LEITMOTIVE

Journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California | Fall 2019

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CONTENTS

Leitmotive is the official journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California and serves as a platform for inquiry and discovery of the works, life, and influence of Richard Wagner (1813-1883). We welcome submissions from scholars affiliated with academic institutions, performing artists, Society members, and anyone with a keen interest in Wagner studies.

All submissions to the journal are subject to review by the Editorial Advisory Board. Reviews are assigned by the editor. The opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Wagner Society of Northern California.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We are back! It has been a year since the last issue of *Leitmotive* and much has happened within Northern California's Wagnerian community. The marquee event of the past year, at least in terms of Wagner, was, of course, the return of Francesca Zambello's production of the *Ring* to the War Memorial Opera House in June 2018. San Francisco Opera assembled an outstanding cast for the work headed by bass-baritone Greer Grimsley, mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton, soprano Karita Mattila, and tenor Brandon Jovanovich, but the withdrawal of the scheduled Brünnhilde before rehearsals began introduced some uncertainty. Fortunately, Swedish soprano Irène Theorin, an experienced Brünnhilde, stepped in and added her gleaming voice and heartfelt portrayal to the ensemble. Wagner's *Ring*, once again, rocked the city of San Francisco!

Additionally, the Wagner Society of Northern California continued to provide a platform for new ideas and discoveries with its monthly lecture series in San Francisco. Looking back, there were so many excellent presentations that it is difficult to point out highlights without giving a full run-down of the entire schedule. Yet, two lectures come to mind when I reflect on the past year: John Mastrogiovanni discussing "Brünnhilde the Redeemer" and Jasmin Solfaghari's thrilling account of staging a new production of Wagner's *Ring* in Odense with just two weeks of rehearsals. These presentations feature prominently in the current issue of *Leitmotive*.

With *Ring*-fever gripping San Francisco last summer, WSNC's three, day-long *Ring* Forums featured an A-list of Wagnerian thinkers speaking to packed rooms of attentive audiences. Among the presenters was John Mastrogiovanni, chairman of the Wagner Society of Southern California and a regular speaker at the Bayreuth Festival. Mastrogiovanni, who is also a minister, was already a known quantity locally. In 2017, he gave a particularly memorable WSNC talk on *Parsifal* as the encapsulation—distilled and matured throughout a life's work—of Wagner's views on art, philosophy, and the meaning of it all. It was epic and enlightening. It was also that rare two-part lecture where everyone returned after the brief lunch break; you just didn't want to miss anything he had to say. His equally thought-provoking Brünnhilde lecture from last summer is our lead article.

German-born Persian stage director Jasmin Solfaghari's accomplishments include directing opera, writing books, and giving master classes. For *Leitmotive*, she recalls an unusual professional experience from last year. Preparations for a *Ring* production were underway in Odense until the company found itself without a director two weeks before the orchestra was to play that first E flat chord in *Das Rheingold*.

Solfaghari received a panicked call and essentially parachuted into the middle of a disorganized and tense situation in Denmark. With opening night days away, she quickly set about "putting on a show," which in this case included making necessary changes to the sets, costumes, lighting, and stage action for four lengthy operas. Operating on little sleep and a strong sense of common purpose, she and her Odense colleagues scored a success.

Swedish soprano Birgit Nilsson, an artist who needs no introduction among *Leitmotive* readers, would have been 100 years old last year. Her centenary was celebrated, in part, by the release of two massive CD boxed sets and a new documentary, *Birgit Nilsson: A League of Her Own*, which aired on PBS and was screened by WSNC. David Shengold reviews the film, which is now available on Blu-ray and DVD, and explores Nilsson's impressive career in San Francisco, a history that is neglected by the filmmakers. Shengold offers an overview of this legendary performer who made her American operatic debut in 1956 with San Francisco Opera and became one of the most beloved performers to appear before the public in Northern California.

Lastly, this summer saw the passing of two major advocates and critical minds in the Wagnerian milieu: Father Owen Lee and Bryan Magee. WSNC board of directors member Kate McKinney recounts Lee's career and praises his ability to inspire potential Wagnerians across generations. Longtime WSNC member and *Leitmotive* contributor, Lisa Burkett, offers a moving double tribute to the legacies of both Lee and Magee.

—JSM

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN L. MASTROGIOVANNI, D.MIN. is the chairman of the Wagner Society of Southern California and has been an avid Wagnerian since the age of five. By the age of 9, he had piano scores open and was underlining leitmotifs and studying Wagner's operas. He has a Doctorate in Ministry, and has been a minister for over 35 years. When asked why he chose a vocation in the clergy, he will tell you that Wagner's repetitive message of the redemption of the human condition inspired him. He is the author of a half-dozen books including *Parsifal: The Will and Redemption.*

DAVID SHENGOLD is a critic and lecturer with a Berkeley M.A. in Comparative Literature. He regularly writes for *Opera News*, *Opera*, *Opéra Magazine*, *Opernwelt* and many other venues and has written program essays for the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, ROH Covent Garden, the San Francisco Symphony and the Wexford and Glyndebourne Festivals. He resides in Philadelphia and New York City.

JASMIN SOLFAGHARI was born in Freiburg, Germany and spent her first six years in Tehran, Iran. She studied stage directing in Hamburg under Götz Friedrich and held leading positions at Stadttheater Bremerhaven, Deutsche Oper Berlin and was Professor at Musikhochschule Leipzig. She gives masterclasses and lectures widely in Italy, Brazil, Israel, Germany, the United States, and China. The English version of her book, *Operaguide for Beginners*, will be published in Spring 2020.

KATE MCKINNEY is PR & Communications Manager for San Francisco Ballet and a member of the board of directors for the Wagner Society of Northern California. She studied music performance at the University of South Carolina, where she received a grant to research and direct the Southeastern premiere of Aaron Copland's little-known children's opera, *The Second Hurricane.*

LISA BURKETT has been a member of The Wagner Society of Northern California since 1982. She has contributed several articles to *Leitmotive–The Wagner Quarterly* and served as its Associate Editor from 2007–2012.

CALVIN "CAL" PEDRANTI (1922-2001) came to Wagner in finest Romantic fashion: confined to a sanatorium for tuberculosis and recovering from surgery, the sixteen-year-old Pedranti heard a Metropolitan Opera broadcast of *Tannhäuser* featuring Lauritz Melchoir and was instantly enraptured by the music. This fascination became a life-long passion, and the focus of his work. Educated at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, his paintings have been exhibited since 1961, including the 1979 Pacific Northwest Wagner Festival in Seattle and a 1980 retrospective at Gallery Become in San Francisco. Pedranti was a longtime member of the WSNC and a donation of his artworks was made to the Society.

On the cover: *Brünnhilde's immolation—Götterdämmerung*, oil on canvas by Cal Pedranti.

BRÜNNHILDE: REDEEMING THE REDEEMER

JOHN L. MASTROGIOVANNI, D.MIN.

When one thinks of Wagner's heroic characters, it is easy to see them slaying dragons, obtaining a coveted ring, winning song competitions, and even claiming a high-priestly position over the Holy Grail. Yet, to see Wagner's works this way is actually a misconstruing of his sense of heroism. Our usual embrace of heroism implies conquering a formidable foe, like Radames in Verdi's *Aïda*; the Wagnerian hero is different.

