THE ALDEBURGH CONNECTION

A Wagnerian Salon

Presented by
The Wagner Society of New York

Thursday, May 21, 1987, 8:00 p.m.

St. Peter's Lutheran Church
619 Lexington Avenue at 54th Street
New York, N.Y.

A Wagnerian Salon

Featuring

CATHERINE ROBBIN, mezzo-soprano **MARK PEDROTTI, baritone**
STEPHEN RALLS, pianist **BRUCE UBUKATA, pianist**

In this concert, Wagner, the composer of masterpieces on a gigantic scale, brings us a collection of what, in comparison, are miniatures. Nonetheless, these songs, in their various ways, reflect the musical world and spirit of his music-dramas.

Wagner visits Paris at least twice this evening. First of all, he is a composer in search of an identity, trying to establish himself (and make his fortune) as a follower of Meyerbeer and Spontini. This attempt was doomed to miserable failure. Paradoxically, it was only when he had finally returned to his homeland and had succeeded in establishing a truly German type of music-theater that Wagner's presence became all-pervasive in Paris, and by that time he had no need of visiting the French capital in person. By the end of his life, the salons of the great ladies of French society were beginning to ring with the strains of La chevauchée des Walkyries and soon le Wagnerisme became de rigueur.

(Note: Names of the individual performers for each work are not indicated in the program.)

PROGRAM

PART I: MINNA, MATHILDE, AND COSIMA

Polonaise in D, Opus 2 — Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

A simple dance for piano-duet, published in Leipzig in 1832.

Gretchen am Spinnrade (Goethe), Opus 5/6 — Wagner

My peace is gone, my heart is heavy. My bosom yearns for him; if only I could die in his embrace!

Wagner produced a set of seven pieces inspired by Goethe's Faust, of which this is one.

Songs to French Texts — Wagner

The first, second, and last of these songs were published in Paris in 1840 as Trois mélodies. "Les deux grenadiers" was published separately at Wagner's own expense, with an illustrated title page and a specially commissioned French translation of Heine's poem. The composer's gaucheries in setting the French language did not help the songs to find favor with the public.

L'Attente (Hugo)

Birds on the treetops and on the mountains, can you see my lover riding back to me?

Mignonne (Ronsard)

See, Mignonne, the rose which bloomed this morning is faded by evening. Make the most of your beauty now, before age tarnishes it.

Les deux grenadiers (after Heine)

On learning of Napoleon's defeat, one French soldier thinks of returning to his family, but the other dreams of rising again to fight for his Emperor.

Dors, mon enfant (Anonymous)

Sleep, my child, your mother's only hope.

Five Poems of Mathilde Wesendonk — Wagner

During Wagner's exile in Switzerland, he received considerable financial help from a wealthy silk merchant, Otto Wesendonk, and considerable inspiration from Wesendonk's wife Mathilde. While working on Act I of Tristan und Isolde, Wagner set five of Mathilde's poems (originally called Fünf Dilettanten-Gedichte. The third and fifth songs actually use music which was later incorporated into the opera: in the Act 2 duet and the Act 3 prelude respectively. The version for voice and piano is the composer's original; only the last song was orchestrated by Wagner himself, as a birthday present for Mathilde in 1857. We shall use it to illustrate Cosima Wagner's description of her own birthday in 1870.

Der Engel

An angel has heard my prayer and borne me away from my sorrow.

Stehe still

Rushing wheel of time, be still. Let me measure my happiness and understand eternity.

Im Treibhaus (study for Tristan und Isolde)

Exotic palm tress, I know your sorrow - our homeland is not here.

Schermzen

Why should I despair? The sun must sink in order to rise again.

Träume (study for Tristan und Isolde)

What wonderful dreams are these that fill my senses, and bloom fairer each day?

