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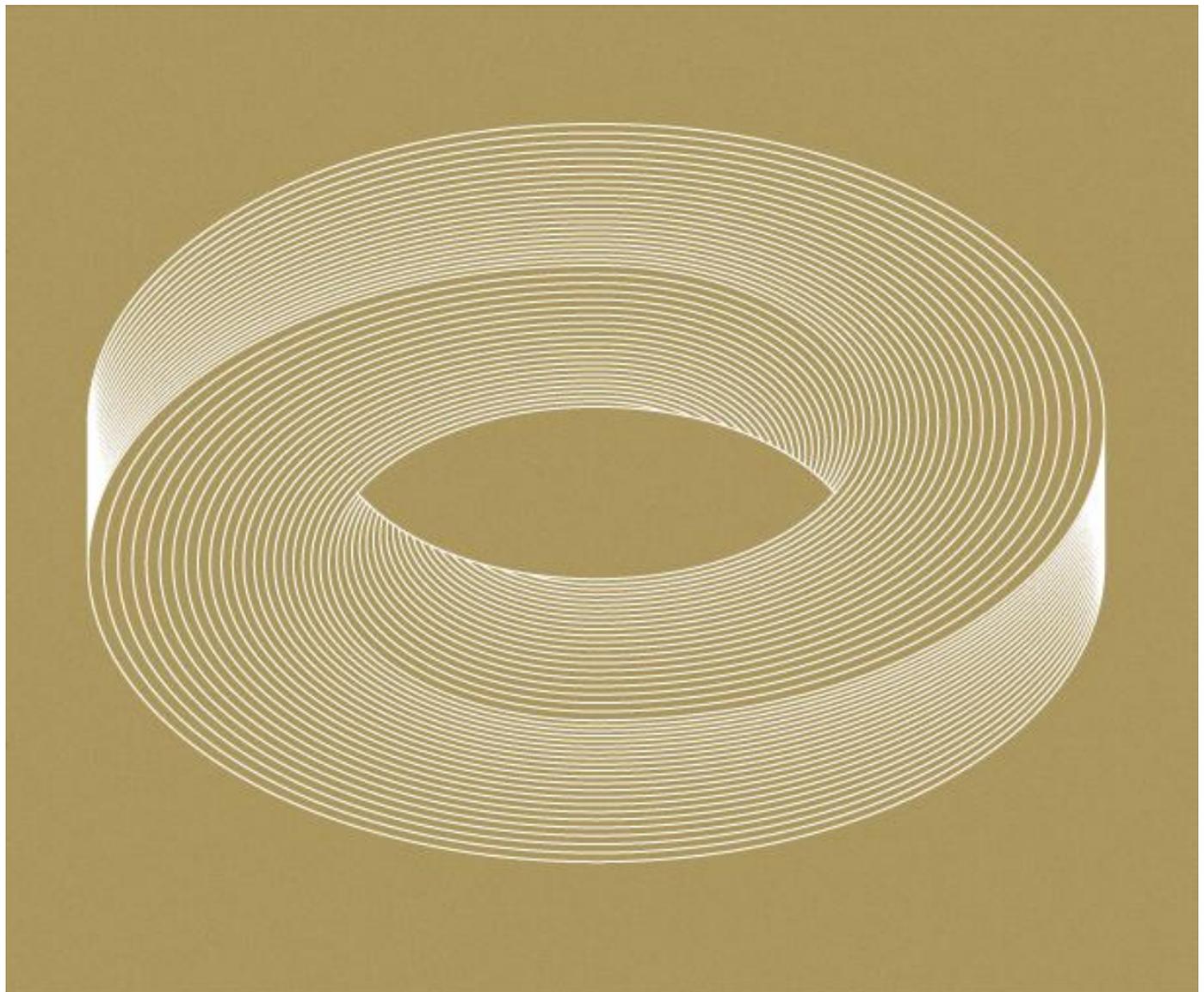
August 2013 No 713

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## THE MELBOURNE RING

## CYCLE 2013

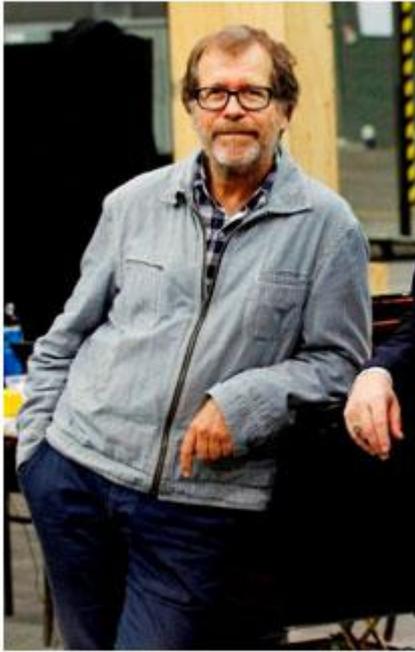
## OPERA AUSTRALIA



**A SINGULAR VISION:**

# DIRECTOR NEIL ARMFIELD ON WAGNER AND HIS RING CYCLE

BY JENNIFER WILLIAMS



**Neil Armfield** is an elusive man to catch. When I finally get him on the phone, just a few weeks after rehearsals finished for *Siegfried*, he is hanging out washing. It's disarmingly ordinary for a man whose name is regularly attached to masterpieces of the Australian and international arts industry.

A long career directing theatre, opera, musicals and feature films is studded by success after success: an all-star production of *Hamlet* for Company B, a stunning adaptation of the uniquely Australian novel *The Secret River* for Sydney Theatre Company, a production of a new opera, *Bliss* that was so successful it travelled from Opera Australia to the Edinburgh Festival and beyond. This year, the acclaimed director takes on an opera juggernaut that has bested many a director before him: Wagner's 16-hour, four-opera masterpiece, the *Ring* cycle.

Armfield doesn't pull any punches when I ask about his intention for the work. "I want to produce the best – by which I mean the deepest and richest – communication of the work that has ever been realised on the stage."

It is a bold ambition for any director, and an especially bold pronouncement given that 15

international opera companies are staging productions of Wagner's epic in the year of the composer's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Opera Australia's premiere will be the last in the world this year, and the first in the national opera company's history.

When Artistic Director Lyndon Terracini first approached Armfield about directing the *Ring*, the director was hesitant. "I've been asked about it a number of times over the years, and I've always stood back from it a little. Maybe it was fear. But I think ostensibly it was a worry that it can be done for the wrong reasons, as a display of wealth itself."

"That's a great irony," Armfield says, "given it is a work that argues so passionately against consumption and the accumulation of wealth."

The European tradition of producing the work has turned into something resembling a technological arms race, Armfield says. "It's a race to see who can create the most complicated technical wizardry in order to produce the most spectacular version of the story. To me, that means it becomes an empty display."

He took on the project under one condition: "I didn't want to shed my way of working, and what I feel art can contribute to our society, in order to produce a multi-million dollar sound and light spectacular. Every image we are trying to create is intended to reveal meaning."

His staging is quite modest (and at this stage of the proceedings, quite secret). That's because at its heart, *The Ring of the Nibelung* is a simple story about love and ambition for the world, Armfield says. "It obviously has to deliver great moments of spectacle, but they have to be absolutely earned," the director explains. It is important they don't overshadow the humanity of Wagner's tale.

"The inner child will get to enjoy the fairytale of the *Ring*, but the mythical beings that populate this tale are masks for real human emotions and real human stories," Armfield explains. It is the job of the director to draw those connections for the audience.

"We need to understand them as creatures of mythology. There is a giant, who puts on the Tarn Helmet and transforms into a dragon. Wotan is a God in trouble, who has a deep, deep consciousness of love and beauty, but is also touched by greed and a desire for control.

"But we also need to be able to see ourselves in them. Wagner himself wrote that it is essential that everyone can see themselves in Wotan. He is a sense the everyman, he is the creator, he is Wagner, he is any sentient being that watches the work. To identify the humanity of these characters, in spite of the mask of God or giant or dwarf, is fundamental to the work."

Armfield has set his *Ring* ambiguously, "nowhere other than a stage". It will be a contemporary story, he says: a tale about the destruction of the natural world, the extinction of the species, and what humans give up to pursue their desire for control.

"But set against that, there is a sense of the human population as optimistic, a constant resource of variety and joy," he says.

The first opera in the cycle, *Das Rheingold*, opens with the dwarf Alberich renouncing love in order to plunder the Rheinmaidens' gold. There are obvious parallels to the way humans abuse the earth's resources, Armfield says.

"In order to make money, we are destroying the earth. In order to do that, you have to renounce love, because if you love the world, if you love people, if you truly love yourself, even, you can't be doing what human beings are doing."

It will be impossible to hold yourself at a distance from Armfield's

production. It points the finger at us all, holding humanity responsible for the world's ecological decay. But the director's intent is not to leave the audience with a helpless kind of guilt. "This is a work that starts with renouncing love and stealing the Rheingold, and then 16 hours later the rivers rise and fire rains down, and the whole thing is destroyed. There is a sense both musically and dramatically that this is a new dawning. Wagner himself saw his revolutionary work as a kind of social gesture that would help to clear away greed from which the human race might start again."

In fact, Wagner wanted the theatre to burn along with the Gods at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, wherever the *Ring* was staged. Armfield

assures me that the Arts Centre Melbourne has nothing to worry about – "not unless there's a terrible malfunction!"

There is a tendency to think of the *Ring* as an epic, as a monumental undertaking. And in terms of its length, its difficulty, its sheer scale – it is. But it is perhaps better understood as a chamber piece, Armfield contends. "The work is extremely intimate. Most of the time in the *Ring* is taken up with scenes between two or three characters. It's a family story about dealing with destiny. About responsibility. About consequences. Big things are being negotiated, but if you don't get those moments intimate and true, that's when it becomes boring and declamatory."

Armfield believes his job as director is to take Wagner's masterpiece and try and work his way into a fresh light on the story.

The only way to do that, he says, is to work without comparison. In a lifetime of watching opera, Armfield has never seen a full *Ring* cycle, and is unfazed that his version will be the last in a long year of *Rings* for a small portion of the audience who follow the *Ring* around the world.

