

Wagner on the POTOMAC



25th
ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE
August, 2023



Twenty-five years promoting the study and enjoyment of the genius Richard Wagner! We have much to celebrate.

We celebrate a robust membership which has remained steadfast through the Covid ordeal, with many members purchasing premium memberships to underwrite the viability and quality of our programs.

For 24 years we have been identifying and nurturing young dramatic voices capable of singing the Wagner roles. Our partnership with **Dolora Zajick's Institute of Young Dramatic Voices** and its offshoot, **Luana DeVol's American Wagner Project**, is a worthy successor to our **Thomas Stewart and Evelyn Lear Emerging Singers Program**, which we initiated in 1999, just a year after our founding. Over 100 aspiring singers, many of whom have gone on to major careers, have received financial support, training and performance opportunities from our programs.

Our singers perform at recitals here in Washington, at Ms. Zajick's and Ms. DeVol's Institute at the University of Nevada, Reno, and with **Michael Rossi's Miami Music Festival**. That event receives a major financial boost from **The Pohanka Family Foundation**; **John Pohanka** was an early Wagner Society of Washington DC member, a long-time Board member, and his foundation, The Pohanka Family Foundation, continues to make annual contributions that directly support our programs here in Washington and performances in Miami.

We have offered over 70 live concerts, most featuring the artistry of Maestro **Jeffrey Swann**, concert pianist and eminent Wagner scholar; in recent years he has been joined by the **Wagner Society Chamber Players**.

We continue monthly presentations, live and on Zoom, which now number over 150. Highlights last year included an interview with **Adam Turner**, conductor for Virginia Opera's *Ring*, last year performing *Die Walküre*, and our own **Saul Lilienstein**, the popular Smithsonian Residents lecturer. Long-time member **Bill Pastor**, along with Maestro Lilienstein presented the film *Twilight of the Gods* at a sold-out Arts Club.

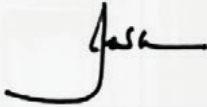
This past year we celebrated the 21st anniversary of our acclaimed weekend retreat **Wagner in der Wildnis** at the modernized and expanded Cacapon State Park in Berkeley Springs, WV. Participants again enjoyed lectures from Maestro Swann and Professor and author **Simon Williams**, Professor Emeritus of Theater at UC Santa Barbara. The topic was *Time and Timelessness in the Ring*.

For the past two years we have been pleased to help underwrite **Virginia Opera's** production of Wagner's *Ring*, this coming October presenting *Siegfried*. It is daunting for a regional opera company to undertake the *Ring*, and we applaud their ambition and the high quality of their productions. We encourage our members and friends to support their performances in October at nearby George Mason University Center for the Performing Arts in suburban Fairfax.

We hope you will join us as we celebrate our 25th year. Membership at the Premium Level, \$250 or more, allows your Wagner Society to provide training, coaching and financial support to developing talent, and to present quality programs. So please, as we celebrate



our silver anniversary, help champion the next generation of great singers. And thank you for your membership at any level. Your membership says we are doing work that is meaningful, important, that warrants your support and participation.


Jim Holman
Chairman

Upcoming Events

September 21: Adam Turner, conductor of the **Virginia Opera**, is interviewed by Chairman Jim Holman. Anticipating the *Siegfried* performances on October 7 and October 8, Maestro Turner discusses the challenges he and innovative director Joachim Schamberger overcame in presenting this challenging opera. Only available by Zoom.



Adam Turner



John Muller

October 3: Julliard Professor John Muller: Attaining Wisdom: Wotan's Growth in the Ring. Over the course of the *Ring*, Wotan's self-understanding evolves, embodied in the music. The arrogant, ambitious damn-the-consequences god of *Das Rheingold* realizes the limits of his power in *Die Walküre*. By *Siegfried* he has achieved wisdom and bows to the next generation. Prof. Muller is Professor of Music History at Julliard.

November 7: Saul Lilienstein: Wagner and the Dance. There is ballet in Wagner, but with a few notable exceptions, dance is the stepchild of his artistic fusion. But with no diminution of the music or the drama, choreographers have created new dimensions reaching for the total Gesamtkunstwerk that was Wagner's dream. Maestro Lilienstein will share familiar moments along with surprising examples of this fascinating potential. Live at the Arts Club.



Saul Lilienstein



Hans Vaget

Dr. Hans R. Vaget, Long Live America: Richard Wagner and the United States. On three occasions (1874, 1877, and 1880), discouraged by criticism and difficult fundraising for Bayreuth, Wagner declared his intention to emigrate to America, specifically to Minnesota and to New York City. Dr. Vaget will describe Wagner's plan to start a Bayreuth in America, including the role played by Dr. Jenkins, Wagner's American dentist. A prevailing theme is Wagner's lifelong attachment to the revolutionary heritage of the United States. Dr. Vaget is professor emeritus of German Studies, Smith College. Time and place TBD.

Jeffrey Swann and the Wagner Society Chamber Players: Wagner, Baudelaire, and French Music. Wagner's stay in Paris 1860-1862 brought him to the attention of many important musicians such as Berlioz and Rossini, but most significantly the poet Baudelaire, who wrote about Wagner in rapturous terms. It was the beginning of Wagnerism as a movement influencing the Symbolist movement and Impressionism in art and in music (see Franck, Chabrier, and the young Debussy).

This performance will explore French Wagnerism of this period, including a piano transcription of *Tannhäuser's* Venusberg ballet by Liszt and Moszkowski, heavily edited by Maestro Swann, along with selections from, among others, Faure, Chausson, Franck and Debussy, played by the Chamber Players. Time and place TBD.



Jeffrey Swann (third from left) and the Wagner Chamber Players

Virginia Opera's Oct 7-8 *Siegfried*



The Wagner Society of Washington DC is pleased to co-sponsor Virginia Opera's production of the third Opera in Wagner's *Ring, Siegfried*. On Saturday evening October 7 and a Sunday matinee October 8, performances will take place at George Mason University's Center for the Arts in suburban Fairfax VA.

Conductor **Adam Turner**, an American who has spent much of his career conducting in Germany, has received critical praise for his work leading members of the Virginia Symphony in *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, and more modern productions like Jake Heggie's *Final Acts* and Cole Porter's *High Society*.



Joachim Schamberger

Director **Joachim Schamberger** has effectively incorporated video design and live video close-ups in lieu of static stage scenery. Mr. Schamberger is director of Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music in Chicago. He has participated in San Francisco Opera's Merola Program and studied digital film production at the New York Film Academy.

The role of Wotan is sung by **Kyle Albertson**, Fricka by mezzo **Claudia Chapa**, and Brünnhilde by **Alexandra Loutsion**. **Ricardo Lugo** sings Hundig.

The Wagner Society of Washington DC is committed to supporting Virginia Opera in its ambition to fully stage the *Ring*. With our financial support and with our presence in the Center's lobby and in the printed program, we support the opera and solicit attendees who, having now seen a Wagner production, are ready to join the Society. We encourage our members to buy tickets and otherwise support the Virginia Opera.

The Wagner Society of Washington DC has a history of supporting Virginia Opera's Wagner productions. In 2004 we co-sponsored *Tristan und Isolde*, where **Tom Truhitte**, ESP participant 2001-02, sang the role of Tristan. Again in 2011 we co-sponsored performances of *Die Walküre*.



Wagner Society membership table at Virginia Opera performance of *Die Walküre*

From left to right: Bonnie Becker, Aury Fernandez, Janet Fernandez, Barbara Karn

Our Abiding Commitment to Emerging Singers

The American Wagner Project of 2022-2023

By Joshua Baumgardner and John Edward Niles



Joshua Baumgardner



John Niles



Dolora Zajick

The American Wagner Project (AWP), founded in 2013, spun off from famed mezzo soprano **Dolora Zajick's Institute for Young Dramatic Voices (IYDV)**, founded in 2009. AWP, directed by soprano **Luana DeVol**, is the successor to the **Thomas Stewart and Evelyn Lear Emerging Singers Program (ESP)**, which we founded in 1999; AWP continues our commitment to help develop aspiring talents who have the capability to sing Wagner.

This past year 35 applicants applied to the program, and 21 were invited to audition in person at New York's Opera America. For the AWP, Ms. DeVol auditioned a few more at her studio near Las Vegas. Many apply to both AWP and IYDV. Those selected attend a three-week intensive workshop at the University of Nevada, Reno.

