

Playing with fire

The pursuit of a Wagner performance tradition in Adelaide in
the decade 1995-2005, and factors impeding its realisation

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Synopsis

The productions of the *Ring* in Adelaide in 1998 and 2004 and *Parsifal* in 2001 were landmarks in Australia's cultural history. They were artistically successful, attracted considerable commercial benefits to South Australia and generated nationwide expectations of further performances. Yet those expectations went unfulfilled. The success of Adelaide's Wagner decade had depended on an effective combination of artistic vision, management skills, politics and patronage. This thesis is an analysis of those factors and the extent to which they at first enabled and then jeopardised the dream of an on-going Wagner performance tradition in the South Australian capital.

Politics provided the incentive for this venture when the South Australian Government sought to achieve a major 'cultural tourism' success in the wake of a major 'sports tourism' calamity - the loss of the Australian Formula One Grand Prix to Victoria. The goal of emulating the 'Wagnerian' city of Seattle was also embraced at the political level. The General Director of the State Opera of South Australia (SOSA), Bill Gillespie, recommended the hiring of a Paris production of the *Ring* for restaging in Adelaide in 1998. A dedicated Ring Corporation was established to oversee the production, and the outcome was a notable success. Performances of *Parsifal* (the first staging of this work in Australia) which followed in 2001, confirmed that the pursuit of a Wagner performance tradition in Adelaide was a viable goal.

The direct involvement of State and Commonwealth Governments in the planning and production processes provided a vital source of funding support, but it also led to conflicting priorities between senior officials and the opera company management. SOSA was, and remains, a statutory body governed by *The State Opera of South Australia Act*. Although the *Ring* of 1998 was a considerable success, official reservations about the capacity of SOSA management to oversee an entirely new *Ring* prompted a government offer of the production's artistic management to Opera Australia. By that time, former Production Director Stephen Phillips had succeeded Gillespie as General Director. When Opera Australia declined this offer, attempts were made to broaden the governance base. However, political events intervened, including a change of State Government, and de facto oversight of *Ring* planning shifted to the State Opera. This led to some unfortunate consequences such as the abandonment of the broadly based Ring Corporation model, a decision not to appoint a Ring Artistic Director or Production Manager, and a concentration of governance and management

responsibilities in the hands of the small State Opera Board and the General Director. As a result, SOSA management lost control of the production design and building processes. This led to a budgetary blow-out and the need for rescue interventions by the State and Commonwealth funding authorities who commissioned an inquiry and engaged expert personnel. Without those interventions the production would very likely have foundered. Opportunities for exporting the production as it then stood were frustrated by the scale and technical complexity of the scenery.

Notwithstanding the consequences of its flawed management model, the 2004 *Ring* was hailed as an artistic triumph and featured, among its high points, Australian soprano Lisa Gasteen as Brünnhilde at the peak of her career. Nevertheless, soon after the performances, the Commonwealth arts funding body, the Australia Council, indicated that it would not be interested in funding a remount, although this was not revealed publicly at the time. From 2003 onwards the (new) State Government faced criticism in Parliament about *Ring* budgetary excesses, and it too became disenchanted with the idea of funding a remount. Eventually a remount feasibility study was commissioned in late 2006 which, in its final (2008) report, recommended a return to a broadly-based Ring Corporation model rather than the 2004 management structure. However, this came too late and, following confirmation that Commonwealth funds would not be forthcoming, the State Government announced that it too would be unable to fund a remount. SOSA management then offered the production to Opera Australia which (once again) did not take up the offer.

In 2009, when SOSA became aware of the interest of an interstate private donor in contributing to a new *Ring*, General Director Sephen Phillips proposed an entirely new production for 2013 with a new creative team. He envisaged that this new production would be financed from a combination of South Australian Government funds and private donations, thus avoiding the need for Commonwealth funding. By that time Opera Australia was also considering staging a *Ring* in Melbourne and, ultimately, the private donor, who was a Melbourne resident, opted to support Opera Australia's production in 2013. After 2010, SOSA made no further efforts to stage the *Ring* or to maintain Adelaide's ambition to become a centre for the performance of Wagner's stage works.

Statement of originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Peter Bassett

Peter Bassett
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List of Abbreviations

AFCT	Adelaide Festival Centre Trust
ASO	Adelaide Symphony Orchestra
MPAB	Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council
OA	Opera Australia
SORC	State Opera Ring Corporation
SOSA	State Opera of South Australia

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Overview

In 1995 the government of South Australia endorsed a proposal for the production of Richard Wagner's largest and most demanding work for the operatic stage - his 'stage festival play for three days and a preliminary evening' *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ('The Ring of the Nibelung' – usually shortened to 'the *Ring*'). It was the start of an ambitious plan to make Adelaide a centre for the performance of Wagner's stage works in the Asia-Pacific region after the example of Seattle in North America. This resulted in a production of the *Ring* in 1998, the Australian premiere staging of *Parsifal* in 2001, a new *Ring* in 2004 and, as an epilogue, *The Flying Dutchman* in 2009. How did this plan evolve, and why did it end prematurely?

The success of the productions of Wagner's works in Adelaide during the decade 1995- 2005 depended on an effective combination of artistic vision, management skills, politics and patronage. This thesis is an analysis of those factors, their interrelationships and the extent to which they at first enabled and then jeopardised the dream of an on-going Wagner performance tradition in the South Australian capital.

When the idea of producing the *Ring* in Adelaide was mooted late in 1994 and given State Government endorsement the following year, it was widely seen as an important cultural tourism initiative for South Australia. Many prominent South Australians supported the project, as they had supported the foundation of the Adelaide Festival of Arts four decades earlier.

HYPOTHESIS 1: The *Ring* of 1998 was regarded not only as an operatic event but also as a measure of South Australia's prominence in the arts. This philosophy underpinned governmental involvement in the project and provided the rationale for high levels of financial support. (See Chapter 2)

Chapter 3 addresses the early steps towards bringing Adelaide's first *Ring* production to fruition, the breadth of community support, and the relevance of Seattle Opera's model for creating a successful Wagner performing tradition. The South Australian Government drew parallels between Adelaide and Seattle as centres for the arts and technological innovation, and foresaw the *Ring* as an important element in a mutually beneficial relationship. The

Seattle model had been invoked from the earliest days of the Adelaide *Ring* proposal, and in 1997 Premier John Olsen told Parliament: ‘... we are looking at the possibility of ensuring that it [the *Ring*] returns to Australia and to Adelaide every third or fourth year, as happens in Seattle in the United States, which is now known as the city in the US where the *Ring* is regularly performed’.¹ However, in 2000 the State Opera of South Australia (SOSA) declined opportunities to establish a relationship with Seattle Opera and to explore ways of benefiting from the Seattle experience. This was an early indication that the priorities of the opera company and the State Government would not always coincide, notwithstanding SOSA’s position as a statutory authority responsible to the Arts Minister and to the Parliament.

HYPOTHESIS 2: The hope that Adelaide might emulate Seattle’s record as a centre for the performance of Wagner’s works provided further justification for State and Commonwealth support of the productions. However, while political considerations motivated and enabled the Wagner initiative in Adelaide, Seattle Opera had been motivated primarily by artistic goals. (See Chapter 3)

The 1998 Adelaide *Ring*: A political initiative

Chapter 2 deals with the South Australian Government’s decision in 1995 to stage the *Ring* in 1998, a decision motivated primarily by the desire to achieve a major ‘cultural tourism’ success in the wake of a major ‘sports tourism’ calamity - the loss of the Australian Grand Prix (a round of the FIA Formula One World Championship) to Victoria. Although South Australia had long enjoyed a fine reputation in cultural matters, especially through the Adelaide Festival of Arts founded in 1958², the Grand Prix had become the State’s principal tourist attraction after 1985. The State Labor Government of John Bannon had secured the car race in 1985 for a ten-year term. However, in September 1992 Bannon resigned his premiership following the collapse of the State Bank of South Australia which left the State facing debts of \$3 billion. Soon afterwards, the car race organisers, headed by British businessman and billionaire Bernie Ecclestone, entered into negotiations with Jeff Kennett’s recently elected Victorian Government for the race’s relocation to Melbourne from 1996. John Bannon’s successor, Lynn Arnold, lost the December 1993 elections, and the Liberal

¹ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1997). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, February, 26, p. 1042.

² Adelaide Festival directors have included Sir Robert Helpmann, Anthony Steel, The Earl of Harewood, Barrie Kosky, Robyn Archer and Paul Grabowsky.

Government of Dean Brown came to office with a landslide majority.³ The new government was confronted with the challenge of finding major tourism events which might offer similar economic benefits to the Grand Prix. In 1994 an Events Steering Committee⁴ was created within the South Australian Tourism Commission to consider proposals. This committee received formal submissions from forty different groups, and among them was a proposal to stage Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in three complete cycles. With admirable foresight, the Chairman of SOSA, Tim O'Loughlin, who was by profession an executive of the mining company Santos, had recognised an opportunity for the opera company if a suitable project could be identified. He consulted SOSA General Director Bill Gillespie who suggested the *Ring*, and together they drafted a submission.⁵ Gillespie, an experienced and highly qualified American opera administrator and long-time Wagnerian, had been appointed to the State Opera in 1988. The circumstances of his appointment are covered in Chapter 2. In 1995 he vacated the General Directorship to become Artistic Director of the *Ring*, and the Production Director and Deputy General Director Stephen Phillips moved into the General Director's position.

The 1994 proposal found a political champion in Diana Laidlaw, Minister for the Arts (1993-2002) who advanced it with enthusiasm and commitment and persuaded her Cabinet colleagues that an Adelaide *Ring* would be a worthy counterpart to the Adelaide Festival. Most other State capitals had broadly-based arts festivals by that time, but nobody else had the *Ring*, although both the Australian Opera (as it was called until 1996) and Victoria State Opera had been interested in staging it.⁶ Importantly, the project also won the support of the Minister for Tourism (and Deputy Premier from 1996) Graham Ingerson, who oversaw the work of the Events Steering Committee and, subsequently, the Australian Major Events Corporation within the South Australian Tourism Commission.

Unlike Opera Australia, Opera Queensland,⁷ West Australian Opera and Victorian Opera,⁸ which are all companies limited by guarantee, SOSA is a statutory body governed by *The*

³ Martin, R. (2009). *Responsible Government in South Australia*. (Vol. 2, p. 141). Adelaide, SA: Wakefield Press.

⁴ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1994). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, May 18, p. 1236.

⁵ Lloyd, T. (1998, August 8). Bill's epic journey. *Adelaide Advertiser*, p. 12. A copy of the submission is in the Gillespie papers in the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

⁶ Lloyd, T., *ibid.*, and also Cosic, M. (1995, May 20). For opera fans, paradise will be in Adelaide. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 6.

⁷ Opera Queensland was called The Lyric Opera of Queensland from 1982 to 1995.

State Opera of South Australia Act 1976. During the period under consideration, its Board was subject to the general control and direction of the Minister,⁹ and Board members were appointed and removed by the Governor in Council acting on the advice of Ministers.¹⁰ SOSA was required to present a report to the Minister on its activities during the previous financial year,¹¹ and this report had to be laid before both Houses of Parliament within 12 sitting days of presentation. The report had to include the company's accounts audited by the Auditor-General.¹² SOSA could not, without the Minister's consent, make any expenditure that was not already authorised by a budget approved by the Minister¹³ - an important point which led to difficulties in respect of the 2004 *Ring*. These were stringent political controls which had no parallel with any other Australian opera company. The implications of this distinctive governance model are dealt with in several chapters, and were of particular significance for the way in which the productions were developed and managed.

For the State Government in 1995, the *Ring* project would be an exercise in cultural tourism, a means of rejuvenating the State's arts profile after a period of relative stagnation, and a visible sign of South Australia's creative vibrancy. On the advice of the Crown Solicitor,¹⁴ corporate governance was vested in a specially created public corporation - the State Opera Ring Corporation (SORC), a subsidiary of the State Opera, which came into being after the gazettal of the *Public Corporations (State Opera Ring Corporation) Regulations* on 6 July 1995. The creation of SORC followed the usual South Australian practice of establishing subsidiary corporations to manage major public events, especially those involving more than one agency.¹⁵ The regulations made clear that SORC (independently of SOSA) was a body corporate capable of suing and being sued in its corporate name.¹⁶ There were benefits in this arrangement because it protected the parent company from any liabilities incurred during the production and staging of the multi-million dollar *Ring*. The Managing Director of SORC was Stephen Phillips, who had been appointed General Director of the State Opera after Bill

⁸ Victorian Opera was established in 2005 as a successor to Victoria State Opera which had merged with the Sydney-based Australian Opera in 1996.

⁹ *State Opera of South Australia Act 1976* (Historical version: 1.12.1989 to 31.3.2007), Section 17. On a day-to-day basis, this means oversight by the Executive Director and officers of Arts SA.

¹⁰ Sections 6 and 8 of the Act.

¹¹ Section 28 of the Act.

¹² Section 23 (3) of the Act.

¹³ Section 26 (3) of the Act.

¹⁴ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly, Estimates Committee B. (1995). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, 21 June 1995, pp. 85-96.

¹⁵ Other examples have been the Adelaide Film Festival, the World Police and Fire Games, the Australian Children's Performing Arts Company, and the Seventh Australian Masters Games.

¹⁶ *Public Corporations (State Opera Ring Corporation) Regulations 1995*, section 5.

Gillespie vacated this position in 1995 to become Artistic Director of the *Ring*.¹⁷ The creation of SORC facilitated the appointment of directors from outside the State Opera Board, the existing members of which, though enthusiastic supporters of the State Opera, had no experience of managing arts projects as large and as complex as the *Ring*. In 1997, Sydney-based Donald McDonald was invited to chair SORC. Mr McDonald was at that time Chairman of the ABC and a Board member of the Sydney Olympic Games Organising Committee. Most importantly, he brought to SORC exactly the kind of abilities and experience required of additional directors by the regulations, having been Chief Executive of the Australian Opera between 1987 and 1996 and General Manager of the Sydney Theatre Company.¹⁸ Donald McDonald had excellent connections with the Howard Coalition Government in Canberra (specifically with the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, who was responsible for the ABC) and with business figures and philanthropists in the eastern states. The failure to replicate this Ring Corporation model for the 2004 *Ring* was, in my view, one of the principal sources of that production's difficulties, and this is considered in Chapters 4 and 8.

The production concept, sets, designs and properties for the 1998 Adelaide *Ring* had been created for the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris in 1994 and were hired for the Adelaide season. Gillespie had been sent overseas to identify a production that could easily be transported to Adelaide and, as a result, recommended the Châtelet's streamlined and striking staging (Chapter 2). The original Paris conductor, Englishman Jeffrey Tate, French stage director, Pierre Strosser, and English assistant director, Stephen Taylor, were also engaged for Adelaide.¹⁹ The principal singers, chorus and orchestra (an augmented Adelaide Symphony Orchestra totalling 128 musicians including relief players, some from interstate) were specific to Adelaide. Englishman Lionel Friend was the assistant conductor, and SOSA's chorus master Florin Radulescu undertook this role for the *Ring*. The other members of the music and production staff were principally Adelaide-based, with a few coming from elsewhere in Australia to perform specialised tasks. In November 1997, one year ahead of the performances and before the arrival of Jeffrey Tate, Peter Grunberg, head of music staff at San Francisco Opera, undertook several weeks of introductory rehearsals with the Adelaide

¹⁷ The SORC Regulations, section 11, provided that the chief executive officer of the State Opera would be the chief executive officer of the Ring Corporation.

¹⁸ *Who's Who in Australia* (XLIX ed.). (2013). Melbourne: Crown Content Pty Ltd.

¹⁹ SA Premier Dean Brown and Minister for the Arts Diana Laidlaw. Media Release. (1995, May 19). *South Australia wins world classic opera epic*.

Symphony Orchestra. He had worked with Jeffrey Tate on the *Ring* previously and was familiar with his style and requirements.²⁰ Grunberg's engagement was indicative of the thorough artistic planning that underpinned the 1998 *Ring* and for which Gillespie was chiefly responsible.

The *Ring* was staged in three complete cycles at the Adelaide Festival Theatre between 18 November and 12 December 1998 at a cost of \$7.896 million, to which the State government contributed \$2.762 million²¹, the Commonwealth contributed \$250,000, and box office and other production revenue returned \$4.201 million or 53% of the total operating expenses. The balance of the income was made up of sponsorships, donations and other revenue totalling \$705,000. The three cycles returned a small operating surplus of \$22,000.²² The original 1995 budget estimates for the 1998 *Ring* had envisaged expenditure of \$6.458 million, and it was on this basis that the project was approved by the State Government.²³ In June 1996 these estimates were revised upwards to \$8.355 million, a movement prompted mainly by increases in administrative costs and cover (understudy) cast expenses.²⁴ Reaction to this \$2 million budget increase took the form of questions in Parliament and a report to the Arts Department by consultant Derek Watt (Chapter 3). In the end, the actual cost was nearly \$450,000 less than the June 1996 revision. After the performances, an economic impact study conducted by the SA Centre for Economic Studies on behalf of Arts SA and the South Australian Tourism Commission, found that the 1998 *Ring* returned an estimated economic benefit to the State of \$10 million.²⁵ Preliminary estimates in 1995-96 had foreshadowed an economic impact of \$14 million, which was subsequently revised down to between \$9 million and \$13 million. The volatility in all of these figures demonstrates just how difficult it is to determine precise and unwavering estimates years in advance for a project of such complexity and scale.

This was the first time that the *Ring* had been staged in its entirety in Australia since 1913, when the Quinlan Opera Company from the United Kingdom had performed two cycles in

²⁰ Milton, N. (1998, June). *The Ring*, Issue 2 Newsletter. State Opera of South Australia.

²¹ The State contribution was made up of a \$1.47 million grant from Arts SA and \$1.292 million underwriting by Australian Major Events, created in 1995 as the events arm of the South Australian Tourism Commission.

²² SA Auditor-General's Report on the State Opera of South Australia for 1998-99. The record of *Ring* productions around the world suggests that any surplus is a noteworthy achievement.

²³ Minister Laidlaw quoted \$6.4 million in Parliament, as recorded in Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly, Estimates Committee B. (1995). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 21, p. 82.

²⁴ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (1996). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, July 10-11, pp. 1677-8 and 1725-6.

²⁵ The SA Centre for Economic Studies combined the resources of the University of Adelaide and Flinders University. Its report was presented to the State Government in May 1999.

Melbourne and one in Sydney. Much was made of the historic nature of the 1998 *Ring* in publicity, and this played a part in attracting the attendance of Wagner's great-granddaughter Eva Wagner-Pasquier who was a guest of honour at the first cycle. The third cycle was transmitted live to the Space Theatre in the Festival Centre (and recorded on video tape), enabling free viewing of the performances by members of the public. The model for this relay was San Francisco Opera's relay of its 1985 *Ring* into a neighbouring auditorium²⁶ of which Gillespie was aware.

HYPOTHESIS 3: SOSA was not equipped to produce a *Ring* and associated activities without substantial assistance from governments and from external agencies and individual experts. The 1998 *Ring* management model was an effective one and would have provided a sound basis on which to begin structuring the 2004 production. (See Chapters 2 - 4)

The Adelaide performances of 1998 were successful artistically and financially. 63% of tickets sold were to patrons from interstate or overseas.²⁷ Importantly, this *Ring* received bipartisan support in Parliament, with members on both sides speaking eloquently of its benefits, and supporting the notion of another Adelaide *Ring* in the near future.²⁸ Audience members were overwhelmingly in favour of the staging of another *Ring* in Adelaide, as revealed in the survey by the SA Centre for Economic Studies.²⁹ These positive reactions fuelled public discussion of the creation of an entirely new, home-grown production for Adelaide. The State Government had in fact been considering an on-going *Ring* involvement for some time, with a 'pre-emptive' strategy³⁰ adopted as early as 1995 (see Chapter 3). In 1996 SOSA was asked by the Minister to consider what might be required to stage a new *Ring*. On the last night of the 1998 performances, Minister Laidlaw announced the allocation of \$250,000 to set up an inquiry, 'the Ring Consortium', to look at what was needed to create a new *Ring* production.³¹ This followed an economic impact study for a future *Ring* by the

²⁶ Lindsey, Robert. (1985, June 4). *New York Times*.

²⁷ SA Centre for Economic Studies Report, p. 4. (1999, May).

²⁸ See for example Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council and House of Assembly. (1998). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, November 25, pp. 332-335, and South Australia House of Assembly, November 26, pp. 450-451.

²⁹ 96% of respondents indicated they would be likely to recommend a future production of the *Ring* to friends or colleagues if it were staged again in Adelaide. 95% of overseas visitors stated they would be likely to recommend a future production to friends or colleagues. 81% of all respondents stated they would be likely to attend a future production.

³⁰ The strategy was aimed at pre-empting any interstate plans to stage the *Ring*.

³¹ Jones, D. and Plane, T. (1998, December 18). Adelaide in a cycle of success. *The Australian*, p. 20. I was present when this announcement was made.

accounting firm Ernst & Young, which delivered its report to Arts SA and the Minister in August 1998. Arts SA Executive Director O'Loughlin told the media that, based on international experience, a new *Ring* would cost up to \$11 million, comprising \$5 million for sets and costumes, and \$6 million for operating costs, mostly wages.³² The 1998 Ernst & Young report followed an 'in-house' inquiry in 1997 by O'Loughlin himself into the practicalities of making the *Ring* a regular Adelaide event. He had begun this study when he was Chairman of the State Opera in response to the Minister's request, but was better equipped to complete it as a senior public servant. He looked primarily at Seattle in the US which, at that time, was staging a *Ring* cycle at four-yearly intervals.³³ Nobody questioned the assumption that a new Adelaide *Ring* could only be produced under the aegis of the State Government through the Minister for the Arts and her department, Arts SA.

The Nugent Inquiry and lasting financial benefits to SOSA from the Wagner decade

In 1997 a Major Performing Arts Inquiry chaired by Dr Helen Nugent was set in motion by the Commonwealth Minister for the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, with the support of all State Governments through the Cultural Ministers Council. The Inquiry presented its findings (the 'Nugent Report') in December 1999. The Report made 95 recommendations to governments, of which 89 were accepted. One of the recommendations was for a funding model for each of the major performing arts companies which would be used as a basis for determining the level of ongoing support for each company. From my own discussions with Dr Nugent in Adelaide in 1999 it was clear that she was impressed by the success of the 1998 *Ring*, by the plans for *Parsifal* in 2001 and by expectations of a new *Ring* in 2004. As a result, SOSA secured a funding advantage over other state opera companies, an advantage which continues to this day even though the company no longer produces Wagner's works.³⁴ The immediate outcome of the Nugent Report was that all states agreed to contribute to the Commonwealth's proposed \$70.2 million national funding boost for the performing arts. It was as a consequence of this that the South Australian Government was able to negotiate, in early 2000, majority Commonwealth funding for a new *Ring* in 2004. Once again, it was the State Government that was driving plans for a new *Ring*.

³² Holgate, B. (1998, September 11). Extra confidence in the Ring. *The Australian*, p. 17. O'Loughlin's estimate of \$5 million for sets and costumes turned out to be right on target (\$4.757m) for the final costs in 2004. The SOSA budget estimates for sets and costumes on the other hand were unrealistic at \$1.9 million. The latter figure appears to have been simply a modification of the costs for the modest 1998 imported production.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *Securing the Future. Major Performing Arts Inquiry, Final Report.* Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 1999, Recommendation 5.2.4, p. 27.

HYPOTHESIS 4: The Nugent Report's recommendation of 'niche' or 'specialist' status for SOSA (the only opera company and one of only five performing arts companies to be so designated) flowed directly from an appreciation of South Australia's Wagner initiative. It was the cultural tourism appeal of the *Ring* in particular which gave national and international dimensions to SOSA's work, and justified a special level of Commonwealth funding and a special contribution to a new production. As a consequence of the adoption of the Nugent Report recommendations, the South Australian Government was able to negotiate majority Commonwealth funding support for the new *Ring*. (See Chapter 5)

The 2001 Adelaide *Parsifal* - between the *Rings*

In order to provide a Wagnerian bridge between the *Rings* of 1998 and 2004, Phillips proposed the staging of a new production of Wagner's final work, *Parsifal*, as part of the 2001 season. The decision to do this came about when Leo Schofield, then Artistic Director of the Sydney Festival and the Olympics Arts Festival, told me in Sydney in 1999 that his plan to bring the Barenboim/Kupfer *Parsifal* with the Berliner Staatsoper Unter den Linden and Staatskapelle Berlin to Sydney had fallen through because of the unwillingness of the New South Wales Carr Government to fund the visit. The Berlin visit would have marked the first staged performances of *Parsifal* in Australia's history. When I informed Stephen Phillips of this development, he recalled that the Australian Opera had commissioned designs for *Parsifal* from German designer Carl Friedrich Oberle in the early 1990s but had not proceeded with the production because of budgetary pressures.³⁵ He managed to acquire those designs from Opera Australia for use in the Adelaide production. The *Parsifal* production is addressed in Chapter 6.

The four performances of *Parsifal* in Adelaide between 22 September and 2 October 2001 linked the main events of the two *Rings* - 'main' because they attracted the greatest number of tourists to South Australia and achieved the largest economic returns. The *Parsifal* performances were conducted by Jeffrey Tate, the conductor of the 1998 *Ring*, and directed by Elke Neidhardt, who had been the choice of the Australian Opera for the production that never happened.³⁶ By that time, Neidhardt had also been selected to direct the 2004 *Ring*. The

³⁵ Oxenbould, M. *Timing is Everything: A Life Backstage at the Opera*. Sydney NSW: ABC Books, p. 570.

³⁶ *ibid.*

intention was that *Parsifal* would maintain the Wagner momentum for South Australia, block other states from getting a foot in the Wagnerian door, add to SOSA's audience data base, and build on the 1998 *Ring* donor support base. Consequently, no thought was given to staging it beyond a single season, and this remained the case notwithstanding its artistic and commercial success and the ready availability of the beautiful sets and costumes by Carl Friedrich Oberle and Australian designer Sue Field. An approach was made to Seattle Opera in late 2000 offering the Adelaide production for their planned *Parsifal* in 2003. This approach was made at the suggestion of Asher Fisch who had been engaged to conduct it and who, by then, had been invited to conduct the 2004 Adelaide *Ring*. The offer was declined because Seattle wanted to create its own, distinctive production for the opening of its refurbished opera house, with visual references to the Pacific Northwest of the United States.³⁷

The Adelaide *Parsifal* cost \$2.274 million to produce and stage, and the South Australian Government provided a special grant of \$200,000 towards this.³⁸ *Parsifal* was one of three major State Opera productions and two minor productions in the financial year 2001-02,³⁹ and so parts of the regular operating grants from the Australia Council⁴⁰ and the State Government⁴¹ were also used to meet costs. Box office returns and other production revenue for *Parsifal* totalled \$1.058 million, and donations accounted for the remainder. *Parsifal* earned three times more in ticket sales and production revenue than the next most successful SOSA production that season, *Andrea Chenier*.⁴² An Economic Impact Study conducted by Barry Burgan, senior economist at the Centre for Economic Studies at the University of Adelaide, found that the four performances of *Parsifal* had generated \$2.4 million in economic activity for South Australia, notwithstanding travel disincentives at that time caused by the terrorist attack on the New York World Trade Centre eleven days before opening night, and the collapse of Ansett Airways two days after that.

³⁷ Phillips, Stephen. Oral information to Peter Bassett (2000, October 18). Also Bargeen, Melinda. (2001, May 22). *Parsifal* to open 2003 opera season, *Seattle Times*.

³⁸ This was in addition to regular annual operating grants to the State Opera. The Australia Council and Arts SA had agreed to maintain existing grant levels or better for SOSA for the period 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2003.

³⁹ No works other than the *Ring* were staged during *Ring* years.

⁴⁰ The Australia Council grant to the State Opera for 2001-2002 totalled \$1,791,000 comprising: \$871,000 (general); \$703,000 (special purpose 2004 Ring Cycle); \$158,000 (Opera Conference productions), and \$59,000 (seed funding). Source: SA Auditor-General's Report for the year ended 30 June 2002.

⁴¹ State Government grants to the State Opera for 2001-2002 totalled \$1,427,000 comprising: \$997,000 (general); \$200,000 (special purpose *Parsifal*), and \$230,000 for orchestral services of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, which at that time was managed by the ABC. Source: SA Auditor-General's Report for the year ended 30 June 2002.

⁴² SA Auditor-General's Report for the year ended 30 June 2002.

A larger opera company⁴³ might have considered mounting a second Adelaide season of *Parsifal* three years later in conjunction with the 2004 *Ring*, and there would have been advantages in doing this. Once an augmented Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (130 musicians including relief players) had been assembled for the new *Ring*, this orchestra would have been available for rehearsals and performances of both works. The musicians were familiar with both the *Ring* and *Parsifal* scores from their 1998 and 2001 performances, Asher Fisch could have conducted both works, the Director (Elke Neidhardt), Lighting Designer (Nick Schlieper) and Assistant Conductor (Lionel Friend) had been engaged for both productions, and there would have been economies of scale in terms of marketing, ticket sales, ancillary events and the like.⁴⁴ However, as the new *Ring* began to occupy more and more of the State Opera's attention, and budgetary problems arose, no further efforts were made to export, sell, rent or restage the *Parsifal* production, and it was deemed more expedient to dispose of the sets and costumes and save on storage costs. I remember being shocked to hear of this at the time and, in retrospect, it still appears to have been a rash decision and a squandered opportunity. One can only conclude that, to SOSA management, the *Parsifal* production was less important as a work of art than as a programming strategy. The 1998 *Ring* had been a 'one-off' and now, with *Parsifal* following the same course, a pattern was being established. As events transpired, both the 2004 *Ring* and the 2009 *Flying Dutchman* were also destined to become 'one-offs'. This was not the way in which Seattle had become a major centre for the performance of Wagner's works.

HYPOTHESIS 5: *Parsifal* was an important and successful undertaking from both artistic and cultural tourism points of view, and helped to maintain audience interest in the Adelaide Wagner initiative. However, as a contribution towards an on-going Wagner performing tradition it was something of a wasted opportunity since it was given only a single season before its scenery and costumes were destroyed. (See Chapter 6)

⁴³ The State Opera of South Australia had a regular staff of 29 in 1988, which was reduced to 8 in 1989, 11 at the time of the 1998 *Ring*, 10 at the time of the 2001 *Parsifal*, and 10 (including consultants) at the time of the 2004 *Ring*. There were repeated media references to 'a permanent staff of four' in connection with the 2004 *Ring* but these references were largely for 'effect'. A great many additional staff were engaged specifically for the 1998, 2001 and 2004 productions (including more than 200 for 2004) although these did not appear on SOSA's permanent establishment.

⁴⁴ Multiple Wagner operas in a single season with the same conductor and director are not uncommon; a notable example being the Berlin Staatsoper's 2002 Festtage conducted by Asher Fisch's mentor, Daniel Barenboim and directed by Harry Kupfer. At Bayreuth, seven operas are usually performed three or four times during the Festival.

The 2004 *Ring* and its management structure

Chapter 3 examines the State Government's strategies for the production of a new 'Australian' *Ring*, strategies which began in earnest in 1996-97, even before the 1998 *Ring* had been performed.

Chapter 4 examines the administrative planning of the 2004 *Ring*. Following the Minister's announcement in 1998 of the creation of a Consortium to consider requirements of a new production, a group of South Australian arts leaders was assembled by Tim O'Loughlin for this purpose. The Consortium met for the first time on 4 February 1999, its members being: Tim O'Loughlin (Arts SA) as chairman; Stephen Phillips (SOSA); Nicholas Heywood (Adelaide Festival of Arts); Kate Brennan (Adelaide Festival Centre Trust); Bob Clarke (Adelaide Symphony Orchestra) and Les Neilsen (Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra). Its first decision was to commission former Adelaide Festival director Anthony Steel to produce a report outlining a management model for a new *Ring*.⁴⁵ Three members of the Consortium had Adelaide Festival connections. Anthony Steel had been Artistic Director of three Festivals (1974, 1976 and 1978), General Manager/director of the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust, and had had extensive international experience in arts management. Nicholas Heywood had been appointed General Manager of the Adelaide Festival in 1997 after being Chief Executive Officer of the Brisbane Biennial International Music Festival which, in 1995, had featured two concert performances of *Parsifal* with a fine international cast. Kate Brennan had become CEO of the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust in 1998, overseeing both the organisation and the facility, and had occupied that position during the first *Ring*. O'Loughlin was keen to have people with such experience involved with a new *Ring*, but this did not sit well with Phillips's view that, with the 1998 *Ring* behind it, SOSA was capable of managing another *Ring* as an in-house production like any other operatic undertaking (see Chapters 3 and 4). Such were O'Loughlin's reservations about the capability of SOSA management to produce a new *Ring* from scratch that he contemplated handing over its artistic management to Opera Australia. Approaches were made but Opera Australia was not receptive to the idea.⁴⁶

The first action of the Ring Consortium was to commission Adelaide Festival director and former Artistic Director Anthony Steel to undertake an inquiry into requirements and options

⁴⁵ This report *Another Ring for Adelaide?* was delivered in draft form to Tim O'Loughlin at Arts SA in July 1999 and was presented formally to the State Government later that year. Appendices 9 and 10.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

for a new *Ring*. Steel's report, compiled after extensive meetings and discussions in Australia and Europe, was delivered in the second half of 1999. It included a recommendation for the use of a Ring Consortium along the lines of the 1998 SORC. Eventually, SOSA would disregard virtually all the recommendations of the Steel report and pursue its own course. After October 2000 when O'Loughlin moved from Arts SA to a more senior position in the public service, close SA Government supervision of the *Ring* preparations began to wane. Major problems besetting the Adelaide Festivals of 2000 and 2002 occupied much of the Minister's attention and, early in 2002, the Liberal Government lost office and was replaced by the Rann Labor Government. These developments coupled with the fact that the Commonwealth was now the majority funding body, saw a shift of control of *Ring* planning from the State Government to SOSA management, with unfortunate consequences.

The winding up of the State Opera Ring Corporation

Central to SOSA's plans for an in-house *Ring* production model were decisions not to appoint a new SORC Board and to initiate steps to have SORC wound up. Oversight of the new *Ring* was to be in the hands of the eight-member SOSA Board which was also overseeing the company's regular seasons and operations. In January 1999, SOSA had proceeded to put its financial house in order after the first *Ring* and, in the process, sought ministerial approval (retrospectively) to have the terms of several directors extended from 24 July 1998 until 30 September 1999 to allow for the winding up of SORC.⁴⁷ The assumption seemed to be that SORC had been created specifically for the 1998 production and had achieved its purpose. In fact though, the operations of SORC were not limited to any particular production and, under the Regulations creating it, it could have continued until September 2006. On 31 May 2000, a week after the Minister's announcement in Parliament of the decision to proceed with the new *Ring*, a formal decision was made by SOSA to wind up SORC and to transfer its remaining surplus of \$22,000 to the opera company.⁴⁸ However, the dissolution of SORC was not finalised until 6 February 2003 and so, legally, it remained empowered but dormant for another three years. SOSA management preferred not to reactivate it, which they could have done at any time by appointing new Board members with the Minister's approval. The decision not to make use of SORC for the purpose for which it had been created was an irresponsible one in view of the success of the corporate structure for 1998. It did however

⁴⁷ Approval was given in a letter of 27 January 1999 from the Minister for the Arts to the Chairman of SOSA in response to the latter's discussions with Arts SA. Referred to in the SOSA Board agenda for February 1999.

⁴⁸ This was referred to in the Auditor-General's Reports for the years ended 30 June 2000, 30 June 2001, and 30 June 2002.

suit SOSA's immediate interests and reduce the risk that 'outsiders' (especially Adelaide Festival and Adelaide Festival Centre Trust outsiders) would become involved in the *Ring* production process. This issue is crucial to an understanding of the problems that beset the production of the 2004 *Ring*.

Significantly, when a feasibility study was commissioned in 2006 by the South Australian Government to look into the possibility of remounting the 2004 *Ring*, the final report recommended that a *Ring* Corporation model be adopted for future productions, and that the 2004 model should *not* be followed (see Chapter 9).

Concentration of responsibilities in fewer hands

SOSA General Director Stephen Phillips provided internal continuity between the two *Rings*, worked tirelessly on the productions themselves and became, to all intents and purposes, the face of the State Opera. This led some journalists to describe him as the author of Adelaide's Wagner project. Penelope Debelles, for instance, in a piece entitled *Adelaide the Ringmaster* in the Fairfax press on 30 November 2004, wrote: 'Stephen Phillips ... had a 10-year plan to import the French production of the Ring Cycle - staged in Adelaide in 1998 - with the hope Australia's first production of the Ring would follow.'⁴⁹ This was not true, but it was a persistent myth despite Minister Laidlaw having set the record straight in a statement to Parliament on 25 November 1998 when she said: 'I acknowledge the efforts of Mr Tim O'Loughlin who is now CEO of Arts SA but who, approximately four years ago, was Chairman of State Opera, and Mr Bill Gillespie, the then General Manager and Artistic Director of State Opera. Together they put a proposition to me which I was able to take forward to Cabinet.'⁵⁰ It also overlooked the Government's initiatives in 1996-7 for a new *Ring*, its decision to establish and fund the Ring Consortium, and its handling of negotiations with the Commonwealth for major subsidies. Commentators, especially from the eastern states, tended to overlook the central role played by the South Australian Government in bringing the *Rings* of 1998 and 2004 to fruition, and were inclined to assume that SOSA was an independent entity like other Australian opera companies.

Phillips decided not to appoint an Artistic Director for the new *Ring* but, as General Director of SOSA, to undertake this role himself. The very title General Director combines the

⁴⁹ Debelles, Penelope. (2004, November 30). Adelaide the Ringmaster. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/Adelaide-the-Ringmaster/2004/11/29/1101577402031.html>:

⁵⁰ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (1998). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, November 25, p. 332.

functions of General Manager and Artistic Director. If SORC had been revived for 2004 with the same format as for 1998 - when separate General Manager and Artistic Director positions existed - Phillips would have been responsible for management decisions but not artistic ones.

The restructuring of *Ring* management arrangements, including the decisions to wind up SORC and not to appoint a dedicated Artistic Director, led to a concentration of responsibility in fewer hands for 2004 than in 1998, notwithstanding the greater challenge of building a new *Ring* from scratch. Coinciding with this was a weakening of official supervisory arrangements with the change of government in early 2002, change of Minister, change of senior Arts SA personnel, and a shift in the funding balance from the State to the Commonwealth. In this environment there was a heightened risk that administrative and planning problems would arise, and they did.

HYPOTHESIS 6: The impetus for the 2004 *Ring* came from the South Australian Government. Early planning and negotiations about Commonwealth funding were also handled by the Government. There was considerable scepticism in official circles about the ability of SOSA management to oversee a project as large and complex as a new *Ring*, and consideration was given to broadening the governance and management base. The General Director of SOSA on the other hand was confident that, after the company's experience of the 1998 *Ring*, it was capable of producing a new *Ring* by itself. The resolution of this crucial difference in judgment would ultimately determine not only the course of the 2004 production but also prospects for on-going Wagner performances. Political and administrative events delivered to the General Director of SOSA a greater freedom of action and a greater control over *Ring* decision-making than had been the case for 1998, and yet he had fewer resources at his disposal. (See Chapters 4 and 5)

Problems with the budget

The 2004 *Ring* was at greater risk of budgetary over-runs than the earlier production because its design elements were unknown and uncosted. In 1998, after the preliminary Ernst & Young study, O'Loughlin had told the media that based on international experience a new *Ring* would cost up to \$11 million, comprising \$5 million for sets and costumes, and \$6

million for operating costs, mostly wages.⁵¹ A figure of \$12 million was referred to from time to time in parliamentary debates and the media,⁵² reflecting a 1999 trial budget by SOSA management which anticipated expenditure of \$11.7m.⁵³ However, in June 2000, State Opera management prepared a five-year business plan which showed *Ring* costs of just \$9.3 million. The Board approved this plan in August 2000.⁵⁴ This represented a modest \$1.4 million increase on the actual production costs incurred for the hired 1998 *Ring*, and was unrealistic for a new production. The Auditor-General in his report for the year ended 30 June 2004 noted that:

Audit were unable to locate documentation which supported a conclusion that a Board decision to schedule the 2004-05 production of *The Ring* was based on full review and evaluation of the relevant merits of the production.

He was also critical of the fact that the State Opera Board did not receive from management formal regular reporting on the achievement of documented key timeframes and milestones for the 2004 production. John Hill, the Minister assisting the Premier for the Arts after March 2002, told the Parliament in June 2004 that he had requested details of the budget records relating to the original decision to produce the 2004 *Ring*, and had found only ‘a notional understanding of approximately \$10 million’ that had not been properly worked through.⁵⁵ Few people were aware of the official \$9.3 million business plan figure before it was revealed publicly in the 2003-04 Auditor-General’s Report. However, as early as July 2000, SOSA was referring to a *Ring* budget of \$13 million in its correspondence with artists’ agents, that is one month after the business plan was prepared and one month before it was approved by the Board. I was advised to use this figure when, between July and October 2000, I assisted Phillips in a voluntary capacity to prepare a shortlist of potential conductors, and liaise with their agents.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Holgate, B. (1998, September 11). Extra confidence in the Ring. *The Australian*, p. 17.

⁵² For example, Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2003). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, September 25, p. 233. See also (2000, May), First all-Australian Ring cycle set for Adelaide. *International Arts Manager*, p. 5, and Nunn, L. (2000, July 24). Home production needs ring-in. *The Advertiser*, p. 27.

⁵³ Referred to by Anthony Steel in his report *A new Ring for Adelaide?* delivered to Arts SA in July 1999. Appendix 9.

⁵⁴ SA Auditor-General’s Report for the year ended 30 June 2004, p. 1029.

⁵⁵ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly, Estimates Committee A. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 16, p. 34.

The ‘approximately \$10 million’ may have referred to the SOSA five-year plan figure of \$9.3m of June 2000.

⁵⁶ Phillips, Stephen. (2000, July 27). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 11.

In February 2004, the Premier informed Parliament that SOSA's latest five-year business plan anticipated a total *Ring* cost of \$12.596 million.⁵⁷ However, two months later, on 27 April 2004, SOSA was obliged to increase its official figure to \$14.2 million to accommodate further costs.⁵⁸ In May 2004 Minister Hill told Parliament that the expert team brought in to manage the budget had revealed the actual figure for the *Ring* to be \$15.345 million.⁵⁹ In the end though, after some savings, the cost settled at \$15.143 million.⁶⁰

The fluctuating budget estimates for the 2004 *Ring* can be summarised as follows:

September 1998	Up to \$11m.	T. O'Loughlin/Arts SA's initial estimate.
1999	\$11.7m.	Trial budget by SOSA.
June/August 2000	\$9.3m.	SOSA five-year business plan (in Auditor-General's Report).
July 2000	\$13m.	SOSA information to artists' agents.
February 2004	\$12.596m.	SOSA five-year business plan announced by the Premier.
April 2004	\$14.2m.	SOSA revised estimate (in Auditor-General's report).
May 2004	\$15.345m.	Calculation by expert team, announced by Minister Hill.
FY 2004-05	\$15.143m.	Actual costs, resulting in an operating deficit of \$178,000.

The Premier, Arts SA and the MPAB were not at all happy with the way SOSA had managed the budget of the 2004 *Ring* (see Chapter 8). There was also a question of whether SOSA had observed the *State Opera Act* requirements that its operating budget be approved by the Minister annually and that expenditure could only be incurred in accordance with the approved budget. The evidence of repeated, extra-budget or post-approved expenses suggests that it had not.⁶¹ After the dismantling of the Ring Corporation, there was also a risk that the State Opera itself could be irreparably damaged by the collapse of the project. Such an event would have left SOSA (and behind it, the Government) vulnerable to legal action and claims for compensation. One of the reasons for creating SORC in the first place had been to protect SOSA from just such an eventuality. Furthermore, under the terms of the Commonwealth grant, if, for any reason, the State Opera had failed to carry out the 2004 *Ring*, unexpended

⁵⁷ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, February, 16, p. 960.

⁵⁸ SA Auditor-General's Report for the year ending 30 June 2004, p. 1029.

⁵⁹ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, May, 27, p. 2273.

⁶⁰ SA Auditor-General's Report for the year ending 30 June 2005, p. 1293.

⁶¹ See for instance the findings of the 2003 Stuart Report.

moneys would have had to be refunded. In practice, this meant that the State would have had to refund the Commonwealth millions of dollars while also being vulnerable to litigation.

A production cost of \$15.143 million was not, in itself, excessive when compared with the cost of other *Rings* in recent times. The 2011 San Francisco *Ring* (a co-production with Washington National Opera) for instance, was reported to have cost US\$23 million, and the 2010 Los Angeles *Ring* cost a whopping US\$31 million, a figure made public when Los Angeles County had to come to the rescue with a loan of \$14 million. Houston Grand Opera, which hired the Valencia *Ring* after its co-production arrangement with Opera Australia fell through, was reported to have set its budget at USD\$16 million. Opera Australia's budget for the 2013 Melbourne *Ring* was \$15.5 million⁶² and the final figure was reported to be at least \$20 million.⁶³ As a statutory body, SOSA was open to public scrutiny and could not be coy about its finances. However, the crucial issue was not that expenditure had exceeded the budget estimate but that the government had been embarrassed politically in circumstances where legislative and administrative controls should have ensured that this would not happen. No government is less forgiving than one that has been embarrassed on the floor of Parliament by the actions of one of its own instrumentalities. At issue therefore was the quality of government supervision, the quality of SOSA's management procedures, and the nature of the relationship between SOSA and the Minister/Department. These are all matters that I shall address in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Publicly, Phillips blamed technical and production cost increases for the budgetary overruns,⁶⁴ but he did not explain why, as General Director (and de facto Artistic Director and Production Manager) he had allowed this to happen, or why the design budget had been set so low (\$1.9 million) in the first place. In an email to me of 14 January 2002, the Director, Elke Neidhardt wrote: 'One of the good things about this [design] team, I feel, is that there are no egomaniacs and that the whole thing will remain a creative process, most likely horribly over budget in its first state, until the bitter end. Which is how it should be.' Clearly, her expectation was that the designers would pursue their ideas with all of their creative energy until it became necessary to modify them in response to management direction or

⁶² Boland, Michaela. (2010, August 26). Opera Australia to scale Ring's epic heights. *The Australian*.

⁶³ Nicholson, Anne Marie (Reporter). (2013, November 18). *Philanthropist helps bring marathon opera to Australia*. ABC Lateline. Retrieved from: <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2013/s3893804.htm>.

⁶⁴ Opera News (2004, June 3). *State Opera Mounts 'Most Expensive Musical Production in Australian History' with \$15m Ring*. Retrieved from: [http://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2004/6/News/State_Opera_Mounts_Most_Expensive_Musical_Production_in_Australian_History_With_\\$15m_Ring.html](http://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2004/6/News/State_Opera_Mounts_Most_Expensive_Musical_Production_in_Australian_History_With_$15m_Ring.html)

financial constraints. In the end though, there were no requests to modify the proposals, although it would have been open to SOSA to make them. This matter is examined in Chapter 8.

Michael Scott-Mitchell's designs were brilliant but they were also massive and put a considerable strain on the technical resources of the Adelaide Festival Theatre, by then thirty years old and lacking stage lifts (although possessing the largest orchestra pit in Australia). Indicative of this operating strain was the need to reschedule the starting time of *Das Rheingold* in each cycle to allow sufficient time for the entire under-lit stage to be removed and replaced by hand for *Die Walküre* the following evening. The physical handling of large-scale scenery required the engagement of many additional casual staff, with resulting extra manpower costs. The scenery also had to be removed and stored off-site between operas, utilising 38 semitrailers. Unbudgeted-for costs were incurred by spectacular special effects - especially the huge water curtain with its pumping and storage systems for 20,000 litres of water, and the dazzling fire effects. Eventually, the size and technical demands of the scenery would discourage overseas and interstate opera companies from any thought of leasing the production. An unforeseen expense arose from the need to have the *Ring* sets built by twenty different companies in five states. Preliminary work had begun in 2002 on drafting a memorandum of understanding for the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT) workshops to build the scenery for the *Ring*, but this had not been finalised when the workshops entered into a commercial arrangement for work in Sydney and Melbourne, as they were entitled to do.⁶⁵ Consequently, the AFCT workshops were unable to guarantee that the *Ring* sets would be finished in time for the start of the 2003 rehearsals. This was a particularly damaging development in terms of the cost of the production, and one must conclude that it was another consequence of the failure to appoint an Artistic Director and/or Production Manager for the 2004 *Ring* (see Chapter 8).

It was hardly surprising that Phillips did not have time to carry out all of the responsibilities of a *Ring* Artistic Director/Production Manager, since he was fully engaged as SOSA's General Director overseeing five productions in 2001: *The Turn of the Screw*, Verdi's *Requiem*, *Andrea Chenier*, *Parsifal* and a concert of music by Orff and Fauré; four productions in 2002: *El Niño* (Adams - with the Adelaide Festival), *Akhmaten* (Glass),

⁶⁵ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, February, 16, p. 936. Also (2004), South Australia House of Assembly, Estimates Committee A, June 16, p. 34.

Sweeney Todd, *Don Giovanni*, plus two Young Artists works; and the mainstage operas *Cavalleria rusticana* & *Pagliacci* and *Dead Man Walking* plus four Young Artists works in 2003. If ever a production needed a dedicated Artistic Director to work collaboratively with the design team and scenery building workshops from the outset it was the 2004 *Ring*, but no such person had been appointed.

My impression at the time was that State Opera management was at a loss to know what to do when *Ring* costs went over budget, other than to amend the budget and look for additional funds. The solution adopted in early 2003 was to try to secure more corporate sponsorship which, at that stage, was easier said than done. The 1998 production had taken advantage of commercial and philanthropic connections within and beyond the State, particularly with the assistance of prominent supporters such as the Governor of South Australia for whom I was working at the time. Although a number of major sponsors had come on board for 2004, Adelaide had fewer corporate headquarters than, say, Sydney or Melbourne, and by 2003 there were not many left to engage. These realities had been recognised in the forward planning stages when I proposed to Phillips a strategy of pursuing many smaller contributions from individual patrons, rather than relying so much on larger donations from a small corporate pool. This approach was modelled on Seattle Opera's *Ring* donor program and it was successful, although Seattle also had the advantage of being able to draw on large corporate donations and family trusts. This left governments as the only other sources of additional funding assistance.

In 2003, because of alarming budgetary increases and the threatened collapse of the whole project, the Major Performing Arts Board (MPAB) of the Australia Council and Arts SA, commissioned theatre consultant Richard Stuart to look at the physical and technical aspects of the production budget and identify potential cost efficiencies.⁶⁶ As a result of this very thorough review, the MPAB made it a condition of additional funding of \$1.3 million that technical and production experts should be brought in to manage the budget.⁶⁷ This happened in early 2004 when the experienced and capable Noel Staunton was brought in as Executive Producer, Pamela Foulkes from the Sydney Opera House became Assistant Producer, Christopher Potter from Opera Australia was appointed Technical Director, and other key staff members from Opera Australia and elsewhere were engaged. The State also contributed

⁶⁶ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, February, 16, p. 960.

⁶⁷ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, May, 27, p. 2273.

an extra \$1.68 million on condition that these changes were made. Effectively, these interventions by governments rescued the production and ensured its ultimate success.

By May 2004, with only six months to go before opening night and with most tickets sold, the South Australian Government could not afford to allow the project to fail. After the final performance in December 2004, Premier Rann told the media: ‘If we had cancelled the [*Ring*] festival it would have cost more and we wouldn’t have had anything to show for it’.⁶⁸

HYPOTHESIS 7: The budgetary and production crisis that assailed the 2004 *Ring* in 2003 can be traced back to the flawed SOSA management model. This model was characterised by a ‘push back’ against official oversight, the exclusion of external participation in decision making, and the concentration of decision making in few hands. As a result, the production process was compromised and only the rescue efforts of governments and funding agencies ensured that deadlines were met and performance expectations achieved. (See Chapter 8)

The aftermath

The 2004 performances were highly successful in terms of audience reaction, national and international reviews, and peer judgments (the Adelaide *Ring* won an unprecedented ten Helpmann Awards in 2005). A Super Audio Compact Disc recording was made of the complete cycle by Melba Recordings which took the performances to the world and, in the process, garnered praise and awards including the Prix Lauritz Melchior, Académie du disque lyrique (Paris), twice. The economic impact of the new *Ring* on the South Australian economy was estimated to have been \$14.2 million. However, the production and budgetary crisis that strained relations between State Opera management and both the State Government and the Australia Council eventually undermined Adelaide’s hopes of becoming a Wagner centre in perpetuity (see Chapter 9).

Phillips had long resisted the idea of securing an early commitment from governments for a restaging, although such a course would have followed the example of Seattle Opera which, in 2001 announced its intention to stage its *Ring* again in 2005, 2009 and 2013. Instead, he preferred to wait and see how the production was received.⁶⁹ ‘We will talk to the government

⁶⁸ Cosic, M. (2004, November 24). Opera’s ringing endorsement despite blow-out. *The Australian*. Retrieved from: <http://blog.hoiking.org/pictures/2005/11/Adelaide-Ring.pdf>.

⁶⁹ In 2000 I had put the argument to Phillips for early endorsement, at least in principle, of a restaging, based on the Seattle model.

and see if it is in everybody's interests to restage the cycle,' he said the day after the final performance of *Götterdämmerung*.⁷⁰ The initiative, it seemed, lay with the State Government which, by that stage, was in no mood to initiate anything to do with the *Ring*. The likely views of the Australia Council were not discussed, but an inquiry commissioned by the State Government in 2006 revealed that, even then, the MPAB of the Australia Council was hostile to the idea of funding a remount of the 2004 *Ring*. Phillips was of the opinion that they had been unwilling to provide more funding from as early as the end of 2004 (see Chapter 9). Immediately after the 2004 performances, SOSA's priority was not a remount in Adelaide but export of the production overseas. China, Singapore, Hong Kong and Los Angeles were all mentioned as potential destinations, the hope being that leasing arrangements would recover some if not all of the rescue funding provided by State and Commonwealth Governments. Although media reports suggested that there was serious interest in the production, nothing came of it, mainly because of the size and complexity of the scenery and effects, and the transportation and staging costs involved (Chapter 8). No consideration was given to modifying the designs to make them more marketable. It has to be said too that the attempted negotiations with overseas authorities were played out in public for domestic consumption and were not well handled.

In September 2005, nine months after the last performance in 2004, Minister Hill announced that the South Australian Government through Arts SA and the South Australian Tourism Commission would commission 'a study into the feasibility of reprising the *Ring* in Adelaide and its possible longer term future as a major event on South Australia's and Australia's cultural tourism calendar.'⁷¹ However, another year would pass before the firm of Ernst & Young was invited on 27 October 2006 to provide 'an objective review and assessment of the economic and financial benefits to South Australia of a remount of the 2004 Ring Cycle production'.⁷² Eight days earlier, the Premier (who was also Arts Minister) told the House that the government 'was seeking expressions of interest. We are having a feasibility study about whether or not we will have another *Ring* Cycle and whether it is a different version of

⁷⁰ Cosic, M. (2004, November 24). Opera's ringing endorsement despite blow-out. *The Australian*. Retrieved from: <http://blog.hoiking.org/pictures/2005/11/Adelaide-Ring.pdf>.

⁷¹ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2005). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, September 12, p. 3263.

⁷² Mackie, G. (2006, October 27), Ring Cycle Feasibility Study Contract. Retrieved from: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:kjGYA3YngOMJ:https://www.tenders.sa.gov.au/tenders/contract/download.do%3Fid%3D2405%26section%3Dcontract+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=au>

the one we have just had, or something completely different. We are not ruling anything out.⁷³

It had taken two years to get to the point of initiating a broadly focused feasibility study, during which time the huge sets remained in storage, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra endured a bruising fight for survival following the recommendations of the 2005 Strong Report into Australia's orchestras, and audience enthusiasm for a remount began to wane. In those circumstances, a casual observer might have wondered whether the State Government and SOSA management had any interest in restaging the 2004 *Ring* at all. The deadline for the Ernst & Young feasibility study report was 8 December 2006, although this was extended, and the report was delivered on 27 December. A supplementary report considered the implications of a remount in 2011 rather than 2010, and this was delivered in March 2008. The South Australian Government had made it clear that it would only contribute to a remount of the 2004 *Ring* if the Commonwealth would agree to provide similar funding. In November 2007 the Coalition parties lost the Commonwealth general elections and the Rudd Labor Government took office. Peter Garrett was appointed Minister for the Arts. One month later, Minister Hill (not, it should be noted, the Arts Minister himself, Mike Rann) and the South Australian Minister for Tourism, wrote to their federal counterparts enquiring about Commonwealth interest in supporting a possible remount of the *Ring*. By that time, arts funding applications in respect of the State Opera of South Australia were being determined by the Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council, not by the Minister. So what, one might ask, could the South Australian Government have expected? The tourism 'angle' might provide an answer, as it had at the time of the Nugent inquiry. Indeed, the Ernst & Young report, after mentioning the Australia Council's negative position on a remount, suggested that Tourism Australia might be able to assist. In April 2008 Minister Garrett replied to the South Australian Ministers on behalf of the Commonwealth that the latter would be unable to contribute special funding for a remount of the 2004 Adelaide *Ring*. Consequently, the State Government announced that it too would be unable to contribute funds.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, SOSA continued to receive a level of annual funding from the Australia Council that was considerably higher than that received by any of the other state

⁷³ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2006). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, Estimates Committee A, October 18, p. 11.