"It's a basic principal that you have to tell the story as though you were telling it for the very first time. It's my job to reach into the work and help it to come to life."

[THE MELBOURNE RING CYCLE 2013  
OPERA AUSTRALIA](#)

## Tickets to the Melbourne Ring Cycle are now completely sold out

### DATES

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
<i>Das Rheingold</i>	7pm Monday 18 November	7pm Wednesday 27 November	7pm Friday 6 December
<i>Die Walküre</i>	5pm Wednesday 20 November	5pm Friday 29 November	5pm Monday 9 December
<i>Siegfried</i>	5pm Friday 22 November	5pm Monday 2 December	5pm Wednesday 11 December
<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	4pm Monday 25 November	4pm Wednesday 4 December	4pm Friday 13 December

### PRICES PER CYCLE

Premium	A Reserve	B Reserve	C Reserve
\$2,000	\$1,600	\$1,200	\$1,000

## THE ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE



Arts Centre Melbourne is Australia's largest performing arts centre and the focal point of Melbourne's cultural precinct.

Each year it hosts the Melbourne seasons of the national and state music, opera, theatre and dance companies.

The Melbourne Ring Cycle will be performed in the State Theatre, the largest lyric theatre stage in the Southern Hemisphere.

State-of-the-art and renowned for its luxurious interiors, the State Theatre is being further enhanced with the expansion of the orchestra pit to accommodate up to 110 musicians. This new flexibility will enable performances of a scale and variety that cannot be staged anywhere else in Australia. The Melbourne Ring Cycle will be the first production to reveal the thrilling full-sized Wagnerian orchestral sound that this theatre can produce.

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## THE OPERAS



Richard Wagner's four-opera cycle ***Der Ring des Nibelung*** is spectacular and deeply moving. Watching a great production of this masterpiece is a life-changing experience.

At its heart the *Ring* cycle is a compelling drama, arcing through a mythological landscape. Immortals and humans fall in love and fight over power and wealth. Their destinies are determined by the fate of the ring.

The Melbourne Ring Cycle will be distinctly Australian in spirit and outlook – respectful of the work's historical importance yet boldly responding to it with antipodean

freshness. It will honour the great triumph of the *Ring* cycle - that the ideas it embodies are at once eternal and contemporary.

**Want to learn more?** Consider attending one of our special Insights or Pre-performance talks.

[Read more...](#)

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## DAS RHEINGOLD



### SUMMARY

The *Ring* cycle opens with this magnificent prelude.

In the space of a single, majestic, two-and-a-half-hour musical span, we are immersed in a struggle for power that alters the order of the universe and determines the course of the entire saga.

Spurned by the three beautiful Rhinemaidens, the Nibelung dwarf Alberich steals their gold and forges it into a ring that gives unlimited power to its wearer. When Wotan, the lord of the gods, steals the ring, Alberich curses it and all who wear it.

Internationally renowned for his interpretation of the role, Norwegian baritone Terje Stensvold is Wotan, Australian Wagnerian stalwart John Wegner plays the evil Alberich and English tenor Richard Berkeley-Steele is the wily Loge, god of fire.

### CAST

**Wotan** Terje Stensvold

**Donner** Warwick Fyfe

**Froh** Andrew Brunsdon

**Loge** Richard Berkeley-Steele

**Fricka** Jacqueline Dark

**Freia** Hyeseoung Kwon

**Erda** Deborah Humble

**Woglinde** Lorina Gore

**Wellgunde** Jane Ede

**Flosshilde** Dominica Matthews

**Alberich** John Wegner

**Mime** Graeme Macfarlane

**Fasolt** Daniel Sumegi

**Fafner** Shane Lawrencev

\*\*\*

**Evenings at 7pm**

**November 18, 27, December 6**

**Running Time:** Approximately 2 hours and 40minutes.

# DIE WALKÜRE - THE VALKYRIE



## SUMMARY

After *Das Rheingold's* rarefied realm of gods and monsters, *Die Walküre* plunges us headlong into the world of an emotional humanity, powered by some of Wagner's most remarkable music, including the famous 'Ride of the Valkyries'.

Wotan wants to protect his children but is forced to forsake them. His twin offspring Siegmund and Sieglinde fall passionately in love; his warrior daughter Brünnhilde defies Wotan by trying to protect the twins. Ultimately she is punished: Wotan strips her of her immortality and puts her to sleep surrounded by a wall of flames that only the greatest hero can brave.

Terje Stensvold returns as Wotan, English soprano Susan Bullock makes her first appearance as

Brünnhilde and internationally-renowned Australian singers – tenor Stuart Skelton and soprano Miriam Gordon-Stewart – are the passionate lover-siblings Siegmund and Sieglinde.

\*\*\*

**Evenings at 5:00pm**

**November 20, 29, December 9, 2013**

**Running Time:** 5 hours and 30 minutes, including two intervals

**First interval:** 1 hour and 15 minutes

**Second interval:** 30 minutes

## CAST

**Wotan** Terje Stensvold

**Fricka** Jacqueline Dark

**Siegmund** Stuart Skelton

**Sieglinde** Miriam Gordon-Stewart

**Hunding** Jud Arthur

**Brünnhilde** Susan Bullock

**Gerhilde** Anke Höppner

**Ortlinde** Meryl In Quaife

**Waltraute** Deborah Humble

**Schwertleite** Dominica Matthews

**Helmwige** Hyeseoung Kwon

**Siegrune** Sian Pendry

**Grimgerde** Elizabeth Campbell

**Rossweisse** Roxane Hislop

# SIEGFRIED



## SUMMARY

The *Ring* cycle's third opera charts the rise of Siegfried into the greatest hero of the age.

Following his mother Sieglinde's death, Siegfried has been raised by the dwarf Mime, brother of Alberich. Although Mime loathes Siegfried, he hopes Siegfried will kill the dragon Fafner, guardian of the all-powerful ring.

Instead, Siegfried kills both Fafner and Mime, claims the ring for himself and sets off to find the sleeping Brünnhilde. Siegfried braves the flames, wakes her with a kiss and the two declare their love in one of the most thrilling duets in all opera.

German tenor Stefan Vinke is the mighty hero Siegfried, English soprano Susan Bullock returns as Brünnhilde and Terje Stensvold makes his final appearance in the cycle as The Wanderer.

\*\*\*

**Evenings at 5:00pm**

**November 22, December 2, 11**

**Running Time:** 5 hours and 40 minutes including 2 intervals

**First interval:** 1 hour and 15 minutes

**Second interval:** 30 minutes.

## CAST

**Siegfried** Stefan Vinke

**Brünnhilde** Susan Bullock

**Erda** Deborah Humble

**Mime** Graeme Macfarlane

**The Wanderer** Terje Stensvold

**Alberich** John Wegner

**Fafner** Shane Lawrencev

**Forest** Bird Taryn Fiebig

# GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

## TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

[In 1908 J Cuthbert Hadden translated it as THE DUSK OF THE GODS – ed. AI.]



### SUMMARY

It is in *Götterdämmerung's* tale of treachery and destruction that the *Ring* cycle reaches its devastating finale.

All seems lost when love is betrayed by naked ambition and villains outsmart heroes. After drinking a magic potion, Siegfried forgets Brünnhilde and falls in love with Guttrune. Enraged, Brünnhilde joins forces with Hagan to murder Siegfried but then, discovering the truth about his betrayal, leaps into his funeral pyre and returns the ring to its rightful owners. The Rhinemaidens joyfully reclaim their gold, the old world order is swept away by flood and fire, and the world is redeemed.

German tenor Stefan Vinke and English soprano Susan Bullock are the star-crossed lovers Siegfried and Brünnhilde, and Australian bass-baritone Daniel Sumegi is the malevolent Hagen.

\*\*\*

**Afternoons at 4:00pm**

**November 25, December 4, 13**

**Running Time:** 7 hours

including 2 intervals

**First interval:** 1 hour and 30 minutes

**Second interval:** 35 minutes

### ARTISTS

**Siegfried** Stefan Vinke

**Gunther** Barry Ryan

**Alberich** John Wegner

**Hagen** Daniel Sumegi

**Brünnhilde** Susan Bullock

**Guttrune** Sharon Prero

**Waltraute** Deborah Humble

**Woglinde** Lorina Gore

**Wellgunde** Jane Ede

**Flosshilde** Dominica Matthews

**First Norn** Elizabeth Campbell

**Second Norn** Jacqueline Dark

**Third Norn** Anke Höppner

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## WAGNER - THE COMPLETE EPIC By Tony Palmer with RICHARD BURTON



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**Published on August 27, 2012**

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**TOO ALL WHO READ THIS...PLEASE READ MY PUBLIC DISCLAIMER- APOLOGY ON MY YOUTUBE PROFILE – "About Ronbeadle's Channel".**

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Filmed in 200 different locations in 6 different European countries as part of the centenary of Wagner's death, this film was the biggest East-West production in the history of television. Notably for shooting the original places Richard Wagner visited, lived and worked. The film took 7 months to complete and was written by Charles Wood in conjunction with the Bayreuth estate and Wolfgang Wagner – Wagner's grandson.

The film was filmed in widescreen and in 35mm Dolby Stereo. The music was recorded by Sir Georg Solti especially for the film and features many notable actors, including:

Sir Richard Burton

Vanessa Redgrave

Sir Laurence Olivier

Sir John Gielgud

Sir Ralph Richardson

Ronald Pickup

Cyril Cusack

Sir William Walton

\*\*\*

Despite the controversy on the length of this film, I can claim that my upload is the "complete" film as seen on TV in 1983 - taken from the four full original vhs tapes. The latest dvd version – there are now three different editions – is supposedly complete, but if you compare them, there is up to

almost an hour of more footage in mine. I heard that Tony Palmer went back and edited out some footage, as well as recut some of the sequences for the last dvd release.