Ms. DeVol, the artistic director of the AWP, is a soprano celebrated for her Wagner-sized voice, especially her many Brünnhildes. **John Parr** is a voice coach with the Deutsche Oper in Berlin. Participants start each day with physical exercise, and receive coaching on health and nutrition, acting, media, group vocal exercises, and individual voice coaching. The program also provides room and board with contributions, including those from the WSWDC.



Luana DeVol

This year the AWP welcomed soprano **Lorna McLean**. She joins returning sopranos **Maureen Brabec**, **Charlotte Kelso**, **Heather Hjelle**, **Taryn Holback**, and tenor **Blake Talbot**.

Lorna McLean, British soprano, is only 29 years old, somewhat young for the demanding Wagner repertory. Nevertheless, Ms. DeVol says that Lorna has intuitive musicality, a warm timbre to her voice, presents long vocal lines, and possesses an innate sense of phrasing. She easily meets the challenge of even the most demanding roles.



Lorna McLean

Maureen Brabec, returning for the third year, is a dramatic soprano who recently sang in the Wagner Society's AWP concert in Washington DC. She has covered Senta for Opera Maine and has sung the title role in Pittsburgh Opera's production of Mark Adamo's *Lysistrata*. She has sung a variety of roles with Boston University's Opera Institute and the Miami Wagner Summer Institute. Ms. DeVol says Ms. Brabec possesses remarkable vocal range, with an especially beautiful top. Like Ms. McLean, she is well-suited to the most demanding of Wagner's roles.

Heather Hjelle, a soprano in her second year, has twice won an Encouragement Grant from the Wagner Society of New York. An observer has written that her most potent vocal asset is direct projection, ideal for the dramatic roles in Wagner and in Italian operas. At this year's AWP concert she sang three selections from *Lohengrin*. Ms. Hjelle recently headlined Opera Festival Chicago's celebration of the work of Renata Tebaldi.

Taryn Holback, in her second year, sang Flosshilde last summer in the Miami *Das Rheingold*. She has recently



Taryn Holback



Charlotte Kelso

sung in Teatro Nuovo's productions of Barber's *Vanessa* and Adamo's *Little Women*. She sang Flosshilde in the Miami Wagner Festivals *Das Rheingold*. She has won an Encouragement Award at the 2023 International Vocal Competition.

Charlotte Kelso, also in her second year, is a versatile soprano working on roles from both Wagner and Verdi. Ms. DeVol says that her voice has the lightness ideal for roles like Eva and Elsa, and that she has wonderful technique, reminiscent of Maria Callas.



Blake Talbot

Blake Talbot, a tenor in his third year, is preparing the roles of Siegmund and Parsifal. He is a large-voiced heldentenor, vocally a bit darker than the light tenors of the Italian repertory.

The AWP Recital

Ms. Brabec, Ms. Hjelle, and past participant tenor **Jon Janacek** sang in this year's AWP recital. Mr. Janacek, an AWP participant 2020-2022, received an "Encouragement Award" from the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. He has sung for the Houston Grand Opera roles in *Madame Butterfly*, *Götterdämmerung*, and *La Traviata*. For the Miami Music Festival he sang the title role in *Lohengrin*, the role of Erik in *The Flying Dutchman*, and Loge in Miami's *Das Rheingold*.

At the AWP Recital, Ms. Hjelle and Ms. Brabec sang the Elsa/Ortrud duet from *Lohengrin* Act 2. Mr. Janacek sang "In fernem Land" from *Lohengrin* Act 3 and "Allmacht'ger Vater" from *Rienzi* Act 5, and with Ms. Brabec he sang the Elsa/Lohengrin duet from *Lohengrin* Act 2.

The AWP summer institute culminates with a recital at the University of Nevada, Reno, Concert Hall including all of the year's participants. Subsequently we select two or three to perform for our members here in Washington.



Left to right: Joshua Baumgardner, Heather Hjelle, Luana DeVol, Jon Janacek, Maureen Brabec

Plan now to attend the Bayreuth Festival, held the third week of August 2024!
Applications will be solicited in March, 2024.

Bayreuth 2023

By Mark Golden



Mark Golden

This year our ticket allotment included the *Ring*, plus *Tannhäuser* and *Der fliegende Holländer*. This *Ring*, now in its second year, is directed by the 34-year-old Austrian wunderkind **Valentin Schwarz** and conducted by the young Finnish conductor **Pietari Inkinen**.



Valentin Schwarz

Schwarz's is an intimate, human-scale story of family relationships and generational conflict. The emotional and often graphically presented physical abuse of children is the key element. The first two minutes of music video projections during the opening show twin fetuses in the womb – Alberich and Wotan. Alberich delivers the wound which is a visible scar in the adult Wotan. The brothers are damaged and in opposition even before they are born.



Pietari Inkinen

In this rendering, the children are the gold. In a less dysfunctional family they might turn out fine. But the Rhine daughters, who are the nannies, are negligent, provoking a disheartened Alberich to forcibly abduct one small boy. Theirs is a sick, abusive codependent relationship, but Alberich clearly loves this child, and he him. The anguish Alberich exhibits when Wotan seizes the boy (aka the gold) from him is not about power or money, but about losing the one person with whom he has been able to establish a bond.



Wotan with gold, foreground, Alberich hoarding gold in the background

By *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde and Siegfried now have a young child of their own, but their marriage is on the rocks. The love duet is a biting display of passive aggressive animus. It doesn't take any magic potion or love spell for Siegfried to leave his wife and move on; he seems callous about any deception it takes to do so.



Hagen, Gunther, Gutrune, Brünnhilde

Again, the child is caught in the middle of parental conflict. Brünnhilde's refusal to give up the Ring (her child), because Siegfried gave him to her, is as touching as any mother unwilling to surrender her child.

The concept, children in lieu of the gold, is powerful, and promising. In its first iteration in 2022, some aspects of the production were

somewhat incoherent--boos rained upon the production staff during curtain calls, though this is not a new phenomenon at Bayreuth.

As with other initially problematic *Rings* at Bayreuth, (which date back to the 1920's), the concept becomes more coherent as the production enters its second and subsequent years. That said, by humanizing the characters, this is a deserving *Ring*.



Tomasz Konieczny



Klaus Florian Vogt



Emily Magee



Catherine Foster



Daniela Köhler



Andreas Schager



Stephen Gould

Featured are the Wotan of the phenomenal Polish baritone **Tomasz Konieczny**, with **Klaus Florian Vogt**, who sang so brilliantly in the Met's most recent *Ring*, as Siegmund and **Emily Magee** as Sieglinde. The British soprano **Catherine Foster**, who sang Brünnhilde at the Washington Opera's *Ring*, performs Brünnhilde in the *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*, while the radiant **Daniela Köhler** sings the role in *Siegfried*. **Andreas Schager** performs the title role in *Siegfried*, while the American tenor **Stephen Gould**, a Bayreuth veteran, sings his signature role of Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*.



Tobias Kratzer

As for *Tannhäuser*, directed by **Tobias Kratzer**, I cannot remember a production where a Wagner drama is presented more clearly, or with greater authenticity. The use of pre-filmed elements and live camera projections strengthen narrative continuity and adds depth to the drama.



Lise Davidsen

Stephen Gould was strong in the title role, and words cannot do justice to the performance of **Lise Davidsen**. **Ekaterina Gubanova** as Venus is a great singer and a gifted comedienne.



Ekaterina Gubanova

Der fliegende Holländer offered an embarrassment of vocal riches, resplendent vocal form and strong acting abilities. **Elisabeth Teige** has a huge voice... and owned the Festspielhaus. By the third act, the tense and slow build-up of tension between the locals and the Dutchman's crew erupts into masterfully staged violence, ending in an epic conflagration. This is an unforgettable *Dutchman*.



Elizabeth Teige as Senta

Retrospective 2022-2023

By Bonnie Becker



Bonnie Becker

Live opera is back! And the Wagner Society of Washington DC began the 2022-23 season with an interview of **Adam Turner**, artistic director of the Virginia Opera over a four-year period, who shared the joys and challenges of staging a Wagner opera, particularly after two years of pandemic substitutes. Zoom, September 23.

WSWDC co-sponsored **Virginia Opera's** production of *Die Walküre*, in the adaptation by Johnathan Dove. This was the second in the *Ring* Cycle that Virginia Opera is producing over a four-year period. George Mason University Center for the Arts, October 8-9.

The **Wagner Society Chamber Players**, an ensemble of National Symphony Orchestra artists, collaborated with pianist **Jeffrey Swann** for an in-person performance of Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major*; piano transcription of the Norn Scene from "*Götterdämmerung*" and Schubert's *String Quintet in C Major*. Washington Arts Club, October 10.