In all of Wagner's operas, particularly from *Der Fliegende Holländer* to *Parsifal,* it wasn't so much about conquering armies, slaying dragons, or obtaining a powerful ring, but the redemption and transformation of an individual and society. While all the obvious trappings of such heroic acts are present, the focus of Wagner is that such heroism never really made the protagonist heroic, or more importantly, a "complete person."

Wagner's male protagonists are always initially amorphous, lacking the necessary ingredients to become who they truly were. In both *Holländer* and *Tannhäuser,* we really don't have a masculine "hero," but a troubled, helpless protagonist who is his own antagonist. The only way to bring the transformational dilemma to its necessary redemptive expression, is for a selfless counterpart to elevate him back to his true self. Of course, the said counterpart was none other than a woman, the feminine counterpart to the masculine. As outlined in my 2014 book, *Parsifal: The Will and Redemption*, we trace an overview of this masculine and feminine development beginning in *Lohengrin* and concluding in *Parsifal,* with the emphasis on the masculine aspect. In this article, based on my forthcoming book, I will focus on the Wagnerian *feminine catalyst* that brings about transformation and redemption in the hero.

When we look at the story-arch Wagner suggests, the journey of this saintly, romantic, masculine hero begins in *Lohengrin,* with Gottfried, furthered in *Der Ring Des Nibelungen* through a couple of characters, but the ultimate is Siegfried, and concluding with Parsifal, in the opera which bears his name. What some may see as the intermittent works of *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (written between the second and third acts of *Siegfried* and the beginning of *Götterdämmerung),* actually reveals the same story, but in another arc that begins with *Tannhäuser.* Accordingly, I argue that *Tannhäuser, Tristan und Isolde*, and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* are also a trilogy within themselves.

We first meet our male protagonist in the finale of *Lohengrin,* as the formally victimized and newly incarnated Gottfried. He is the primordial reemerging masculine quality without definition, except what is briefly spoken of him earlier by Elsa in the first act and the items Lohengrin gives him at the conclusion of the opera. Though his name is Gottfried, *God's Peace,* there is hardly any peace at this point, and we

won't see such Divine peace until the finale of *Parsifal.* Gottfried is given the iconic symbols of the horn, ring, and sword, of the forthcoming Siegfried of the *Ring.* It was as if the entire opera of *Lohengrin* was as an earth without form and Wagner took the ingredients of it to form a character not seen until the very end; only to convey, that the beginning is in the end.

Brünnhilde by Arthur Rackham, 1910.

In the *Ring* this masculine quality is reincarnated in Siegfried, who begins much like Gottfried, ignorant and unknowing, but dies incomplete and not fully developed in *Götterdämmerung.* Siegfried dies alienated from and in one sense, because of, his counterpart Brünnhilde. Ultimately, Siegfried perishes, never realizing his true self. This is not only clear in the drama, but also in the music. The final depiction of Siegfried's leitmotif exemplified at the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung*, is also incomplete. The protagonist portrayed as Siegfried doesn't become the full expression of who he is until he is reincarnated as Parsifal.

While in the Wagnerian belvedere the masculine depictions are fatherless, unaware and impulsive. For Wagner a "person" is not masculine, nor for that matter feminine; but the union of those two qualities. In that union the Divine is revealed. Here the most important aspect of the emancipation from the "lower brute nature" (as Wagner called it) of this world, is where the feminine abides. It is through the interaction and interconnection of the masculine and feminine qualities that develop their awareness of their oneness.

In the story-arch of *Lohengrin,* the *Ring*, and *Parsifal,* the most pronounced development of this transformational liberation is Brünnhilde in the *Ring.* Like the masculine, the feminine must go through a process to unveil her true self. But for the feminine the journey is different. The feminine begins with Elsa in *Lohengrin* who experiences separation from all aspects of love. First, it's the loss of her father (with never a mention of her mother), then the loss of her brother, and then she is accused of fratricide by the man she was to marry (Friedrich of Telramund). Finally, she is separated from Lohengrin, her husband of one day. To make matters more difficult, Elsa never denies the allegations of fratricide and seems ignorant of Ortrud's involvement. Elsa is unknowing because of what was taken from her. In contrast, her masculine counterparts all arrive without ever having known such connection. Gottfried arrives after his father's death. Siegfried arrives fatherless and motherless, and Parsifal is also fatherless.

Why is this important? Because these works direct the observer to the view that the creation of the lower brute nature was the desire for knowledge through egoism, thus creating a false ignorant self. True knowing occurs through selfless love, compassion, and subsequently the enlightenment that unveils the authentic self and Divinity as well. The story-arc beginning with Elsa must also have a brief mention about the issue of "the name," the symbol of identity. When Lohengrin arrives, Elsa is never to ask his name, but when she does, separation occurs. This is the dilemma of the lower egoistic world. The masculine and feminine qualities that make up Divinity remain separate and their true self remains concealed. Wagner explained why this is significant in a letter to Herman Franck on May 30th, 1846:

> From the time I first became familiar with the subject, separation, the idea of separation struck me as being the most characteristic in uniquely distinguishing feature … The symbolic meaning of the tale I can best sum up as follows: contact between a metaphysical phenomenon and human nature and the impossibility that such contact will last. …When Elsa now call's on Lohengrin to punish her for her failing, the latter replies: 'No other sentence may suffice for thee! My heart and thine equally pain as rent! Apart, asunder ever doomed to be, this is our sentence, our punishment!'

When we arrive at the *Ring*, Siegmund, as a precursor to Siegfried, is also nameless. When asked his name by Hunding, Siegmund says he is called Wehwalt. He states this not as a lie, but because this is the only way he perceives himself, Woeful. Later, after Hunding is asleep, Sieglinde and Siegmund find themselves enraptured with each other, and she gives Siegmund his name, his true identity. Notice that his name is given by the feminine counterpart. This reoccurs at the conclusion of *Die Walküre*, when Brünnhilde names her counterpart, Siegfried, though still in the womb of Sieglinde. Finally, in the second act of *Parsifal* we see Kundry do the same when she calls Parsifal's name among the flower maidens. The libretto says that he repeats it as if recalling a dream, a distant memory. It is the feminine spiritual quality that aids the masculine in becoming aware or remembering who he is, making their union possible.

This is another key point regarding the feminine. The discovery of one's identity is not finding what was lost or forming something new, but remembering who we truly are. However, the remembering is not simply about one's individual or egoistic identity; that is what creates the separation and fall from Divine consciousness to begin with. Our authentic identity is found with the masculine and feminine qualities united in loving union. In another way, Wagner opens this to us in *Tristan und Isolde*, Act II, Scene 2:

> Tristian: "Tristan you, I Isolde, no longer Tristan."
> Isolde: "You Isolde, Tristan I, no longer Isolde."

This is not the extinguishing of one's identity, but the discovery of a greater one through union. Nor is it about two egos trying to be together, but rather the giving of one's awareness into the other.

In the case of Siegfried and Brünnhilde, the masculine is thoroughly unaware while the feminine has a latent memory of loving connection. It is the feminine who is to rekindle the memory of the masculine. Wagner said it quite profoundly in a letter dated January 26th, 1854:

> Not even Siegfried alone (man alone) is the complete 'human being': he is merely half, one with Brünnhilde, does he become the redeemer; one man alone cannot do everything; many are needed, and a suffering, self-immolating woman finally becomes the true, conscious redeemer: for it is love which is really 'the eternal feminine' itself.

