

Wagner on the Potomac

For the study and enjoyment of Wagner's Art

January 2006

Vol. 8 No. 1

Chairman's Greeting: An exciting year is behind us and another one lies ahead! Thanks to the Members who have already renewed and others who will do so for 2006. A special welcome to Friends who will join for the first time. Chairman J.K. Holman, author Wagner's Ring: A Companion and Concordance.

W

An Evening with Jeffrey Swann on December 7, 2005 at the German Embassy



"Major Works Influencing Wagner and Major Works Influenced by Wagner" was the title of Jeffrey Swann's characteristically engaging and instructive concert and lecture at the piano. The program was enthusiastically received by the capacity audience of Jeffrey Swann's many admirers from his previous programs for the Society such as the *Wagner in der Wildnis* spring retreats.

Das Rheingold to launch "The American Ring" at the Washington National Opera (WNO)

Performances in March and April will be accompanied by a wide range of Wagner Society programs. Director **Francesca Zambello** will present an exclusive program for the Society on March 16. Tickets are available for the opening night performance on March 25 and for the cast dinner party at the Residence of the German Ambassador after the performance. Tickets are available for either one or both events. (See page 7 for application forms and page 3 for additional *Das Rheingold* programs.)



Francesca Zambello

The 11th Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Concert



The 11th concert in the twice-yearly series was presented on Friday, October 14, 2005, at the German Embassy. Taking their bows after the concert (left to right) are Soprano Rebecca Teem, Evelyn Lear, Thomas Stewart, Mezzo-soprano Roxanne Rowedder, Baritone Jason Stearns, Tenor Joshua Saxon, Betty Bullcock (piano) and Tenor Christopher Owens.

CONTENTS

Autumn 2005 Season	2
Winter to Summer 2006 Season	3
Emerging Singers Program.....	4-5
Books & Recordings	6
Membership and <i>Rheingold</i> Order Forms.....	7
Special Thanks.....	8



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2006

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Highlights of the Autumn 2005 Season

September 15. **Iain Scott** launched the autumn season at The George Washington University (Funger Hall, GWU) The notable Wagner expert from Toronto is well known and appreciated by Society audiences from three previous appearances. In a fascinating and comprehensive multimedia presentation titled “Richard Wagner and the Inspiration of Italy”, he drew on a wide range of sources illustrating the background of Wagner’s many visits to Italy, and the inspiration they gave to his works.

October 14. **The 11th Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Concert** was presented at the German Embassy. (See the photo story on page 1 and www.wagner-dc.org for the interesting range of Wagner’s works presented by the singers.)

W

October 20. **Phillip W. Raines**, a member of the WSWDC Board of Directors and a veteran lecturer for the Society, illustrated selected “magical moments” of filmed performances conducted by Herbert von Karajan, Arturo Toscanini, Georg Solti and James Levine. Mr. Raines’s programs in recent months included presentations in Chicago and Seattle titled: “What do I Listen for Next?”. (Levine School)



November 10. **Alan Walker**, the world’s leading Franz Liszt scholar drew on his lifetime of scholarship, including the famous three volume biography, to describe the unique musical relationship between Wagner and Liszt. The program was another in our continuing series devoted to Wagner’s relationships with other composers. Professor Walker’s most recent book is *Reflections on Liszt* (2005). (Levine School)

December 7. **An Evening with Jeffrey Swann** at the German Embassy. (See photo story, page 1)



Members at Seattle Ring 2005



Members at the Bayreuth Festival 2005

R.G. Head, John Pohanka, Carol Hoover, Janet Fernandez, Bruce Bisnez, Dagmar Gunther-Stirn, Sally McNulty, Michael McNulty, Peggy Jones, Lynne Lambent, **Thomas Rolf Truhitte (Froh) and Speight Jenkins, (General Manager)**, Aury Fernandez, Diane Stanley, Betty Byrne, Tom Stanley and Benno Gerson.

Some Members of the Class of 2005, left to right, Kinga Revesz, Ruth Mitchell, Akos Revesz, Roberta McKay, Rowland Cross, Bill Gheen and Ingrid Gheen at the Festspielhaus.

Early in the 2006 Season

January 19. Irwin Shainman, Professor of Music Emeritus at Williams College and former conductor of the Berkshire Symphony, will speak on “Wagner and Strauss Songs: Women and Love.” (Funger Hall, GWU)

February 23. Simon Williams, Chairman of the Drama Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara will speak on “Coming to Terms with History: Nietzsche and The *Ring*.” Professor Williams lectures each year on the dramatic aspects of Wagner’s works at our *Wagner in der Wildnis* retreats in June. His latest book is Wagner & Romantic Tradition. (Funger Hall, GWU)

And then.... *Das Rheingold* !