The film has many drawbacks nevertheless, Wagner's philosophical-esoteric ideas are not exposed. His inspired way with mythology and legend is not covered at all either. His friendships and relations with many of the great men and artists etc at the time are not even taken in consideration...Not only that but Wagner's compassionate, profound and humane nature is utterly glossed over...leaving the man completely political and spiteful, which is totally wrong.

In any case...part of the reason of why I decided to publish this on youtube was because:

1. To present it complete on youtube, and not in broken up segments and short clips.  
2. It is ultra rare, and well-nigh impossible to find.

3. Not many people know about it, or even have heard of it.  
4. To clear up the controversy on the length of the film – just read the reviews on amazon.

PS: When you watch this, make sure you're on wi-fi or have an unlimited internet data plan!  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alf7JtcifLQ>

## Bayreuth to Fete Wagner Bicentenary With Radical 'Ring'

By Agence France-Presse on 10:54 am July 21, 2013.



**This photo taken on July 15, 2011 shows the festival hall of the Bayreuth Festival – Richard-Wagner-Festspiele – in Bayreuth, southern Germany. All eyes in the opera world are on Bayreuth this week where the curtain rises on the most anticipated event in this year's Richard Wagner Bicentenary. AFP Photo/Christof Stache.**

**Frankfurt.** All eyes in the opera world are on Bayreuth this week where the curtain rises on the most anticipated event in this year's Richard Wagner Bicentenary.

Frank Castorf, the 62-year-old iconoclast and "bad boy" of German theatre, is staging Wagner's sprawling four-part "Ring" cycle, the Mount Everest of opera.

And the production's popular and critical success could prove crucial for the very future of the Bayreuth Festival itself, the month-long summer music fest dedicated exclusively to Wagner's works.

But Castorf played down expectations for his production in a magazine interview at the weekend, complaining that he had not had sufficient time.

"I'm not looking to come with a 'Ring of the century'," Castorf told the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* in excerpts of an interview released ahead of publication. "I'd be happy with a 'Ring of the year'," he said.

It has been unusually quiet so far in the legendary Festspielhaus, the theatre

built to Wagner's own designs that sits atop Bayreuth's fabled Green Hill.

There have been no tantrums, scandals or walkouts, so far at least, unusual for a festival which is almost more notorious for the behind-the-scenes machinations and bitter infighting among Wagner's many descendants than for any of the productions on stage.

Last year, the Russian bass-baritone Evgeny Nikitin, cast to sing the title role of "The Flying Dutchman", quit over an alleged Nazi tattoo on his chest.

But this year there has been nothing, aside from a storm-in-a-tea-cup over Jonathan Meese, the notorious German painter, sculptor and performance artist, who will direct a new production of "Parsifal" in 2016.

Meese is facing charges of making a Nazi salute in public during one of his theatre performances, but the affair has gone almost totally unnoticed outside Germany.

Strictly speaking, it won't be Castorf's first-ever foray into opera or even Wagner.

He staged a version of "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg" at Berlin's Volksbuehne theatre in 2006. But he used actors instead of trained opera singers and interspersed Wagner's text with a play by Expressionist playwright Ernst Toller (1893–1939).

In Bayreuth, Castorf has been contractually banned from any such tinkering with the text of Wagner's monumental "Gesamtkunstwerk", the "Ring".

Until the interview with *Der Spiegel*, both he and his conductor, Russian rising star Kirill Petrenko, had resolutely refused to talk to the press.

But tiny tantalizing details have managed to filter out, nonetheless.

Castorf and his stage designer Aleksander Denic have decided to stage the "Ring" as a tale of globalisation and the rush for oil.

The staging, rumor has it, includes a gas station on Route 66 and the Rhinemaidens as Anita Ekberg lookalikes in the Fontana di Trevi in Rome.

For Bayreuth's current management – Wagner's great-granddaughters Eva

Wagner-Pasquier and Katharina Wagner – the success of the new "Ring" could prove crucial.

The two half-sisters took over the running of the festival in 2009 and their contracts are up for renewal in 2015.

But their aesthetic choices have never been very popular among the conservative circles who attend the festival year after year.

Katharina's own staging of the "Mastersingers", which ran from 2007 until 2010, was critically panned.

And she was also responsible for choosing Germany's Sebastian Baumgarten to direct the current staging of "Tannhaeuser", which is so unpopular that it is being withdrawn early at the end of this year's run.

Katharina has long been at loggerheads with the powerful Society of Friends of

Bayreuth which puts up huge chunks of the funding for the festival.

Castorf's punkish, anarchic theatre is anathema to them, as well as to the hundreds of Wagner societies around the world, whose ultra-conservative membership also contributes to Bayreuth's funding.

The choice of Castorf is seen by many as very much a stop-gap solution anyway, after long and protracted negotiations with German filmmaker Wim Wenders ran aground.

The "Ring" is an almost insuperable challenge for even the most experienced music theatre directors. So to entrust it to an opera novice like Castorf with just two years to stage it, is, for many, sheer folly.

Nevertheless, Bayreuth needs this "Ring" to be a success.

With the entire opera world pulling out all the stops to celebrate Wagner's 200th birthday, the composer's home town has yet to put its authoritative stamp on the proceedings.

The crumbling facade of Festspielhaus is encased in scaffolding to prevent injury to passers-by.

And Wagner's home, Wahnfried, a museum, is a building site due to extensive renovation work with no firm reopening date.

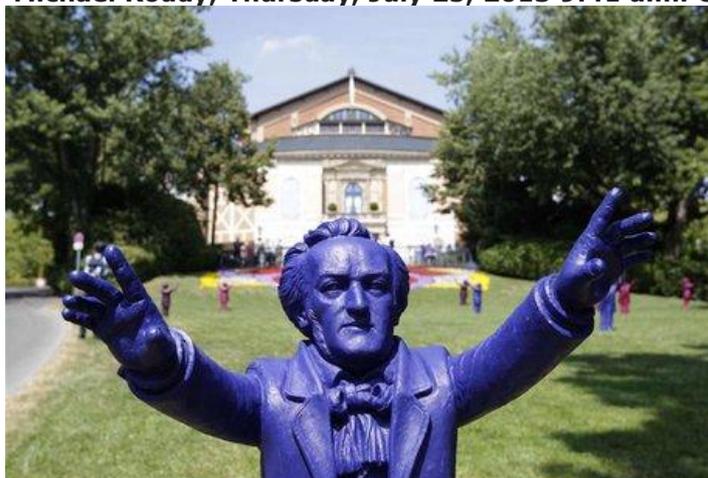
**Agence France-Presse**

<http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/international/bayreuth-to-fete-wagner-bicentenary-with-radical-ring/>

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## Wagner's 200th anniversary gets an oil-themed "Ring"

By Michael Roddy, Thursday, July 25, 2013 9:41 a.m. CDT



### Sculptures of German composer Richard Wagner are seen outside the Grüner Hügel opera house in Bayreuth

BAYREUTH, Germany (Reuters) - The sometimes staid audience for the annual Wagner festival in the Bavarian opera house he built was bracing this week for a new production of his mythic "Ring" cycle inspired by American TV, Hitchcock's "Psycho" and the pursuit of oil.

For a new production for the 200th anniversary of Wagner's birth, Berlin theatre director Frank Castorf said "Rheingold", the first in the four-opera cycle, was set in Texas and opened at a motel on Route 66 - the road that snakes through America.

"It's a place where you would meet a figure like Jim Morrison," the late lead singer of rock group "The Doors", Castorf said.

At a press conference on Thursday, with Wagner's great-granddaughters Eva Wagner-Pasquier and Katharina Wagner in attendance, Castorf said he had also drawn inspiration from film director Quentin Tarantino, big American cars and Coca-Cola.

The production, which will have its premiere on Friday night, has already prompted speculation in the German press that it could cause a scandal, but Katharina Wagner was unfazed.

"It's not about whether I think the 'Ring' is good or bad, it's important that it's exciting and people talk about it," she told reporters.

Castorf said he had also incorporated Mount Rushmore, the monument to U.S. presidents in South Dakota, into the production but had replaced their heads with those of Stalin, Lenin, Marx and Mao.

The switch showed the interplay between capitalism and communism and both systems' dependence on oil, he added.

Long-time Bayreuth-goers have learned to cope with different directors' takes on works that have been playing for 150 years and have only grown in popularity.

The opening of the festival season was marked with a morning musical ceremony beside Wagner's grave.

Trumpet players of the Festival orchestra and the Festival chorus performed a chorale from his "Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg" for several hundred people.

"I do this every single solitary year. I find it riveting and unbelievably touching," said Siobhan Conroy of Dublin who, with her husband Patrick von Gordon, lives in Bayreuth.

"The singing has a certain resonance on a morning like today, with the sun shining through the trees and so many people have come to celebrate the genius that was Richard Wagner." German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her husband - quantum chemist and Wagner enthusiast Joachim Sauer - arrived minutes before the start of the festival's opening performance of Wagner's "The Flying Dutchman" on Thursday, making no comment to waiting photographers.

(Additional reporting by Marzanne van den Berg; Editing by Andrew Heavens)

<http://kfgo.com/news/articles/2013/jul/25/wagners-200th-anniversary-gets-an-oil-themed-ring/>

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## Wagner Festival Confronts Controversial Past *Bayreuth Looks Back at a History of Music and Politics*

By [A.J. Goldman](#), Published August 02, 2013, issue of [August 09, 2013](#).



**Blue Man Group: This year, Wagner gnomes are ubiquitous at the Bayreuth Festival. A.J. GOLDMANN**

On the occasion of the [Bayreuth Festival the](#) Grüner Hügel, or Green Hill, that is home to the Richard-Wagner-Festspielhaus was littered with 500 multicolored "mini-Wagners" — garden-gnomelike figurines of the composer, hands raised as if ready to conduct. These cute statuettes share the hill with an outdoor exhibition, "Silenced Voices," honoring 53 Jewish singers, musicians and conductors who performed at the festival before World War II. One of the earliest was conductor Hermann Levi, who led the premiere of "Parsifal," Wagner's final, mystical opera, in 1882. To the left and right of the massive bust of Wagner, designed by [Arno Breker](#), Hitler's favorite sculptor, are the biographies of Bayreuth musicians who perished in the Holocaust. At the top of the hill is the Bayreuther Festspielhaus, the opera house designed by the composer himself both as the perfect performance venue

for his operas and as a den of worship for his most ardent admirers.