⁷⁴ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2008). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, April 10, pp. 3060-1.

opera companies. This remains the case despite the fact that, since 2004, the State Opera of South Australia has staged only one Wagnerian opera – *The Flying Dutchman* in 2009.

A final glimmer of hope came with an expression of interest on the part of Melbourne resident and philanthropist Mrs Maureen Wheeler in supporting a new *Ring* production in Australia. Mrs Wheeler was prepared to contribute \$5 million to such a project. After the 2008 decision by governments not to support a remount of the 2004 Adelaide *Ring*, she explored the practicalities of staging a new production in Melbourne (her preferred location), and I assisted her with this for about nine months from mid-2008 (see Chapter 9). However, in the absence of a suitable venue for the rehearsal and performance time required, she felt unable to proceed with that idea. Opera Australia had already looked into the possibility of staging the Adelaide *Walküre* at the State Theatre in Melbourne but had found that the sets were too large and complicated for the stage there without incurring major expense. There were also plans afoot to close the State Theatre in 2012-13 for major renovations. In August 2009 Mrs Wheeler met with Stephen Phillips who indicated his willingness to work with her on an entirely new production for 2013 with the creative team she had in mind. In order to secure SA Government funding and to cope with the closure of the State Theatre in 2013, the performances would have had to have taken place in Adelaide first, before moving to Melbourne. In November 2009 she met with the Chief Executive of Opera Australia, Adrian Collette, and OA's newly appointed Artistic Director, Lyndon Terracini. Terracini in particular was keen to produce a *Ring* in Melbourne (Chapter 9).⁷⁵ The anticipated closure of the State Theatre was postponed, making it available after all for rehearsals and performances and, in December 2009, Mrs Wheeler informed Phillips that she had accepted Opera Australia's proposal for a complete *Ring* in Melbourne in 2013.

With the substantial costs of storing the sets from the 2004 *Ring* continuing to eat into SOSA's budget, it was decided in late 2010 to write off the production. The sets, properties and costumes were then dismantled, auctioned off, recycled or lodged in museum collections. Consideration was given to producing *Die Meistersinger* in 2010 but this idea came and went. Thought was also given to hiring a production of *Tristan und Isolde* from Rome Opera under attractive terms for performance in 2012, but this did not proceed when it became clear

⁷⁵ Gill, R. (2009, November 10). Bringing Melbourne in from the operatic cold. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/arts/bringing-melbourne-in-from-the-operatic-cold/2009/11/09/1257614998370.html>.

that Opera Australia's *Ring* would go ahead in 2013. Operatic life in Adelaide moved in different directions after Stephen Phillips resigned in 2011, and the vision of Adelaide as a Wagner centre in the Asia-Pacific region was finally dispelled.

HYPOTHESIS 8: Notwithstanding an overwhelmingly positive reception from audiences and critics to the 2004 performances, prospects for restaging the 2004 *Ring* in Australia and overseas had been undermined by the production and budgetary problems flowing from the flawed management model. In 2009 an entirely new SOSA *Ring* production with a new artistic team was proposed for 2013. Eventually, the announcement in 2010 by Opera Australia of the staging of its new *Ring* ruled out even this option. (See Chapter 9)

Sources and methodology

Political considerations had inspired the establishment of an Adelaide Wagner performance tradition, and political and management factors subsequently led to its abandonment notwithstanding the artistic success of the three productions. A central issue in this thesis therefore is the connection between those productions and the policies, priorities and functions of governments. Because of the central role played by State Governments in initiating and funding the two Adelaide *Rings* and *Parsifal*, and the position of SOSA as a statutory body responsible to the Minister for the Arts, I have been able to access a great deal more material in the public domain than would have been the case if SOSA had been a company limited by guarantee like other Australian opera companies. For this reason, parliamentary statements and debates, annual reports of the Auditor-General, reports commissioned by government departments, and opera company reports and publications have provided especially valuable insights into one of the most interesting ventures in the history of the performing arts in Australia.

Through freedom of information applications I have obtained copies of hitherto confidential reports going back to 1999. These have been of crucial importance. Other material of significance has included recorded audio interviews with key players (held in the collections of the State Library of South Australia in Adelaide) and the collected papers of former State Opera General Director and *Ring* Artistic Director Bill Gillespie, now in the collections of the National Library of Australia in Canberra. I have also drawn on documentary films and radio

broadcasts made by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and a diverse array of articles and interviews in the print media.

Above all, I have been able to draw on my personal experience and close involvement in a variety of roles, official and unofficial, dating from 1995. This involvement at close quarters (see Appendix 1) has informed my approach and determined the priorities and structure of the thesis. Over the past twenty years I have assembled a large personal archive (see Appendix 11) relating to the ‘Wagner decade’ and its aftermath. These documents concern the State Opera and the Ring Corporation, policy issues, dramaturgy, recruitment of artists, artistic administration, public relations, preparation and editing of publications, fund-raising, marketing, education and post 2004 developments.

Of particular significance is a complete set of my email exchanges with the late Elke Neidhardt between October 2001 and July 2003 on dramaturgical matters relating to the 2004 *Ring* production (see Appendix 4). Heinrich Porges and Richard Fricke left detailed accounts of Wagner’s rehearsals of the *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1876, and there have been other commentaries by directors on their productions, but I am not aware of any other comprehensive records of communications between a dramaturge and the director and designers of a *Ring* production over such an extended period. That is why I have included the complete exchanges in the appendices to this thesis.

Many years have elapsed (in some cases more than two decades) since the events being considered took place. Therefore I have relied predominantly on contemporary sources and reports, including my exchanges with key participants, which reflect actual views and actions at the time. Important material from these sources is included in both the general and confidential appendices. Discussions with a number of former State Opera Board members, opera company staff and government officials have been of assistance in alerting me to useful lines of enquiry.

My general approach to the subject has been a chronological one, since the key issues of management and policy were revealed most clearly in the unfolding of the Wagner decade. If chronology provides the ‘warp’ of the research fabric, its ‘weft’ is made up of a number of recurring themes such as the nature and quality of government oversight, relationships between government officials and State Opera management, the quality and effectiveness of State Opera governance and management procedures, the quality of artistic decisions including the selection of the creative team and singers, relations between the State Opera

and other interested parties such as the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust, and tourism and marketing bodies, pursuit of long-term goals, remounts and new productions, and critical reviews and audience responses. The three major productions attracted an extraordinary level of media coverage and commentary in Australia and overseas, reflecting their ground-breaking roles in Australia's operatic history.

CHAPTER 2

The origins of the Adelaide *Ring* of 1998

The 1991 collapse of the State Bank of South Australia and the resulting cost to the State of more than \$3 billion sealed the fate of the Bannon Labor Government. John Bannon, who had been in office since 1982, resigned as Premier and Treasurer on 4 September 1992, and the party leadership passed to Lyn Arnold. Arnold contested the election of 11 December 1993 from a fatally weakened position, and the electorate's judgment was predictably brutal. The ALP, which had previously held 22 seats in the 47-seat House of Assembly and formed government with the support of two Independent Labor members, was left with only 10 seats, while the Liberals, led by Dean Brown, won 37 seats.

While the triggers for the Labor Government's defeat had been the bank's collapse and the resulting findings of the State Bank Royal Commissioner and the Auditor-General, this was not the only disaster to befall the outgoing government. In 1993 the Australian Grand Prix was lost to Victoria, although this development did not become public knowledge until after the new government had been sworn into office. The Bannon Government had secured the car race in 1985 for a ten-year term, and had appointed the Managing Director of the State Bank, Tim Marcus Clark, to be the inaugural Chairman of the Grand Prix Board. The findings of the State Bank Royal Commission were severely critical of both the government and the Bank Board and management, including Clark, and the Auditor-General's independent inquiry was similarly critical of the Bank's internal management. These findings came to the attention of Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone, and on 16 September 1993, the Formula One organisers entered into an agreement with the Kennett Government in Victoria to relocate the car race to Melbourne after the expiry of the existing contract in 1995. Ironically, it had been the collapse of the State Bank of Victoria (owned by the Victorian State Government) that had contributed to the 1992 defeat of the Kirner Labor Government and the election of the Liberal Party led by Jeff Kennett. Melbourne-based Australian Grand Prix chief Ron Walker revealed in March 2015 that Ecclestone had told Bannon that he could have the race for as long as he remained in office as Premier, and that there was a written agreement between Ecclestone and Walker that Melbourne would take over the Grand Prix as

soon as Bannon failed to re-sign the race, which happened when he resigned as Premier in September 1992.¹

South Australian Minister for Tourism Mike Rann, who had responsibility for the Grand Prix and had been Premier Bannon's adviser at the time of the 1985 decision, later pleaded ignorance of the relocation agreement or of any side agreement between Ecclestone and Bannon. Nevertheless, within a fortnight of the Victorian agreement's unannounced signing and shortly after Bannon's resignation, he had dispatched Grand Prix Executive Director Mal Hemmerling² to London to meet with Bernie Ecclestone on 4 October 1993. The fate of the Adelaide Grand Prix remained a closely guarded secret until the December 1993 election was over. As late as 20 October, Minister Rann was still vigorously rejecting suggestions that the race might be lost to Victoria.³ Incoming South Australian premier Dean Brown was told by Ecclestone of the relocation on 16 December 1993, two days after being sworn into office.⁴

The Formula One agreement with South Australia ran for another two years, which gave the Brown Government time to develop an alternative, high profile tourism event or, more realistically, a cluster of events to replace the Grand Prix. An Events Steering Committee was established within the Tourism portfolio, divided into nine subcommittees representing tourism, arts, sport, conventions, entertainment, food and wine, multicultural, events, and marketing.⁵ Proposals were invited from interested groups. Some forty submissions were received, including ones for a tall ships event, dragon boat racing, musical concerts in rural centres, wine festivals and gourmet weekends, a world left-handers' golf tournament, automotive events and conferences, and a month-long multicultural festival combining the existing Italian, Greek and German festivals. It was the opinion of the Minister and the committee that the Grand Prix could be replaced in economic terms by upgrading existing events and by adding one or two national or international events which would be offered on an annual basis.⁶ Initially, arts events had not been thought of as likely substitutes for a multi-

¹ Fogarty, Mark. (2015, March 8). Melbourne had eye on grand prix since 1980s, claims retiring chief Ron Walker. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/sport/motorsport/melbourne-had-eye-on-grand-prix-since-1980s-claims-retiring-chief-ron-walker-20150308-13yh41.html>.

² Dr Hemmerling had been Director of the Cabinet Office, SA Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 1984-85.

³ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1993). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, October 20, p. 973.

⁴ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1994). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, March 22, p. 573.

⁵ The Hon. G A Ingerson, Minister for Tourism, Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1994). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, May 18, p. 1236.

⁶ *ibid.*

million dollar international car race but, as the committee pursued its work, ‘the arts went up the list from the bottom to near the top’.⁷

The *Ring* as a major cultural tourism event

When proposals to replace the Grand Prix after 1995 were invited, the Chairman of the Board of the State Opera of South Australia (SOSA) Tim O’Loughlin noted that options were not restricted to sporting events. He spoke to SOSA General Director Bill Gillespie⁸ about the possibility of SOSA submitting a proposal with international appeal in time to meet the six months deadline for submissions. Gillespie responded that he did not need much time to think about it; there was only one operatic event likely to attract international visitors on a large scale, and that was the *Ring*. O’Loughlin asked what would be needed to put a proposal together, to which Gillespie replied that a flexible approach should be taken. SOSA had already brought in a number of productions from overseas: *Samson et Dalila* from San Francisco/Chicago in 1990, *Nixon in China* from Houston in 1992 and *Otello* from the Canadian Opera in the same year. The model therefore existed for an imported *Ring* production. In Gillespie’s view, it was important not to fall into the trap of thinking it was necessary to mount a brand new *Ring*, which might never get a second season – a prophetic observation in light of the fate of the 2004 *Ring*.

Gillespie felt that if SOSA could find a high quality production (sets, costumes and director’s concept) from a major house - one that could be brought in without provoking any sense of Australian ‘cultural cringe’ - it would be possible to build around it, given sufficient lead time.⁹ In response, O’Loughlin proposed that Gillespie should travel overseas as soon as possible to identify a suitable production. On 28 October 1994, the day after SOSA’s last performance of *Salome* in that season, Gillespie was on a plane to Paris to see the new production at the Théâtre du Châtelet directed by Pierre Strosser. He continued on to New York, Seattle and San Francisco. He also stopped in Arizona to meet Glynn Ross, founder and former General Director of Seattle Opera and architect of Seattle’s Wagner performance tradition. Gillespie had known Ross and his successor, Speight Jenkins for two decades and admired the way in which they had built Seattle’s reputation as a Wagner city.¹⁰ Clearly

⁷ Former Minister Ingerson’s remarks to the author on 26 November 2014.

⁸ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Interview with Bill Gillespie recorded on 2 September 1998. Adelaide. University of Adelaide Library, Theatre programmes and papers 1952- MSS 792 T3743.S.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Gillespie referred to this in his program message for the 1998 Adelaide *Ring* production.

theirs was a model from which South Australia could learn. This whole journey of exploration took Gillespie about a month.

At that time, the Seattle *Ring* (that company's second *Ring* production, directed by François Rochaix and first seen in 1986) was about to have its fourth staging of three cycles in 1995, after which it was going to be retired. The San Francisco production directed by Nikolaus Lehnhoff (a former associate of Wieland Wagner), had first been staged in 1990 and was due to be replaced in 1999. Gillespie recognized that North American patrons would have little reason to travel to Adelaide to see a production which they already knew well and, in any case, there would be formidable technical challenges involved in bringing either the Seattle or San Francisco productions to Australia because of their elaborate scenery. The Châtelet production on the other hand (a relatively simple one as *Rings* go) was brand new. It had been the only *Ring* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in three years, and it had been staged only once and had sold out quickly. To Gillespie's mind, that production was well suited to Adelaide and was most likely to attract visitors from Europe and North America.¹¹ Clearly, tourism benefits were looming large in the planning process, as the government intended they should.

In 1994, Bill Gillespie was uniquely placed in South Australia (and, indeed, in Australia) to initiate, research and develop a proposal to stage the *Ring*. Introduced to opera when he was a university student in New York, he applied a growing interest in the art form to his studies of German. His initial operatic encounter, as far as staged performances were concerned, was with Wagner's *Parsifal*, and it made a powerful impression on him.¹² In 1972, at the age of 21, he pursued his studies in Germany where he gained access to the Bayreuth Festival by waiting outside the box office for single ticket returns. In the following summer he managed to see his first complete *Ring* at Bayreuth. He stayed on the Bayreuth mailing list for more than twenty-five years and, during that time, met members of the Wagner family including Eva Wagner-Pasquier, Richard Wagner's great-granddaughter, who became an artistic consultant to the Théâtre du Châtelet. Wagner's works had been Gillespie's entry point into opera, and had directly influenced his choice of career.

Gillespie's first professional job had been as education co-ordinator with Houston Grand Opera, under the general directorship of David Gockley who would later become general director of San Francisco Opera. He strengthened his qualifications by acquiring an MBA in

¹¹ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Bill Gillespie, op.cit.

¹² *ibid.*

Arts Management from UCLA via the National Endowment for the Arts. Subsequent appointments were with Chicago Lyric Opera, San Diego Opera and Sarasota Opera of which he was Managing Director. It was during his appointment as director of administration with Pittsburgh Opera that he visited Australia as a tourist in 1986, at a time when SOSA was in considerable financial difficulties. His attention was drawn to the South Australian company's plight by Ian Campbell, formerly General Manager of the State Opera of South Australia (1976-1982) and after 1983 General Director of San Diego Opera. Two years later, amidst dreadful media coverage, SOSA received a State Government bail-out, underwent major restructuring, and set about replacing its Chairman Alan Hodgson and General Manager Ian Johnston. The Premier and Arts Minister at the time was John Bannon. Bill Gillespie was appointed General Manager¹³ in July 1988 (redesignated General Director from 1991) and Keith Smith became the new Chairman. Within two seasons, they had turned the company's fortunes around and SOSA embarked on one of its most successful and productive periods. Performance standards were raised to levels rarely seen before in Adelaide, partly through the use of co-productions and the hiring of productions from elsewhere.¹⁴ Gillespie was determined to avoid the 'easy but dull way out' of concentrating on the so-called 'top ten' most popular operas,¹⁵ and he displayed a keen sense of what would work in the South Australian market and what would not. Performances were transferred from the cramped Her Majesty's Theatre to the spacious Festival Theatre, and audience and subscription numbers grew. Between 1988 and 1998, the company's subscription base grew from 1,600 to 4,000.¹⁶ At the time of Gillespie's arrival in Adelaide, any suggestion that SOSA might one day tackle the complete *Ring* would have been met with amusement, but by 1994 it was a credible proposition. In an article in the *Adelaide Advertiser* of 12 December 1998, Tim Lloyd quoted Gillespie as saying that he had spoken to the former head of the South Australian Department of the Arts and Cultural Development, Len Amadio as early as 1989 about staging the *Ring*, but at that time neither of them thought it was a possibility.

¹³ His referees were Tito Capobianco General Director of Pittsburgh Opera, Ian Campbell of San Diego Opera (and formerly General Manager of the State Opera of South Australia), and Ken Mackenzie-Forbes, opera and theatrical producer and one-time General Manager of the Victoria State Opera.

¹⁴ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Bill Gillespie, op.cit.

¹⁵ Works such as *La traviata*, *Carmen*, *La bohème*, *The Magic Flute*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Barber of Seville*, *Marriage of Figaro*, *Rigoletto* and *Don Giovanni* (the ten most performed operas in 2012/13 as compiled by *Operabase*), have become 'default' operas for many companies mainly because of the ready availability of singers to perform them, which in turn leads to greater audience familiarity, which encourages more performances, and so on.

¹⁶ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Bill Gillespie, op.cit.

There had been a long-standing desire in Australia to stage the *Ring*, as is apparent from the following summary of complete productions, staged and concert performances of separate operas and proposed but unrealised attempts to present the work prior to the 1998 Adelaide production.¹⁷ Individual acts from the various *Ring* operas were also given in concert, such as the 1988 semi-staged performance of Act I of *Die Walküre* in Adelaide - a collaborative undertaking by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and SOSA, conducted by Nicholas Braithwaite. This had been planned prior to Gillespie's appointment.¹⁸

TABLE 1. Performances in Australia of parts of the *Ring*, including unrealised plans and concert performances, between 1907 and 1998.

1907	<i>Die Walküre</i>	Melbourne/ Sydney	George Musgrove
1912	<i>Die Walküre</i>	Melbourne/ Sydney	Thomas Quinlan
1913	The <i>Ring</i>	Melbourne/ Sydney	Thomas Quinlan
1934/35	<i>Die Walküre</i>	Melbourne/ Sydney	Benjamin Fuller
Tentative plans for <i>Siegfried</i> / <i>Götterdämmerung</i> / <i>Ring</i> (not realised)			Benjamin Fuller
1936	<i>Das Rheingold</i>		ABC live broadcast.
1977	Plans for a <i>Ring</i> beginning 1979 (not realised)		The Australian Opera
1979	<i>Das Rheingold</i> concert	Sydney	The Australian Opera/ SSO
1981	<i>Die Walküre</i> concert	Melbourne	The Australian Opera/ MSO
	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> concert	Sydney	The Australian Opera/ SSO
1983	<i>Die Walküre</i>	Sydney	The Australian Opera
1984	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	Sydney	The Australian Opera
	Plans for a complete AO <i>Ring</i> abandoned.		
	<i>Siegfried</i> concert	Melbourne	The Australian Opera/ MSO
1985	<i>Die Walküre</i>	Sydney	The Australian Opera
1994/96	Plans for a <i>Ring</i> in Melbourne (not realised)		Vic. State Opera/ Melb. Festival
1997	<i>Das Rheingold</i> concert	Sydney	SSO
1998	<i>Die Walküre</i> concert	Sydney	SSO
1998	The <i>Ring</i> ,	Adelaide	State Opera of South Australia

¹⁷ Early performance details from Gyger, Alison. (1990). *Opera for the Antipodes: Opera in Australia 1881-1939*. Sydney: Currency Press and Pellinor Pty Ltd. Australian Opera details from Oxenbould, Moffatt. (2005). *Timing is Everything – A Life Backstage at the Opera*. Sydney: ABC Books. Other details from relevant program books.

¹⁸ Holmes, Robyn (ed). (1991). *Through the Opera Glass*. Adelaide: The Friends of the State Opera of South Australia Inc., p. 238.

The *Ring* submission of 1994

The submission to produce the *Ring* in 1998, prepared by Messrs Gillespie and O'Loughlin,¹⁹ was entitled: *On the proposed Ring Cycle Project for the State Opera of South Australia*. It was dated 16 December 1994 and was addressed to the Hon. Graham Ingerson MP, Minister for Tourism²⁰ and the Hon. Diana Laidlaw MLC, Minister for the Arts.²¹



1. The cover of *The New Yorker* magazine with a caricature by Arnold Roth, which was reproduced on the cover of the 1994 Adelaide *Ring* submission. Source Gillespie/O'Loughlin submission of 16 December 1994.

On the first page of the submission there was a quotation from a 1985 issue of *The New York Times* about San Francisco Opera's motives for staging the *Ring*. It read: 'Although it has long been considered a first-rate American regional company, the San Francisco Opera has not been accorded much international acclaim. Terence A. McEwen, its general director, said candidly that mounting the \$4.1 million production was a calculated effort to make the

¹⁹ A copy of the submission is in the National Library of Australia, Canberra. Papers of Bill Gillespie, ca. 1984-2000. Bib. ID 3999262. 8 boxes, 7 of which are available for public research.

²⁰ Also Minister for Industrial Affairs.

²¹ Also Minister for Transport and Minister for the Status of Women.

operatic world pay attention to San Francisco. ... “There’s only one absolute sure way to attract worldwide attention musically, and that’s to do the *Ring*”.

A synopsis of the SOSA submission was set out in its opening pages and read as follows:

1. The *Ring* in Adelaide would be the most ambitious performing arts project taken on in Australia’s history.
2. The *Ring* can be performed to the highest world-class standard in South Australia in early or late 1998 or early 1999.
3. The preferred option is to use the sets and costumes created for the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. This is a leading edge production, yet one which is based on a traditional approach to the *Ring*.
4. All but three of the many roles can be filled by Australian singers.
5. The *Ring* would be staged three times over a three week period.
6. The net additional cost to the Government of South Australia is assessed as \$1.5 million in an overall budget of \$6.45 million.²² All assumptions are intentionally conservative.
7. It is assessed that the *Ring* would generate direct and indirect economic activity in South Australia in excess of \$20 million.
8. The project would be managed by a subsidiary company under the aegis of the State Opera of South Australia Act. The Board of this company would include representation from the major stakeholders including the Department for Tourism and the Department for the Arts and Cultural Development [which became Arts SA].
9. The project can only go ahead in 1998 or 1999 if a decision is made no later than April 1995.

Specific recommendations made in the submission were:

1. Sufficient lead time to plan and execute the project successfully, which means that a decision to fund would be required no later than 1 March 1995 for performances in either 1998 or 1999.
2. A firm Government commitment for funding.
3. Exclusive use of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra for an 8 week period of time at augmented strength and with overtime as scheduled.

²² This estimate appears to have taken into account the costs of the *Ring* productions in San Francisco (USD 4.1m in 1985) and Seattle (USD 4m in 1986).

4. Exclusive use of the Adelaide Festival Theatre for a minimum period of 8 weeks inclusive and a maximum period of 10 weeks inclusive for technical requirements.
5. Rehearsal sites for 14 weeks outside of the State Opera's facilities.
6. Cooperation of relevant unions and governmental agencies.

The planning timeline in the submission was summarised as:

March 1995	Decision to proceed.
April 1995	Lock in overseas production. Commence negotiations re artists and conductor. Commence contracting Australian artists etc.
May/June 1995	Commence search for sponsorships.
July 1995	Launch announcement.

In fact, the launch announcement by the Premier and the Minister for the Arts was brought forward to May 1995. Coinciding with this announcement (though somewhat eclipsed by it) was a media release by State Opera Board chairman Tim O'Loughlin. Gillespie contributed to the chairman's release in his new capacity as Artistic Director. The Premier's announcement made clear from the outset that the 1998 *Ring* would be a political event as much as an artistic one.

Other matters of a political/cultural nature addressed by the submission included a possible invitation to members of the Wagner family to attend the performances; encouragement of a meeting of International Wagner Societies in Adelaide at the time of the performances; invitations to German and Australian companies to become involved, and pursuit of French Government support for the export/transport of the production from Paris.

Several of the assumptions in the submission synopsis proved not to be 'conservative' at all. Far from limiting non-Australian members of the cast to three, there were ultimately five New Zealanders, three Americans, two Britons and a Swiss, and the cover cast included two Germans and two more New Zealanders. The final cost of the production was \$7.9 million, with a State Government contribution of \$2.76 million. The net economic benefit to the State was revised down to \$14 million in 1995-96, then to between \$9 million and \$13 million, before finally being estimated to have been \$10 million. The 1998 *Ring* was indeed managed by a subsidiary company - The State Opera Ring Corporation (SORC) - but not all of the major stakeholders were represented on it as full members. Arts SA, the successor to the

Department for the Arts and Cultural Development, oversaw statutory arts bodies including SOSA, advised the Minister for the Arts to whom SOSA and SORC were ultimately responsible, and implemented government policy. Arts SA could hardly have had formal representation on the SORC Board because membership would have entailed being bound by the Board's majority decisions. That such an arrangement was even contemplated suggests that either (1) the architects of the submission had not foreseen the extent of the State Government's involvement with the *Ring* (and regarded the Government as essentially a donor akin to major US Opera Board donors) or (2) they expected that a Government representative could issue directives or exercise a veto in the course of the Board's deliberations. In 2011, the *State Opera of South Australia Act, 1976* was amended to provide in Section 12 that: 'No Ministerial direction can be given— (a) as to the artistic nature or content of— (i) objects, works or collections held or promoted by the State Opera; or (ii) performances or other events or activities conducted or promoted by the State Opera; or (b) as to the manner in which the Board is to deal with a testamentary or other gift; or (c) as to any advice or recommendation that the Board makes or is required to make to the Minister.' Prior to 2011, the Act merely specified that: 'The Board is, in the performance of its powers and functions, subject to the general control and direction of the Minister'.²³ In practice, SOSA's Board and management had enjoyed a high degree of autonomy during regular opera seasons, with official involvement being largely confined to the scrutiny of finances by the Auditor-General, budgetary allocations and the appointment of Board members. The *Ring* on the other hand was a major instrument of arts tourism policy, quite unlike any other venture undertaken by SOSA.

Under the provisions of the *Public Corporations (State Opera Ring Corporation) Regulations 1995*, appointments to the SORC Board were made by the State Opera with the approval of the Minister. The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra was represented at SORC meetings by its General Manager Robert Clarke, but only as an observer. The orchestra's formal relationship with SORC was, strictly speaking, that of a contracted service-provider. Although the ASO was part of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's stable until 2005, it received an annual grant of \$230,000 from Arts SA via SOSA for performing for the opera company. A special State contribution was made for the 1998 *Ring* to enable the orchestra to engage additional musicians, and this continued after the *Ring*. The orchestra's operating costs for 1998 were, understandably, higher than usual, and SOSA was billed for the additional costs which

²³ Section 17 of the *State Opera of South Australia Act 1976* prior to the 2011 amendments.

covered augmentation, overtime and other matters. These costs, which were without mark-ups, totalled \$750,000.²⁴ The Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT) was also regarded as a service-provider in its relationship with SOSA. It had no representation on the SORC Board despite its responsibility for the refurbishment of the Festival Theatre and installation of the LARES acoustic enhancement system in preparation for the *Ring*, and as provider of the stage and technical crew, ticketing services, and management of associated activities such as exhibitions, social events and catering. With hindsight, the absence of the ASO and the AFCT from SORC Board membership appears to have worked to the project's disadvantage. Problems that surfaced in the areas of stage management and catering for 1998 might have been avoided if the AFCT had been given a place at the SORC table. There were even more serious problems in connection with the 2004 *Ring* when a similar arms-length relationship between the State Opera and the Festival Centre may have contributed to the decision of the AFCT workshops to accept interstate commercial contracts ahead of the *Ring* scenery building contract. The State Government's tourism interests were represented on the SORC Board by Bill Spur, founding General Manager of the ambitiously named Australian Major Events (later renamed Events South Australia) which was established in 1995.

The December 1994 submission had taken as its starting point the fact that the *Ring* had never been produced as a tetralogy 'down under'. It observed that The Australian Opera had announced a full *Ring* in the early 1970s but this had been abandoned half way through the four operas in response to the production's lack of artistic and critical success – an observation that conflated two separate initiatives of the Australian Opera, one in the 1970s and another in the 1980s (see Chapter 4). The Victoria State Opera (VSO) had also publicly announced its intention to mount a new *Ring* production in the 1990s, and this had led to speculation as to whether the Melbourne Festival of Arts would co-partner with the VSO on the project, and whether the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra would be used. The Victorian plan had been to have scenery and costumes designed by Sidney Nolan and the production directed by Elijah Moshinsky. This did not eventuate although Nolan prepared some designs. He said that what attracted him in particular to the *Ring* was the music: 'It is there that its nature force is in evidence ... it is sublime.'²⁵ In the 1960s, he said, he had been asked by

²⁴ Clarke, Robert. (2009, January 13). Email to Peter Bassett in reply to an enquiry of 6 January 2009.

²⁵ Shmith, Michael. (1989, September 7). Wagner – at last. *The Age*, p. 11. The VSO *Ring* was to commence in 1991 with *Das Rheingold* and then proceed one opera at a time, with a rest year in 1995, to the full tetralogy in 1996 in what, it was hoped, would also be Melbourne's Olympic year. As events transpired, 1996 did not bring the Olympics to Melbourne, and it was the year in which the VSO merged with the Australian Opera to form Opera Australia.

Georg Solti to design a *Ring* for Covent Garden but, although he had been keen to do it, he declined because his wife at the time was vehemently opposed to the idea. She was again opposed when Solti asked him to design another production for Paris.²⁶ To the end of his life Nolan regretted that he had never been able to design a *Ring*.²⁷

The O'Loughlin/Gillespie submission asserted that South Australia had the best single combination of operatic factors: the nation's largest orchestra pit, a regular partnership between the ASO and SOSA, and a proven track record on the part of State Opera management in producing difficult repertoire extremely well, such as the Australian premieres of *Elektra* (1991) and *Nixon in China* (1992). It was observed that a protracted gestation over some five years, with individual *Ring* operas being staged one at a time, was not in the interests of the government, and that the rehearsal of all four operas over a fifteen week period followed by performances over a further three weeks would be preferable. Gillespie considered three productions during his overseas research tour at the end of 1994. The Châtelet production had been staged for the first time in 1994 and its revival was planned for 1998 in Paris.²⁸ The original cost of its scenery, costumes and props²⁹ was FFr 6.7 million (approx. AUD 1.8 m.).³⁰ The Seattle production had been staged in 1986 and revived in 1987 and 1991, and another revival was planned for 1995. Its original scenery/costumes/props had cost USD 2 million. The San Francisco production first staged in 1985 had been revived in 1990, and there were plans for another revival in 1997. Its scenery/costumes/props had cost USD 2 million although, like Seattle (and unlike Adelaide), it had its own scenery workshops. The estimated hire costs and the number of shipping containers required to transport the sets and costumes to Australia were AUD 480,000 in 10 containers in the case of the Châtelet's production, AUD 600,000 (sale only) in 18 containers for Seattle's, and AUD 350,000 in 15-18 containers for San Francisco's. The number of stage hands required varied considerably from 17 to 23 per opera for the Châtelet's, 39 to 41 for Seattle's and 48 to 58 for San Francisco's. When Gillespie met with staff of San Francisco Opera in late 1994 to request production details, he was told that he was the third Australian to whom they had provided this information. The submission noted that Seattle would have presented 12 full cycles of its production by 1995, and San Francisco 9 cycles by 1997. The Châtelet's

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Subsequently moved to 1999 to accommodate construction works at the Châtelet in 1998.

²⁹ That is, excluding other production and performance costs, such as orchestral costs.

³⁰ This and the figures for Seattle and San Francisco may have been the sources of the original SOSA budget figure of \$1.9 million for sets and costumes for the 2004 *Ring*, which, in the end, was exceeded spectacularly.

production on the other hand had had only a single season in 1994 and so was still relatively fresh.

The submission mentioned the need to cast 49 singing roles, the desirability of engaging the American soprano Carol Yahr to sing Brünnhilde, and the availability of the Châtelet's 17-page rehearsal schedule, on which the Adelaide schedule would be based. Reference was made to enlarging the orchestra from 67 musicians to 105. ASO costs had been budgeted at \$1.3 million, which was about double the cost of engaging the orchestra for four regular operas. This increase reflected not only the additional number of musicians involved but also the extra overtime. Significant in-kind contributions towards the orchestral costs would be required from the ASO and/or the ABC. The intention was to engage the services of the original Stage Director, Pierre Strosser, or, if he were not available, the Assistant Director(s). As it turned out, Strosser and Assistant Director Stephen Taylor both came to Adelaide to supervise the production. The small full-time SOSA management team³¹ required augmenting by temporary music and production staff and by technical personnel from the Châtelet.

The submission offered some indication of potential audience composition, noting that there were 180 Wagner Societies around the globe. It was predicted that 50% of the audience would be drawn from SOSA's 3,500 subscribers, with a further 25% coming from interstate and 25% being foreign tourists. It was noted that Japanese opera-goers accounted for 10% of the annual Bayreuth audience numbers, and there remained an unsatisfied Japanese market³² as well as a new, educated and well-heeled Asian market generally waiting to be tapped. These expectations in relation to subscriber sales and Japanese/other Asian attendance proved to be optimistic.³³

In terms of budget estimates, the submission anticipated the sale of 20,000 seats (at 95% overall attendance) at an average price of \$125 per seat, generating income of \$2.5 million. The annual Arts Department grant would remain at \$1.45 million; it was proposed to seek a grant of \$1.5 million from the Tourism portfolio, and other funding would come from naming rights, special orchestra funding, donations and sponsorships. The anticipated budget expenditure would be \$6,414,825, and anticipated income \$6,450,000. The submission also

³¹ Six full-time staff members in early 1995.

³² The Tokyo Wagner Society was said by Bill Gillespie to have 900 members at that time. Gillespie papers, National Library of Australia op.cit.

³³ Surprisingly so in respect of Japanese ticket sales given that Gillespie was working in Japan at Showa University of Music, Tokyo, for most of 1997.

dealt with the length of the production period, orchestral rehearsals and augmentation of the number of musicians, double casting, performing schedules, ancillary events and VIP attendance.

The Gillespie/O'Loughlin submission was endorsed by Arts Minister Laidlaw and won the support of the Events Steering Committee,³⁴ Tourism Minister Ingerson, and the Cabinet. Mr Ingerson recalled that he first heard of the *Ring* submission when he was assailed by Ms Laidlaw with the words: 'Have I got a proposal for you!'³⁵ The submission proposed a partial underwriting of the budget by the Tourism portfolio and, initially, Ingerson was sceptical about this arrangement. He said that he fully expected to lose his money. However, he later admitted that he had had no idea of the scale of the audience response.³⁶

A *Ring* is announced

From the outset it was clear that the State Government wished to create a cultural tourism event which would benefit the State economically, enhance South Australia's reputation as a centre for the arts, and extend beyond a single season. These determining factors were articulated in early statements by ministers and by SOSA management. For example, the first announcement of the decision to stage the complete *Ring* came in a joint media release by Premier Dean Brown and Minister Laidlaw dated 19 May 1995 and headed 'South Australia wins world classic opera epic'. It was revealed that the production would be staged in three cycles in Adelaide in late 1998 and would be 'in collaboration with the famed Paris Opera Company, Théâtre du Châtelet'. In the release, the Premier said he expected that more than \$15 million would be generated in economic activity for the State, an estimate based on the experience of other cities that had staged the event.³⁷ He also said (on the basis of a SOSA briefing) that this would be the first time the *Ring* had been staged in the southern hemisphere, a claim which, unfortunately, was not correct. In fact the complete *Ring* had been staged in Melbourne and Sydney in 1913 by the visiting British Quinlan Opera Company, and it had been performed in its entirety at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Argentina on a number of occasions, beginning in 1922 with a production conducted by Felix

³⁴ It was one of four successful submissions considered by the committee.

³⁵ Former Minister Ingerson's remarks to the author on 26 November 2014. See also Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1998). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, December 10, p. 602.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ These statistics drew on the SA Centre for Economic Studies Report of March 1996 (see Chapter 3) and information provided in the 1994 submission by Gillespie and O'Loughlin.

Weingartner and with the Vienna Philharmonic in the pit!³⁸ In Parliament in June 1995, Minister Ingerson informed the House, on the basis of the information provided in the project submission, that the *Ring* was conservatively estimated to be worth as much as \$20 million in economic value to the State and would directly generate about \$6.5 million in income.³⁹

Historic though the 1998 Adelaide production was in many respects, it also took place in an atmosphere of post-Grand Prix interstate rivalry and political hyperbole. The 1998 *Ring* would, said Premier Brown, ‘help reinforce South Australia’s pre-eminent image as Australia’s arts and cultural State’,⁴⁰ an oft repeated description that was bound to provoke Premier Kennett of Victoria and others. In February 1997, Brown’s successor as Premier, John Olsen⁴¹ remarked that Mr Kennett ‘would give his right arm to get hold of the *Ring*.’⁴² Premier Olsen also told Parliament that the *Ring* would ‘position South Australia, much as did the first Festival of Arts.... This is a quantum step for repositioning South Australia as the head of arts in Australia.’⁴³ Minister Laidlaw, in her message in the 1998 production’s program book said: ‘South Australians prize the arts. We know that our strength across the full spectrum of the arts helps make Adelaide distinctive from all other capital cities in the nation.’ Such inflated claims to uniqueness were not limited to South Australia. Victorian politicians, journalists, and tourism and arts figures frequently referred to Melbourne as the ‘cultural capital’ of Australia, a mantra adopted by the Kennett government in its effort to revitalise Victoria’s economic, social and cultural life.⁴⁴ Kennett even suggested that Melbourne was becoming the third leg of a global show-business tripod alongside London

³⁸ The cast on that occasion included Helene Wildbrunn, Lotte Lehmann and Emil Schipper. It was repeated at the Colón in 1931 (conducted by Otto Klemperer and with Frida Leider, Lauritz Melchior, Ludwig Hofmann and Alexander Kipnis); 1935 (conducted by Fritz Busch, with Max Lorenz as Siegfried); 1947 (conducted by Erich Kleiber, with Astrid Varnay, Lorenz, and Set Svanholm); 1962 (with Birgit Nilsson, Hans Hotter and Fritz Uhl), and 1967 (conducted by Ferdinand Leitner, with Nilsson, Wolfgang Windgassen, Amy Shuard, David Ward and Gwyneth Jones). There have been other *Ring* performances in Buenos Aires in subsequent years.

³⁹ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1995). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, Estimates Committee A, June 28, p. 223.

⁴⁰ SA Premier Dean Brown and Minister for the Arts Diana Laidlaw. Media Release (1995, May 19). *South Australia wins world classic opera epic*.

⁴¹ John Olsen had replaced Dean Brown as Premier of South Australia in November 1996, the year in which the Grand Prix moved to Melbourne.

⁴² Lloyd, T. (1997, February 26). Fanfare for State’s \$8.6 m. production of ‘Ring’. *Adelaide Advertiser*.

⁴³ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1997). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, February 26, p. 1042.

⁴⁴ See Jacobs, T. (1997) *Arts 21- The Victorian Government’s Strategy for the Arts*, Cultural Policy Case Studies, (ed) J. Craik, Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Griffith University, cited in Glow, H. and Johanson, K. (2004) The Politics of Exclusion: Political Censorship and the Arts-as-Industry Paradigm, *Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management* Vol.2 Issue December 2004, 132.

and New York,⁴⁵ although commentators in Sydney begged to differ.⁴⁶ In December 1998, when responding in the Legislative Council to a succession of laudatory speeches from both sides of the house about the recently concluded *Ring*, Minister Laidlaw said that it was her ‘earnest wish that we will have an opportunity to present a further *Ring* in the future, because the unanimous view from Australian critics and worldwide is that Adelaide is the perfect place of all Australian cities, and in the southern hemisphere, to be a *Ring* city in the future’.⁴⁷ In May 2000 she said that the Commonwealth’s subsidy for the 2004 *Ring* ‘recognised SA’s emergence as a southern hemisphere home for Wagnerian opera.’⁴⁸

The first *Ring* production in Australia in 1913 and comparisons with 1998

Few of those involved with planning the *Ring* in Adelaide (including Bill Gillespie who had settled in Australia from the US in 1988 and Stephen Phillips who had arrived from the UK in 1973) were aware of the remarkable story of the *Ring* of 1913 – hence the erroneous claims that the 1998 Adelaide *Ring* would be the first to be performed in Australia. The Quinlan *Ring* had been only a part - albeit a spectacular part - of a much larger program of operas brought to Australia by Quinlan’s touring company. Thomas Quinlan, English baritone⁴⁹ and colleague of Sir Thomas Beecham, had assembled a company in 1911 to tour the British dominions and the USA. His first tour to Australia had been in 1912 when the company had performed fifteen operas in ten weeks, including *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Walküre* and *Lohengrin*. Quinlan had set out with the goal of performing nine *Ring* cycles around the English-speaking world in six months, an ambition that was frustrated only by strikes in New Zealand and poor attendances in Canada. However, the 1913 Australian tour was an extraordinary success and deserves to be better known. The company performed twenty-five different operas in just under eight weeks in Melbourne, including two complete *Ring* cycles and the national premiere of *Die Meistersinger*. In Sydney, the original season of

⁴⁵ Usher, R. (2002, November 4). How Melbourne lost its cultural crown. *The Age*. Retrieved from <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002>

⁴⁶ Sydney Festival director (and former Melbourne Festival director) Leo Schofield told the media in 2002: ‘people are dreaming if they think [Melbourne] is the cultural capital’. Opera Australia CEO Adrian Collette was quoted as saying that Melbourne was certainly not the box office capital.

⁴⁷ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (1998). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, December 9, p. 457.

⁴⁸ (2000, May). First all-Australian Ring cycle set for Adelaide. *International Arts Manager*, p. 5.

⁴⁹ It is often said that Quinlan was Irish but this is not correct. He was born at Bury in Lancashire, now part of Greater Manchester where his father was a railway clerk. He studied to be both a baritone and an accountant (a useful combination), and began music management in 1906, promoting Enrico Caruso, Fritz Kreisler, John Philip Sousa and Nellie Melba, amongst others. The fact that the Quinlan Company had performed in Ireland immediately before travelling to Australia in 1912 may have contributed to the confusion, as might the fact that another impresario, William Lyster (1828-80), who produced *Lohengrin* in Melbourne in 1877, was born in Dublin.

seven weeks was extended to nine because of the New Zealand strike, and included another *Ring* cycle plus extra performances of *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*. In all, nine of the major Wagner operas were staged – all except *Parsifal*, then the exclusive preserve of Bayreuth.⁵⁰ All of the major Puccini operas written at the time were performed: *Manon Lescaut*, *La bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly* and *The Girl of the Golden West*; four of Verdi's most popular operas: *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, *La traviata* and *Aida*; other staple operatic fare like *Cavalleria rusticana* & *Pagliacci*, *Barber of Seville* and *Marriage of Figaro*, and a delicious assortment of French works, including *Louise*, *Samson and Delilah*, *Carmen*, *Faust* and most notably *The Tales of Hoffmann* which alone was given fifteen performances. It was an extraordinary feat: twenty-five operas including the *Ring* and five other Wagner operas in two cities in just seventeen weeks. The efforts of our modern opera companies pale by comparison and, without doubt, the Quinlan experience tended to contradict any assumption that it is not practical to run a regular opera season and stage the *Ring* in the same year.⁵¹

All operas in 1913 were given in English. For the *Ring*, the orchestra was enlarged to 65 and the chorus to 70. Some cuts were made, notably in *Götterdämmerung* (but not the Norns' scene). Top price tickets were four guineas for the cycle, but individual *Ring* operas were interspersed with other works. So, for instance, between *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* there were performances of *Aida*, *Tales of Hoffmann*, *Tannhäuser* and *Louise*. The decision to do a second *Ring* cycle in Melbourne followed the publication in *The Age* of a petition by prominent musical identities. Quinlan obliged, but the strain on the singers affected other performances in the days following. Nevertheless, it seems to have been a remarkably happy opera company.⁵² The conductor of the first *Ring* in Australia was Richard Eckhold who also conducted the first *Meistersinger* here.⁵³ He had been born and trained in Germany but spent much of his career with British companies, working particularly on performances of Wagner's works in English in the UK, the dominions and the United States.

⁵⁰ In 1903, the Metropolitan Opera, New York, mounted an unauthorised but highly successful production of *Parsifal*. As a consequence, Cosima Wagner banned anyone who took part in the New York performances from engagements at Bayreuth. The copyright expired in 1913 although Cosima endeavoured, without success, to have it extended by the German Reichstag.

⁵¹ This was implied by remarks of SOSA chairman Tim O'Loughlin, *Backstage* (1996 July) Vol. 6 No 2, when responding to concerns by some SOSA subscribers that no other operas would be performed in 1998.

⁵² Gyger, Alison. (1990). *Opera for the Antipodes: Opera in Australia 1881-1939*, op.cit. Also Shaw, Jennifer. (1998) *Wagner in Australia*, programme book for the 1998 Adelaide *Ring*.

⁵³ Gyger, Alison. *Opera for the Antipodes*.

The Quinlan tour was not dependent on destination support other than from ticket sales and local theatrical agents. Quinlan estimated that it ‘cost £150,000 a year to run grand opera round the world’.⁵⁴ Before departing Australia in 1912 he posted a letter in major newspapers alerting readers that he would be back in 1913 and was willing to put on Wagner’s *Ring* cycle ‘if 1,000 subscribers could be found to provide an advance subsidy’, which they were.⁵⁵ The company was free to determine the manner and circumstances of its performances. However, the shallowness of its support base, while advantageous in terms of flexibility of operations, left it vulnerable to obstacles of a more general kind such as the indisposition of singers and musicians with resulting difficulties in finding replacements; shipping disruptions and strikes, and international disturbances such as wars, all of which affected its touring program and box office income. Because the Quinlan Company was largely dependent on ticket sales, it was at times obliged to cancel programs and shorten visits, as happened during its North American tour that followed its visit to the antipodes.

The 1998 Adelaide *Ring*, by contrast, was more the child of public policy than artistic entrepreneurship. The support of individuals and sponsors broadened this base, but even sponsorships were, to a degree, a reflection of the confidence instilled by official endorsement and funding. Government agencies and prominent official figures, such as the State Governor and the Minister for the Arts, were actively involved in securing private sector sponsorships and individual donations. This official connection produced major benefits, but it also meant that the motivational base was vulnerable to shifts in government policy and even to the level of enthusiasm of individual ministers and public servants. Longer term sponsorship planning and fund-raising were largely out of the hands of the opera company which had a tiny staffing complement and no resources to pursue such matters. A Council of Benefactors was a group of donors who pooled their resources with the aim of benefiting the opera company generally, not the *Ring* specifically.

Planning and staffing issues for 1998

In the inaugural media release of May 1995, Minister Laidlaw had said that the event would be promoted nationally and internationally with the support and active involvement of the

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.184.

⁵⁵ Murphy, Kerry. (2013, November 22). The Melbourne Ring Cycle is a once in a century celebration. *The Conversation*. Downloaded from: <https://theconversation.com/the-melbourne-ring-cycle-is-a-once-in-a-century-celebration-19519>.

South Australian Tourism Commission through its worldwide networks.⁵⁶ She said that the majority of attendees were expected to come from interstate and overseas, particularly from Asia. While the majority of attendees did in fact come from interstate and overseas, Asian representation (especially from Japan) was disappointingly low, leaving one to conclude that Japanese Wagnerians felt they should go to Germany to see a German work, not to Australia. Clearly there were lessons here for international marketing strategies. The Minister noted that the Théâtre du Châtelet would provide the scenery and costumes as well as the services of the Stage Director. She said that Jeffrey Tate, ‘one of the finest opera conductors in the world’, had been engaged and would oversee the entire four month rehearsal and performance period.

Some of the principal singers had already been signed up, notably Americans Carol Yahr and John Keyes (Brünnhilde and Siegmund), and Australians John Wegner (Wotan), Claire Primrose (Sieglinde) and Malcolm Donnelly (Alberich). Reference was made to a broader ‘*Ring* festival’ of lectures, films, exhibitions and other events which would surround the performances.⁵⁷



2. *Das Rheingold* Scene 4. Malcolm Donnelly as Alberich, John Wegner as Wotan, and Richard Berkeley-Steele as Loge. Photo Randy Larcombe.

⁵⁶ SA Premier Dean Brown and Minister for the Arts Diana Laidlaw. (1995, May 19). Media Release.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* Within the structure of SORC, a Lead-up Events Committee and an Ancillary Events Committee were established.

A key motivation behind the Arts Minister's enthusiasm for the *Ring* was her desire to see the arts used more extensively to attract visitors from interstate and overseas, and to get away from the prevailing assumption that, after ten years of inner-city motor racing, sport provided the best means of bringing tourists to the State.⁵⁸ South Australia already billed itself as the 'Festival State', and the *Ring* fell naturally within that description. Minister Laidlaw was also keen to develop a 'whole-of-government' arts strategy,⁵⁹ to expand the arts potential of other ministries including those involved with tourism, trade, corrections, health and education, and to demonstrate that many branches of government could benefit from a thriving arts sector. She worked hard to persuade her ministerial colleagues that the arts could be a barometer of South Australia's creative energy generally. It was part of my responsibilities as Director Projects at Arts SA (1999-2000) to implement this 'whole- of-government' policy. Tim O'Loughlin had played an active role in presenting the *Ring* proposal to State and Commonwealth Governments for endorsement and funding, and it was clear from my contact with him that he identified closely with the Minister's goals. In 1997 he was appointed Executive Director of Arts SA, in which position he oversaw the activities of SOSA and the *Ring*. He continued in this role during preparations for the 2001 *Parsifal* and the 2004 *Ring*.

Coinciding with the ministerial media release of May 1995, SOSA issued its own release headed: 'National Premiere of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*', and went into more detail. In particular, Chairman O'Loughlin noted that the project had had a gestation period of well over a year, during which time it had received strong encouragement from the State Government through Premier Brown, Ministers Laidlaw and Ingerson, and the Australian Major Events Committee. The release made the (still) incorrect claim that this would be the first time the *Ring* had been performed in German in the southern hemisphere,⁶⁰ and it expanded on the estimate of more than \$15 million in resulting economic activity as being 'based on the experience of other cities, most notably Seattle, USA'. The parallel with Seattle would be highlighted at every opportunity.

In his media release, O'Loughlin, expressed the view that SOSA would use the *Ring* to broaden its supporter base and create new opportunities for the involvement of individual

⁵⁸ See for example Minister Laidlaw's statement in the SA House of Assembly Hansard (1998, June 17), p. 85, in which she compared visitor expenditure during the Grand Prix with likely expenditure during the *Ring*.

⁵⁹ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2000). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, Estimates Committee B, June 15, p. 73, in which Minister Laidlaw set out the rationale for the whole-of-government arts strategy.

⁶⁰ The 1913 Quinlan performances had been in English but all of the Colón performances in Buenos Aires had been in German.

patrons, subscribers and Friends, the corporate sector and all levels of government. There had already been some murmurings amongst subscribers about the absence of other operas during the *Ring* year.⁶¹ O'Loughlin made mention of cooperation with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra through the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which was responsible at that time for Australia's symphony orchestras. He singled out for praise SOSA's General Director Bill Gillespie, mentioning his 'extraordinary background knowledge of Wagner's music generally and this production in particular'. He continued: 'This, combined with his German language skills, vision and hard work have made this project feasible and gives us a high degree of confidence in the outcome'. Mention was made of the fact that Gillespie, as General Director, had 'assumed the role of Artistic Director of the *Ring* project'. In the release, Gillespie himself was quoted as describing the Châtelet production as 'cutting-edge theatre of the highest order, which is most appropriate for the Festival State'. He also quoted Paris newspapers as referring to Pierre Strosser's interpretation as treating the audience as adults rather than children, with an innovative, minimalist approach to the tetralogy. Gillespie highlighted Jeffrey Tate's 'incomparable musical mastery', mentioned the French lighting and costume designers who would also be involved with the Adelaide performances, and referred specifically to working with Eva Wagner-Pasquier, the composer's great-granddaughter, in her capacity as Artistic Consultant to the Châtelet.

It was noted that the rehearsal period for the four operas would span fourteen weeks from August to late November 1998, and that over three hundred Australians as well as international guest artists would be employed. To the list of singers mentioned in the ministerial release, several more were added: Arend Baumann (Hunding), Christopher Doig (Loge in *Das Rheingold* and Mime in *Siegfried*) and Rodney Macann (Gunther). In the end, Carol Yahr withdrew 'for personal reasons'⁶² and did not sing Brünnhilde, the role being taken by another American, Janis Martin, who had sung it in San Francisco in 1990 and, before that, at Vienna, Bayreuth, New York and elsewhere. Neither did Christopher Doig sing Loge and Mime, being replaced by Richard Berkeley-Steele and the excellent Swiss tenor Peter Keller respectively. Doig came out of retirement to sing Loge in the 2004 *Ring*, a role for which he was no longer vocally ideal.

⁶¹ Silsbury, Elizabeth. (2001) *State of Opera: An Intimate New History of the State Opera of South Australia*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press, pp. 170, 177, 207.

⁶² Records amongst the Gillespie papers in the National Library of Australia indicate that conductor Jeffrey Tate was not happy about the engagement of Carol Yahr for the role of Brünnhilde, although he later became reconciled to this on the advice of Assistant Conductor Lionel Friend. However, Yahr withdrew in mid-1998, and this gave Gillespie a major casting challenge late in the day.



3. *Siegfried* Act II. Peter Keller as Mime, Edward Cook as Siegfried and Malcolm Donnelly as Alberich. Photo Randy Larcombe.

Altogether sixty singers would be cast for principal and covering roles. Bernadette Cullen, who had been engaged to sing Fricka, withdrew after undergoing surgery, and was replaced by South Australian mezzo Elizabeth Campbell, who would sing this role again in 2004. As Gillespie remarked in his 1998 recorded interview, he had not heard of any *Ring* cast that did not change along the way, even at Bayreuth. It was almost inevitable, given the need to select singers so far in advance of performances.

Stephen Phillips, SOSA's Director of Production and Deputy General Director at the time of the decision to produce the *Ring*, had 'joined the conversation' (to use Gillespie's words)⁶³ after O'Loughlin had asked Gillespie for ideas for a submission to the Events Steering Committee. Phillips was a chartered surveyor by profession with experience in Birmingham's industrial and commercial real estate between 1967 and 1973. Born and raised at Stratford-upon-Avon, his connection with opera was a practical one and came about largely by

⁶³ Silsby, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Bill Gillespie, op.cit.

accident.⁶⁴ He came to Australia in April 1973 on a working holiday and took an on-the-spot job as a stage hand at the recently completed Sydney Opera House. It was in that capacity that he worked on the production of *War and Peace* that opened the opera theatre in 1973. In 1975 he became a trainee stage manager through an Arts Council grant, and was senior stage manager for the Australian Opera from 1976 until 1982. Between 1982 and 1986 he ran a small business unrelated to the theatre. He returned to opera in 1987 by joining the English National Opera in the production management division and, that same year, took a three month secondment to the Canadian Opera Company before returning to Sydney. Phillips was invited by Gillespie to join the (then) eight-member SOSA team in May 1989 as Production Manager, and in 1993 he was appointed Production Director and Deputy General Director.

By the time the Adelaide *Ring* was announced in May 1995, Gillespie had decided to end his ten-year association with SOSA (and with opera company management) after the final performance of *Götterdämmerung* in 1998 and move on to other things.⁶⁵ Journalist Tim Lloyd in his article in the *Advertiser* of 12 December 1998 quoted Gillespie as saying that his ‘turn around’ job had been completed four years earlier and that he might well have left State Opera then had it not been for the lure of the *Ring*. ‘I can’t see that, having put State Opera back on the map, I would want to stage three or four operas a year for the rest of my life’ said Gillespie. ‘Most general directors don’t get to do the *Ring* in their entire careers’ he added, ‘so it represented closure, not just with the State Opera but also for my opera career’. He had come full circle. Clearly he was not interested in being associated with plans (however nebulous at that stage)⁶⁶ to make Adelaide a *Ring* city à la Seattle. He made it very clear to me that although the 1998 *Ring* had provided a ‘great, priceless sense of closure’ for him, there was no way he would want to be involved a second time around. He imagined that that would be ‘a miserable, thankless, and ultimately pathetic experience for any artistic director or Opera GM’, plagued by ‘political electoral horizons, political interference, and profound ignorance about the artistic process’.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Interview with Stephen Phillips recorded on 18 July 1997. Adelaide. University of Adelaide Library. Theatre programmes and papers 1952- MSS 792 T3743.S. Also biographical note provided by Phillips for the program of the 1997 *Weekend with the Ring* in Adelaide.