- **March 7 at 7:30 pm.** Director Francesca Zambello, WNO Director of Artistic Operations Christine Scheppelman, and members of the cast of the production present a roundtable at the Goethe Institute, 814 7th Street, NW, Washington, DC (open to the public).
- **March 16 at 7:30 pm.** Director Francesca Zambello presents a lecture and discussion program for Members and Friends of WSWDC. (Funger Hall, GWU)
- **March 23 at 6 pm.** WSWDC Chairman J.K. Holman, Insight Lecture on *Das Rheingold*. (Kennedy Center Millennium Stage)
- **March 25 at 7 pm.** WNO opening night performance of *Das Rheingold* followed by cast dinner party at the German Ambassador’s residence. (See page 7 for forms to order tickets for the performance or cast party or for both events.
- **April 14 at 6:15 pm.** Saul Lilienstein O-zone lecture for *Das Rheingold* ticket holders. (Kennedy Center Millennium Stage)
- **April 13 at 7:30 pm.** John Edward Niles speaks on “The Carriers of the Wagner Flame: Humperdinck, Pfitzner and von Schillings.” (Funger Hall, GWU)
- **May 18 at 7:30 pm.** Speaker to be confirmed. (Funger Hall, GWU)
- **June 2006 Society Banquet to be scheduled.**
- **June 2 to 4.** *Wagner in der Wildnis VI: Parsifal* (A Members-only event at Cacapon Lodge, Berkeley Springs WV.)
- **June 14 at 7:30 pm.** The 12th Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Concert with the McLean Orchestra, Sylvia Alimena, Conductor, at the Oakcrest School, McLean.
- **August 19 to 28.** Bayreuth Festival 2006. (A very limited number of tickets available for Members only.)



Professor Simon Williams at *Wagner in der Wildnis*



Bayreuther Festspielhaus

The Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Program - Five Years of Achievement

Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart agreed in late 1999 with Chairman Jim Holman and the WSWDC Board of Directors to create a program for emerging singers with potential for performing the difficult Wagner *Fach*. It was not anticipated at the time that within the next five years, Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart would provide career guidance to more than 70 aspiring singers and that 39 of them would be given rare opportunities to perform in public to display their talents. We are hoped that some singers would reach the international opera stage and this, too, has come to pass as illustrated, for example, by the meteoric rise of Jennifer Wilson reported on the next page.

Enduring credit is due to Evelyn and Tom for their achievements. Through numerous *pro bono* master classes and rigorous rehearsals, they have given a jump start to many Wagner singer careers. Members and Friends of the Society are grateful to them for promoting the Society's motto: "the study and enjoyment of Wagner's art". And many singers are grateful for the help given them to realize their dreams.

For the record: the 1st Concert was presented on April 15, 2000 at the German Embassy in Washington with two singers with Betty Bullock at the piano. The 12th concert will be held on June 14, 2006 with five singers accompanied by the McLean Orchestra conducted by Sylvia Alimena. (For additional information see www.wagner-dc.org and the October 2004 and 2005 issues of *The Wagner Singer* publication).

Evelyn Lear - Happy 80th Birthday (January 8th)

What a pleasure it is, on behalf of all of the Wagner Society family, to offer this little love note to Evelyn Lear on her 80th birthday! Most of us have seen or read or heard about Evelyn's astonishing career in opera and on Broadway and in Hollywood. No one brought a more beautiful voice, greater acting and more stunning beauty onto the stage -- all at the same time! I mention only two feats of historical importance: Evelyn virtually defined the role of Alban Berg's Lulu and she is the only American singer to sing all three principal soprano roles in *Der Rosenkavalier*. But in my view, her greatest accomplishments may well be her generosity of spirit, her joy, energy and enthusiasm, and her magnificent life with Tom, her children, and grandchildren. As Evelyn charges into her ninth decade, let's hope we can all keep up!

Chairman J.K. Holman, WSWDC



Chairman J.K.Holman with Evelyn Lear.



LYRIC SOPRANO ARIAS A Master Class with EVELYN LEAR

Recorded Master on Nine Arias • Recorded Piano Accompaniments
Interpretive Essays • Extensive Coaching Comments in the Score of each Aria

G. SCHIRMER, Inc.

In the introduction to this new book, Evelyn Lear says: "One of the great joys of my life is giving master classes to young singers. They fuel me with eagerness and enthusiasm, and inspire and challenge me to sift through all my years of performing and teaching to come up with accurate advice for each of them." The two CDs included in the book reveal Evelyn Lear's artistry as a singer and teacher.