For much of the festival's history, the spirit of levity coupled with introspection evidenced by the Wagner-gnomes and the "Silenced Voices" exhibition would have been unthinkable. This mixture of irreverence about the cult of Wagner, alongside the sobriety of the festival and the role it played during the Third Reich speaks volumes about the character of the modern-day festival, which opened on July 25 with a performance of "[Der Fliegende Holländer](#)" ("The Flying Dutchman").

Bayreuth is still the most exclusive and prestigious cultural event in Germany, and both Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, and its president, Joachim Gauck, attended the opening of the festival. This year's installment has been especially momentous because of the composer's bicentennial. The Wagnerjahr, as it is succinctly called here, is being celebrated throughout the

country with a seemingly endless spate of operas, concerts, magazine cover stories and newly published books. Bayreuth's new production of the "Ring" cycle by the controversial Berlin director Frank Castorf is the undisputed climax of the Germany-wide Wagner-rama.

Wagner's notorious (and notoriously public) anti-Semitism, coupled with the high-ranking Nazis who held his works in great esteem, has left a deep stain on his reputation and that of his music. To this day, Israel still famously observes an unofficial ban on performing Wagner. But the history of the Bayreuth Festival, run exclusively by members of the Wagner family since its opening in 1876, is far more damning of its reputation than either the composer's racist beliefs or Hitler's musical tastes.

Though Wagner built the Festspielhaus as a shrine to himself and his music, the festival embraced reactionary politics well before the Nazis took power in 1933. Unlike many other cultural

institutions that operated during the Third Reich, the involvement of the Bayreuth Festival went far beyond merely lending cultural prestige to the regime. In the wake of Hitler's failed Beer Hall Putsch, the festival became a haven for members of the then-banned Nazi Party and their supporters. The 1924 festival in particular, which General Erich Ludendorff, one of the key players in Hitler's 1923 putsch, attended as a guest of honor, had the character of a Nazi rally. The festival program that year described Wagner as "The führer of German art." One could say that Bayreuth supported Hitler long before Hitler supported Bayreuth. Hitler never forgot the Wagner family's friendship and support, and remained lifelong friends with Winifred — the English-born wife of the composer's son Siegfried — whom he would visit annually. He would play with the little Wagner children, Wieland and Wolfgang, who called Hitler "Uncle Wolf."

Wagner's anti-Semitism and Hitler's enthusiasm for Wagner are two separate but related issues that make the festival so controversial. Hitler invested Wagner with much of the Nazi ideology that we still associate with his music. The affinity of the festival leadership — starting with Wagner's vehemently anti-Semitic widow, Cosima Wagner, Franz Liszt's daughter, who lived until 1930 — to Nazi ideology was a decisive factor that in the words of Thomas Mann turned the festival into Hitler's "Court Theater."

This alliance has had damning consequences for both the festival and the reception of Wagner's music down to the present day. As Stephen Fry explains in the 2010 documentary ["Wagner & Me,"](#) "Hitler saw one side of Wagner and we tend to see Hitler's side of Wagner because Hitler was such a huge figure in the 20th century and because his taste for Wagner was so enormous."

In the film, Fry, who is Jewish, tries to reconcile his love for Wagner's music with his discomfort at "how close to the Nazi fantasy world Wagner was, and

how deeply stitched into Hitler's vision of the world."

After the war, Winifred Wagner, thoroughly unrepentant about her ties to Hitler, was barred from the festival, yet she proudly displayed her Nazi sympathies by appearing in public with old Nazi friends and neo-Nazi politicians. In 1975 she gave a five-hour-long interview to the experimental filmmaker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg in which she spoke candidly about her undiminished fondness for Hitler.

The interview caused a scandal. In the words of the historian Frederic Spotts, her words "were the ventriloquized voice of numberless Germans and Austrians": the public articulations of what many others still privately thought. At the following year's festival, the German president, Walter Scheel, strongly denounced such attitudes in his address to the audience. In particular, he condemned the festival administration, "who still thought that Bayreuth was only a place of culture without noticing that it had long since become an instrument for evil policies."

Nowadays, Bayreuth considers itself as more of a Wagner workshop than a temple to his music. Yet it remains the most prestigious cultural event in Germany, with a notoriously long wait for tickets and a thriving black market for the consistently sold-out performances. While it aims to present opera as something alive and relevant by routinely engaging controversial and cutting-edge directors, the festival remains very sensitive about the taint of its Nazi history.

Last year it weathered a scandal after the revelation that a baritone engaged to sing there had once performed in a heavy metal band with a swastika tattoo on his chest. The singer, Evgeny Nikitin, was slated to sing to title role in "*Der Fliegende Holländer*" and was summarily dropped from the production.

More recently, Katharina Wagner, who is the composer's granddaughter and has managed the festival along with her half-sister, Eva Wagner-Pasquier, since

2008, has pledged to hand over the letters that passed among Wolfgang, her father and Hitler. She gave little hope, however, that the "potentially explosive" correspondence between Winifred and Hitler, which are in the possession of another Wagner cousin, would ever see the light of day. Winifred claimed to have no knowledge of the final solution. What is known, however, is that she asked the SS chief in Prague, Karl Frank, for the confiscated property of Czech Jews who had been deported to camps. It is difficult to assess just how transparent the festival truly is. And this year the festival has also maintained a certain amount of secrecy about its new "Ring" cycle.

"Ring," a monumental tetralogy derived from an ancient Teutonic saga about gods, dwarfs, giants, dragons (and a few mere mortals), is arguably the fullest encapsulation of the composer's racial and nationalistic ethos. Modern productions, starting with the centenary "Ring" of 1976, directed by Patrice Chéreau, commonly chip away at the myths to challenge Wagner's assumptions about everything from race and purity to women and power. That production, set during the industrial revolution, was much reviled at its premiere but has since become a rarely rivaled benchmark. In the present day, the best Wagner directors working are those who find ingenious and unexpected ways to confront the problematic aspects of the music, libretti and ideology. Among them is Stefan Herheim, the Norwegian director who contributed the festival's much praised 2008 production of "*Parsifal*," which was stuffed with allusions to Bayreuth's past (including huge Nazi flags and goose-stepping extras).

Aside from a handpicked group of 10 journalists who were invited to sit in on rehearsals of the first two installments, of the "Ring" cycle, "*Das Rheingold*" and "*Die Walküre*," Frank Castorf's production has been completely off-limits to members of the press. After being denied access to the planned

media preview of "Götterdämmerung," the cycle's final, longest and loudest installment, I managed nevertheless to gain admittance to the high-security final dress rehearsal of "Rheingold" on July 18, where ushers scrutinized the 2,000-audience members' tickets and passports. Castorf, who has led Berlin's Volksbühne for the past 21 years, has a reputation for being an edgy and occasionally vulgar provocateur. From a distance, his iconoclastic approach to theater seems like a good match to Bayreuth in the 21st century. Nowadays, taking an ax to the sanctity of Wagner's music dramas is always welcome. Although he canceled all his interviews in the run-up to the festival, Castorf did reveal a few details about his vision for the cycle in an interview with German news sources last year. The juiciest admission was that he would tell "Ring" as a vision of postwar Europe's scramble for oil in the Middle East. Based on what I saw, Castorf seems less interested in addressing Wagner's anti-semitism or dealing with the festival's dark past than he is in interpreting the "Ring" operas as an highly ironic allegory for American cultural hegemony, "cowboy diplomacy" and western dependency of oil. His "Rheingold," set in a motel along Route 66 and featuring an unsavory cast of thugs, bimbos and drug-addicts, was occasionally entertaining and humorous, but otherwise puzzling and frankly a trifle boring. Nevertheless, it is invigorating to witness such a desacralizing of Wagner occurring in the very place that served as a shrine to the Holy German Art he claimed to embody. Walter Scheel, the German president who addressed the 1976 festival, spoke about the importance of the festival as an emblem of both cultural honor and national shame. "Bayreuth's history is part of German history," he said. "Its mistakes are the mistakes of our nation. And in this sense Bayreuth has been a national institution in which we are able to recognize ourselves." Four decades later, those words still ring true.

**A.J. Goldman is a Berlin-based writer and critic.**

<http://forward.com/articles/181460/wagnerfestivalconfrontscontroversialpast/?p=all#ixzz2bGW2BrTB>

**COMMENTS**



**Jack**

The Palestine Orchestra, forerunner of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, only cut Wagner from its repertoire after Kristallnacht in 1938. Zubin Mehta, conducting the IPO, in 1981 performed an encore of selections from *Tristan und Isolde*. In 2000 the Rishon leTzion orchestra conducted by Mendi Rodan performed the Siegfried-Idyll. At the 2001 Israel Festival, Daniel Barenboim conducted the Berlin Staatskapelle in a performance of an extract from *Tristan und Isolde*.



**Joel Finkel**

I find it hard to accept that a composer whose every work centers on the theme of Redemptive Love would have embraced a political ideology centered on hatred and slaughter. The sins of the children (and wife) should not be attributed to the father (and husband). The appropriation of Wagner by the Nazis is just another of their crimes, albeit a minor one. From my reading of Wagner's writing, his anti-Semitism does not manifest itself as a dislike of Jews as people but as artists. He recognizes that Jews are among the finest musicians, but he has a fantastically stupid notion that great ART can only be created by those who are totally assimilated into the culture. He did not recognize, until perhaps late in his life, that all the Jews he knew WERE assimilated. He had no hatred for his favorite soprano, his favorite conductor, and his personal pianist, for example, all of whom were Jewish. If, as the Marxist axiom goes, "being begets consciousness," then it is hardly surprising that Wagner, writing as he did during a period of German unification—and the wave of intense nationalism that swept over much of Europe—would seek to unify "holy German art," and therefore reject anything that was not totally "German." His was too caught up in his holy project to recognize that the Jews he actually knew were also totally German. On this point, several years ago the Chicago Tribune published a piece that

claimed that, as he approached the end of his life, Wagner told his wife, Cosima, that he wished he had not said all the nasty things he had about Jews. For, truth be told, there was nothing to be held against them and that the real problem was that Jews came into the German midst before Germans were mature enough to accept them. If true—and I have not studied Cosima's diary where it is claimed she wrote this—then it has its own silliness, albeit it not quite as flawed as his ideas about Great Art. Finally, I dare say that the desire to maintain racial purity, if that even was part of Wagner's ideology, was hardly unique to ethnic Germans. Let's understand that there is a very strong current of this that still exists within Jewish communities today.



