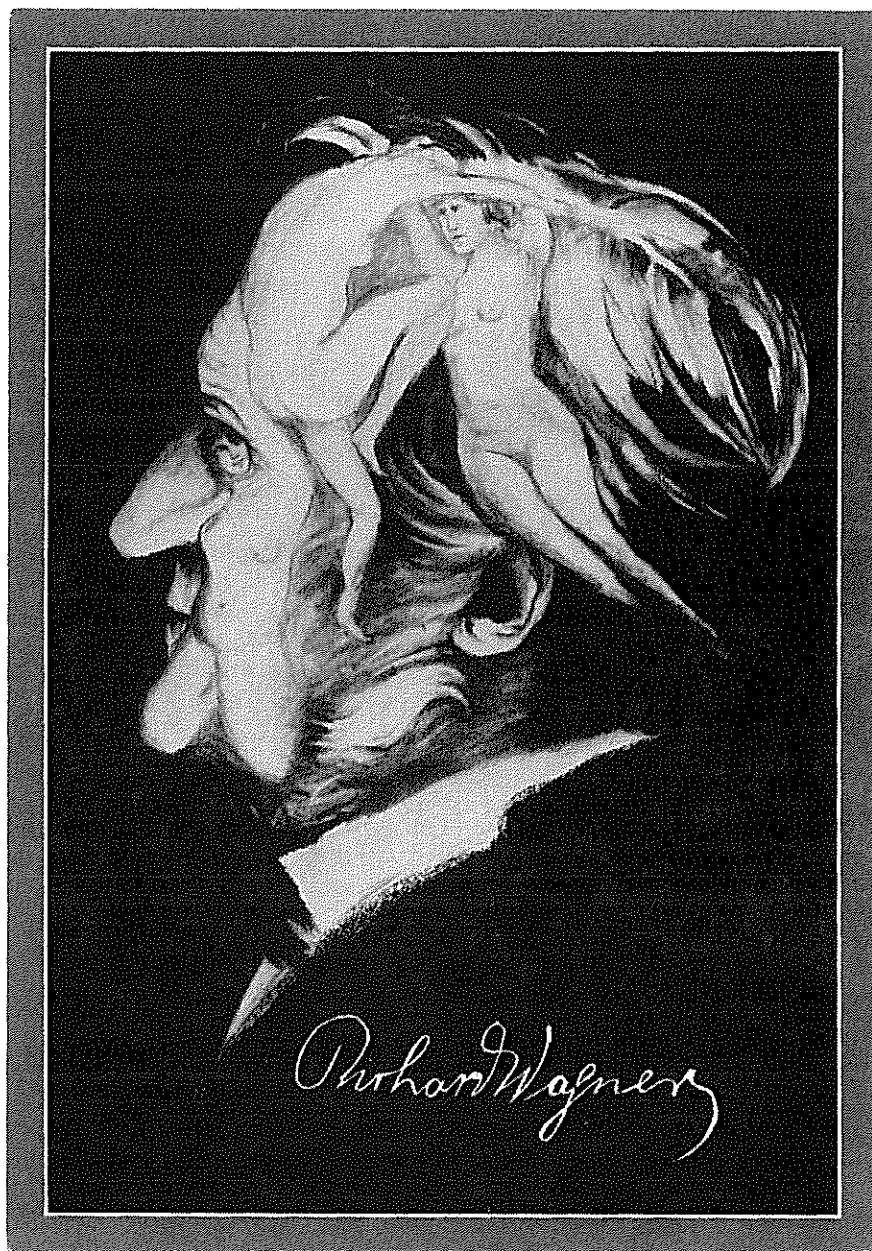


LEITMOTIVE

THE JOURNAL OF THE WAGNER SOCIETY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

...Wagner's music expresses, as does no other art, repressed and highly charged contents of the psyche, and that is the reason for its uniquely disturbing effect... Some people are made to feel by it that they are in touch with the depths of their own personalities for the first time... The passionate nature of it, its unwonted depth and its frequently erotic character also explain why it is like being in love. Most important of all, it is the abandoned

utterance of what has been in some way forbidden...



—Bryan Magee

LETTERS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Progress Report

To Verna Parino and the members of the Wagner Society of Northern California,

Thank you for your continued interest in following my career. 1988 was a great year for me. I made my European debut in Montpellier, France as the Flying Dutchman. I subsequently performed this role in Limoges, France and at the Deutsche Oper Berlin. As most of you will know, I also had the good fortune of being able to sing one performance of *Holländer* at my "home opera" in San Francisco when José Van Dam was unable to go on due to a cold. I also performed in 1988 the title role in Scymanowsky's *King Roger* in Bremen, West Germany; Pizarro in *Fidelio* at the Carmel Bach Festival; and Kurwenal in a concert of Act III of *Tristan und Isolde* for Radio France in Paris, with René Kollo and Karan Armstrong.

After enjoying a relaxing Christmas break I am off on the road again. My travels this year take me to Winnipeg for my first Jochanaan in *Salomé* January 20 to February 10. Then I am off to Vienna for a concert performance of Schrekers' *Irrelohe* for the Austrian Radio March 15. From March 20 to April 16 I'll be in Miami doing the Four Villains in *Tales of Hoffmann*, then off to Paris for a concert of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* conducted by Pierre Boulez. Then from the end of April until the end of June I am in Basel for more Jochanaans. On Bastille Day I sing Don Fernando in Orange, France and then return to Montpellier for *Salomé* again, this time in French. Then back to Basel in September for more *Salomés*, and then to San Francisco for *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. It would be fun if someone from the Wagner Society here would happen to be close enough to catch up with me for any of these performances.