Popular lecturer **Saul Lilienstein** introduced the idea of "Wagner as Musical Craftsman" using examples from *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*. The audience had a choice of a hybrid format: attending in person or viewing on-line at a later scheduled time—or both! Arts Club of Washington on November 3 and Zoom, November 10.

Osher Lifelong Learning at American University offered a special short course taught by WSWDC chairman **Jim Holman** entitled "Richard Wagner: Four Masterpieces". Covering *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Parsifal*, the lectures provided an introduction for those new to Wagner but also contained nuggets of new material for old friends. Zoom, January 30 – February 2.

Movie Night (with popcorn!), a new and popular WSWDC activity, featured "Twilight of the Gods: Nietzsche Contra Wagner", an imagined confrontation between two geniuses whose friendship had decayed into bitter enmity. Film critics were WSWDC member **Bill Pastor** and **Saul Lilienstein** with comments from the



Bill Pastor



Minister Hardy Boeckle of the German Embassy and Lin-Chen Boeckle, with Jim Holman at the Kennedy Center RiverRun Festival

audience. Arts Club of Washington, March 9.

WSWDC chairman **Jim Holman** participated in the Kennedy Center's inaugural RiverRun Festival with the presentation "Talking Rivers, Talking Waters—the Rhine, Wagner, and the Rhinemaidens", explaining the role of the Rhine River as the beginning and end of the four opera *Ring* cycle. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, April 6.

Maestro **Jeffrey Swann** returned to the stage with the **Wagner Society Chamber Players** for another live performance, this time featuring

four Chopin piano preludes, a transcription of the *Quintet* from *Die Meistersinger Act III*, and Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*. Reception followed. Arts Club of Washington, April 30.

The Spring Concert by three of our American Wagner Project singers included solos by **Jon Janacek** performing *Allgemacht'ger Vater* from Wagner's *Rienzi* and **Heather Hjelle** singing *Suicidio!* from *Ponchielli's La Gioconda*. **Maureen Brabec** and **Ms. Hjelle** dramatized the confrontation between Elsa and Ortrud from *Lohengrin* followed by **Mr. Janacek** and **Ms. Brabec** in the duet in which Elsa demands to know Lohengrin's name. Reception followed. Arts Club of Washington, May 25.

For the annual *Wagner in der Wildnis* two WSWDC favorites **Simon Williams**, Professor Emeritus of Theater at University of California, Santa Barbara, and pianist and musicologist **Jeffrey Swann** focused on the sense of "Time and Timelessness in the Ring" with inciteful perspectives on how Wagner enhanced dramatic effect in the narrative by skillful manipulation of time and timing. Cacapon Resort State Park, June 2-4.



Jeffrey Swann delivers a presentation at Wagner in der Wildnis

Wagner in der Wildnis

Our signature weekend *Wagner in der Wildnis*, celebrating its 21st year, again featured the incomparable pianist and Wagner scholar **Jeffrey Swann**, and the knowledgeable and engaging professor and author, **Simon Williams**. 45 members, including friends from the Cincinnati OH Wagner Society, and member of the Houston Opera Board Jack Roth and his wife Liz, gathered at the newly expanded and more beautiful Cacapon State Park Conference Center near Berkeley Springs, WV.



Left to right: Sabrina Cassagnol, Lynne Lambert, Jeffrey Swann, and Simon Williams

With the theme "Time and Timelessness in the *Ring*," Maestro Swann's topics included "Time Recaptured: Remembered Past and Imagined Future," "Very Deep is the Well of the Past" and "Time and 'Work in Progress'." Professor Williams' titles included "The Ruthlessness of the Past," "Questions of Time in *The Ring*: Must a Long Opera Be Boring," and "How the *Ring* Flourishes through Changing Times."

For enrichment, we viewed portions of operas: the Chereau *Das Rheingold* Prelude through Scene 1, the Chereau *Die Walküre* Act 3, the Copenhagen *Siegfried* Act 3, and the Herheim/Runnicles *Götterdämmerung* Act 3. President-emeritus Aury Fernandez again hosted a book fair based on his voluminous Wagner library. Guillermo and Cecilia Schultz provided the wine.

The dates for *Wagner in der Wildnis* 2024 are May 31 to June 2. Topics under consideration are *Tristan und Isolde* or "Nature in Wagner." New members are especially welcomed. This is a great opportunity to dive into Wagner and make some like-minded friends.

The Valhalla Society

The Society has established the **Valhalla Society**. This is a legacy opportunity for members who, as part of their estate planning, would like to support the Wagner Society's core mission of advancing the knowledge and appreciation of Wagner's genius and supporting the development of the next generation of Wagnerian singers.

There is no minimum financial commitment, and we take you at your word that you have included the Society in your bequest. You can remember the Society in your Will or in a Revocable Trust. You can also name the Society as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy or an IRA. Bequests may specify a dollar amount, or a percentage of the residual value of your estate after specific bequests and expenses. The bequest is not payable until death, so it does not affect your assets or cash flow during your lifetime, and it is revocable. It may help minimize estate taxes or avoid tax burden on heirs. If you already have a Will or a Trust, a simple codicil is an easy and inexpensive vehicle.

If you would like more information, or would like to be listed among our Valhalla Society Champions, please contact us at Legacy@wagner-dc.org.

Members include **Jean W. Arnold, Betty Byrne, Sabrina Cassagnol, Marc DePaul, Aurelius and Janet Fernandez, Mark and Annette Golden, Frederic Harwood and Nedda di Montezemolo, Jim and Diana Holman, Margaret C. Jones, Lynne Lambert, Helen McConnell, and Marc Nicholson.**

The New Ring Disc Interactive

The **Ring Disc** is arguably the single most useful tool for understanding the music, libretto, and most essentially the leitmotifs of the *Ring*.

An interactive, computer-based resource, it contains four coordinated elements in a single unit:

- The complete recording of the celebrated Solti/Vienna Philharmonic *Ring*;
- A readable score with the libretto in English and German to facilitate reading the music as it plays.
- 128 leitmotifs identified and hyperlinked so the user can see and hear the development of each leitmotif throughout the four operas of the *Ring*;
- Notations of which roles (singers) are singing the text.

Every element of the *Ring* disc is hyperlinked. For example, find all the appearances of each motif, like the Rhine motif as it evolves from *Das Rheingold* to *Götterdämmerung*. Note which instruments are playing, the tempos, who is singing, where does the motif appear throughout the *Ring*, and how does it evolve. The *Ring* Disc is an essential tool for understanding and enjoying the *Ring*.

Developed by **Monte Stone** with an assist from our Chairman Jim Holman, this essential resource, out of print for ten years, is now available as a download.

It is available for \$50 in Windows with a one-click download, <https://wagnerite.samcart.com/products/the-ring-disc-an-interactive-guide-to-wagners-ring-cycle>. For Apple/Mac, it runs perfectly with one of the Windows emulators such as <https://wethegeek.com/best-windows-emulators-mac>.

Our Silver Anniversary Celebration

By Deborah Diamond



Deborah
Diamond

Twenty-five years calls for a celebration. Even as plans are unfolding, we anticipate a catered dinner, performances by present and past AWP participants, recognition of our Wagner Award recipients, acknowledgment of AWP and ESP singers who have gone on to substantive careers, and a celebration of our founding members.

One highlight is to review the achievements of the American Wagner Project, our signature program to develop the next generation of Wagner artists. AWP, and its predecessor the Thomas Stewart and Evelyn Lear Emerging Singers Program, have trained more than 90 singers who have excelled in opera houses throughout Europe, North and South America, and Asia. We will highlight their achievements in person, online and in print.

Upcoming Performances in the US

Virginia Opera *Siegfried* September 29 – October 15, 2023

San Francisco Opera *Lohengrin* October 15 – November 1, 2023

The Metropolitan Opera *Tannhäuser* November 30 – December 23, 2023

Houston Grand Opera *Parsifal* January 19-February 4, 2024

Bamberg Symphony, Prelude to *Lohengrin*, Overture to *Tannhäuser*, Carnegie Hall April 24, 2024

Bavarian Radio Symphony, Simon Rattle Conductor, Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan*, Carnegie Hall, May 3.