**Daveed R**

The "desire to maintain racial purity" is alive and well in Israel. That's what "Judaization" is all about. Germans wanted Germany to be exclusively Aryan and Zionists want Israel to be exclusively Jewish. The only difference is the tactics used to achieve the dream of ethnic/racial purity. The desire for ethnic exclusivity is the same and is the opposite of multicultural pluralism. So much for Israel being "a light unto the nations". Israel's "light" went out before it was even created thanks to the JNF's racist policy of refusing to sell or lease land to non-Jews. Before all you Zionistas start calling me names think of how we would feel if the most powerful land agency in the US would only sell or lease land to Christians. I rest my case.



**Michael Welbeck**

What humongous stupidity! Where have you seen that Israel has the desire to maintain "racial purity"? Just give us a good example of an event that proves this stupid assertion. Actually the recent most reference in the region to racial purity comes from Abbas who says he does want any Jew to live in hypothetical "palestine". This is hardly surprising since Abbas is a well-known holocaust denier. Unfortunately, idiots like you, racists like you have too big a share of voice in the Muslim world. This is more evidence that Islam (as a civilization) will never get out of the hole. Just look around you. In Syria,

they want to ban croissants because it is a colonialist pastry!!!!

<http://www.vnetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-4413075...>

Iraq is on the verge of a new civil war <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0...>

Tunisia is about to start its own civil war <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/08/2013...>

Egypt has already started its own. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/02/world/africa/egypt-...>

All four events took place in the last 24 hours only !!! This does not ring a bell in your microscopic brain? Your are not just incredibly stupid and racist but deeply insane. You have reached a state of no return in mental and intellectual chaos. Don't you think that solving YOUR problems should be a priority instead of spending your time blaming others for your turpitude? Aren't you ashamed by your hatred and your racism. Is Islam so far down into the hole that it produces the rotten wreck you are?



[busterbobby](#)

Ha ha! You rest your case?! That's hilarious. You never rest your case. In fact, you never shut up. Reading any article in The Forward is like tip-toeing through a minefield. It may be \*\*\*y-trapped with a Daveed-screed. It could be about horticulture in Zimbabwe, virtually anything: you'd still see it as an opportunity to attack Israel and/or the Jews. Your thought is a monorail, the ultimate one-track mind.



[Petraq 36p](#)

Yes, as Churchill said: "A fanatic is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject."



[Anuvai 75p](#)

Daveed - Every time I read one of your comments, I get the impression that you haven't yet decided what it is that

bothers you. For example, you can insist on a "one-state solution" and a "two-state solution" in a single sentence. Now, in your latest attack, you speak of "racial purity" (evoking the image of Aryans) - and then you raise the hypothetical American case of "selling land only to Christians". But "Christians" are members of religious communities, not the descendants of a particular tribe or DNA (not parallel to Aryans). So what is your grievance? Do you want a one-state solution or a two-state solution? Do you condemn the Jews in Israel because they share a common descent, or do you condemn the Jews of Israel because they belong to a particular religion? Part of growing up and being a big boy is deciding what it is that you want. Please choose your real grievance, and then you can have an intelligent debate about whatever it is about Israel that keeps you awake at night.



[JBMazer](#)

Comment to DaveedR: JNF is the JEWISH National Fund. Why should it not stand for improving the JEWISHNESS of its mission by rationing its assets for the benefit of Jews. After all, it is probable that nearly all the funds the the JEWISH NATIONAL FUND had at its disposal came from JEWS who wished to support its mission and practices.\_JB Mazer



[Joel Finkel](#)

As Einstein said, "Nationalism is the measles of mankind." In my opinion, the comments above serve to illustrate just how virulent a disease it can be. I think I'll go listen again to the last speech of Hans Sachs (the last scene in Wagner's "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg") in which he teaches that what makes a people great is not their sword, but their art. He also warns of "foreign" ideas that are contrary to the ideals held by a people. Sort of reminds me of what our rabbis were saying about political Zionism 120 years ago.



[Donna Hughes](#)

I always notice in these pieces that Friedelind Wagner is not mentioned. Siegfried had two daughters as well, and she was one of them. She was the family rebel, and when she saw Hitler for what he was as she grew up, she began denouncing him, which forced her to flee Germany. Her mother came to Switzerland to try to lure her back, but she refused and made her way to England where she was put into an internment camp. Toscanini came and rescued her and took her to America where she continued to speak out against Hitler and recorded her story in a book, *Heritage Of Fire*. She was the spitting image of her Grandfather and apparently the only one who inherited his spirit as well.



[Joel Finkel](#)

Many thanks to Donna for her contribution. I note that a new biography of Friedelind Wagner is due for publication in October of this year.



[Donna Hughes](#)

Yes, I am waiting for that one. I think it has been out in Germany, but this will be the English translation. I think more people need to learn about her - she was a worthy successor. I can't say that for most of the rest of them.

<http://forward.com/articles/181460/wagner-festival-confronts-controversialpast/?p=all#ixzz2bGVofE7g>

**Related**

[Jewish Conductor Seeks to Mark Richard Wagner's 200th Anniversary Without Hate](#)

[Richard Wagner 'Vile' Anti-Semitism May Emerge in Letters From Grandson](#)

[Richard Wagner's Bicentennial Sparks Effort to Split Music and Anti-Semitism](#)

[Bayreuth Opera Drops Swastika-Tattooed Singer](#)

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# Operavore

## New Wagner Books Offer Mysteries, Eroticism and Worship

By [Marion Lignana Rosenberg](#), Thursday, July 25, 2013 - 04:00 PM

Those inclined to hyperbole claim that only Jesus, Napoléon and Adolf Hitler have caused more ink (and pixels) to be spilled than Richard Wagner. Not in dispute is that Wagner's bicentennial has brought a fresh surge of books inspired by the enthralling master. Here are some picks for Operavores looking to delve deeper into Wagnerian mysteries.

### Wagnerian sights

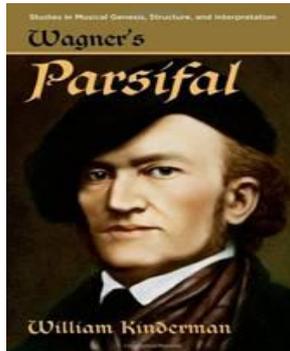
Alex Alice is a French graphic novelist best known for his *Third Testament* series. [Siegfried](#) and [Siegfried II: The Valkyrie](#) (Archaia) are the first two installments in a trilogy loosely based on Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen*. While they make splendid introductions to the composer's mythic world for up-and-coming opera fans, they are decidedly not for youngsters alone. Hardcover volumes printed on lush stock, they include appendices with artist interviews and historic images (for example, stills from Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* films). Alice's gorgeous, saturated drawings crackle with energy and are a worthy visual counterpart to Wagner's grand, sweeping music. And stay tuned: an animated feature film of Alice's *Siegfried* is in the works.

Another beautifully wrought tome, Evan Baker's [From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging](#) (UCP, forthcoming) is a wholesome corrective to the Romantic fancy of the artist as a solitary, self-contained creator, one that clings to many composers, Wagner perhaps most of all. Baker traces the 400-year history in Italy, Germany, France and Austria of the technologies, spaces and professions (stage manager, scenic artist, machinist and others) that bring opera to life.

Citing Wagner's production sketches and colleagues' recollections, Baker argues that he was "the first truly modern stage director who involved himself in all areas of staging" and also, against common wisdom, a

pragmatist who "possessed the capacity to accept changes, deletions, or additions to the scenic effect as necessary." The author pays scant heed to the ideological implications of Wagner's devotion to theatrical illusion: that concealing human labor, as Theodor Adorno argues, also conceals awareness of the injustices associated with it. Still, *From the Score to the Stage* will bring many hours of pleasure and enlightenment to Wagnerites and to Operavores of all stripes.

### Wagnerian mysteries



The next few months will bring two keenly awaited DVD releases of Wagner's last opera, *Parsifal*: one [led by Christian Thielemann](#), and the other last season's unforgettable [Metropolitan Opera Parsifal](#) directed by François Girard and conducted by Daniele Gatti ([to be shown on PBS in coming weeks](#)).

The [English National Opera Guides](#) and [Cambridge Opera Handbooks](#) series both include illuminating primers on this enigmatic work, but William Kinderman's [Wagner's Parsifal](#) (OUP), the best of the bicentennial books that I have examined, surpasses them both. Elegantly written, drawing from cutting-edge scholarship and historical sources, Kinderman's study probes the genesis, literary roots, music and afterlives of *Parsifal* along with its many contradictions, chief among them that a work centering on compassion and reconciliation was one from which Hitler drew inspiration.

Kinderman is too ready to see anti-Semitism in *Parsifal* primarily as a matter of "disastrous German reception history"; at one point he even floats the nonsensical idea of a "pure work of art." To his credit, and in contrast to more starry-eyed Wagnerites, he does look squarely at Kundry's disquieting demise, swept away by an A-minor undertow, and quotes another scholar to the effect that "there are good reasons for finding distasteful a redemption of woman which, to be blunt, first renders her dumb and then liquidates her." I finished this insightful volume with dozens of flagged pages, a clutch of intriguing books and articles to track down, and the desire to turn back to the preface and dive right back in again.