⁶⁵ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Bill Gillespie, op.cit.

⁶⁶ On 17 June 1998, Minister Laidlaw told the Parliament ‘I am keen to see the Festival Centre ... stage future performances of *The Ring* cycle and probably present our own productions’. House of Assembly Estimates Committee B Hansard, 17 June 1998, p. 85.

⁶⁷ Gillespie, Bill. (1999, September 10). Letter to Peter Bassett, Appendix 17.

Gillespie had become an Australian citizen in 1994 and decided to remain in Australia after 1998, albeit in another area of arts management. When he had returned to Adelaide at the end of 1994 after his month-long search for a suitable *Ring* production, he had told O'Loughlin and the State Opera Board that it would be difficult for him to continue to run the company's regular seasons (three or four operas a year) whilst liaising with the Châtelet, making casting and promotional decisions, writing and speaking, and handling the myriad of other artistic responsibilities associated with this formidable project.⁶⁸ Obviously he hadn't heard of Thomas Quinlan! At that time, Gillespie was the only person on SOSA's staff who knew the *Ring* intimately, knew its production history, and had useful international Wagner connections. In May 1995 he became Artistic Director of the *Ring*, combining this role for a brief time with his existing SOSA responsibilities. Phillips, now Deputy General Director as well as Production Director, had managed the company satisfactorily in an acting capacity from time to time; now Gillespie proposed that this should continue on a permanent basis. Phillips spoke of having gone through a Wagner period in the 1960s when he was eighteen or nineteen, when Solti's Decca recordings had come out,⁶⁹ but there was no evidence that his interest in Wagner's works extended beyond that. Gillespie wrote to Chairman O'Loughlin on 11 March 1995 recommending that Phillips, 'and not an outsider', be appointed as his successor.⁷⁰ The letter said: 'As we had previously discussed, I would assume the position of artistic director of the *Ring* and relinquish the general directorship later this year.' Gillespie proposed that the hand-over should take effect on 1 August 1995, by which time, on 25 July, he would have reached the seventh anniversary of his appointment and would be the longest serving CEO in the history of the State Opera. Gillespie went 'off salary' and became a consultant on a permanent part-time contract to the subsidiary entity, SORC, between 1 August 1995 and 31 December 1998. He proposed reporting to the SORC Board as necessary but 'no more than quarterly in the early years'. His letter indicated that he would also pursue teaching contracts in Hong Kong and possibly Japan and Los Angeles 'as in recent years', with a view to building a full-time career when the *Ring* was over. He added that he might wish to relocate to Sydney before 1998 and to return to Adelaide for meetings. He foreshadowed travelling overseas including to Seattle in August 1995, Paris in 1996-97, Chicago in early 1996 and Bayreuth in August 1996. Phillips was formally appointed General Director of SOSA as well as Managing Director of SORC in August 1995. He oversaw the

⁶⁸ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Bill Gillespie, op.cit.

⁶⁹ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Stephen Phillips, op.cit.

⁷⁰ Letter in Gillespie Papers, National Library of Australia, op.cit.

regular seasons in 1996 and 1997 as well as the *Ring* in 1998. Gillespie worked full time on the *Ring* in 1995 and 1996 and then, in 1997, he moved to Japan for twelve months to a position on the teaching staff of Showa University of Music in Tokyo. This was a surprising move at a time when the enthusiasm of many people – staff, Wagner societies all over Australia and New Zealand, journalists, local businesses, interstate and South Australian sponsors, politicians and government agencies – was being ratcheted up in support of a production that was being colourfully described by politicians as ‘the Mount Everest of operas’ and ‘the Olympics of opera’.⁷¹

With hindsight, it must be said that Gillespie’s year-long absence and, indeed, his 1995 transition to a limited-term consultant, was unfortunate in terms of the government’s plans for Adelaide as an on-going regional home for the *Ring*. He was by far the best qualified person to give effect to such a plan, but he was adamant that he would not be involved,⁷² and no-one seems to have tried to persuade him to reconsider. His move to Japan caused friction with Phillips who, as the new General Director of SOSA and General Manager of SORC, now bore the brunt of management responsibilities without being able to rely on the close assistance of the principal architect of the project and the person best qualified to assist. I formed the impression that Phillips felt exposed, and he said as much in his recorded interview with Elizabeth Silsbury. He spent 95 per cent of his time on the *Ring*, he said.⁷³ It stretched the company’s resources, and his ‘career was riding on it’.⁷⁴ However, memories are short and the workings of the arts industry mysterious, and by 2004 the media were crediting Phillips with originating the entire Adelaide Wagner enterprise. In the Melbourne *Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 12 November 2004, four days before the opening night of the new *Ring*, Penelope Debelles wrote: ‘Phillips began small by convincing the South Australian Government to stage, in 1998, a cheaper, imported French production of the *Ring* where the costumes and sets were brought out from the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris’.⁷⁵ Gillespie had been airbrushed from the picture. In the 2004 *Ring* program, his name appeared only in tiny print amongst 705 other donors, and there was no acknowledgment of his seminal role in bringing Wagner to Adelaide. The former head of the South Australian Department of

⁷¹ Minister for Tourism Graham Ingerson used the former expression in Parliament, House of Assembly – Estimates Committee A (1995, June 28), p. 223, and the latter term was used by Arts Minister Diana Laidlaw in (1998, Dec. – 1999, April). SA Opera wins ‘the Olympics of the Arts’. *State of the Arts, South Australia*, p. 4.

⁷² Gillespie, Bill. (1999, September 10). Letter to Peter Bassett. Appendix 17.

⁷³ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Stephen Phillips, op.cit.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Debelles, Penelope. (2004, November 12). Wagner calling, *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/11/11/1100131127901.html?from=storyrhs>.

the Arts and Cultural Development, Len Amadio, who had been influential in securing Gillespie's appointment in 1988 and had enthusiastically backed his and Tim O'Loughlin's 1994 *Ring* submission, was livid at what he regarded as a calculated snub and a rewriting of history.⁷⁶

German/Australian director Elke Neidhardt, who had worked on several *Rings* in Europe and would eventually direct SOSA's *Parsifal* and the new *Ring* of 2004, was engaged by Phillips as Artistic Adviser for the 1998 *Ring*, but her appointment was abruptly terminated shortly before rehearsals began. It was a strange appointment in the first place, given that the production had already been staged in Paris and the original Director, Pierre Strosser (or, at the very least, his Assistant Director) would be accompanying it to Adelaide. The title 'Artistic Adviser' was created to accommodate Neidhardt's *Ring* experience, German language assistance and other forms of practical help for Wagner novice Phillips. However, it seems that the creative team had not been consulted about the appointment of their new 'Artistic Adviser' and, in any case, Strosser was bringing with him Assistant Director Stephen Taylor from Paris. Clearly there were going to be too many cooks for this particular broth, and the appointment was cancelled before it began. It had not helped that, a year earlier, Neidhardt had made headlines for all the wrong reasons following a fiery confrontation with French conductor Philippe Auguin during rehearsals for Opera Australia's new production of *Tannhäuser*. Since her Adelaide contract had already been signed, she was paid compensation, took a holiday in Fiji and, as she told me later, came out of it rather well.

It is true that, by 1997 when Gillespie went to Japan, the most important work of the Artistic Director had been done. The artists had been engaged, rehearsal timetables determined, sets and costumes (all known and approved) would soon be on their way to Adelaide from Paris, and marketing and media coverage was in full swing. In Europe or in the United States, where a larger company might have been able to rely on an established Wagner tradition and experienced managers, the absence of the Artistic Director for a year would not have been a problem. However, in Adelaide where the eight-member resident company had very little Wagner experience,⁷⁷ a superficial knowledge of the *Ring*, and a first-time General Director, it was a different matter. I formed the impression that Phillips's irritation with Gillespie's absences influenced his decision not to engage a separate Artistic Director for the 2004 *Ring*

⁷⁶ Len Amadio shared his views with me in the foyer of the Festival Theatre on opening night.

⁷⁷ The only other Wagnerian work staged by SOSA before 1998 had been *The Flying Dutchman* in 1986 (with Malolm Donnelly as the Dutchman), before the era of either Gillespie or Phillips. The company had been associated with the ASO in a semi-staged performance of Act I of *Die Walküre* in 1988.

and coloured his replies to questions about whose idea it had been in the first place to stage the 1998 *Ring*. Phillips is on record as saying that ‘no single person should take credit – it was something that happened’.⁷⁸ The newly formed Adelaide Critics Circle took a different view. When Gillespie was about to leave Adelaide at the end of 1998 to take up his new appointment as Director of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, the Critics Circle presented him with a Special Award, the citation for which read in part:

His crowning glory is also South Australia’s. His was the idea of doing *The Ring*, his the proposal to bring the production from the Châtelet, his primarily the responsibility of casting the roles, of fixing the orchestra, of ensuring that everything worked to the best possible advantage This award expresses the gratitude of the Adelaide Critics Circle for the part Bill Gillespie has played in elevating the operatic sophistication of our state.⁷⁹

Some local commentators who had had doubts about the ambitious *Ring* project from the outset, and felt it had been motivated ‘more by politics and profit than by concern for the arts’,⁸⁰ were quietly (and not so quietly) relieved to see the Wagnerian ‘folly’ come to an end.

Following the success of the 1998 *Ring*, *The Birmingham Post* (UK) published an interview with Stephen Phillips in January 1999 with the sub-heading: ‘How a chartered surveyor turned hours and hours of opera into a hot property’ which could be read as an expression of interest by Phillips in producing a *Ring* in Birmingham (where he had previously lived and worked) in the wake of his success in Adelaide.⁸¹ The article concludes: ‘Stephen Phillips is convinced that Birmingham could reap similar benefits to those achieved in Adelaide if it put on its own *Ring*, particularly if the CBSO,⁸² perhaps with Simon Rattle, were participating. “People are passionate about the *Ring*,” he said. “They just go anywhere. If you had the right

⁷⁸ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Stephen Phillips, op.cit.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Silsbury, Elizabeth. (2001) *State of Opera: An Intimate New History of the State Opera of South Australia*. p. 175.

⁸⁰ Silsbury, Elizabeth (February 1999). Gratefully received, but *Opera* magazine. She concluded: ‘This controversial production may even, in time, contribute to the general de-bunking of a work that the French view ... has shown to be even more dramatically flawed than I previously thought.’

⁸¹ Grimley, Terry. (1999, January 12). When Wagner went faster than racing cars. *The Birmingham Post*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/When+Wagner+went+faster+than+racing+cars%3B+Terry+Grimley+finds+out+how...-a060552718>.

⁸² City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

venue you would have people coming from all over the world.” ’ Bill Gillespie, it seems, was not the only one testing the waters elsewhere after 1998.

CHAPTER 3

Towards a new *Ring*

As early as 1995, the strategy of the South Australian Government had been to consider initial reactions to the 1998 *Ring* proposal and then determine a policy towards the creation of Adelaide's own *Ring* production ahead of any other Australian city or any other major city within the South-East Asian region.¹ In March 1996, the SA Centre for Economic Studies delivered an anticipatory report on 'The Economic Impact of Wagner's Ring Cycle', prepared for the SA Department for the Arts and Cultural Development (the forerunner of Arts SA).² This report was publicly released at the opening of the State Opera's new headquarters in the Adelaide suburb of Netley soon afterwards. It noted that in the decade to 1994, international visitation to South Australia had grown at approximately 8.0 per cent per year on average, whereas, over the same period, the growth rate of international visitors to Australia as a whole had grown at a higher annual rate of 12.0 per cent. The report analysed estimated expenditure by visitors for the *Ring* and revealed that 'The use of numbers of this order of magnitude is confirmed by the personal experience of a member of staff of the State Opera in attending a recent performance of the *Ring* in Seattle in the USA'.³ The staff member cited was Bill Gillespie during his 1994 investigations. The report concluded that the *Ring* would generate up to \$14 million in economic benefits for the State and would create almost 270 full-time jobs. It added that: 'the potential for an impact of this order of magnitude is confirmed by estimates associated with the Seattle performance which suggest an economic impact in that city of the order of \$US26 million from 4000 visitors'.⁴

In the mid-1990s the South Australia Government had become alarmed by changes and uncertainties surrounding the Commonwealth Government's support for Australia's symphony orchestras. The SA Legislative Council passed a motion on 16 March 1995 expressing its alarm following the Keating Government's Creative Nation Statement which supported divestment of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and foreshadowed consequences

¹ O'Loughlin, Tim. (1997, June). Report to consider the case for South Australia investing in a new *Ring* to be performed in Adelaide on a regular basis. Bill Gillespie's papers, National Library of Australia.

² SA Centre for Economic Studies. (1996, March). *The Economic Impact of Wagner's Ring Cycle; Prepared for the Department for the Arts and Cultural Development*. Researcher Mr Barry Burgen.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 11.

for other orchestras, including the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.⁵ Arts SA engaged consultant Peter Alexander to examine the possibility of a merger of the State Opera and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (ASO). Minister Laidlaw was of the opinion that the *Ring* was exactly the sort of event which would benefit from a merger of SOSA and the ASO.⁶ Equally, the *Ring* offered a convenient opportunity to bring the ASO into the State fold. This was a time of South Australian arts ‘empire-building’, reflected in burgeoning portfolio responsibilities (including the ‘whole-of-government’ arts program),⁷ the creation of new ‘arts precincts’ in Adelaide,⁸ international cultural exchanges⁹ and nation-wide ambitions for which the *Ring* would be the flagship. However, after considering the findings of the Alexander Report, the Minister decided that the anticipated artistic benefits and cost savings could not be realised through amalgamation of the ASO and SOSA. Nevertheless, the search continued for ways to bolster local involvement with the management of the orchestra and increase State Government participation.¹⁰ An opportunity arose in 1998 when Tim O’Loughlin was appointed a member of the ASO Board while he was still Executive Director of Arts SA.¹¹ Questions were asked in Parliament about a possible conflict of interest with such an appointment but, as the Minister pointed out (while keeping a straight face), unlike SOSA and SORC, the ASO was not her responsibility but the ABCs.¹² Nevertheless, the move strengthened the State Government’s hand in respect of the orchestra.

The orchestral uncertainties of the mid-1990s introduced a note of urgency into *Ring* planning. The permanent complement of ASO musicians was increased through State funding from 65 to 80, and this number was augmented further for the *Ring* to 128, including relief

⁵ Brown, Premier Dean. (1995, April 11). Letter to the Secretary of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra Players’ Association, containing the text of the motion and advising of steps to assess possible new models for the management of opera and orchestral services. For a Commonwealth (Opposition) perspective see Senator Richard Alston, Shadow Minister for Communications and the Arts. (1998 February 28). *ABC Orchestras in Turmoil* [Media release].

⁶ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1995). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, Estimates Committee B, June 21, pp. 81-83.

⁷ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2000). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, Estimates Committee B, June 15, p. 73.

⁸ Arts SA moved to grand new premises in Hindley Street (the renovated former 1909 West’s Coffee Palace) in 2000, as did the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (to the renovated West’s 1939 art deco cinema building) in 2001. At that time artists, galleries and other arts organisations were encouraged to set up shop in the neighbourhood, to transform what had become a seedy part of town into a cultural boulevard. The ASO remains but Arts SA vacated its ‘palace’ in 2014 in response to dwindling staff numbers and the need for cost savings.

⁹ Notably with Seattle, with which I was directly involved.

¹⁰ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1996). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 19, p. 76.

¹¹ He subsequently became chairman of the ASO Board.

¹² Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (1998). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, December 10, pp. 496-97.

players.¹³ In 1998, Gillespie was quoted in the press as saying that a grant of \$250,000 from the Howard Government, which came to office in March 1996, would help fund the extra musicians needed to bring the *Ring* orchestra to full strength.¹⁴ The close and sympathetic relationships between the State and Commonwealth governments and between the chairman of SORC and Minister Alston in Canberra were paying dividends. The cost to the SORC budget of utilising the ASO's services for the *Ring*, including more than 200 hours of rehearsals under the skilled direction of Jeffrey Tate, was just \$750,000¹⁵ - an extraordinarily reasonable figure for such a huge project and one unlikely to be matched ever again. Ten years later, in 2008, the cost of engaging an augmented Melbourne Symphony Orchestra of around 120 musicians for rehearsals and twelve performances of the *Ring* was closer to \$2.5 million.¹⁶

In June 1996 Minister Laidlaw made it clear to officials that she wished to have the matter of a new *Ring* production formally investigated with a view to determining the government's position in the middle of 1997. In the State Opera's *Backstage* newsletter of July 1996,¹⁷ chairman O'Loughlin revealed that the Minister for the Arts had asked SOSA to investigate the feasibility of producing further Wagner *Ring* cycles beyond that planned for 1998. This information confirmed that on-going *Ring* performances were being considered at the highest level of government as early as the middle of 1996, more than two years before the 1998 staging. Nevertheless, O'Loughlin indicated, mainly to reassure concerned subscribers,¹⁸ that the Board would determine its position on future *Rings* taking into account: their impact on the company's ability to maintain its subscriber base; the funds available to maintain performances at an appropriate artistic level; the State Opera's ability to continue to involve itself in community activities (audience development, touring, young artist programs etc); relationships with other parties, particularly the ASO, and the State's reputation for cultural excellence and for generating economic activity through cultural tourism. Since the actual performances of the 1998 *Ring* were still two and a half years away, a lot of water had to flow under the bridge before these issues needed to be addressed. However, expectations were certainly rising in favour of future productions, and the impetus for action was coming from

¹³ During performances, there were at least 95 musicians in the pit at any one time.

¹⁴ Holgate, B. (1998, September 11). Extra confidence in the *Ring*. *The Australian*, p. 17.

¹⁵ The State funding for increasing to 80 the number of permanent musicians, who would remain with the orchestra after the *Ring*, was extraneous to this figure.

¹⁶ This estimate reflects the author's enquiries in late 2008 about engaging the services of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra for a possible new *Ring* production in Melbourne.

¹⁷ (1996, July). *Backstage* Vol. 6 No 2.

¹⁸ Concerned because they did not wish *Ring* productions to be at the expense of all other opera productions.

the State Government. Six months later, O'Loughlin retired from the Chairmanship of SOSA in order to head Arts SA and vigorously drive the *Ring* planning process. An *Advertiser* newspaper article of 13 July 1996 referred to plans for a *Ring* every four years and the establishment of a *Ring* culture in Adelaide.¹⁹ It quoted Stephen Phillips as saying that he would like to see the *Ring* return once every four years; that he believed the 1998 production would build expertise towards developing a uniquely Australian vision, and that he wanted that expertise to develop in Adelaide. The article noted that several cities around the world regularly staged the *Ring*, and that whole industries had developed around those events. Another article by Jeremy Eccles in the *State of the Arts* magazine drew parallels between Adelaide (population 800,000) and Seattle (population 500,000).²⁰

In September 1996, Australian arts consultant Derek Watt had delivered a report to the South Australian Department for the Arts and Cultural Development (the forerunner of Arts SA) entitled 'Review of Planning by the State Opera of South Australia for the presentation of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*'.²¹ The report had been commissioned in response to Parliamentary concerns in July 1996 about an increase in *Ring* budget estimates from \$6.4 million to \$8.355 million – an increase which Minister Laidlaw attributed mysteriously to 'a substantial upwards revision of the income projections'.²² The additional costs, it seems, actually related to the engagement of a cover cast and unforeseen charges for State Opera administration.

The Executive Summary within the Watt report read as follows:

1. SOSA's plans, budgets and monitoring procedures had been reviewed.
 2. The project was well planned and controlled from both the artistic and management viewpoints.
 3. Interstate sales would be quite a challenge.
 4. There would be a major financial challenge in achieving sponsorship projections. Over \$500,000 is being sought. There were no major contributions to date.
 5. There would be a serious risk if a local permanent orchestra were not available.
- There was currently some uncertainty as to the ASO's funding situation.

¹⁹ Lloyd, Tim. (1996, July 13). A Ring of confidence. *The Advertiser*, p. 23.

²⁰ Eccles, Jeremy. (1996, December – 1997, March). Ring Ring. Adelaide's David takes on Goliath. *State of the Arts*, pp. 60-61.

²¹ Watt, Derek. (1996, September). *Review of Planning by the State Opera of South Australia for the presentation of Der Ring des Nibelungen for the Department for the Arts and Cultural Development*. A copy of the report is among the Gillespie papers in the National Library of Australia.

²² Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (1996). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, July 11, p. 1725.

6. Management control and risk was satisfactory.
7. Artistic planning had been very thorough and had involved reasonable compromises when necessary.
8. Looking after visiting artists should be a priority.
9. SOSA/SORC management and the ASO should work together to ensure that the ASO has a sense of ownership.
10. There was a danger in the project being over-hyped and the actual event not being able to meet expectations.

SOSA Chairman O'Loughlin's response to the Watt report²³ was that the ASO was receiving \$1.1 million in grants through the Department for the Arts and Cultural Development, SOSA and SORC to perform the *Ring*. This could be diverted to importing another orchestra if necessary, he said, for example from Western Australia. In his view \$1.1 million should be sufficient to meet salary costs, with living away from home allowances being financed from the contingency. In theory it might have been possible to engage an interstate orchestra but, even assuming that one were available for the long periods of rehearsals and performances involved, the extra costs associated with transportation, accommodation and local allowances (not to mention acceptable fees) would have been exorbitant. Such a measure would also have detracted from the distinctively South Australian branding of the production and, in view of the political imperatives involved, this was unlikely to have been a desirable option.

Government strategies for creating a new *Ring* dating from 1995

After O'Loughlin moved to Arts SA at the beginning of 1997, Minister Laidlaw instructed him to provide his assessment on a new *Ring* following his planned visit to North America in May that year.²⁴ This visit went ahead and included stops in Seattle and also in New York where he attended a performance of the *Ring* (his first) at the Metropolitan Opera. In June 1997, O'Loughlin submitted his 'Report to consider the case for South Australia investing in a new production of the *Ring*'.²⁵ He addressed the notion that the *Ring* should be performed in Adelaide on a regular basis, and reported in the following terms:

- The *Ring* is likely to generate a return to the State in terms of net economic activity of \$4.63 for every \$1 invested by the State Government. This is comparable to the

²³ Gillespie papers, National Library of Australia.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

return achieved by the Adelaide Festival of Arts and superior to all other existing major events.

- The strategy developed early in 1995 had been to reconsider initial reactions to the 1998 *Ring* with a view to the Government determining its attitude before any other Australian city - or major city within the South-east Asian region - decided to go ahead with the creation of its own *Ring* production. This was therefore a pre-emptive strategy.²⁶
- After Minister Laidlaw's instruction in June 1996 that the Government wished to have the matter of a new *Ring* formally investigated with a view to determining its position in the middle of 1997, it was envisaged that Tim O'Loughlin would prepare the assessment following his planned visit to North America in May 1997.
- By far the most important single criterion would be the artistic outcome.
- It is generally accepted that SOSA and the Tourism Commission had not developed an effective working relationship for the development and marketing of tourism packages for 1998. The full tourism potential of the event is unlikely to be realised. The arrangement with Qantas had adverse consequences and requires amendment.
- The case for a new *Ring* production is not primarily artistic; the primary justification for the project is its economic impact. Comparisons might be drawn with the Australian Golf Open, the rationale for which is not about the impact on the quality of golf in Australia.

The latter point was a revealing statement of motivation, coming as it did from the head of the Arts department, and it sat rather awkwardly with the earlier point that 'the most important single criterion would be the artistic outcome'. This inherent contradiction proved to be a fault line in *Ring* policy planning. It transpired that, for Adelaide at least, neither artistic excellence nor domestic and international audience appeal nor generous private sector support could guarantee a production revival in the absence of political will.

²⁶ The consciously pre-emptive nature of the South Australian decision was confirmed in remarks by O'Loughlin reported in Turner, Brook. (1998, April 4-5). Wagner coup rings up a jackpot for Adelaide, *The Australian Financial Review*.

The relevance of the Seattle model to Adelaide's ambitions to stage a new *Ring*

In respect of the Seattle model, O'Loughlin observed in his report that:

- The sources of funding were different.
- Seattle Opera was more involved in producing new work than was SOSA.
- Seattle was not as isolated as Adelaide but had adjacent populations for box office support.
- The relevance of Seattle for Adelaide related not so much to existing similarities as to the fact that Seattle represented what Adelaide could aspire to. The underlying aim had been to use the *Ring* to support Seattle's objective to project itself as a culturally sophisticated city. Adelaide would only be able to emulate Seattle if it could design a production and present it in a way that met fully the very demanding standards set by *Ring* followers throughout the world.
- If Adelaide went ahead, it should follow the precedent of the Seattle model and perform the *Ring* every four years. The first Seattle production of the full *Ring* had been preceded in the previous year by the first two parts which attracted an audience that was 50/50 local and external. Then it became three equal parts: local/interstate/international.
- There would be risks for SOSA in managing the *Ring* in its entirety to begin with. It would stretch resources and could convey the impression that it was a German opera company located in Adelaide.

Recommendations for a new *Ring* model

He made the following recommendations:

- A future *Ring* production should be a joint venture by both SOSA and the Adelaide Festival. The latter had a new general manager, Nicholas Heyward, who was experienced in organising music festivals and was very familiar with the *Ring*.²⁷ Under this proposal SOSA would commission the creative team, manage the production budget and handle all artistic operations, while the Adelaide Festival would manage marketing, sponsorship and public and media relations. It was proposed that SOSA would reduce the number of mainstage operas from 3 to 2 in

²⁷ As chief executive officer of the Brisbane Biennial International Music Festival, Heyward had overseen a successful concert performance of *Parsifal* on 27 May 1995.

Ring years. The Board of Management would have the following membership: Adelaide Festival (2); SOSA (2); Arts SA (1); Tourism/Economic Development/Major Events (1); other (1). Two further positions could be created to accommodate national representation if necessary. The new organisation would be incorporated.²⁸

Funding

- The cost of performing the *Ring* was assumed to be \$6.5 million²⁹ in each *Ring* year – the same as in 1998 with the hire costs removed. The total economic benefit was assessed at \$36.06 million through to 2011.

Conclusions

- The *Ring* had the potential to bring lasting benefits, with a direct economic impact superior to just about anything else of comparable size, and indirect benefits for Adelaide's reputation and self-image. The risks were unusually low due to the prior experience of presenting someone else's *Ring*.³⁰
- Tourism income could be assumed to be in the vicinity of \$14 million for each bracket of *Ring* cycles.

A launch of the *Ring* national and international Box Office took place at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney on 25 February 1997 hosted by the chairman of SORC Donald McDonald, and also attended by the Governor and Premier of South Australia and the Commonwealth Minister for the Arts. At that launch, and in Parliament on 26 February 1997, the Seattle model was highlighted and extolled. In an article in *The Australian Financial Review* of 4-5 April 1998, O'Loughlin was quoted as describing the 1998 *Ring* project as 'a brave positioning ploy'.³¹ He said that SOSA and the South Australian Government were already contemplating their own production of the cycle, and that he would like to see

²⁸ A similar Board structure was proposed by Anthony Steel in his July 1999 report 'Another Ring for Adelaide?' p. 8, and in March 2008 by the Ernst & Young Ring Cycle Feasibility Study Update report (see Chapter 9).

²⁹ This figure probably refers to recurrent costs once the production had been created. Inevitably the design and building process would call for a higher initial outlay, which O'Loughlin subsequently estimated to be \$5 million, making a total cost of \$11.5 million for the first *Ring* season.

³⁰ In fact the risks proved to be high because producing the brand new *Ring* had important differences from overseeing a hired production that already had a performance history. Stephen Phillips also mistakenly assumed that having managed the 1998 hired production he could manage a new one from scratch with even fewer resources.

³¹ Turner, Brook. (1998, April 4-5). Wagner coup rings up a jackpot for Adelaide. *The Australian Financial Review*.

Adelaide become a regional centre for the *Ring*. ‘Seattle is called The Ring City of North America’ he said, ‘Seattle is a city we would do well to emulate’. In *The Advertiser* of 15 December 1998, at the conclusion of Adelaide’s first *Ring*, arts journalist Tim Lloyd wrote of Minister Laidlaw’s creation of a Consortium of the State Opera, ASO, Adelaide Festival and Arts SA to investigate the creation of a permanent *Ring* in Adelaide. It quoted the Minister as saying: ‘The Consortium’s immediate task will be to develop a management model for a permanent *Ring*; establish international sources of artistic advice; identify key creative personnel and develop time lines and cost estimates’. She continued: ‘...the 1998 *Ring* had established Adelaide as a credible and exciting location for the presentation of future cycles. We will now take the opportunity to develop and present a new Australian production of the *Ring*.’ Those words can only be read as an unequivocal commitment just days after the final performance of the first production. In the same article, Lloyd observed that a permanent *Ring* cycle would put Adelaide on the same footing as the Seattle Opera, and he noted that ‘as recently as last week, the Seattle Opera announced that it had recently received \$US1 million from each of two private foundations towards the \$US8 million cost of its next cycle’.

Seattle Opera began producing Wagner’s stage works in 1966 and the *Ring* in particular in 1975, and Seattle came to be regarded as one of the principal centres for the Wagnerian repertoire. Its reputation as an arts hub, not only for opera, impressed Minister Laidlaw and persuaded her that Adelaide should establish an on-going arts relationship with that city and, in particular, seek to emulate its Wagnerian credentials. Adelaide, it was argued, had much in common with the North American city. Both were medium-sized cities remote from heavily populated eastern seaboard, and both recognized that the arts, including glass and craft arts, youth arts, contemporary music, and opera, played a major role in their communities.³² If Seattle could provide an intellectual environment that nurtured creativity in the arts (exemplified by the *Ring*) as well as in technology (exemplified by Microsoft and Boeing), then why couldn’t Adelaide? A frequently expressed view in the mid-1990s was that South Australia should position itself to be a hub of innovative thinking and high technology, taking its cue from Seattle and other North American regions such as Silicon Valley.³³ In 1995, contemporaneously with the decision to stage the *Ring*, the South Australian government

³² April 2001. *Seattle, South Australia & The Arts*. Arts SA Flyer recording key features of an Arts Co-operation Agreement established by an exchange of letters between Minister Laidlaw and the Mayor of Seattle in July 1999.

³³ For example, in 1997, the South Australian Multi-Function Polis Development Corporation adopted the Silicon Valley model of development based on clusters of innovative firms. See Parker, P. (1998). The Multi-Function Polis 1987-97: an International Failure or Innovative Local Project? *Pacific Economic Paper No. 28*. Australia-Japan Research Centre, 22. Retrieved from <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/pdf/pep/pep-283.pdf>.

concluded a major investment and computing agreement worth \$500 million with Texan computer giant Electronic Data Systems (EDS) ‘designed to propel South Australia to the forefront of the information technology (IT) industry in the Asia/Pacific region’.³⁴

I was directly involved with the negotiation of the Arts Exchange Agreement with Seattle between 1998 and 2001, and travelled there on two occasions on behalf of the South Australian government. Notwithstanding the government’s interest in seeing Adelaide develop as ‘another Seattle’, there were differences between the two cities which needed to be taken into account, apart from those identified by O’Loughlin in his 1997 report. One difference related to motivation. The *raison d’être* for Wagner performances in Seattle was artistic, not political as was the case in Adelaide. O’Loughlin was mistaken when he said that ‘The underlying aim had been to use the *Ring* to support Seattle’s objective to project itself as a culturally sophisticated city’. That might have become a rationale for seeking financial and other support but it was not the original motivation. The aim of Seattle Opera’s founder Glynn Ross in the 1960s had been to offer productions that were true to Wagner’s stage directions as distinct from the modernist productions taking hold of European opera houses.³⁵ In any case, Seattle Opera was and is entirely independent of the Government of Washington State and the City of Seattle and is funded chiefly from private sources. Its history demonstrates the kind of Wagner performing tradition to which the South Australian Government aspired.

TABLE 2. Performances of Wagner’s works in Seattle.

YEAR	WAGNER OPERAS	PERFORMANCES
1966	Lohengrin	New, 2 performances
1972	Der fliegende Holländer	New, 5 performances
1973	RING 1 introduced, Die Walküre	5 performances
1974	Siegfried	6 performances
1975	Götterdämmerung Der Ring des Nibelungen	6 performances 1 cycle in German, 1 in English
1976	Der Ring des Nibelungen	Revival. 1 cycle in German, 1 in

³⁴ (1995, October 30). EDS and government of South Australia announce largest IT contract in Asia/Pacific region. *The Free Library*. Retrieved from: <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/EDS+and+government+of+South+Australia+announce+largest+contract+in...-a017449010>

³⁵ *Wagner at Seattle Opera*. Retrieved from: <http://seattleopera.org/discover/wagner/seattle>.

		English
1977	Der Ring des Nibelungen	Revival. 1 cycle in German, 1 in English
1978	Der Ring des Nibelungen	Revival. 1 cycle in German, 1 in English
1979	Der Ring des Nibelungen	Revival. 1 cycle in German, 1 in English
1980	Der Ring des Nibelungen	Revival. 1 cycle in German, 1 in English
1981	Tristan und Isolde <i>Pacific Northwest Wagner Festival</i> Der Ring des Nibelungen Tristan und Isolde	New, 6 performances 1 cycle in German, 1 in English 1 performance between Ring cycles
1982	Der Ring des Nibelungen	1 cycle in German, 1 in English
1983	Der Ring des Nibelungen	1 cycle in German, 1 in English
1984	Der Ring des Nibelungen Tannhäuser	1 cycle in German New. 5 performances. Surtitles introduced
1985	RING 2 introduced, Die Walküre	3 performances
1986	Der Ring des Nibelungen	2 cycles in German with surtitles
1987	Der Ring des Nibelungen	2 cycles
1989	Der fliegende Holländer Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg	New. 6 performances New. 7 performances
1991	Der Ring des Nibelungen	3 cycles
1994	Lohengrin	New. 5 performances
1995	Der Ring des Nibelungen	3 cycles
1998	Tristan und Isolde	New. 10 performances
2000	RING 3 introduced Das Rheingold Die Walküre	3 performances 7 performances
2001	Der Ring des Nibelungen	3 cycles
2003	Parsifal	New. 9 performances. New Theatre.
2004	Lohengrin	New. 8 performances

2005	Der Ring des Nibelungen	3 cycles
2006	International Wagner Competition*	
2007	Der fliegende Holländer	Revival. 8 performances
2008	International Wagner Competition*	
2009	Der Ring des Nibelungen	Revival. 3 cycles
2010	Tristan und Isolde	New. 7 performances
2013	Der Ring des Nibelungen	Revival. 3 cycles
2014	International Wagner Competition*	

* The intention behind Seattle's International Wagner Competitions of 2006, 2008 and 2014 was to keep the Wagnerian flame burning between staged productions, especially at times when funding constraints were affecting the company's operations.

This table demonstrates the gulf that separated Seattle Opera's Wagner tradition and South Australia's achievements in the decade 1995-2005. South Australian politicians and opera managers had made much of following the Seattle model and of staging *Ring* productions every four years or so.³⁶ However, the South Australian initiative became a series of Wagnerian 'one-offs', with neither the *Ring* of 1998, nor *Parsifal* of 2001, nor the *Ring* of 2004 nor *The Flying Dutchman* of 2009 being repeated. Importantly, no provision was ever made for them to be repeated, which contrasted sharply with Seattle Opera's clear goal of multiple stagings over a number of years, after the example of the Bayreuth Festival. The original SOSA submission of 1994 had made no mention of revivals. In O'Loughlin's advice to SOSA supporters and subscribers in July 1996, he said that the State Opera had undertaken the 1998 *Ring* as its 'contribution to the efforts being made in many sections of the South Australian arts community to re-build the State's reputation for artistic excellence and to create a new era of cultural tourism',³⁷ but he was careful to placate disaffected subscribers by noting that '[The *Ring*'s] appeal is to a limited audience and it cannot provide the variety of a subscription series'.³⁸

When, as early as mid-1996, the first steps were taken towards staging a second *Ring*, no thought was given to a re-staging of the Châtelet production in Adelaide, even though such a course would have had some advantages. It would have provided a cost-effective means of strengthening the company's Wagnerian credentials, and of consolidating management

³⁶ For example Premier Olsen, SA House of Assembly Hansard (1997, February 26), p.1042; Stephen Phillips, quoted in Lloyd, Tim. (1996, July 13). A Ring of confidence. *The Advertiser*, p. 23.

³⁷ *Backstage* (1996 July) Vol. 6 No 2.

³⁸ *ibid.*

experience and patron and sponsor support. However, the widespread assumption was that South Australia should aim to produce its own *Ring* from scratch – the very thing that Gillespie had warned against. Generally speaking though, Gillespie did not favour repeating opera productions of any kind, and took pride in the fact that, during his term at the helm of SOSA he had staged thirty-two mainstage productions of which only three were repeats. ‘Repeating operas again and again’ he said, ‘was not right, and boring’.³⁹ Seattle Opera’s two directors would not have agreed with him, for they had deliberately used repetition - albeit refreshed with new singers and conductors - to develop their company’s reputation as one of the most important centres for the performance of Wagner’s works in North America. If the Seattle example were to have real relevance to South Australia, it would have been better to have had a General Director closer in philosophy to Glynn Ross or Speight Jenkins than Bill Gillespie. Ross had headed Seattle Opera for twenty years from 1963 to 1983 and, during that time, had produced not only *Rings* in separate German and English cycles which were revived each year for the following nine years, but also three other Wagner operas and many operas from the broader repertoire. Jenkins ran Seattle Opera for thirty-one years between 1983 and 2014 during which time he produced two complete *Rings*, each of which was performed in two or three cycles on four separate occasions, plus nine other productions of Wagner operas, three international Wagner competitions for singers, and many works by other composers. Usually four or five other works were performed during *Ring* years in Seattle. These two men displayed the long-term sense of continuity which a Wagner performing tradition demands and which was noticeably lacking in South Australia.

There was a considerable gap between the staffing establishments and internal resources of the two companies. In 2005-06, SOSA had a Board of Management of 8, a permanent administrative staff of 4 and a handful of part-time employees. For the same year, Seattle Opera had a Board of Trustees of 61, an Advisory Board of 22, a Seattle Opera Foundation Board of 9, a full-time staff of 70 and 700 part-time employees.⁴⁰ Even allowing for the fact that Seattle Opera offered larger seasons than did SOSA, and performed other works during *Ring* years, it is clear that the governance, management and auxiliary structure required for a *Ring* in Adelaide (especially if it were to be part of an on-going performance tradition) extended well beyond SOSA’s internal capabilities. This had been recognised for the 1998 *Ring* with the creation of the Ring Corporation, but even that did not go far enough and

³⁹ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Bill Gillespie, op.cit.

⁴⁰ *Seattle Opera on the Move*. Community Report 2005/06.

benefited from the fact that the production was a pre-existing one. The attempt to manage the new 2004 production on an in-house basis was bound to be problematic and, in the end, this mistake had to be remedied through crucial interventions by the State and Commonwealth funding bodies.

Funding and structural issues

There were never any prospects of SOSA funding a *Ring* production from ticket sales or private sector donations and, in this respect, the South Australian company had little in common with its Seattle counterpart. In the case of the 2005-06 Seattle Opera season, during which the *Ring* plus four other operas were presented, government contributions amounted to only \$336,850 out of total income of \$12,482,076. Individuals gave \$9,916,123, corporations \$1,140,914, foundations \$479,925 and endowments \$364,110.⁴¹ In the case of the *Ring* performances of 2005 which had their own budget, the \$7,595,000 cost was met from \$4,982,000 in ticket revenue, \$2,562,778 in donations, \$279,775 in education events, and \$299,148 in merchandise sales.⁴² In the US, foundations, endowments, charitable and family trusts and individual donors are all encouraged by favourable taxation arrangements. This is an effective alternative to Government funding allocations.

The special management structure for the 1998 Adelaide *Ring*, involving the creation of the State Opera Ring Corporation, went some way towards creating a unique production environment from which might have grown a long-term Wagner performing tradition. It was an effective mechanism capable of further development but, unfortunately, it was not used beyond the 1998 *Ring* for reasons canvassed elsewhere. The SORC Board consisted of members of the SOSA board appointed by the State Opera with the approval of the Minister (in practice all of the SOSA Board members were appointed to the SORC Board, giving them dominance) plus four others appointed by SOSA with the approval of the Minister.⁴³ SORC Board appointments were for three years.⁴⁴ The four non-SOSA Board members were the General Manager of Australian Major Events,⁴⁵ the coordinator of the 1998 *Ring* ancillary events program (who in practice was a former member of the SOSA board), and the wife of a corporate sponsor. As already mentioned, notable absentees were a representative of the ASO

⁴¹ *Seattle Opera on the Move. Community Report 2005/06*, p. A19.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Inaugural SORC appointments had been for three years from 1995. Some were extended to 30 September 1999 to allow for the winding up of the Corporation, although it was not legally wound up until 2003.

⁴⁴ Regulations Section 8 (1).

⁴⁵ Despite its name, it was actually the events arm of the SA Tourism Commission. Eventually it became Events South Australia.

(the General Manager attended meetings only as an observer) and a representative of the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust which managed the Festival Theatre. I was appointed to both Boards in 1998 and remained a member of the SOSA board until the end of 2000 when I moved to Canberra from where I continued to be involved with SOSA as a consultant for a limited period and in various voluntary capacities.⁴⁶

In 1998, David Meldrum, a former Director of the Helpmann Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts, was commissioned by Arts SA to undertake a review of the legal framework governing the 20 leading funded arts organisations in South Australia. The Meldrum Review recommended that the State Opera should cease operating as a statutory authority and that SORC should be assigned to another parent body. Just which other ‘parent body’ was not specified but it seems that the Adelaide Festival of Arts was the likely candidate. Such an arrangement would have constituted a modified version of the O’Loughlin plan of June 1997 which had anticipated joint SOSA/Adelaide Festival management of the *Ring*. The removal of SOSA’s statutory status would have brought it into line with other Australian opera companies, but the recommendation was rejected by Minister Laidlaw.⁴⁷ The Minister said that she regarded most of Mr Meldrum’s recommendations as being ‘on the wild side’.⁴⁸ She noted that South Australia had historically made greater use of the statutory authority mechanism than any other State, and expressed the view that: ‘Overall, I consider that South Australia generally, and the arts sector in particular, is well served by the organisational structures now in place – and that a radical dismantling of structures ... is neither appropriate nor warranted.’ In the end, SORC was ‘mothballed’ after 1998, and it was wound up in 2003. The Minister’s remarks were indicative of the high level of political intervention in the arts that characterised the policies of successive South Australian governments from the Labor Dunstan era onwards. One might have thought that a Liberal Government would have preferred less state involvement in the major performing arts sector, but this was not the case. Dunstan’s interventionist policies had been influential in shaping the South Australian arts scene and were in advance of what was happening elsewhere in Australia. By the 1990s this advantage had been lost, but Minister Laidlaw, inspired by the Dunstan example, used the arts as a vehicle for broader policy objectives and for responding to interstate rivalries which characterised the 1990s and 2000s, and still persist. In her

⁴⁶ For a list of my various roles see Appendix 1.

⁴⁷ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (1998). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, August 11, pp. 1290-92. Similar recommendations had been made in respect of five other statutory bodies, so the matter was not specific to SOSA.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.1291.

remarks to Parliament in support of a condolence motion on Dunstan's death in February 1999, Laidlaw (who spoke mainly of Dunstan's endorsement of her own achievements) had the following to say:

Over the past eight years, I have held first the position of shadow Minister for the Arts for three years, and Minister for the Arts for five years. On quite a few occasions Don Dunstan and I have shared the same platform. ... He was ... generous when it came to me saying 'that Di deserved some praise for having persuaded the Liberals to do one or two good things in the face of bean counters'. Two years later at the Arts Critics Circle Award he relented even further: he increased the list of good things to three or four, adding our focus on Emerging Artists and the magic of Wagner's Ring cycle. In the arts I always accepted Don Dunstan's judgment and his capacity and willingness to give praise where it was due ...

Don Dunstan knew better than most that if the Arts Minister is not Treasurer it is only possible to achieve with the support of the whole of Cabinet. On this occasion I acknowledge and thank my Cabinet colleagues and my parliamentary Party for ensuring that we did earn—and I think justly—Don Dunstan's praise for three or four good things we have done in the arts over the past five years.

I recognise at all times in my role as Minister for the Arts that we have a responsibility to build on one of the State's greatest strengths—the arts—and I recognise at all times that it is a legacy we have inherited in a very large measure from Don Dunstan. The achievements of the Dunstan led Government (1970-78) in the arts are impressive and they remain the backbone of the arts in this State to this day and the envy of every other State.⁴⁹

Broader official and community support for the *Ring*

As a festival city, Adelaide satisfies the test of the writer Bernard Levin as being 'of a size big enough to accommodate all those who want to come, but small enough to be dominated by its festival function.'⁵⁰ It is sophisticated but not too large, has taken a particular pride in its cultural achievements, is easy to navigate on foot, has reliable weather in the spring and summer months, and has ample accommodation and plenty of restaurants. To this can be

⁴⁹ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (1999). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, February 9, p. 525.

⁵⁰ Levin, Bernard. (1981). *Conducted Tour*, London: Jonathan Cape, p. 13.

added a strong interest amongst leading citizens in getting behind the *Ring* project as, four decades earlier, they had got behind the Adelaide Festival of Arts. Two Governors of South Australia - Dame Roma Mitchell (until the end of 1996) and Sir Eric Neal, with whom I worked as Official Secretary (chief of staff), were patrons of SOSA and of the *Ring* and were highly supportive and used their position to win the support of others in South Australia and in other States. They recognised that projects like the *Ring* could do much to raise the State's profile, bolster tourism, encourage musicians and other artists, and strengthen cultural institutions like the State Opera, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and the Adelaide Festival Centre. Government House was frequently a venue for *Ring*-related hospitality involving not only members of the public and the arts community but also interstate and overseas visitors, politicians and senior public servants. Sir Eric and Lady Neal had spent many years in the eastern States and had many contacts in New South Wales and Victoria amongst business leaders and philanthropists with an interest in the arts. Through these contacts an impressive list of donors and sponsors was assembled, and promotional events were held in Sydney and Melbourne.⁵¹ Sir Eric had been Chairman of Opera Foundation Australia and a member of the National Council of The Australian Opera, and had known Donald McDonald long before he became Chairman of the State Opera Ring Corporation. Through my involvement with the *Ring* in various capacities I was in a position to encourage and facilitate these activities, keep the Governor abreast of planning, and develop opportunities for Government House to play a useful role in the lead up to the 1998 performances. A notable example of this was the *Weekend with the Ring* conference in September 1997 which I coordinated under the umbrella of the Ring Lead-up Events Committee of SORC, chaired by Lillian Scott, and actively supported by the Governor and Lady Neal. An opening night reception featured a performance in the ballroom of Government House of the *Siegfried Idyll* by selected members of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and the Australian String Quartet under the musical direction of Nicholas Braithwaite. The Neals attended conference sessions and social events, and offered accommodation at Government House to several interstate speakers and other visitors. Conference participants included celebrated singers Lauris Elms, John Shaw, Rita Hunter and Robert Allman, and other speakers were Barry Millington, David Kram, Maria Prerauer, Brian Coghlan, Roger Parker, Leo Schofield, Elke Neidhardt, Malcolm Fox, Elizabeth Silsbury and Nicholas Braithwaite. The event was a considerable success, receiving

⁵¹ In Parliament, Minister Laidlaw referred to one such lunch in Melbourne (at the Pratt mansion, Raheen) during which two cheques for \$25,000 were written on the spot. SA House of Assembly Estimates Committee B, (1997, June 19), p. 117.

coverage in the national and local press, and bringing to Adelaide many visitors who had booked for the *Ring* the following year.⁵²

This broader kind of support for the 1998 *Ring* lay outside SOSA's capabilities but proved invaluable to the project. The Governor's involvement was appreciated by the Minister for the Arts, Members of Parliament and senior bureaucrats with whom there was regular liaison, and I was present when many complimentary remarks were made. The general atmosphere of goodwill created during the years 1995-98 ensured receptivity towards plans for the production of *Parsifal* in 2001 and for a home-grown production of the *Ring* in 2004. My strong impression was that the support offered by the Governor and other prominent South Australians at that time contributed materially to the success of the 1998 *Ring*.

Indicators of success and issues of contention

There were many indicators of the overall success of the first *Ring*. At an on-going funding level, the Major Performing Arts Inquiry (the Nugent Inquiry) of 1999 initiated by Commonwealth Arts Minister Richard Alston, opened the way for special niche funding for SOSA. Central to the decision to recommend a special funding status for SOSA was the outstanding achievement of the 1998 *Ring* in attracting international audiences, and plans to stage *Parsifal* in 2001 and a new *Ring* in 2004. The Nugent Report contained the following paragraph:

Undoubtedly, the best recent example of a company pursuing a segment-specific programming approach is the State Opera of South Australia's 1998 presentation of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, with orchestral support from the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. Wagnerians from all over Australia and overseas made the journey to Adelaide to see *The Ring*, enabling the State Opera of South Australia to tap into a sufficiently large niche to cover the additional costs associated with bringing in artists of the quality of Maestro Jeffrey Tate.⁵³

One of the Nugent Report's recommendations that was not adopted but nevertheless confirmed the importance of SOSA's 'niche' Wagner program, proposed that the state opera companies should jointly commission productions or purchase them from Opera Australia or from overseas but should not individually undertake new mainstage ones. This

⁵² See Appendix 3.

⁵³ Major Performing Arts Inquiry. (1999). *Securing the Future*, p. 173. Retrieved from: <http://apo.org.au/research/securing-future-major-performing-arts-final-report>.

recommendation specifically exempted the ‘niche activities of The State Opera of South Australia that are designed to attract large [numbers of] overseas and interstate attendees’.⁵⁴

As far as immediate benefits of the 1998 *Ring* were concerned, a study conducted by the SA Centre for Economic Studies⁵⁵ and presented to the government in May 1999 provided a rigorous and reliable analysis of not only the economic impact of the production but also factors relevant to the potential for staging future cycles. Such surveys are politically useful but they are not always reliable for comparative purposes, since their methodology can vary from one production to another and even between one season of the same production and another. For example, Professor William B. Beyers of the University of Washington forecast an economic impact for the 2013 Seattle *Ring* of US\$39 million,⁵⁶ whereas four years earlier, the same production, in the same theatre, with the same number of patrons and similar ticket prices was assessed as generating an economic impact of just US\$9.5m.⁵⁷ However, the Adelaide study was certainly thorough and open to scrutiny, and it was of considerable use to the State Government. The key findings were that the event attracted almost 3600 new visitors to the State; the expenditure of those visitors amounted to an estimated \$9.5 million, and expenditure on *Ring* cycle tickets which could be considered to be new expenditure to the State was \$2.8 million. Total expenditure incurred by SORC in staging the event was \$7.8 million, of which \$5.2 million was within South Australia. Of this expenditure, approximately 43% could be considered to have been financed from external sources, such as ticket revenues and sponsorships from interstate and overseas. The 1998 *Ring* was estimated to have provided an economic impact to the State of the order of \$10 million (ie, net addition to the State’s GSP), and created of the order of 200 jobs measured as full-time equivalent positions, sustained over a year. These figures were lower than forecast in the 1996 anticipatory report, but nevertheless were impressive. The report concluded that the *Ring* was particularly successful in providing an economic boost to the State, and that each visitor contributed on average \$2,789 to the State’s GSP compared with a per visitor impact of around \$1,500 to \$1,600 for other special events held in South Australia in previous years.

⁵⁴ Recommendation 12.1.1. Major Performing Arts Inquiry Report p. 60.

⁵⁵ The SA Centre for Economic Studies comprised academics from The University of Adelaide and Flinders University. The report was prepared by the following researchers: Mr Kevin Kirchner, Senior Economist, SACES; Mr Barry Burgan, University of Adelaide and Research Associate, SACES; Mr Richard Trembath, Richard Trembath Research, with fieldwork for market research undertaken by Robyn Kunko Market Research.

⁵⁶ Seattle Opera Press Release, July 23, 2013. Retrieved from http://seattleopera.org/_downloads/press/releases/07232013_EconomicImpactRING.pdf.

⁵⁷ Warner, C. (2009, August 16). Seattle Opera predicts 9.5 million dollars economic benefits from the "Ring Cycle". *The Examiner*. Retrieved from: <http://www.examiner.com/article/seattle-opera-predicts-9-5-million-dollars-economic-benefits-from-the-ring-cycle>.

More than 96% of patrons indicated that they would definitely, or would likely recommend a future production of the *Ring* in Adelaide to their colleagues and friends.

An analysis of the tickets sold revealed that, on any single night, the audience consisted of 49% interstate visitors, 37% South Australians and 14% overseas visitors. Consequently, about 63% of the audience came from outside South Australia. Of the 14% who were international visitors, the majority were from New Zealand (51%), followed by the United States (22%) and the United Kingdom (14.6%). Although it had been speculated in 1995 that there would be many attendees from Asia, in fact there was only a small number – (0.7%) from Japan. 8.3% of international visitors were from Europe excluding the United Kingdom. Marketing and promotional shortcomings played a part in the small attendance from Asia, and the result for the 2004 *Ring* was rather better in this regard. Of the 49% of audience members who were from interstate in 1998, 50% came from New South Wales, whilst 26.7% came from Victoria. Total audience gender breakdown was 54.8% female and 45% male. 80% of the audience was over 50 years of age.

The Adelaide Festival Centre, opened in 1973 just ahead of the Sydney Opera House, underwent a major refurbishment in time for the 1998 *Ring*, with the government providing \$4 million for this purpose. Improvement of the acoustics of the Festival Theatre was a key objective. As with many opera houses, the stage was acoustically too reverberant and the auditorium (maximum seating 2,200) was too dry.⁵⁸ About 350 square metres of absorption was added to the stage area to control the reverberation there, and 250 square metres of absorption was added to the stalls to correct low frequency problems. Additional absorption was added to the rear walls of the Dress Circle and Grand Circle to reduce the focusing of sound back to the stage. Carpets were removed and replaced with wooden flooring. A LARES (Lexicon Acoustic Reinforcement and Enhancement System) was installed to correct acoustic imbalance and ‘dead spots’.⁵⁹ LARES uses microprocessors to control multiple loudspeakers and microphones placed around a performance space for the purpose of providing active acoustic treatment. The system was invented in Massachusetts in 1988 by engineers working at Lexicon Inc. In the Festival Theatre, six cardioid microphones were installed, as well as 288 loudspeakers. The control system allowed the selection of settings for opera, ballet or orchestra. Since reaction to sounds can be very much a personal,

⁵⁸ Griesinger, D. (1999). Recent Experiences with Electronic Acoustic Enhancement in Concert Halls and Opera Houses. Retrieved from www.lares-lexicon.com.

⁵⁹ *ibid*.

physiological response (and a psychological one after a listener has been informed that electronic sound enhancement is in place) the new system elicited a variety of reactions following the *Ring* performances. The critical response was overwhelmingly positive. One audience member wrote: ‘Generally the sound is a miracle, every harp glissando and thundering percussion glittering like electricity in the theatre’s new acoustic’.⁶⁰ Conductor Jeffrey Tate was of the opinion that ‘It’s state of the art. It adds reverberation, genuine life, to dead halls. It is the first system that does it for voices and orchestra without any sense of amplification. The system picks up sound waves and distributes them around the space more evenly. But if a singer has a small, ugly voice, it remains a small, ugly voice.’⁶¹ British author and critic Barry Millington, writing in *The Times* said: ‘A state-of-the-art acoustic enhancement system (LARES) delivered exceptional clarity. London’s major concert halls should investigate immediately’.⁶² Adelaide critic and *Ring* sceptic Elisabeth Silsbury took a contrary view.⁶³

The use of LARES generally (including in the Berlin State Opera and other international venues) has not been without controversy, usually for the psychological reasons mentioned above. Speight Jenkins of Seattle Opera, for instance, told me in Seattle in 1999 that he would not have a bar of it. Many mistook it for amplification,⁶⁴ as I think he did. It is worth remembering though that Wagner was acutely aware of the need to manipulate acoustics to achieve his desired ends. In the justly famous Bayreuth Festspielhaus (opened in pre-electronic times in 1876), he achieved this in various ways, including by using a stretched canvas ceiling, hollow wood and plaster columns on each side, a tiered amphitheatre modelled on ancient Greek theatres, wooden floors, lightly upholstered seats (originally just woven cane), and a sunken orchestra pit with reflective cowl which effectively blends the orchestral sound with the stage sound before both are projected into the auditorium. This physical manipulation of sound poses a challenge to conductors but the results are undeniably worth it.

⁶⁰ Purdon, Noel, (1999, February-March). *RealTime E-Zine*. Retrieved from: http://www.vaf.com.au/oem/articles/lares_rev.htm.

⁶¹ Tate, Jeffrey. (1999, July). Quoted in *Opera News* (New York).