Atlanta Opera *Die Walküre* April-May, 2024

Dallas Symphony *Ring*, concert version, October, 2024

Sponsor a Performance or a Singer

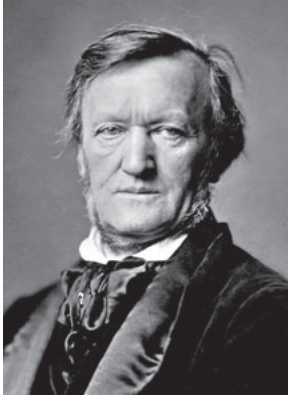
We are pleased to acknowledge a generous gift of \$5,000 from Jim Holman to underwrite the November 21, 2021 concert by Jeffrey Swann and the Wagner Society Chamber Players. Other notable donors were Thomas Brennan, Deborah Diamond, Helen Edwards, Elizabeth French, Louis Kaplan, Maureen Kelly, and Alan Reiter.

You too can sponsor a performance, a program, or a singer from the American Wagner Project. Tax deductible opportunities include stipends for any of the AWP participants and underwriting portions of our live concerts. For more information contact Will Stewart at Will.Stewart@Wagner-DC.org.

**Renew Your Membership Now!!
The 2023 Membership Year runs
January 1 - December 31.**

Renew now and when you do, please consider joining at the Premium membership level to support the singers in the Society's American Wagner Project.
Wagner Society office, Will.Stewart@Wagner-dc.org

Twenty-Five Years



What was Wagner's allure? Why our fascination? Why, among all the great composers to draw from, are there Wagner Societies throughout the world?

Gabriel Monod was a French historian who had seen a good deal of Wagner during the first Ring festival of 1878. In an article published contemporaneously in the periodical *Moniteur universel*, he wrote:

"On everyone who comes near him he exercises an irresistible fascination, not only by reason of his musical genius, or the originality of his intellect, or the variety of his learning, but above all by the energy of temperament and will that emanates from every fibre of him. You feel that you are in the presence of a force of nature, unleashing itself with almost reckless violence. After seeing him at close quarters, at one moment irresponsibly gay, pouring forth a torrent of jokes and laughter, at another vehement, respecting neither titles nor powers nor friendships, always letting himself be carried away by the first thing that comes into his head, you find yourself unable to be too hard upon him for his lapses of taste, of tact, or delicacy: if you are a Jew, you are inclined to forgive him for his pamphlet on 'Judaism in Music,' if a Frenchman, his farce on the capitulation of Paris, if you are a German, all the insults he has heaped on Germany... You take him as he is, full of faults – no doubt because he is full of genius – but incontestably a superior being, one of the greatest and most extraordinary men our century has produced."

Quoted in Ernest Newman's *The Life of Richard Wagner*, Volume 4, 1946, page 700, reprinted from Adolphe Julien's *Richard Wagner, Sa Vie e Ses Oeuvres*, Paris 1886.

The Roots of the Wagner Society of Washington, DC



By Barbara Karn, Frederic Harwood with Aurelius Fernandez

How does an organization begin? What accounts for its longevity? Who are the people who persevered and did the hard work behind the scenes? How does the organization grow and evolve?

For the Wagner Society of Washington DC, it began in early 1998 when Wagnerite **Janice Rosen** posted a notice on the classical music listserv Opera-L. She asked if there was anyone interested in forming a Wagner Society of Washington DC.

A handful of people responded, and four organized to create a steering committee: **Aurelius (Aury) Fernandez**, **John Green**, **Justin Swain**, and **Ms. Rosen**. After meeting once, they invited **Barbara Karn**, a PhD scientist, who had responded to the list-serve, and **RG Head**,

a retired Air Force brigadier general who had learned about the initiative by word of mouth.

The nascent Wagner Society of Washington DC now had a steering committee of six. The first meeting was held at **Allen Savada's** home, where they viewed videos – RG recalls it was of *Tannhäuser*.

By March the Society had booked three presentations and secured a room for meetings at Middle C music store in DC. **Professor Donald Crosby**, a friend of RG's, gave a talk on "The Literary Sources of *Tristan und Isolde*." On March 25, 1998, **Rosamund Bartlett** discussed "Wagner on the Russian Stage."

Then on June 16 **Jim Holman** presented "Wagner's *Ring*: Listening to Leitmotifs," a talk based on his recently published book 'Wagner's *Ring*: A Listener's Companion & Concordance.' Shortly thereafter the Board offered him the Society's chairmanship. A managing director at the multi-national Carlyle Group, Jim had broad connections to Washington's classical music scene, including years on the Board of the Washington Opera – and he was an author.

In short order, Jim recommended five new board members: **John Edward Niles**, a local opera impresario, **Tom Arthur**, a publicist, **Hank Gutman**, an attorney and Washington Opera Board member, and **Jeffrey Roames**, bursar at George Washington University who secured space for presentations at GW's Fungar Hall. The fifth was **John Pohanka**, a member of the Washington Opera board and President of the Pohanka Auto Group.

Almost immediately growth exploded. Jeff obtained meeting space at George Washington University; John Edward spied opportunities to support young singers; Hank filed incorporation papers as a 501(C3), and John and Jim collaborated on programming and membership development. Jim was now Chairman, and Aury was elected President.

Our Bayreuth Relationship

The pilgrimage to the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth Germany, Wagner's home and final resting place, is aspirational for many Wagnerians. Sitting in the opera house designed and built by Richard Wagner exclusively for his operas, with its superb acoustics, is an unforgettable experience.

For us, 1999 was momentous. **Wolfgang Wagner**, Richard Wagner's grandson and Artistic Director of the Bayreuth Festival, along with his wife **Gudrun**, came to the Washington Opera for a performance of *Tristan und Isolde*. The day after the performance, Wolfgang gave a talk at the Kennedy Center to patrons and staff, members of the Goethe Society, and the fledgling Wagner Society of Washington.



Wolfgang Wagner met members of the Wagner Society Board after his talk at the Kennedy Center, February 1999

Left to right: Jeffrey Roames, Aury Fernandez, Janice Rosen, Mr. Wagner, RG Head, John Green, Jim Holman, and John Edward Niles

Although we had fewer than 50 members and were barely 6 months old, Jim wrangled a breakfast with Wolfgang and Gudrun at the Kennedy Center. Jim and Aury sat with Wolfgang, while Barbara Karn and Janice Rosen sat with Gudrun. Barb asked Gudrun how



Some of the members of the Bayreuth Class of 2006.
 Front row left to right: Peggy Jones, Janet Fernandez, Betty Byrne,
 Kathleen Fuller, Cathy and Richard Soderquist,
 Aury Fernandez and Richard Fuller
 Back row left to right: R G Head, Carole Hoover, Bonnie Becker,
 Donald Crosby, Lynne Lambert, Sally Lund, Frederic Harwood
 and Lea McDaniel



Thomas Stewart (Left)
 Aug. 29, 1928 – Sept. 24, 2006
 Evelyn Lear (Right)
 Jan. 8, 1926 – July 1, 2012



Evelyn Lear (left) with tenor
 Issachah Savage (right)



U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor hosted at the Supreme
 Court an Emerging Singers recital with soprano Jennifer Wilson
 and tenor David Smith, 2004
 Left to right: Thomas Stewart, Evelyn Lear, Justice O'Connor,
 John O'Connor and Jim Holman

our Society could get tickets to the Bayreuth Festival. Gudrun said to simply fax a request by September. To our delight and surprise, fifteen sets of tickets for the year 2000 *Ring* plus three non-*Ring* operas arrived by mail.

Since that momentous 1999 offering, for 24 years that annual allotment has regularly arrived, most recently through our membership in the **Friends of Bayreuth**.

The Thomas Stewart and Evelyn Lear Emerging Singers Program 2000 to 2013

In 1999, shortly after our founding, John Edward Niles noted that two giants of the opera world had moved to the Washington area: **Thomas Stewart**, the reigning Wotan in Europe and North America, and his wife, the gifted soprano **Evelyn Lear**. John Edward and Jim felt that Tom and Evelyn might be interested in creating a program to identify and mentor singers for the Wagner canon.

Tom Stewart was a bass-baritone, named by Time magazine as “Wotan of his generation.” For a decade he was The Met’s leading baritone for the dramatic roles in Wagner, Verdi and Strauss. For 13 years he sang the heroic baritone roles at Bayreuth, including Wotan, Gunther, the Dutchman, and Wolfram. He sang Amfortas there for 13 consecutive years. He sang Wotan on Herbert von Karajan’s recording of the *Ring*, as well as in his *Ring* staged at Salzburg.

