

The Adelaide Rings and Parsifal

Presentation by Dr Peter Bassett

Saturday 29 October 2016

I really cannot say adequately enough what a real thrill, and education, it is to belong to the Queensland Wagner Society. Peter Bassett gave a wonderful, a most interesting discussion on the State Opera of South Australia's world class endeavours with staging Wagner's *Ring Cycle* (twice) and *Parsifal*.



In 1998 a production created for the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris was brought to Adelaide. **Pierre Strosser** was the director and **Jeffrey Tate** (photo at left) conducted the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

This was a triumph for South Australia and thousands of Australians were introduced to the *Ring*. (As an aside, I remember buying the Georg Solti CD set and the Otto Schenk Metropolitan Opera videocassette set months before the Adelaide production. I didn't know much about the *Ring Cycle* and played these sets over and over to become familiar with the work before I went to Adelaide.). Like most who went in 1998 there was no disappointment when it all came to life on the Adelaide stage.

The State Government of South Australia was the principal source of funding for this production and the great success of the venture fostered interest in the creation of a wholly "Australian *Ring*".

There was groundswell of support in the whole opera loving community for the staging of an "Australian *Ring Cycle*". Stars even became aligned when the Commonwealth Government agreed to contribute \$4.3 million towards production. Peter led members through the exciting and very challenging tasks that brought this Australian production to fruition. The visual and recording illustrations Peter gave were just wonderful; they revived memories of this sophisticated, massive and witty production. In 2004 this concept became a triumphant reality on the stage of State Opera of South Australia.



Elke Neidhardt (at left) was director, Asher Fisch conductor and featured great Australian singers including our very own Patron **Lisa Gasteen** as Brünnhilde (below) – just magnificent!



To the surprise and disappointment of many, this 2004 *Ring* became a one-off.

2001 saw the first staging of *Parsifal* in Australia directed by Neidhardt and Tate conductor. Poul Elming was Parsifal and Margaret Medlyn, Kundry.

The Adelaide Festival Theatre has the largest stage in Australia and the largest proscenium arch, and this made possible some tremendous scenes in their Wagner productions.



The Festival Theatre orchestra pit, already large, was made larger for the 2004 production by breaking through the rear wall and extending the orchestra back under the stage.

Peter gave us a great piece of scholarship on the history of Wagner performances in Australia and particularly in Adelaide. His detailed research and engaging presentation are a delight for members and future music students.

Paul Caesar