⁶² Millington, Barry. (1998, November 24). *The Times*. Quoted in *Electronic Architecture Lares*. Retrieved from: <http://www.lares-lexicon.com/pdfs/adelaiderreviews.pdf>.

⁶³ Silsbury, Elizabeth. (February 1999), Gratefully received, but, op. cit.

⁶⁴ See Silsbury, Elizabeth, *ibid*, and also *State of Opera*, op. cit. p. 179. But for other views see Griesinger, D. *Recent experiences with electronic acoustic enhancement in concert halls and opera houses*, Retrieved from <http://www.davidgriesinger.com/icsv.pdf> , 8 May 2015; and Rosetto, J, *To research the latest methods in Orchestral and Operatic amplification with particular attention to operating a LARES system*. Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, retrieved from: https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/media/fellows/Rosetto_Jane_20021.pdf .

The first Adelaide *Ring* may have begun as an exercise in cultural tourism but it ended as a high quality artistic achievement. Michael Kennedy, biographer of Richard Strauss, Vaughan Williams, Elgar, Barbirolli and Walton, and author of *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, wrote in London's *Sunday Telegraph*: 'I count this among the finest stagings of the cycle I have heard and seen'.⁶⁵ I met Kennedy in Berlin a few years later and he was still talking enthusiastically about the Adelaide *Ring*. Tristram Cary in *The Australian* of 23 November 1998 observed that 'These *Ring* audiences are adoring every minute, every hour, and roaring like a grand final crowd at every curtain'.



4. *Götterdämmerung* Act III, immolation scene. Janis Martin as Brünnhilde. Photo Randy Larcombe.

However, not everyone adored Pierre Strosser's austere staging and design. Arts writer Maria Prerauer who, under her maiden name Wolkowsky, had sung Brünnhilde, Guttrune, a Norn and Gerhilde in Germany, Italy and Spain, objected to the fact that Brünnhilde did not leap into a funeral pyre at the end but merely sat contemplating a glow in the distance.⁶⁶

In my view, such quibbles missed the point of a thoughtful and often quite beautiful production. Since then, more avant-garde *Ring* productions - not least at Bayreuth - have

⁶⁵ Kennedy, Michael. (1998, December 13). London *Daily Telegraph*.

⁶⁶ Prerauer, Maria. (1998, December 8). Perverse cycle. *The Bulletin* p. 79. She said as much to me in the corridors of the Festival Theatre after the performance of *Götterdämmerung*.

made Strosser's *Ring* seem a model of respect for the composer's wishes.⁶⁷ John Slavin in *The Age* of 26 November 1998 was of the view that 'This event in Adelaide is going to prove a benchmark for the way we measure and think about, not just opera but the rich possibilities of art'.⁶⁸

By the time the curtain fell on the last act of *Götterdämmerung* on 12 December 1998, there was a pervading expectation in operatic circles that another *Ring* would be staged in Australia sooner rather than later. The State Opera of South Australia had the strongest claim to stage it, but companies in the eastern states also harboured ambitions. In May 2000 a pre-emptive announcement was made by Minister Laidlaw in Parliament.⁶⁹ The Minister told the House that a new *Ring* would be staged in Adelaide between 17 November and 12 December 2004, and that over 75% of the government subsidy would be met by the Commonwealth Government. She was reported in the Fairfax press as saying (with not a little Schadenfreude) that the Commonwealth funding recognised South Australia's emergence as a southern hemisphere home for Wagnerian opera, and that SA's Wagnerian coup ended Sydney's hopes of mounting its own *Ring* through Opera Australia and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. 'I would say the Federal Government was not interested in staging two Australian productions.'⁷⁰ A month later she told the Parliament: '... It is interesting to see that some other states were not able to negotiate as well as we did ... nor score as well with a coup such as Wagner's *Ring* as a national event of excellence in South Australia.'⁷¹ Thus, interstate rivalry continued to be a powerful motivation for staging the *Ring*. Commonwealth funding had been secured four-and-a-half years ahead of a new Adelaide production, but commitments for a revival were neither sought nor given. No one could deny that the prospect of a *Ring* in 2004 was a significant political win for South Australia. That, in the short-term at least, seemed to be what really mattered.

⁶⁷ Sabor, Rudolph (1997). Richard Wagner - *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Performance History. London: Phaidon Press, p. 205, sets Strosser's production in an historical context.

⁶⁸ Slavin, John. (1998, November 23). An awesome vision. *The Age*, p. 23.

⁶⁹ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2000). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, May 23, p. 1058.

⁷⁰ DeBelle, Penelope. (2000, May 11). Funding boost allows Adelaide into The Ring. *The Age*.

⁷¹ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2000). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, Estimates Committee B, June 15, p. 78.

CHAPTER 4

Administrative planning of the Adelaide *Ring* of 2004

On 11 February 1999, as work began on planning a second *Ring* for Adelaide, I offered Arts SA Executive Director and former SOSA Chairman Tim O'Loughlin a short memorandum entitled *A Possible Way Forward with the Ring*. At that time I was Director Projects in Arts SA and a member of the SOSA and SORC Boards, but this document was a personal memorandum based on my observations of the 1998 Adelaide *Ring* and *Rings* elsewhere, including at the 1998 Bayreuth Festival. I suggested that there were three imperatives attaching to a new production: the achievement of a high artistic standard; the attraction of about two-thirds of the audience from interstate and overseas, and a significant use of Australian content in terms of performers, production concepts and design. The use of an Australian producer and Australian production concept would, I suggested, ensure that a new Adelaide *Ring* had a distinctive quality likely to attract an international audience. I also ventured that an international conductor of world repute should be engaged and, if at all possible, this should be Jeffrey Tate. Tate's role in the success of the 1998 *Ring* had been crucial, and he had expressed interest in returning to South Australia to conduct a Haydn opera at the Barossa Music Festival in 2002 and either a single Wagner or Strauss opera in 2003 or 2004. In fact he did return in 2001 to conduct *Parsifal*, but when asked about conducting a new *Ring* he declined, asserting enigmatically that 'lightning doesn't strike twice'.¹

In respect of singers, I suggested that Australian and New Zealand singers should be employed to the greatest extent possible, whilst recognising that, inevitably, some of the main roles and covers would have to be filled by singers of other nationalities. I also suggested that it would be useful to seek the involvement of Eva Wagner-Pasquier (who had attended the 1998 *Ring* and had been of assistance to Bill Gillespie) in identifying desirable overseas singers and advising on artistic matters. I noted that on the demise of her father Wolfgang Wagner, she was the family member most likely to take over the Bayreuth Festival's on-going management which, more than a decade later, did come to pass although it was in tandem with her half-sister Katharina. For a management structure, I recommended an

¹ Nunn, Louise. (2000, July 24). Home production needs ring-in, *The Advertiser*, p. 27.

Adelaide-based team headed by the General Director of the State Opera reporting to the Ring Corporation Board, as in 1998. I felt that the *Ring* management team, which would initially concern itself with planning and coordination, should be kept small until closer to the production date when other members could be co-opted. Furthermore, I considered that the *Ring* team's operations should be independent of the mainstream operations of the State Opera, and that orchestral arrangements should follow the same pattern as for 1998, using the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra augmented by players drawn from elsewhere. That arrangement created, in effect, a special 'festival' orchestra. I noted that all of these proposals would assist collaborations with Seattle Opera, by which I meant exchanges of information, experience and artists; not necessarily co-productions.

In the event, a number of these recommendations came to fruition. The 2004 *Ring* had an Australian director and designers and an Australian production concept; there was a conductor of international repute (although it was Asher Fisch, not Tate), and the orchestral arrangements were as for 1998. Most of the singers were from Australia and New Zealand, and two-thirds of the audience did come from interstate and overseas. However, Eva Wagner-Pasquier was unavailable to assist with the selection of singers, and the General Director did not report to the Ring Corporation because that body was not revived for the new production. With a few exceptions, *Ring* preparations were not handled separately from the company's other commitments but were managed along with regular seasons, and no separate Artistic Director was appointed, which proved to be a crucial mistake. No links were established with Seattle Opera other than indirectly through the conductor Asher Fisch who would conduct Wagner's works for both companies.

My appointment as Director Projects in Arts SA was for a fixed term of 22 months from January 1999 until November 2000, and my task was to plan and establish a program of internationalisation for the South Australian arts industry and a program of arts partnerships and projects across South Australian government agencies.² The former focused particularly on relationships with Seattle which I visited in June 1999 for discussions with some twenty institutions, including the Mayor's office, the Seattle Arts Commission and Seattle Opera. Earlier that year I had arranged a meeting for O'Loughlin with Mayor Schell in Sydney when the Mayor was there on a brief visit. An arts exchange agreement between South Australia and Seattle was formalised in July/August 1999 and Minister Laidlaw and O'Loughlin visited

² O'Loughlin, Tim. (1998, December 2). Letter of offer to Peter Bassett.

Seattle in September 1999 to inaugurate the relationship - a visit which the Minister later described as successful in every respect.³ On my return to Canberra at the end of 2000, I was retained by Arts SA as a consultant for a further twelve months in order to consolidate the Seattle relationship and facilitate exchanges of arts practitioners and other personnel.

The *Ring* and Seattle – the missing link

Minister Laidlaw was keen to advance the Seattle relationship as much as possible and, to this end had approved funding for a program of visits, exchanges and dialogues. A potentially fruitful area of cooperation was the financing, production and marketing of the *Ring* and other works by Wagner, about which Seattle Opera had acquired a great deal of experience. SOSA general director Stephen Phillips was mildly interested but, unlike Bill Gillespie, he had no connections with Seattle Opera's general director Speight Jenkins and, as far as I could see, was unlikely to develop any. This was despite the fact that Phillips told reporter Miriam Cosic of *The Australian* in February 2000: 'If you look at the model of Seattle, which is something our government has been looking at closely, they have managed to establish themselves as a *Ring* city, or a Wagner centre, and they reap considerable long-term benefits from that'.⁴ In the first project funding round under the new exchange arrangements there were some excellent submissions from visual and theatre arts applicants, including from the State Theatre Company of South Australia;⁵ however there was nothing at all from the State Opera of South Australia. Phillips was adamant that he did not need to know anything about how Seattle Opera went about its artistic or management business. Having spent three months on secondment to the Canadian Opera Company in 1987, he considered that he was familiar with the way opera companies worked in North America. He said that he respected Jenkins's achievement in establishing Seattle as a Wagner city, but he believed that if SOSA wanted to do something similar, it had to proceed in its own way and in a manner that was relative and relevant to Adelaide's place in the world.⁶ The upshot was that opportunities for information-sharing and other forms of interaction were never explored. The twelve month period leading to the new Seattle *Ring* production of 2001 would have offered an ideal opportunity for SOSA to have someone on the ground because it marked the beginning of Seattle Opera's 'Ring 3', scheduled for revivals in 2005, 2009 and 2013 – which duly happened with considerable success.

³ Laidlaw, The Hon. Diana, Minister for the Arts. (1999, October 1). Letter to Peter Bassett.

⁴ Cosic, Miriam. (2000, February 25). Adelaide re-enters Wagner cycle. *The Australian*, p. 9.

⁵ Arts SA. (2001, April). Brochure on the Seattle/South Australia Arts Exchange Program.

⁶ See Appendix 18.

Conductor Asher Fisch's engagements with SOSA and Seattle Opera could have been, but never were, used to facilitate links between, say, South Australian and Seattle music, sponsorship and marketing personnel. State Government funding was available to make this happen but it was never sought. Fisch was certainly open to the idea and was a willing ambassador for South Australia. In July 2004, for example, the *Seattle Times* reported:

... he is about to spend four months in Australia, where three cycles of Wagner's four-opera *Ring* will take place in Adelaide. 'It's my first complete *Ring*,' says Fisch, 'and I'm very excited about it - a good cast, and the sets are amazing. You should come!' If he needs any extra musicians, he may even be able to persuade some Seattle players to follow him to Adelaide. Wagner Down Under, anyone?⁷

Fisch conducted *Lohengrin*, *Parsifal*, an International Wagner Competition and the *Ring* for Seattle Opera. Nine years later, Australians Stuart Skelton (Adelaide's 2004 Siegmund), and Daniel Sumegi (Adelaide's 1998 Hagen) performed in the 2013 Seattle *Ring* conducted by Fisch, but by that time their engagements had no connection with or value for SOSA. In 2014, a decade after the Adelaide *Ring* which he conducted with great success, Fisch was appointed Principal Conductor of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. He has not yet returned to conduct in Adelaide.

Phillips knew that Gillespie had had long-standing connections with Speight Jenkins and his predecessor Glynn Ross and had once explored the possibility of hiring the Seattle *Ring* production for Adelaide. However, as far as Phillips was concerned, the American years were in the past, and he was now looking elsewhere for inspiration, including to the English National Opera (ENO) where he had worked briefly in 1987. The possibility of a co-production with the ENO was raised by Phillips in discussions with O'Loughlin,⁸ but the latter was sceptical about the value of co-productions and, in any event, felt that the ENO's plans for its new *Ring*, conducted by Paul Daniel⁹ and directed by Phyllida Lloyd, were too far advanced. ENO concert performances of the *Ring* operas were given at the Barbican between 2001 and 2003, and the staged production opened with *Das Rheingold* in February 2004. The complete *Ring* was performed at the London Coliseum in 2005 and attracted generally disparaging reviews. *The Guardian's* was typical: 'Phyllida Lloyd's *Ring* is near its

⁷ Bargreen, Melinda. (2004, July 25). A happy day for Seattle musicians: Asher Fisch returns. *The Seattle Times*. Retrieved from: <http://community.seattletimes.nwsource.com/archive/?date=20040725&slug=fisch25>.

⁸ Phillips, Stephen. (2000, July 28). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 11.

⁹ As well as being ENO's music director, Paul Daniel became principal conductor of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra from 2007 until 2013, when he was succeeded at WASO by Asher Fisch.

end, thank heavens'.¹⁰ It was just as well therefore that SOSA had not entered into a co-production arrangement with the ENO. The possibility of another co-production was raised in 2000 when consideration was given to engaging Hungarian conductor Iván Fischer. Fischer's agent confirmed his client's in-principle interest in the Adelaide *Ring*, and asked whether this might become a co-production with Lyon Opera where Fischer had just been appointed music director. Phillips's response this time was more cautious, since he felt that European audiences might prefer to wait until the production appeared on their own doorstep rather than going to see it in Adelaide. However, he was prepared to consider an early cash injection from Lyon and agreement to a first staging in Adelaide,¹¹ and he noted that Lyon Opera would be a good match as long as the stages were compatible. Acting on Phillips's behalf, I advised Fischer's agent that while planning to date had been on the assumption that SOSA would be the sole producer, and government funding had been provided on this basis, co-productions could take various forms and we would be happy to explore some options. I said that we were committed to an Australian production/design team but were looking internationally for the conductor. I suggested that that might be a useful starting point for discussion. I added that Phillips would be happy to travel to Europe to meet with Mr Fischer if this were desirable. No further proposals were forthcoming from Fischer's side and, on 6 October, I advised his agent that we had decided in favour of another conductor for the project.¹²

The first planning steps

In Arts SA, day-to-day responsibility for overseeing SOSA's operations lay with my colleague the Director Lead Agencies and Planning, Jeff Andary. The reality though was that *Ring* policy planning was closely managed by Tim O'Loughlin himself because, in the early stages, it was not at all certain that it would be SOSA or a specially created entity that would oversee the production of a new *Ring*. O'Loughlin's personal interest in the opera company and the *Ring* (which Minister Laidlaw jokingly said she had once thought was his sole interest in life) was an extension of his former roles as co-architect of the 1998 production

¹⁰ Holden, Anthony. (2005, April 10). To Valhalla and back. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/apr/10/classicalmusicandopera1>.

¹¹ See Appendix 11. This was a formula which Phillips pursued again ten years later when the possibility of a new *Ring* production was being canvassed, with an injection of private funds from Victoria and a proposal to open in Adelaide followed by performances in Melbourne (see Chapter 9).

¹² Email exchanges between Peter Bassett and Stephen Phillips, and with Jennifer Spencer of Harrison Parrott between 27 July and 6 October 2000.

and Chairman of SOSA. Both Gillespie and Phillips regarded some of his interventions as intrusive.¹³

The Steel Inquiry and report of 1999

The Ring Consortium established by Minister Laidlaw on the last night of the 1998 *Ring*, was first convened on 4 February 1999, and it commissioned Adelaide Festival board member and former artistic director Anthony Steel¹⁴ to produce a report outlining a management model for a new *Ring*. In many ways this was a curious appointment since, although Steel had had extensive experience as the Artistic Director of arts festivals, he had had no involvement with *Ring* productions and only indirect experience of opera productions generally. However he did have the confidence of Minister Laidlaw. In 2006 Steel would again be engaged on *Ring* matters, this time as a consultant for a feasibility study conducted by the accounting firm of Ernst & Young at the initiative of the State Labor Government.¹⁵ Steel's brief in 1999 was to progress the project 'to the stage where the first significant funding decisions need to be made', and his detailed terms of reference, prepared by Arts SA,¹⁶ were spelt out as follows:¹⁷

Artistic model: the key requirement is to identify how the *Ring* would actually be produced, including consideration of: co-productions versus going it alone; sequence of appointment of key artistic personnel; process of engaging other personnel through costing and hire of designers and technical staff; provision of ongoing support for artistic personnel. The key criterion is that the new *Ring* must be of a standard to attract an international audience and international media attention on the same scale as the forthcoming Seattle production. In broad terms the production will need to be at least as interesting as the Châtelet *Ring*, and the casting would need to be one notch above that of the 1998 Adelaide *Ring*.

Management model: it will be necessary to identify a model which makes best use of the State's arts management resources without compromising the core businesses of

¹³ Gillespie, Bill. (1999, September 10). Letter to Peter Bassett referring, *inter alia*, to political interference in the artistic process. Appendix 17. Also Phillips, S. (2010, July 28). Email to Peter Bassett referring to O'Loughlin's insistence in 2000 that Neil Armfield be approached to direct the 2004 *Ring*. Appendix 20.

¹⁴ Anthony Steel was a board member of the Adelaide Festival 1999-2002, and Festival artistic director 1974, 1976, 1978, 1984 and 1986. He had preceded Nicholas Heyward (CEO of the Adelaide Festival 1997-2001) as director of the Brisbane Biennial International Music Festival.

¹⁵ See Chapter 9.

¹⁶ General Director's report to the SORC board. (1999, February 25), p. 5.

¹⁷ Steel, Anthony. (1999, July). *Another Ring for Adelaide?* Report prepared for Arts SA and the *Ring* Consortium, Appendices 9 and 10.

the organisations in which those resources are located. The development of this model should also identify Australian resources outside of the State where gaps exist within the State or where management resources could be obtained at a higher quality or on a more cost-effective basis. The legal organisational vehicle will also need to be determined.

Timelines: it is assumed that the principal factor determining timelines would be the availability of key artistic personnel. It is expected that the consultant will assemble lists of possible conductors and directors from which the preferred choices will be selected.

Budgets: it will not be possible to develop precise budgets in advance of finalising the creative concept. However, it will be necessary to provide some indication to both governments [State and Commonwealth] once the three tasks above have been progressed.

In preparing his report, Steel conducted interviews with administrators, conductors, artists' agents and other relevant people in Australia, the United Kingdom and France, including Eva Wagner-Pasquier (then of the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence); Lord Harewood (inter alia former Adelaide Festival artistic director and chairman/managing director of the ENO); Nicholas Snowman of Glyndebourne; Nicholas Payne of English National Opera; Anthony Freud of Welsh National Opera; Rudolf Berger of Festival du Rhin, Strasbourg; seven London artists' managements; conductor Mark Elder; Wagnerian singers John Tomlinson and Anne Evans; Moffatt Oxenbould of Opera Australia; Leo Schofield of the Sydney Festival, and members of the newly formed Adelaide Ring Consortium. He received a copy of my memorandum of 11 February 1999. A full copy of his report delivered to Arts SA in July 1999 is provided in Appendices 9 and 10. Its conclusions may be summarised as follows:

- For pragmatic marketing reasons alone, a new production makes more sense than either another hired one or a co-production.
 - Another hired production would probably be counter-productive at the box office. The novelty of a new production with highest standards of casting and performance was more likely to attract at least as many visitors as in 1998. A co-production with English National Opera was canvassed but was ruled out because ENO's plans were too far advanced. In any case, the consensus was

that producers should be wary of co-productions, as they often led to considerable, perhaps fatal, compromises.

- There are a sufficient number of conductors of the requisite experience and quality likely to be interested in conducting the *Ring* in Adelaide.
 - Most of the ‘top names’ would not contemplate spending so long away from their regular jet set existence.
 - Twelve internationally prominent conductors were identified for consideration.
- The conductor, who is effectively artistic director for the project, must be engaged first.
 - Most people consulted applauded Adelaide’s strong preference for an Australian director (and designer).
 - Conductors would want to have a say in the final choice of director since the latter would inevitably bring a certain aesthetic standpoint.
 - The director should know the work or at least have a fairly intimate knowledge of Wagner, and have a familiarity with the German language.
 - Many of those consulted recommended giving the director and designer a clear schedule of technical limitations, such as the maximum number of trucks, lighting bars and flylines, the need for a unit set with variations, and the amount of time available in the Festival Theatre.
- The casting needs to be on a higher level than in 1998.
 - Some conductors would probably take on casting responsibilities themselves in conjunction with their assistant conductor. Others might want a casting consultant.
 - Performance dates should not be fixed until it is clear who the Brünnhilde, Wotan, Siegfried and Alberich would be.
- Since it is impractical in the Adelaide context for the operas to be introduced in performance one at a time over several years, the production of the tetralogy should be mounted in one fell swoop.
 - If a decision to go ahead could be taken by the end of 1999, it should be possible to achieve a performance date of November/December 2003 or even March 2003, depending on the availability of conductor, director and principal singers. This should be known by mid-2000, giving at least two years for the

general management of the production to get under way before the final six months of rehearsal and performance.

- The most appropriate legal organisational vehicle would be an independent Public Corporation, hiring SOSA to mount the production.
 - The board needs to have adequate oversight, help raise sponsorship and, if required, provide voting rights for the main funding bodies. The Commonwealth Government does not want any representatives on the board, or even to nominate any directors, as they prefer to be as far removed from decision-making as possible.
 - It would be open to the State Government to at least nominate a board director. A minority of SOSA board members should have places on the Ring Corporation board; otherwise, board members could be drawn from the private sector, including a community representative, and several business people to help with sponsorship.
 - The board should, like the last one, have an independent chairman.
 - The Ring Consortium in its existing form could be disbanded on the appointment of the board.
- The most satisfactory way of sharing the workload would be for SOSA to contract out a large number of responsibilities to other South Australian arts organisations, working together in collegiate fashion.
- It appeared possible to draw up a realistic budget where expenditure could be covered from the various available sources of income.
- The evidence suggests that there would be sufficient interest from overseas and interstate to attract significant visitor numbers again to Adelaide.

Steel recommended that State and Commonwealth governments be asked for financial commitments by the end of 1999, including a submission to the Commonwealth in conjunction with the Nugent report which was due to be presented in September that year. He also recommended that, because of the paramount importance of ensuring a strong artistic team and principal singers of the highest quality, it was absolutely essential for the availability of preferred people to be ascertained without delay. He anticipated that there would be two revivals following the initial staging, all within a period of ten to twelve years. He also foreshadowed rentals of the Adelaide production to other cities, and suggested that Asia was the most likely region for such a venture, even though no cities had emerged so far

as strong candidates. Steel observed that there might be a concern that rental of the production in the Asia/Pacific region would reduce opportunities for deeper penetration of the Japanese market for the Adelaide cycles, a market which it was generally felt had not been tackled vigorously enough for the 1998 performances. However, he believed that the rental option was certainly worth pursuing in the interests of possible budget economies.

He also envisaged an administrative arrangement in which SOSA staff members would include:

- Artistic administrator, the *Ring* – a crucial appointment since the general director would have continuing responsibility for the normal overall running of SOSA. A very experienced person would be required to support the general director virtually throughout the period, and to play a vital role monitoring all aspects of the progress of the production, dealing with the needs of the artistic team, taking responsibility for contracts and negotiations with agents, acting as company manager, and monitoring rehearsals. [Note: It would have been more appropriate to designate the holder of this position ‘Artistic Director’, since the duties envisaged were essentially those held by Bill Gillespie, Artistic Director for the 1998 *Ring*. ‘Artistic Administrator’ is usually a position subordinate to that of ‘Artistic Director’.]
- Sponsorship consultant.
- Assistant production manager for the last six months.
- Finance assistant (or the hire of an accounting firm to ensure necessary arm’s length financial control; or the Ring Corporation could employ a part-time administrator to look after the money).

He suggested that marketing be put out to tender, with both the Adelaide Festival and the Adelaide Festival Centre being likely bidders.

A Project Team, overseen by the Ring Corporation and chaired by the General Director of SOSA, would include the following representation and responsibilities:

- SOSA - production matters, artistic concerns, sponsorship, and overall responsibility.
- ASO – orchestra.

- Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT) – venue, catering, ticketing, set building (even if this required an amendment to the SOSA Act, which currently required them to put such work out to competitive tender)¹⁸.
- Australian Major Events – the ‘visitor experience’ and assistance with overseas marketing.
- Adelaide Festival or AFCT or another body - marketing.

The gulf between recommendations and reality

Anthony Steel’s comprehensive and detailed report, summarised above, ended up having little bearing on what actually happened with the 2004 *Ring*. The only production outcomes that had anything in common with Steel’s recommendations were:

- The production was new rather than hired.
- The director had an intimate knowledge of the work.
- The *Ring* was done in its entirety rather than piecemeal, and
- There was significant – indeed increased – interest from interstate and overseas visitors.

In virtually all other respects the Steel report was ignored by SOSA management.

Asher Fisch, the conductor appointed in September 2000, had not been one of the twelve candidates on Steel’s list although he was known to Australian audiences, having conducted the Melbourne, Queensland and West Australian Symphony Orchestras. Opera Australia had invited him to conduct for them in 2002, subject to finding mutually convenient dates.¹⁹

Phillips had already approached Australian conductor Simone Young about conducting the 2004 *Ring*, but she declined in June/July 2000 because of her impending appointment as Music Director of Opera Australia.²⁰ Young had not been on Steel’s list of possible conductors either.²¹ Steel’s observation that the conductor would effectively be the artistic director of the project was a curious one since this usually happened only in the case of major festivals like Salzburg where celebrity conductors (Karajan comes to mind) might exercise an

¹⁸ In fact the SOSA Act did not require scenery building by competitive tender, although the State Supply Board exercised rigorous control over such matters in respect of Government departments and instrumentalities.

¹⁹ This information was provided by his London agent at the time of our first exchange of emails.

²⁰ Nunn, Louise. (2000, July 24). Home production needs ring-in. *The Advertiser*.

²¹ The possibility of Simone Young’s appointment as Music Director of the Australian Opera/Opera Australia had been put to her in 1995 in circumstances described in Oxenbould, M. (2005). *Timing is everything – A life backstage at the opera*. Sydney, NSW: ABC Books, p. 608. Her appointment took effect in 2001.

unusual degree of influence, or in opera companies in which the company's permanent Artistic Director was also a conductor of note.

The stage director who was engaged for 2004, Elke Neidhardt,²² was chosen in advance of the conductor, not the other way around as Steel had advocated. She had not been on Steel's list either. Phillips had had Neidhardt in mind for the director's position at least since 1999 and probably from as early as 1996 when he had appointed her to the short-lived position of Artistic Adviser for the 1998 *Ring*. At Phillips's suggestion I wrote to Neidhardt on 19 July 1996, inviting her to speak at the *Weekend with the Ring* symposium in Adelaide planned for 26-28 September 1997. In a follow-up letter I wrote: 'If you agree, it would be of great interest to hear you speak at one of the hourly-sessions on your vision for the *Ring*. In other words, if you were commissioned to create a brand new production, how would you go about it, what would be your concept, and what would you want to bring out that other directors had not.'²³ She entitled her talk '*In medias res*', and she focused on the practical aspects of being 'in the midst of things' directing a *Ring* cycle. She explored the reasons for the continuing and seemingly growing fascination in the work worldwide, fantasised on a future production, speculated on audience expectations in Australia and overseas, and gave some facts on vocal and financial requirements.²⁴ In retrospect, it was the perfect job application, although she pretended otherwise and later told journalist Penelope DeBelle: 'I never thought I would be given a *Ring*, nor did I particularly hanker for it. I didn't think it would come my way, frankly, nor did I seek the kind of commitment that is necessary for it. ... I think he [Phillips] probably asked "Would I be interested?" and I laughed it off.'²⁵

Elke Neidhardt's involvement with opera and directing before coming to Australia had been during a brief period as assistant director at Zürich State Opera in 1964, and on festival productions of operas in Aix-en-Provence, Amsterdam, Salzburg and Vienna. Otherwise her experience had been in acting on stage and in film and television. Most of her stage work had been in Vienna where she performed in plays at the Theater in der Josefstadt, including *Uncle Vanya* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*,²⁶ but she continued with television in Australia

²² Elke Neidhardt (1941-2013). She became an Australian citizen in 2007.

²³ Bassett, Peter. (1996, September 20). Letter to Elke Neidhardt.

²⁴ Neidhardt itemised these elements of her talk in a Fax to me of 17 March 1997.

²⁵ DeBelle, Penelope. (2004, November 8). She tells it like it is. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/She-tells-it-like-it-is/2004/11/05/1099547371359.html?oneclick=true>.

²⁶ After completing her training at the State University of Music and Performing Arts in Stuttgart, she worked in Aix-en-Provence, Amsterdam and Zürich before settling in Vienna where she performed in plays and appeared in television series and in film.

after meeting, and in 1967 marrying, Christopher Muir, an innovative Australian television producer. Muir was one of the first of the ABC producers to bring opera performances to the television screen, sometimes from stage performances of the Australian Elizabethan Trust (which became The Australian Opera after 1970) but often from especially created studio adaptations. In the 1960s, the ABC catered for a burgeoning taste for opera by showing as many as ten major works each year.²⁷ Between 1956 and 1975, the ABC created or recorded 58 opera productions for television.²⁸ Muir's own studio work included Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* in 1957; Britten's *Albert Herring* featuring Victor Franklin and Neil Warren-Smith (1959); Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* starring June Bronhill and Brian Hansford (1962);²⁹ *Simone Boccanegra* featuring John Shaw with a cast of 50 singers plus two horses, a greyhound and a flock of pigeons (1963),³⁰ and *Peter Grimes* with Ronald Dowd and Lauris Elms (1965). In 1976 the Australian Opera's General Director, Danish musician and administrator John Winther, brokered an agreement with the ABC to record and televise six productions that year. Winther's view was that television broadcasts would bring these works into homes across the nation, help to justify the federal subsidy and affirm the company's national status.³¹ There was therefore a keen awareness of the nexus between television and opera when, in 1977, Neidhardt was offered a job by the Australian Opera as resident director, a position she held until 1990. Stephen Phillips was the Senior Stage Manager for the Australian Opera between 1976 and 1982 and knew her from that time.

Muir became Director of ABC TV Drama in 1982. After his resignation in 1985, Sandra Levy was appointed to this position before becoming Director of Television until 2005 after which she moved to commercial television. In a noticeable reaction to the previous production policy, Levy shifted the focus of ABC drama 'towards the more popular end of the spectrum and away from programming regarded as more esoteric, eccentric or specialized'.³² Consequently the ABC, which had once filmed just about anything that moved at the Sydney Opera House, did not film or broadcast the 1998 *Ring* (the first to be staged in Australia since 1913); nor did it film or broadcast the 2001 Australian premiere performances

²⁷ Inglis, Kenneth Stanley. (2006). *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission 1932-83*. Victoria: Melbourne University Press, p. 207.

²⁸ ABC Television Opera Productions. Retrieved from:
<http://www.abctvgorehill.com.au/assets/contributions/abc-tv-operas.htm>.

²⁹ Available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXXFzY6hr2c>.

³⁰ Neidhardt would give dachshunds walk-on parts in her *Tannhäuser* of 1998.

³¹ Oxenbould, M. (2005). *Timing is everything – A life backstage at the opera*. Sydney, NSW: ABC Books, p. 286.

³² Newcombe, Horace, ed. *Encyclopedia of Television*. London and New York: Routledge, 2nd ed. 2013, p. 181.

of *Parsifal*, or the 2004 *Ring* (the first Australian production), for which it has been roundly criticised. Reviewer Roger Covell, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald, observed: 'There seems little doubt that [ABC] director of television, Sandra Levy, has set her face against opera telecasts and recordings. Opera Australia's proposal of the popular Baz Luhrmann staging of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is said to have drawn from the ABC the usual excuse of shortage of funds. There is also a distinct shortage of will.'³³

In 1977 English opera administrator Peter Hemmings was appointed General Manager of the Australian Opera. He had come from a similar position in Scottish Opera which, in 1971, had staged its first complete production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.³⁴ When Hemmings took over in Sydney he was extremely keen to produce Australia's first home-grown *Ring*. The Australian Opera's Music Director, Richard Bonyngne, while not opposing the idea in principle, did not believe that Australia possessed singers who could perform the *Ring* at that time. Nevertheless, Hemmings went ahead, and there were discussions with Mark Elder as the intended *Ring* conductor, and with David Pountney, Scottish Opera's chief producer. Plans were ongoing, dates were considered, budgets planned, and casting discussed. Designs were prepared by Maria Bjørnson. However it all came unstuck when relations between Hemmings and Bonyngne deteriorated over a variety of issues, and the Australian Opera went through a series of management and financial crises. Peter Hemmings left prematurely in 1979, and proposals for a staged *Ring* were abandoned for the time being, to be replaced by a succession of concert performances in Sydney and Melbourne.³⁵ There were other Australian Opera Wagner performances from the 1970s onwards: *Tannhäuser* had been performed in 1973 and 1974; *Parsifal* was done in concert with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1977; *The Flying Dutchman* was staged the same year and was repeated in 1978 along with *Die Meistersinger* (conducted by Mark Elder and directed by David Pountney) which was itself repeated in 1979. In 1983 came a production of *Die Walküre* followed in 1984 by *Das Rheingold*, both being directed by Andrew Sinclair who was Principal Resident Director (1983-85). However, plans for a full *Ring* were abandoned half way through for artistic

³³ Covell, Roger. (2004, November 25). A brilliant Ring, but don't expect a DVD. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/Arts/A-brilliant-Ring-but-dont-expect-a-DVD/2004/11/24/1101219610487.html>.

³⁴ Scottish Opera's 1971 *Ring* had been directed by the company's German-born Director of Productions, Peter Ebert and conducted by Alexander Gibson. Top price tickets for this successful, sold-out *Ring* featuring (at different times) Helga Dernesch and Berit Lindholm as Brünnhilde, David Ward as Wotan and Ticho Parly as Siegfried, were £100 for a box for the whole cycle. Seats in the circle went for £35 per cycle; some seats in the stalls cost £18, and balcony seats could be had for as little as £1.40. See Elder, Dorothy-Grace. (1971, November 9). Staging the Ring proves a Wagnerian operation: *The Glasgow Herald*, p. 10.

³⁵ Oxenbould, M. (2005). *Timing is everything – A life backstage at the opera*, op.cit. p. 299ff.

reasons. ‘Wagner’ had certainly been in the air when Neidhardt came to work for the Australian Opera. However, the reality of being a resident director in training meant that most of her time was spent restaging other people’s productions. Nevertheless, she was able to co-direct (with Munich-based August Everding) *Lohengrin* for Victoria State Opera in 1985, and then revive it for the Australian Opera in Sydney in 1987. After Michael Hampe’s production of *Die Meistersinger* of 1988 (conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras), she left Australia to become Principal Resident Director and Director of Productions at Oper der Stadt Köln where Hampe was Intendant. She was at Cologne from 1990 until 1997³⁶ and initially assisted with, and then restaged, three complete cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and later assisted with and restaged productions by Harry Kupfer and Michael Hampe. She directed *Tannhäuser* for Opera Australia in 1998.

Neidhardt might not have been on Steel’s list, but Australian theatre director Neil Armfield was, and I expressed the view to O’Loughlin in July 1999 that an Elder/Armfield combination could be a likely winner. This was so even though Armfield’s only experience of Wagner at that time had been his successful *Tristan und Isolde* of 1990, designed for the concert hall of the Sydney Opera House. Its single set had imposed a scenic and conceptual discipline, a quality that was noticeably missing from his fragmented Melbourne *Ring* of 2013. In 2000 O’Loughlin insisted that Phillips sound out Armfield about directing the 2004 production, to which Armfield replied that he didn’t know if he wanted to give up a year of his life to direct a *Ring*,³⁷ and so the enquiry proceeded no further. The *Ring*, it seemed, was not a work that interested Armfield, or, at least, it was not something he felt able to stage in a meaningfully dramatic way. He admitted as much publicly in 2013 when he said ‘I never had any directorial ambitions. It seemed to me such a musical thing – basically unstageable.’³⁸ When asked by journalists about rumours that Armfield had been considered to direct the new *Ring*, Phillips told them in July 2000 that ‘There are a number of obvious choices for direction. Neil Armfield would have to be part of that group of people’.³⁹ Neidhardt, who was aware of the approach to Armfield and referred to it in comments to the media,⁴⁰ was to spend four years, not one, working on the *Ring* – but then, her role expanded well beyond stage directing.

³⁶ Hampe stepped down in 1995. American conductor James Conlon was music director at the time, and Simone Young was his assistant.

³⁷ Phillips, Stephen. (2010, July 28). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 20.

³⁸ Paget, Clive. (2013, November 17). Neil Armfield: One Ring to rule them all? *Limelight*. Retrieved from: <http://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/Article/364533,neil-armfield-one-ring-to-rule-them-all.aspx>.

³⁹ Nunn, Louise. (2000, July 24) Home production needs ring-in. *The Advertiser*.

⁴⁰ Litson, Jo. (2004, August). Ring of confidence. *Limelight*, p. 32.

Instead of the conductor having a say in the choice of director as Steel had recommended, here the director had a say in selecting the conductor. Neidhardt had seen Fisch conducting *Parsifal* in Vienna and had approved of him.⁴¹ In her address to the second *Weekend with the Ring* symposium in Adelaide on 5-7 September 2003, she even suggested (in Fisch's presence) that she had been responsible for his appointment. This was an overstatement but it implied, as no doubt she intended, that the choice of director, rather than conductor, had been the primary consideration. Neidhardt had not always enjoyed an easy relationship with conductors, and there was a much publicised falling out with French conductor Philippe Auguin over *Tannhäuser* in Sydney in 1998, which had resulted in director and conductor exchanging personal insults, lawyers' letters and, in the end, not speaking to one other, despite the fact that Auguin had been suggested to Opera Australia's management by Neidhardt after she had seen him conducting in Europe.⁴² Moffatt Oxenbould, who was OA's Artistic Director at the time, said he was surprised that Neidhardt had become so inflexible and autocratic and was unwilling to appreciate the musical problems that her concept caused the conductor.⁴³ She certainly had a strong inclination to take 'uppity' conductors down a peg, telling one journalist: '[Conductors] are all egomaniacs ... just look at the record covers of any of these big conductors. It's all these poses, they have infinite power. You stand there in front of a band of a hundred people and they've got to do what you say.'⁴⁴ She approved of Asher Fisch though, because he was 'everything a conductor should and should not be. He is not a "maestro", seeking to be elevated above the rest of the production team [I]initially he wasn't here enough for my liking', but he had made amends by being 'funny, charming and laid back as well as a very good cook'.⁴⁵ While the stage director-designate had been allowed to play a very influential role in the choice of a conductor for the 2004 *Ring*, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra was not consulted at all, and played no part in the selection process.

Other contradictions between what Steel had recommended in his report and what actually happened were equally stark. The performance dates were announced before the production team and principal artists were engaged, and the designers were not given clear guidelines as

⁴¹ Phillips, Stephen. (2000, August 7). Email to Peter Bassett.

⁴² Auguin replaced another conductor who had withdrawn.

⁴³ Oxenbould, M. (2005). *Timing is everything – A life backstage at the opera*, p. 654-5.

⁴⁴ Nicholson, Anne Maria. (2013, November 25). Acclaimed Australian opera and theatre director dies aged 72. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-26/theatre-director-elke-neidhardt-dies-at-72/5117428>.

⁴⁵ Debelles, Penelope. (2004, November 8). She tells it like it is. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/She-tells-it-like-it-is/2004/11/05/1099547371359.html?oneclick=true>.

to limitations on the size of stage sets - an oversight that was to have both budgetary and political repercussions. Casting was done almost entirely by the general director and the stage director. I handled most of the negotiations with agents and the preparation of contracts (but not the contracts of the conductor, director and designers which were handled by the general director and his office administrator, Debra Pahl, who also became Ring Company Manager). The conductor, Asher Fisch, played only a minor role in casting. He auditioned just three singers for two roles while he was in Europe, and one singer for a secondary role in Adelaide. Casting consultants were not used.

Far from being 'in place', the budget went through numerous revisions, moving from an initial estimate of \$11.7 million in 1999, to one of \$9.3 million in 2000, to \$13 million in advice to artists' agents in 2001, to \$12.59 in February 2004, to \$14.2 million in April 2004, to \$15.3 million in May 2004, to a final figure of \$15.14 million. Not surprisingly, the uncertainty and frequency of budget adjustments had political repercussions. When no separate position of Artistic Director was created, some tasks were delegated to me in the years when I was part-time⁴⁶ Artistic Administrator. Financial control was not kept at arm's length but was managed by SOSA's Finance Director (and Phillips's deputy) Nigel Bray, while he was also managing the financial operations of regular opera seasons. He took on a casual employee to assist him at certain times. Marketing was not put out to tender, and no project team as such was created. Contrary to Steel's assumption, there would be no revivals of the 2004 *Ring*. Despite some initial optimism, no overseas rentals of the production were forthcoming, principally because of the size and complexity of the production design (see Chapter 8).

Proposals for a new *Ring* management structure, and questions of confidence

Talk in 1999 of a re-structured corporate entity to replace the old SORC was regarded with suspicion by State Opera management. As one of the six members⁴⁷ of the Ring Consortium, Phillips was aware of the terms of reference prepared by Arts SA for Anthony Steel's inquiry, and he was also aware of O'Loughlin's confidence in the Adelaide Festival's General Manager Nicholas Heyward as an event manager (see Chapter 3). In his report, Steel observed that the Ring Corporation had worked well for 1998 and that it was not necessary to

⁴⁶ I was part-time Artistic Administrator in theory but full-time in practice.

⁴⁷ Effectively five, since one was a Canberra-based Commonwealth representative who was less concerned with SA inter-agency relationships and local management structures. The fifth was from the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, which was not a South Australian instrumentality, and his focus was chiefly on orchestral services.

look beyond that model. However, he saw merit in SORC becoming an independent body rather than remaining as a subsidiary of SOSA – a recommendation that had already been floated by the Meldrum review in 1998,⁴⁸ only to be rejected by Minister Laidlaw. Steel's justification for this change was that, even though SOSA would have the principal role in managing the multi-million dollar production, it should be protected from ultimate responsibility for adverse financial outcomes. An independent Ring Corporation, he suggested, would have no parent body onto which to pass responsibility for its losses. This reasoning overlooked the fact that the State Government would have to stand behind any statutory corporation, however described, and cover its debts. Steel proposed that the new corporation should receive subsidies and sponsorships and hire SOSA to produce the *Ring*, and that SOSA in turn should contract out any or all of marketing, scenery building, box office, accounting, accommodation and travel arrangements. This was comparable with O'Loughlin's 1997 recommendation that while SOSA should commission the creative team, manage the production budget and handle all artistic operations, the Adelaide Festival should manage marketing, sponsorship and public and media relations. Steel had recommended that the Consortium 'in its present form' be disbanded on the appointment of the new Ring Corporation Board. Although no such Board was created, the Consortium became moribund when O'Loughlin moved to a new appointment in the Public Service in October 2000, and nothing more was heard of it. Both Steel and O'Loughlin endorsed preliminary cost estimates for a new *Ring* which had been set tentatively by SOSA at \$11.7 million.

In June 1997, Phillips had written to O'Loughlin suggesting that if the 1998 *Ring* could be designated a 'festival' it would no longer be bound by strict union quotas on the engagement of imported artists.⁴⁹ This suggestion was not taken up at the time, but it would have been a legitimate course of action if O'Loughlin's proposal (also from June 1997) for a future SOSA/Adelaide Festival *Ring* joint venture had been adopted. SOSA had not always viewed its relationship with the Adelaide Festival with equanimity. Gillespie told Elizabeth Silsbury in September 1998⁵⁰ that although the Festival needed the opera company as much as the company needed the Festival, some of the more challenging operas contributed by SOSA over the years had been treated simply as Festival productions, and the opera company had 'received no thanks' for its efforts. So, it is true to say that by 1999, SOSA had become guarded in its dealings with the Adelaide Festival. Ironically though, because the 1998 *Ring*

⁴⁸ See Chapter 3. Meldrum had also recommended that SOSA should no longer operate as a statutory authority.

⁴⁹ Phillips, Stephen. (1997, June 11). Letter to Tim O'Loughlin. Gillespie papers, National Library of Australia.

⁵⁰ Silsbury, Elizabeth. Recorded interview with Bill Gillespie, op.cit.

was frequently referred to as a ‘festival’ in common parlance (appropriately so, since Wagner had called *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ‘a stage festival play’), some commentators assumed that it must have been an Adelaide Festival production, and I heard this said more than once.

In a memorandum of personal views that I offered to O’Loughlin about the draft Steel Report⁵¹ I noted that one of the dates being canvassed, viz. 2003, would be cutting it fine, though it would not be impossible. After all, Wagner had completed his score in November 1874 and staged the complete *Ring* only nineteen months later in August 1876!⁵² I expressed the view that the Ring Corporation Board should be chosen with the sponsorship and marketing challenges in mind, and that Board members should be expected to produce the goods or at least create a mechanism for doing so. The capacity to raise funds was one of the defining characteristics of US opera boards, but it was an unfamiliar concept in Australia. In the end, no effective mechanism was created to pursue non-governmental funding (other than individual donations), and this proved to be one of the 2004 production’s organisational weaknesses. Seattle Opera by contrast, had a large non-executive board to undertake this role.

I also said that while the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust, Australian Major Events, and the Tourism Commission would have important roles to play with a future *Ring*, they needed to understand their audiences better. There had been deficiencies in 1998 with catering, ticketing and marketing, partly because audience expectations had not been understood. I suggested that better coordination was required for all of these non-artistic elements. I also urged that the interval breaks in the longer operas should be each one hour long⁵³ after the example of Bayreuth. This would assist catering and give the singers and orchestral musicians a longer rest. Physical strain on musicians was an important consideration when performing works as lengthy as the *Ring* operas and it was for this reason that physiotherapists were engaged for the 1998 performances, and would be engaged again in 2004.⁵⁴ I accepted though that disproportionate costs might be incurred in extending the orchestra’s time by half an hour, and recommended that the union be consulted at an early juncture in order to sort this out.

⁵¹ Bassett, Peter. (1999, July 12). *A New Ring*, some thoughts on Anthony Steel’s report on the practicalities of another *Ring*. Personal memorandum to Tim O’Loughlin.

⁵² And, at the same time, Wagner was building the theatre in which to stage it!

⁵³ Instead of one long interval and one short one.

⁵⁴ Milanese, S. (2000). Provision of On-site Physiotherapy Services during the Performance of Wagner’s Ring Cycle by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra: A Model of Early Intervention for Playing-related Musculoskeletal Disorders. *Medical problems of Performing Artists* (US), 15(3), pp. 107-110.

The Ring Consortium had been the brainchild of Tim O’Loughlin and, as its chairman and as the Minister’s principal adviser on the arts he was very much in control of its processes. His commissioning of Anthony Steel to prepare a management model for a new *Ring*, notwithstanding Steel’s lack of *Ring* experience, can only be interpreted as reflecting his reservations about Phillips’s ability to undertake such a task. There had been no such doubts about Gillespie with whom O’Loughlin had co-signed the original submission of 1994. According to Gillespie,⁵⁵ O’Loughlin had specifically asked him to meet with Steel during the course of the latter’s enquiries and, in April 1999, they met in Perth for nearly four hours ‘over a slow Sunday afternoon lunch’ to discuss ways of proceeding with a new Adelaide *Ring*. By that stage Gillespie had severed all formal connections with South Australia, but clearly O’Loughlin continued to value his advice. Such was O’Loughlin’s lack of confidence in SOSA management in 1999 that he contemplated handing the *Ring* production’s artistic management to Opera Australia.⁵⁶ However, Opera Australia’s response was that they had other priorities,⁵⁷ which was a polite way of saying that they had been less than impressed by South Australia’s boasting over the 1998 *Ring* at the expense of other companies. Interestingly, in 2008 Phillips proposed to Opera Australia that they should manage a remount of the 2004 *Ring* since they were the only Australian company in a position to do so (see Chapter 9). And yet, in 1998, interstate rivalry was still a driving force in the *Ring* production stakes. In a guest column in a national arts magazine that year, Minister Laidlaw wrote: ‘This coup bewildered other states which for years had been talking about staging the project – the Olympics of the Arts. State Opera simply went ahead and did it!’⁵⁸ Clearly, South Australia’s humiliation over the loss of the Grand Prix – the Olympics of Car Races – had been avenged, but interstate resentment was one of the by-products in an industry already riven with jealousies.

⁵⁵ Gillespie, Bill. (1999, September 10). Letter to Peter Bassett. Appendix 17.

⁵⁶ Steel, Anthony. (1999, July). *Another Ring for Adelaide?* Appendices 9 and 10. I also recall O’Loughlin’s references to this option at that time. See also Chapter 5, footnote 3.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* In the end, Opera Australia did provide paid services to SOSA by way of technical staff and set-building assistance for the 2004 *Ring*.

⁵⁸ Laidlaw, Diana. (1998, December – 1999, April). SA Opera wins ‘the Olympics of the Arts’. *State of the Arts, South Australia*, p. 4.

CHAPTER 5

Shifting responsibilities and artistic planning of the Adelaide *Ring* of 2004

Interstate rivalries for a new *Ring*

In 1999 rumours circulated that Edo de Waart, chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, wanted to bring to Sydney the fine *Ring* production of De Nederlandse Opera, of which he was also chief conductor.¹ My reaction at the time was that this seemed impractical because of the challenge of transporting the enormous sets of the Dutch production and then finding venues large enough to accommodate them – problems which, six years later, would frustrate attempts to export the 2004 Adelaide *Ring*. The Sydney orchestra had already embarked on a successful series of *Ring* concert performances under de Waart's direction, beginning in 1996 with *Das Rheingold*, continuing in 1997 and 1999 with *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* respectively, and finishing in the Olympics year of 2000 with *Götterdämmerung*. If consideration had indeed been given in 1999 to importing the Amsterdam *Ring* (a precedent for which had been set by the import of the Châtelet *Ring* the year before) it was soon abandoned in favour of the continuing concert performances. Meanwhile, jockeying for the first Australian-produced *Ring* continued.

In March 2000 the ABC radio program 'PM' reported² a 'stoush' between the New South Wales and South Australian governments over which state should host the first Australian production of the *Ring*. Opera Australia's Chief Executive Adrian Collette was quoted as saying that both New South Wales and South Australia³ had approached him about the project. He said: 'I've had very informal conversations with the SSO and a couple of other people about a long term possibility of perhaps undertaking the *Ring* sometime in the future and that is as informal as it's been. And the business case or plan for the opera company [Opera Australia] looks to 2003 at the moment. It certainly couldn't possibly fall within that timeframe'. In the same ABC program Stephen Phillips, presumably unaware that an official approach had been made to Opera Australia, noted that SOSA had already staged the *Ring* in

¹ Bassett, Peter. (1999, September 3). Letter to Bill Gillespie.

² Mealey, Rachel (Reporter). (2000, March 31). *States fight for Wagner opera*. ABC PM Archive transcript. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/stories/s115192.htm>

³ This confirmed the SA Government's overtures to Opera Australia to which reference was made in the previous chapter.

1998 and that it had been a huge success, not just artistically but also in terms of tourism and economic returns for South Australia. ‘So we believe’ he said, that ‘we have the credentials to do another one and we’ve gained the sort of expertise and we know where the pitfalls are, so we believe that we are very well equipped to take it on again and hopefully this time with a brand new, all Australian production.’ He added that work had been under way for fifteen months preparing the numbers, that the budget was in place [an exaggeration], and that SOSA would be ready to go very quickly. He was waiting, he said, like everyone else to hear the outcome of the Nugent recommendations.

In April *The Advertiser* newspaper reported that Sydney had emerged as a rival to Adelaide in the race to stage the next production of the *Ring*.⁴ The report said that Adrian Collette had held informal talks with the managing director of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Mary Valentine, and the artistic director of the Sydney Festival and chairman of the SSO, Leo Schofield. Collette described the initiative as ‘a shadow of an idea’, and said he had had no direct overtures from the New South Wales Government. Ignoring the fact that Opera Australia was a national company not a New South Wales one, he added: ‘[In Sydney] there isn’t going to be the clear economic benefit that there is in Adelaide, which depends so much more on these events to stimulate tourism. We would need a bigger reason than just tourism to mount the *Ring* in Sydney’. O’Loughlin was quoted as saying that South Australia’s preparations were much further advanced than any competing project in Australia. Phillips added that the first *Ring* had been a success both culturally and in terms of tourism, and that ‘as a result, Sydney thinks it should be jumping on the bandwagon’. One month later, with speculation rife about the possibility of a production in the eastern states, Minister Laidlaw made her announcement in Parliament that a new *Ring* would be produced in Adelaide in 2004.⁵ At that stage the conductor had not yet been chosen, the director had still to be confirmed, and no principal singers had been identified. Clearly, interstate rivalries were continuing to propel planning for a new Australian *Ring*.

Commonwealth funding secured for the 2004 *Ring*

The creation of the Major Performing Arts Board as an independent, arm’s length funding entity within the Australia Council had been recommended by the 1999 Nugent Inquiry. It was established in October 2000, and its first Director, Dr Catherine Brown-Watt, was

⁴ Archdall, Susan. (2000, April 4). Rumours run in rings. *The Advertiser*, p. 52.

⁵ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2000). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, May 23, pp. 1057-58.

appointed in December 2000. It replaced and extended the ambit of the Major Organisations Fund of the Australia Council which had funded theatre, dance and chamber music companies but not opera. Until then, funding for opera companies had come via the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DOCITA).⁶ The state opera companies (unlike Opera Australia) received no base (ie regular) funding from the Commonwealth, and their applications were considered on a case by case basis.⁷ After the creation of the MPAB in October 2000, provision was made for Commonwealth funding of state opera companies, and a formula was devised for apportioning Commonwealth and State contributions. Under that formula, SOSA was designated a 'Niche' (later termed 'Specialist') company - the only opera company to be so designated - and was thereby entitled to 50/50 Commonwealth/State funding. This was a direct consequence of SOSA's success with the 1998 *Ring* and recognition of the value of the Wagner productions as international cultural tourism drawcards. Other state opera companies were designated 'Regional Flagship Companies' for which the Commonwealth/State funding split was 20/80. SOSA's privileged position in terms of annual Commonwealth funding generated some resentment amongst other opera companies, and continued after the demise of its Wagner program which had provided the rationale for the discrepancy. In 2014 for example, ten years after the last *Ring*, SOSA received \$1.44 million from the Commonwealth in annual grants, whereas West Australian Opera received just \$453,000 and Opera Queensland \$626,000.⁸

The MPAB's role was an interventionist one and included:⁹

- Negotiating terms of performance agreements (including conditions of funding) with State Government funding agencies, and negotiating tripartite arrangements.
- Deciding, with the agreement of the relevant State/Territory Government funding Agency, whether a company should be put on notice, the conditions of such notice, whether these conditions have been met and whether the company should have its major company status withdrawn.
- Working with the companies to improve their management and governance practices.

⁶ Until 1998 it had been the Department of Communications and the Arts (DOCA).

⁷ 1999. *Securing the Future. Major Performing Arts Inquiry* (the Nugent Report), Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, ss 3.4.2 to 3.4.4. This report provides a useful account of the Australia Council funding arrangements applying in 1999. Retrieved from: <http://mcm.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/securing-the-future-inquiry-into-the-major-performing-arts.pdf>.

⁸ Bevis, Stephen. (2014, July 31). WA Opera in Federal spotlight. *The West Australian*. Retrieved from: <https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/entertainment/a/24600743/wa-opera-in-federal-spotlight>.

⁹ 1999. *Securing the Future. Major Performing Arts Inquiry* op.cit. Recommendation 6.2.2.