Evelyn Lear sang more than 40 operatic roles in every major American opera house from 1959 to 1992. She sang all three female roles in *Der Rosenkavalier* in Berlin, Salzburg, and La Scala. It was her final role at the Met when she retired. She won a Grammy for her performance in Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*. Evelyn focused on sopranos and tenors.

Thus was created another cornerstone, the **Thomas Stewart and Evelyn Lear Emerging Singers Program (ESP)**, under the Society’s auspices. The idea was to identify early-career (but not young) singers and bring them to their home in Silver Spring for three weeks of intensive coaching, culminating in a recital, usually at the German Embassy before an audience of 125-150. By 2011 they had mentored 42 aspirants, many of whom participated in the program for two or even three years. In a survey conducted in 2011, two thirds of the participants had made careers in music, many on opera stages.



Tom and Evelyn had the uncanny ability to identify singers with discernable potential. There were stars.

Jennifer Wilson was discovered in the program’s first year. A few bars into her audition, Tom stopped the piano. “Where have you been,” he asked. “Singing in the Washington Opera chorus”, Jennifer replied. “Not any more,” he roared. Jennifer went on to cover for Jane Eaglin at the Chicago Lyric Opera, where she was called in to perform Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung*. That performance, which “brought

down the house,” was described by the critic Ann Midgette in a New York Times article entitled “The End of the Big American Voice.” Jennifer went on to sing Brünnhilde for multiple *Rings* in Valencia and Florence under Zubin Mehta. She recorded the role of Turandot with the Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli.

Rebecca Teem was, for many years, a member of the Lübeck Opera, where she sang Brünnhilde in Lübeck’s *Ring*, as well as *Rings* for the Bayreuth Festival, the Deutsche Oper Berlin, and for Opera Essen.

Carolyn Whisnant was a 7-year member of the renowned State Opera of Mannheim, where she sang Brünnhilde in the *Ring*, and the roles of Ortrud, Senta and Elisabeth. She sang three *Ring* cycles of Brünnhilde for the Badische Staatstheater Karlsruhe and at the Royal Opera Stockholm.

Other ESP alumnae who have sung Brünnhilde include **Amanda Mace**, who sang Brünnhilde at Bayreuth, in addition to the role of Eva in Bayreuth’s *Meistersinger* and Sieglinde in Lithuania Opera’s *Die Walküre*. **Deidra Palmour Gorton** sang Brünnhilde for the Pittsburgh Opera and the Long Beach Opera. **Valerie Bernhardt** sang Brünnhilde in the New Jersey Concert Opera’s *Siegfried*.

Soprano **Julia Rolwing** sang Elisabeth in Washington National Opera’s *Tannhäuser*. Mezzo **Jennifer Roderer**’s title role in Carlisle Floyd’s *Susanna* became a signature role in Spoleto and the New York City Opera.

Soprano **Othalie Graham** continues a strong career, singing at the June 2023 Wagner concert at Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico, the Wagner Festival with the Vallejo Festival Orchestra, California, the role of Freia in Nashville Opera’s *Das Rheingold* in 2022, and Sieglinde for 2021’s Festival Theater-Hudson.



Jay Hunter Morris Daniel Brenna Charles Robert Austin Thomas Rolf Truhitte



Corey Bix Roy Stevens Jason Stearns

Jay Hunter Morris sang the role of Siegfried in the San Francisco Opera’s *Ring*, in two *Rings* at the Metropolitan Opera, and at the Valencia *Ring* opposite Jennifer Wilson. **Daniel Brenna** sang the role of Siegfried at the Washington Opera *Ring*. He went on to sing the role of Siegfried at England’s Longborough festival, the Stuttgart State Opera, and at Opera Days Budapest.

Charles Robert Austin performed King Marke for San Juan, PR, Hunding for the Washington National Opera *Ring*, and Wotan for Opera Theater Pittsburgh. **Thomas Rolf Truhitte** sang an emotionally vibrant Tristan for Virginia Opera and the role of Lohengrin at Spoleto. Tenor **Corey Bix** sang the role of Walther at Washington National Opera’s *Die Meistersinger*.

Heldentenor **Roy Stevens** sang Loge for Austria’s 24-hour *Ring* in 2004. Baritone **Jason Stearns** enjoyed an extended run with the Metropolitan Opera.

The American Wagner Project 2013–Present

With the death of Evelyn Lear in 2012, the Society affiliated with mezzo **Dolora Zajick’s Institute for Young Dramatic Voices (IYDV)**. In 2013 the Society joined with IYDV to form the **American Wagner Project (AWP)**, led by the great Wagnerian soprano **Luana DeVol**. As with the ESP, the IYDV and AWP are creating space and support for the kind of big dramatic voices often shunned by music conservatories. The abiding purpose of these programs continues to be to identify and nurture voices with the potential and the dramatic power to sing the Wagner canon.

Dolora Zajick is a mezzo soprano, described by the New York Times’s critic Ann Midgette as “one of the greatest voices in the history of opera.” She is especially known for her roles in Verdi’s *Aida*, *Don Carlos*, *Macbeth* and *Un Ballo in Maschera*, among numerous other roles. With ten recordings and nine DVDs and streaming performances, she is one of the most recognizable of opera stars.

Luana DeVol is one of the world’s most successful dramatic sopranos. She has sung major roles in the world’s major houses including La Scala, Milan, Teatro de Liceu, Barcelona, the Bayreuth Wagner Festival, Staatoperas in Berlin and Vienna, and the Metropolitan Opera. She was twice named “Singer of the Year” by the magazine *Opernwelt*.



From left to right: Dolora Zajick, Luana DeVol, Pianist Betty Bullock, Baritone Hunter Enoch, Soprano Amber Opheim, and Tenor Jon Janacek after the 2020 AWP 2020 at the Swedish Embassy

Ms. DeVol and Ms. Zajick identify candidates using notices in *The Classical Singer*, a magazine and online resource for singers, and an on-line program, *The Young Artist Tracker*.

The application process is intensive. In detail, candidates describe why either program is a good fit for them and include three video clips. Those who make the first cut audition in person, where the judges can assess the size and timbre of the voice. Typically, two or three candidates are selected for the three-week summer institute held at the University of Nevada, Reno, where they join three or four returnees.

In the past two years the AWP has returned to Washington for a recital where members can also observe coaching that Ms. DeVol provides the soloists.

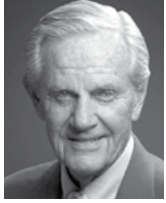


(Left to right) William McCullough, Stephanie de Prez, Hunter Enoch, Eugene Richards, and Jon Janacek perform at the Miami Wagner Festival Das Rheingold, 2022

In 2019 the Society under the leadership of the late John Pohanka and board member John Edward Niles formed a partnership with **Michael Rossi’s Miami Wagner Festival**. Mr. Pohanka, an

early WSWDC board member, co-founded the Miami Festival. Maestro Rossi has selected many AWP singers for his productions, including *Das Rheingold* in 2022.

The **Pohanka Family Foundation** provides major support for the Miami Festival, and also makes substantial contributions to the Wagner Society to support our work with the AWP fostering the careers of emerging Wagnerians.



John Pohanka



Anne Kline, Director, Pohanka Family Office, Michael Rossi, and Geoffrey Pohanka, Chair of the Pohanka Automotive Group

The AWP has also seen many of its participants begin careers.



Issachah Savage

Tenor **Issachah Savage**, bridged the transition between the ESP and the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices. He studied with Evelyn Lear in 2011 and 2012, and with Dolora Zajick and Luana DeVol in 2013 and 2014. He swept the 2014 Seattle Opera International Wagner Competition winning First Prize, the Audience Prize, and the Orchestra Prize. He has sung the title role in Los Angeles Opera's *Tannhäuser*; and Siegmund in Canadian Opera's *Die Walküre*.



Lauren Decker

Mezzo/contralto **Lauren Decker** has appeared with the Chicago Lyric Opera under contract for an entire season, a position she currently holds with Opera Philadelphia. At the Lyric Opera of Chicago she assumed roles in operas such as *Die Walküre*, *Dead Men Walking*, *Elektra*, *Il Traviatore*, and *La Traviata*. In 2022/23 she is engaged for Dayton Opera's *Das Rheingold* (Erda).



Hunter Enoch

Hunter Enoch, a bass/baritone, will sing Scarpia for Opera Theater St. Louis, and sing the role of Iago in *Othello* and the role of Germont in *La Traviata* at Pacific Northwest Opera. He sang Donner in Miami Music Festival's *Das Rheingold*, and Kurwenal in *Tristan und Isolde* with the Washington National Symphony.