INTERMISSION

PART II: PARIS IN BAYREUTH

Souvenirs de Bayreuth - Fantaisie en forme de Quadrille (based on themes from the Ring)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) and André Messager (1853-1929)

1. Valkyries' call and ride - Siegfried's horn call
2. Tarnhelm - death motif
3. Siegmund's song - Rhine - Nibelungs
4. Magic fire - Siegfried
5. Siegfried's horn call - Brünnhilde - Rhinemaidens

Colette, in her Journal à Rebours, describes the famous Wednesday evenings at the salon of Mme. de Saint-Marceaux: Fauré and Messager "improvised piano-duets, rivalling each other in their sudden modulations and evasions of the tonic. They both loved these games during which they exchanged attacks like duellists: 'Pull up there! Why are you waiting? Go on, I will catch you up!' Fauré, like a dark-skinned emir, nodded his tuft of silvery hair when giving the signal to use leitmotifs from the Ring." Mme. de Saint-Marceaux organized a "weird and wonderful lottery" in 1884 to help them attend Parsifal at Bayreuth. Fauré later wrote to his benefactress: "If one has not heard Wagner at Bayreuth, one has heard nothing! Take lots of handkerchiefs because you will cry a great deal! Also, take a sedative because you will be exalted to the point of delirium!"

Duet: Pleurs d'or (Samain) Opus 71 — Fauré

Tears hanging in flowers; tears on starry nights; tears of lovers, flowing as far as the beloved's soul - fall from nights, from flowers, from eyes!

Fauré, for all his Wagnerian enthusiasm, never speaks without his own individual voice.

Le manoir de Rosemonde (Bonnières) — Henri Duparc (1848-1933)

With sudden and voracious tooth, like a dog, love has bitten me! Follow the trail of my blood - you will find I have come to die, far away, without finding the blue mansion of Rosemonde.

This song dates from 1879, when Duparc and Chabrier together heard Wagner's operas in Munich. Duparc had met Wagner ten years earlier, and at one point showed himself decades ahead of his time by urging a more symbolic approach to the staging of the Ring: there should be a simple circle of light surrounding Brünnhilde at the end of Die Walküre, not a ring of fire.

Souvenirs de Munich - Quadrille Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894)
(based on themes from Tristan und Isolde)

1. Pantalon: Sailors' greeting - Tristan's home
3. Poule: Shepherd's happy tune - death song
4. Pastourelle: Kurwenal's song
5. Galop: Sailors' song: Kurwenal - longing for death

In the late 1870's, Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Messager, Duparc, and Chabrier comprised what was known as 'Le petit Bayreuth.' It was Duparc who took Chabrier to Munich to hear Tristan in 1879. This visit was a major factor in persuading Chabrier to resign his government post and devote himself wholly to composition.

PART III: DEATH IN VENICE

La lugubre gondola (II) Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

This piano piece dates from December, 1882, when Liszt spent time with the Wagners at Palazzo Vendramin in Venice.

Sur les lagunes - Lamento (Nuits d'été) (Gautier)
Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

My beloved is dead: I shall weep for ever. How bitter to sail away without love!

Like the Wesendonk-Lieder, the Nuits d'été were conceived as songs with piano, and were not orchestrated until 15 years later. Judith Gautier, the daughter of the poet, visited Wagner frequently during the last years of his life, possibly becoming as important for the composition of Parsifal as was Mathilde Wesendonk for that of Tristan.

EPILOGUE: "SOEUR, IL FAUT VIVRE!"

Souvenirs de Munich Chabrier

2. Eté: Love duet themes

"A Wagnerian Salon" will conclude with a champagne reception in honor of the New York debut of The Aldeburgh Connection, Wagner's 174th birthday, and the 10th anniversary of the Society. Everyone is invited to join in this celebration.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The Aldeburgh Connection has been active in the Canadian concert scene for the past five years. Its distinctive programs are planned around a specific theme and include spoken extracts which set the music in a framework. It is the brainchild of pianists Stephen Ralls and Bruce Ubukata, who have visited and worked at the Aldeburgh Festival for many summers as have most of the singers appearing with the ensemble. All of its artists also pursue independent careers.

Stephen Ralls has performed extensively, both live and on radio, throughout England and Canada. Since his appointment in 1978 to the staff of the Opera Division, University of Toronto, he has accompanied many of Canada's finest singers, and has worked with the Canadian Opera and Festival Ottawa.

Bruce Ubukata is a noted recital accompanist, organist, and harpsichordist, and has worked with such artists as Maureen Forrester and Sir Peter Pears. He has appeared many times on CBC radio and television and has worked as repetiteur with the Canadian Opera Company and the National Arts Centre, Ottawa.