In 1988 I also returned to do further work with Hans Hotter at his home in Munich. I can not stress enough how important this work has been for me, and I intend to continue whenever possible. As you will recall, I first studied with him using the grant I received from the Wagner Society of Northern California, and I remain grateful. Thank you again and good luck in your future activities.

Monte Pederson

This is exhausting just to read through! The

life of a singer in the age of jet travel is clearly a fast-paced one. At least one Society member is known to be heading to Miami to hear the Hoffmann, so we hope to have a report in a future issue. And of course many of us were able to catch Mr. Pederson's splendid performance as the Dutchman. The Society is pleased to have been able to make a contribution to Mr. Pederson's career through our Grant Program, and most gratified to observe his progress. -Ed.

"Improve" Wagner?

Misguided attempts to "improve" or modernize Wagner's stage directions and settings are not new.

In an old book store I found an issue of *ETUDE* magazine dated April, 1938 which I pounced upon as it had a portrait of Wagner on its cover. It contains an article by Artur Bodanzky, Senior Conductor of the Metropolitan Opera, in which he writes:

"To my mind, Wagner stands beside Sophocles and Shakespeare, as the third great foundation pillar of drama. His music represents but a part of his gigantic achievement. He conceived his own opera plots, from sagas and legends; acquainted himself with the minutest details of research in order to work them out in accurate fashion; wove his own dramatic libretti, with their plots and characters and dialogue; and bound the whole structure around with stage directions of such richness of content and

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David Dalto, Editor

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TRISTAN ON RADIO

By Debora Greger

And now, over the swell of sea into storm,
in rigging even more symphonic,
a sailor sings of what curves away –
ship that made a night's companion
gone, moth to lamp lit by a woman
and held aloft, beacon over the shoals
of his body. She turned from him to a window
so black it was blind to anything deeper.
If he was bent on leaving, why wait
till first light?

So, scanning the unmoving
ruffle of canvas waves, he sings for a wind
and its woman, curtain rising on a muslin ship
taking the stage, the roll of chords
over an Isolde adrift in her own story,
making the song of a man she knows nothing of
cover herself.

From the dress circle,
a gloved hand reaching tiers down
to resubmerge a toy ship – no, farther:
over radio's remote susurrations,
a sailor sings the last bars and then
it's the usual matter of love and death
up close. From his end of the deck,
Tristan sights for land where, when a woman
who has healed him raises his own sword
against him, this time he would fail
to stay her hand with all he could muster,
a look fierce with undefended islands.
Two voices braid into upbraiding each other
in words wooded with consonants –
into an announcer's translated promises, frenzied
with revision: *Isolde's own magic;*
or a broader one – say, love; or unhappiness
love-induced; or desire passing for love;
or many other things – backlit backdrop
the ship makes from on a tide of applause.
From the couch where she's languished,
a hefty soprano springs up for curtain calls,
done with the easy part, the dying for love.

Poet Debora Greger teaches in the Creative Writing program at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and has published two volumes of poetry. Among her recent honors is the Peter I. B. Lavan Younger Poets Award. "Tristan on Radio" is reprinted by permission from and: Poems by Debora Greger, copyright © 1985 by Princeton University Press.

LETTERS...

such precision of detail that to deviate from even the slightest of Wagner's own indications is enough to ruin a performance.

"I know from experience. In 1910, during the time that I served as Chief Musical Director of the Royal Theater of Baden, in Mannheim, I had a burning urge to try to remount *Tannhäuser* in a freer, more modern style. I had no wish for sensationalism. Simply, I wanted to make certain changes in setting and mounting which, I believed, would make it more alive. Such experiments had been successfully carried through with Mozart, Shakespeare, and other masters; and I thought I could do it with Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. Well, I found that it could not be done. New sets were made, my new directions were carefully coached — I coached them myself — and when the performance was ready it was not *Tannhäuser* at all. I was able to see this, and Mannheim speedily went back to the orthodox presentation. The music, the plot, the stage action were all the same — but a deviation from Wagner's own superb directions for the performance led to disaster. Wagner's imaginative powers were so sure and so intense that he was able to set down, once and for all time, the only

way in which his works should be mounted, to insure their proper effect."

Perhaps even the great Toscanini would have agreed. In his biography of the famed conductor, *The Maestro*, Howard Taubman writes, "Toscanini had proved what he had believed all along and what he came to hold with undeviating conviction throughout his career — that the old operas, which have endured the batterings of generations of self-appointed improvers, have the greatest power if one goes back to first sources and does them truthfully."

Harold Dreyer

With the debate over "Deviationist" productions of the Wagner works showing no signs of cooling, in these pages or elsewhere, it seems only fair to let the anti-Deviationists get in an after-the-fact first blow. At least a few fortunate members will be able to do a direct comparison between New York's traditional (or old-fashioned, depending on your outlook) Ring and the more modern (or trendy) versions provided by Götz Friedrich for Berlin on their Kennedy Center visit, or Harry Kupfer for Bayreuth. This journal expects to be publishing the results. -Ed.

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