South Australia had seized the opportunity between the presentation of the Nugent Report recommendations in December 1999 and the creation of the MPAB in October 2000 to negotiate very favourable terms under which the Commonwealth would contribute 75 percent of the combined government subsidy for a new *Ring*. The close working relationship between Arts SA and DOCITA was facilitated by the participation of Les Neilsen, General Manager, Arts, DOCITA, in the Ring Consortium chaired by Tim O'Loughlin from February 1999. Ministerial relations were also close, with the Commonwealth Minister for the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, who had supported the 1998 *Ring* (which he attended) working sympathetically with Diana Laidlaw. Alston also trusted the judgment of Donald McDonald, Chairman of the 1998 SORC Board. As part of the federal budget delivered on 9 May 2000, and in response to the findings of the Nugent inquiry, the Commonwealth had announced that it would, over four years, inject a further \$45 million into the major performing arts companies across Australia, of which South Australia's share would be \$5.5 million or 12.1 per cent of the Commonwealth's overall funding package, the highest per capita grant to any state. The major beneficiary would be SOSA for the *Ring*. In order to secure that funding, the State Government was required to invest an additional \$1.2 million over the same period. In a statement on 10 May 2000, the day after the budget, the Commonwealth Minister for the Arts, Senator Alston issued a media release which said:

The Commonwealth, in collaboration with the South Australian Government, has also decided to increase the funding allocated to the State Opera of SA. This will allow SOSA to stage an Australian production of the Ring Cycle. SOSA gained an international reputation for their Ring Cycle, and as a result expect significant international interest in tour packages for their Wagnerian productions, demonstrating the clear economic and social benefits of investment in the arts.¹⁰

The crucial achievement in securing majority Commonwealth funding for the *Ring* should therefore be seen in the context of wider benefits flowing from the Nugent inquiry and from the negotiating efforts of the South Australian Government and particularly O'Loughlin and Laidlaw.¹¹ Once again, Penelope DeBelle of the Fairfax press erroneously credited Stephen Phillips with this achievement, writing in November 2004: 'Coming off this [1998] Wagner

¹⁰ Media Release by Senator The Hon. Richard Alston, Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. (2000, May 10). Appendix 6.

¹¹ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2000). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, May 23, pp. 1057-58. Also 2000, June 15, p. 74.

experience, Phillips secured Australia Council and South Australian Government backing for the historic first full national production of the cycle of four Wagner operas.¹²

When the MPAB came into existence five months after the Commonwealth/State agreement, it was faced with a *fait accompli*. Then, following the Stuart Inquiry in 2003, the MPAB had little option but to contribute additional funding to salvage the *Ring* production, although it insisted on stringent conditions (see Chapter 8). Phillips was of the opinion that the MPAB had never forgiven Diana Laidlaw and Tim O’Loughlin for their success in 2000 in securing such a high level of Commonwealth funding support for the 2004 *Ring*.¹³

Supervision shifts from the State Government to the State Opera of South Australia

In October 2000 there was a significant change in *Ring* supervisory arrangements. Tim O’Loughlin transferred from the position of Executive Director of Arts SA with direct oversight of *Ring* planning to the more senior but also more remote and largely transport-focused position of Chief Executive of the parent Department for Transport, Urban Planning and the Arts (DTUPA). It was a compliment to his administrative skills and negotiating success. Nobody else in Arts SA had been as closely involved with the project from its inception as he had, had invested as much time and effort into ensuring its success, or was in such a strong position to influence and enforce policy. Following O’Loughlin’s departure, second and third-tier public servants were left with responsibility for overseeing SOSA’s work on a new *Ring* on a day-to-day basis, and neither they nor a succession of new Executive Directors¹⁴ shared his interest in or intimate knowledge of the project.

Three months after O’Loughlin moved from Arts SA, Minister Laidlaw was informed that the 2000 Adelaide Festival had incurred significant losses, and it soon became clear that the Festival was in serious trouble. In March 2001, a deficit of \$1.5 million from the 2000 Festival¹⁵ was disclosed and, shortly afterwards, the Finance Director resigned. In April, Minister Laidlaw turned up unannounced at a Festival Board meeting and lambasted the

¹² Debelles, Penelope. (2004, November 12). Wagner calling, *The Age*.

¹³ Phillips, Stephen. (2008, May 9). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 19.

¹⁴ Ms Kathie Massey (Executive Director Arts SA 2001-2003) had previously been Director, Organisation Performance at the Sydney Opera House, and prior to that Assistant General Manager - Corporate Resources at the Victorian Arts Centre. She was succeeded by Mr Greg Mackie (2004-2009) who was previously a councillor of the Adelaide City Council and, before that, a bookshop proprietor and social activist.

¹⁵ The Artistic Director had been Robyn Archer, who expressed surprise at the size of the deficit. She had also been Artistic Director of the 1998 Festival.

Board members for their incompetence in not disclosing the deficit earlier.¹⁶ With less than a year to go to the next elections, her embarrassment was compounded by the fact that, twelve months earlier in Parliament, she had lavished praise on the 2000 Festival's Artistic Director, Chairman, Board members and management.¹⁷ Later in April 2001, the Festival's Chairman, Ed Tweddell of Fauldings resigned. In July/August, the General Manager Nicholas Heyward¹⁸ and the Operations Director announced their departures. In September a shortfall of \$3.4 million in funding was disclosed, necessitating the provision of a further \$2 million from the State Government to cover part of this shortfall. Public opinion was in no mood for Festival shenanigans when, in October 2001, the use of an image of Adolf Hitler on promotional material for the 2002 Festival led to media-fanned outrage and to the principal sponsor, Telstra, threatening to withdraw support.¹⁹ The offending image was removed. In November the renowned American theatre and opera director Peter Sellars, who had been engaged to direct the 2002 Festival, was forced to resign amidst controversy over issues of artistic management. In all, the South Australian Government paid out almost \$10 million to the Adelaide Festival in 2000-2002²⁰ and, amidst the furore surrounding the 2002 Festival, bookings for ticketed events barely exceeded 35,000. Tim Lloyd in *The Advertiser* spoke for Adelaide's critical heartland when he said of the 2002 Festival: 'This would go down as the worst run, worst financed and worst marketed Festival of all time. While there has been a popular move to sheet the blame home to Peter Sellars for the shortcomings of the Festival, he is just a convenient and not very deserving target. Instead, we have to look at the failings in Adelaide's ability to stage a Festival.'²¹ Later, Sellars summed up his treatment in a pithy sentence: 'It's not a good idea; it's bad for international relations; and it's a little bit stupid,' he said.²²

South Australian arts officialdom was shaken by these Festival experiences which, politically speaking could not have come at a worse time for the Liberal Government and eclipsed memories of the successful 1998 *Ring*. Indeed, a change of government soon followed and, with dramatic timing, the incoming Premier Mike Rann (who also became the Arts Minister)

¹⁶ Caust, Jo. (Summer 2004). A Festival in Disarray: The 2002 Adelaide Festival: A Debacle or Another Model of Arts Organization and Leadership? *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 103-117.

¹⁷ SA Legislative Council Hansard (2000, March 30), pp 738-740.

¹⁸ Heyward moved to the position of General Manager of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

¹⁹ Caust, Jo. A Festival in Disarray, p. 111.

²⁰ Debelles, Penelope. (2002, April 23). Adelaide Festival reels from box-office deficit. *The Age*. Retrieved from <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/04/22/1019441221171.htm>.

²¹ Quoted in Caust, Jo. A Festival in Disarray, p. 112.

²² Debelles, Penelope. (2002, March 22). Has Sellars bequeathed Page a poisoned chalice? *The Age*. Retrieved from <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/03/21/1016660123244.html>.

was sworn into office on 6 March 2002²³ in the middle of the troubled Festival itself. Under the new government the Festival Board was radically reconstituted, and amongst those members who retired was Anthony Steel.

With the Adelaide Festival in such bad odour and with the departures of Heyward and Steel, O'Loughlin's 1997 proposal for a State Opera/Adelaide Festival *Ring* joint venture²⁴ was never mentioned again. Neither was Anthony Steel's 1999 suggestion that *Ring* marketing initiatives should exploit the 'cutting edge' qualities of the 2000 Festival opera (Louis Andriessen's *Writing to Vermeer*, which reportedly cost \$3 million for four performances) and the appointment of Peter Sellars to direct the 2002 Festival.²⁵ The Ring Consortium, which had been announced in December 1998 with great fanfare and a budget of a quarter of a million dollars, quietly vanished.

Arts SA's close supervision of the *Ring* project began to ebb around the middle of 2000. The turning point, ironically, was probably the provision of regular Commonwealth funding to SOSA as a consequence of the Nugent Report. In future, SOSA would no longer be so dependent on the State Government for financial support. Then came the announcement of the 2004 performance dates and broad details of the State/Commonwealth funding arrangements. The initial 75/25 breakdown of Commonwealth/State funding for the *Ring* would, four years later become 63/37, but the figures were still weighted substantially towards the Commonwealth. That was a reversal of the 1998 situation in which the State contributed 92% of government funding and the Commonwealth just 8%. Laidlaw characterised this change as representing a national vote of confidence in the arts in South Australia. Given the size of the Commonwealth's contribution, one might have expected Canberra to want to participate in the planning and production of the 2004 *Ring* but, for sound policy and practical reasons, the Australia Council stayed well away from the day-to-day management concerns of recipient organisations and, in any case, in the absence of a Ring Corporation, no mechanism existed for Commonwealth participation. On the other hand, the State Government, to which the eight-member SOSA board was legally responsible, was now the minority investor in the enterprise. This new dynamic gave Phillips an unfamiliar sense of independence as he set about choosing key artistic personnel and

²³ Mr Rann took office on 6 March 2002 after winning the state elections on 9 February 2002. The election results had been indecisive and Liberal premier Rob Kerin refused to concede until the matter had been tested on the floor of the House of Assembly. Rann gained office with the support of independent members.

²⁴ See Chapter 3.

²⁵ Steel, Anthony. *Another Ring for Adelaide?* p. 10. Appendix 9.

bringing to fruition the single most expensive arts project ever undertaken in Australia. Management responsibilities would now be concentrated in even fewer hands than for the 1998 *Ring* although the challenge would be much greater.

Choosing the production team

In June 2000, Phillips drew up a 'Proposed Outline Rehearsal/Performance Plan' which envisaged a design presentation in late 2002; scenery/costume building in the first half of 2003, and rehearsals spread over two years. The rehearsal/performance schedule would be: *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* for fourteen weeks in 2003, and then *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung*, revision of *Rheingold/Walküre* and final rehearsals and performances all for twenty weeks in 2004. The assumption was that Elke Neidhardt, as director, would choose the design team. She chose Michael Scott-Mitchell for sets, Nick Schlieper for lighting, and Stephen Curtis for costumes. Sue Field who, together with Schlieper, would work with Neidhardt on the 2001 *Parsifal*,²⁶ had been the first choice for the *Ring* costumes but she was not available. The Neidhardt/Scott-Mitchell/Schlieper/Field team had worked together on the 1998 *Tannhäuser* and, minus Field, on *Il trovatore* in Adelaide in 1999. The 2004 *Ring* was the twenty-fifth project on which Scott-Mitchell and Schlieper had worked together.²⁷

When it became clear by mid-2000 that Simone Young would not be available to conduct the new *Ring*, Phillips began the search for possible contenders. At that time I was a SOSA Board member and a committee member of the Friends of the State Opera - a voluntary association which sponsored productions and supported the company in a variety of ways. I was neither an employee of SOSA nor a contracted service-provider, and my work with Arts SA as Director Projects did not relate to SOSA or to the *Ring* which came under the Lead Agencies and Planning branch. However, I had provided various forms of voluntary assistance to SOSA management since 1996 and, in this spirit of support and encouragement I offered to help in the search for a conductor. In view of SOSA's tiny staffing resources and Phillips's other responsibilities, he welcomed my involvement on an informal, unpaid basis.²⁸ Between July and October 2000 I handled negotiations with the overseas agents of nineteen

²⁶ The set designer for *Parsifal* was Carl Friedrich Oberle, who was also listed as one of the costume designers. Field was also listed as associate designer.

²⁷ Scott-Mitchell, Michael, and Schlieper, Nick. (2003, September 6). Joint presentation to the *Weekend with the Ring* symposium, Adelaide Convention Centre.

²⁸ Phillips, Stephen. (2000, August). Memorandum to Minister Laidlaw providing a progress report and acknowledging my assistance.

international conductors, sounding out their interest and providing details of the production as it evolved. The basic negotiating position, as set out by Phillips in an email to me of 27 July 2000, included references to the successful 1998 production conducted by Jeffrey Tate, a production budget figure of \$13 million,²⁹ the high level of government support, the names of the director and the set and lighting designers (even though their contracts had not been concluded at that point) and the anticipated rehearsal arrangements. As these exchanges progressed, several agents took the opportunity to draw my attention to other conductors on their books. One of these was Asher Fisch, whose biographical details I received by email on Saturday 5 August 2000 from his London agent, Sue Spence of Askonas Holt. I passed this information with a supporting comment to Phillips who was also very interested and responded on the following Monday morning: 'I think we should definitely follow up fast with him. He's very high on Elke's list'.³⁰ On 8 August Phillips informed me that Neidhardt would be in Germany for at least two weeks from the beginning of October 2000 and that if any of our preferred conductor candidates were Europe-based at that time it would be good for her to meet them.³¹ The implication was that it was important for her to be able to work constructively with the chosen conductor and to be able to express her preferences in the selection process. I had no doubt that Neidhardt was being given an unusual opportunity to influence the choice of the conductor, and that if she objected to any of the candidates, Phillips would not engage them. This was contrary to the recommendations of the Steel Report but it did suggest that her position was becoming considerably more than that of Stage Director.

On 10 August 2000, Fisch's agent Sue Spence informed me that 'without question' Asher Fisch was very interested in our *Ring* project, and she gave me his email address so I could contact him directly. I advised Phillips of this and expressed the view that Fisch must be our number one prospect. On 11 August, Phillips told me: 'I think we should get him if possible'.³² So, less than a week after receiving an expression of interest, Asher Fisch had become the favoured candidate even though he had not been on Anthony Steel's list, and the General Director had neither seen nor heard him in action. It was sufficient that Neidhardt had. I then emailed Fisch in New York and began detailed negotiations with him.

²⁹ The official SOSA figure as at June 2000 was, according to the five-year business plan, \$9.3 million.

³⁰ Phillips, Stephen. (2000, August 7). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 11.

³¹ Phillips, Stephen. (2000, August 8). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 11.

³² Phillips, Stephen. (2000, August 11). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 11.

It was also on 8 August 2000 that Phillips asked me for a list of the conductors under review, together with some comments, for a progress report for Minister Laidlaw, which I duly provided.³³ The request for a report, which had come from the Minister's office, was indicative of the close oversight which the government was exercising in connection with *Ring* planning, something that never happened with operas in the standard repertoire. This was yet another reminder of the extent to which the *Ring* was a political undertaking as well as an artistic one. There was never any suggestion that the relationship between SOSA and the ASO should be anything more than a contract for the provision of an orchestral service. For 1998 the ASO was represented on the SORC Board in an observer capacity, but in the absence of SORC for 2004 there was no ASO involvement at all in early *Ring* planning and decision making.

While negotiations were continuing with various agents, I contacted Asher Fisch in New York and arranged meetings there between him and Phillips on 9th and 10th September 2000. After these meetings had taken place, Phillips visited London to call on Askonas Holt and finalise the contract details. The terms were then agreed with Fisch, and his appointment was confirmed at the end of September. There was however a bigger picture against which this operatic toing and froing was taking place. Around that time, relations between Israel and the Palestinians deteriorated alarmingly and the spectre of war loomed in the Middle East. Conflicts broke out in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; captured Israeli servicemen were murdered by Palestinians, and Israel retaliated. In these circumstances, on 9 October I suggested to Phillips that it would be prudent to announce the whole *Ring* production team in one go rather than make a separate announcement about Fisch who was an Israeli citizen and music director of the New Israeli Opera.³⁴ A few days later an American warship was attacked in the port of Aden and US servicemen were killed. Stock markets tumbled, a bomb exploded in the British Embassy compound in Yemen, President Clinton attended an acrimonious meeting in Egypt (he was soon to leave office), fighting worsened on the West Bank and the Israeli prime minister suspended the peace process before announcing his own resignation on 9 December. Amidst these headline-grabbing events, the *Ring* production team was announced publicly on 9 December 2000, and was well received.³⁵

³³ Bassett, Peter. (2000, August 8). Email to Stephen Phillips.

³⁴ Bassett, Peter. (2000, October 9). Email to Stephen Phillips.

³⁵ Nunn, Louise. (2000, December 9). State Opera selects the A team for the great Wagner challenge. *The Advertiser*, p. 22.

One curious omission from the lists of possible conductors for the 2004 *Ring* had been Nicholas Braithwaite.³⁶ London born Braithwaite had been a resident of South Australia for many years, and had been chief conductor of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra from 1987 to 1991, during which time, in May 1988, he conducted a semi-staged performance of Act I of *Die Walküre* in collaboration with the State Opera.³⁷ Braithwaite studied in London and Vienna and his Wagnerian credentials were impeccable. From 1960 to 1966 (the year of Wieland Wagner's death) he was a member of Friedelind Wagner's masterclasses at the Bayreuth Festival, and he attended most rehearsals and all performances at Bayreuth during those years. He became associate principal conductor of the English National Opera in 1970 and worked closely with Reginald Goodall on the famous ENO *Ring* production of the '70s for which he conducted five cycles and received consistently fine reviews in the London press. All up, he had conducted every Wagner opera from *The Flying Dutchman* onwards, including six complete cycles of the *Ring*, and had appeared at Covent Garden, Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera, Norwegian Opera and Hamburg State Opera amongst others. He had conducted all of the major orchestras in the UK and Australia, and toured Japan and Korea with the London Philharmonic Orchestra as Associate Conductor to Sir Georg Solti. In the 1990s he conducted the Collegium Musicum Copenhagen (the cream of Denmark's orchestras) nearly every year. So, why was this eminently qualified, internationally recognised and locally resident conductor ignored for the Adelaide *Ring* of 2004? I suspect it was because Neidhardt did not know him and, in any case, she was more comfortable with the idea of a younger, up-and-coming, less experienced *Ring* conductor, into which category Asher Fisch fell.³⁸

For the 1998 *Ring*, Gillespie had chosen the Châtelet production of 1994, and brought to Adelaide not only the Paris sets, costumes and production book but also its English conductor Jeffrey Tate, French director Pierre Strosser and English assistant director Stephen Taylor. In other words, it was a complete package, and there was a logical basis for keeping the original production team together. Tate selected English conductor Lionel Friend to be his Assistant Conductor in Adelaide. For some time it was taken for granted that Tate would conduct the next *Ring* in Adelaide, until he indicated that his 1998 experience would be a one-off. In September 1997, for the opening night of the *Weekend with the Ring*, I invited Braithwaite to

³⁶ Nicholas Braithwaite, b.1939.

³⁷ This had been arranged before Gillespie was appointed to SOSA. Alberto Remedios sang Siegmund, Sandra Hahn was Sieglinde and Noel Mangin was Hunding.

³⁸ For her attitude to conductors see Chapter 4. Fisch was seventeen years her junior.

conduct the *Siegfried Idyll* at a soirée at Government House, which he did splendidly with musicians from the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and the Australian String Quartet. However, when Anthony Steel listed potential conductors in mid-1999, Braithwaite's name was not amongst them, nor was Simone Young's,³⁹ nor Sir Charles Mackerras's.⁴⁰ Steel's list largely grew out of his conversations with managers, consultants and agents in Europe, and reflected European priorities amongst Wagner conductors at that time. Phillips's views on Braithwaite were harder to fathom. He asked Braithwaite to conduct *Tosca* for SOSA in October/November 2000, immediately before the *Ring* production team was announced. Braithwaite's only other conducting engagement for SOSA until then had been *Tosca in the Park* a decade earlier (an outdoor concert performance during the 1990 Adelaide Festival).⁴¹ It seems likely that after Jeffrey Tate's success, the expectation was that another overseas 'name' should be found to catch the attention of globe-trotting, *Ring*-going audiences; after all, the 2004 *Ring* was as much an investment in cultural tourism as an artistic enterprise. Fisch's much publicised association with Daniel Barenboim was a marketable commodity. There was, as well, a realisation that if the 2004 production were to be revived, a prudent course would be to engage a conductor in the early stages of his or her career. Asher Fisch was 46 in 2004. He had been music director of the Vienna *Volksoper* where, in 1998, he conducted a successful *Die Meistersinger* directed by the German Regisseurin Christine Mielitz.⁴² He had also conducted *Parsifal* at the Vienna State Opera, *Tristan und Isolde* at the Royal Danish Opera, *Die Walküre* for Barenboim in Berlin (and he worked with him at Bayreuth) and *Der fliegende Holländer* at Los Angeles. He had not conducted a complete *Ring*.

The selection of singers for a 'director's *Ring*'

When I returned to Canberra in November 2000 I was engaged for a twelve-month, part-time consultancy as Artistic Administrator for the 2004 *Ring*. This consultancy was renewed

³⁹ In 2000, Simone Young (b. 1961) conducted the complete *Ring* at the Vienna State Opera. She had also assisted Daniel Barenboim in Berlin and at the Bayreuth Festival. By 2000 she had conducted other works by Wagner in Europe and in Australia, and in 2001 was appointed Music Director of Opera Australia - an appointment which had been foreshadowed since 1995.

⁴⁰ Sir Charles Mackerras (1925-2010) conducted *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* for Opera Australia in 1988, and *Tristan und Isolde* with Welsh National Opera in 1993. Between 1981 and 1985 he conducted concert performances of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* and *Tristan und Isolde* in co-presentations between The Australian Opera, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

⁴¹ Later, in 2002, Braithwaite conducted the Opera Conference production of *Cavaleria rusticana/Pagliacci* for SOSA, and in 2009 he conducted a new production of *The Flying Dutchman*, his first Wagner opera for SOSA.

⁴² Lisa Gasteen made her debut as Brünnhilde in the complete *Ring* at Meiningen under Mielitz's direction in 2001. Gasteen was a great success but found the direction physically trying.

annually until December 2003, at which time SOSA ran out of money for such things - and for just about everything else. Nevertheless, I continued to provide assistance until the 2004 performances. In 2001-02 my responsibilities began with the negotiation and preparation of contracts for artistic personnel (which, in practice, meant the principal singers and cover cast, since the production team had already been engaged), and the preparation of detailed rehearsal schedules. Then in 2002 I took on a public relations role, writing articles for newspapers and journals, placing advertisements in interstate and overseas publications (including in opera programs in Europe and Japan), doing radio interviews, compiling and editing newsletters,⁴³ coordinating graphics and the like, and launching and maintaining the *Ring* website with the help of a Canberra-based website designer. I developed the *Ring* donor program inspired by Seattle Opera's strategy of maximising the number of smaller donations (anything from \$100 upwards) to complement larger corporate sponsorships. This was certainly one area in which SOSA was able to benefit from the Seattle experience, and Phillips was happy to embrace it.

There are 34 separate roles in the *Ring*, some of which can be covered by artists who have smaller roles elsewhere in the tetralogy and some which need to be covered by additional singers engaged specifically for this purpose. For the most important roles it may be necessary to bring in covers from overseas, but the number of imported singers for principal or cover roles is strictly limited by union quotas. The combination of mainly local singers and an overseas conductor meant that it was impossible for Fisch to play a meaningful role in the casting process. Nearly all the singers being considered were unfamiliar to him, and he could not spend time in Australia to audition them. During the casting process there was no assistant conductor on whom he could rely. Sydney-based musician Stephen Mould, who had been a repetiteur for the 1998 *Ring* and the 2001 *Parsifal* was engaged in 2003 as Coach and Rehearsal Conductor, along with Lionel Friend (2004) and Sharolyn Kimmorley. Phillips had Mould in mind for the position of Assistant Conductor but Fisch wanted a more experienced conductor who was familiar with the *Ring* and who could take charge should the need arise. Adelaide-based Nicholas Braithwaite was the obvious choice, but he was much too experienced to be designated Assistant Conductor to the comparatively inexperienced Fisch, and so I suggested that he be called Guest Conductor, which was how he was described.

⁴³ I had compiled and edited a printed newsletter for the 1998 *Ring* called, simply, *The Ring*. For the 2004 production the newsletter was called *Valhalla*.

Inevitably, Phillips's and Neidhardt's views governed the selection of singers although neither was a trained musician and neither had more than a passing knowledge of singing. As General Director, Phillips had the final say on all artistic and administrative appointments, but, in the first years of the new *Ring* project he regularly sought Neidhardt's views on a range of matters. She had been his only choice to direct the second *Ring* (and *Parsifal*), she was contactable in Sydney and they liaised easily - to begin with. He would consult her about casting, and she would nominate her preferred singers and rule out others. Among her selections were American Timothy Mussard for Siegfried, New Zealander Christopher Doig⁴⁴ for Loge (he had turned down Mime in 1998, and an offer to cover Siegmund in 2004), and Australian Andrew Brunsdon for Froh (and cover Siegmund). Neidhardt had seen Timothy Mussard sing in Stuttgart and recommended him highly. Five years later, after the long and arduous rehearsals had taken their toll, there was a crisis meeting and Mussard stood aside in *Siegfried* for Canadian tenor, Garry Rideout.⁴⁵ Mussard sang the less exhausting *Götterdämmerung* Siegfried.

Phillips's first choice for Wotan was the comparatively young American bass-baritone Alan Held, who had been strongly recommended by Jeffrey Tate.⁴⁶ For nine months, every effort was made to attract Held but he had small children at the time and did not want to be away from his family for the long rehearsal periods in 2003 and 2004. Even an offer to arrange schooling for his children in Adelaide was to no avail. He also felt it was a little early in his career and said, some years later: 'You have to mature with Wotan and I gave it 20 years to let it grow and I believe it is important for a singer to do that.'⁴⁷ So, the search began for other contenders. Agents and conductors were consulted and various names were considered. Then Neidhardt floated the name of Dutch bass-baritone John Bröcheler after reading a review in a newspaper clipping sent to her by a former German Consul in Sydney.⁴⁸ Bröcheler had recently performed Wotan in Bonn and had also performed it in the Amsterdam *Ring*. His Amsterdam performance was available on video, and it was clearly a fine one. At the time of his consideration for Adelaide he was singing Amfortas in Munich with Waltraud Meier and Kurt Moll, and was about to sing in Salzburg in the company of Susan Graham, Natalie Dessay, Deborah Polaski, Franz-Josef Selig and Diana Damrau.

⁴⁴ Christopher Doig (1948-2011)

⁴⁵ Gary Rideout (1952-2007)

⁴⁶ Tate had recommended Held before Fisch had been engaged as conductor.

⁴⁷ Pritchard, Jim. (2012, February 24). Interview with Bass-baritone Aland Held. *Seen and Heard International*. Retrieved from: <http://seenandheard-international.com/2012/02/interview-with-bass-baritone-alan-held-2/>.

⁴⁸ Phillips, Stephen. (2001, April 10). Email to Peter Bassett.

Although by 2004 he was nearing the end of his stage career, it had been a distinguished one, and the decision to engage him was not difficult.

As time went by, what had begun as a consultative gesture by Phillips towards Neidhardt developed into an expectation on her part that she would have equal say on who would be engaged. She had no hesitation in referring to the production as ‘my’ *Ring*. She was forthright in her views, and any hint of independent action on the General Director’s part drew a swift response: ‘Steve, please don’t cast any Rhinemaidens yet without further consultation’ she wrote in March 2001.⁴⁹ I observed that Phillips found this attitude increasingly hard to take, especially since he had been used to casting SOSA’s regular operas without reference to anybody else, including directors and conductors. Very few of SOSA’s mainstage productions were created by the South Australian company itself; most were either rented from other companies (usually Opera Australia) or were co-productions of the Opera Conference – the main Australian opera companies acting cooperatively. This meant that existing productions were frequently staged with revival directors. Conductors were often fairly junior or when, occasionally they came from overseas, they arrived just in time for rehearsals and played no part in the casting process. Phillips baulked at confronting Neidhardt about her assertive manner, but told me: ‘While I think it’s a good idea to keep Elke in the loop, I don’t think she should be given the impression that she is making all the decisions!’⁵⁰ However it was too late; she had already formed that impression.

By early 2001 Neidhardt had identified two possible contenders for the role of Sieglinde, and Phillips had identified two others, one of whom was Australian soprano Deborah Riedel.⁵¹ Riedel had sung Tosca for SOSA in October/November 2000 opposite Stuart Skelton, who would sing Siegmund in Adelaide. She was an accomplished artist who had made her European debut as Freia in *Das Rheingold* in 1991 at Covent Garden, and had sung a wide-ranging repertoire at the Paris Opera, Vienna State Opera, Bavarian State Opera and the Metropolitan Opera. Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé thought highly of her, and Bonyngé was her mentor. He helped her transition from mezzo-soprano to ‘lyric soprano with a coloratura facility’, and described her as having ‘one of the most beautiful voices we have heard in Australia in a very long time ... warm, human and touching. It is also a voice of a

⁴⁹ Neidhardt, Elke. (2001, March 29). Email to Stephen Phillips and Peter Bassett. See Appendix 12.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Deborah Riedel (1958-2009). Her performance as Sieglinde in 2004 was outstanding, as can be heard on the complete Melba recordings. However, in 1999 she had been diagnosed with cancer which finally claimed her life on 8 January 2009. She was 50 years of age.

very decent size capable of filling any opera house.’⁵² Eighteen years later he described her voice as ‘velvety’ and ‘voluptuous’, and said that hers was ‘undoubtedly one of the greatest voices ever produced by Australia’.⁵³ Nevertheless, in an email of February 2001 to Riedel’s agent Jenifer Eddy (herself a former opera singer) and to me, Phillips wrote: ‘As I expected, Elke finds the idea of Deborah singing Sieglinde difficult, given Deb’s background. However she by no means dismisses the idea. She feels, understandably, that she needs to hear her sing something from this fack to feel convinced that she has the ‘big’ phrases, especially from the last act of *Walküre*.’⁵⁴ Once again, Neidhardt was being allowed to venture well beyond the responsibilities of a stage director and into an area more properly the preserve of an artistic director or conductor.

Fisch was going to be in Paris between late March and mid-May 2001, and so arrangements were made for him to audition three candidates for Sieglinde and one for Hunding during that time. Riedel auditioned for Fisch on 10 April 2001, and he was in no doubt at all that she should be given the role. He reported: ‘I was very impressed. She is a highly intelligent singer with a beautiful voice. ... the German suits her well in my mind. She would have to beef up her middle voice a bit, I have told her so, and she seems to be happy to give it a try. ... So, if it is ok with you, we can go with Deborah.’⁵⁵ Since he had already heard one of the other Sieglinde candidates and found her wanting, there could be no reason for further delay, and Riedel was offered the role. A planned audition for a third candidate in early May was cancelled. Neidhardt too had cancelled her trip to Paris in order to concentrate on preparations for the 2001 Adelaide *Parsifal* which had been delayed by preparations for Opera Australia’s 2002 *Andrea Chénier*. She told a journalist in November 2004: ‘I have not been in Europe for four years - unheard of - but I didn’t dare! One is the captain of the ship.’⁵⁶ She made it clear to Phillips that her agreement to the engagement of Deborah Riedel for ‘Sieglinde’ was conditional on Riedel remaining in good physical shape and not becoming overweight. Stuart Skelton had been Phillips’s preferred candidate for Siegmund after his fine performance as Cavaradossi in *Tosca* in October 2000. He was also sought-after in Europe where he was about to sing Erik (*Der fliegende Holländer*), Lohengrin and Rienzi, and would

⁵² Bray, David. (1991, November 21). Singing the praises of the next Dame Joan. *The Courier Mail*. Retrieved from: http://users.telenet.be/deborahriedel/singing_the_praises_of_the_next_.htm.

⁵³ Hallett, Bryce and Stephens, Tony. (2009, January 12). Soprano scaled the heights. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/obituaries/soprano-scaled-the-heights/2009/01/11/1231608518954.html>.

⁵⁴ Phillips, Stephen. (2001, February 5). Email to Jennifer Eddy and Peter Bassett. Appendix 13.

⁵⁵ Fisch, Asher. (2001, April 11). Email to Peter Bassett.

⁵⁶ DeBelle, Penelope. (2004, November 8). She tells it like it is, *The Age*.

then appear at the Berlin State Opera's all-Wagner *Festival Days*, conducted by Daniel Barenboim. He sang for Neidhardt on 2 March 2001, and she approved.

During the *Ring* rehearsals in 2003, Deborah Riedel told me with some pride that one of her forebears had been associated with the first Bayreuth Festival. She wasn't certain of the details, although she thought there was some connection with the orchestra⁵⁷. I found that in the 1870s Richard Wagner had had frequent dealings with Professor Carl Riedel (1827-1888), chorus master, composer and president of the *Allgemeiner Deutsche Musikverein*. His Leipzig choral society, the 'Riedel-Verein' founded in 1854,⁵⁸ took part in the choral finale of Beethoven's 9th Symphony which Wagner conducted in the Margrave's Opera House after laying the foundation stone for the Festival Theatre on 22 May 1872.⁵⁹ Carl Riedel became a member of the management committee of the General Society of Patrons for the support and preservation of the festival in Bayreuth,⁶⁰ and he was also president of the Leipzig Wagner Society.⁶¹ In 1873 his 'Appeal to the Germans' for support for the Bayreuth enterprise was used in preference to a text written by Nietzsche, thereby contributing to Nietzsche's growing disenchantment with Wagner. He lunched informally with Wagner on 15 May 1876 during rehearsals for the first *Ring*⁶² and, in later years, Wagner and Cosima saw him socially on a number of occasions.⁶³ Wagner promised to take Cosima to Leipzig on her birthday in 1881, to perform the *Parsifal* choruses for her with the Riedel choir.⁶⁴ It was a nice connection between the Adelaide production and Wagner himself.

It may be trite to say so, but a good Brünnhilde is crucial to the success of any production of the *Ring*, and SOSA was fortunate to have in Queenslander Lisa Gasteen the finest Australian Brünnhilde since Marjorie Lawrence in the early 1940s. Gasteen had won the Cardiff Singer of the World competition in 1991, the finals of which were broadcast on Australian television. Even then her performance bore the hallmarks of a future Brünnhilde, and she was inundated with requests to perform this and other major Wagnerian roles which, wisely, she

⁵⁷ There was no Riedel listed amongst the players for the 1876 Festival - the only performances of the *Ring* at the Festspielhaus during Wagner's lifetime. The second complete *Ring* performance took place in Leipzig in 1879 under the management of Angelo Neumann (with Wagner's permission). The orchestra for *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 1882 was from the Royal Court and National Theatre, Munich, on loan from King Ludwig.

⁵⁸ Wagner, Cosima. Gregor-Dellin, Martin and Mack, Dietrich, eds., Skelton, Geoffrey, trans. (1976-1978).

Cosima Wagner's Diaries. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Vol. 2, pp. 452, 1084.

⁵⁹ Wagner, Cosima. *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*. Vol. 1, p. 488.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p. 1155.

⁶¹ *ibid.* p. 1078.

⁶² Fricke, Richard. Fricke, George R. trans., Deaville, James, ed. with Baker, Evan (1998). *Wagner in Rehearsal 1875-1876, The Diaries of Richard Fricke*. Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, p. 46.

⁶³ Wagner, Cosima. *Diaries*. Vol. 2, p. 399.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 452.

declined at that early stage in her career. However, by 2000 she felt ready to sing the *Siegfried* Brünnhilde at Stuttgart and, one year later, all three Brünnhildes in her first complete *Ring* at Meiningen, in a theatre whose dramaturgical innovations had once exercised an influence on Wagner.⁶⁵ She was, I thought, the obvious candidate for Australia's first home-grown *Ring*, although, surprisingly, Stephen Phillips took a while to warm to this idea. Initially, he favoured American soprano Jeannine Altmeyer who, after her famous exposure as Sieglinde and Gutrune in the Bayreuth centenary *Ring* production, had sung Brünnhilde in the complete 1982 recording conducted by Marek Janowski, and in the 1997 production by De Nederlandse Opera (with Bröcheler). Altmeyer would have been nearing the end of her stage career by 2004, whereas Gasteen was then at her peak as a Wagnerian singer, something which Asher Fisch immediately recognised when he encountered her at the rehearsals in Adelaide. Attempts had been made for him to attend one of her performances at Meiningen in 2001 but this had proved impractical. However her European agent Michael Lewin, whose judgment Fisch trusted, assured him that an audition was not necessary. Gasteen was in wonderful form, said Lewin, and would be a brilliant Brünnhilde.⁶⁶ She went on to sing a magnificent Isolde at Covent Garden in 2002, which I witnessed, and which prepared the way for her first Brünnhilde there in 2006, much to the fury of English soprano Susan Bullock who would nevertheless get her own back by singing Brünnhilde in Melbourne in 2013. In a short ABC television documentary about the making of the 2004 *Ring*, Asher Fisch, in the midst of rehearsals, had no hesitation in saying: 'Lisa, she really has *the* Wagnerian voice of the cast. If you really think of a Wagnerian voice singing at the top and going through this huge orchestra without any thought and without getting tired, that's her. ... You have a feeling that when she finishes *Götterdämmerung* she could go back to the beginning, you know, and start all over again'.⁶⁷ That augured well for the historic events about to unfold.

⁶⁵ See Carnegy, Patrick. (2006). *Wagner and the art of the theatre*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, pp. 82 ff.

⁶⁶ Fisch, Asher. (2001, March 24). Email to Peter Bassett.

⁶⁷ Duthie, Amanda and Phillipson, Margot (Executive producers). (2005). *Forging the Ring. Back stage at the State Opera of SA's Ring Cycle*. Adelaide and Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

CHAPTER 6

Staging *Parsifal* in 2001

On 11 March 1997 *The Bulletin* magazine published a ‘scoop’ by columnist and former operatic soprano Maria Prerauer under the heading ‘*Parsifal* takes on an Olympian ring’. It read:

Exciting news. My spies tell me that Leo Schofield’s mammoth 2000 Olympic Arts Festival – as the Cultural Olympiad is now called – will stage Australia’s first production of *Parsifal*, the only big Wagnerian music drama Australia has yet to experience. It’s planned for the Capitol, which has a Wagnerian-sized orchestra pit. The Sydney Opera House does not. Who’s putting it on? The Sydney Symphony Orchestra under its brilliant musical director Edo de Waart. Marietta [Prerauer] hears that Opera Australia is being invited to join the SSO as joint partner.

Coming just one year before the much heralded 1998 Adelaide *Ring*, this news suggested that the eastern states were fighting back in terms of ground-breaking Wagner productions, although the suggestion that the Sydney Symphony Orchestra would be staging the opera (as distinct from giving a concert performance) and that Opera Australia would be ‘invited to join’, should have raised doubts about the veracity of the story. In fact, the rumours proved to be garbled. Schofield, who had been artistic director of the Sydney Festival since 1998¹ following his move from the Melbourne Festival, had been hoping to bring to Sydney the Berlin State Opera’s production of *Parsifal* with Daniel Barenboim and the entire *Staatskapelle Berlin*. However, as he told me in early 1999, these plans had fallen through because the New South Wales State Government was unwilling to fund such an expensive operation on top of its major outlay for the Olympics.² In the end, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra conducted by Edo de Waart contributed a concert performance of *Götterdämmerung* to the Olympic Arts Festival, thereby completing the *Ring* concert series it had begun in 1996. When, in 1999 I informed Stephen Phillips that the Berlin *Parsifal* would

¹ Leo Schofield replaced Anthony Steel as director of the Sydney Festival (1995-1997) largely through the intervention of NSW Premier Bob Carr, as Steel notes in his memoir *Painful in Daily Doses*, (2009). Adelaide: Wakefield Press. Schofield’s tenure with the Sydney Festival overlapped with his role as artistic director of the arts festival associated with the 2000 summer Olympics and the 2000 summer Paralympics.

² Bassett, Peter. (1999, March 29). *Program of Action – Internationalisation of Arts Industries and Whole of Government Application of the Arts*. Memorandum to Executive Director, Arts SA.

not be coming to Australia after all, he replied that he knew of a *Parsifal* production that had been designed for the Australian Opera but was never used. He said he would try to obtain this for Adelaide for staging between the two *Rings*. The intention was to further SOSA's official objective of being 'renowned nationally and internationally as the performing arts company that makes Adelaide a 'Wagner City'.³

In 1993, the Australian Opera (as it then was) had planned a new *Parsifal* for its summer season and had commissioned the staging from Elke Neidhardt and German designer Carl Friedrich Oberle.⁴ However, when the final costings for the season had been worked out it was clear that something would have to go. That 'something' was *Parsifal*. The decision not to proceed had been influenced by production costs (which, actually, were not especially high) and estimated box office income. That there should have been any hesitation about the latter is, in retrospect, surprising. If there was one overriding lesson from the 1998 Adelaide *Ring* and the 2001 Adelaide *Parsifal*, it was that the audience for Wagner's works, especially his later works, extended well beyond the customary demographic of regular opera patrons. In place of the Neidhardt/Oberle *Parsifal*, the Australian Opera revived its existing Armfield production of *Tristan und Isolde*, which enabled it to achieve savings in production costs and make use of singers already chosen for roles in *Parsifal*. Phillips was able to purchase the *Parsifal* production from Opera Australia and plans were made for a staging in Adelaide in late 2001. There was never any doubt that Neidhardt would be the director, since she had been involved from the outset in the original plans and had been in contact with Phillips since 1996 about her advisory role with the 1998 *Ring*. One sometimes reads⁵ that her appointment to direct the 2004 *Ring* had been prompted by her successful direction of the 2001 *Parsifal*, whereas in fact, Phillips had already decided on her engagement for the second *Ring* well before contemplating *Parsifal*, and her formal contract for the *Ring* had been concluded more than twelve months in advance of the *Parsifal* performances.

³ Objectives forming part of the financial statements of the State Opera of South Australia, in the annual report submitted to the SA Parliament for the year ended 30 June 2002.

⁴ Oxenbould, Moffatt. *Timing is everything*, p. 570.

⁵ For example, in the program notes for a recital of Humperdinck's arrangement of *Parsifal*, given by Simone Young and Alexander Soddy (piano four hands), with Elke Neidhardt (narrator) in the Sydney Opera House's Utzon Room Music Series, 20 July, 2008.

Historical constraints on the performance of *Parsifal*

For Wagner, *Parsifal* was more than a theatrical event; it was also his *credo*, the fulfilment of a lifetime's reading and reflection.⁶ Little wonder then that he called it *A Festival Play for the Dedication of the Stage*. He was also determined that the Bayreuth theatre should set the standard and provide the model for other performances; this, after all, had been his objective in building it in the first place. He wanted to present ideal performances in ideal surroundings, using singers who truly understood his intentions.⁷ There were practical considerations too. According to Cosima, Wagner thought the way in which the *Ring* was being performed elsewhere was appalling,⁸ and this had led to caution in sanctioning productions over which the author had no control. The possibility that *Parsifal* might suffer a similar fate did not bear thinking about. So, Wagner's inclination to restrict performances to the Bayreuth theatre was, first and foremost, to safeguard the integrity of a work into which he had poured so much of himself.

The law relating to copyright and royalties within the German states prior to unification in 1871 had been chaotic, and it was not standardised until 1870 and, even then, was nowhere near as comprehensive as the modern law on the subject. After the inaugural 1876 Festival, financial pressures had made the sale of the *Ring*'s performing rights unavoidable, although Wagner had resisted this for as long as he could. Even the ownership of the intimate *Siegfried Idyll*, written to mark Cosima's thirty-third birthday and the birth of their son, had to be sold in 1877 to make ends meet. Cosima wept bitter tears over this. However, *Parsifal* was a different matter. The 1882 season had produced a profit of 135,000 marks and, for the first time in Wagner's life, there was no need to sell his creations to raise money. He could enjoy the luxury of retaining complete artistic control for as long as he wished, and he could be sure that his family would be provided for after his death – no small consideration given that Cosima was twenty-four years his junior and was destined to outlive him by forty-seven years.

In 1881, when the Wagners had been holidaying in Palermo, Cosima recorded in her diary that Richard had told her he intended to sell *Haus Wahnfried* (the family home in Bayreuth paid for by King Ludwig), hand over the performances of *Parsifal* to the impresario Angelo

⁶ He had first read Wolfram's *Parzival* in 1845. His *Parsifal* was not completed until 1881.

⁷ Bassett, Peter. (2013). *Richard Wagner on the Practice and Teaching of Singing*. Paper presented at the 8th International Congress of Voice Teachers, Brisbane, Australia, 13 July 2013.

⁸ Wagner, Cosima. *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*. Vol. 2, p. 946.

Neumann and settle down in Italy. Neumann was already touring all over Europe with productions of the *Ring* for which he had purchased the original Bayreuth sets. Wagner was tired and run down.⁹ By August 1882, notwithstanding the success of the Festival in which *Parsifal* had its first performances, he was still in an anti-Bayreuth mood and again spoke of handing over *Parsifal* and the festival theatre to Neumann.¹⁰ In his *Personal Recollections of Richard Wagner*,¹¹ Neumann maintained that, in August 1882, Wagner had promised him the exclusive rights to produce *Parsifal* anywhere in the world except Bayreuth. Neumann wrote:

Then I again touched upon the subject nearest to my heart, - that he should entrust to me his most sacred treasure, “Parsifal”! To my own great amazement his answer was fairly favourable; he even promised to consider it at our next meeting, and I was to bring a proposition for “Parsifal” at the same time with my contract for the “Ring.”¹²

But, said Neumann, shortly afterwards Wagner changed his mind on *Parsifal* and asked to be released from this promise on the understanding that Neumann would indeed eventually be granted exclusive rights. We shall never know for certain what Wagner’s long-term intentions were, for within six months he was dead and his inconsolable widow could not bring herself to sell the performing rights to anyone. Wagner did not leave a will.

In 1884, and again in 1885, the Bayreuth production of *Parsifal* was staged privately at the Court Theatre in Munich for an increasingly unstable Ludwig II, without whom, it must be said, there would have been no Bayreuth theatre and probably no *Parsifal*. Ludwig had declined to attend the premiere on grounds of poor health, much to Wagner’s disappointment. Between 1882 and 1914, *Parsifal* was the most performed of Wagner’s works at Bayreuth. It provided the main reason for going to the Festival. Gustav Mahler attended a performance in 1883, barely six months after Wagner’s death, and remarked in a letter to a friend: ‘When I walked out of the Festspielhaus, incapable of uttering a word, I knew I had come to understand all that is greatest and most painful and that I would bear it within me, inviolate, for the rest of my life.’¹³ A concert performance of the complete work took place at the Royal Albert Hall, London, on 10 November 1884 and was repeated five days later. Other concert

⁹ *ibid.* p.754.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.898.

¹¹ Neumann, Angelo. (1908). Edith Livermore, trans., *Personal Recollections of Richard Wagner*. London, New York, Boston: G. Schirmer, Chapter XVI.

¹² *ibid.* p. 235. The contract for the *Ring* was specified as extending until 1889.

¹³ Letter to Friedrich Löhr, July 1883, in Knud Martner, ed.. (1979). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, trans. Eithne Wilkins, Ernst Kaiser and Bill Hopkins. London: Faber & Faber, p. 73.

performances took place at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, on 4 March 1886¹⁴ and in Amsterdam on 5 December 1896. Cosima's embargo on *Parsifal* stage productions other than at Bayreuth held firm until 1903. In that year, on 24 December, the Metropolitan Opera, unfettered by international copyright obligations, mounted a stage production of its own, with enormous success. The United States did not become a signatory to the 1886 Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works until 1909; Germany had been one of the original signatories a century before. The New York stage performances provoked outrage amongst the Bayreuth faithful (the phrase 'rape of the Grail' was heard),¹⁵ and German opera directors outside Bayreuth were furious that they would have to wait another ten years before they could stage the work. Although the Mayor of New York and certain clerics in that city thought *Parsifal* blasphemous and were inclined to support a ban, the performances went ahead. In just two years, no fewer than 354 performances of *Parsifal* were given in the United States. There were spin-offs too. A Yiddish version was performed on Manhattan's lower east side; Thomas Edison made a short *Parsifal* film, and a theatre in Brooklyn mounted *Parsifal* as a spoken play with musical interludes.¹⁶ *Parsifal* was staged in Toronto and Montreal in April 1905 in contravention of British/Canadian copyright law, but nobody seemed to bother about this in the wake of the more controversial Metropolitan kerfuffle. It was also performed in Amsterdam on 20 June 1905, where there were no treaty impediments.

The German copyright restriction finally expired in December 1913 at the end of the thirtieth year after the composer's death, notwithstanding Cosima's strenuous efforts to persuade the German *Reichstag* to extend it for a further twenty years. Her efforts had been supported by composers such as Richard Strauss, Charpentier, Humperdinck, and Puccini. The latter attended *Parsifal* performances at Bayreuth in 1888, 1889 and 1912. It was one of his favourite operas and he invoked the *Abendmahl-Motiv* in *Le Villi* and the 'redemption' theme in *La fanciulla del West*. He once described *Parsifal* as 'five hours of the utmost bliss, out of

¹⁴ Excerpts from *Parsifal* had been heard in the United States from as early as October 1882, when the prelude was performed by the Musical Society of Milwaukee, and a month later by the Brooklyn Philharmonic. Other excerpts were heard in Boston, New York and Philadelphia, all before Wagner's death. In 1886, 28 out of 52 opera performances at the Metropolitan Opera were devoted to Wagner's works. See DiGaetani, John Louis, and Sirefman, Josef P., eds. (1994). *Opera and the Golden West*. New Jersey; Associated University Presses.

¹⁵ Gibson, Robert. (2001). *Guardians of the Grail – Keeping Parsifal for Bayreuth*. Essay in the program book for the 2001 Adelaide production of *Parsifal*.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

this world!’¹⁷ To Cosima’s letter of May 1901 seeking support, Gustav Mahler responded at once:

I doubt that you could find anyone more ready to support you in this matter. As far as diplomatic means are concerned, I find it hard to suggest how a campaign for such a perfect cause as *Parsifal* could be initiated and organized. Nonetheless, I am body and soul at your disposal. If you would give me a hint of how I can be of use to you, I will spare and disdain no effort to help with all my physical and intellectual strength to attain our goal (permit me, from now on, to consider it our common cause). If a petition from artists or intellectuals in general would be useful, I am sure that there would be no defaulters. And if you want the Austrian authorities to be brought into it, I will find ways and means of approaching them.¹⁸

***Parsifal* in Australia before 2001**

Unlike the United States, the United Kingdom was one of the original signatories to the Berne Copyright Convention, and Australian copyright law originated in British law. However, curiosity in Australia about *Parsifal* was intense during the first decade of the twentieth century and prompted at least one local oddity. In December 1906, in Sydney, the American impresario J.C. Williamson staged what was described as ‘an entirely Australian drama, *Parsifal; or the Redemption of Kundry* – written by the Reverend Thomas Hilhouse Taylor [aka Toso Taylor] and following the Wagnerian story in spirit’.¹⁹ Inspired by the success of the 1903-04 production of *Parsifal* in the United States and some of its theatrical offshoots, it was a ‘verse play with music’ staged in four acts and ten scenes. It was promoted as a ‘romantic mystery drama founded on ancient legends and stories of the grail,’ and as ‘a colossal spectacular of mythological splendour’. The role of Kundry was played by the young American actress Miss Minnie Tittell Brune who was extraordinarily popular in Australia at that time. In this version, Kundry became a central figure in the story, and it was around her redemption that the narrative was woven. Amongst other characters were some who are not to be found in Wagner’s work, such as ‘Maidens of the Holy Grail’, mysteriously parentless

¹⁷ Marotti, G. and Pagni, F. (1926, repr. 1942). Giacomo Puccini intimo. Florence. Quoted in Budden, Julian. *Puccini: His Life and Works*. (2002). Oxford University Press, p. 439.

¹⁸ Letter from Mahler to Cosima Wagner, about 20 May 1901, published in Blaukopf, Herta, ed. (1983). *Gustav Mahler Unbekannte Briefe*. Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 1983, pp. 239-40.

¹⁹ For a detailed description, analysis and photographs from the 1906 production see Kelly, Veronica. *J C Williamson produces Parsifal, or the Redemption of Kundry: Wagnerism, Religion, and Sexuality*. Theatre History Studies 1995, No. 15. Retrieved from: <http://www.espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:10914/vk-parsifal.pdf>.

‘Grail children’, ‘the Dumb Maiden’ and ‘Zana, Klingsor’s slave and companion’.²⁰ The musical score by Christian Helleman, a Sydney based conductor, musical director and organist, consisted mostly of incidental music but included arrangements of some of excerpts from Wagner’s original score, including the prelude. The production also contained a number of songs and dances, including those performed by Kundry ‘the singing and dancing medieval temptress who sought goodness, love and marriage with Amfortas, one of the White Knights, but who was bound to obey every wish of the evil sorcerer Klingsor.’ The sorcerer was eventually defeated after Titurel, the King of the Holy Grail, sent forth his son Amfortas to attack Klingsor’s castle armed with the Sacred Spear. Kundry was the desired beloved of Amfortas throughout and, at the end Parsifal sent them both on a soul-saving mission.²¹ The fourth act of this extravaganza culminated in a massive scene of destruction whereby the castle of Kingsor was destroyed by an earthquake, temples and pillars crashed to earth with thunderous roars while the lighting highlighted a panoramic visual spectacle as the sky was filled with swiftly moving clouds.²² The production was notable for its elaborate scenic effects (requiring 180 stagehands) and use of electric lighting, and seems to have owed more than a little to the ending of *Götterdämmerung*! Williamson’s *Parsifal; or the Redemption of Kundry* was his most successful work during those years and ran for 51 packed performances at Her Majesty’s Theatre Sydney from 22 December 1906 until 15 February 1907. It then transferred to Her Majesty’s Melbourne from 23 March to 26 April, after which there were six performances in Adelaide commencing on 1 June. Williamson’s former partner, George Musgrove, had formed his own company by 1899 and produced the first Wagnerian season in Australia (*Die Walküre*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*) with German singers, from 30 March 1907 in Melbourne while Williamson/Taylor’s *Parsifal* was also playing in that city. Musgrove was a nephew by marriage of William Lyster, the impresario who had brought *Lohengrin* to Melbourne in 1877 and to whom Wagner had sent greetings in a letter in reply to Emil Sander of Melbourne on 22 October 1877.²³ Clearly Wagner’s works enjoyed considerable popularity in Australia before the First World War.

²⁰ Shaw, Jennifer. (2001). *From Earthquakes to Concert Dress*. Essay in the program book for the 2001 Adelaide production of *Parsifal*. Also Tallis, Michael and Joan (1999). *The Silent Showman*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press.

²¹ Kinderman, William and Sayer, Katherine. R. (2005). *A Companion to Wagner’s Parsifal*. New York: Camden House.

²² *Written ‘legitimate’ music theatre works - 1906*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ozvta.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/legitimate-music-theatre-1900-1935-1932015.pdf>.

²³ Spencer, Stewart and Millington, Barry. (1987). *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*. London: J M Dent & Sons, p. 872.

Thomas Quinlan had intended to return to Australia with his opera company in 1914-15 to stage Wagner's *Parsifal* as well as other works, but the outbreak of the war combined with financial tribulations after the company's 1913 world tour put paid to that idea. Two decades later there was much public clamour for Nellie Melba and J C Williamson to include *Parsifal* in their 1928 grand opera season but this did not happen.²⁴ Although Sir Benjamin Fuller promised to include a fully-staged production of *Parsifal* in his company's 1934-35 season, that did not materialise either.²⁵ However, in 1936 the Australian Broadcasting Commission presented (over three evenings, ending on Good Friday, 10 April 1936) a concert version of *Parsifal* conducted by Maurice de Abravanel and featuring Florence Austral as Kundry.²⁶ The producer was the pianist, conductor and music critic Curt Prerauer, husband of Maria Prerauer (née Wolkowsky) whose comments in *The Bulletin* in 1997 are quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Born and educated in Germany, Curt Prerauer had been engaged as a music coach at the 1933 Bayreuth Festival until his appointment was cancelled by Winifred Wagner on the implementation of Hitler's anti-Jewish policies. Moving to Britain, he accompanied Florence Austral on recital tours and joined the BBC before coming to Australia to work for Sir Benjamin Fuller's company. In addition to *Parsifal*, other operas organised by him for ABC broadcasts were *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* and *The Rhinegold*. Clearly he had no difficulty in separating Wagner's works from events taking place in Germany at that time.²⁷ More than forty years would pass before *Parsifal* was again staged in concert in Australia - on 2 April 1977 - when Carlo Felice Cillario conducted the work at the Sydney Opera House with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in collaboration with the Australian Opera. Reid Bunger from the Vienna State Opera sang Klingsor, while the other soloists were principals from the Australian Opera: Ronald Dowd, Lone Koppel-Winther, John Shaw, Alan Light and Donald Shanks.²⁸ Almost twenty years later, the next concert performance of *Parsifal* was given in Brisbane on 27 May 1995, as part of the Brisbane Biennial International Music Festival (chief executive officer Nicholas Heyward; artistic adviser Richard Mills) with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. It was conducted by American Gunther Schuller, with international soloists James Maddalena, Sir Donald

²⁴ Shaw, Jennifer. (2001). *From Earthquakes to Concert Dress*. Essay in the program book for the 2001 Adelaide production of *Parsifal*.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.* The ABC Melbourne orchestra was augmented to fifty members for the broadcast, just under half the size of Wagner's 1882 *Parsifal* orchestra, and there were 32 members of the ABC Wireless Chorus.

²⁷ Australian Dictionary of Biography (Vol. 16). (2002). Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

²⁸ Shaw, Jennifer. (2001). *From Earthquakes to Concert Dress*, op.cit.