It takes the one awareness to awaken the other. When we meet Brünnhilde, she appears to be nothing more than a daughter who loves her father, Wotan, and thoughtlessly performs what he wills: "To Wotan's will you speak, when you tell what you will what am I, if not your will alone?" (*Die Walküre*, Act II, Scene 2). In this statement is both the bondage and the emancipation. Wotan is the personification of the quasi religious/political system born of the lower, egotistic, brute nature. For the unveiling of true divinity, Wotan and his world must come to an end. (The same applies to Titurel in *Parsifal*.) In the same scene, Wotan tells Brünnhilde, "These are the bonds that bind me. I became ruler through treaties; by my treaties I am now enslaved."

Brünnhilde's bondage is her thoughtless love for her father and her almost mindless desire to do his bidding. For her this is not deliberate religious or political zeal, nor arrogant submission to a cause; it is all she knows. However, it will be her pure love, fully developed, that will cause liberation from Wotan's world and the ability to give birth to another. The second act of *Die Walküre* reveals Wagner's idea of the world. He tells us that the rituals of religion and loyalties of the state are all egoistic perversions. To merely love what the gods tell us to love, is not love at all! More so it is a powerful form of slavery; and in this case, in Wotan's world, the slave is not allowed the realization that they are enslaved.

Brünnhilde is put in an inner predicament, which causes her true self to begin to emerge. She is commanded by Wotan to make sure Siegmund dies in battle. This saddens her, but she will do as she is told. In Act II Scene 3, when she arrives to tell Siegmund of his fate, she is confronted with two things she never saw before; a transcendent love and a defiance of the system because of it. For the first time she witnesses the revelation of what emancipated love looks like. Siegmund refuses to be separated from Sieglinde, even if the ruler of Valhalla says so. He knows if he were to leave her, she would be back in the clutches of a loveless life. He sees it better for her to die by his sword than to live a life of torment. In that moment, Brünnhilde's inner sight is expanded and her sense of compassion is emboldened to defy Wotan's world. Thus, she declares that both Siegmund and Sieglinde shall live and that she will defend him in battle! Yet, as we know, her defiance isn't enough and, in the end, Siegmund is killed. Nevertheless, Brünnhilde is motivated by something far greater than what Wotan represents and boldly takes Sieglinde to refuge.

American soprano Lillian Nordica as Brünnhilde. Photo: Aime Dupont.

In Act III of *Die Walküre,* we see the clash of what Wotan represents and the emerging Divine compassion within Brünnhilde. She is condemned by her father to be a mere mortal! What horror if all you have known is Valhalla! However, in Wag-

ner's economy, being mortal, a human, is the necessary substance for truly being Divine. At the conclusion of the opera, Wotan puts Brünnhilde to sleep, surrounding her with the fires of transformation and faces his own looming conclusion. In the timeless state of sleep, she awaits her counterpart whom she named earlier. When he arrives and awakens her; Brünnhilde is conscious again and her journey toward Divinity unfolds.

In the final *Ring* opera, *Götterdämmerung,* we find Brünnhilde in the joy of love. Unfortunately, Siegfried is still of the lower world, looking for heroic battles and victories. Hence, Brünnhilde must release him to grow further. He leaves their fiery rock of bliss, leaving behind only a token of his love in the form of the infamous ring.

Like previously with Siegmund and Sieglinde, two things occur for Brünnhilde. First, her sister Waltraute arrives and tells her that Wotan is slowly dying and requests that she give up the insidious ring to save the gods. This is a last effort to keep the old, quasi-religious/political system from dying. Once again, Brünnhilde is thrust into conflict. She believes in a love that Siegfried is not yet capable of, and while she is enraptured by that vision, he is in the lower world pledging himself to another woman (Gutrune)! Secondly, a betrayal for Brünnhilde is about to occur. Her very counterpart will come disguised as another (Gunther) and take her captive into a world as corrupt as the one from which she was originally banished. The Divine masculine and feminine qualities are separate and alone.

By the conclusion of the second act of *Götterdämmerung,* Brünnhilde is plotting Siegfried's death with Gunther and Hagen. Why? Because the old, quasi-religious/political system demands it. This harkens back to Elsa's non-denial of Gottfried's drowning in *Lohengrin.* Though it is apparent that Ortrud was behind the so-called death, she either manipulated Elsa to do the deed or she did it herself, convincing Elsa it was her fault. We do know from the text that Ortrud was an emissary of Wotan and his religious/political system. Like Elsa, Brünnhilde condemns her counterpart to death. We also see this in *Parsifal,* when Kundry tells Parsifal that when Christ was dying on the Cross, she mocked him and caused many future saviors their demise.

By the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung,* Brünnhilde says: "Through his most valiant deed... did you condemn him to endure the doom that on you had fallen..." (*Götterdämmerung,* Act III, Scene 3)

Awakened by what she observed in Siegmund, Brünnhilde goes further:

> ...the doom that on you had fallen; he, truest of all, must betray me, that wise a woman might grow! Know I now all thy need? All things, all things, all now know I. All to me is revealed.

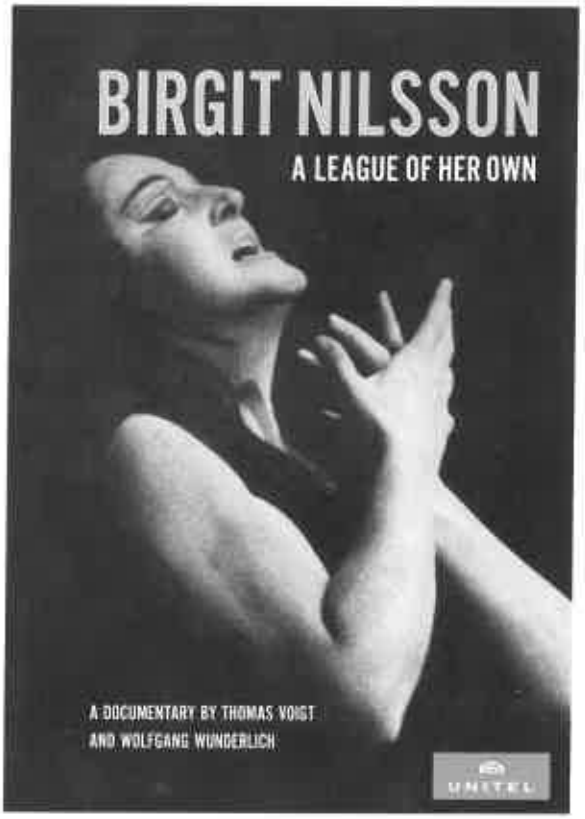
Siegfried has been murdered by Hagen while hunting and is now laid to rest upon a funeral pyre. Like the conclusion of *Die Walküre,* where Brünnhilde slept in a ring of fire awaiting her counterpart; now in *Götterdämmerung,* Siegfried is in a death sleep in a ring of fire, waiting to be awakened by Brünnhilde. As the fire brightens, so is Brünnhilde's awareness. Now she's truly aware. She is no longer ignorant; she is *knowing and free.* She is no longer a servant or slave to a world influenced by Wotan. The statement above made by Brünnhilde is mostly translated as, "All things, all things all now know I. **All to me is revealed."** In German it reads, "Alles, Alles, Alles weiß ich, **Alles ward mir nun frei."** When mechanically translated it really says, "Every

thing, Everything, Everything know I, **Everything was, I am now free."** There's the ultimate unveiling of Brünnhilde's love and enlightenment; it emancipates her from the lower, brute nature which dominates the world. Her discovery is not just a transcendent love, but a selfless, sacrificial love; a quality completely opposite of what Wotan represents and the world he rules. Thus, through her love's liberation, she initiates the redemption of her counterpart. The vision she had of love with Siegfried will now grow and take on a new form.