Eugene Richards

Eugene Richards is a bass/baritone who completed seven years of training with the AWP. He sang Wotan in the Miami Festival's *Das Rheingold* and the role of The Wanderer for Kassel Opera's *Siegfried*. With the help of a grant from the Society, he has relocated to Vienna, where he is studying with veteran bass Kurt Rydl.



Corey Bix

Corey Bix, a tenor, has sung the role of Tannhäuser for the Chicago Lyric Opera and the role of Erik for San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Arizona Opera, and Virginia Opera. He sang the role of Bacchus at Glimmerglass, the Ft. Worth Opera, and the Washington National Opera's productions of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Also at the Met, in 2023 he sang the role of Faninal's Major-Domo in *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Wagner in der Wildnis

Shortly after our founding, Barbara Karn suggested a retreat characterized by the German word "Wildnis" (wilderness), signifying an escape – much as Wagner selected the relatively bucolic Bayreuth for his festival theater, rather than the Munich of his patron King Ludwig. Wildnis signified something more for our founders: a place to explore the challenging outer reaches of Wagner's musical, dramatic and psychological genius.

At the first Wildnis, held in 2001 in Capon Springs, VA, Simon Williams led the study of *Das Rheingold*. Williams, now Professor of Theater emeritus at the University of California Santa Barbara, is the author of several books on Wagner and has frequently provided English-language lectures at the Bayreuth Festival. In 2002 Wildnis moved to Cacapon Resort State Park, near Berkeley Springs, WV. At the suggestion of Aury Fernandez, Barbara Karn invited Maestro Jeffrey Swann, an internationally renowned concert pianist and expert on the music of Wagner, whose doctorate from Juilliard focused on the *Ring*.

Wildnis has been held at Cacapon every year since then (interrupted only by COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021). Each year, Maestro Swann and Professor Williams have shared their expertise on Wagner's art. Maestro Swann provides illuminating lectures on Wagner's music from the piano, and Professor Williams offers penetrating insights into his drama and its place in the history of European theater. They have covered all 10 of Wagner's mature operas, plus topics as varied as the theme of love in Wagner; Wagner's influence on modern culture; and the relationship of the artist and society as portrayed in *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger*.

Opera readings and reenactments, a feature of the early Wildnis, were replaced over time by DVD viewings. Members have made scholarly presentations, and Aury Fernandez has offered briefings from his extensive library. Betty Byrne and Aury were early champions of the event, which has been ably managed by Lynne Lambert, Jackie Rosen, and now Sabrina Cassagnol.

The Wagner Society of Washington DC Board

Jim Holman has served as Chair since the formation of the Society in 1998. He is the longest serving Chair/President of any Wagner Society in the world, and has been honored as such by the Friends of Bayreuth, the international association of Wagner societies.

In June, 1998 Jim gave the Society's third lecture. Immediately the Steering Committee invited him to serve as Chairman. Before joining the Society, Jim served as a managing director of The Carlyle Group, a large Washington-based multinational private equity firm. He is a former Board member of the Washington Opera, and author of the books *Wagner's Ring, a Listener's Companion & Concordance*, and *Wagner Moments, A Celebration of Favorite Wagner Experiences*.

For the Society, he books lectures and concerts.

John Edward Niles was recruited in 1998 by Jim Holman and is the second longest-serving Board member. He has spent his career conducting and producing operas in Washington and beyond. He initiated the relationship with Thomas Stewart that led to the Emerging Singers Program, and spotted the opportunity to work with Dolora Zajick's IYDV and with Michael Rossi's Miami Music Festival. Since 1999 he has managed the Society's relationship with the ESP, the IYDV, and the AWP.

Lynne Lambert has served on the Board since 2003. She was a Foreign Service Officer who served in Tehran, Athens, Paris, London, and Budapest before retiring in 2001. She is the Society's treasurer and for many years managed the Wildnis Program along with Jackie Rosen, and now with Sabrina Cassagnol.

Frederic Harwood joined the Board in 2006. He co-founded a consulting firm in the pharmaceutical industry and served as executive director of a large non-profit here in Washington. Since 2008 he has written and edited the Newsletter.

Mark Golden joined the Board in 2007. He is CEO of the Association for Diagnostic and Laboratory Medicine. For the Society he manages the Bayreuth relationship, including acquiring and distributing tickets.

Bonnie Becker joined the Board in 2017. She is in charge of membership, including renewals. For 27 years, before retiring in 2001, she served as Title IX Coordinator in the Compliance Office for Fairfax County Schools.

Sabrina Cassagnol joined the Board in 2019. She is our webmeister and is co-director of Wildnis along with Lynne Lambert. She is the Chief Compliance Officer for an institutional brokerage firm.

Deborah Diamond joined the Board in 2019. She manages the Society's Marketing and Public Relations, a role she inherited from Betty Byrne. She was an intelligence analyst for 34 years.

Joshua Baumgardner joined the Board in 2022, assuming leadership of our relationship with the AWP and the IYDV, along with John Edward Niles. Joshua is no stranger to the Society. In 2014 he was a tenor in the AWP, studying under Luana DeVol. Joshua is currently Vice President at TTR Sotheby's International Realty.

Ex-officio **Will Stewart** is the Society's Business Manager, Zoom enabler and technical guru.

Legacy Board Members

Aurelius (Aury) Fernandez, President Emeritus, co-organized the Steering Committee that led to the creation of the Society in 1998. He served as President until 2008. For a dozen years he wrote and edited the Society's Newsletters. Aury is a retired USIA Foreign Service Officer.

Janice Rosen initiated the list-serve that led to the formation of the Society. She served on the Board from the founding until 2002.

Barbara Karn joined the steering committee which formed the Society, serving on the Board from 1998 to 2003. She was instrumental in the formation of Wildnis and in securing the Society's tickets to the Bayreuth Festival. With a PhD, Barbara was an environmental scientist at EPA where she built and managed a program in nanotechnology, before moving on to the NSF.

RG Head was a member of the Steering Committee that formed the Society. He served on the Board from our founding until he moved to San Diego in 2008. A retired brigadier general in the US Air Force, RG has written five books on military history and tactics since his retirement.

John J. Pohanka was recruited to the first Board, in 1998 and remained active until his death in 2020. John was a long-time member of the Washington National Opera Board and for several years served as its chair. He founded the Palm Beach Wagner Society, and co-founded the Miami Summer Music Festival. He was a brilliant businessman, taking his father's single Oldsmobile dealership and building it into one of the nation's largest automotive networks.

Betty Byrne, one of our earliest members, served on the Board from 2000 until 2023. She managed publicity and mailings, before turning the job over to Deb Diamond in 2021. She enjoyed a long professional career focusing on Information Technology.

Guillermo Schultz served on the Board from 2007 until 2022. For 20 years he worked for an affiliate of the World Bank until leaving to form a Washington-based investment group. Fluent in German and in the Spanish of his native Mexico, he managed the Society's relationship with Bayreuth.

Jackie Rosen, Business Manager 2000-2020. During the period of our most explosive growth Jackie managed our membership files and financial records. She was our meeting planner, including the "Cruise on the Rhine" (Potomac) for the WNO *Ring* in 2016. In her career Jackie was coordinator of volunteer services at the Washington Opera.

The Society is also grateful to former Board members:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Henry (Hank) Gutman, 1998-2008 | Jim Giragosian, 2010-2020 |
| Phillip Raines, 1998 -2010. | Diane Stanley, 2010-2013 and co-chair Tenth Anniversary Gala |
| Elliot Marshall, 2002-2012 | Audrey Prendergast, 2012-2014 |
| Bill Kugler, 2002-2004 | Helen McConnell, 2017-2019 |
| Bill Pastor, 2004-2009 | Yoko Arthur, co-chair Tenth Anniversary Gala |
| Nancy O'Hara, 2006-2010 | |



Jim Holman



John Edward Niles



Lynne Lambert



Frederic Harwood



Mark Golden



Bonnie Becker



Sabrina Cassagnol



Deborah Diamond



Joshua Baumgardner



Will Stewart



Aury Fernandez



Janice Rosen



Barb Karn



RG Head



John Pohanka



Betty Byrne



Guillermo Schultz



Jackie Rosen

**Join us for next year's Wildnis!
May 31 – June 02, 2024**

The Wagner Award

By Frederic Harwood

Since its earliest days, the Wagner Society of Washington DC has recognized notables who have made extraordinary contributions to the study and the enjoyment of Richard Wagner's work, particularly in the Washington DC area. To date, fifteen luminaries have been honored.