McIntyre, Arley Reece, Franz Mazura and Isolde Elchlepp, and with Australian bass Donald Shanks as Titurel.²⁹

Planning the 2001 Adelaide *Parsifal*

In management terms, the 2001 production of *Parsifal* was, understandably, less challenging than the *Ring*, as Wagner himself had found with the Bayreuth premiere of *Parsifal* in 1882. Its Conductor Jeffrey Tate was highly regarded by orchestra and audiences alike. The Assistant Conductor, Lionel Friend had also worked on the 1998 *Ring* and was known to the cast and the orchestra. The orchestral administrative arrangements were, by and large, the same as for 1998 although (significantly in terms of later events) there was no authority comparable to the State Opera Ring Corporation, and the production was controlled directly by SOSA and its Board. Director, Elke Neidhardt came with the production and was known to Adelaide audiences through her *Il trovatore* of 1999. Assistant Director Ian MacKenzie-Thurley had worked with Neidhardt on *Il trovatore* and would work with her again on the 2004 *Ring*, as would Lighting Designer Nick Schlieper. One commentator described the production concept in the following terms:

Neidhardt eschewed polemics and also avoided an intensely Christian or solemn approach to the work, even allowing allusions to Busby Berkeley-style choreography in the seduction scene of act 2. ... Amfortas (Jonathan Summers) carried around a large unidentified book, which the Grail Knights dutifully touched, while the Grail itself was represented by a narrow cone of red light emanating from a pedestal. In the opera's final moments this light opened out to embrace the audience, as did Kundry's gaze as she stood at the front of the stage, apparently transformed.³⁰

Neidhardt's preference for a large square block of 'stone' on stage (the 'pedestal' referred to in the above description) and the 'large unidentified book', reflected her aversion to the symbolism of a chalice, which might have led the audience to confuse the scene in the Hall of the Grail with the sacrament of Holy Communion. She seized on Wolfram von Eschenbach's 13th century description of the Grail as a stone that had fallen from heaven. The 'book' reflected her admiration for Martin Luther, although she did not mention this in her program note. One of the rallying cries of Luther's movement had been '*sola Scriptura*' ('scripture

²⁹ *Parsifal* program book. (1995). Brisbane Biennial International Music Festival.

³⁰ Kinderman, William and Sayer, Katherine. R. (2005). *A Companion to Wagner's Parsifal*, p. 333.

alone'), and his translation of the Bible into German was an important element in his reformation of the church. Neidhardt explained some of her symbols in the following terms:

We agreed early to adopt the 'lapsit exillis' from the *Parzival* poems by Wolfram von Eschenbach: here the Grail is a mysterious large stone which produces food, drink and eternal youth. Parsifal's costume in Act 1 is based on the Chrétien de Troyes version, *Perceval*, in which Parsifal killed a knight because he fancied his red armour. We found humour and, of course, plenty of sensuality. Fortunately, I am blessed with good singer-actors and a wonderfully supportive conductor, which allows these elements to be fully realised.

Wagner was a good dramatist who knew how to structure and entertain. Ultimately, *Parsifal* is no exception. So we endeavour here to tell and interpret the story without striving to answer every question.³¹

Her reference to 'a wonderfully supportive conductor' was a reminder of her troubles with Philippe Auguin and her views on the proper relationship between director and conductor when it came to staged productions. Jeffrey Tate did not rise to the bait but he was keenly aware of the independent power of music, as he wrote in the 2001 program:

...more than any other form, music can seem to mirror spiritual experiences, even render them tangible. ... Richard Wagner/Klingsor [can] render his asceticism yet more alluring than his paper flowers and painted courtesan – Klimt in sound. Stained glass cannot glow with any greater luminescence than the chords that accompany the first appearance of the Grail in Gurnemanz's narration, and the boys in the dome of the Grail temple ravish us with sweet innocence. ...

Why am I, the unbeliever, still moved almost to the brink of tears each time Gurnemanz ushers in the great interlude that links forest and temple in an unhurried depiction of time becoming space, the ultimate breaking down of our limited perceptual capacity? Are we not being invited to be seduced by, and therefore to 'feel', the very rhythm of our universe, the cycles of birth and rebirth that metaphysics tries to grasp, to 'feel' this as only music can make us feel? ... Perhaps this is the greatest achievement of the conjurer ... to have created his powerful aural metaphor

³¹ Director's program note in the 2001 *Parsifal* program.

for our natural world and its patterns, and to have created the acoustic Zaubergarten to allow its fullest expression.

Views on the 2001 production

The scenic design of the 2001 production was quite beautiful, in a simple, stylized way. The stage was raked with a kind of sand pit to one side at the front, in which Kundry grovelled. The sides were mirrored panels which could be opened and closed, and the back wall was a cyclorama for high quality rear projections. The latter were, in turn, reflected in the mirrored walls. For Acts 1 and 3, the main effect was akin to a Japanese screen with the abstract projections descending slowly, dissolving and merging in worn gold-leaf, reds, yellows and blues. The forest in the first scene was a soft projection of stylized tree trunks (or were they crosses?) and the swan was a superimposed projection of a giant white wing pierced by an arrow, with a drop of blood appearing at the appropriate moment. There was not a stuffed swan in sight! Towards the end of the prelude, the curtain rose on a tableau of the sleeping Herzeleide and the child Parsifal, and their eventual separation. The use of panels – mirrored and coloured - to enclose the set, served an important purpose often overlooked by directors and designers whose backgrounds are in the theatre rather than opera. Singers need reflective surfaces in order to project their voices into a cavernous auditorium, and to relate to the orchestra and fellow singers. The Oberle designs served this purpose wonderfully well, as did Michael Scott-Mitchell's designs for the 2004 *Ring*.

The second Act had the most surprises and, visually, it was a foil to the outer acts. The self-castrated Klingsor reclined on an enormous bed whose fabric, in a deep plum colour, covered the entire stage. He wore a long pink coat opened at the front, and a shiny metallic codpiece against which he flourished his long vermilion spear in a suggestive way, drawing predictable laughter from the audience. Klingsor is far from being a comical character, unless self-mutilation and all that that implies psychologically and allegorically is a fit subject for mirth.³² One might equally make a comedy out of the references to Wotan sacrificing one of his eyes, or Oedipus blinding both of his, or Edgar's references to self-mutilation in *King Lear*. Neidhardt's treatment of Klingsor tapped a vulgar strain of humour that garnished (some would say, tarnished) a number of her productions, such as with *Tannhäuser* of 1998 (tumescant Cupid), *Il trovatore* of 1999 (stripping soldiers), *Die Walküre* of 2004 (Valkyries'

³² 'Klingsor Syndrome' has become a recognized psychiatric disorder in which genital self-mutilation is associated with religious delusions.

punk 'Wunderbar'), *Siegfried* of 2004 (dying dragon 'giving the finger' to Siegfried), and *Don Giovanni* of 2008 (naked Giovanni in the shower, splay-legged Donna Elvira etc).³³ These gestures may have been rationalised as Brechtian alienation effects designed to puncture undue reverence and audience self-delusion and, in the case of Wagner, to demonstrate Neidhardt's modern, 'objective' views on the old sorcerer of Bayreuth. 'Wagner was tainted - he was an evil man in our household,' she once said, 'such an anti-Semite and altogether a nasty person. I much prefer his orchestral stuff to the sung side of matters'.³⁴ The Australian painter Jeffrey Smart, who was a knowledgeable and thoughtful Wagnerian and followed *Ring* performances around the world, hated the way Neidhardt introduced such imagery into her productions. When he returned to Adelaide for the *Ring* in 2004, the *Age* newspaper reported his views in the following terms:

Smart's theory, which he relishes sharing, is that Neidhardt, the German director who has lived in Australia for extended periods, felt the need to send up Wagner because of the Third Reich's association with his music. "It's her way of trying to pay a disrespect to Wagner. You know all that stuff, you can play around and vary it and we can have a joke about it and don't have to take it seriously, whereas she couldn't be more wrong. We've got to take it seriously, it's meant to be taken seriously."³⁵

Reviewer Tristram Cary in *The Australian* observed: 'Director Elke Neidhardt doesn't seem entirely happy with Wagner – I felt her direction was sometimes uneasy, although some scenes were completely assured'.³⁶ Fundamentally, I think Neidhardt was playing to the gallery and, for her, in Australia, the gallery meant just about everyone. She had a European disdain for aspects of Australian culture, and was quite candid about this. She spoke of it as being 'still behind in many aspects; I mean quite massively behind'.³⁷ She was, she said, frustrated by the prudishness that plagued the arts in Australia. 'No one in Europe would complain. This is a bit infantile here. What can you do? It's puritanical.' She didn't stop there:

³³ See Byrne, Andrew. (2008, July). *Don Giovanni at the Sydney opera House 5th July 2008*. Retrieved from: <http://www.redfernclinic.com/opera/critique/blog/2008/07/don-giovanni-at-sydney-opera-house-7th.php4>.

³⁴ Munro, Kelsey. (2008, July 5). Shower scene from Gio. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/shower-scene-from-gio/2008/07/04/1214951021973.html?page=fullpage>.

³⁵ DeBelle, Penelope. (2004, November 21). Opera and old friends. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/Opera-and-old-friends/2004/11/20/1100838271406.html?from=storyrhs>.

³⁶ Cary, Tristram. (2001, September 24). Sounds superb, looks awkward. *The Australian*, p. 18.

³⁷ Munro, Kelsey. (2008, July 5). Shower scene from Gio. *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

‘Musicals sell, and Opera Australia is doing more of the lighter fare now. ... It seems to be the temperament of the Australians.’³⁸

Such sentiments aside, Oberle’s scenic design for Act II of *Parsifal* was eye-catching. A large two-way mirrored wall provided the backdrop, tilting forward at the top and reflecting everything below in a way that was reminiscent of 19th century stage illusions – a suitable context for the sorcerer Klingsor. Beautiful maidens appeared in ghostly form beyond the reflecting surface, heightening Klingsor’s torment. Kundry arose from the depths of his bed and, again, the message was one of Klingsor’s frustrated desires. When the castle disappeared and the magic garden arose, the plum coloured cloth that had swathed the stage was withdrawn to reveal a shiny emerald green marble floor, reflected in the mirrored wall above. Klingsor with his pink coat and vermillion spear against the deep green marble provided a psychedelic image. The Flower Maidens wore diaphanous negligées in pinks, mauves, creams etc and, to my mind, resembled handfuls of sweet peas scattered over the green floor. However, beneath their negligées were flesh-toned 1930s bathing costumes. Seated around the edge of a pool, centre stage, they did a leggy synchronised routine to ‘Komm, komm holder Knabe’. Wagner had wanted his Flower Maidens to convey a child-like naivety, and he made it very clear that they were not sirens.³⁹ Some modern directors find it hard to resist the lure of the Venusberg when they stage Act II of *Parsifal* and Neidhardt’s version came close to this. But were they flesh and blood or just holograms created by Klingsor? A rather vacuous lot, they would have graced any 1930’s Hollywood magazine spread. They sang beautifully.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Wagner, Richard, (1882). *Parsifal at Bayreuth 1882*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (1897). Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, vol. 6. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press (1994 printing), p. 304.



5. Act II. Flower Maidens. Photo Randy Larcombe.

Reviewer Tristram Cary expressed his reservations about the ‘severely rectilinear set’ in his article in *The Australian*. He remarked: ‘Wagner’s stage directions are full of magical happenings, but hard edges, straight lines and vast areas of bare stage do not help. The Act II flower maiden scene, an Esther Williams bathing beauty affair set halfway between Wagner’s time and ours, I found embarrassing, as was Kundry’s Jean Harlow wig – the scene came to life amazingly as soon as she got rid of it.’⁴⁰ In fact though, productions of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth, Berlin, Covent Garden and elsewhere have gone far beyond those of 2001 and, in the course of a decade, have made the Adelaide novelties seem positively conservative by comparison.

The opening of the Good Friday scene in Act III was very beautiful. It captured a moment before dawn – all deep blue with silvery stars. Gurnemanz emerged from a rectangular section of the stage that had been propped up as his hut. He struck a match to search for the

⁴⁰ Cary, Tristram. (2001, September 24). Sounds superb, looks awkward. *The Australian*.

source of Kundry's groaning, and gradually the golden light of dawn was revealed behind and around him, once more evoking the stylised beauties of an oriental screen.⁴¹

I had seen, and later met, Poul Elming at Bayreuth in 1998 where he had sung Parsifal and Siegmund, and recommended him to Stephen Phillips. Elming was eager to come to Australia and was a pleasure to observe in performance. Tall, youthful, with a flexible, bright sound and persuasive acting ability, he was surely the kind of singer that Wagner had had in mind but never found in his own day.⁴² He arrived in Adelaide for rehearsals immediately following the 2001 Bayreuth Festival. Austrian bass Manfred Hemm, who sang the long and crucial role of Gurnemanz in Adelaide, had performed it for Scottish Opera in 2000 to glowing reviews. He too had sung at Bayreuth (in *Lohengrin* in 1987) as well as at major houses and festivals in Europe and the United States. During the almost two hours of Act I, Gurnemanz is, as reviewer Humphrey McQueen put it in *The Bulletin*: '... the human centre as steward of a world which is disintegrating. Taxed at times in his bass role, [Hemm] proved steady, never merely foursquare, stern without turning gruff, returning in force in Act 3 to reveal a chastened comprehension of his mission'.⁴³

Australian baritone Jonathan Summers was all pain and suffering as Amfortas, and his 'Wehvolles Erbe' was grippingly portrayed.

⁴¹ I recorded these observations on 17 October 2001, a fortnight after the final performance of the season, in an email to a friend in the United States who cancelled her travel to Adelaide in the wake of the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre.

⁴² Wagner's Parsifal in 1882 was Hermann Winkelmann, whose voice was preserved on early recordings, long after the Bayreuth performances.

⁴³ McQueen, Humphrey. (2001, October 2). Knight to remember. *The Bulletin*, pp. 88-89.



6. Act I. Jonathan Summers as Amfortas and Manfred Hemm as Gurnemanz. Photo Randy Larcombe.

The Kundry of New Zealander Margaret Medlyn was vigorously acted, and she met the role's extraordinary vocal demands with ease. Kundry is a character like none other, for during the course of the opera she must undergo sudden and extreme mood transformations. In Act I she is more of a wild creature than a human being, rushing around the world doing errands for the Knights and their ailing ruler, and sleeping under bushes and in ditches. In Act II we find her as a weary and tormented soul, caught in an endless cycle of rebirth, and then as an alluring siren intent on leading Parsifal to moral destruction. Finally in Act III she is a Magdalen-like penitent who is on stage for much of the act but says only two words: 'Dienen Dienen!' ('To serve ... to serve!'). McQueen described Medlyn's performance in these terms:

Margaret Medlyn displayed a full palette of *mezzo* colours and toning for the repertoire of voices required for her multiple personalities as Kundry, the eternal feminine as temptress and penitent. She spellbound her audience as her attempted seduction of Parsifal moved through every emotion from the maternal to the

voluptuous. Her animal cries and incantations embellished a musical intelligence that held firm throughout these reincarnations.⁴⁴

Not every soprano can handle the dramatic extremes asked of Kundry, and we know that Marianne Brandt - one of the alternate Kundrys for the original 1882 performances (the other was Amalie Materna) - had difficulty with Act II, and that Wagner in his impatience during rehearsals reduced her to tears.⁴⁵ Australian bass Daniel Sumegi's Klingsor was 'magnificently rendered in a dark, craggy voice'.⁴⁶ McQueen noted that 'Klingsor's death, as if crucified along the spear, left a wish that Wagner had given him more to sing'.

The choruses in *Parsifal* are amongst the work's particular glories and were well performed in Adelaide, although doubts remain about the wisdom of using boys' voices off-stage. Prince Alfred College's Chapel Choir and the St Peter's Cathedral Choir (which included five girls) provided the angelic voices in the Hall of the Grail; the State Opera's adult choruses were the Grail Knights and Flower Maidens. Jeffrey Tate clearly favoured the aesthetic purity of boys' voices, as he remarked in his program essay: 'The sound of an unaccompanied Byrd Mass echoing in the fan vaults of King's College Chapel can, by its beauty, seduce us into thinking that we have moved into a spiritual plane'. However, while such ethereal voices work perfectly in the reverberant acoustic of a chapel or in a recording studio, in the relatively dry acoustic of most theatres – especially when the boys are not actually on stage but in the wings - it is difficult to get the balance right. Selective amplification is no solution in these circumstances since it creates false relativities that quickly become apparent to the audience. McQueen observed: 'The knights were brisk in attack, potent in their contrasting voice parts and uplifting when in unison. The younger voices from Prince Alfred College and St Peter's Cathedral, were a shade too heavenly, being further off than was advisable.'⁴⁷

The impact of international and local events on audience attendance

The opening night of *Parsifal* on 22 September 2001 came twelve days after the devastating attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. Of the nearly three thousand innocent people killed, eleven were Australians. This disaster had an immediate impact on audience members planning to travel to Adelaide from overseas, particularly from North America, some of whom decided at the last moment not to come. United States airports

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Neumann, Angelo. (1908). Edith Livermore, trans., *Personal Recollections of Richard Wagner*, p. 233-234.

⁴⁶ Davidson, Jim. (2001). *Parsifal and London*, in Peter Craven ed, *The Best Australian Essays 2001*, p. 455.

⁴⁷ McQueen, Humphrey. (2001, October 2). *Knight to remember*.

were in lock-down and nobody knew whether or not the New York events might herald other terrorist attacks. Another event that had an impact on audience travel was the collapse of the Australian domestic airline Ansett Australia on 13 September, barely a week out from opening night. Interstate and overseas travellers who had booked with Ansett were obliged to scramble for new bookings with other airlines, and this had a flow-on effect on travel times, accommodation and other arrangements. Some decided not to come at all. To make matters worse, the Adelaide Festival Centre was undergoing refurbishment at the time, and partitions obstructed the entrances and foyers. Visitors were greeted with boarded up facades, prompting Jeffrey Tate to ask incredulously of Stephen Phillips how he could have allowed such a thing to happen. It had nothing to do with Phillips of course, since the Adelaide Festival Centre was managed by a separate statutory authority - the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT) – and SOSA was merely a tenant. Nevertheless, it seems extraordinary that the Minister for the Arts, Arts SA and SOSA should have acquiesced in the theatre becoming something of a building site while *Parsifal* was being staged – especially after some \$4 million had been spent on ensuring that the Festival Centre and its surrounds were in immaculate condition for the 1998 *Ring*. The greater priority now, it seemed, was to have the building refurbished in time for the much heralded Peter Sellars Adelaide Festival of March 2002 – the same festival that would be described in *The Advertiser* seven months later as ‘the worst run, worst financed and worst marketed Festival of all time’.

Marketing *Parsifal*

The marketing of *Parsifal* had begun in earnest in March 2000, with advice to SOSA subscribers and mail-outs to 1998 *Ring* ticket buyers, Adelaide Festival audience members and others who had expressed interest. This was followed by targeted advice to professional organisations through trade publications. The 1998 *Ring* had confirmed that Wagner’s works attracted a disproportionate number of professionals, such as lawyers and doctors, a phenomenon regularly remarked on in press articles.⁴⁸ Philosophers and psychoanalysts too have long found the works to be fertile fields for speculation and research,⁴⁹ and it is not unusual to see conferences of psychoanalysts being organised to coincide with performances of Wagner’s mature works.⁵⁰ Initially, letters and flyers were the principal vehicles for

⁴⁸ Bernard Levin once remarked that ‘Wagner nights’ at Covent Garden seemed to attract a disproportionate number of clergymen! See Levin, Bernard. (1981). *Conducted Tour*, London: Jonathan Cape, p. 8.

⁴⁹ See for example, Donington, Robert. (1969). *Wagner’s Ring and its Symbols*. London: Faber & Faber.

⁵⁰ Such as *Engaging with the Ring*, an open day during the Australian Psychoanalytical Society Conference in Adelaide on 18 November 2004.

Parsifal publicity, but articles and advertisements in publications followed, and in July there were ‘launches’ in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland to encourage potential donors and attract wider media coverage. *Parsifal* brochures with full details of booking and dining arrangements, and information about ancillary events, were mailed in July 2000, targeting subscribers, Friends of the State Opera, patrons, media, business interests, the local arts sector, Wagner societies, audience members of interstate opera companies (through program advertisements), and tourism offices interstate and overseas. In a marketing strategy document prepared by a professional marketing manager, the ‘target’ audience was identified in the following terms:

Parsifal is a Specialist Classical event of international significance. It will attract a predominantly older audience of a high social status. This audience appreciates opportunities to express its status and illustrate its discerning tastes. They are university educated, traditional, enjoy ceremony, formality and indulgence. They are more knowledgeable and educated in the arts than the population average, and they often have focused tastes. They perceive the traditional arts as ‘ideals’ and seek authenticity. This group includes a significant product-led group who are academic in orientation and who prepare for each performance and may attend alone.⁵¹

A comprehensive program of media articles and interviews was arranged, covering print and electronic media and involving, amongst others, conductor Jeffrey Tate, director Elke Neidhardt, and Poul Elming. My principal involvement was to participate in media interviews on radio and television, address groups and societies in South Australia and interstate, and to write articles for the print media. I also published a book *Wagner’s Parsifal – The Journey of a Soul* (2000), and gave pre-performance talks at the Adelaide Festival Theatre on each performance day.

Financial outcomes

The total cost of mounting *Parsifal* was \$2.274 million, and ticket sales raised \$1.058 million.⁵² The resulting economic benefits in terms of Gross State Product were estimated to be \$2.4 million. There were 5,906 tickets (or 85%) sold, out of a budgeted capacity of 6,770 over four performances. A shortfall of 10% in budgeted ticket sales reflected in part the

⁵¹ State Opera of South Australia 2001 *Parsifal Marketing Strategy* prepared by the contracted marketing adviser.

⁵² Auditor-General’s Report on The State Opera of South Australia for the year ended 30 June 2002.

effects of the international terrorism crisis and domestic airline difficulties. Some 1,800 visitors attended from interstate and overseas, comprising 30% of the audience.⁵³

Waning Liberal Government interest

The first public announcement of a *Parsifal* production for Adelaide had come not from the Minister for the Arts as had been the case for the 2004 *Ring*, or the Premier of South Australia, as for the 1998 *Ring*, but via a SOSA media release on 18 February 2000. That was the first indication that *Parsifal* was not being treated as a singular event but as an integral part of the company's regular opera season. This was so notwithstanding the State Government's special budgetary contribution of \$200,000, approved by Cabinet on 21 February 2000. By mid-2001, Minister Laidlaw and senior arts public servants were preoccupied with the financial catastrophe of the 2000 Festival and the looming management disaster of the 2002 Festival. Nevertheless, in a speech at the Festival Theatre on 27 August 2001 for the combined launches of SOSA's 2002, 2003 and 2004 opera seasons (which I had been asked to write) the minister maintained an air of optimism saying:

In four weeks' time, Wagner's final masterpiece *Parsifal*, will receive its Australian stage premiere in the Festival Theatre. It is indeed a pleasure to welcome Jeffrey Tate back to Adelaide to conduct this great work. He occupies a special place in the affections of South Australian music lovers.⁵⁴ Rehearsals for *Parsifal* are in full swing, and to the production team and singers, and others who are involved with it, I need hardly say that I am looking forward enormously to seeing and hearing your work. This will be a major event in the Australian arts calendar. A large section of the *Parsifal* audience will be from interstate and overseas. We can all remember the 'buzz' of enthusiasm that surrounded the 1998 *Ring*, and how much the people of Adelaide responded to that tremendous artistic achievement.

Now that the ice has been broken (or the *Ring* forged), the State Opera will stage the first completely Australian inspired *Ring* in 2004, and I'm delighted that the musical director of that challenging but immensely rewarding enterprise, Asher Fisch, is here with us today.

⁵³ Burgan, Barry, senior economist at the Centre for Economic Studies of the University of Adelaide. (2001). *Report of an Economic Study for Parsifal*. Quoted in a media release of the State Opera of South Australia (2001, December 10).

⁵⁴ In 2001 the City of Adelaide presented Jeffrey Tate with the Keys to the City.

These great works carry high risks, financially and in terms of the resources and effort they demand. But they are also achieving much for South Australia. As always in the arts ... the higher the risk, the greater the triumph!

Such sentiments were designed to lift morale. However, in contrast with the heady displays of government enthusiasm for 1998 *Ring*, there were no Parliamentary statements on, or interest expressed in *Parsifal*, other than a passing reference on 2 October 2001 by the Minister for Tourism, Joan Hall to her attendance at a performance the week before and to the final performance that evening. Moreover, no statements were made in 2001 in either House of Parliament about the *Ring* being planned for 2004, and, in comments made elsewhere by politicians about *Parsifal* or the forthcoming *Ring*, the Seattle model was no longer invoked. Mayor Paul Schell⁵⁵ of Seattle whom I had met several times and with whom Minister Laidlaw had concluded the South Australia/Seattle Arts Exchange agreement in 1999 lost the municipal elections in November 2001 and left office in January 2002. Seattle's international image had been bruised by major riots associated with the World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference in November 1999. Back in Australia, the political environment in which the Wagner experiment had been born was changing, and political enthusiasm for the productions was waning, even within the Liberal Government.

However, the *Parsifal* production itself attracted considerable attention in the media. The Australian writer, Jim Davidson, wrote in a published essay:

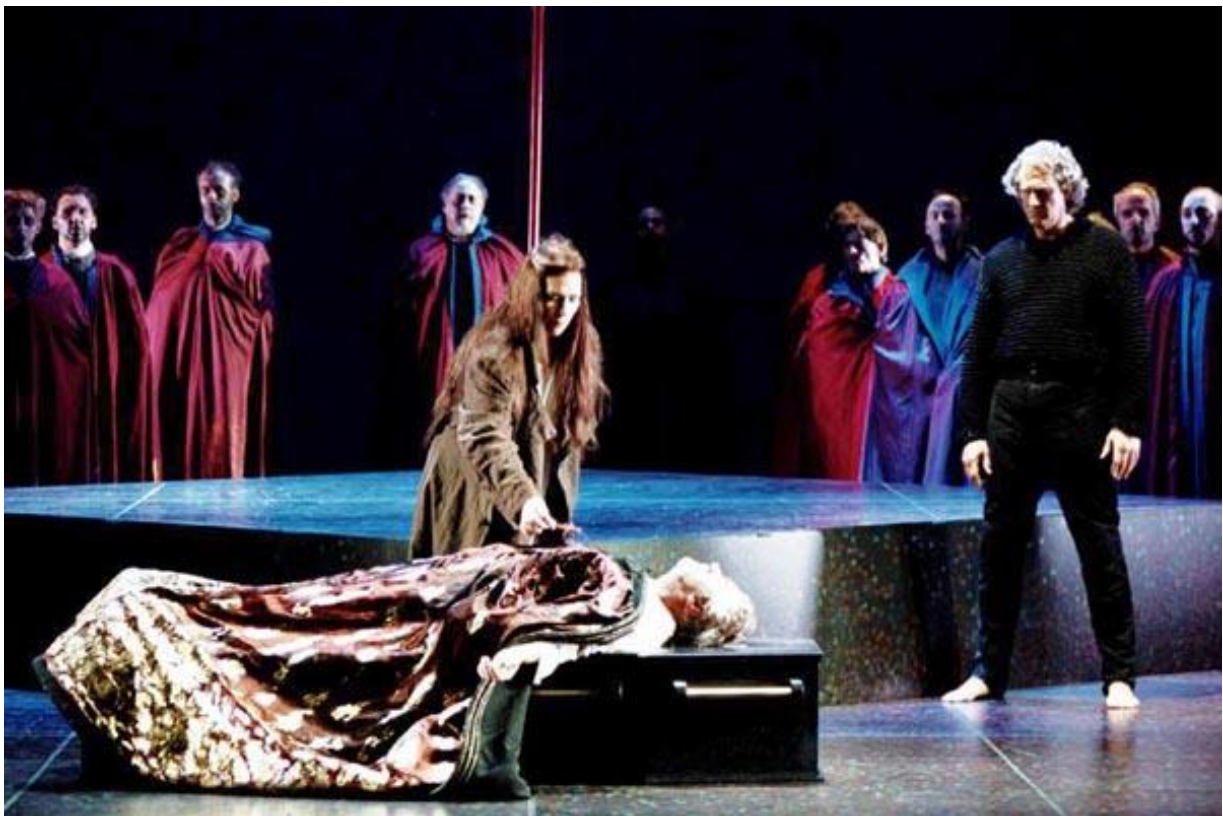
... the striking thing about this production was how good *all* the soloists were, even in the minor parts.

Clearly some of the credit for this rests not only with the individual singers, but with Jeffrey Tate as conductor. People not present asked about the tempi, a very sensible question when it comes to Wagner, since in the longer acts variations of time of up to twenty minutes are not unknown. The best thing that can be said is that the music proceeded like a seamless web, the action determining the pace, adroitly varied accordingly. At the same time the magnificent grail music of the prelude was taken daringly slowly, so that its full majesty emerged. Tate had clearly built it up phrase by phrase, so that there was wonderful definition in all that shimmering liquidity. The playing of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra left nothing to be desired.

⁵⁵ Mayor Paul Schell (1937-2014) had been born *Paul Ervin Schlachtenhaufen*, the son of a Lutheran pastor.

Perhaps only Adelaide could have brought it off. Sydney and Melbourne could not have put so much effort into making a single cultural statement; indeed the management of the late Victoria State Opera rejected the idea of a *Parsifal* some years ago. But there it was by the Torrens, splendidly sung and splendidly revealed. In the course of a lengthening life I suppose I have seen a couple of hundred different opera productions; this one would have to be placed in the top ten. State Opera South Australia should be congratulated, and Adelaide's Festival Centre is on the way to becoming Australia's Festspielhaus.⁵⁶

Alas, Australia's Festspielhaus on the Torrens was not to be. The 2001 production of *Parsifal* was given just a single season of four performances before its sets were destroyed and costumes disposed of to save on storage costs. Expedience had triumphed over art, and transience was now an established feature of South Australia's Wagnerian venture.



7. Act III. Margaret Medlyn as Kundry, Jonathan Summers as Amfortas, Poul Elming as Parsifal, and the Knights of the Grail. Photo Randy Larcombe.

⁵⁶ Davidson, Jim. (2001). *Parsifal and London*, in Peter Craven ed, *The Best Australian Essays 2001*. Melbourne: Black Inc., pp. 452– 456.

With news of the Adelaide Festival of Arts going from bad to worse, it seemed that the arts had become almost a political liability. Indeed, it is possible to date waning Liberal Government interest in a Wagner-related future to around the middle of 2001. Quite simply, there were more pressing matters to worry about, key personnel had moved on and general elections were looming. Twelve months earlier, Minister Laidlaw had told Parliament: ‘It is interesting to see that some other states were not able to negotiate nearly as well as we did in this matter [the outcome of the Nugent Inquiry] nor score as well with a coup such as Wagner’s *Ring* as a national event of excellence in South Australia’,⁵⁷ but that sense of confidence was now in short supply. In October 2001 John Olsen resigned as Premier in favour of Rob Kerin and, in March 2002 the Liberal Government lost office. Within fifteen months, Diana Laidlaw had retired from Parliament. SOSA’s preparations for the 2004 *Ring* continued, but earlier assumptions about government support now had to be readdressed.

⁵⁷ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly, Estimates Committee B. (2000). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 15, p. 78.

Chapter 7

Conceptualising and designing the 2004 *Ring*

On 25 October 2001, three weeks after the curtain fell on *Parsifal* in Adelaide, Elke Neidhardt and her design team began a week-long ‘retreat’ in the Blue Mountains to the west of Sydney to discuss production concepts and designs for the new *Ring*. Neidhardt was open to most ideas but she had a few general guidelines, the first being to tell the story clearly. Extremes were out. She did not want a conventional *Ring*, nor did she want a self-consciously avant-garde production, one that divorced action from meaning – ‘a German-style, deconstructed sort of concept where very often you don’t recognise what is on stage ... It’s terribly successful’ she said. ‘I don’t know why. I hate this stuff.’¹ In Germany ‘you have to go over the top now because they’re so blasé. They’ve seen everything, they want to see something different in the theatre and they want to boo.’² Unveiling the four operas in one go added even more pressure to an already daunting task. Unlike the Bayreuth tradition where a *Ring* is staged for five or six years running and directors have the chance to come back each year and work on it, the Adelaide production would not have that privilege. ‘We have to get it right and successful and acclaimed the first time’, said Neidhardt. Neither set-designer Michael Scott-Mitchell nor costume designer Stephen Curtis was familiar with the *Ring*. Lighting and associate set designer Nick Schlieper knew it but was not an enthusiast. Neidhardt had to do a lot of backgrounding and explaining, but basically she was working with a clean slate, and this permitted a fresh – perhaps even Australian - vision.

The discussions in the Blue Mountains moved slowly and, as they later joked,³ after four days they had reached the end of the prelude to *Das Rheingold*. Water and fire are persistent elements in the story of the *Ring*, and it seemed natural that they should feature prominently in this production too. One image that had fired Neidhardt’s imagination even before the ‘retreat’ was the enormous cauldron which Scott-Mitchell had designed for the Sydney Olympics opening ceremony in September 2000, which rose out of the water and blazed high above the stadium. Might there be some way of adapting this for the *Ring*? As a consequence,

¹ Debelle, Penelope. (2004, November 8). She tells it like it is. *The Age*.

² Litson, Jo. (2004, August). Ring of confidence, *Limelight*, pp. 30-32.

³ Schlieper, Nick. (2003). *Forging the Ring - Backstage at State Opera of SA’s Ring Cycle*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

a circular platform which rose and fell on a central pillar surrounded by jets of flame became a feature of *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*.

Early design concepts

The formal starting point for the design process was the association of the goddess Erda with the Rhinegold in its pure state - a fecund Earth Mother representing nature at its most pristine and fundamental. Scott-Mitchell and Neidhardt imagined her seated, Buddha-like, virtually naked but caked with mud, and with a vein of gold running down her. She would emerge from the gloom during the prelude to *Rheingold* and remain visible in the depths of the river. When the gold on her body glowed at the appropriate point, Alberich would lunge through the water and the golden gleam would be extinguished. The notion of a 'water curtain' filling the entire proscenium space also made its way onto the 'clean slate' early in the piece although at that point nobody had any idea how it might be realised. Another idea which gained early acceptance was Scott-Mitchell's concept of the 'Rhine frame' – a frame of blue Perspex panels lit from behind, which would line the proscenium arch and be a constant reminder of the proximity of the River Rhine in, on and beside which most of the drama takes place. These images – the primal Erda on her moveable platform, the real water and the blue Rhine frame – clean, bright, modern and architectural – provided the visual syntax for the designs still to come.⁴

Neidhardt was familiar with my books on the *Ring* and *Parsifal* - the latter being of particular interest to her in 2001 at the time of the Adelaide production. Apparently she liked what she read and felt that I might be able to contribute to the concept and design process for the new *Ring*. In an email to me on 27 November 2001 she wrote:

I meant to get in touch with you for a while or certainly since our Blue Mountain retreat where your name was repeatedly mentioned. It struck me that we don't have a dramaturge, a situation quite untenable in German opera houses. I think we should discuss this with Steven (*sic*) and then endeavour to make use of your knowledge in matters Wagner to possibly "install" you in this position. What do you think? It has always worried me when working with SOSA how little effort was spent on devising the program, research and actual dramaturgical input. O.A. is not much better,

⁴ (2005). *Forging the Ring - Backstage at State Opera of SA's Ring Cycle*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

although at least they have a person in place to take care of the program and oversee some kind of coordination.

No doubt you know what a big help a dramaturge can be to every aspect of a production, but particularly to the director. Maybe it would interest you.

At present I am having irregular meetings with various members of the design team and we are progressing very slowly, as is to be expected. But it is exciting and fruitful.⁵

I replied to Neidhardt that I would be very interested in performing this role, and assured her that Phillips had been enthusiastic about the idea although there was no funding available since no provision had been made for a dramaturge in the very lean budget.

By 5 December there had been preliminary discussions within the design team about *Die Walküre*, but not a lot of progress had been made. In an email to me, Neidhardt summarised in simple terms the concepts developed so far: ‘modern, somewhat politically relevant, clean as against dirt, dark against light, rich against poor, Western World against Third World without necessarily recognizable figures on stage. The gold is not necessarily gold but a substance that the superpowers want. We would like to leave it to the audience to imagine what Alberich is fossicking for rather than have the invariably awful props of gold. So ours will look more sinister. So stay away from gold things in your PR, though there will be a ring, of course.’⁶ Not all of the contrasts mentioned in these preliminary thoughts survived in the finished work, and those that did were usually represented obliquely and not in any simplistic or obvious way. On 19 December, not long after the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York, Neidhardt commented: ‘Can hardly bear to read the papers these days All the more important that people like us try to bring something exciting and uplifting into this world of gloom and threat.’ She mentioned that Scott-Mitchell had thrown out his first concept for Nibelheim, which she had actually liked very much. ‘But that’s how it goes.’ She said she had also been looking at a ‘brilliantly executed white cardboard model of scenes 1 and 4 of *Rheingold*, so these designs had been finalised as early as December 2001.’⁷

⁵ Neidhardt, Elke. (2001, November 27). Email to Peter Bassett. For this and other correspondence concerning the concept and design meetings see Appendix 4.

⁶ Neidhardt, Elke. (2001, December 5). Email to Peter Bassett.

⁷ Neidhardt, Elke. (2001, December 19). Email to Peter Bassett.

Early in the New Year, on 11 January 2002, I attended a concept/design meeting in Sydney and subsequently reported to Phillips in the following terms:

The design is going well and some exciting images are emerging. We'll meet again on 14 February. Some features so far are: A 'Rhine frame' which is a blue light box framing the proscenium arch and providing a visual reminder throughout the *Ring* of the proximity of the Rhine; a water curtain for the opening scene through which the Rhinemaidens cavort, plus doubles on ropes;⁸ a mesh floor downstage that can assume various angles and on which Alberich climbs and slides, and a mist curtain upstage (the 'celestial waiting room' for Valhalla) with a light box floor for the gods. Nibelheim is the subject of on-going thinking, with several ideas under consideration. We also talked about Act 1 of *Walküre* and this is coming along very well – simple but with striking images. ...

[The] image of Erda, caked in mud with the seam of gold through her and framed in the blue 'Rhine frame' emerged during our discussions as a striking image for a logo. I think it would be intriguing and memorable....⁹

Dramaturgical issues

At the 11 January meeting, a question was raised as to whether Wotan might be involved in some way in the events in Act 1 of *Die Walküre*. I pointed out that, unlikely as it now seemed, there was indeed a precedent for Wotan's presence in this Act. In Wagner's early drafts¹⁰ he had Wotan entering Hunding's hut during the meal and thrusting a sword into the ash tree. The god was described as an old man with grey hair and beard, one eye, and a round hat and a grey cloak (ie as Wälse, the father of the twins). In the first sketch, Wotan even stayed the night and witnessed the coming of love into the lives of his offspring! In the third and fully worked-out prose sketch he didn't stay but thrust the sword into the tree and declared that the sword would belong to the man who could pull it out. Hunding tried to do this but failed, before Siegmund succeeded. It seems that the composer's main reason for dropping the visible intervention of Wotan/Wälse was to allow the dramatic tension to build gradually towards the exciting business with the sword at the end of the Act. For the Adelaide production it was decided that Wotan/Wälse would appear just as the great door to the hut

⁸ No doubles on ropes were used in the final version.

⁹ Bassett, Peter. (2002, January 13). Email to Stephen Phillips. In the end the Erda image was not used for a logo.

¹⁰ Cooke, Deryck (1979). *I Saw the World End*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 293.

burst open (audibly but not visibly in this instance), and he would draw ‘Spring’ across the scene in the form of a gorgeously painted curtain.

When the discussion turned to the depiction of Hunding’s hut on stage, I mentioned that behind the action in this Act had been Wotan’s plan to prepare Siegmund to claim the sword, defeat his enemies and do what the god, bound by his laws and treaties, was unable to do. That had been the whole purpose of the boy’s tough and tragic upbringing. The hut therefore might be likened to a hunter’s trap set for Siegmund. Wotan could not simply *give* his son the sword, for that would have compromised his own authority and the laws from which it derived, but he could lure him to it and leave it to the heroic nature of the young man to do the rest. Since the spear was the instrument and symbol of Wotan’s will, it seemed appropriate to conceive of the hut as a circle of spears that would shoot up from the floor and stop the fleeing man – in the way that a trap might catch a fleeing animal. Scott-Mitchell and Neidhardt quite liked this idea, and this was how the hut was depicted in the final staging. When Siegmund pulled the sword from the tree (in practice from a pool at the centre of the hut, alluding to the spring of wisdom at the base of the world ash tree from which the god had drunk) the spear posts sank into the ground and the twins fled into the night.

On 22 February 2002 I reported to Phillips in the following terms on the design meeting that had taken place on the 14th:

The *Ring* meeting last week was attended by the whole design team. We ‘finished off’ Act 1 of *Walküre* and moved on to Act 2, where things got a bit stuck. Michael has had his expensive imported laptop stolen in a car park and is having to rely on printouts at this stage. Fortunately he had made backups but it will be a while until he can get a replacement machine. ...

The main idea for Act 2 is to divide it into two scenes, the first one being in Wotan’s office in Valhalla, surrounded by the trappings of executive power. He is also surrounded by (life size?) statues of heroes, frozen or in suspended animation pending future use to defend Valhalla. The main sticking point was how to move the heroes in and out on a light box floor. Personally I’d prefer to see them stationary rather than risk having a lot of wobbling dummies. I think Elke is coming to that view too. Anyway, there is still more work to do on this. So, I guess you can say the team is not quite half way through at this stage.

Production concepts and understanding characters

For several weeks in February/March 2002, Neidhardt and I corresponded about aspects of *Siegfried* as she marshalled her thoughts and decided on an approach to this, the trickiest of the *Ring* dramas to stage convincingly for a modern audience. Many of my comments were drawn from the *Siegfried* chapter of my *Ring* book, and the full texts of emails are at Appendix 4. However, the following exchange will illustrate the development of production concepts and the nature of my input as dramaturge.

Neidhardt raised a question about the Woodbird in Act II of *Siegfried*. Her point was that the ring and Tarnhelm would have escaped the young man Siegfried's attention had it not been for the Woodbird advising him to take them. So, she asked:

Who was manipulating the Woodbird? In the Kupfer production it was Wotan and that makes sense to me. Or was the Woodbird intending that through Siegfried nature would be repaired, ie the ring returned to the Rhinemaidens?¹¹

I had never agreed with Kupfer's interpretation, and responded as follows:

The bird takes fright when it sees the Wanderer in Act 3, which shows it is quite aware of who he is. But why would the Woodbird be so clearly alarmed (*flattert ängstlich hin und her* – [flutters anxiously to and fro]) if it is merely doing Wotan's bidding? The Wanderer's own remark: '*Ein Vöglein schwatzt wohl manches*' ['A bird may chatter all sorts of things'] also suggests that its advice had nothing to do with him. ...

I have seen a suggestion that the Woodbird's role is the legendary/fairy tale one of telling Siegfried what he desperately needs to know ... I am inclined to the interpretation that the voice of the Woodbird is 'nature' caring for its own [I had previously made the point that Siegfried was a child of nature metaphorically speaking, in addition to being the actual child of Sieglinde whom he had never known. Siegfried had been lying under the Linden tree listening to the womb-like sounds of the forest murmurs, trying to imagine what his mother was like]. ... In the abandoned text for *Der junge Siegfried*, when listening to the Woodbird, Siegfried exclaims: 'It is as though my mother sings to me!' Again, at the end of the music for

¹¹ Neidhardt, Elke. (2002, February 28). Email to Peter Bassett.

the Woodbird's warning about Mime's treachery, we hear the Wälsung motive. Wagner explained this in a note to King Ludwig: 'We hear, softly, softly, mother Sieglinde's loving concern for her son.' So it could be said that the Woodbird is also the voice of his mother's love, warning her son of danger and leading him to Brünnhilde.¹²

Neidhardt replied on 5 March 2002:

Thanks for your Woodbird thoughts. I have been reading lots of different (German) opinions, quite funny since they all vary but are vehement in their opinion. More often than not I came across the 'Woodbird being Wotan's tool', which surprised me. Your argumentation makes colossal sense. Also plenty about Mime, poor chap. Mostly German dramaturges seem to feel sorry for him, manipulated and maltreated sod that he is.

Our next meeting is on Thursday, at last. I must say the long pauses drive me nuts.

... I hope I'll be able to see you at the donors launch! I'm having my eyes lasered the day before and don't know what state I will be in on the 14th or 15th for that matter. I think Michael plans to show Steve the model on one of those days, so surely, if you have time, you will be invited as well.

I have, as usual, printed out your latest thoughts for the team. It makes my work a lot easier. So thank you once again.¹³

Management awareness of the design process

The Donors Launch to which Neidhardt referred took place in Sydney on Thursday 14 March 2002 at the premises of *State of the Arts* magazine. The Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir was guest of honour and spoke eloquently about the work and about her fond memories of the 1998 *Ring*. Two days earlier, a similar launch had been held in Melbourne, co-hosted by Stephen Phillips and Melbourne philanthropist Lady Potter. Phillips did see the model on 14 March and I subsequently reported to Neidhardt that: 'The model presentation on Thursday was most impressive. Steve wasn't feeling his brightest at the time but his subsequent comments to me were very positive and I believe he is entirely happy with

¹² Bassett, Peter. (2002, February 28). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

¹³ Neidhardt, Elke. (2002, March 5). Email to Peter Bassett.

the way the designs are developing. I'm sure he will say as much when he is over the 'flu.'¹⁴ This reaction from Phillips was important given later developments which are discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

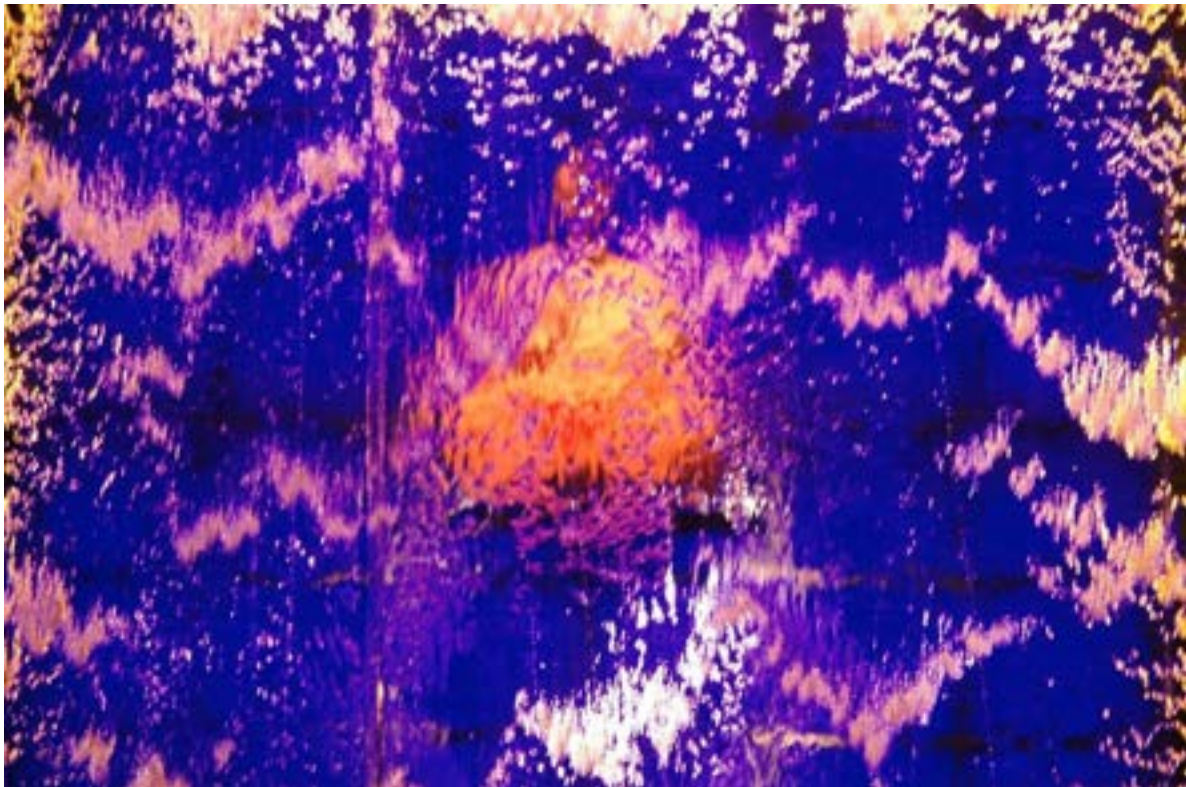
By the time the design team had moved on to consider Act III of *Die Walküre* I was in Berlin leading an opera tour to the 'Festival Days' of the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, at which Barenboim was conducting all ten of Wagner's mature works in productions by Harry Kupfer. Some observers have felt that the Neidhardt/Scott-Mitchell 'punk' treatment of the Valkyries at the 'Wunderbar' nightclub was disrespectful but, although it would not have been my choice, it was consistent with the production's aesthetic, and it certainly had the desired effect of providing emotional release after the long and, at times, gruelling second Act. I had previously drawn attention to the Valkyries' flippant exchanges as they came into land on the rock – exchanges that often pass unnoticed in the theatre amongst the fast and furious music and overlapping voices. I also referred to a 9th-10th century Swedish figure of a Valkyrie in the form of a cup-bearer; one of the mythological functions of the Valkyries was to serve drinks to the heroes in Valhalla, and so the 'Wunderbar' associations did have some justification.



8. *Die Walküre* Act III, Scene 1. Elizabeth Stannard as Gerhilde, Gaye MacFarlane as Siegrune, and Donna-Maree Dunlop as Rossweisse. Photo Sue Adler.

¹⁴ Bassett, Peter. (2002, March 16). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

On 1 June 2002 (that is, six months before the formal design presentation to the SOSA Board) Neidhardt sent to Phillips the detailed running order schedules for both *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* (see Appendix 4). These schedules set out precise instructions for scenery movements scene by scene, including points for the activation of special effects such as the *Rheingold* water curtain (downstage), mist curtain (upstage)¹⁵ and pop up floor; and *Walküre* Act I hydraulically operated spikes, Act II movable floor and ‘frozen’ heroes, and Act III hydraulic circle and flames. Most of these features and effects would appear again in *Siegfried* and/or *Götterdämmerung*, with some additional designs still to come, notably the ‘dragon’ for Act II of *Siegfried*, and the Hall of the Gibichungs and final flame effects in *Götterdämmerung*. So, by 1 June 2002 (that is, two and a half years ahead of the opening night), SOSA management had received detailed information on all of the scenery elements for the first two operas, and key components for the third and fourth.



9. *Das Rheingold* Scene I. The Rhine gold, identified in this production with Erda, seen through the waters. Photo Michael Scott-Mitchell.

¹⁵ This became a dark grey fabric curtain which was released dramatically when Donner’s thunder clap sounded.



10. *Die Walküre* Act III. Brünnhilde asleep surrounded by fire. Photo Michael Scott-Mitchell.

The Director's inclination towards contemporary German dramaturgical ideas

In an email to Neidhardt on my return from Berlin I wrote of the many excellent features of the productions, but I also referred to problems I had had with some of Kupfer's interpretations:

Just a few things I didn't like: Wotan appearing in Siegfried 1(i) and manipulating the Woodbird in 2 (ii) (no surprise there) and turning up again in *Götterdämmerung* 3 (iii). Also I didn't like Alberich wandering on stage at the end (Götz Friedrich did that too, and I thought it was a big mistake because it upstaged Brünnhilde). It anchored the work in politics, whereas I think the ultimate message of the *Ring* is that politics can never be the guarantor of human happiness. While Wagner in the 1850s, despairing of social reform, was inclined to the view that Alberich and his kind would inherit the world (and said as much in a letter to Liszt), by the 1870s he no longer put his faith in political remedies. Brünnhilde offers a new way forward – but it is one that can only be approached by suffering through love. Alberich, the quintessential

renouncer of love, can have no part in this. He has been swept aside (conceptually speaking) just as surely as Wotan has been swept aside.¹⁶

Amongst my descriptions of the Berlin productions was a reference to Kupfer's depiction of Erda in *Siegfried* Act III, in which she had appeared beneath a raised stage, entangled in luminescent yellow fibre optic rope against a deep blue background— a solution that was copied in Adelaide for the three Norns in the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*. Neidhardt in her reply of 13 June 2002 said she had been most interested in what I had described. However, alarmingly, and notwithstanding her earlier statement, she now seemed to be inclining towards contemporary German (and in my view ill-considered) concepts of a Wotan/Woodbird connection. She wrote:

I must say I am more and more inclined to think along the lines of Wotan manipulating or indeed turning himself into the Woodbird one way or the other. It makes very good sense as in many ways does the re-appearance of Alberich in the end, particularly in the current political situation. [But then she changed her mind again] It is a very grim view to take and it is not in the music at the end which speaks of a new (tranquil?) beginning, so I won't do this.¹⁷

Mercifully, in the finished product Wotan did not transform himself into the Woodbird, nor was there any overt godly manipulation of the bird which, in the form of soprano Shu-Cheen Yu was given a colourful and athletic stage presence. Actually, in Wagner's score the Woodbird does not appear in the cast list at all; there is merely a reference above the appropriate vocal line to *Stimme des Waldvogels* [Voice of a Woodbird]. This supports the interpretation that the Woodbird has no independent dramatic 'personality' at all but is a vocalisation of nature through which Siegfried hopes to learn something of his mother. It is an example of what psychologists call wish fulfilment - a manifestation of Siegfried's need. However, few directors these days (including Elke Neidhardt) can resist giving the audience a colourful, even comical new character to entertain them during a rather slow scene, although this flies in the face of what Wagner intended. Furthermore, directors who require Wotan to manipulate Siegfried's actions are ignoring the god's psychological transformation after the death of Siegmund. This transformation is graphically described in Wotan's long monologue in Act II of *Die Walküre*, and again in Act III when he tells Brünnhilde: 'Never ask me to

¹⁶ Bassett, Peter. (2002, June 10). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

¹⁷ Neidhardt, Elke. (2002, June 13). Email to Peter Bassett.

protect the woman [Sieglinde] still less the fruit of her loins'. The whole point of the transfer of dramatic focus from Wotan to Siegfried is that Siegfried is a hero in philosophical terms – a free agent – fundamentally, a modern man, no longer beholden to the beliefs and superstitions of an earlier age. To ignore this development is merely to replay the Wotan/Siegfried relationship of master and vassal, and to negate one of Wagner's most important ideas. As Wotan himself says: 'The other man for whom I long, that other I can never find: for the free man has to create himself; I can only create subjects to myself.' Siegfried is not, and never will be, Wotan's creature.

Further evolution of design and concept

The design team meetings had been proving difficult to co-ordinate because of conflicting commitments. Therefore, from late June 2002 onwards Neidhardt decided to have separate meetings with the costume designer on the one hand, and the set and lighting designers on the other. As at 13 June, under these new arrangements, meetings involving Neidhardt, Scott-Mitchell and Schlieper were scheduled for 21 June, 23 and 26 July, 1 August - with the remainder of August/September to be determined, and 23 and 24 October. Other dates were to be added as opportunities arose and needs dictated. I attended as many meetings as possible. Neidhardt did not envisage turning her attention to *Götterdämmerung* much before the end of July 2002, with loose ends on the other three being tied up in the meantime.

When the *Nibelheim* scene in *Das Rheingold* had been discussed, I had suggested a port/shipping container setting in order to imply third world exploitation, child labour and the like. It was a topical idea because our Sydney discussions were taking place not long after the riots that had marred the World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle. It was also prompted by something that Wagner had said in 1877 during his visit to London - then the largest metropolis in the industrial world. In Cosima Wagner's diary entry for 25 May, after a boat journey down the Thames from Greenwich, she quoted her husband as saying: 'This is Alberich's dream come true, Nibelheim, world domination, activity, work, everywhere the oppressive feeling of steam and fog.'¹⁸ My further idea was that when Alberich uses the Tarnhelm to transform himself into a giant serpent, this could be represented by a crane-like piece of machinery rearing up from behind one of the containers, sporting the Tarnhelm (it is after all a humorous episode although Wotan and Loge feign fear). The suggestion was

¹⁸ Wagner, Cosima. *Diaries*. Vol. 1, p. 965.

considered but, in the end, Scott-Mitchell took a different tack, creating a structurally elaborate underground cavern with double ramps.

For the Alberich transformation, an upper chamber was revealed in which a Chinese-inspired festival dragon manipulated by children writhed and twisted. However I had not given up on the mechanical dragon idea, and when discussion turned to depicting the *Siegfried* Fafner, we considered the prospect of a huge prosthetic hand. The audience would be left to imagine the nature and size of the creature to which it belonged. After further discussion this hand became an enormous articulated claw, and I commented in an email to Neidhardt: ‘Your idea of a giant hand to represent Fafner as dragon offers a potent image of a grasping, crushing, enclosing force.’¹⁹ The finished dragon claw was a splendid and sophisticated piece of machinery. It cost in excess of a quarter of a million dollars to build²⁰ and, in the end, it was used only three times.