Brünnhilde mounts her horse Grane and they ride toward the fire of transformation. She throws the treacherous ring to the Rhinemaidens and with a leap they plunge into the flames. The fire blazes, burning down the surrounding hall. The Rhine overflows, seemingly putting out the fire, though in that moment it's as if the flames traverse the land and ignite Valhalla. The castle of the gods bursts into flames and Wotan's pagan, religious/political system comes to an end. The powerful leitmotif of Redemption (also known as the Glorification of Brünnhilde) is heard soaring in the violins. Then, for one last time, the leitmotif of Siegfried is heard, but incomplete! Its melodic conclusion is replaced with the leitmotif of the Twilight of the Gods. As the opera concludes with the final A-flat of Redemption played high in the violins, there is now a new world. In a moment of darkness, several octaves lower, the violins play an ominous A-flat once again. It is the leitmotif of the Grail in *Parsifal*. The world of Monsalvat emerges; soon Kundry (the knowing one) will arrive on a horse. She will meet her counterpart, Parsifal, awaken him, and together they will complete their journey, revealing Divinity and the fullness of redemption.

NILSSON REMEMBERED: A REVIEW ESSAY

David Shengold



Birgit Nilsson: A League of Her Own. A Film by Thomas Voigt and Wolfgang Wunderlich. Unitel, 2018. 89 minutes (DVD).

Swedish dramatic soprano Birgit Nilsson, born one hundred years ago on a farm near the west coast of Sweden, remains—more than a dozen years after her death on Christmas 2005—one of the benchmark vocal artists of the 20th century. Nilsson's remarkable stage career lasted from 1946 through 1982. Her recorded legacy—studio products and live tapings—includes complete operas by Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Verdi, and even Bartók. But her greatest renown derives from her spectacular achievements in the heavier roles of Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Giacomo Puccini. The latter's posthumously premièred, high-lying Turandot had some brilliant exponents in her eponymous opera's much-heralded first wave of productions: Rosa Raisa (the creatrix in Milan, 1926), Maria Jeritza, Mária Németh, Lotte Lehmann, Florence Easton, Eva Turner. Yet within a decade after its appearance the opera's viability lagged, its title role largely the province of specialist singers. But the advent of Birgit Nilsson and her fearlessly produced upper register revived the work in the late 1950s, leading to productions the world over and its revitalization as a frequently produced and recorded work.

In the German wing, Nilsson cannot be said to have 'reset' the interpretation of a particular role or restored it to public favor. One might venture such a credit to her frequent colleague Leonie Rysanek in regard to Senta and—even more so—the Kaiserin in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. Just as Rysanek always resisted Isolde due to

Nilsson's triumphant example, the Swedish singer always demurred attempting the Kaiserin after the Austrian diva's worldwide successes in it. Nilsson did take on *Frau*'s *other* nameless title role, the Färberin, as her final new part: the all-too-human Dyer's Wife suited her straightforward, earthy manner. Nilsson did perform, at some point, almost all of the Wagnerian roles, small and large, that suited her voice. Even though her Elisabeth outpolled her Venus among critics, she did pioneer (at the Old Met in March 1966 as well as on a later Berlin-based recording) the use of one singer for both parts. Gwyneth Jones and Eva Marton followed suit in Götz Friedrich's 1972–1978 Bayreuth production. To the ire of Rudolf Bing who had contracted Nilsson for Senta at the Metropolitan Opera, she gave up the part early, not liking to sing, "Ich bin ein Kind und weiss nicht was ich singe." ("I am a child and know not what I sing"). But as Isolde and Brünnhilde she joined the pantheon (Frida Leider, Kirsten Flagstad, Helen Traubel) of the very greatest exponents of the era of clearly assessable recordings and broadcasts.

Birgit Nilsson (Brünnhilde) and James King (Siegmund) in *Die Walküre* at San Fra

A new documentary has appeared to commemorate Nilsson's centenary. Co-directors Thomas Voigt and Wolfgang Wunderlich's previous documentaries include biographical works on soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, operetta composer/conductor Robert Stolz and Wunderlich's own father, the legendary lyric tenor Fritz Wunderlich. The film starts with the famous incident during the 1964 taping of the Solti/Vienna Philharmonic *Götterdämmerung* in which a horse was led in to the Sofiensaal just as Nilsson as Brünnhilde apostrophizes Grane. This proves an apt introduction, as much of the film's hour and a half length consists of anecdotes, quotes and facts relatively familiar to anyone generally knowledgeable about Nilsson's career. (Perhaps the ideal viewer for such a film is not such a person.) For a while, it adheres to a logical chronology, starting with her strict if emotionally supportive upbringing, and then proceeding geographically as her career acquires new bases from Stockholm outward.

Her stage debut in Stockholm came as an overnight substitute in the proto-Wagnerian role of Weber's Agathe in 1946, not helped by the caustic conductor, Leo Blech.

More supportive was the great Fritz Busch, who put her through the paces of the tremendous challenges of Verdi's Lady Macbeth. Nilsson was to return to the role at La Scala in Milan and for three Met performances in 1964, the year she recorded a not unimpressive studio recording for Decca under Thomas Schippers. We see the end of the Sleepwalking Scene, up to a well-executed pianissimo top D flat, from a mid-60s Swedish television film.

Nilsson's first Wagnerian lead part was Senta. Tragically it was the only role her encouraging, amateur singer mother was to see the young soprano perform before dying in a bus accident. She sang several small parts when Hans Knappertsbush came to Stockholm in 1950 as guest conductor for the *Ring*. His enthusiasm for her Wagnerian potential led to an invitation to sing Sieglinde at the cycle that would reopen the Bayreuth Festival in 1951; yet Nilsson, adjudging herself unready, demurred, and the role was awarded to Regina Resnik. Her first international engagement—unmentioned in the documentary—was Elettra in *Idomeneo* at Glyndebourne in 1951, under Busch's baton. And she had further experience guesting at the Vienna State Opera—as Aïda, but also as Senta under Rudolf Kempe and Elsa under Rudolf Moralt. The latter assignment paired her for the first time with tenor Wolfgang Windgassen, her future partner in so many *Tannhäuser*, *Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* and—above all—*Tristan* performances (she says in an interview here that when she sang Isolde opposite other tenors, she felt like she was committing adultery). Windgassen—with whom she did not overlap in his brief tenure at the Met—was to join her as a fortuitous substitute for five San Francisco Opera *Tristan* performances in 1970 (his only stint with the company).