Jennifer Wilson “...she brought down the house”

New York Times music critic Anne Midgette

As *New York Times* music critic Anne Midgette reported, “Jennifer Wilson suddenly burst onto the international opera scene (in March 2005) by jumping in for Jane Eaglen as *Brünnhilde* in Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, just a day after singing the same character in a rehearsal of *Die Walküre*. Artistry aside, this is a stunning athletic feat. Few people today have the vocal heft and stamina to get through even one of these roles, let alone take on both back to back. Ms. Wilson not only sang the killer leading role of the five-hour *Götterdämmerung*, she also sang it so well, with a huge, beautiful sound and dramatic nuance, that she brought down the house.”



vocal training. As Ms. Midgette stated, “One clear measure of the (conservatory) problem is the system’s inability to deal effectively with large voices and talents like Ms. Wilson.”

Ms. Wilson has received critical acclaim for her Turandot in Santa Fe in 2005 on the road to engagements at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris and a world class opera singing career. Her success is the result of many years of disciplined and dedicated training and performances, including appearance over the years with the Washington National Opera chorus. Ms. Wilson described her Chicago Lyric experience to Ms. Midgette as “the overnight success that took 20 years.” As a protégée of Evelyn Lear, Ms. Wilson has been a leading ESP performer.

Ms. Midgette’s review was the lead for the comprehensive article titled “The End of The Great American Big Voice.” (*New York Times*, November 13, 2005). The review also included quotations from Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart about the Emerging Singers Program illustrating the important contribution it makes to developing new voices needed by big opera house but not encouraged by American conservatory

She sang in the 3rd and 8th ESP concerts in 2001 and 2004 and for WSWDC Gala Benefit in 2002. She also took part in a panel with *Washington Post* music critic Tim Page at the Smithsonian *Tristan und Isolde* seminar in 2003. She is a favorite of Wagner Society Members and Friends who salute her impressive successes!

The Wagner Singer

Updates on selected ESP Singers

Bass-baritone **Charles Robert Austin**, is engaged for performances, with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. Soprano **Amada Mace** will sing Eva in Bayreuth’s *Die Meistersinger*. Heldentenor **Thomas Rolf Truhitte** sang Froh in the Settle 2005 Ring and will perform it again in the Canadian Opera Company *Ring* in September 2006. Soprano **Carolyn Whisnant’s** engagements in Germany include Ortrud, Senta and Elizabeth with the National Theater in Mannheim. Tenor **Paul Mow** returns to Rostock in February 2006 to sing a concert version of Act II of *Tristan*. Tenor **David Smith** is in Paris to cover for Placido Domingo’s Siegmund. Bass-baritone **Jason Stearns** made his ESP debut at the 11th Concert in October 2005, which was followed by a series of promising auditions in London, Munich, and Brussels for upcoming engagements. (See *The Wagner Singer* publication October 2005 on our website: www.wagner-dc.org.)

Books and recordings of interest (and why!)

Thomas May, Decoding Wagner: An Invitation to His World of Music Drama (Amadeus Press, 2005). This book is offered as a premium for WSWDC Members who join as Patrons, Donors, Sponsors, or Golden Ring 2006. The book is organized by individual operas so that both the expert and the novice can easily read it with profit. The book includes two CDs, which provide recorded excerpts to illustrate the concepts used in the book and analyzes of all Wagner's major works.

Simon Williams, Wagner and the Romantic Hero (Cambridge Press, 2005). This book is welcomed by Members who have enjoyed Professor Williams' presentations since 2001 at the annual *Wagner in der Wildnis* weekend retreats. The book is scholarly and lucidly written; it is an important contribution to the literature on Wagner. The concept of the hero, so central to Wagner's works, is presented in illuminating detail by Professor Williams.

Alan Walker, Reflections on Liszt (Cornell University Press, 2005) is a welcomed addition to Professor Walker's scholarship. His work over the past three decades has provided important insights to the Wagner-Liszt relationship. This book is an especially rewarding supplement for Members who attended Professor Walker's informative presentation to the Society in November 2005.

Placido Domingo's *Tristan und Isolde* recording (EMI Classics, 2005) is offered as a premium to Sponsors and Golden Ring 2006 Members. The recording has been enthusiastically welcomed by fans and critics of the incomparable Placido Domingo. This addition to Domingo's vast discography was conducted by Antonio Papano with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. The impressive cast includes Nina Stemme (Isolde), Mihoko Fujimura (Brangäne), René Pape (King Marke), Olaf Bar (Kurwenal) and others including Jared Holt, Ian Bostridge, Matthew Rose and Rolando Villazon.

Das Rheingold: CD Commentary by Saul Lilienstein (Washington National Opera, 2004) is of special interest to music lovers attending the performances of the WNO "American Ring" in March and April. (This CD and Maestro Lilienstein's highly regarded commentaries of WNO productions can be purchased on the WNO website.)

Das Rheingold as told by Myra C. Mondzac is a charming book for children written with affection and clarity. The colorful illustrations accompanying the text are delightful and fascinating for both children and adults. Dr. Mondzac is a long time Member of the Society and a supporter of its activities. (The book is available from Amazon.com.)