### You with the stars in your eyes

Raymond Furness's [Richard Wagner](#) (Reaktion) offers commentary of the starry-eyed variety. He ascribes to the composer views on Jewishness "of considerable originality," asserting that if Wagner must be "stereotyped as an anti-Semite," his bigotry was "of a very idiosyncratic kind." At the same time, he declares that there is no anti-Semitism "in the whole of [Wagner's] musical and dramatic *œuvre*," a claim with which many (including Mark Weiner, Paul Lawrence Rose and Robert Gutman, to say nothing of Gustav Mahler) might take issue. Otherwise, his compact book, with handsome black-and-white illustrations, offers a pithy overview of Wagner's works and life and a recommended discography. Be warned, though, that its tone is worshipful and some of its assumptions ingenuous: that the *Ring's* meaning is "timeless" (meanings, like all earthly things, are time-bound and contingent); or that a particular staging is "closest to Wagner's heart, going beyond his wildest aspirations, yet truthful to his intentions"—as if such things

were transparent (or somehow binding on us).

### ***Nacht der Liebe***



Finally, Adrian Daub's [Tristan's Shadow: Sexuality and the Total Work of Art after Wagner](#) (UCP, forthcoming) investigates Wagner's artistically fruitful misreading of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who contended that "only resignation in the face of the inevitable frustration of the will... can bring the human being to peace."



### **Alex Alice's graphic novel 'Siegfried,' based on Wagner's opera**

According to Daub, Wagner believed that "erotic love could bring the will to rest in another human being" and that "the erotic and the total work of art were linked, could be linked, or had to be linked in and through opera." He characterizes the ideas that shaped *Tristan und Isolde* as both "revolutionary" and "reactionary," "antibourgeois" and "indebted to... commodity culture" and examines how subsequent composers (including Wagner's son Siegfried, Richard Strauss, Franz Schreker, and Kurt Weill) grappled with them.

The ink and the pixels continue to flow, then, unleashed by the unending fascination of Wagner and his works.



To mark the bicentennial of Richard Wagner's birth, WQXR offers a week of music and commentary on his life and works.

<http://www.wqxr.org/#!/blogs/op-eravore/2013/jul/25/new-wagner-books-offer-mysteries-eroticism-and-worship/>

## **Star conductor Thielemann steals show at Wagner Fest**

**25 July 2013**

German maestro Christian Thielemann was given a tumultuous reception at the opening night of this year's legendary Bayreuth Festival, a performance of Richard Wagner's "The Flying Dutchman".

In a glitzy gala attended by Chancellor Angela Merkel and German President Joachim Gauck, it was Thielemann who earned the most applause at the end of the evening.

The German conductor is regarded by many as the festival's unofficial general music director and as currently one of the best Wagner interpreters around.

German soprano Ricarda Merbeth who sang Senta and Korean bass-baritone Samuel Youn in the title role were also rapturously received in the first revival of a staging that premiered last year by German director Jan Philipp Gloger.

Gloger has made a number of changes and tightened up his direction since last year, but he and his leading team were loudly booed at their curtain call.

The opera tells the story of a Dutch captain condemned to roam the seas for eternity unless he can find redemption in the love of a woman.

Gloger updates the story to the present time, casting the Dutchman as a wealthy businessman bored with everything that life can offer him.

Senta is the daughter of an entrepreneur who agrees to marry her off to the Dutchman in return for his limitless wealth.

The real-life rich and famous had sweated in the sweltering heat as they traipsed up Bayreuth's famous Green Hill in their tuxedos and ballgowns to the fabled Festspielhaus theatre.

But they were greeted by a unexpected downpour when they emerged two-and-a-half hours later.

While it was the "Dutchman" that opened this year's proceedings, the main attraction -- and arguably the highpoint of the entire Wagner 200 celebrations -- will be a hotly anticipated new production of the composer's four-opera "Ring" cycle by the enfant terrible of German theatre, Frank Castorf.

The 62-year-old iconoclast's anarchic reinterpretations of literary classics regularly outrage Germany's theatre-going public.

And although he is a relative newcomer to opera, Castorf has been invited to

stage the Bicentenary Ring, the most eagerly awaited event this year for Wagner aficionados around the world.

Castorf has had only two years to plan and prepare the staging, an unusually short time for even the most experienced opera director, after German film director Wim Wenders pulled out.

At a news conference earlier on Thursday, festival chief Katharina Wagner, the composer's great-granddaughter, described the rehearsal period with Castorf as "extremely productive".

The director himself, who in a rare interview had earlier criticised the working conditions on Bayreuth's Green Hill, told journalists it was a "very special challenge" to work in the Festspielhaus.

Asked about his reputation of being difficult, Castorf conceded that he could be "short-fused" and "fierce".

But he also insisted that his time in Bayreuth had been pleasant.

"There is a lot of green forest, beer breweries, spas. It's almost like being on holiday," he joked.

**The festival runs until August 28 and includes 30 performances in all of seven different operas -- the four operas that make up the *Ring*, as well as *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhaeuser* and *Lohengrin*.**

For the first time, the opening night was broadcast live to some 200 selected cinemas around the world. In addition, it was scheduled to be broadcast on public television, also for the first time. Most of Merkel's cabinet were on the guest list, including Economy Minister

Philipp Roesler and Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle. Bavaria's regional premier Horst Seehofer also walked up the red carpet.

<http://www.expatica.com/de/news/german-news/star-conductor-thielemann-steals-show-at-wagner-fest-270563.html>

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## Director ducks out at start of Bayreuth's new 'Ring'

**26 July 2013**

Controversial German director Frank Castorf refused to show himself at the end of his new staging of Richard Wagner's "Rheingold" that premiered at the Bayreuth Festival on Friday.

"Rheingold" is the first of four instalments in Castorf's widely anticipated new production of Wagner's sprawling "Ring" cycle. And it was met with deafening boos and whistles when the curtain went down in the sold-out Festspielhaus theatre built to the composer's own designs.

By contrast, the cast of singers received tumultuous applause and Russian conductor Kirill Petrenko, making his debut on Bayreuth's fabled Green Hill, already seems to have stolen the hearts

of the 2,000 Wagner aficionados lucky enough to have secured tickets.

The "Ring" is being seen as the climax of the Wagner bicentenary year.

Castorf, the 62-year-old enfant terrible of German theatre, dispenses with the Nordic gods, giants and dwarfs that people Wagner's monumental masterpiece.

And instead of setting it on the banks of Germany's Rhine river, he transfers the action to a sleazy motel on Route 66 in the United States, where Wotan and the other gods are seedy gangsters and hookers.

The Rhinemaidens are brassy blonde prostitutes, the giants Fafner and Fasolt

are thugs with baseball bats and fire god Loge is a sort of paparazzo.

The spectacular set was by Serbo-Croatian designer Aleksandar Denic.

The next instalment of the "Ring" will be "The Valkyrie" which premieres on Saturday.

<http://www.expatica.com/de/news/german-news/director-ducks-out-at-start-of-bayreuth-s-new-ring-270650.html>

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## Das Rheingold/Die Walküre – review Bayreuth festival



[Martin Kettle](#), [The Guardian](#), Monday 29 July 2013 01.59 AEST



**A sense of the production overshadowing the music ... Das Rheingold at the Bayreuth festival.**

**Photograph: Enrico Nawrath/AFP**

In Britain, Wagner's Ring in the composer's bicentenary year has already brought acclaimed cycles [at the Longborough festival](#) and the

[BBC Proms](#). In the wider Wagnerian cosmos, however, the most anticipated event has been [Frank Castorf's](#) new Ring cycle in the

composer's own [festival theatre in Bayreuth](#), conducted by [Kirill Petrenko](#). On the basis of the first two evenings, it is a decidedly

mixed achievement. The production takes a bold step along the path pioneered by [Patrice Chéreau](#) and [Harry Kupfer](#) in their admired Bayreuth Rings of the late 20th century. Like theirs, Castorf's Ring is set in a political frame, but a less nuanced one. Castorf's unifying theme, hardly a revelatory insight, is that oil is today's equivalent of Wagner's mythic gold – source of power, wealth and destruction. So Das Rheingold is placed in a Quentin Tarantino-style gas station and a "golden" motel on Route 66, in which Wotan is a sleazeball mafioso who beds Fricka and Freia in an upstairs room while the Rhinemaidens lounge by the pool below. Meanwhile, Die Walküre transports us a world away to the Baku oil fields of the early 20th century, with red revolution in the

air and where Hunding's hut looks like something out of Paul Thomas Anderson's [There Will Be Blood](#). The continuities between the two settings are the dark, polluted skies against which both operas unfold, and Castorf's extensive use of on stage handheld video, so that interactions are highlighted on large screens. By directing the attention at stage and screen simultaneously, Castorf distracts from the music and words. There are two Rings taking place here: one by Castorf and one by Wagner. They only intersect intermittently, and major moments in Wagner's version – including Alberich's curse, Siegmund's death and Wotan's punishment of Brünnhilde – are denied their proper weight. This sense of the production overshadowing the music is not

helped by Petrenko's fluent but somewhat self-effacing account of the score. Two stand-out vocal performances – from [Anja Kampe](#) as Sieglinde, urgent and incisive, and [Günther Groissböck](#) (a Wotan in the making) as a tender Fasolt, could not conceal a run-of-the-mill feel to much of the other singing. But [Wolfgang Koch's](#) Wotan, mainstay of the first two parts of the Ring, sang with growing authority and an attractively burnished tone, while [Catherine Foster's](#) richly articulate Brünnhilde – disgracefully booed for presumably chauvinistic reasons after Act 2 of Die Walküre – now prepares to come into her own. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2013/jul/28/das-rheingold-die-walkure-review>

## **Siegfried/Götterdämmerung – review Bayreuth festival, Germany**

**[Martin Kettle, The Guardian](#), Friday 2 August 2013 02.40 AEST**



### **Wolfgang Koch as Der Wanderer and German tenor Burkhard Ulrich as Mime in Siegfried at the Bayreuth festival 2013. Photograph: ENRICO NAWRATH / BAYREUTH FESTIVAL/EPA**

In Frank Castorf's indulgent, nihilistic, in-your-face new Bayreuth Ring cycle, Erda gives Wotan a blowjob, while Siegfried wakes Brünnhilde beneath gargantuan Mt Rushmore-style sculpted heads of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao on a stage revolve that periodically transports them into Honecker-era East Berlin, where crocodiles hump one another and the hero and heroine drink themselves into a loveless operatic climax. Welcome to a Ring in which narrative and consistency deliberately counted for nothing and whose increasingly wilful indifference to Wagner triggered [the most sustained and widespread booing](#) a German [opera](#)house can have heard, when the curtain finally fell on Götterdämmerung two nights later.