By 12 August 2002 Neidhardt was busy directing *Andrea Chénier* in Brisbane and using what free time she had to think about *Götterdämmerung*. She told me:

At present I’m still trying to find the ultimate solution to the Norns, you see how advanced I am! Unfortunately the Brisbane production of *Chénier* proves more time consuming than I had anticipated. Can’t wait until I can be singleminded, with all other productions out of the way. Have said no to all offers for 2003.²¹

The next design meeting took place on 15 August 2002, and a solution to the Norns problem was found by using the tilted underside of the central lift platform and the fibre optic rope imagery referred to above. By the end of August 2002, the scenic plan for the entire *Ring* had been mapped out, but the director continued with the painstaking business of conceptualising the production and analysing the characters. She emailed me early in September:

I am struggling with some things in *Götterdämmerung*. Brünnhilde’s last monologue, for example, when she mentions that Siegfried put the sword between herself and him. After all??? Did he or didn’t he? But I think I’ve worked out why the Rhinemaidens don’t take the ring in Act 3 (2). And why is Siegfried so nihilistic, not caring about life and death? Does he know he’s doomed? Is it a death wish?

¹⁹ Bassett, Peter. (2002, March 16). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

²⁰ Costs for the *Siegfried* dragon claw were listed as \$237,520 in the Stuart Report budget projections as at 28 July 2003.

²¹ Neidhardt, Elke. (2002, August 12). Email to Peter Bassett.

Haven't found the end yet, but most of the rest. Michael has been in Melbourne, as you know, but I hope to have another session with him soon, and with you, of course.²²

I replied the next day as follows:

What did happen on Brünnhilde's rock?

The strongest evidence suggests that Siegfried (as Gunther) and Brünnhilde spent the night with Nothung lying between them. If one relies solely on Siegfried's remarks [to Guttrune] (treating them firstly as ironic and, later, as deceitful), a case can be made that he did rape her. The authority for this is Thidrek's Saga of Bern²³ (c.1260-70) which states categorically that on the fourth night, at Gunther's request, Siegfried deflowered Brünnhilde by force. However, although Wagner relied on Thidrek's Saga for material in *Siegfried*, he seems not to have done so for *Götterdämmerung*. In his 1848 prose sketch 'The Nibelung Myth – A Sketch for a Drama' which formed the basis of *Siegfrieds Tod*, Wagner describes the situation in these terms:

Already robbed by Siegfried of her maidenhood, she has lost alike her superhuman strength, and all her runecraft has passed to Siegfried – who does not use it; she is as powerless as any mortal woman, and can only offer lame resistance to her new, aggressive suitor; he tears from her the ring – by which she is now to be wedded to Gunther – and forces her into a cavern, where he sleeps the night with her, though to her astonishment he lays his sword between them.

This, coupled with Brünnhilde's reference in her final monologue to which you refer (and which I had forgotten about) makes it pretty clear I think that Siegfried did not rape her when disguised as Gunther – not out of respect (his brutal action has already put paid to that) but only because of his commitment to his 'brother'. Had it not been

²² Neidhardt, Elke. (2002, September 2). Email to Peter Bassett.

²³ Thidrek (or Dietrich) of Bern is Theoderic of Verona. Bern was the Middle High German name for Verona. Scholars still debate whether Dietrich von Bern and Theoderic the Great were two different individuals or one and the same.

for his obligation to Gunther, he would have raped her. It is still hardly noble behaviour.²⁴

Siegfried's Nihilism? This, I think, is a left-over from *Siegfrieds Tod* – one of the odd little details that cling like barnacles to the poem of *Götterdämmerung*. [I referred to the business of tossing a clod of earth over his shoulder after the medieval practice of mercenaries doing this before going onto battle.] It was part of Wagner's original idea that Siegfried 'takes on' the gods and Brünnhilde purges their guilt by the act of self-immolation. In that version, the gods continue to rule in glory instead of perishing, and Brünnhilde and Siegfried rise above the flames like Senta and the Dutchman. This of course reflected Wagner's political ideas at the time, in which the aristocratic/plutocratic regime would be swept away but the Saxon king would remain as father of his people and head of a kind of crowned republic. After all, in 1848 Wagner was still in the king's employ.

I then quoted at length Wagner's text in his 1848 prose sketch, and concluded:

In this version there is no suggestion (as in *Götterdämmerung*) that he contemplates returning the ring to the Rhinemaidens for a bit of slap and tickle in the bulrushes. Once again, it seems, the Rhinemaidens are reluctant to play those kinds of games, even if Siegfried is a better catch than Alberich. As with the Nibelung, they'll flutter their eyelashes and swish their tails but swim away just the same.²⁵

By the third week of September, one of the remaining details of concern to the director was how to introduce a symbol of hope and renewal into the ending of *Götterdämmerung*. She decided to do this by bringing some live vegetation into the scene following the conflagration. I endorsed this idea and mentioned that apart from the contemporary ecological resonance, there was also a passage in the legends of the Buddha that underpinned the idea quite nicely. Wagner certainly knew his Buddhist stories, as his wife Cosima's diaries and the passage ending the *Götterdämmerung* poem (not set to music but preserved in the published text) make clear:

²⁴ My point was that Siegfried, deprived of his memory by the potion (a metaphor perhaps for Hagen's evil influence) and transformed by the Tarnhelm, was no longer truly himself, and would not regain his true nature until the effects of the memory-loss potion had been removed, just prior to his murder.

²⁵ Bassett, Peter. (2002, September 3). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

In a First Century Sanskrit text called ‘The Acts of the Buddha’ we read the following, which could easily be describing the events following Brünnhilde’s immolation: ‘And when the Sage entered Nirvana, the earth quivered ... and firebrands fell from the sky. The heavens were lit up with preternatural fire Fearsome thunderbolts crashed down on the earth The rivers, as if filled with grief, boiled over. Beautiful flowers grew out of season on the Sal trees above the Buddha’s couch and the trees bent down over him and showered his golden body with their flowers.’

The imagery of violent upheavals being followed by flowers appearing out of season and trees raining down their blossoms is such a beautiful one. I can’t think of a more perfect way to express nature’s continual benedictions on a wounded and suffering world.²⁶

On 23 September 2002 I reported to Phillips on the design meeting the day before, and gave him the following detailed account of how *Götterdämmerung* would run in terms of scenery, special effects and director’s concepts. Therefore, none of this should have come as a surprise when the design presentation took place in Adelaide three months later. Details of the most important scenic elements had already been provided on 1 June. I wrote:

The design meeting yesterday made good progress and we got through *Götterdämmerung*. There are still a few loose ends to tie up but the main concepts have been worked out. The Norns scene and all the scenes on Brünnhilde’s rock will utilise the existing ‘lift’ mechanism, so no new scenic elements for those. The Hall of the Gibichungs will use the *Rheingold* portals clad in red lacquer panels – I had suggested thinking in terms of a Forbidden City,²⁷ with a feeling of oriental/occidental cultural difference to imply a contrast between the realm of the Gibichungs and all that had gone before. They liked this idea and it will make use of the portals again. The portals will move backwards and forwards on castors, so that the hall can either extend the full depth of the stage, move back to a half-way position or stack up against the rear wall like Chinese boxes – one inside the other. The most distant frame will have a sloping top, to break the strict symmetry and create a sense of things being

²⁶ Bassett, Peter. (2002, September 23). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

²⁷ Michael Scott-Mitchell used a book of photographs I had brought back from Beijing to match the colour of the red lacquer columns.

a bit out of kilter in the land of the Gibichungs. The colour too should make quite an impact after all the grey, black and white of the other scenes.

The Act 2 vassals are Hagen's thugs; pretty rough 'skinheads', which I think is exactly right. The women on the other hand will be Guttrune's friends and relatives and would be conservatively dressed. The men in the Act 3 hunting scene will be Gunther's supporters, on a sort of army reserve exercise. They would bring on half a dozen cartons of beer (to use as seats as well as for drinking), so there might be a sponsorship opening for one of the breweries here!

The Rhinemaidens scene will use the adjustable rake downstage (as the river bank), behind which they will cavort. There wouldn't be any new scenic elements for the hunting scene. Siegfried's dead body would be left in a pool of light on the 'lift'. During the funeral music a gauze curtain would be drawn (probably by Hagen) across the scene and, behind it Elke wants 'doubles' of Wotan, Siegmund, Sieglinde etc etc to appear, coinciding with various references in the music. Then a smother would obscure the scene enabling it to be set for the final showdown. The hall of the Gibichungs would be in the half open position, with space in front. It would later move upstage for the final conflagration. Siegfried would 'lie in state' with the people filing past, and then he would be carried upstage and through the partially opened screen doors and out of sight. Brünnhilde would be left alone for her long peroration and, after throwing the brand (metaphorically) on the funeral pyre, disappear through the upstage opening. A fire batten would be lowered and ignited behind the mesh screen, illuminating the red portals of the hall; other fires would spring out of the downstage vents. When Hagen dashes for the ring, the water curtain would be activated and the downstage rake (river bank) would rise and Hagen would be swept beneath it. We would then see the fires through the water curtain before both fires and water would cease for the final 'herschtes Wunder' music of hope and renewal. Elke has in mind bringing forty children onto the stage at this point, dressed in contemporary, everyday clothes. A couple of ideas are being considered: either they would carry small pine tree seedlings (her environmental statement) [Eventually, Erda would perform this function with a single sapling] or they could be putting on or taking off surgical masks (an environmental warning) or (?) something else. More work has to be done on the final symbolism. I have argued for a positive, hopeful ending, and this is Elke's (and I think Michael's) inclination. Nick on the other hand

would be just as happy with a bleak ending but he is not firmly committed. I think the optimists will win – perhaps with a nod to the idea that if mankind doesn't get its act together then

So, that's where things stand at present.²⁸

In January 2003, Canberra, where my family and I were living, suffered the worst bushfires in memory – forests and suburbs ablaze, blackened leaves raining down, orange skies and bright turquoise trees – in short, *Götterdämmerung*! This elicited much concern from Elke Neidhardt. Soon afterwards (appropriately) she had a query about Loge:

I wonder if you could enlighten me a bit about Loge. I never quite understood why he is so unpopular with all the other gods, why Wotan says he is his only friend. What happened in the past???

As you remember we have costumed him rather like Mr Teflon, smooth and surviving all upheavals. I have arrived at the moment of his entrance in my blocking/production concept and noticed that my picture of Loge is really not clear ...²⁹

I replied:

I think that the key to Loge's character lies in his symbiotic relationship with Wotan. They need and use each other, and the other gods resent this. Like many leaders, Wotan makes agreements of convenience that he has no intention of keeping. Then he resorts to cunning and dishonesty to get around them and, in so doing, undermines the very basis of his own authority. Loge aids and abets him in this. The other gods have little or nothing to gain from such behaviour but everything to lose. If Wotan falls, they fall with him, and so they deeply resent Loge's involvement with and encouragement of such perilous goings-on. Wotan is playing with fire – literally!

In the closing pages of *Walküre*, when Wotan summons Loge, he says that they once had an alliance. Clearly, in *Rheingold* Wotan is desperate for Loge to appear and sort out the mess with the giants. Loge's skills as a slick operator are vital to the god if he is to maintain the balancing act of basing his authority on the law but, at the same time, trying to circumvent it. Of course this can't be done, as Wotan discovers by Act

²⁸ Bassett, Peter. (2003, September 23). Email to Stephen Phillips.

²⁹ Neidhardt, Elke. (2003, February 11). Email to Peter Bassett. An almost identical costume design was used for Loge in Opera Australia's *Ring* in Melbourne in 2013.

2 of *Walküre*, and Loge is of no further use to him, except to surround the sleeping Brünnhilde. That is why we never see him again except as his fiery element. Loge is chained to the rock (like Prometheus) and only at the end of *Götterdämmerung* is he released to go to Valhalla and bring about Wotan's end.³⁰

In May 2003 Neidhardt turned her attention to sketching out rehearsal plans for the Wotan/Alberich scene in Act II of *Siegfried*, prompting me to offer my belief that this scene was written as homage to Carl Maria von Weber.³¹ Its opening, with the spooky musical atmosphere, soft timpani beats and lights in the forest is reminiscent of the Wolf's Glen scene in *Der Freischütz*. The latter had made a great impression on the young Wagner, and Weber had been a visitor to the Wagner/Geyer household. The Wolf's Glen's mood of German romanticism fitted perfectly with the Grimm-like spirit of *Siegfried*. In the Scott-Mitchell design, developed a year earlier in March 2002, the forest canopy was to comprise hundreds of green helium-filled balloons, swaying gently in the breeze (I had shown the designers photos of the canopy of upturned green umbrellas from the Rosalie-designed Bayreuth production I had seen in 1998). The balloon canopy suggested both the fragility of the natural environment and the child-like vulnerability of Siegfried although, to begin with, I had reservations about its effectiveness. In an email to Neidhardt I wrote:

What scenic device could convey a sense of enclosure or embrace in its various aspects, both benign and malign? I don't think balloons could do this. They might convey Siegfried's vulnerability and child-like qualities, but they also say 'party time', which would be quite misleading. I doubt if they could convey the sinister qualities of the other scenes. However, I think that tendrils/strips hanging at various lengths would be effective and versatile.³² Appropriately lit, such tendrils could suggest inky depths for the Wanderer/Alberich encounter, the clammy crypt that is Neidhöle [Fafner's lair], and the ravishingly beautiful embrace of the forest in which Siegfried (like a young bird in its nest?) comes closest to his true nature.³³

Neidhardt replied:

I am intrigued by the idea of the Woodbird impersonating Sieglinde. That has never occurred to me and I certainly will give it a lot of thought, not ignoring the fact that

³⁰ Bassett, Peter. (2003, February 13). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

³¹ Bassett, Peter. (2003, May 15). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

³² Tendrils had been used for the forest in Götz Friedrich's Covent Garden *Ring* of the 1970s.

³³ Bassett, Peter. (2002, March 16). Email to Elke Neidhardt.

Siegfried has never seen any woman nor knows a woman's voice. I would like to show the bird, not sure how as yet.

I think you underestimate the effect of the balloons. They wouldn't be the only element in the set, but possibly part of a ceiling, maybe imbedded in other materials. Michael's little son had a birthday on St Patrick's Day, last Sunday. So Michael had covered one ceiling of his house in green balloons with long ribbons. Looked rather good the way they moved in the breeze. As you say: kids party! I never imagined they would be part of Neidhöle.³⁴

The value of unpaid assistance to the production

The hundreds of 'forest' balloons for *Siegfried* were inflated and prepared on rehearsal and performance days by members of a group of 44 unpaid supporters whom I called the 'Nibelung Bureau' after the volunteers who had assisted Wagner during the first production in 1876. This was just one of many ways in which groups and skilled individuals became involved with and contributed their services to the *Rings* of 1998 and 2004 and *Parsifal* in 2001. These unpaid contributions from various quarters, which ranged from translation services and the organisation of exhibitions and events,³⁵ to assistance with auditioning, marketing, public relations, article and speech writing, website establishment and maintenance, education, and liaison with artists' agents - represented considerable financial savings to SOSA, but the value of these savings was never included in budgetary statements or production analyses in the way that direct monetary donations and sponsorships were.

The lead-up and rehearsals

By July 2003 budget issues were distracting the design team as much as they were distracting everyone else concerned with the project. Neidhardt told me: 'As you no doubt have heard we have had a bumpy (financial) ride but are slowly seeing land. I am looking forward to get started rather than shunting budget figures.'³⁶ Little did she know that the budget crisis would get much worse over the next twelve months. In the interim I was preoccupied with arrangements for a *Weekend with the Ring*³⁷ at the Adelaide Convention Centre in September

³⁴ Neidhardt, Elke. (2002, March 20). Email to Peter Bassett.

³⁵ Christine Rothauser, for example, provide extensive translation and documentary assistance with the Châtelet production, and organised ancillary events and exhibitions in 1998, 2001 and 2004, including displays from the Richard Wagner Museum in Bayreuth. All of this was done on a voluntary basis.

³⁶ Neidhardt, Elke. (2003, July 14). Email to Peter Bassett.

³⁷ See Appendix 3.

2003, at which speakers included celebrated Wagnerian bass-baritone Sir Donald McIntyre who came from the UK especially for the event, conductor Asher Fisch, *Ring* artists John Bröcheler, Deborah Riedel and John Wegner, former singers Margreta Elkins and Robert Gard, Australian and New Zealand academics Brian Coghlan and Heath Lees, and the *Ring* design team. Elke Neidhardt launched a new edition of my book on the *Ring* and spoke about the forthcoming production. There was an Adelaide Symphony Orchestra concert conducted by Asher Fisch and featuring Deborah Riedel on the Friday evening, and a banquet with musical entertainment the following night. Participants in the *Weekend* conference came from all over Australia. The first rehearsals were under way by then at SOSA's Netley studio, the ASO's Grainger Studio in Hindley Street, and the Festival Theatre where the sets and technical facilities were given their first trials. Rehearsals had begun on Monday 11 August 2003 and proceeded for thirteen weeks, six days a week. It was hardly surprising that these exhaustive and exhausting rehearsals took their toll on some artists, notably the Siegfried, Timothy Mussard. This experience amply demonstrated the complexity of the task and reminded everyone concerned why staging the *Ring* in one go rather than piecemeal over several years is a rarely attempted venture.

2003 - Week (Mon-Sat)

	(Studio)	
1	<i>Die Walküre</i> Act 1 (i) (ii) (iii)	Production. Music Act 1
2	<i>Die Walküre</i> Act 2 (i) (ii) (iii)	Production. Music Act 2
3	<i>Die Walküre</i> Act 2 (iv) (v)	Production
4	<i>Die Walküre</i> Act 3 (i) (ii) (iii principals)	Production. Music Act 3
5	<i>Das Rheingold</i> Scene I	Production. Music Scene i
6	<i>Das Rheingold</i> Scene ii	Production. Music Scene ii
7	<i>Das Rheingold</i> Scene iii (principals)	Production. Music Scene iii
8	<i>Das Rheingold</i> Scene iv	Production. Music Scene iv
	(Theatre)	
9	<i>Das Rheingold</i> Lighting/Technical; Piano/Stage (i) (ii) (iii)	
10	<i>Das Rheingold</i> Piano/Stage; <i>Die Walküre</i> L/T; P/S Act 1	
11	<i>Die Walküre</i> P/S Acts 1, 2, 3. Changeover <i>Siegfried</i>	
12	<i>Siegfried</i> Technical. Changeover <i>Götterdämmerung</i>	
13	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Technical	
14	Bump Out	

The fifteen weeks (six days a week) of rehearsals in 2004 began in the Netley studio on Monday 2 August

2004 – Week (Mon-Sat)

	(Studio)	
1	<i>Siegfried</i> Introduction; Act 1	Production. Music Act 1
2	<i>Siegfried</i> Act 1; Act 2	Production. Music Act 2
3	<i>Siegfried</i> Act 2; Act 3	Production. Music Act 3
4	<i>Siegfried</i> Act 3	Production
5	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Introduction; Prelude; Act 1. Prod.; Music Prel.; Act 1	
6	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Prelude; Act 1	Production
7	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Act 2	Production. Music Act 2
8	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Act 2	Production
	(Theatre) <i>Siegfried</i> /Gött. Bump In/Build	
9	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> Act 3	Production. Music Act 3
	(ASO) <i>Das Rheingold</i> ; <i>Die Walküre</i>	
	(Theatre) <i>Siegfried</i> /Götterdämmerung Technical	
10	<i>Rheingold</i> / <i>Walküre</i> Revision	Production. Music R/W Revision
	(ASO) <i>Walküre</i> ; <i>Siegfried</i>	
	(Theatre) <i>Siegfried</i> Piano Dress; <i>Götterdämmerung</i> Piano Dress; Tech.	
11	<i>Rheingold</i> / <i>Walküre</i> Revision	Production
	(ASO) <i>Siegfried</i> /Götterdämmerung	
	(Theatre) Technical. Gött. Piano Dress; <i>Rheingold</i> PD; <i>Walk.</i> PD	
12	(ASO) <i>Rheingold</i> Sitzprobe; Gött Sitz.; <i>Walk.</i> Sitz.; Gött. Sitz.	
	(Theatre)	
13	Technical. <i>Rheingold</i> Stage/Orch.	
14	Technical. <i>Walküre</i> Stage/Orch.; <i>Siegfried</i> Stage/Orch.	
15	Technical. Gött. Stage/Orch.; <i>Rheingold</i> Pre General	
16	<i>Rheingold</i> ; <i>Walküre</i> ; <i>Siegfried</i> ; Gött. Dress Rehearsals	
17	Performances begin on 16 November	

Reviews and commentary

In the end, the production concept and designs won consistently glowing reviews. The *Adelaide Advertiser* critic was extravagant in his praise for the opening night of *Die Walküre*: ‘This is, without reservation, the most astounding night of theatre the Festival Centre has ever witnessed. It is probably without parallel in Australian opera history for its courage and audacity. Each act was greeted with tumultuous applause and the final scene with a ten minute standing ovation’. The interstate media was hardly less enthusiastic, with the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic describing the whole *Ring* as ‘one of the finest occasions in the history of Australian music, opera and theatre’. *The Australian* declared it ‘gloriously rich visually and musically’, *Limelight* called it ‘spectacular, witty, thoughtful and theatrically gripping’, and for Melbourne’s *Age* it was simply ‘awesome’. Overseas, London’s *Sunday Times* lauded ‘one of the most visually resplendent *Rings* of recent times’, and *Opera Now* magazine said: ‘The results were so dazzling that the sets often won loud applause on their own’. Hugh Canning in *Opera* magazine (UK) wrote: ‘Elke Neidhardt, with her team ... [has] come up with one of the most beautiful, thoughtful and spectacular stagings of recent times’. He also ventured that ‘It is unthinkable that it should not be seen again in Australia. Indeed this *Ring* could well establish Adelaide, like Seattle, as one of the world’s Wagner Meccas’.

Unfortunately the unthinkable did happen; the production was not seen again in Australia or anywhere else, and Adelaide did not follow Seattle to become one of the world’s Wagner Meccas. To understand why this successful and admired production was abandoned after a single season, we must look firstly to events leading to the dramatic and decisive intervention by the State and Commonwealth Governments in early 2004.

Chapter 8

Producing the 2004 *Ring*

In 2002, SOSA negotiated with Opera Australia to secure the services of OA's Technical Director Christopher Potter to be Technical Director for the *Ring*. Potter was highly experienced and he was one of few people in Australia capable of managing the scenic demands of the massive 2004 production and, in particular, the complicated changeovers between operas. The director and designers had been unhappy with SOSA's existing capabilities in this regard, and had become aware of shortcomings during *Parsifal* in 2001. They told me of their concerns when we met in January 2002. Eventually, Phillips accepted that additional expert assistance was going to be required, even though no provision had been made for this in the budget. Potter's responsibilities included overseeing the construction and delivery of the physical production, and providing an interface between SOSA and the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT) Set Construction Workshops (at that time the anticipated sole provider), Festival Theatre staff and the creative team. He began preparing for these tasks in the second half of 2002, which was rather late in the production schedule given that many of the key scenic elements had already been determined and the designs were due to be presented at the end of 2002. A specialist scenery builder Hannes Finger, who had had many decades of experience with Opera Australia, was also engaged by SOSA to provide detailed cost estimates for the construction of the scenery and props. His role included providing an independent check on quotes supplied to SOSA by the AFCT Set Construction Workshops.¹

When, two years earlier, in May 2000, Minister Diana Laidlaw had announced plans for the new *Ring*, she had made specific mention of its scenery and costume budget of \$2 million. The new production, she said, would be built in South Australia by the AFCT's scenic workshops,² and the costumes would be made by the State Opera's wardrobe workshop. Three weeks later, on 15 June, she added: 'all the staging would be undertaken by the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust. The workshop is at Dry Creek and it is a fantastic

¹ Stuart, Richard. (2003, October 3). *Production Consultancy Report for State Opera of South Australia*. Appendix 14.

² These workshops had built the *Parsifal* sets for 2001, which were destroyed a year later.

compliment to the skills of our designers and technicians’.³ She elaborated on the subsidy required for the whole production: approximately \$4.1 million (at that time) of which the State Government would provide \$1 million and the Commonwealth Government \$3.1 million. In further comments on 15 June 2000, the head of Arts SA Tim O’Loughlin who had handled the negotiations with the Commonwealth, told the parliamentary estimates committee that when considering the estimated economic benefits to the state from the 2004 *Ring*, they should take into account not only overseas and interstate attendances based on 1998 precedents but also the substantial Commonwealth Government investment of around \$2 million for building the sets in the AFCT workshops.⁴ Securing this investment was regarded as a notable achievement.

Unfortunately, the potential benefits to South Australia of this investment went largely unrealised. By the time SOSA moved to engage the AFCT Workshops, the latter had already entered into commitments for major musical productions in Melbourne (*We Will Rock You*, from August 2003, transferring to Perth, Brisbane, Sydney and then Tokyo) and Sydney (*The Lion King*, from October 2003 to June 2004, transferring to Melbourne) and was unable to guarantee completion of the *Ring* sets in time for the first rehearsals in late 2003. A scramble then ensued to find other workshops that could build the sets and props as a matter of urgency and, eventually some 20 different workshops were contracted across five states. As designer Michael Scott-Mitchell put it: ‘We pretty well used a large percentage of the available workshops in Australia to build – we were on a very tight schedule of about six months, but we were literally jamming everything we could into each workshop until they said, “We can’t take any more”’.⁵

The larger part of the scenery building budget was contracted to Opera Australia, StageWeld and ALM in Melbourne, Showtrek in Adelaide and Artworkshops in Perth. Consequently, not only did South Australia miss out on most of the benefits of the Commonwealth ‘investment’ in scenery building but also construction costs blew out considerably because of the commercial rates incurred instead of the ‘at cost’ rates expected from the AFCT,⁶ and

³ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly, Estimates Committee B. (2000). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 15, p. 74.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Sexton, Mike. (2004, November 17). Ambitious opera series draws Wagnerians to Adelaide. *ABC 7.30 Report*. Retrieved from: <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2004/s1245866.htm>.

⁶ SOSA had no idea what these ‘at cost’ charges would be because significant special effects elements of the design remained unrealised and unvalued.

because of unforeseen travel and freight charges. A budgeted figure of \$1.9 million for costumes and sets in 2000 became a staggering \$4.757 million by 2004.⁷

In order to meet commitments to Opera Australia in early 2003, Potter had to withdraw his services from the *Ring* set construction phase which now required extensive interstate travel and considerably more time than had been envisaged when the AFCT was to be sole contractor. A new Technical Director, Malcolm Lamb, also based in Sydney, was appointed to continue the planning and delivery process and to commence the preparation of detailed staff-related schedules. Stephen Phillips then assumed the role of Production Manager as well as General Director of SOSA and de facto Artistic Director of the *Ring*. As Production Manager he monitored the production budget and awarded construction contracts to various workshops. It was unrealistic to imagine that a single person could handle all of these responsibilities and run an opera company on a daily basis, even though Phillips's background had been in production management. Therefore, as an interim solution and to assist with the additional workload in preparing specifications and fielding quotes from the various workshops, he appointed Lisa Penlington, Scott-Mitchell's partner, to the part time role of Production Co-ordinator. She worked from Sydney alongside Lamb and the creative team and produced detailed costing spreadsheets, breaking down and listing all individual elements of the overall design. Notwithstanding all of these new arrangements, there was still no one person (other than Phillips) in charge of the physical production, a situation which exposed SOSA to considerable risk.⁸

Phillips blamed the Festival Centre Trust for the collapse of the scenery building arrangements, while insisting that he was not blaming them: 'I'm not dumping on the Festival Centre Trust' he said in May 2004. 'They basically thought they had a more lucrative sort of contract so they were not able to make their workshop facilities available to us.'⁹ He had not been so insouciant in February 2003 when he told me he was 'totally embroiled in technical matters and ongoing battles with the Festival Centre'.¹⁰ It was a calamity, and there was no way of disguising it. What were the facts? The AFCT was a statutory body subject to the general control and direction of the Minister for the Arts.¹¹ Amongst its functions was

⁷ Auditor-General's Report for the year ended 30 June 2005, based on a statement of revenues and expenses provided by SOSA.

⁸ Stuart Report, op.cit., p. 11.

⁹ Debelle, Penelope. (2004, May 19). Lord of the Ring rides to the rescue. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/05/18/1084783513917.html>.

¹⁰ Phillips, Stephen. (2003, February 25). Email to Peter Bassett.

¹¹ Adelaide Festival Centre Trust Act 1971, s.19

responsibility for ‘advisory, consultative, managerial or support services, within areas of the Trust's expertise, to persons associated with the conduct of artistic, cultural or performing arts activities (whether within or outside the State)’.¹² Therefore, its workshop was entitled to build scenery for interstate clients and it was not obliged to give preference to South Australian clients unless directed to do so by the Minister. While there had been an expectation in May 2000 that the AFCT workshops would build the *Ring* scenery for 2004, as they had for *Parsifal*, no ministerial directive to that effect had ever been given. Clearly this was an oversight by SOSA, Arts SA¹³ and Ministers.¹⁴ However, the workshops had long been encouraged to operate on a commercial basis, and their annual turnover of \$4 million was derived largely from interstate and international contracts¹⁵. Consequently, they had been entitled to enter into a lucrative (and more clearly defined) agreement with an interstate company even though this made it impossible for them to meet the delivery deadlines of a later South Australian proposal. The Trust maintained that there had been delays in design development.¹⁶ Since the Trust was not represented on the SOSA Board (there being no SORC for 2004), and no Artistic Director or Production Manager had been appointed to supervise the design process and liaise with them (Christopher Potter’s involvement came late in 2002), communications appear to have been sparse. In any case, in the absence of a ministerial directive, the choice was entirely theirs.

The crucial issue was that the Trust workshops were not able to complete scenery building in time for the 2003 rehearsals which were due to commence in August that year. However, they had never said that they could not complete them in time for the 2004 rehearsals. If this issue had been confronted early enough, and SOSA/AFCT liaison had been sufficiently close, the possibility arises that the five weeks of technical stage rehearsals scheduled for 2003 could have been deferred until a later date. Although this would probably have incurred additional expense in terms of hiring the Festival Theatre for extra weeks and rescheduling some singers, it would undoubtedly have been a cheaper option than going down the ‘all stops out’ commercial scenery building path just to meet the August 2003 deadline. One cannot help but think that if the SOSA/AFCT relationship had been one of partnership from the outset – say through AFCT participation in a Ring Corporation Board rather than one of

¹² *ibid.*, s.20 (1) (c).

¹³ It is possible that Tim O’Loughlin would have picked up on this oversight and taken action had he not moved from Arts SA in October 2000. The Ring Consortium, on which the AFCT was represented, had ceased to function by the time of the Commonwealth funding grant.

¹⁴ The Minister for the Arts was Diana Laidlaw until 5 March 2002 and, from 6 March 2002, Mike Rann.

¹⁵ Adelaide Festival Centre Annual Report 2002-03, p. 52.

¹⁶ Bockmann, Michelle Wiese. (2004, Dec. 11-12). Bayreuth on the Torrens, *The Weekend Australian*, p. 19.

as hirer and service provider (as Richard Stuart noted in his report) – things might have worked out differently.

The collapse of the scenery building plan was the subject of questions in both Houses of the State Parliament. In response to one such question in February 2004 from the Hon. Sandra Kanck (Australian Democrats),¹⁷ Premier Rann, on advice from SOSA, said:

It was originally intended that the sets for the *Ring* would be built in South Australia, and that the construction work would take place between January and August 2003 in readiness for the first round of stage rehearsals in the Festival Theatre between September and November 2003.

A draft memorandum of understanding between the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT) and the State Opera was prepared in late 2002, before the comprehensive set design presentation in mid-December 2002.

At this presentation, the AFCT was provided with technical information and a full working model of the designs in order to prepare a detailed costing for building the sets that would form part of the final contract. It was expected that arrangements between the AFCT and the State Opera would be finalised in late January or early February 2003.

State Opera was advised by the AFCT on 18 February 2003 that its workshops would not be available to State Opera prior to July/August 2003 as the workshops had entered into a commercial contract with another organisation to build the sets for a musical to be presented in Sydney. The AFCT could not therefore fulfil the construction schedule required by the State Opera which required completion by September 2003. State Opera therefore placed selective contracts with other scenery workshops in Adelaide and interstate.

No penalty payments were required or paid.¹⁸

The reference to the preparation of a ‘draft memorandum of understanding in late 2002’ made no mention of what form that draft took, how substantial it was or, indeed, whether there was any ‘understanding’ at all. Certainly there was no agreement. The rehearsal schedule for

¹⁷ Kanck, The Hon. Sandra, Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, February 16, p. 936.

¹⁸ Holloway, The Hon. P., on behalf of the Premier, SA Legislative Council Hansard, 16 February 2004, p. 936.

2003, which would have had a bearing on any scenery building timetable for that year,¹⁹ only received its final ‘sign-off’ in the second week of December 2002.²⁰ The ‘comprehensive set design presentation’ which I attended and which took place at SOSA headquarters at Netley in Adelaide on Friday 13 December 2002, was in fact not a presentation to the AFCT workshop but rather a ‘showing’ for SOSA Board members to enable them to see and approve the designs. Representatives of Arts SA, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and the AFCT had been invited to attend, and the occasion was rounded off with celebratory drinks - it was a fortnight before Christmas. However, notwithstanding the general admiration for the spectacular stage model (which had been built under Scott-Mitchell’s supervision by 28 Sydney-based model-makers²¹ at a cost of around a quarter of a million dollars²²), there was still a possibility that the Board would withhold its approval on grounds of excessive or indeterminate cost, or request design changes.

In the second half of 2003, Mr Richard Stuart was engaged by Arts SA and the Australia Council to provide a production consultancy report on the state of the *Ring* production, and make recommendations. Richard Stuart was a theatre consultant of considerable experience, who had worked with theatrical organisations including J C Williamson, Edgley International, Harry M Miller, Aztec Services, the performing arts centres in Perth and Melbourne, the Australian Ballet, Melbourne International Festival of Arts for seven festivals, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre and the Sydney Opera House. At the time of his investigation he was involved with the Queensland Performing Arts Trust. His report was presented in October 2003 but was not made public. Stuart observed, inter alia, that ‘The very high costs for the set model could have been contained by a Production Manager exercising strict financial control of the design team’. As events transpired, the General Director became concerned when it was clear that the design team had still not developed technical solutions or costings for features such as the huge water curtain and the large scale flame effects. The designers could have been asked then and there to dispense with their more ambitious ideas and come up with something simpler and cheaper - a solution which would have had the added benefit of making the production ‘export friendly’.²³ A request for major

¹⁹ With performances programmed for November/December 2004, and in the absence of a detailed schedule, the AFCT might reasonably have assumed that scenery building would commence in late 2003 at the earliest.

²⁰ Neidhardt, Elke; Phillips, Stephen, and Bassett, Peter. (2002, December 9 and 10), exchange of emails with observations, queries and adjustments relating to the 2003 rehearsal schedule prior to finalisation.

²¹ All of whom were listed by name in the program.

²² Information provided by SOSA Finance Director Nigel Bray at the 13 December 2002 presentation.

²³ When, in 2009, consideration was given to mounting the Adelaide production in the State Theatre in Melbourne, the technical demands of the fire and water effects were cited as major obstacles, and they were also

design changes within the context of the formal design presentation would have been awkward - embarrassing even - for the General Director who, in his role as de facto Artistic Director, might have been assumed to have supervised the designs before presenting them to the Board, but it would have saved a great deal of money and would probably have avoided the political traumas that were to follow. However, no such request was made, and the designs were approved without modifications. Board and management were emotionally disinclined to compromise, for there was no doubt that South Australia was on the brink of producing a stunning *Ring* that would make the eastern states sit up and take notice. Then, on 18 February 2003, came news that the AFCT could not build the sets in time for the 2003 rehearsals.

Budget blow-out and approved designs

Phillips also blamed the designers for the budget blow-out, although he made light of this in media interviews: 'We deliberately appointed a design team who had not done a *Ring* before and did not know a lot about it, because we wanted it to be fresh and Australian. The design needed to match the musical scale of the work,' he said, 'and they've certainly done that. In fact, I think you could say they've exceeded our wildest expectations – but unfortunately they've exceeded our wildest budget expectations as well.'²⁴ Elke Neidhardt rejected criticism that the design team was to blame for the budget overruns: 'The designs were accepted by the Board' she said. 'We presented the model in the best detail, it was all there, all they needed to say was 'no' and we would have cut then. But after you accept a design, there's no good coming later and saying 'oohhh!' [it costs too much]. I'm absolutely deaf on that ear. Once it's accepted then we've done our job, they have to make it work.'²⁵ Richard Stuart in his Production Consultancy Report of October 2003 made the telling point that 'The lack of a high calibre Production Manager from the outset to oversee the design and manage the production budget has led to design aspirations that exceed the available budget'.²⁶

The Auditor-General in his report for the year ended 30 June 2003, made the following observation:

a discouragement to exporting the production to theatres overseas. (2013, November 17). Remarks by Maureen Wheeler at a dinner in the National Gallery of Victoria for the 2013 Melbourne *Ring*.

²⁴ Litson, J. (2004, August). Ring of confidence. *Limelight*, p. 32.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Stuart Report, op.cit., p. 15.

In July 2001 the State Opera entered into an agreement with a designer²⁷ for the development of a design for the 2004-05 production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring). As part of this agreement the designer was required to deliver completed designs (including costumes, sets and special effects) within a budget of \$1.9 million, on 12 December 2002.

Discussions with management concluded that the designer failed to meet certain obligations in that final costing information for critical special effects designs were not delivered by the agreed date. Review of the agreement with the designer by Audit revealed that there were no penalty clauses within the agreement for failure by the designer to meet contractual obligations.

Audit communicated to management that the inclusion of penalty clauses within major contracts would improve State Opera's bargaining position in negotiations with contractors who fail to meet their contractual obligations.

State Opera responded that the inclusion of penalty clauses was not practical and not a realistic option in the broader arts industry.²⁸

More to the point, set designer Michael Scott-Mitchell had produced outstanding designs which would in time be praised by international critics and receive a Helpmann Award in 2005. However, dreams can be expensive, and these certainly were. Scott-Mitchell's penchant for massive, architectural scenery²⁹ and high quality engineering had been well known to SOSA management from his *Tannhäuser* (Opera Australia 1998), *Il trovatore* (Opera Conference/Adelaide 1999) and *L'elisir d'amore* (Opera Australia 2001), and from his work for the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Despite the undoubted impact of certain design elements - the vast water curtain, dazzling flame effects, sophisticated mechanical 'dragon claw' (costing \$237,520),³⁰ hydraulic platform and 'spear' walls, under-lit floors and life-size perspex 'heroes' - these were stand-alone features and SOSA management could have requested simpler solutions, as Neidhardt had noted.³¹ She joked prophetically during one rehearsal: 'At times you say "damn you, why can't we just have a simpler set". However, I

²⁷ The contracts with the Director and designers were handled personally by the General Director.

²⁸ Report of the Auditor-General for the Year ended 30 June 2003, Part B, Volume III, p. 1037, tabled in the House of Assembly and ordered to be published, 13 October 2003. Government Printer.

²⁹ Michael Scott-Mitchell's early academic training was in architecture.

³⁰ Stuart Report, op.cit., budget and expenditure figures.

³¹ See p. 179.

have not I think ever lost sight of the fact that what you'll see on stage is something that has never been seen before and might not be seen in a hurry again.'³²



11. *Siegfried* Act II. Fafner as dragon. Photo Michael Scott-Mitchell.

The designs were accepted by SOSA management and Board in toto and without caveats, although the creative team did decide of their own volition in April 2003 to leave out three very large illuminated portals and a trapeze effect (the Rhinemaidens' doubles on ropes). When alternative workshops in five States were commissioned after March 2003, the highest priority was to meet the deadline for the first stage rehearsals, barely five months away. To this end, SOSA abandoned its own requirement that design costs be capped at \$1.9 million, and instead looked for ways to raise additional funds from government grants and corporate sector donations. Stuart found that, by 28 July 2003, the estimated cost of the designs approved in December 2002 had exceeded the revised budget of \$2,381,704 of 31 May by between \$250,000 and \$500,000, subject to final costs being known for special effects. He recommended at that point that SOSA include an additional and separate set build

³² (2005). *Forging the Ring - Backstage at State Opera of SA's Ring Cycle*. Television documentary, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

contingency of \$300,000 for the production.³³ Even so, this proved inadequate and the figures continued to climb.

With more complicated sets went higher labour costs. The Adelaide Festival Theatre had a large stage and orchestra pit but it lacked the sophisticated, computerised machinery of say, the Metropolitan Opera House or the new Copenhagen Opera House, and depended heavily on the organisational and physical capabilities of its backstage crew of 75, much as Wagner had in 1876. Staging problems had arisen with both the 1998 *Ring* and the 2001 *Parsifal* which should have served as a warning. In August 1998, the Châtelet production's installation had got off to a bad start because of the stage crew's inexperience, and confusion over supervision.³⁴ There was also a budget over-run in connection with the theatre fit up and subsequent reinstatement of the stage floor and basement. Then, after the final cycle in December 1998, the Production Manager abruptly left the company without informing the General Director, and went to live in the United States.³⁵ In *Parsifal* in 2001, the Lighting Designer had to lend a hand with scene changes and projections.³⁶

The removal and replacement of the stage floor between *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* in the 2004 production took so long to accomplish by hand (the floor was made up of fragile sections lit internally by some 900 dimmable fluorescent tubes) that the starting time for *Das Rheingold* had to be brought forward by two hours to avoid delaying the start of Act I of *Die Walküre* the following day. AFCT backstage labour rates were high compared with other arts venues and, in order to reduce costs, SOSA sought AFCT concurrence to engage its own theatre staff, but the AFCT rejected this request based on its venue hire policy. Again SOSA sought a 'special event' labour rate, effectively a 'discount for bulk' approach, but the AFCT rejected this suggestion too on the grounds that it had made financial sacrifices elsewhere to accommodate the production. These responses reinforced the impression that a more inclusive role for the AFCT from the outset, rather than an arm's length one, would have been beneficial. Richard Stuart in his October 2003 Report recommended that 'underlying tensions between SOSA and AFCT should be dealt with to allow a proactive business

³³ Stuart Report, op.cit., p. 14-15.

³⁴ (1998, August 28). State Opera Ring Corporation Board Agenda, Managing Director's report. Half the number of stage crew were required for the 1998 *Ring* as for the 2004 production.

³⁵ (1999, February 25). State Opera Ring Corporation Board Agenda, Managing Director's report.

³⁶ I was told of this during my first meeting with the design team in January 2002.

relationship to flourish'. He further recommended that SOSA and the AFCT find ways to build more of a partnership relationship rather than one of hirer and venue.³⁷

Phillips told journalists: 'Some large pieces of the set have to be taken out of the theatre and brought back in again, and the changeovers require enormous numbers of people. It means there is also a transport schedule. We did our initial labour budget by looking at what it cost [for the 1998 imported *Ring*] and we doubled that and thought it would be reasonable, but it turned out to be three-and-a-half times that'.³⁸ Storage of scenery between performances required the use of 38 semitrailers which were parked around Adelaide.

SOSA management and the design team

Phillips later insisted that when he had received the April 2003 monthly production report which warned of overruns, he took action. 'I actually blew the whistle' he said, 'and stopped everything for a while. Transparency is the only way to get through a problem like this.'³⁹ However, Neidhardt and the designers had met with Phillips in Sydney two months earlier on Friday 28 February 2003 (at the unsociable hour of 8:00 am⁴⁰) ten days after he had learned of the AFCT's inability to build the sets, when he was en route to New Zealand for a promotional visit. In an email to me on the following Monday, Neidhardt wrote: 'The meeting with Stephen went o.k. He didn't seem to want to hear any of the rather alarming figures which we had prepared. So we will just soldier on and hope that he will be able to raise the much needed Corporate Sponsorships. All a bit frightening.'⁴¹ It was also at that time, late February 2003, that Scott-Mitchell's partner Lisa Penlington was engaged as Production Co-ordinator.⁴² Richard Stuart observed in his report: 'It is unfortunate that SOSA has relied heavily on the creative team to manage the set construction budget. The creative team should not have financial responsibilities. That is a production management role'.⁴³

³⁷ Stuart Report, op.cit., pp. 22 and 24. Appendix 14.

³⁸ (2004, June 3). State Opera Mounts "Most Expensive Musical Production in Australian History" With \$15m *Ring*. *Opera News*. Retrieved from: [http://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2004/6/News/State_Opera_Mounts_Most_Expensive_Musical_Production_in_Australian_History_With_\\$15m_Ring.html](http://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2004/6/News/State_Opera_Mounts_Most_Expensive_Musical_Production_in_Australian_History_With_$15m_Ring.html).

³⁹ Wiese Bockmann, Michelle, and Westwood, Matthew. (2004, December 11-12). Bayreuth on the Torrens, *The Weekend Australian*, p 19.

⁴⁰ 'A time which I don't particularly relish ...' commented Elke Neidhardt. (2003, February 27). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 4.

⁴¹ Neidhardt, Elke (2003, March 3). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 4.

⁴² Retrieved from: <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/lisa-penlington/38/9a/8b0>.

⁴³ Stuart Report, op. cit., p. 15. Appendix 14.

The plan for corporate ‘rescue’ sponsorships to which Neidhardt had referred in her email to me of 3 March 2003, took shape on 13 March when a ‘Message from the Premier of South Australia’ was sent to South Australian companies. It read in part:

... State Opera must also raise support from the private sector to balance its budget. So far it has been very successful in raising over \$500,000 through a special *Ring Donor Program* and is now concentrating its efforts on raising a similar level of support from the corporate sector.

As Premier of South Australia and Minister for the Arts, I commend for your consideration sponsorship of this major cultural event.

Support as a sponsor will enable you to provide a unique experience for your valued guests.

By July 2004, 20 South Australian businesses had responded positively, although the total amount raised was modest compared with private sector sums raised for *Ring* productions elsewhere.

The Auditor-General in his report for 2002-03, noted that SOSA management seemed to be keeping its eight-member Board in the dark on certain key *Ring* production matters. He wrote:

Audit observed that the State Opera Board did not receive formal regular reporting on the achievement of documented key timeframes or milestones for the 2004-05 production of *The Ring*.

State Opera responded that the Board would be provided with copies of the confirmed rehearsal schedule and other information that shows how the production process will progress over the final 18 months.

One wonders whether this problem would have arisen if the State Opera Ring Corporation Board had been revived. The SORC Board had played a key role in ensuring the success of the 1998 production under the chairmanship of Donald McDonald, Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (1996-2006), former Chief Executive of The Australian Opera (1987-96) and General Manager of the Sydney Theatre Company (1980-86). Amongst the SORC Board’s members were four other CEOs/senior managers from the public and private sectors and other individuals with considerable managerial experience. It also had a

dedicated Audit & Finance Committee chaired by Colin Dunsford, then Managing Partner of the accounting firm Arthur Andersen in South Australia, a 1998 Events Committee, a Social & Community Events Committee, and a Lead-up Events Committee. Unlike the eight-member SOSA Board for 2004, the SORC Board's focus had been exclusively on the *Ring*.

Salvaging the *Ring* production

In his Production Consultancy Report, Richard Stuart's conclusions included the following:⁴⁴

- The production had suffered from not having had a dedicated high calibre Production Manager working with the creative team to design to budget from the outset. Such a key appointment is essential on a project of this scale with such an extensive and potentially very costly design.
- There was a definite requirement for a full time, high calibre Stage Director/Production Manager to oversee and project manage the entire physical production and production budget. All production staff would report to the Stage Director/Production Manager.
- There was a definite requirement for a high calibre full time Technical Director for the production, reporting to the Stage Director/Production Manager and acting as a critical link between the creative and stage teams, as well as the Technical Manager, production Co-ordinator and Departmental Heads and their Deputies.
- The continuing appointment of Opera Australia Technical Director Christopher Potter was essential to the success of the physical staging of the production.
- The Stage Director/Production Manager and Technical Director should determine a production staff structure based on their knowledge and assessment of the staff structure that is actually required to stage the production and appoint appropriate staff to those positions to service the requirements of the production and stage schedule throughout the 2003 and 2004 set up, rehearsal and performance periods.
- Business arrangements between SOSA and the AFCT required close monitoring to ensure a successful outcome for *The Ring Cycle* and future productions.
- A production of this size required a Company Manager (full time) to deal with the planning and administration of all arrangements for visiting artists, musical staff, creative and technical personnel, in the rehearsal room and theatre. This involved a very heavy workload and should not be undertaken by SOSA staff on top of existing

⁴⁴ Stuart Report op.cit., sections 4 and 6.

duties. A second position might be filled from another arts organisation or as a career development opportunity.

As a consequence of the Stuart Report, the new post of Executive Producer was created and highly experienced production manager Noel Staunton was installed. Staunton's background was with English National Opera (including work on two and a half *Rings*); Opera Australia where he was Technical Administrator and had already worked with Elke Neidhardt who thought highly of him; Baz Luhrmann's company; the *Moulin Rouge* premieres in Cannes, New York and Sydney, and the Fox Studios Entertainment Precinct. He came to Adelaide from the US after producing *La bohème* for Baz Luhrmann on Broadway. Christopher Potter from Opera Australia was re-engaged as Technical Director. The General Director's Assistant had already been given the title of Company Manager in addition to her other diverse duties, and so a new senior position of Executive Producer was created and filled by Pamela Foulkes who came from the Sydney Opera House and was previously General Manager of Orchestra Victoria and West Australian Opera. The task of Staunton in particular was, to put it bluntly, to review costs in the light of budget projections of 28 July 2003 and rescue the production. Emergency funding arrangements were also put in place. The appointments of Staunton, Foulkes and Potter proved crucial.

By the middle of 2003, the production was in such a parlous state that without the implementation of the Stuart Report's recommendations it is unlikely that the Adelaide *Ring* would have reached the stage by November 2004. My clear impression was that Phillips was unhappy about the insertion of Staunton and Foulkes into the production at that time, although the public might have thought otherwise. On 19 May 2004 the ever-obliging Penelope DeBelle in *The Age* ran the line that Staunton's appointment had been Phillips's initiative after he had been left in an impossible position by the director and designers. She wrote:

Back in Australia, he [Staunton] took a call from SA Opera General Director Stephen Phillips who needed his help. Having last year completed a run-through in rehearsal of Elke Neidhardt's new production of the four *Ring* operas, Phillips was faced with some weighty technical problems.

They stemmed from Neidhardt's use of real elements, mainly fire and water, and the collapse of a crucial arrangement with the opera workshops in Adelaide that would have allowed all the sets to be built locally.

‘That fell to pieces over a year ago’ Phillips said. ‘I’m not dumping on the Festival Centre Trust’

As the scale of the production grew and with sets now being constructed in Adelaide, Sydney and Perth, the coordination became impossible for Phillips who was also trying to raise sponsorship and mount an international production with an office staff of five.⁴⁵

The truth was that Staunton’s appointment was a joint SA Government/Australia Council action, not SOSA’s. In the SA House of Assembly on 16 June 2004, Minister Hill was quite clear on this:

...the Commonwealth and ourselves have employed Noel Staunton and Pamela Foulkes as experts in getting shows on the road. Noel Staunton, of course, worked with Baz Luhrmann and has international experience and credibility. He has gone through the budget in fine detail and has assured me that it is as close to being what it needs to be as we can possibly anticipate. He has also found about \$900,000 worth of savings that can be made in producing the budget, so he has been harsh on them. He will stay in the employment of the government until the *Ring Cycle* is finalised.⁴⁶

‘He will stay in the employment of the government’ The facts could not have been clearer.

Dealing with the collapse of the AFCT scenery building program

The collapse of the AFCT scenery building plan was a disaster and a source of considerable anxiety to the SOSA Board and management. Nevertheless, in a PR gesture comparable to describing the Great Fire of London as an urban planning initiative, the company issued a media release in May 2003 headed: ‘Set construction starts in five States’. This release announced that:

... construction of the massive sets designed for the first ever new production of Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* have (*sic*) commenced in scenic workshops across the continent, making the production a truly national affair.

⁴⁵ Debele, Penelope. (2004, May 19). Staunton’s three-Ring circus. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/05/18/1084783499537.html?from=storyrhs>.

⁴⁶ Hill, The Hon. John. Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly, Estimates Committee A. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 16, p. 34.

State Opera's General Director, Stephen Phillips said, 'The designs are so large and complex that no single scenic workshop could handle it all. Major components are being built in Perth, Sydney and Adelaide with other items expected to be contracted to smaller specialist companies in Melbourne and Brisbane.'

'Engineers and academics at the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Adelaide are also assisting the design team in developing systems for the special effects, and consulting engineers at United Utilities Australia (Riverland Water) are providing expertise and assistance in developing a spectacular water curtain. It's wonderful that we have been able to call on these valuable State-based resources to help realise the designs.'

The design and development work on the flames was performed at Adelaide University's Research Park, Thebarton Campus by staff and postgraduate students from the School of Mechanical Engineering. The final product was manufactured by FCT-Combustion which had worked with set designer Michael Scott-Mitchell on the cauldron for the Sydney Olympic Games and went on to create effects for the Athens Olympics. In the rush to secure scenery building contracts, both the newly appointed (and Sydney-based) Production Co-ordinator and the General Director appear to have overlooked the fact that SOSA was in a different legal position from that of other Australian opera companies. It was a statutory body, and the State Supply Act of 1985 required it to observe the directions of the State Supply Board.⁴⁷ The Auditor-General in his report to Parliament for 2002-03 homed in on the fact that *Ring* set-builders and other suppliers were not being engaged in the manner prescribed by the Supply Board:⁴⁸

Audit noted instances where the contracting and procurement activities associated with the construction of sets for the 2004-05 production of *The Ring* had not been undertaken in accordance with policies of the State Supply Board.

In particular State Opera were unable to clarify what delegation of authority had been vested in State Opera from the State Supply Board for contracting and procurement. Audit recommended that State Opera seek written clarification from the State Supply Board regarding its accredited purchasing delegation threshold and obtain appropriate

⁴⁷ South Australia, *State Supply Act 1985*, s. 14. Certain bodies (universities and local government entities, the Natural Gas Authority and the Motor Accident Commission) were specifically exempted by the Act from its jurisdiction, but SOSA was not exempted.

⁴⁸ Report of the Auditor-General for the Year ended 30 June 2003, p. 1037.

ratification from the State Supply Board for procurement and contracting activities already carried out.

State Opera responded that they would seek clarification with the State Supply Board regarding their accredited purchasing and contracting delegation thresholds.

One year later, in his 2003-04 report to Parliament,⁴⁹ the Auditor-General noted that SOSA had still not sought written clarification from the State Supply Board on these matters. He said though that in June 2004, SOSA had sought retrospective approval from the State Supply Board and approval to waive a competitive tendering process for set construction for the *Ring*, but the Board had responded that it was unable to approve that request. Minister Hill informed the House that SOSA had not let any other major contracts since it had received this response, and was resolved to consult with State Supply before letting future contracts in order to ensure compliance.⁵⁰ By that time though, the building work had been done.

Parliamentary pressures and growing government disenchantment

In September 2003 the Labor government was confronted with more questions in Parliament about a ‘looming budget blowout’. Sandra Kanck asked for details of the State Opera’s business plan cost projections, how much had been spent to date, whether any cost overruns had been identified, and how much the Commonwealth and the State Governments had pledged. A request was also made for the release of an Australia Council/Arts SA commissioned Production Consultancy Report by Richard Stuart.⁵¹ The premier replied in February 2004 that the State Opera’s business plan projected a total cost of \$12.596 million, and that expenditure as at 24 September 2003 had been \$3.615 million and in line with the business plan. Cost overruns, he said, had been due principally to the complexity of technical aspects of set construction especially special effect works, and associated labour requirements. He added that:

Cost pressures on *The Ring Cycle* budget had been first identified in May [2003] through the close monitoring process established for the project. Discussions ensued between Arts SA, the Major Performing Arts Board (MPAB) of the Australia Council and the State Opera to identify the nature and magnitude of these cost pressures. ...

⁴⁹ Report of the Auditor-General for the Year ended 30 June 2004, p. 1025.

⁵⁰ Hill, The Hon. John. Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2005). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, April 11, p. 2259.

⁵¹ Kank, The Hon. Sandra. Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2003). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, September 25, p. 233.

On 10 September 2003 I was briefed on the cost pressures facing *The Ring Cycle* and the steps being taken to deal with these by the Chair and General Director of the State Opera.

Arts SA, the MPAB and the State Opera have been working on ways to contain these cost pressures and generate savings. In this regard, expert assistance has been engaged in the areas of production management and technical direction. In addition, the State Opera is exploring opportunities to optimise revenues from corporate sponsorship, in-kind support, donations and other means.

In keeping with the shared funding responsibilities that underpin the tripartite agreement between Arts SA, the MPAB and the State Opera, a joint Commonwealth/State Government approach to funding the cost pressures is envisaged.