Mark Pedrotti, baritone, is a native of New Zealand and now one of Canada's most successful and versatile singers. He has been heard internationally in recital, oratorio, and opera. His Feb. 1987 appearance at Carnegie Hall with the New York Choral Society in Orff's Carmina Burana was subsequently recorded for future release; he sang Mercutio in the Baltimore Opera's Roméo et Juliette in March 1987. Future engagements include the role of Eugene Onegin this July with the Glimmerglass Opera and his New York City Opera debut this fall as Dr. Falke in Die Fledermaus. (Mr. Pedrotti is represented by Harwood Management Group, Inc., New York.)

Catherine Robbin, mezzo-soprano, is a native of Toronto. She has performed extensively with The Aldeburgh Connection and as a recitalist and soloist with ensembles in Canada and the U. S., to excellent reviews. She last appeared in New York in April 1985 in Handel's Alessandro at Carnegie Hall. She has recorded Messiah under John Eliot Gardiner (Philips). Her recent recording (Marquis Era 113-digital) of songs features a varied range of English and German repertoire.

The Aldeburgh Connection is represented by HART/MURDOCK Artist's Management, Toronto.

WAGNER'S EARLY DAYS IN PARIS

"The only way that the world revolution can succeed is when Paris burns down." This is what Wagner said to his friend Rockel in the Dresden days, and the statement shows how hurt he felt after his early stay in the French capital. According to Heinrich Heine, Wagner came to Paris in order to become famous, but things did not work out that way. As a matter of fact, Paris had no use for the little Saxon composer who, with his legendary self-assurance, claimed to be the answer to opera. Cosmopolitan Paris, however, acclaimed only the grand opera of Meyerbeer and other brilliant virtuosi of the time. This explains Wagner's failure, but, on the other hand, it would turn out to be a blessing as well. Wagner learned a lot from Meyerbeer, even though he hated him in the end and called him an artistic cheat and swindler.

His experience in Paris served to turn him away from sheer virtuosity and grandness for its own sake. It made him find his own style, a combination of the Berlioz dramatic symphony with some grand opera devices.

What Wagner was really objecting to, and he was not alone in this, was the relatively recent emergence of what we call today the "music business." In the past, music had been patronized by the aristocracy, while the artist of the 19th century had to sell his goods to a far less sophisticated middle class. Concerts as well as opera became as much social events as artistic ones. We really owe it to composers like Wagner, Schumann, and Mendelssohn that such musical events evolved to what they are today. The idea that the public should come prepared to listen concentratedly to a musical masterpiece was practically unheard of at that time, especially so in the case of opera. During the performances, the house was fully lit and people discussed the latest events, keeping nearly quiet during the arias. It is easy to see why an artist like Wagner was out of place in the Paris of that time. More than 20 years later, in 1861, Wagner would have the same experience when his Tannhäuser caused one of the biggest scandals in operatic history.

But it was around 1840 that Wagner wrote his French songs. They were intended for the then stars of the Paris opera who, so he hoped, would perform them in concert and make him known to the general music loving public.

Because Wagner has gone into history as the creator of the music drama on the large scale, we have paid little attention to his song writing. Even the Wesendonk songs, which are frequently performed, are mostly done to a Tristanesque orchestra background that is not by Wagner. He only orchestrated "Träume," and this for violin solo and not for voice. His Faust songs, which he wrote at age 17, like his later French songs, are practically unknown. We might assume that everything a truly important composer has written should be of interest to us. We do not look down on Verdi's early works even if they are a far cry from Otello or Falstaff, but as far as Wagner is concerned there is still the belief that, of all major composers, he is the one who showed the least talent in his youth.

The major cause for this singular neglect is Wagner himself. No other artist has ever had a following as devoted, yes even fanatic, as the master of Bayreuth, and, at the same time, no one has ever dismissed his early works with as much brutality as he did. The result? No true Wagnerian is able to tolerate anything the master condemned, anything that is not truly Wagnerian.

Yet, if we take a good look at his French songs, we can already find roots of his later creations. The piano part of "Attente" is similar to the third act of Tristan when the impatient Tristan sends Kurwenal to the watchtower to look for Isolde. "Dors mon enfant" leads right into the spinning song of the Flying Dutchman, and in the "Deux grenadiers" we hear a theme from the third act of Parsifal which describes the distress of the Grail knights. There is another interesting side to this song, which was written to a French translation of Heine's poem. Wagner composed it two months before Schumann wrote his famous song on the original German version. That both of them end with the Marsaillaise might after all be an understandable coincidence but in comparing them we can see the contrasting concepts of the two composers as well. Schumnann's is a true song in strophelike form that at the end reaches its high point with the Marsaillaise. Wagner treats the poem word for word like a music drama in miniature. Here the Marsaillaise appears in the piano part only, suggesting the subconscious of the dying grenadier in much the same way that Wagner used later in the leitmotifs of his mature works.