Castorf's busy and tiresomely provocative production, with Alexander Denic's vast and sometimes imposing sets and extensive use of video, might seem to require detailed description. In the end, though, it offered an increasingly wearisome representation of a three-part idea: that Wagner's Ring has nothing worthwhile to say, that it should therefore be denied any unifying production idea, and that only a priesthood of German Marxists have the authority to put Wagner's washed-up tetralogy on the stage. Take it or leave it. I know which gets my vote – and the audience's. The pity is that Castorf – and [possibly the Wagner sisters who run Bayreuth](#) – will take the booing as a vindication, not as a mature public verdict.



**Soprano Allison Oakes as Gutrune, bass Attila Jun as Hagen and baritone Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester as Gunther performing during a rehearsal for *Götterdaemmerung* (Twilight of the Gods) in Bayreuth, Germany, summer 2013. Photograph: ENRICO NAWRATH / BAYREUTH FESTIVAL/EPA**

The tragedy is that in some musical ways this was a fine Ring. Neither [Catherine Foster's](#) Brünnhilde nor [Lance Ryan's](#) Siegfried was the completely rounded performance of one's dreams, but both produced sustained fine singing at big moments. Martin Winkler was a classic Alberich and Burkhard Ulrich a terrific Mime. Wolfgang Koch's Wotan/Wanderer sang

with ever greater authority. In the pit, [Kirill Petrenko](#) saved the best for the last two parts of the cycle, which had all the musical weight they require. The conductor emerged covered in glory. But Castorf's production should be binned.

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/aug/01/siegfried-gotterdammerung-review?INTCMP=SRCH>

## Take that, dragon: Siegfried blasts Fafner for Wagner's 200th

By MICHAEL RODDY, [Reuters](#) July 30, 2013 6:31am

BAYREUTH, Germany - It was bound to happen in a staging of Richard Wagner's "Ring" cycle someday, but few would have expected that in Wagner's own opera house in his bicentenary year his hero Siegfried would kill the fierce dragon Fafner with a machinegun instead of a magic sword. Crocodiles also copulated on stage during the love duet between Brünnhilde and Siegfried - something the famed composer never had in his libretto.

The unorthodox production at Bayreuth by Berlin theater director Frank Castorf was booed by the audience at the final curtain on Monday, but the singers and Russian conductor Kirill Petrenko won cheers.

"It's not a catastrophe, the singers are the best in years," Manuel Brug, critic for the German newspaper *Die Welt*, said at the end of a "Siegfried" that produced laughs and snickers but also seemed intentionally designed to offend traditionalists.

Several people noisily left the opera house - which has no aisles down the center, only side exits - after Siegfried pumped Fafner full of lead. "The interesting thing is he tries to be very naturalistic, with naturalistic sets,

and on the other side there are very surrealistic moments," Brug said of Castorf's production.

"On one side, he is giving what Wagner wrote, but at other points not, and I think that is the most disturbing for people because they never know what they will get."

The production of the third opera in the four-opera cycle was set at the foot of a likeness of Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, but with the heads of four American presidents replaced by the heads of communist notables Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao.

The hero Siegfried was an Elvis-like Las Vegas entertainer who turned into a Clint Eastwood-like vigilante to kill the dragon in a scene that played like it was straight out of a Quentin Tarantino movie.

Canadian tenor Lance Ryan strode about the stage of the opera house, which Wagner built in the 19th century to showcase his nationalistic and mythic German works, dressed in a spangled vest with chains around his neck.

As he has done since the opening opera, "Rheingold", Castorf used video to show scenes hidden from the audience. He also has extended the roles of minor

characters far beyond Wagner's original libretto, and invented entirely new ones.

### A pivotal production

A lot is riding on the success of the production, with reports circulating in the German and international press that the renewal of the contracts of the festival co-managers, Wagner's great grand-daughters Eva Wagner-Pasquier and Katharina Wagner, may hang in the balance.

As part of his contract, Castorf was forbidden to engage in his usual practice of excising chunks of text, or having it screamed in the background, and he had to keep all 17 hours of music.

His response appears to have been to overlay a series of mini-operas or cinematic moments on top of Wagner's original story about the loss of the Rhine gold, the creation of a ring that makes its wearer the ruler of the world, and the eventual destruction of the gods.

In "Siegfried", Castorf stretched the bit part of a bear which Siegfried hauls in from the forest in order to terrorize the dwarf Mime, who has raised the hero after his mother Sieglinde died in childbirth, into a jack of all trades who stayed around for much of the opera.

Ryan and English soprano Catherine Foster won ovations, as did German bass-[baritone](#) Wolfgang Koch, whose Wotan, knowing the end of the gods comes on Wednesday in "Gotterdammerung", was chain smoking and chugging wine when he wasn't singing.

German tenor Burkhard Ulrich made a properly acidulous Mime. German soprano Mirella Hagen strutted around the stage as the bird that lets Siegfried

in on the secrets of what he has won by killing Fafner while clad in a star-spangled, feathered costume that looked like something out of a Rio de Janeiro carnival float.

Castorf's fellow Berlin theater director Stefan Lukschy, after three installments of a "Ring" that was supposed to be about oil as the new gold, said he was not sure he knew what story Castorf was telling.

"There are moments I enjoy, lots of things happen. But what is he telling us apart from what Wagner tells us?"

He added: "Maybe he (Castorf) doesn't want to tell a story at all."

<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/319722/lifestyle/culture/take-that-dragon-siegfried-blasts-fafner-for-wagner-s-200th>

## Castorf has become the villain of the Bayreuth Ring cycle

After the Bayreuth audience booted a deliberately incoherent Ring cycle, Martin Kettle wonders if the festival - and Wagner - deserves better



The audience liked what they heard, but hated what they saw... British soprano Catherine Foster and Canadian tenor Lance Ryan in Siegfried, part of director Frank Castorf's loudly booed Bayreuth festival production. Photograph: Enrico Nawrath/AFP/Getty Images

I have spent many years in many [opera](#) houses and I have heard booing there many times. I have heard booing, in particular, in German opera houses, places in which the tradition of making your disapproval clear when the curtain falls sometimes seems to be as reflexive and automatic as the volleys of bravos during the most humdrum performance at New York's Metropolitan Opera. But I have never heard booing that matched the loudness and endurance from the outraged audience at this week's [Bayreuth festival](#).

This display of vehement displeasure, at the end of [Frank Castorf's production of the Ring cycle](#), was aimed at the Berlin-based Castorf and his creative team, including set designer [Aleksandar Denic](#) and the costumes, lighting and video of Adriana Braga Peretzki, Rainer Casper, Andreas Deinert and Jens Crull. It was not directed at the conductor, Russian-born [Kirill Petrenko](#), who the audience cheered to the rafters. Nor was it aimed at the singers, although [Catherine Foster's](#) Brünnhilde was booed earlier in the cycle and at the end of *Götterdämmerung*. [Lance Ryan's](#) Siegfried and [Attila Jun's](#) Hagen also received some of the audience's displeasure. But overwhelmingly, the Bayreuth audience liked what they heard. It was what they saw that they hated.

The explosion on Wednesday, after [Götterdämmerung](#), had been building up all week. Castorf and his team did not take curtain calls during the [other three operas](#), so their appearance at the end of the cycle unleashed a pent-up tempest akin to the thunderstorms that explode over Bayreuth in a hot, humid August. Not surprisingly, tempers in a theatre without air conditioning can become very short. And what a storm it was.

Some will be rightly squeamish about what took place. Booing is nasty and cruel. In [Germany](#), it comes freighted with a dark history, too. It is particularly devastating for singers, who

are doing their best, often in difficult circumstances. But Castorf seemed to revel in it, almost as if the audience verdict was a badge of honour or a vindication. He stood on the stage for more than 10 minutes, mocking his detractors with a thumbs up, ironic applause and dismissive waves. Castorf's response enraged the audience even more. There is no way to know who would have won this battle of wills had not Petrenko diffidently put his head around the curtain to remind Castorf that the orchestra still had to take its traditional end-of-cycle bow. (The orchestra was cheered to the heavens.)



(l to r) Elisabet Strid (Freia), Lothar Odinius (Froh), Oleksandr Pushniak (Donner), Günther Groissboeck (Fasolt), Claudia Mancke (Fricka), Wolfgang Koch (Wotan) and Sorin Coliban (Fafner) in *Das Rheingold*/ Photograph: ENRICO NAWRATH / BAYREUTH FESTIVAL/EPA

Some people might think they witnessed an uncomfortable martyrdom. That seemed to be Castorf's own projection of it, though surely even he must have been a little daunted by the torrential booing. One should not be naive about the fact that Bayreuth is a lightning rod for dark passions with deep historical roots. Some want it to stay the same; others want radical and permanent change. In my view, change is inevitable, but it needs to be positive. Castorf's production was the latter, and his indifference struck me as egotistical rather than saintly.