Martin Feinstein

Martin Feinstein served as General Director of the Washington Opera during its formative years, from 1980 to 1995, making a singular contribution to WO's development. He nurtured many singers early in their careers, including Jerry Hadley and Denyce Graves.

In 1992 he brought Berlin State Opera maestro Heinz Fricke to WO as music director, and staged many Wagner productions, including the pivotal *Tristan und Isolde* attended by Wolfgang and Gudrun Wagner. Honoree 1999.



Thomas Stewart

Thomas Stewart was the reigning Wotan of his generation, and Herbert von Karajan's default bass-baritone. With his wife soprano Evelyn Lear, he co-founded the Emerging Singers Program, launching many significant operatic careers. He was a regular at the Bayreuth Festival for 13 years, singing the baritone roles of Wotan/Wanderer, Gunther, the Dutchman, Wolfram, and Amfortas, a role he sang for 13 consecutive Bayreuth seasons.

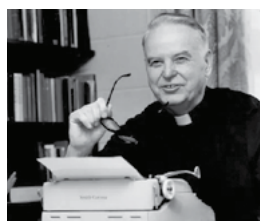
When Herbert von Karajan launched the Salzburg Festival with a staging of the *Ring* cycle, he cast Stewart as Wotan/Wanderer and as Gunther during the festival's first four seasons; von Karajan recorded the *Ring* with Stewart. *Time Magazine* acclaimed him as "the Wotan of his generation." Honoree 2000.



Placido Domingo

Placido Domingo, tenor, has sung the role of Siegmund in numerous productions, including the Metropolitan Opera, Paris Opera and Milan's La Scala. With soprano Nina Stemme he recorded an acclaimed studio recording of *Tristan und Isolde* in 2005. He performed with soprano Jennifer Wilson in WNO's 2007 *Dutchman*. He served as

General Director of the Washington National Opera from 1996 until 2011. Honoree 2001.



Father M. Owen Lee in his study

Father M. Owen Lee, critic, musicologist, author and Professor of Classics at the University of Toronto. Father Lee wrote three books on Wagner: *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Around*, *Wagner: The Terrible Man and his Truthful Art*, and *Wagner and the Wonder of Art*. He wrote books on Virgil, Horace, and countless articles on classical and musical subjects.

For many years he provided commentary for the Metropolitan Opera Saturday broadcasts. Honoree 2001.



Heinz Fricke

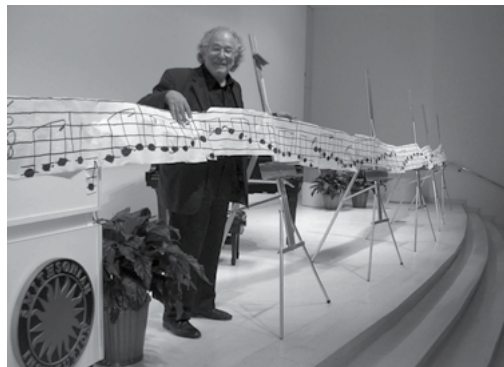
Maestro Heinz Fricke was music director of the Washington National Opera from 1993 until his retirement in 2010. He made his company debut conducting *The Flying Dutchman*, and during his tenure conducted many Wagner productions including *Parsifal*, *Die Walküre*, and *Tristan und Isolde*. Critics wrote that Maestro Fricke had a signal effect

on the orchestra's sound and morale. Born in East Germany, from 1961 to 1992 he was Music Director of the Berlin Staatsoper and enjoyed an international reputation as a Wagner conductor. Honoree 2002.



Evelyn Lear

Evelyn Lear, an internationally recognized soprano, was widely acclaimed for her interpretation of the German repertoire, especially Richard Strauss, Mozart, and Berg. She sang more than 40 operatic roles, including all three female leads in Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*. She appeared with every major opera company in the United States and won the Grammy for classical performance in 1966. With her husband Thomas Stewart she mentored many aspiring singers in her role co-directing WSWDC's Emerging Singers Program. Honoree 2003.



Maestro Saul Lilienstein and one of his famous teaching aids explaining the Tristan Chord

Saul Lilienstein is a popular lecturer for the Society, the Washington National Opera, and the Smithsonian Resident Associates Program. He was a student of Leonard Bernstein and holds a degree in music from Queens College, NY. He has served as artistic director of Baltimore's Handel Choir and Maryland's Harford Opera Theater. He has recorded many presentations for Washington National Opera productions sponsored by the Pohanka Automotive Group. Honoree 2004.

James Morris bass-baritone, inherited the mantle as the world's leading Wotan and Hans Sachs from his friend and mentor Thomas Stewart. The Metropolitan Opera's video recording of the complete *Ring* cycle with Morris as Wotan/Wanderer was described as "exceptional on every count."



James Morris accepts the Wagner Award from Thomas Stewart

He was the resident bass/baritone at the Met for many years, singing Wagner, Verdi, and numerous other roles. He won Grammy Awards for Best Opera Recording for his renditions of *Die Walküre* (1990) and *Das Rheingold* (1991). He recorded Hans Sachs in the Met's *Die Meistersinger*. Honoree 2005.



Jeffrey Swann

Jeffrey Swann, internationally acclaimed concert pianist, completed his doctoral dissertation at Julliard on the *Ring*. He has won first prize in the Dino Ciani competition sponsored by La Scala in Milan, a gold medal at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, and top honors at the Warsaw Chopin, Van Cliburn, and Montreal Competitions. His musicianship, punctuated by comments that elucidate the music, is a mainstay for

the Society at our concerts, at Wildnis, for Wagner Societies, most especially the New York Wagner Society, and at the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth. His many recordings include the Complete Beethoven Sonatas for which he was awarded Best of the Year by Fanfare magazine. He has recently completed a scholarly book on the leitmotifs in the *Ring*. Since 2010 he has served as Professor of Piano at New York University. Honoree 2007.

John Pohanka was Chairman of the Board of the Washington National Opera in the years when WNO staged the individual operas of the *Ring*, culminating in the highly acclaimed 2016 *Ring* presented in three cycles. In 2019 WNO dedicated its annual Gala to him, recognizing his outsized artistic and financial support. He was an early member of WSWDC's Board. In addition to helping fund the Emerging Singers Program, he co-founded the Miami Wagner Festival, which his family foundation continues to support. He authored *Wagner the Mystic*. Honoree 2009.



John Pohanka (arm raised) acknowledges appreciation for his Platinum level contribution while Maestro Philippe Auguin applauds

Donald Crosby PhD was a professor of German Language and Culture at centers for learning including Indiana University, Dartmouth, the University of Kansas, and the Goethe Institute in Germany. In 1998 he gave the first lecture to the newly formed Wagner Society of Washington DC, on *Tristan und Isolde*.



Donald Crosby

For the Society his frequent lectures included “*Tristan und Isolde*,” “Goethe, Wagner, and the Evolution of Culture,” “Sigurd and Brynhildt,” and “Wagner and the German Tradition.” He translated *The Flying Dutchman* and authored more than 100 scholarly articles. Honoree 2012.



Francesca Zambello

Francesca Zambello, Artistic Director of the Washington National Opera (WNO) is a true Wagnerian. She conceptualized, produced and directed the American *Ring*, first one opera at a time at WNO, and then in its entirety, in three cycles, at San Francisco Opera in 2011 and WNO in 2016 with Jay Hunter Morris as Siegfried. She directed WNO's *Tristan und Isolde* in 2012, and *The Flying Dutchman* in 2013. Honoree 2014.

Jay Hunter Morris performed the role of Siegfried in the Francesca Zambello American *Ring* in San Francisco, 2011, and then in two subsequent *Rings* at the Metropolitan Opera in 2013 and 2014. He was selected by Ms. Zambello for her San Francisco *Ring*. Lightning struck again when he was offered the Met Siegfried. He reprised the role of Siegfried in the Valencia *Ring* with Jennifer Wilson. Honoree 2015.