Golden Ring 2006 Members (\$1,000 or more)

The Board of Directors extends special thanks to Members who have already renewed in this category for the 2006 membership year. Members wishing to upgrade their membership to this category are encouraged to do so. New Members are invited to join for the first time in this category.

Members of the Golden Ring 2006 are named as Sponsors of the 12th Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Concert with five singers accompanied by the McLean Orchestra under the baton of Sylvia Alimena. Members of the Golden Ring 2006 so far this membership year are: *Betty Byrne; Thomas E. Brennan; Aury and Janet Fernandez; Frederic Harwood and Lea McDaniel; Jim and Diana Holman; Marc and Jacquelyn Leland; John and Lynn Pohanka; Richard Soderquist and Cathy Noogard; Guillermo and Cecilia Schultz; and Maika Siebeck*

MEMBERSHIP 2006: Time to join again or for the first time!

The Membership Year runs from January 1 through December 31, 2006, regardless of the time of year you join. To become a member, please complete this form and either mail it with your check or credit card authorization to P.O. Box 33051, Washington, DC 20033, or fax it to 301-907-8671 or become a Member on our website: www.wagner-dc.org.

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(Note: Dues levels have changed since the 2004 Membership Year.)

\$50 Regular \$75 Dual \$40 Senior/Non-Resident
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 \$1,000 Golden Ring \$10 Student

Golden Ring Membership 2006 (\$1,000 or more.) (See description of the membership category on page 3 of this newsletter.)

Sponsors, Donors and Patrons: As an expression of our appreciation, we would like to send you a copy of Thomas May *Decoding Wagner*.
Would you like to receive it? Yes, please No, thanks

Sponsors and Golden Ring 2006 Members only. Please indicate if you would like to receive a copy of the EMI CD of the *Tristan und Isolde* recording by Placido Domingo and Nina Stemme. Yes, please No, thanks

Form of Payment

Check enclosed Visa Master Card

Number _____
Expiration date _____ Amount to be Charged _____
Signature _____

PLEASE REVIEW THE LEGIBILITY OF NUMBERS AND LETTERS YOU ENTERED ABOVE.

Das Rheingold Opening night

March 25, 2006 7 pm Performance at WNO and the Cast Party

immediately following the performance at the Residence of the Ambassador, Federal Republic of Germany

To reserve tickets for *Das Rheingold* Opening Night, fill out this form and mail it with your check or credit card authorization to WSWDC P.O. Box 33051, Washington, DC 20033, or fax the form to 301.907.8671, or make your reservation at the Society's web site at www.wagner-dc.org. DATE _____

NAME(S): _____ Wagner Society Member Non-member

ADDRESS : _____ TELEPHONE: _____

NUMBER OF SEATS REQUESTED:

2ND TIER AT \$72 EACH \$ _____ PRIME ORCHESTRA AT \$170 EACH \$ _____ PREMIUM ORCHESTRA AT \$190 EACH \$ _____

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SIGNATURE _____

Reservations should be made by Friday, March 10th. Tickets will be mailed the week of March 13th.

PLEASE REVIEW THE LEGIBILITY OF NUMBERS AND LETTERS YOU ENTERED ABOVE.

The Society gives special thanks to:

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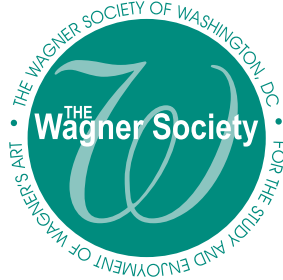
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Designer: Tina Cheng

Editor: Aurelius Fernandez

- + Speakers and performers of the Autumn 2005 Season who helped make it so rewarding.
- + Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart for their continuing dedication to the Emerging Singers Program.
- + Cultural Attache Trautlieb Hülz for facilitating programs at the German Embassy.
- + Heribert Uschtrin and Sylvia Blume of the Goethe Institut for facilitating cooperative projects.
- + Member McKinney Russell for his valuable assistance with copy and proof reading of *The Wagner Singer* and this issue.
- + Member Alfred C. Boyd, Jr. for his video recording contributions to the WSWDC archive at the Martin Luther King Library.
- + Members who joined the Golden Ring 2006 membership category in support of the 12th Emerging Singers Program and other activities.



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www.wagner-dc.org

BECOME A MEMBER!

- Bayreuth Festival tickets, August 17 to 28, 2006 (for Members only)
- The 12th Emerging Singers Concert, June 14, 2006
- *Wagner in der Wildnis*, June 2-4, 2006
- cast party tickets and other March and April programs)
- *Das Rheingold* at the Washington National Opera (March 25, 2006 performance and *Selected Upcoming Programs:*

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