His take on the Ring was ultimately – and perhaps deliberately – incoherent. Before the cycle began, Castorf held a press conference. In it, he explained that this Ring cycle, focusing on oil, would tease out ways that our greed for it and its wealth re-enact the impulse for the riches, power and destruction on which Wagner's Ring is centred. In its first two parts – a [Rheingold set in a Route 66 US gas station](#) and motel inhabited by Tarantino-style characters, and a Walküre set in the Caspian oil fields just before the Russian revolution – it was just about possible to discern a link, albeit a loosely drawn one, between these two settings and the professed oil theme. But the two final parts of Castorf's cycle had almost nothing of this theme, beyond the dark polluted clouds that formed its

permanent backdrop. Instead, the settings were increasingly dominated by the remnants and echoes of East Berlin before the fall of communism. Even here, little was developed to a theatrical, let alone musical, argument. Most important, it had nothing to do with Wagner's Ring – with its music, its poetry or [its ambition to unify the performing arts and elevate humankind](#) in the process. One can understand why some directors, especially Germans and Marxists, may feel uneasy about tackling Wagner's vast work [in his own theatre](#), but that's the challenge. And some fine modern directors have faced it with great and radical distinction.



**(l to r) Lance Ryan (Siegfried), Alison Oakes (Gutrune) and Catherine Foster (Brünnhilde) in Götterdämmerung. Photograph: Enrico Nawrath/AFP/Getty Images**

Castorf's approach was the reverse. He tried to ignore everything with which Wagner had provided him. He seemed to say that such an effort was inherently unworthy in the 21st century, and he essentially blew a raspberry at the entire Wagnerian inheritance. All along, Castorf alluded and then ran away from what he may have been saying – though so much was all but impossible to see, understand or discern. That lack of clarity was not the audience's fault, but Castorf's. His was an interpretation against interpretation. Fair enough, you may say, if you think that anything goes. But that didn't seem to be the view of the angry audience. And, in that case, why offer Castorf the Bayreuth bicentenary Ring? And why would he accept the commission?

If this Ring had any theme, it was unintentional and only occurred to me after the performance. Castorf seems like a living embodiment of the Ring's villain, Alberich, who steals the gold, renounces love and wants to rule the world. Castorf is a director who took the money, wanted notoriety and tried to face down a public. I know whose side I'm on. I wish that the Wagner half-sisters, Eva and Katharina, who run Bayreuth, were on that side, too. But after seeing this deliberately incoherent Ring cycle, it is hard to believe they are.

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2013/aug/02/frank-castorf-bayreuth-ring-cycle?INTCMP=SRCH>

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**Fredrick Töben is thinking of writing another book, which may perhaps emerge one day titled:**

***Richard Wagner: the Gesamtkunstwerk  
and the Jews  
and Antisemitism  
and Adelaide Institute***

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**Erich Priebke's 100th birthday angers Rome**

**25.07.2013**

The approaching 100th birthday of former SS officer Erich Priebke – a Rome resident and one of the world's last surviving Nazi criminals – has prompted a statement from the partisan group *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia* (ANPI) that "to celebrate a war criminal would be indecent."

Priebke turns 100 on Monday 29 July and is serving a life sentence, under house arrest, for his role in the 1944 Fosse Ardeatine massacre in Rome in which the Nazis killed 335 people, mostly Italians. Priebke lives near Piazza Irnerio in the city's Balduina district where he receives numerous visitors and is a familiar figure on his daily walks in the neighbourhood, accompanied by his carer and a police escort. The milestone birthday has put the former Nazi captain in the spotlight once more, and comes ten years after there was outrage over his 90th birthday party at an *agriturismo* at Tor Lupara

north-east of the capital, where over 100 guests arrived from across Italy, Germany, France and Switzerland.

However Priebke's lawyer Paolo Giachini insists there will be no party this time around. Giachini has appealed for an end to "climate of hatred" against his client who he says has been subject to a "media lynching" and a "witch hunt."

Relatives of Priebke's victims have called on him to make a public apology 69 years after their murder, and the president of Rome's Jewish community Riccardo Pacifici has appealed to authorities not to allow any public birthday celebration. "The bone of contention is not the centenary of Priebke – said Pacifici – but the tribute that many make to him by going to his house. It is to them that we express our indignation, not only as Jews but as Italians."

The mayor of Rome Ignazio Marino has also intervened in the debate, pledging

to ensure "personally" that no public party for Priebke takes place. One of Priebke's close friends Mario Merlino, nicknamed "il Professore Nero" for his neo-fascist past, recently told Italy's *Corriere della Sera* newspaper that Priebke "has got a lot closer to Christianity, perhaps because he feels his end is near. He reads sacred texts, he meditates. He is almost deaf and has lost most of his memory."

Angelo Sermoneta, who runs Rome's historical Jewish community association *Ragazzi del 48* said: "We will make the memory come back to him. The Italian authorities treat him with kid gloves. He is escorted on walks, to the park, to restaurants. He lives his old age in serenity, he who has denied an old age to so many people" he said.

On 24 March 1944 the Nazis executed 335 hostages including 75 Jews in retaliation for a partisan attack on Rome's Via Rasella the day before, in

which 33 German soldiers died. The SS command in Rome under Herbert Kappler recommended that ten Italians be shot for every dead German, with the direct order allegedly coming from Adolf Hitler who stipulated that it be carried out within 24 hours.

Priebke is accused of ordering the deaths of five extra prisoners brought erroneously to the caves, close to the Via Appia Antica south of the city walls. He was responsible for checking off the list of those executed and has admitted to killing two hostages personally.

Following the war Priebke escaped from a British prison camp in the north-east Italian city of Rimini in 1946. After living for a couple of years in a safe house in South Tyrol, northern Italy, he made his way back to Rome where Alois Hudal, an Austrian bishop based in the capital, provided him with false travel documents. In 1948 Priebke arrived in Argentina as "Otto Pape" but reverted to his real name the next year after an amnesty for illegal immigrants was issued by the Argentine president Juan Peron.

Priebke settled in the picturesque skiing resort of S. Carlos di Bariloche, a town with strong German connections. Here he lived for nearly 50 years, becoming a delicatessen owner and even heading the local German-Argentine Cultural Association.

His apprehension by authorities came about after American investigative reporters, acting on a tip-off, were led to his adopted town in pursuit of another former Nazi, Reinhard Kopps, in 1994. To get rid of the journalists Kopps told them that there was a far more senior Nazi living nearby, and directed them to Priebke. When a camera crew led by Sam Donaldson arrived at his doorstep, Priebke admitted to his role in the massacre stating "at that time an order was an order...I had to carry it out."

The confession resulted in the 1995 extradition of Priebke to Italy where he faced a protracted series of high-profile trials and appeals.

Eventually, in 1998, he was sentenced to life in prison but the following year received permission to serve the rest of his sentence under house arrest, on grounds of poor health and old age.

<http://www.wantedinrome.com/news/2002469/erich-priebke-s-100th-birthday-angers-rome.html>

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### **Erich Priebke**

#### **Uploaded on Apr 22, 2010**

SS criminal Erich Priebke is exposed in Argentina by US newsman Sam Donaldson for ABC in 1994. As a result Priebke was sentenced to prison for his part in the Ardeatine Caves massacre in Rome. In 2007 Priebke sued author Uki Goñi, demanding 50,000 euros in alleged damages he claimed resulted from Goñi's book "The Real Odessa". Priebke lost the lawsuit.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3hsI3AU88>

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#### **Erich Priebke - Wehe den Besiegten! Published on Jul 29, 2012**

Wie stets nur - den besten Gruß unserem Kameraden Erich Priebke zu seinem 99. Wiegenfeste am heutigen 29. im Heuert (Juli) in die Inquisitionshaft.

Erich Priebke, geboren am 29. Heuert 1913 in Henningsdorf bei Berlin ist der weltweit letzte lebende Kriegsgefangene des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Heute nun im Heuert 2012 steht Erich Priebke im Alter von 99 (!) Jahren immer noch unter Hausarrest und auch jetzt ist keine Freiheit in Sicht. Weder sein Heimatland Deutschland, noch Italien, das ihn über seine Gerichte vor nahezu 18 Jahren zu lebenslänglicher Haft verurteilt hat, können sich dazu durchringen, Erich Priebke endlich die Freiheit zu gewähren. Er selbst trägt als gläubiger Katholik dieses unmenschliche Schicksal mit Würde, Anstand und Gottvertrauen. Der Film "Vae Victis - Wehe den Besiegten" (hier in einer Kurzfassung) beschreibt sein Martyrium, das heute immer noch einer menschenwürdigen Beendigung harrt. Wann wird es endlich soweit sein?

Weitere Informationen zu Erich Priebke:

<http://www.erich-priebke.de>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LecueTS7aw>

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**More German Hatred - distortions of history and re-education, even those non-existent human skin lampshades get a mention! The Holocaust narrative is, indeed, an expression of racial hatred against Germans.**

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#### **Nazi Hunters: The Real Story Published on May 19, 2012**

**\*NOTE\* HATEFUL, IGNORANT, OR ANTI-SEMITIC COMMENTS WILL BE DELETED AND USER WILL BE**

### **BLOCKED AND REPORTED!**

After Hitler's death and the collapse of the Third Reich, the Allied forces were faced with the problem of identifying war criminals from several countries. The majority were caught and 22 of the most important leaders of Nazi Germany were tried by the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg Germany. Several key Nazis such as Adolf Eichmann escaped trial however and fled to remote countries with tough extradition laws. Nazi Hunters The Real Story is a 2 part French Documentary that focuses the first episode mainly on the end of the war and the Nuremberg Trials. The Second part focuses more on those who initially escaped punishment for their crimes and were eventually hunted down. The three main Nazi Hunters who are the focus of this documentary is the husband and wife team of Serge and Beate Klarsfeld and Simon Wiesenthal. They took very different approaches to their life's calling as Serge and Beate would travel to the locations and protest to bring attention to the criminal, while Simon did extensive research and then turned his proof of the criminal's existence over to the proper authorities. Of the three, Beate is probably the best known due to 1986's The Beate Klarsfeld Story, a film in which she was portrayed by Farrah Fawcett.

Peppered throughout this documentary is a lot of raw, sometimes disturbing footage from concentration camps, post trial executions and medical research. I admit that I actually had to forward a clip involving a child being experimented on in a concentration camp. Although bloodless and in grainy black and white, the nature of the footage made it far more disturbing than any of the recent Saw films. The footage is all appropriate and is not included merely for shock value but as some are sensitive to such footage, it is better to know beforehand that it is there.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQnGO9qeYW4>