Opera, 1981. Photo: San Francisco Opera Archives.

Elsa did not stay long in Nilsson's repertory, but it did provide the vehicle for her eventual stage debut under Eugen Jochum's baton at Bayreuth in Summer 1954—Windgassen again was her partner. The documentary does not mention that Nilsson's actual Bayreuth debut took place the summer before, in a Beethoven's Ninth led by no less than Paul Hindemith. Ortrud, also marked in the *Lohengrin* score as a soprano role, might have proved a compelling part for her in late career, but she once said in a print interview that she was so impressed with Astrid Varnay's riveting portrait in their Bayreuth encounter that she never dared go near it.

With rather typical European blinders, the documentary only discusses and documents Nilsson's North American operatic appearances at the Metropolitan. There is some brief footage of a concert in Chicago and a rather pointless discussion of the promoter's failure to provide her with a spotlit entrance but one would not know

from this film that Nilsson appeared in staged opera in America except with the Met, at home or on tour. (Yes, the stories of Bing telling Corelli/Calaf to bite instead of kiss Nilsson/Turandot on tour are rehearsed in *Birgit Nilsson: A League of Her Own.*) Nilsson performed Puccini's ice princess with the local companies of Baltimore, Hartford, Miami, New Orleans, Newark, Seattle, and Philadelphia (which also presented her as Tosca). Besides Turandot (plus Leonore and Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera*), Nilsson sang her major Wagner roles (Isolde and the *Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* Brünnhildes) at Chicago Lyric Opera. But it was San Francisco in which—like Renata Tebaldi, Leonie Rysanek, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Inge Borkh, Rita Streich, and so many other operatic luminaries of the 1950s—she made her United States operatic debut. That event came as the *Walküre* Brünnhilde in October 1956 with familiar Wagnerian stars Ludwig Suthaus and Hans Hotter as well as Leonie Rysanek who would join Nilsson at her very last SFO appearances in the same opera, in November and December 1981 as Sieglinde.

Nilsson's farewell to San Francisco Opera in 1981 was as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*. Photo: San Francisco Opera Archives.

Right out of college, I was privileged to witness the first of those performances during Kurt Herbert Adler's final season as general director, in the course of which many of his major "draws" reappeared with the company. Rysanek and James King remained in blazing form, but apart from Kurt Rydl's solid Hunding the rest of the principal cast was as banal as was Otmar Suitner's leadership in the pit. Bay Area fans' golden memories of Nilsson's Wagnerian San Francisco adventures don't always concede that she had to contend with cut scores, reduced orchestras, and the less than world class conducting of Suitner, Hans Schwieger, and Silvio Varviso. (I would venture that the closest thing to a front-line conductor Nilsson encountered at San Francisco Opera was Francesco Molinari-Pradelli, who led her, Franco Tagliavini, and Pilar Lorengar in 1964's *Turandot.*) Having only heard Nilsson live in one of her Metropolitan Wagner concerts earlier that year, I was grateful for the chance to see her committed performance and to gauge the sheer impact of her monumental voice in the house. (I thus managed to hear one more live Nilsson outing than co-director Thomas Voigt, who in the DVD booklet essay mentions that he only heard her final

Vienna Elektra in 1982, six months before she left the operatic stage altogether in the same part in Stuttgart.) At that late point in Nilsson's career—I am fairly sure that San Francisco witnessed her last Brünnhildes onstage—the 63-year old soprano tended to sing sharp as much as a full tone on some attacks. But she was undeniably impressive, and some passages—especially "Fort, denn eile"—retained the superhuman quality I had heard on the Erich Leinsdorf, Georg Solti, and (live from Bayreuth) Karl Böhm recordings.

Over the years San Franciscans heard Nilsson as Beethoven's Leonore, Turandot, and the Färberin, while her Wagnerian assumptions between those "bookend" stand-alone *Walküre* stagings of 1956 and 1981 included *Tristan* in 1970 (with Windgassen and Janis Martin) and 1974 (with Jess Thomas and Yvonne Minton), plus 1972's *Ring* Cycles in which she shared Brünnhilde duties with her younger Swedish colleague, Berit Lindholm.

In the film we see and hear bits of Nilsson at a televised round table with her long-time—and evidently friendly—colleagues Martha Mödl and Astrid Varnay. These two phenomenal singing actresses—favorites of genius director Wieland Wagner in his productions at Bayreuth and Stuttgart—had set the interpretive bar extremely high for Isolde and Brünnhilde in the years just before Nilsson emerged as a truly international Wagnerian heroine. Their strengths in meaningful declamation and physical enactment of character were sometimes used as a critical cudgel against the Swedish singer in the years during which her dramatic achievements were still developing, a process only brought to maturity—the film would have it, and Nilsson from her published statements might have agreed—through her work with Wieland on *Tristan* at Bayreuth in 1962. (Her previous Green Hill appearances had been in Wolfgang Wagner's more pedestrian stagings.) Still, Nilsson's vocalism, in terms of technique, freshness, and timbral quality speedily outstripped Mödl and Varnay: the former was a pushed-up mezzo singing the Hochdramatische *Fach* on borrowed time, and the latter—though just a few months' Nilsson's senior—began her career at the top at age 23, singing Sieglinde at the Met and adding the *Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung* Brünnhildes and Kundry, leading to darkening and wear on her expressive instrument. Eventually, Varnay partnered Nilsson's heroines as a character mezzo.

Overall the documentary is organized—at least in principle—by topics (some recur or are touched on again and again) and there's a list of subjects covered in the 13 DVD tracks. Typical examples include "New York, primadonna [sic] status, humor" and "Studio and live, strength and sensitivity, honesty." Typically of documentaries made in the age of internet-attenuated attention spans, there are simply too many little bits of interviews and musical examples strewn about at too quick a pace. The directors deploy—perhaps "sample" would be the term of art—a wide variety of footage from previous documentaries and television programs. We see snippets from BBC efforts like *The Golden Ring* (1964) and *Profiles in Music* (1972) as well as talk shows and *This is Your Life*-style programming from Sweden, Austria, and Germany. Nilsson is charming and direct in all the languages she fields here, and her sly humor is never far away.

Many "talking heads" filmed in 2017 are also deployed, some without sufficient explanation or introduction. The film's subtitle comes from sentiments echoed by both director Otto Schenk, in whose productions Nilsson appeared in both Vienna and New York (there is backstage and dressing room footage from their joint 1968

Birgit Nilsson as Lady Macbeth in Verdi's *Macbeth* at the Metropolitan Opera, 1964.
Photo: Louis Melancon/Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Met *Tosca*) and former Met Master Carpenter and later General Manager Joseph Volpe; but many others endorse her uniqueness as a vocal phenomenon. Valerie Solti and administrator Eva Wagner-Pasquier shed some light on Nilsson' personality and work ethic. Christa Ludwig, who accompanied Nilsson in Wagner works in Vienna, Bayreuth and New York, has the most insight to share about Nilsson's role in the profession, saying perspicaciously of the complex, shifting Vienna State Opera political situation: "Karajan *needed* her, but Böhm *wanted* her." Marilyn Horne appeared with Nilsson only in the context of gala concerts, but has some typically bright perceptions regarding her ironclad technique and collegiality. (She, like Ludwig and some others, feels that only Nilsson's live recordings have a sense of her impact in the theater.) Jonas Kaufmann—though intelligent and well spoken as ever—seems included purely to up the star cachet of the enterprise.