Jim Holman (left) with Jay Hunter Morris (right)

Jennifer Wilson, Soprano, was an ESP participant 2001 and 2004 who went on to a major career. She was discovered by Thomas Stewart and Evelyn Lear at the first audition/master class for the ESP in 2001. A turning point in her career came in 2008 at the Chicago Lyric Opera, recounted by Anne Midgette in a New York Times



Jennifer Wilson

article entitled “The End of the Big American Voice.” Her performance in *Götterdämmerung*, filling in for an ailing Jane Eaglin, “brought down the house.” Her Chicago triumph led to a multi-season collaboration with Zubin Mehta, who cast her as Brünnhilde in the Valencia and Florence *Rings*. She sang the role of Aida in Valencia under Lorin Maazel, Gutruine in the Los Angeles *Ring* under James Conlin, and the role of Turandot in her 2015 debut at the Met, a role she recorded with the tenor Andrea Bocelli. Honoree 2016.



Philippe Auguin

Phillipe Auguin served as music director of the Washington National Opera (WNO) from 2009 to 2018. He has conducted all of Wagner's mature works, including the WNO's three *Ring* cycles, the first *Ring* performed in China, at the Beijing Music Festival, and the *Ring* at Staatstheater Nürnberg. He served as assistant conductor of the Vienna Symphony under Sir Georg Solti and conducted the London Symphony in Westminster Abbey at the memorial for Maestro Solti in 1998. His resume includes 8 operas conducted at Teatro Alla Scala, 7 at the Metropolitan Opera, 14 at the Washington National Opera, and 13 operas at Deutsche Oper Berlin. Honoree 2018.

“Weist du. Wie das Wird?”



Aury Fernandez

“What will happen now?” (Second Norn, *Götterdämmerung* prologue). The question posed by the Second Norn was very much on my mind in May 1998 when a steering committee was formed to create what became the Wagner Society of Washington DC.

At the outset, the committee decided we needed a godfather to lead the organization, and we found Jim Holman, soon to be retiring from leadership at the Carlyle Group, and who had recently left the Board of the Washington National Opera. This was patently the right choice, as evidenced by Jim's 25-year tenure as Chairman.

We were an audacious lot. Requesting 15 sets of tickets to the Bayreuth Festival even though we had fewer than 50 members at the time; establishing the Emerging Singers Program with the legendary Wotan Thomas Stewart and his wife, the soprano Evelyn Lear, a program in Washington to identify and nurture Wagnerian singers; establishing a durable study retreat in the West Virginia countryside where a world class concert pianist, Jeffrey Swann, and Wagnerian scholar and author Simon Williams would elucidate the complexities and joys of the Wagner operas and themes.

Through my satisfying years as President and now President-emeritus, here we are, 25 years later, with inspired leadership, a hard-working Board of Directors, a treasury and program that supports developing singers, and most importantly a membership that supports with their financial contributions and participation in our mission “to promote the study and enjoyment of Wagner's art.”

Aury Fernandez

Aurelius (Aury) Fernandez



Our Premium Members and New Members

The Wagner Society of Washington DC is committed to developing emerging Wagnerian talent. We could not fulfill that mission without the help of our Premium Members, our most generous donors. We thank the members who champion our mission.

Premium Members

Wotan's Circle (\$10,000+)

Jim and Diana Holman
Pohanka Foundation

Meistersinger's Guild (\$5,000+)

Mark and Annette Golden
Thomas Powell
Guillermo and Cecilia Schultz

Pilgrims' Chorus (\$2,500+)

Kathleen and Richard Fuller
Frederic Harwood and
Nedda di Montezemolo
Bill and Cathy Pastor
Allan J Reiter
Harriet A. Rogers
Jack Roth

Golden Ring (\$1,000+)

Ann Harris Albin
Jean Arnold
Thomas C. Brennan
Porter G. Dawson
Marc DePaul
Deborah K. and Craig
Diamond
Donald Dittberner and
Roswitha Augusta
Aurelius and Janet
Fernandez
Lynne Lambert
Roberta McKay
Ingrid Meyer
Robert Misbin
Thomas and Diane Stanley
Mark Villamar and Esther
Milsted

Sponsor (\$500+)

Bonnie Becker
Robin and Katherine Elwood
David Gallalee
Marilyn Wong Gleysteen
Faith Greene
Margaret C Jones
William H. and Kathryn

Gerry Heller
Paul C. Palmer
Jacqueline Rosen
Robert Schreiber
Edward Seidel
Barbara Teichert
William Zeile

Patron (\$250+)

John Arbab
Jane C. Bergner
Van Patrick Bevill and
Doug Lakey
Donnie L. Bryant
Maija Budow
Sabrina Cassagnol
Donald and Tatjana Clagett
Francis Creighton
Linda DeRamus
K. Burke Dillon
Martin Donougho
Carol Ann Dyer
Helen A. Edwards
Jose Garcia
Cragg Hines
James Adams Holman
Ann Hoopes
Courtney W. Howland
Kenneth Johnston
Dr. Barbara Karn
Betty Kranzdorf
Michelle Krisel
Marie Louise Lerch
Christine W. Lynn
William Malone
Nina Woo Matheson
Marilyn Mautz
Louis Pangaro
Wolfgang Pordzik
Kinga Revesz
Robin Sagoskin
Marie Sippel
Ida Tjeknavorian
Dorothy Wexler
Kenneth and Dorothy
Woodcock
N. Convers Wyeth
John Yetter
Frank J. Zaremba

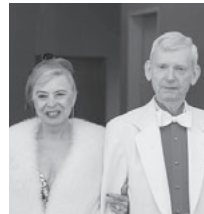
Welcome, New Members

Ty Collins
Nathalie P. Coupet
Joseph Donato
Maryann Eitler
Kevin Lewis
Lorinda Beth Madison
Michael McDonald

Rebecca Oppenheimer
Ann Wise Schlinkert
Alan Steele
Adam Twardowski
N. Convers Wyeth
John Yetter

In Memoriam

Cathy Soderquist



Cathy Soderquist (Left)

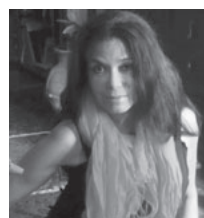
Cathy Noodgard Soderquist and her husband Dick saw every Bayreuth production at least once since 1976. She was renowned for her gowns and parasols, matched by his bow tie and cummerbund. Full page photos appear in the 2016 and 2017 Bayreuth Almanach. She lost her battle with cervical cancer.



Bea Bobotek

Bea Bobotek

Bea Bobotek was a pianist who regularly attended society events, particularly *Wagner in der Wildnis*. She worked as a medical librarian most of her career.



Sophia Angelini

Sophia Angelini

Sophia Angelini, a member since 2010, was a frequent attendee at Wildnis. She was a nuclear law attorney at the Department of Energy for over 30 years. After retiring she moved to Vienna, Austria, where she passed away in September 2022.

WSWDC'S Webinars are now on Youtube.

Go to the our webpage, then to resources, and click on any of the following:

Lohengrin, Jim Holman, April 23, 2020

"The Immolation Scene in the *Ring*," Jeffrey Swann, May 7, 2020

"Imagination and Reality in Wagner," Saul Lilienstein, May 21, 2020

"Tristan and the Delights of Ambiguity," Jim Holman, May 28, 2020

"Wagner's Music Dramas and the Jews," Saul Lilienstein, July 15, 2020

"Wagner: A Voyage of Self-Discovery through Beethoven," Jeffrey Swann, August 6, 2020



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Pilgrims' Chorus \$2,500 – \$4,999

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Wotan's Circle \$10,000 and Above

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- Priority for WSWDC Bayreuth tickets

Priority for lodge accommodations at the Wildnis weekend

- Recognition in programs and the newsletter for support of AWP and emerging singers

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September 21, **Adam Turner**, conductor of the Virginia Opera performance of *Siegfried*, is interviewed by Chairman Jim Holman about the challenges in presenting Wagner's *Ring*. On Zoom/webinar.

October 3, **John Muller**, Professor of Music History at Julliard: *Attaining Wisdom: Wotan's Growth in the Ring*. Time and place TBD.

October 7 and 8, *Siegfried* presented by the **Virginia Opera** at George Mason Center for the Performing Arts in suburban Fairfax VA.

November 7, the popular **Saul Lilienstein** discusses **Wagner and Dance: The Role Choreographers Have Played to Intensify the Drama In Wagner**. Arts Club of Washington, in person, 7:30 PM.

November-January, **Professor Hans Vaget** presents **Long Live America: Richard Wagner and the United States** examines three times Wagner considered relocating to the United States. Time and place TBD.

November-January, Pianist Jeffrey Swann and the **Wagner Society Chamber Players** explore the influence Baudelaire had on creating *Wagnerism in France, and Wagner's influence on French composers*. Time and place TBD.



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