Gunter Kossodo

ABOUT THE WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

The New York debut of The Aldeburgh Connection is the most recent in a ten-year succession of firsts presented by the Wagner Society of New York, now the largest Wagner organization in this continent.

The Society's first president, Dr. Leonard Hyams, recalls that a small group of Wagnerians got together in a hospital conference room in 1977 to become better acquainted and decided that evening to elect officers. The organization was incorporated shortly thereafter; it has continuously grown and expanded its range of activities and still benefits from the support of many of its charter members. The second president, Dr. Aurel M. Seifert, led the Society through several formative years with persistence and dedication. The third president and also a well-known lecturer in New York and Bayreuth, Mr. Gunter Kossodo, initiated the now-famous Seminar Series, in-depth studies on a Wagner opera in the Met repertory. The current president, Mrs. Nathalie D. Wagner (but not a relative), has served since 1981.

As its name indicates, the Society has always considered itself in and of New York and has greatly benefited from the profusion of operatic and other musical activity this metropolis offers. However, it offers a wide variety of services (such as information and reviews of both local and international Wagner events; catalog and mail order service of books, tapes, videocassettes, and other Wagneriana; discounts at record stores) in addition to monthly meetings, lectures, films, seminars, musicales featuring promising Wagnerian singers, and receptions for major artists. It thus has proven its value to members in more than 30 states (including Alaska) and several countries.

Looking back on a few of our firsts:

- U. S. premiere performance of the complete early French songs, performed by Inga Hulgaard, November 1978.
- Presentation of first New York performance of the Children's Ring by Philip Caggiano, January 1980.
- Tristan Seminar, January 1981: launching of an annual major event.
- World premiere of marathon showing of complete Boulez/Chéreau Ring on videotape, January 1983.
- Initation of American premiere of Wagner's Das Liebesverbot, July 1983, by the Waterloo Festival, Gerard Schwarz, conductor.
- World premiere of Bayreuth Die Meistersinger videotape in public screening, February 1984.
- U. S. premiere of Bayreuth Parsifal videotape in public screening, April 1986.
- Musicale Series, featuring many singers of promise in the Wagner repertoire, some public and some private recital settings.

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Mrs. Nathalie D. Wagner, President
Wagner Society of New York

Dear Mrs. Wagner and the Members of the Wagner Society of New York:

I take great pleasure in congratulating the Wagner Society of New York on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its founding. The Society is continuing a tradition of close ties between the United States of America and Bayreuth for which the large number of American visitors has been proof since the inauguration of the Bayreuth Festival in 1876.

Richard Wagner's historical interest in the U.S. and in the ties between the continents was evidenced by his acceptance in February 1876 of a commission to compose a festival march on the occasion of the centenary celebration of American independence. On February 8, 1876, he confirmed his acceptance of this commission to Music Director Theodore Thomas of Philadelphia and on March 17 the score for the "Grand Festival March" was completed.

A further important bond between the U.S. and Bayreuth exists in the exchange of the many American singers who since 1882 have regularly participated in performances of Richard Wagner's works at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus and of their German counterparts who have been engaged by American opera companies for the same purpose.

This exchange unites both nations and, through the music, promotes, on the one hand, an understanding of the Gesamtkunstwerk itself and on the other hand an appreciation of different ways of looking at things.

In this context I would like to commend the Society on its support of young American singers studying to master the Wagnerian "fach," thus carrying on the tradition of singers' exchanges established in 1882.

The activities of the Wagner Society of New York during the past decade, which I have followed with interest and admiration, are bearing fruit in a steadily growing membership. This most gratifying success is a sign of the recognition and acknowledgement of your work, particularly when one considers the immense efforts necessary in a city of New York's dimensions to keep alive an organization such as yours.

I extend my best wishes for continued success in the future, mindful of the traditions bridging the United States of America and Bayreuth, and again congratulate you on your tenth anniversary.

Wolfgang Wagner

(translated by the Society)

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