Plácido Domingo's first Met broadcast (*Tosca*, 1969) was an emergency save for Franco Corelli opposite Nilsson, whose kindness he recalls. They also sang *Turandot* together at the Met and Verona (in interview footage she laughingly recalls that the Act III kiss lasted so long it brought forth cries of "Basta!"). Nilsson always hoped that Domingo would be her youngest Tristan, but when he came to record the opera partnered Nina Stemme—a protégée of Nilsson's, who also appears in the film recalling her aid. Domingo and Stemme have both been recipients of the generous Birgit Nilsson Prize (the other awardees have been Riccardo Muti and her beloved Vienna Philharmonic). Rutbert Reisch—President of the charitable foundation the soprano founded, which co-produced this film—makes several appearances, including one in which he details how he and other Vienna State Opera standees bought her an Isolde-imaged golden ring in 1968. Vienna is in a way the true focus of the film, though only two of the concert or opera excerpts shown were filmed there. To me, the most memorable of these musical clips are the climax of Aïda's Nile aria from a Stockholm 1964 concert and—conducted by Karl Böhm—the resplendent end of Salome's final monologue concluding the Met's 1972 Rudolf Bing Gala.

Voigt and Wunderlich's film is neither ideally penetrating nor filled with revelation, but it's a solid and enjoyable tribute that both Nilsson devotees and newbies to her legacy should enjoy.

STEP INTO THE RING: STAGING WAGNER'S RING CYCLE IN TWO WEEKS

Jasmin Solfaghari

In spring 2018 something happened that seems now to be part of a sort of strange and interesting dream. I had just come back home from a premiere of *Martha* by Friedrich von Flotow in Saxonia/Germany. It was the time when you just unpack and start the washing machine. The phone rang, and it was my dear colleague, heldentenor Torsten Kerl. He was asking me to jump in to direct the *Ring* in Odense, Denmark, and beginning as soon as possible. I then had a very nice talk with the director of the Odense Symphony Orchestra, Finn Schumacher, and took a plane to Denmark; laundry would have to wait!

Jasmin Solfaghari

Jumping in for a singer is a very normal part of life in opera. Bringing singers into productions, even a few hours before a performance, had been part of my work as a director for many years. Yet, in over 25 years of professional life and more than 70 productions, this project began a new chapter.

I had been very much connected to the *Ring* in different stations of my work at the Hamburgische Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper Berlin for a long time. I had directed a "*Ring* for Children" at Oper Leipzig in 2013. I also had written and directed a shortcut

version, "*Ring* in 100 Minutes" for Rundfunksinfonieorchester Berlin in 2014 and the "Operaguide for Beginners" in 2016. The *Ring* had always been a part of my professional life.

In Odense a wonderful cast and great colleagues of all kinds of departments were waiting for me. We knew we had zero time, as in three and a half weeks all of the performances would be concluded.

The conclusion of *Die Walküre* in Odense, 2018.

There was much about the production that I needed to change and, as the company was already two weeks into rehearsals, I knew this would be a great effort for everyone. From the props to the lighting and its cues, the singers' entrances, positions

Torsten Kerl as the title role in *Siegfried.*

of the set, and even replacing some of the costumes, we began making our production in the moment. There were some artists performing their roles for the first time, while quite a lot of the singers knew the *Ring* well and had been singing it for ages.

We worked step-by-step and day-by-day calmly through this marathon. Sometimes there was this magic happening: in obviously having no time there was this expanded moment where we could create and even laugh a lot, as we invented stage actions, lighting cues, and timing. With the support of everyone, it all worked out in a very satisfying way.

The end of *Götterdämmerung* was such a creation: Brünnhilde, Gutrune, and the Rhinemaidens merged into one group with the male chorus. During the last chord of redemption, I wanted to express that despite the destruction that happened through the fire, there is some hope for the future; a future that can only be built together, which is why these female characters stayed. As a metaphor for nature, I chose a drop of golden color that "fell" in a video sequence to the earth and changed the entire set into gold. Brünnhilde turned to the audience and "offered" the thought that we can only survive together by leaving our egos and excluding no one on this planet.

Siegfried approaches the sleeping Brünnhilde in Odense.

I had never imagined that a production of the Ring could be created, rehearsed, and performed within the span of just three and a half weeks, but from that frantic call from Torsten until the final bows after Götterdämmerung, that is exactly what happened in Odense last year. I am very grateful for the experience.

WAGNER: DER RING DES NIBELUNGE

(May 22–June 3, 2018)
Odense Symfoniorkester

DAS RHEINGOLD

(May 22, 29)
Wotan: James Johnson
Loge: Vsevolod Grivnov
Fricka: Lioba Braun
Freia: Lyuba Petrova
Donner: Wieland Satter
Froh: Magnus Vigilius
Erda: Anja Jung
Alberich: Pavlo Hunka
Mime: Gerhard Siegel
Fasolt: Gabor Bretz
Fafner: Andreas Hörl
Woglinde: Nina Bols Lundgren
Wellgunde: Sabrina Kögl
Flosshilde: Andreas Pellegrini

DIE WALKÜRE

(May 23, 30)
Siegmund: Kristian Benedikt
Sieglinde: Miina-Liisa Värelä
Hunding: Andreas Hörl
Brünnhilde: Jennifer Wilson
Wotan: James Johnson
Fricka: Lioba Braun
Helmwige: Winnie Merete Duholm
Gerhilde: Ylva Kihlberg
Ortlinde: Anne Margarethe Dahl
Siegrune: Sabrina Kögel
Waltraute: Karin Lovelius
Rossweisse: Andrea Pellegrini
Grimgerde: Johanna Bock
Schwertleite: Elenor Wiman

Conductor: Alexander Vedernikov
Director: Jasmin Solfaghari, after a concept of Annechien Koerselman
Stage Design: Elisabeth Holager Lund and Michala Clemmensen
Lighting Design: Andrew Tristram, after a concept of Nico Kracima
Costume Design: Uta Materne
Video Design: Arthur Steijn

SIEGFRIED

(May 25, June 1)
Siegfried: Torsten Kerl
Mime: Gerhard Siegel / Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke (June 1)
Wanderer: James Johnson
Alberich: Pavlo Hunka
Fafner: Andreas Hörl
Waldvogel: Nina Bols Lundgren
Erda: Anja Jung
Brünnhilde: Catherine Foster

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

(May 27, June 3)
Siegfried: Torsten Kerl
Brünnhilde: Jennifer Wilson
Gunther: Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester
Gutrune: Lyuba Petrova
Hagen: Runi Brattaberg
Alberich: Pavlo Hunka
Waltraute: Lioba Braun
First Norn: Margarete Joswig
Second Norn: Karin Lovelius
Third Norn: Winnie Merete Duholm
Woglinde: Nina Bols Lundgren
Wellgunde: Sabrina Kögel
Flosshilde: Andrea Pellegrini

TRIBUTE

Father Owen Lee (1930–2019)

Father M. Owen Lee died this summer, July 25, at age 89. A classics scholar and Roman Catholic priest, Lee taught at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto for 35 years before he was appointed as emeritus faculty, garnering four honorary doctorates throughout his career. He made a broad and consequential impact on parishes and university students alike, and on the tens of millions of radio listeners who knew him, lovingly, as "Father Lee."

