The leitmotiv system of the 'Ring' strikes me as a sort of vast musical city directory.

You say I don't know the rhythmical changes in it, madam? There are no rhythmical changes in 'Götterdämmerung'... It goes on and on from half-past five till midnight like a damned old cart-horse.

Sir Thomas Beecham

Hans Sachs was a master singer and a good cobbler to boot.

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

'Tannhäuser' is a music one must hear several times. I am not going again.

Gioacchino Rossini

I like Wagner's music better than any other music. It is so loud that one can talk the whole time without people hearing what one says. That is a great advantage.

The principle of the endless melody is the perpetual becoming of a music that never had any reason for starting, any more than it has any reason for ending.

Wagner, thank the fates, is no hypocrite. He says out what he means, and he usually means something nasty.

James Huneker

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

Wagner's aunt was so musical that when she came to a five-barred gate, she stopped and sang the spots on her veil.

The frog is a diligent songster, having a good voice but no ear. The libretto of his favorite opera, as written by Aristophanes, is brief, simple and effective — 'brekekex-koax'; the music is apparently by that eminent composer, Richard Wagner.

Ambrose Bierce