Lee emerged as a worldwide celebrity in 1984, when the Metropolitan Opera invited him to host their intermission broadcast for *Les Troyens*, an experience he called his

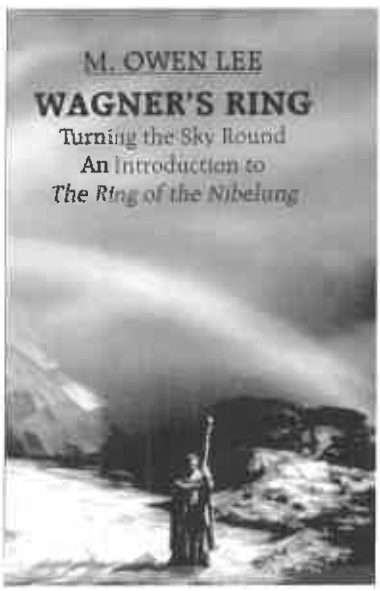
Father M. Owen Lee

"heart-in-throat" debut. Lee opened his commentary with a description of a "lordly, venerable manuscript" bearing some of the oldest writings of Virgil, buried deep in the vaults of the Vatican Library. He dedicated the entire first half of this debut broadcast, in fact, to the poet; he shared his personal, profound experience reading the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid* in the Vatican, recounting the stories he devoted his life to studying. He concluded with an analysis of Berlioz and his music, and the influence of the *Aenied* on his epic opera, his masterpiece, *Les Troyens*.

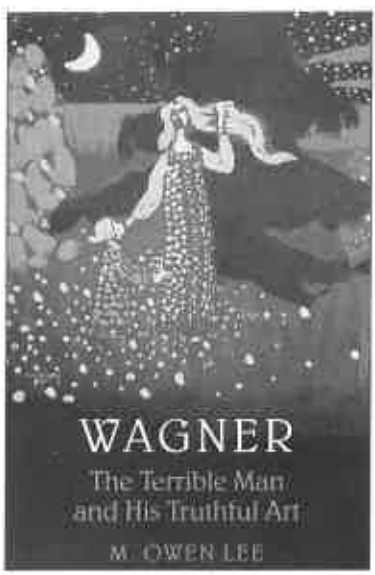
This debut and other of Lee's "first intermission" broadcasts, the last of which was heard in 2006, make apparent Lee's gift for teaching, his insatiable curiosity, and deep knowledge of the art form. Lee was a self-taught music scholar who wrote about Wagner for *Opera News* years before he was first heard on air in 1983 for the Met's "Texaco Opera Quiz" panel. He was also a longtime columnist for *The Opera Quarterly*; his opera-themed anagrams, acrostics, and crossword puzzles from the journal have

since been compiled into *Father Lee's Opera Quiz Book*, one of 22 of his published works, the majority of which are about Wagner. Lee's academic career led him to teach in Houston, Chicago, and Rome, and he was named the University of Toronto's "Educator of the Year" in 2001. He was also a proud baseball buff, who once opened a Toronto Blue Jays game singing both "O Canada" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Lee grew up in Detroit and attended the city's Catholic Central High School before joining the Basilian novitiate in Toronto in 1948. His love of Wagner began as a child when he heard the Met's broadcast of *Tannhäuser*, featuring Lauritz Melchior in the title role. In his 1987 on-air commentary about the opera, Lee recalled learning how to play a "Pilgrim's Chorus" reduction on his family's ten-dollar piano: "It was more than a discovery. It was a self-discovery...*Tannhäuser*, for anyone who surrenders to its spell, tells something of one's own self."

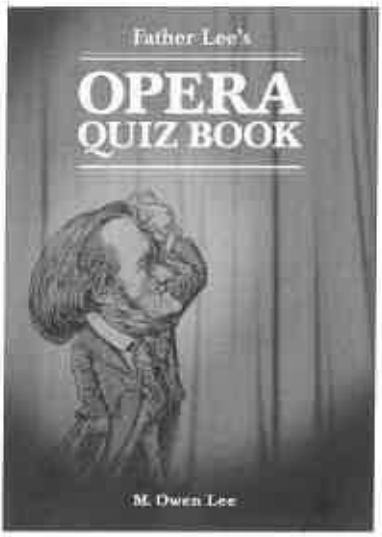


Tannhäuser continued to grip Lee throughout his life. When he was a teenager, he was hired to play organ for Holy Rosary Church in Toronto, where he admits to slipping some of Elisabeth's music from the opera into his Masses on St. Elizabeth's day. Lee reminds his readers of St. Elizabeth's historic significance, and how Wagner used *his* Elisabeth not as a foil to Venus, but as a character as central to the plot as Tannhäuser himself. St. Elizabeth was said to have worked miracles through her prayers, and devoted her short life to service—she was "too good for Wagner *not* to use" as inspiration for his leading female figure.



I was introduced to Lee's work regrettably late, shortly after experiencing the *Ring* for the first time at San Francisco Opera last year. Like many who approach Wagner in their 20s, I was troubled by his paradox: how could a man who expressed such hateful remarks create art that felt so indispensible, so human? I searched for an answer—or at least ideas—in *Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art*, a collection of three Larkin-Stuart lectures Lee presented at the University of Toronto's Trinity College in 1998. The Larkin-Stuart series is devoted to the studies of religion and ethics; Wagner, Lee felt, was an appropriate subject (though only after he was convinced not to speak about Horace and his *Odes*, his initial choice).

The first lecture opens with the story of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, a play with which Wagner was intimately familiar. In the play, Philoctetes receives a gift from Heracles, which once belonged to Apollo: a bow that will lead the young soldier and his fellow Greeks to victory in the Trojan War. But when a serpent bites Philoctetes and the wound festers, his comrades reject him and abandon him on the island of Lem-



nos, returning only when they realize they need his gift, the bow, to win glory for Greece. Philoctetes, rightfully, is filled with resentment and rage. Lee posits Wagner as Philoctetes: "However defective Wagner may have been as a man, however detestable his obsessive ranting, we need his unerring art," Lee says. "The fact is that Wagner's dramas plunge us through myth and music deep into ourselves, and what we discover there—often primitive, frightening, vindictive, and erotic—are the feelings that we who have constructive roles in society have suppressed."

Lee concludes the lectures by recalling Wagner's influence on T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and works of literature, art, music, and dance, and also on the Nazi regime. He ends with an analysis, yet again, of *Tannhäuser*. While I left the book with more questions than answers, I think that reflects part of Lee's legacy: he provides his readers with a catalyst for curiosity, arming us with the knowledge to embrace and question Wagner in both mind and heart.

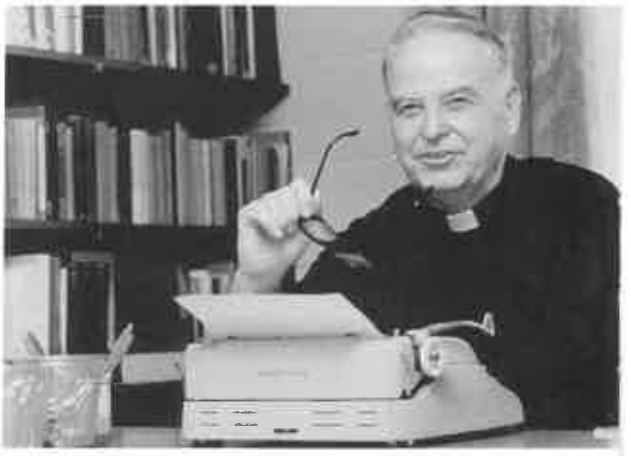
—KATE MCKINNEY

A TRIBUTE TO TWO WAGNER SCHOLARS

Remembering Father M. Owen Lee and Bryan Magee

During the past summer, the Wagner world lost two prominent scholars within one day of one another. Coincidentally, both were born in the same year.

Mark Owen Lee was born in Detroit on May 28, 1930. Ordained a member of the Basilian Fathers in 1951, Father Lee was the first awardee of a PH.D. in classics from the University of British Columbia in 1960. He served as a professor of classics at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto through 1995, authoring myriad writings on classical literature.



Father M. Owen Lee

For opera lovers, especially Wagnerians, Father Lee was equally impressive in his lectures and writings on Wagner. A very popular commentator and quiz panelist on Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts, he debuted in 1983 during the intermission of the season opener, Berlioz' *Les Troyens*. When a Wagner opera was broadcast, Father Lee's enthusiasm was contagious over the airwaves. He delivered a particularly memorable commentary on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg,* offering biblical parallels to each of the characters. On one occasion during the quiz, he named the nine Valkyries without hesitation; on another, he responded to a question on the Mastersingers, all of whom he named with precision.

In the early 1980s, Father Lee was a visiting scholar at St. Mary's College in Moraga, California, where he taught a course on Wagner. He attended a program by the forerunner of The Wagner Society of Northern California in 1982 at a time when our organization was quite small and met in a member's home. Following a performance by a soprano, he entertained us by playing show tunes on the piano. Our program director invited Father Lee to speak later in the year in conjunction with San Francisco Opera's *Lohengrin,* which he did memorably with musical illustrations from the piano and recordings.

WSNC maintained communication with Father Lee once he returned to Toronto. He joined us during the SFO premiere of the Nikolaus Lehnhoff-directed *Ring* in 1985. As an honored guest at a post-performance dinner, he was accompanied by fellow Met quiz panelist, George Martin, and the legendary quizmaster, Edward Downes. Our

late past-president, the very resourceful Verna Parino, attempted to recruit Father Lee to return during a subsequent Wagner production to offer SFO Guild previews. She asked then General Director, Lotfi Mansouri, who previously served in the same role at Canadian Opera Company, to extend the invitation. Father Lee graciously declined as he was limiting travel and, in fairness to the West Coast, had declined invitations to speak at Seattle Opera.

Former WSNC *E-Notes* Editor, Trish Benedict, corresponded with Father Lee as recently as 2015. She had been pondering complexities of *Die Meistersinger*, specifically the issue of St. Catherine's versus St. Martha's Church. She emailed Father Lee for his input; his gracious response was sent from a wheelchair while recuperating from a fall on the Toronto ice, shattering his leg in four places:

> Your e-mail just reached me, and I hope you will pardon the briefness of this reply. The best answer to your query lies on page 136 of John Warrack, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Cambridge, 1994). It seems that Wagner's church was 'a composite fiction.

Father Lee is remembered for his many books, including Wagner: *The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art* and *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round.* He died on July 25, 2019 in Toronto.

One day later, we learned of the passing of British philosopher, politician, and scholar Bryan Magee. Born in London on April 12, 1930, Mr. Magee is credited with authoring what is frequently called "the best short book on Wagner," *Aspects of Wagner.* It is the book that introduced the works of Richard Wagner to many future devotees.

Mr. Magee studied at Oxford University followed by a post-graduate fellowship in philosophy at Yale University. He was elected a Member of Parliament in 1974.

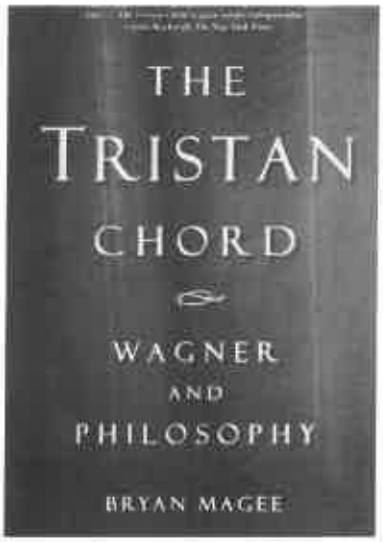
Bryan Magee

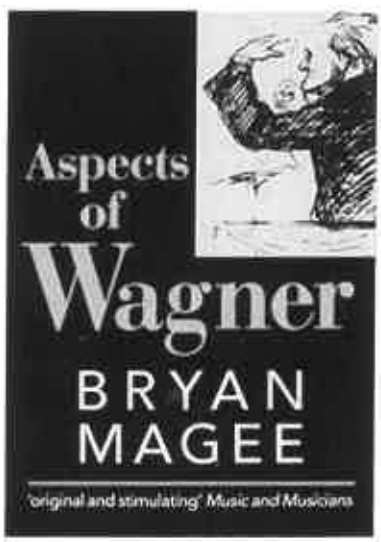
His expertise on the philosopher Schopenhauer was exemplified in much of his writing, most notably *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer.* The philosopher's influence on the composer is explored in detail in the 2000 book *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy.*

Having read the original 1968 edition of *Aspects of Wagner* prior to seeing my first *Ring*, I was thrilled to learn that Mr. Magee would be among the symposium panelists during Seattle Opera's 1989 production of *Die Meistersinger.* Speight Jenkins, then general director, recruited many of the world's finest Wagner scholars for this three-day program. Mr. Magee spoke eloquently on patrio-

tism versus nationalism. He used examples from Shakespeare to illustrate patriotism in dramatic literature ("God for Harry, England, and Saint George!" from *Henry V*), declaring that *Die Meistersinger* is not a study in nationalism.

That same symposium featured another celebrated Wagner scholar, Barry Millington, who asserts in his writings that Wagner's antisemitism is evident in his music. As an example, he played recordings of a Jewish cantor's chant opposite Beckmesser's failed attempt at creating a winning song. There were distinct similarities. Mr. Magee disagreed strongly, inspiring a lively discussion.





WSNC members were most interested in bringing Mr. Magee to San Francisco the following year to speak during the *Ring* production, but that would require a sponsoring partner. Again, in stepped the ever-inventive Verna Parino, who managed speaker previews for the SFO Guild for nearly three decades. She succeeded, and Mr. Magee offered well-received previews to each Guild Chapter and an outstanding presentation to WSNC.

We had additional opportunities to hear from Mr. Magee in Seattle during subsequent *Ring* productions. I recall a very humorous talk he gave during the 1991 production, directed by François Rochaix, on the director versus the production. With some hilarious pantomimed examples of some of the great singers of years past, he described the importance of paying attention to the text and the score.

Bryan Magee died on July 26, 2019 in Oxford, England. In addition to his voluminous writings, many of his lectures are available on YouTube.

—Lisa Burkett

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