The Commonwealth and State Governments are providing \$2.925 million and \$1.940 million, respectively, towards the 2004 production and performance of *The Ring Cycle*.⁵²

Richard Stuart's report was commissioned by the Australia Council and Arts SA, in consultation with the State Opera, to look specifically at the physical and technical aspects of the production of *The Ring Cycle*, their likely impact on the production budget and to identify potential cost efficiencies. I have been advised that, as the report contains information that is considered to be 'commercial in confidence', it should not be released.⁵³

'Commercial in confidence' the Stuart Report may have been in terms of its attachments but, in respect of the main body of the report it made embarrassing reading for SOSA management, and it is hardly surprising that they did not want it released. The Premier's answer demonstrated the depth of concern felt by both the South Australian Government and the MPAB of the Australia Council. The MPAB had a formidable chairman in Mel Ward (2002-2006), an engineer by training who had been Managing Director of Telecom Australia (1986 -1992), a Board member and Chairman of the Australian Ballet (1991-2002), and a Board member of a number of major Australian companies. The Director of MPAB was the

⁵² These figures would be increased during 2004.

⁵³ Holloway, The Hon. P, on behalf of the Premier and Minister for the Arts, SA Legislative Council Hansard, Monday 16 February 2004, p. 960.

similarly highly qualified and experienced Dr Catherine Brown-Watt. They were not easily persuaded of the desirability of advancing further funds for a project which showed every sign of slipping out of control and, in the end they did so only under the most stringent conditions. The South Australian Government had its own incentive for ensuring that the 2004 *Ring* did not fail, because under the terms of the agreement between SOSA and the Australia Council, if for any reason whatsoever the State Opera failed to carry out the 2004 *Ring*, any unexpended moneys provided by the Australia Council would have to be refunded.⁵⁴ The State Government stood behind SOSA in terms of financial liability. Only two months after the Premier had stated in Parliament that the SOSA business plan projected a total cost of \$12.596 million, the forecast expenditure figure was again revised upwards, this time to \$14.2 million. One month later it went up again to \$15.3 million.

In October and November 2003 more questions were asked in Parliament about the Auditor-General's references to an absence of penalty clauses for a breach of contractual obligations, the absence of a risk management plan, the absence of a formal process for the evaluation and approval of major operatic productions, and a breakdown in the proper chain of authority between State Opera and the State Supply Board.⁵⁵ The reference to the absence of a formal process of evaluation had been prompted by another section of the Auditor-General's report of 2002-03, which read:

Review of the documentation supporting the Board decision to schedule a 2004-05 production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring) concluded that the State Opera did not have a formal process for the evaluation and approval of major operatic productions.

Specifically, Audit were unable to locate documentation which supported a conclusion that a Board decision to schedule the 2004-05 production of The Ring was made based on full review and evaluation of the relevant merits of the production.

⁵⁴ Report of the Auditor-General for the Year ended 30 June 2003.

⁵⁵ Kank, The Hon. Sandra. Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2003). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, October 22, p. 424 and November 12, p. 538.

The State Opera responded that whilst the pre-production process for *The Ring* did not follow a usual pattern, the evaluation and approval for the 2004-05 production had been influenced by the:

- Impact of the economic and financial success of the 1998 *Ring* production;
- Feasibility study undertaken in 1999 commissioned by Arts SA;
- Need for State Opera to receive significant Commonwealth Government funding in order to stage the 2004-05 production;
- Endorsement of State Opera as a specialist company as recommended by the Nugent Report into the performing arts.

The fact that the Auditor-General had queried the basis of the original decision to mount a *Ring* production in 2004 is significant on two counts. Firstly, it assumed that the impetus for the new production had come from the opera company, whereas we know that it originated in the political sphere and formed part of a wider policy objective of the previous State Government. Secondly, the Auditor-General observed that SOSA had not undertaken a full review and evaluation of its 2004 production proposal. That was certainly true; the only detailed study was the one commissioned by the Ring Consortium (in reality by Arts SA) and undertaken by Anthony Steel in 1999. SOSA claimed in its response that the results of that study had influenced its decision, but the Steel report had been all but ignored by SOSA management, and virtually none of its recommendations had been adopted (see Chapter 4). Amongst the most important recommendations to be ignored were those in favour of reviving the State Opera Ring Corporation to manage the new production, and the appointment of a Ring Artistic Director. The third SOSA response to the Auditor-General - that evaluation and approval of the *Ring* production had been influenced by the need to receive significant Commonwealth funding - was a circular one (the special funding was in response to the *Ring* proposal, not the other way around), as was the claim that the Nugent recommendations had influenced the decision. Those recommendations were in response to SOSA's on-going commitment to staging the works of Richard Wagner; they were not the reason for that commitment, although it could be argued that SOSA's desire to preserve its 'niche' status and enhanced Commonwealth funding did provide an incentive to produce a new *Ring*. Either way, such factors had no bearing on the evaluation of the production proposal.

By the middle of 2003, alarm bells were ringing in government circles and it was clear that the opera company was facing its most testing time since the crisis of the late 1980s. In 1987,

under General Manager Ian Johnston and Board Chairman Alan Hodgson, SOSA had accumulated a deficit of \$1,558,000⁵⁶ and its future was in doubt. The Labor Premier and Arts Minister at the time, John Bannon, blamed the deficit on ‘an overambitious program, poor box-office results, and an inability to adjust workforce members in line with the 1987/88 budget allocation.’⁵⁷ He provided a government financed bailout for the company and asked Johnston to consider his position. Johnston resigned, as did Hodgson. The entire SOSA Board which, between 1982 and 1986 had allowed the deficit to grow unchecked, offered to resign, but the government settled for the change of Chairman and General Manager. Bill Gillespie was appointed in July 1988 and, over the next decade, he and the new Chairman Keith Smith and his successors turned the company’s fortunes around, culminating in the highly successful *Ring* of 1998.

It is instructive to compare the 1987 situation with what happened after 2000, where the over-expenditure was considerably higher and, at times, out of control. Questions in both Houses of Parliament about the budget overrun continued well into 2004. Sandra Kanck led the charge in the Legislative Council on 3 June 2004 (five months out from opening night), noting that while the premier had advised in February that State Opera’s [revised] business plan projected a cost of \$12.596 million for the production, by the end of May that figure had risen to \$15.345 million. The additional money, she noted, would come via a \$1.15 million increase in Commonwealth funding; the State Government would find an additional \$986,000 in funding; Arts SA and the major performing arts board would contribute an additional \$200,000 each, and Arts SA would lend State Opera \$500,000.⁵⁸ In other words, the Commonwealth would contribute an extra \$1.35 million and the State an extra \$1.686 million. On 16 June 2004 in the House of Assembly, Opposition Arts Spokesman Martin Hamilton-Smith asked why the Festival Centre had decided not to produce the sets for the *Ring*. ‘Did the minister responsible make that decision?’ he asked. If not, why had the minister not intervened on a matter that had led to a budget blow-out and impacted on the arts budget?⁵⁹ Minister Hill pointed out⁶⁰ that the *Ring* had been an initiative of the former

⁵⁶ Silsbury, Elizabeth. (2001) *State of Opera: An Intimate New History of the State Opera of South Australia*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press, p. 144.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p. 142.

⁵⁸ Kanck, The Hon. Sandra. Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, June 3, p. 1785. The Arts SA loan was subsequently converted into a grant.

⁵⁹ Hamilton-Smith, Martin. Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly, Estimates Committee A. (2004). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 16, p.34.

⁶⁰ Hill, The Hon. John. SA House of Assembly – Estimates Committee A (2004) - Hansard, June 16, p. 34.

government. Diana Laidlaw⁶¹ had been responsible for the staging of the first (imported) *Ring* cycle and it had been such a success that there was enthusiasm for South Australia to produce its very own cycle. However, when that decision was made it had been on ‘an indicative basis’ and enthusiasm had trumped thoroughness. Minister Hill said he had asked to see the records and found that no detailed budget had been prepared at that early stage. What Diana Laidlaw had signed off on, he said, was a notional understanding and a crude estimate that it would cost \$10 million to \$11 million. It was a naïve budget that had certainly blown out.⁶² The notional budgeting done by the opera company, he continued, assumed that the sets would be produced in South Australia by the Festival Centre Trust and, to this end, there had been some discussions between SOSA and the AFCT but there was no signed contract – no finalised arrangement. The Trust, in the end, had been offered a commercial contract from interstate and they decided to accept that contract, operating within their commercial charter and leaving the opera company to go elsewhere, albeit at increased cost. Minister Hill’s judgment was that there should have been a much more rigorous budgeting process [under the former Government], but this did not happen until the budgetary pressures were discovered [under the present Government]. Then the Federal and State Governments commissioned what became known as the Stuart Inquiry which made recommendations about how the problem should be addressed. In the Auditor-General’s report on the twelve months ended 30 June 2004, it was noted that, in August 2000, SOSA’s Board had approved budget estimated costs of \$9.3 million for a new *Ring*, and that on 27 April 2004 a revised budget of \$14.2 million was approved by the Board - that is, a \$5 million increase. Eventually, actual costs would grow by a further million dollars to \$15.14 million, sending expenditure soaring \$6 million over its original Board-approved budget limit. No wonder ministers were less than impressed, although it was awkward for them to say so publicly. By characterising the previous Liberal Government (and especially former Arts Minister Laidlaw) as the villains of the piece, the Rann Government was able to depict itself as making the best of an inherited bad job. Nevertheless, behind the scenes, the damage to Government/SOSA relations had been done, as Phillips subsequently acknowledged.⁶³

In contrast with the 1987 precedent, the State Government’s response in 2004 was tempered by the fact that it had to act jointly with the Commonwealth because of the combined funding

⁶¹ Former Arts Minister Diana Laidlaw retired from Parliament on 6 June 2003.

⁶² Faced with criticism in Parliament, the Minister responded by blaming the former government rather than opera company management for whom he was now responsible.

⁶³ See Phillips, Stephen. (2008, May 9). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 19.

arrangements. This time the solution - by both governments acting together - was not to ask the General Director to 'consider his position' (it was too late for that) but to initiate the Stuart Inquiry. It was soon after this that Phillips and Neidhardt stopped speaking to one another.⁶⁴ There was no need for daily contact between the two after mid-2004 since Staunton was now in charge of the production arrangements, but the relationship was irretrievably soured when, at the Helpmann Awards ceremony in 2005, Neidhardt publicly acknowledged Staunton's role in rescuing the production.⁶⁵

Following the appointments of Staunton and Potter, Philip Drake (a project design manager who had previously worked with Staunton on Baz Lurhmann's projects) was appointed Project Manager, and the Sydney Opera House's Lana Lazareff became Sound Co-ordinator.

The seeds of government disenchantment with the *Ring* project had been sown as early as 2002-03. Subsequent comments in Parliament by the Treasurer/Deputy Premier Kevin Foley⁶⁶ suggested that he had become unsympathetic to the *Ring* project and would not have favoured a remount. The Premier (and Arts Minister) Mike Rann wanted to see the production succeed, but no one would have described him as an enthusiastic advocate *à la* Diana Laidlaw. Although he dutifully supported the project in formal statements and answers to parliamentary questions, more often than not he left its advocacy to others, notably Minister Hill. After Tim O'Loughlin had left Arts SA in October 2000, the senior public servants who succeeded him were lukewarm at best about the *Ring*, and they became increasingly frustrated by the 'rather painful experiences' associated with SOSA's handling of the production.⁶⁷ The State Government had actually considered cancelling the production once it discovered the size of the budget overrun, but decided that rescue was the more prudent course of action. 'If we had cancelled, it would have cost more and we wouldn't have had anything to show for it' said the Premier before having another 'dig' at his predecessors for commissioning the cycle.⁶⁸ Minister Hill put it this way: 'One option was to cancel it, but that would have had negative consequences for our reputation. There had been so much money already invested it would have cost more money to cancel than to put in the extra

⁶⁴ I was informed of this by Phillips himself at the time.

⁶⁵ Phillips expressed his outrage at this in a conversation with me in 2005.

⁶⁶ See for example Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2008). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, April 10, pp. 3060-1.

⁶⁷ Mackie, Greg. Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council, Budget and Finance Committee. (2008). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, May 12.

⁶⁸ Cosic, Miriam. (2004, November 24). Opera's ringing endorsement despite blow-out. *The Australian*. Retrieved from: <http://blog.hoiking.org/pictures/2005/11/Adelaide-Ring.pdf>.

money ... so you just bite the bullet.’⁶⁹ The fact that cancellation had even been contemplated, the pros and cons weighed and rescue measures put in place, implied that the government was going to be less than enthusiastic when considering any proposals for a remount; and so it proved to be. In reality, the loss of any prospect of a remount can be traced to early 2004 when both State and Commonwealth Governments found themselves obliged to initiate emergency funding and production management measures.

Premature announcements of foreign interest and the collapse of negotiations

For SOSA, the immediate goal after the final performance of the *Ring* on 12 December 2004 was not its restaging in Adelaide but the sale or rental of the production to opera companies overseas. It was hoped that sales/rentals would recoup some, perhaps all, of the costs, and vindicate management’s decisions in the face of government irritation and scepticism. Phillips told Miriam Cosic of *The Australian* that ‘both the Hong Kong Festival and Los Angeles Opera had shown interest in buying it’.⁷⁰ Observers who knew little or nothing of what had gone on behind the political scenes, thought it inconceivable that the production would not be restaged. Roger Covell in *The Sydney Morning Herald* had no doubt about the production’s significance: ‘At this point of the first cycle it is already possible to declare that this is a *Ring* that deserves to travel. I hope that the director, Elke Neidhardt, and her scenic colleagues will be besieged by invitations from international houses to restage or further develop this brilliant event.’⁷¹ ‘After the rapturous reception this production has received, it will almost certainly be staged again’, waxed Penelope Debelles in *The Age* on 30 November 2004. ‘Hong Kong Opera and Singapore Opera had people in the audience for the first cycle’ she said, ‘and will meet with Phillips in the New Year. Adelaide may also host a revival of this *Ring* although, with a four-year lead time, not until much later this decade’.⁷² ABC Television, in a feebly written and even more feebly narrated documentary called *Forging the Ring*, ended its commentary with the words: ‘On the back of this success there is now talk of presenting this first Australian *Ring* internationally’.⁷³ Tim Lloyd in *The Advertiser* quoted

⁶⁹ Wiese Bockmann, Michelle, and Westwood, Matthew. (2004, December 11-12). Bayreuth on the Torrens, *The Weekend Australian*, p 19.

⁷⁰ Cosic, Miriam. (2004, November 24). Opera’s ringing endorsement despite blow-out. *The Australian*.

⁷¹ Covell, Roger. (2004, November 19). Die Walkure Adelaide Ring Fest, *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/Review/Die-Walkure-Adelaide-Ring-Fest/2004/11/18/1100748131784.html>.

⁷² Debelles, Penelope. (2004, November 30). Adelaide the Ringmaster. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/Adelaide-the-Ringmaster/2004/11/29/1101577402031.html>.

⁷³ (2005). *Forging the Ring - Backstage at State Opera of SA’s Ring Cycle*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Phillips⁷⁴ as saying that the Adelaide *Ring* was under consideration for productions in Singapore and Hong Kong. ‘A first step in the future of the *Ring*’ he said, ‘would be to travel to Hong Kong and Singapore with Executive Producer Noel Staunton. We have scheduled nearly a week of meetings in January.’ He was also reported as saying that the production was being discussed as a possibility for the Cultural Olympiad at the time of the Beijing Olympic Games (2008), and he noted that the Chinese ambassador had attended *Die Walküre* in Adelaide, and the Cultural Counsellor had attended *Das Rheingold*. What were the chances of a remount in Adelaide? ‘Mr Phillips said the decision whether to remount the *Ring* in Adelaide at a future date was up to the State and Federal Governments’. In other words, the initiative would again be with governments, not with SOSA.

None of the anticipated overseas sales eventuated. In May 2008, Greg Mackie, Executive Director of Arts SA was asked during a meeting of the Budget and Finance Committee of the South Australian Legislative Council whether the 2004 *Ring* set was marketable or not. He replied unequivocally: ‘It is not marketable. In the period immediately following the presentation of the 2004 *Ring* cycle, efforts were made to secure the interest of another city in the world to take it on. One of the things we are blessed with in South Australia at the Festival Theatre is one of the larger proscenium arches in the world and, as the production was scaled to take full advantage of the scale of our stage, it subsequently proved to be very difficult to find another city able to take it. It is part of the reason why the *Ring* cycle has never been presented in its entirety anywhere else in Australia’.⁷⁵ It was ironic that one of the 2004 *Ring* production’s most lauded features in terms of critical appeal and audience response – its spectacular sets and special effects – had become an impediment to its export and to its restaging elsewhere in Australia. Options for modifying the more challenging elements of the staging in order to facilitate exports were never explored.

Beijing imported a structurally simpler production from Nuremberg in 2005 at a cost of about one million Euros, half of which was met by firms in the Nuremberg region as a trade promotion gesture. Los Angeles Opera had expressed interest in the Adelaide production⁷⁶ at a time when the Australian Consul-General in Los Angeles was John Olsen, who had been Premier of South Australia at the time of the 1998 *Ring*. This expression of interest was not

⁷⁴ Lloyd, Tim. (2004, December 11). Ring may head to China for Olympics, *The Advertiser*.

⁷⁵ Mackie, Greg. Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council, Budget and Finance Committee. (2008). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, May 12.

⁷⁶ Cosic, Miriam. (2004, November 24). Opera’s ringing endorsement despite blow-out. *The Australian*.

followed up and Olsen's involvement was not sought. Eventually, Los Angeles Opera produced its own *Ring* at a cost of \$US31 million.

Singapore Lyric Opera had shied away from the performance of Wagner's works after its founding in 1990, presumably for reasons of cost and its programming philosophy, and it was not a serious contender in 2005. Neither was Bangkok Opera which had plans to produce its own *Ring* and staged *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* in 2006 and 2007 respectively. The New National Theatre of Tokyo staged its first *Ring* (directed by Keith Warner) between 2001 and 2004, and it was therefore a rival to SOSA rather than a potential customer. The Tokyo *Ring* was staged again in 2009-10. Hong Kong had looked promising, especially since the CEO and Artistic Director of the Adelaide Festival Centre, Douglas Gautier, had worked there for many years, including as Executive Director of the Hong Kong Arts Festival. Gautier had hopes of collaboration between SOSA and the Hong Kong Philharmonic, where former Sydney Symphony conductor Edo de Waart was music director. However, the budget for such a project was estimated to be \$US7 million to \$US8 million, and there seemed little chance of raising that kind of money.⁷⁷ Nor was there a likelihood of remounting the production elsewhere in Australia without scenic modifications. As already mentioned, Opera Australia had looked at doing SOSA's *Die Walküre* as a stand-alone production in Melbourne but had found that it would not fit on the Arts Centre stage without structural changes.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the orchestra pit in the Victorian Arts Centre was too small for a *Ring* orchestra at that time. The pit would be enlarged by the Victorian Government in 2012-13 at a cost of \$4 million prior to Opera Australia's *Ring* production of 2013.

SOSA's inability to capitalise on the 2004 *Ring*'s overseas potential, and the absence of a suitable venue elsewhere in Australia had left a remount in Adelaide as the only possible option. However, several questions remained to be answered:

- Did SOSA's management seriously want to restage the Neidhardt production in Adelaide, given the problems encountered in bringing it to fruition, and the rupture in relations between Phillips and Neidhardt?
- Would the State and Commonwealth funding authorities who had rescued the 2004 production, be inclined to make major commitments for a second time?
- If so, should the management model be retained or modified?

⁷⁷ Strickland, Katrina. (2005, December 12). Lords of the Ring contemplate its return to the stage. *The Australian*.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

- Were there now any realistic prospects of Adelaide becoming an established centre for the performance of Wagner's works after the example of Seattle?



12. *Götterdämmerung* Act III. Lisa Gasteen as Brünnhilde. Photo Sue Adler.

Chapter 9

Developments after 2004 and the end of a tradition

Late in November 2004, towards the end of the first cycle of the new *Ring*, Stephen Phillips offered an explanation as to why no commitment had been made to restaging the production. He was reported as saying: ‘It was agreed when we arrived at our final budget this year that all bets were off until it was performed. If it had been a so-so production and gone down fairly well, then people would have thought, “well that was an interesting exercise”. But it has actually been an incredible success and we are being asked, “what are we doing next and when will it be restaged?”.’¹ A fortnight later, as the performances drew to a close, he pointedly avoided any suggestion that SOSA would be making the case for a remount, saying that such a decision would be one for governments.² Seven months later, Premier Rann told Parliament that he had received no proposal to remount the 2004 *Ring*.³ There had been no submission comparable to that prepared by Tim O’Loughlin and Bill Gillespie in 1994, and no indication that either the State Government or the Australia Council would welcome one. The absence of any proposal for a remount can be explained by the traumatic events of 2003-04 and by two developments in particular:

- The crisis in the opera company’s relationships with the funding agencies which had led to the latter’s direct interventions, to the Stuart Inquiry and to the new production management appointments, and
- The breakdown in the relationship between Phillips and Neidhardt. Phillips told me in 2004 that if the production were to be revived, he would ask the Australian Assistant Director, Ian MacKenzie-Thurley⁴ to direct it. Undoubtedly this would have come as a shock to Neidhardt and it would have been highly controversial, although perhaps less so if the revival had taken place overseas rather than in Adelaide. This was

¹ DeBelle, Penelope. (2004, November 30). Adelaide the Ringmaster. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/Adelaide-the-Ringmaster/2004/11/29/1101577402031.html>.

² Lloyd, Tim. (2004, December 11). Ring may head to China for Olympics, *The Advertiser*.

³ Rann, The Hon. Mike. Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2005). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 15, p. 36.

⁴ The First Assistant Director of the 2004 Adelaide *Ring* had been the young German director Søren Schuhmacher, who returned to Germany after the 2004 performances.

another reason, I think, why a high priority had been given to exporting the production.

An Adelaide remount was only going to occur if the South Australian Government and the Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council had decided to fund it of their own volition, either out of conviction or in response to public pressure, or following the recommendations of a specially commissioned review. In reality, the Australia Council would not have taken such an initiative since its role was to respond to applications; it was not a political entity. The South Australian Government on the other hand could have followed the 1998 (*Ring Consortium*) precedent and begun a consultative process. In practice, two years would pass until, at the end of 2006, the State Government commissioned an inquiry into the desirability or otherwise of staging of the *Ring* again, either as a remount or as a new production.

The mood for a possible remount of the 2004 *Ring*

The 2003-04 *Ring* budgetary and management crisis, coming in the wake of the Adelaide Festival debacle of 2001-02, had left Labor ministers with little appetite for revisiting their predecessors' Wagnerian adventure. In contrast with Minister Laidlaw's establishment of a Ring Consortium on the last night of the 1998 *Ring* performances, neither Premier Rann nor Minister Hill flagged any prospect of a new staging at the conclusion of the 2004 performances. Furthermore, reactions in Parliament in early 2005 were hardly encouraging. In 1998, a motion congratulating the State Opera had been carried unanimously in the Legislative Council before the third cycle had even finished.⁵ Moved by Minister Laidlaw herself, that motion attracted enthusiastic statements of support from both sides of the chamber. A similar motion was carried unanimously in the House of Assembly⁶ where it was also supported by statements from both sides of the chamber. By contrast, in February 2005, a motion in the House of Assembly⁷ by the Opposition Spokesman for the Arts, Mr Hamilton-Smith, congratulating the State Opera on the 2004 production, attracted no supporting statements from government benches, and discussion was terminated by a motion from Labor Member (and subsequently Arts Minister) Mr Jack Snelling to adjourn the

⁵ Parliament of South Australia, Legislative Council. (1998). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia Legislative Council, December 9, pp. 455-7.

⁶ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (1999). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, February 18, pp. 856-7.

⁷ Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2005). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, February 17, pp. 1688-90.

debate. The Legislative Council did not address the subject at all. There could hardly have been a greater difference in Parliamentary moods. It did not help that Mr Hamilton-Smith used his statement to say that during the Premier's 'period at the helm of the budget and management of State Opera and the *Ring*, things went off track, leading to a budget blowout in the vicinity of \$4 million.' However, he congratulated General Director Stephen Phillips for his 'firm and outstanding leadership', and suggested that SOSA management should not be blamed for the budgetary excess; after all, they 'will want to do the best job possible and, of course, will want to go and spend to ensure that that is delivered. And I commend them for that. However, it is the job of government to manage the purse strings, and something went wrong on this occasion. What I want to ensure now is that State Opera is not punished for this overspend.' SOSA management had found an ally and would-be protector in the Opposition Spokesman for the Arts, while the blame for budgetary blowouts was being laid at the feet of the Minister – hardly a propitious turn of events for an opera company in need of government support. Nevertheless, the Opposition's tactic was to be expected given that its 2004 *Ring* budget had been labelled 'naïve' by Minister Hill.

Arts commentators too were inclined to criticise the South Australian Government for not immediately announcing a revival of the 2004 production. Sydney-based journalist and impresario Leo Schofield published a scathing 'letter' in *The Bulletin* magazine on 1 March 2005 in which he lampooned Premier Rann for dozing off during *Das Rheingold* ('but then all this Wagner was probably new to you'), noted the diverse international origins of the audience, hailed South Australia's attractions to which the *Ring* had drawn visitors who might otherwise not have come, and suggested that the Premier might be 'like a lot of polties who can't see the value in arts or cultural enterprises' or 'can't calculate the knock-on effect of a cultural spectacular on city economics'. His main point was: 'Why in hell didn't you immediately announce a return season?' Schofield was not alone in expressing incredulity that the moment had not been seized to announce a revival of the production in, say, four years' time. However, arts journalists and commentators were unaware of the tensions underlying the 2004 performances, and how close the production had come to being abandoned altogether. The Government's position was that it had inherited a poorly prepared budget and a flawed management structure;⁸ that it had come to the rescue by commissioning expert inquiries, engaging additional production staff, securing Commonwealth support and

⁸ The latter point, though not stated publicly, was inherent in the commissioning and adoption of the Stuart Report recommendations.

providing considerable additional funding. Right up to the opening night, it had been far from certain that such efforts would pay off in terms of the quality and reception of the production, and it would have been premature to announce a new staging in the absence of an evaluation of its effectiveness and economic impact.⁹ The government's efforts to salvage the project had been vindicated but, even so, ministers continued to be the butt of criticism while SOSA's management was hailed as visionary, competent and hard done by. It was not surprising that some ministers and public servants were inclined to wonder why they had bothered.

Encouraging developments in the lead-up to an election

The first indication that consideration was being given to restaging the 2004 *Ring* came on 15 June 2005, seven months after the curtain fell on the third cycle. Labor member of the House of Assembly Vini Ciccarello asked a 'Dorothy Dixey' of the Premier about the benefits of the 2004 production of Wagner's *Ring* cycle to South Australia. Minister Hill offered to answer the question, prompting the Premier to quip: 'Go ahead – you are much more Wagnerian than I am.' Minister Hill confirmed that he was indeed 'much more Wagnerian' by informing the House that the ringtone on his mobile phone was 'the *Ride of the Valkyrie*' (*sic*). He said that the production had been a major triumph for the small State Opera Company. It had astounded and delighted audiences and continued to receive positive coverage in the international media. He continued:

When the original budget allocated by the previous state government proved to be grossly inadequate for such an ambitious undertaking, it had to be revised, with increased budgeted income levels for box office, sponsorship and donations. I am pleased to say that the production was achieved within its existing budget. Box office sales exceeded targets, and the State Opera had a waiting list of patrons eager to purchase any premium seats that became available. Income from the sale of programs and merchandise also exceeded budgeted targets. Private donations from almost 700 donors around the world finished only \$1,595 short of the target of \$850,000. Total corporate sponsorship support finished \$4,800 ahead of the net target of \$300,000, with some 20 businesses having provided support.

⁹ Rann, The Hon. Mike. Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2005). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, June 15, p. 36.

The minister noted that an economic impact study undertaken by the Tourism Commission was yet to be considered by Cabinet, but it had revealed that substantial income had accrued to the State. He also quoted Adelaide Festival Centre Trust estimates that the value of media exposure was \$2.3 million. He then went on to say:

Finally, we are contemplating whether or not to restage the *Ring* cycle at some future time. I have written to the federal government, to ministers for the arts and tourism and also to Alexander Downer, who has a ministerial interest in cultural matters. I have asked them to support the cost of restaging because there is no way that the state of South Australia, off its own bat, can afford to do so. We would need federal government support, and it is important for us to know up-front whether or not the federal government is interested in participating. If it is not, it really means that the *Ring* cycle cannot be restaged. However, we would be keen to work with the federal government to consider this.

Clearly, a remount of the 2004 *Ring* was only going to occur if it could be supported jointly by the State and the Commonwealth. Two months later, on 12 September 2005, Minister Hill noted that the *Ring* production had won 10 of the 11 categories for which it was nominated at the national Helpmann Awards, including Best Opera and Best Special Event. He added that it had also been a major cultural tourism event with approximately 80 per cent of the audience coming from overseas and interstate. According to the South Australian Tourism Commission survey, it had generated an extra \$14.2 million for the state economy. Faced with these objective measures of the 2004 *Ring*'s success, which could hardly be ignored, the minister announced that the South Australian Government, through Arts SA and the South Australian Tourism Commission, would commission a study into the feasibility of reprising the *Ring* in Adelaide and its possible longer term future as a major event on South Australia's and Australia's cultural tourism calendar. He added:

The future of the *Ring* in South Australia will depend critically on a shared commitment between the Australian and South Australian governments on all elements of any future production. I acknowledge the bipartisan support for the *Ring* in 2004 and the continuing interest in the federal government, through the Minister for

the Arts (Senator Rod Kemp) and the Minister for Tourism (Senator Fran Bailey), both of whom I met recently to discuss our proposals.¹⁰

Coming as it did nine months after the 2004 performances, this statement emphasised the ‘continuing interest’ of the Commonwealth but gave no hint that the Australia Council might be unsympathetic to the idea of funding a remount. If State ministers and officials had any grounds for suspicion, which they should have, they were certainly not publicising them six months out from the next State elections. At those elections, in March 2006, the Rann Labor Government was returned to office with an increased majority in the House of Assembly.

The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra wins government support and secures new funding

2005 had been a crucial year for the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. In March, the findings of a Commonwealth inquiry into Australia’s symphony and pit orchestras were made public.¹¹ This inquiry had been undertaken by businessman James Strong, and it recommended that the (ABC-managed) Adelaide Symphony Orchestra be downsized by 25 per cent from 75 players to 56. Since the recommendation was actually for 56 full time equivalent positions, the reduction in full time players as such would have been down to about 50 players or a 33 per cent reduction in full time positions. The Queensland Orchestra and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra were also to be cut back under the Strong recommendations. The ASO size had been increased by a State subsidy to 78 players at the time of the 1998 *Ring*, but had fallen back to 72 musicians by the beginning of 2006. At that time, the orchestra was carrying a debt of well over \$2 million. The two productions of the *Ring* had brought the orchestra a high level of international attention and community respect but, for at least a decade, the ASO had been operating in precarious financial circumstances. The threatened 25 per cent reduction in size caused general outrage amongst the orchestra’s supporters and others who regarded it as a slap in the face for South Australia, especially after the successes of the 1998 and 2004 *Rings*. Amongst those who were outraged by the prospect of such a cut was Alexander Downer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who with his wife, prominent SA arts figure Nicky Downer, promised to use his influence to ensure that the downsizing would not happen. Premier Rann was initially reported as saying that his government was not going to pay one more cent for the ASO. However, several weeks later he changed his tune and decided that he wanted to work with the Commonwealth Government to increase the funding

¹⁰ Hill, The Hon. John. Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly. (2005). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, September 12, p. 3263.

¹¹ The Review had been announced in May 2004.

to the ASO which he then described hyperbolically as ‘one of the great orchestras of the world’. The orchestra itself had organised an active campaign to counter the recommendations of the Strong Report, eliciting support from within and outside Australia, including from a number of world famous conductors and other musicians. It arranged meetings with politicians, maximised television and radio coverage of the issue, gave impromptu concerts in public places, used orchestral players and Friends of the ASO to speak with audience members before and during concerts, handed out leaflets and bumper stickers, and set up a special website. Tim O’Loughlin, who had been instrumental in securing the 1998 *Ring* for Adelaide and preparing the ground for the 2004 production, was by 2005, a member of the Board of the ASO. He became its Chairman in 2006. The public campaign in South Australia and elsewhere was very successful and, as a result, the Commonwealth approved the establishment of the six symphony orchestras as independent companies limited by guarantee, and allocated \$25.4 million to maintain them. This amount was matched by \$7 million from the various State Governments.¹² For its part, the South Australian Government announced in May 2005 that it would contribute \$2.1 million extra over four years for the ASO, or 23 per cent of the total government funding.¹³ This was approximately the same amount that the State had contributed to the 2004 *Ring*.

The orchestra and its supporters had responded immediately and with vigour, galvanising support from the public and from politicians at both Commonwealth and State levels. In only four months they had achieved their objectives by making a strong case and bringing politicians - especially government politicians - on side. After the 2008 announcement of the decision by governments not to fund a remount of the *Ring*, Phillips received an official warning to be careful about what he said publicly.¹⁴

The *Ring* feasibility study

On 18 October 2006, sixteen months after Minister Hill’s announcement of a proposed *Ring* feasibility study and almost two years after the end of the 2004 performances, Premier Rann, in a rambling and barely coherent statement to Parliament, expounded on the feasibility study’s objectives. He told the House of Assembly’s Estimates Committee:

¹² For a full account see Blackman, Paul. (2006, February 13). *The Fight for Survival: Adelaide Symphony Orchestra*, Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance. Retrieved from: <http://www.alliance.org.au/the-fight-for-survival-adelaide-symphony-orchestra>.

¹³ ABC News. (2005, May 9). *Funding pledge cheers SA orchestra*. Retrieved from: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2005-05-09/funding-pledge-cheers-sa-orchestra/1567044>.

¹⁴ See Appendix 19.

I know there has been speculation that I am somehow anti-Wagner. In fact there was a silly piece in *The Bulletin* some time ago written by Leo Schofield ... who said that I should be announcing the new *Ring* and what a disgrace I was, or something like that – that is how I read it, anyway. The fact is that at that stage we had not had a proposition for a new *Ring* Cycle. A case was not put to us by anyone that I am aware of. So, we are basically seeking expressions of interest. We are having a feasibility study about whether or not we will have another *Ring* Cycle and whether it is a different version of the one we have just had, or something completely different. We are not ruling anything out. I want to congratulate Diana Laidlaw for the *Ring* Cycle. I went to one of them. I went to the opening night with the Governor, and people said that because I was not at the other events I was anti Wagner and that all of this had something to do with the Second World War. It is bizarre.

From memory, parliament was sitting, and there seemed to be a little bit of a fandango going on about Wagner. I just want to assure you that it has nothing to do with my family's involvement in the Second World War, or anything else. We are having a feasibility study and if it works, it works. I think the ASO deserves enormous credit, and so does the State Opera. It is a brilliant *Ring* Cycle. I wish I could have gone to the *Ride of the Valkyries* sequence. As you know, there is that great film that affected our youth.¹⁵

Following an advertisement by Arts SA for expressions of interest in undertaking the study into a possible future staging of the *Ring*, the accounting firm of Ernst & Young was appointed to this task on 26 October 2006¹⁶ - a task which, twelve years earlier, had been successfully undertaken by SOSA's General Director and Chairman. This inquiry, coming in the wake of the Steel, Stuart and other reports, amounted to a vote of no confidence in SOSA's ability to plan its own *Ring* productions and, by extension, to execute them. However, at least two of the ten-member Ernst & Young consultancy panel brought personal knowledge of SOSA to the task. One was Colin Dunsford who had been Chairman of the Board of SOSA (and chairman of the Audit & Finance Committee of SORC) during the first *Ring* and *Parsifal* and in the early years of planning the 2004 *Ring*. Another was Anthony

¹⁵ Rann, The Hon. Mike. Parliament of South Australia, House of Assembly, Estimates Committee A. (2006). *Parliamentary debates (Official Hansard)*. Adelaide, Australia: South Australia House of Assembly, October 18, p. 11. The film reference was, presumably, to the soundtrack adaptation of the *Walkürenritt* for the 1979 Vietnam War movie *Apocalypse Now*.

¹⁶ Terms of the Ernst & Young contract retrieved from:
www.tenders.sa.gov.au/tenders/contract/download.do?id=2405§ion=contract.

Steel who had provided the 1999 report which SOSA had ignored. The consultants collectively were paid \$71,225 for their services on the initial report.¹⁷ Subsequent payments¹⁸ were made for a follow-up report delivered in March 2008, putting the total cost of the Ring Cycle Feasibility Study in the vicinity of \$100,000. The consultancy was charged with reviewing and assessing the economic benefits of, and options available to the South Australian Government for, the *Ring Cycle*, including:

- A remount of the 2004 production of *The Ring Cycle* in 2010 (at the earliest, given the long lead times needed for booking singers of international standing);
- The possibility of *The Ring Cycle* as a major long-term event on both South Australia's and Australia's cultural tourism calendars, following successful productions in 1998 and 2004; and
- The 'do-nothing' option, and its associated opportunity cost.

In undertaking this work, the consultants were required to consider:

- The optimal timing to hold the event in terms of staging month and year, both from a demand perspective (including the maximisation of interstate and international visitation) and the availability of the venue
- The coordination of the event with other significant South Australian and Australian cultural tourism events to achieve mutual benefits
- The impact of an increasingly dynamic marketplace for *The Ring Cycle* on the economic benefits of the various options (eg. The increasing number of *Ring Cycles* being performed worldwide and the impact this might have on patronage and ticket prices for any planned remount, and therefore on any flow-on tourism benefits, the availability of specialist artists, etc.)
- The cultural impacts of a remount from both a state and federal perspective
- The impact of a remount as opposed to a new production on potential benefits
- The necessary investment and its flow-on effects.

The consultants were also required to:

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Shown in the Annual Report of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet for 2007-8 as being between \$10,000 and \$50,000.

- Identify and analyse all foreseeable management, artistic, production and funding issues to be considered in the planning of a remount of The Ring Cycle, including highlighting critical success factors
- Recommend a risk management strategy to ensure that all potential risks and problems can be identified and addressed
- Prepare indicative and conservative budgets, including all production, artistic, marketing and administrative components.

After two years of government inactivity, the report was now required within five weeks by 8 December 2006, although this date was subsequently extended. There was also a follow-up report in 2008.

The original terms of this long-delayed study were all-encompassing and canvassed not only a remount of the 2004 production but also the possibility of an entirely new one and, indeed, the implications of having no *Ring* at all. The consultants were required to provide an assessment of tourism impacts and audience expectations, detailed budgets, risk management strategies and *all foreseeable management, artistic, production and funding issues* [my emphasis] – within five weeks. The scope was impractical and, not surprisingly, it was amended during the course of the review to confine its attention to ‘a remount of the 2004 production rather than exploring the potential of creating a new production. ... Similarly, with regards to an assessment of the potential benefits, the objective of the consultancy is to give priority to the economic aspects over the cultural benefits.’¹⁹

When Ernst & Young’s Ring Feasibility Study Report was delivered to Arts SA on 21 December 2006, its assumption²⁰ had been that 2010 would be the year of any prospective remount. However, a supplementary report of March 2008 assessed whether a remount in 2011 (instead of 2010) would materially affect the original estimates. In undertaking this follow-up inquiry, Ernst & Young worked closely with Ian McRae (Artistic Consultant) appointed by Arts SA to ensure that the revised budget took into account all relevant artistic, operational and financial matters. The original 2006 report had advocated a single governance and management structure led by SOSA²¹ – the same structure as for 2004 which, unsurprisingly, was the opera company’s preferred model. However, during risk assessment consultations after the first report, a number of ‘stakeholders’ drew attention to the risks

¹⁹ (2006, December 21). Ernst & Young, *Ring Cycle Feasibility Study*, Section 3.3.

²⁰ Based on the terms of reference of 26 October 2006.

²¹ (2006, December 21). Ernst & Young, *Ring Cycle Feasibility Study*, Section 6.1.1. Appendix 15.

associated with such a model. Consequently, on 11 February 2008, Arts SA asked Ernst & Young to:

Assess and include in the financial budget for a 2011 *Ring Cycle* the resource implications of the proposed new management structure for a remount (being a Ring Corporation, to be established by Regulations under the *South Australian Public Corporations Act 1993*).²²

The March 2008 report endorsed the removal of governance responsibilities from SOSA, and advocated the creation of a separate Ring Corporation along 1998 lines. This was a belated acknowledgment that the flawed SOSA model had been at the root of many of the problems associated with the 2004 *Ring*. The 2008 report was specific and incorporated the recommendations of the Artistic Consultant, Ian McRae that the new Ring Corporation should comprise: two representatives from SOSA; one representative from the ASO; one representative from the AFCT; one representative from the SA Tourism Commission, and three ‘appropriate and relevant’ members from interstate.²³ This formula was remarkably close to that advocated by Tim O’Loughlin over a decade earlier in 1997, and to the arrangement put by Anthony Steel to the Ring Consortium in 1999, both of which had been disregarded, with dire consequences. Thus the narrow ‘SOSA command and control’ approach would be replaced by a more inclusive model in which all of the major stakeholders as well as key, qualified ‘outsiders’ would be able to participate.

The Commonwealth rejects further involvement and South Australia ends prospects of a remount

Commonwealth elections had been announced in October 2007 and electors went to the polls on 24 November. The Labor Government of Kevin Rudd came to office, replacing the Liberal-National Government which had previously supported the 1998 Adelaide *Ring*, the 2001 *Parsifal* and the 2004 *Ring*. Minister Hill advised the South Australian House of Assembly on 10 April 2008:

In September 2005, following the success of the 2004 Adelaide production, I announced that the South Australian government, through Arts SA and the South Australian Tourism Commission, would commission a study into the feasibility of

²² Ernst & Young. (March 2008). *The Ring Cycle Feasibility Study Update. Addendum to The Ring Cycle Feasibility Study Report date 21 December 2006*, Section 1.2. Appendix 16.

²³ *ibid.*, Section 2.1.4.

remounting the *Ring Cycle* and its possible longer term future as a major event on South Australia's and Australia's cultural tourism calendar. At that time I stated that the future of the *Ring Cycle* in South Australia would depend on a shared financial commitment between the Australian and the South Australian governments.

Following consideration of the findings of the *Ring Cycle* feasibility study undertaken by Ernst & Young and discussion with my Cabinet colleagues, the Minister for Tourism and I wrote to the Australian government in December last year to determine its interest in contributing to a remount. The Hon. Peter Garrett AM, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, has now replied to our letter, advising that the Australian government is declining to support a remount. Without a shared financial commitment, the South Australian government will not be able to proceed with a remount of the *Ring Cycle* in 2011. I must say, it gives me great sadness to have to announce that.

The decision was disappointing for many people throughout Australia, although it hardly came as a surprise given that three and a half years had already elapsed since the 2004 performances. Nevertheless, it was devastating for Elke Neidhardt who was, as her son remarked after her death in November 2013, inconsolable.²⁴ When the sets were eventually auctioned off in 2011, she described this as an act of cultural naivety, and said that the federal government's refusal to contribute several million dollars was one of the major political, cultural bumbles of this country. 'It was not a lot of money' she said. 'If you think how much it costs to send a team to the Olympics, it was a pittance in comparison. [It] has huge ramifications because of the money being wasted. You make money when you restage a successful production.'²⁵ Several of the principal artists of the *Ring* were scathing in their reactions. Soprano Lisa Gasteen, who had been an outstanding Brünnhilde in Adelaide and went on to sing the role at Covent Garden, the Vienna State Opera and the Metropolitan Opera, was reported as saying: 'It was short-sighted and I guess it is going to take Australia a long time to grow out of its imbalance between what is important culturally and what is important for the general populace and sport.'²⁶ She told Tim Lloyd of *The Advertiser*:

²⁴ Muir, Fabian. (2013, December 7). Elke Neidhardt: A passionate life lived in the arts. *Sydney Morning Herald*.

²⁵ Frew, Wendy. (2011, March 18). Valhalla for sale in twilight of director's stellar operatic term. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/opera/valhalla-for-sale-in-twilight-of-directors-stellar-operatic-term-20110317-1bys8.html>.

²⁶ *ibid*.

Somebody did well out of it because they have prepared about three feasibility studies. The whole thing is a nonsense. It makes me mad, really mad, but that's Australia and that's the arts in Australia. The arts are being asphyxiated. It's a mentality and a mindset. I think we just have to grow up as a country. There are some incredibly generous individuals who put their own money into projects, but it's not up to them to fund the arts generally. Unless the government sees the performing arts as having a purpose we are stuck, really. ... All the notoriety that SA and Australia got for that *Ring* just shows they are not well-informed or just don't care.²⁷

Stuart Skelton, who had been a splendid Siegmund in 2004, was livid. He called the production

... one of the greatest achievements in the history of opera in Australia. A truly world-class production, with an Australian orchestra, and apart from a few notable exceptions, cast entirely from Australian and New Zealand artists. It is an absolute disgrace that the Federal Government, under the auspices of the Minister for the Arts, Peter Garrett has refused to come to the party in terms of helping to remount the most wonderful production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* I have ever seen. ... [W]hen the Federal Minister for the Arts can be quoted as saying that opera (and classical music in general) is a dinosaur, without any real sort of counter argument or indignation, then I fear for the art form in Australia. This sort of absolute nonsense is risibly stupid, demonstrably false and a weak and petty stab at class warfare. Wish I could say I expected better....²⁸

The artists were understandably upset that the production had been abandoned after a single season, because it had been an unqualified success artistically and had drawn a large international audience to Adelaide. As far as they were concerned, that should have guaranteed a remount. And yet history is littered with fine achievements which, for a variety of non-artistic reasons, have been left unrepeated. One need only think of Wagner's frustration when his Festival Theatre fell into darkness for six years because of the debt incurred by the Festival of 1876. In reality, the performing arts are products not only of artistic skills but also of management skills, politics and patronage.

²⁷ Lloyd, Tim. (2008, July 15). *Aussie Soprano PO'd at Her Government*. Retrieved from: <http://www.classicalmusicguide.com/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=22869>.

²⁸ Skelton, Stuart. (2008, May). These remarks were provided to Opera Australia's *Alerta* newsletter for publication in June 2008.

Arts Minister Garrett became the principal target of criticism because it was his letter in reply to his State counterpart that had removed the last vestiges of hope. The State Government was now able to deflect blame to the Commonwealth, with Minister Hill declaring: ‘The SA Government investigated staging another performance, but the Commonwealth Government declined to support the proposal.’²⁹ He did not explain why it had taken the State Government three years to seek Commonwealth support for a remount. SOSA management too was now able publicly to blame the Commonwealth.

Minister Garrett had shown little interest in opera, it is true, but the fact was that from October 2000 onwards, decision-making about Commonwealth funding for the State Opera of South Australia had resided with the Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council.³⁰ I have recounted elsewhere the circumstances under which, in early 2000, the State and Commonwealth Governments negotiated substantial Commonwealth funding support for the new *Ring* just prior to the creation of the MPAB. However, the Commonwealth’s involvement with the *Ring* did not stop there. In May 2004 the Melba Foundation received a grant from Commonwealth Arts Minister Senator Rod Kemp, Alston’s successor, of \$5 million to produce 35 CDs over five years, of which 15 Super Audio Compact Discs were to be devoted to the Adelaide *Ring*.³¹ The grant was listed in the Australia Council’s Annual Reports, but it did not have to go through the MPAB because it was given to the Melba Foundation, not to SOSA. Melba had not applied to the Australia Council, it was explained, because the latter did not have a program whose criteria would allow it to apply for funding, and so the application was dealt with directly by the Minister and his department.³² The recording project was an expensive one but the results were outstanding and attracted international awards and accolades from reviewers around the world. Nevertheless, it did represent an additional form of Commonwealth investment in the 2004 *Ring*, on top of the original funding of 2000 and the rescue funding of 2004.

²⁹ Frew, Wendy. (2011, March 18). Valhalla for sale in twilight of director’s stellar operatic term. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/opera/valhalla-for-sale-in-twilight-of-directors-stellar-operatic-term-20110317-1bys8.html>.

³⁰ The Australia Council’s ‘arms-length’ role was the subject of public discussion in 2015 when Arts Minister Brandis proposed the creation of a National Program for Excellence in the Arts under direct ministerial control.

³¹ DeBelle, Penelope. (2004, December 13). Melba’s ringing approval, *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/Melbas-ringing-approval/2004/12/10/1102625522335.html>.

³² (2014, September 22). New funding for Melba Recordings raises eyebrows, *ABC Radio National*. Retrieved from: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/new-funding-to-melba-recordings/5759468>.

Phillips told me that it had been clear to him immediately after the 2004 performances that the MPAB was not at all interested in backing a revival.³³ If this was correct (and I believe it was), one might ask why the State Government had bothered with the protracted and expensive business of the Ernst & Young inquiry in 2006-08, given that it had already made its position clear that a remount would be conditional on the availability of Commonwealth funding. The \$100,000 might have been better spent on modifying the staging to make it more marketable.

When did the South Australian Government know that the Commonwealth would not fund a remount?

The December 2006 report of the Ernst & Young Inquiry contains the following:

In 2004 the Australia Council contributed specific funding to the SOSA Ring Cycle production. However that organisation has indicated that it will not fund a remount of the Ring Cycle by SOSA in 2010.³⁴

Therefore at least as early as 2006, and probably earlier (and certainly well before the 2007 federal elections and the change of Commonwealth Government), the Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council had made it known that it would not be able to provide special funding for a remount. However, apart from the Commonwealth grants allocated specifically for the 2004 *Ring* (totalling \$4,347,000)³⁵ SOSA continued to be in receipt of annual Commonwealth funding at a level not open to other state opera companies. In 2014 for example, it received a million dollars more from the Commonwealth than did West Australian Opera, and \$800,000 more than Opera Queensland. Each year it has continued to receive close to \$1.5 million from the Australia Council. This is the result of its special ‘niche’ status recognised by the 1999 Nugent report – a status which reflected the cultural tourism value of its Wagner productions and, in particular, the *Ring*. However, in the twelve years between 2004 and 2016, SOSA has produced only one Wagner opera - *The Flying Dutchman* in 2009.

Ernst & Young flagged the possibility of additional funding from Tourism Australia, although it is hard to imagine that a grant from that source could be used for anything other than marketing and promotional activities. Minister Hill’s carefully worded statement of 10

³³ Phillips, Stephen. (2008, May 9). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 19.

³⁴ Ernst & Young. (2006, December 21). *Ring Cycle Feasibility Study*, section 7.1.2.

³⁵ SA Auditor-General’s Report on the Adelaide *Ring* 2004 Revenue and Expenditure.

April 2008 deserves close scrutiny. In it he mentions that he (not the Arts Minister, Mike Rann) and the Minister for Tourism had written ‘to the Australian Government’ in December 2007. Thus the correspondence was not only about Arts but also about Tourism. If South Australian Ministers already knew that the Australia Council would not be willing to provide special funding for a remount (which I believe they did) this would explain why non-arts sources of Commonwealth funding were being explored. The reply, when it came, was not that Minister Garrett declined to support a remount of the *Ring* but that the *Australian government* declined to support a remount. Nevertheless, annual arts funding from the Australia Council continued to flow to SOSA at a level which was the envy of other state opera companies.

Within a week of the April 10th announcement, Phillips proposed to Opera Australia that they should restage the 2004 *Ring*.³⁶ In his view, OA was the only company in Australia able to muster the resources to do it, although he recognized that there would be difficulties in using the State Theatre in Melbourne without costly modifications to the sets and to the theatre itself. Such a proposal would have come as a surprise to South Australian supporters of the production although, ironically, it was in line with Tim O’Loughlin’s idea in 1999 of offering artistic management of the production to Opera Australia. However, OA did not take up this suggestion and SOSA continued to store the *Ring* sets at a cost in excess of \$400,000 until the decision was made in late 2010 to dispose of them. No consideration was given to asking the designers to modify the sets to enable the production to be restaged elsewhere in Australia or exported overseas.

Attempts to maintain a Wagner performance tradition in Adelaide

Despite the *Ring* setback, SOSA still sought to maintain some kind of Wagner performance tradition. Phillips had wanted to stage *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in 2010,³⁷ although it has to be said that this was probably a case of ambition clouding judgment. *Die Meistersinger* is the most demanding of Wagner’s works in practical staging terms. It is the longest single work (approaching six hours), has the most elaborate text, the longest singing role (Hans Sachs), the largest cast of principals (17), the most complicated stage action, and it makes the greatest demands on the chorus. The cost of rehearsing, marketing and staging it would have been considerable, and it would not have attracted the same number of international and

³⁶ Phillips, Stephen. (2008, April 21). Email to Peter Bassett. Appendix 19.

³⁷ *ibid.*

interstate visitors as had come to Adelaide for the extended experience of the *Ring*. By April 2008 the idea of producing *Die Meistersinger* had been abandoned.

Phillips scheduled a new production of *The Flying Dutchman* for late in 2009 and I was asked to provide dramaturgical advice and compile and edit the program. Planning for the *Dutchman* began in 2007 with a production philosophy of low budget minimalism – the antithesis of the 2004 *Ring*. The design brief was for economical and simplified staging, eschewing complicated set designs and making maximum use of lighting effects, including lasers. The costumes were hired from Opera Australia at minimal cost. The conductor was Adelaide resident and experienced Wagner conductor Nicholas Braithwaite, and the director and designer were also Adelaide residents - Chris Drummond and Geoff Cobham respectively – although their experience had been in theatre rather than opera. The cast was made up entirely of Australians with the exception of the Senta - Margaret Medlyn (Kundry in the 2001 *Parsifal*) who was a New Zealander. The Dutchman was played by John Wegner, Daland by Daniel Sumegi, and Erik by Stuart Skelton. The reviews were mixed. SOSA loyalists amongst the reviewing fraternity rhapsodised, while others who came with fresh eyes were highly critical. *The Flying Dutchman* was not revived after the 2009 performances and the sets (such as they were) were destroyed, thus continuing Adelaide's notorious habit of Wagner one-offs, although, this time, with some justification.

Plans for other Wagner productions/performances came to nothing. I had suggested an on-going series of 'Wagner Nights' in which excerpts from Wagner's works would be performed by celebrated Australian and overseas Wagner singers in concert with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. This would have been economical, had the potential to attract interstate visitors if the singers/conductors were famous enough, and would have kept alive the Wagner associations. This was not pursued, although the ASO gave a one-off Wagner/Strauss concert with Lisa Gasteen in 2008. Seattle's parallel initiative under Speight Jenkins had been International Wagner Competitions held in 2006, 2008 and 2014 with considerable success.

In 2009 I had seen a production of *Tristan und Isolde* at the Teatro de la Maestranza in Seville which I thought would be perfect for Adelaide. It had been created for Rome Opera in 2006 and was directed by Pierluigi Pier'Alli. It was strikingly beautiful and typical of the best Italian work. In scenic terms it seemed relatively simple and made wonderful use of projections and holograms, and so would not have been difficult to transport to Adelaide.³⁸

³⁸ Bassett, Peter. (2009. June 24). Email to Stephen Phillips.

Phillips contacted Rome Opera and was sent design specifications and details of the very reasonable hire costs. The initial intention was to stage it in Adelaide in 2012, but as prospects of a SOSA *Ring* faded and Opera Australia's plans for a new *Ring* in Melbourne were announced, interest in Wagner in Adelaide faded too and the *Tristan* idea was abandoned. Attention was turned to an imported production of *Moby Dick* by the contemporary American composer Jake Heggie, whose *Dead Man Walking* had been performed in Adelaide in 2003. In 2011 Phillips resigned from SOSA and returned to the United Kingdom. He was replaced by Timothy Sexton, formerly SOSA Chorus Master, arranger, singer and conductor who took the titles of Chief Executive Officer and Artistic Director. He had become known as a champion of works by contemporary American composers such as Heggie, whose *Moby Dick* he conducted for SOSA in 2011, Mark Adamo whose *Little Women* he conducted in 2007, and Philip Glass, whose *Akhnaten*, *Einstein on the Beach* and *Satyagraha* he conducted between 2003 and 2007 in studio versions, and again as a full scale Trilogy in 2014. The latter took place in Her Majesty's Theatre, SOSA's original home before Bill Gillespie came to Adelaide in 1988.

Developments interstate and movements towards a Melbourne *Ring*

In late June 2008, when I was leading an opera tour in Europe, one of our tour members, Mrs Maureen Wheeler spoke to me about the recent decisions by the Commonwealth and South Australian governments not to fund a restaging of the Adelaide *Ring*. The conversation turned to the size of the Commonwealth Government subsidy required for the *Ring*, and I said that the total amount had been in the vicinity of \$5 million. On our return to Australia we continued to communicate about the possibility of her supporting another *Ring* production in Australia. She had not seen the 2004 Adelaide production but had heard reports of it. It soon became clear that her strong preference was to see a new *Ring* staged in Melbourne, her adopted home city, and we began the process of exploring how this might be done. Over the next nine months, planning advanced rapidly. The Melbourne Ring Corporation was established, management models were examined, creative staff and most singers (Australian and international) were identified and their interest and availability determined, negotiations were commenced with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, venues were considered and a detailed budget was prepared in conjunction with an accounting firm. I was directly involved with all of this. We entered into discussions with an international conductor who had a substantial Wagner background (including experience at Bayreuth) and who had conducted in Australia for Opera Australia. We were also in discussions with an experienced overseas

opera director who had already directed a complete *Ring* which both Mrs Wheeler and I had seen. Both conductor and director visited Melbourne for meetings and to view potential venues. A performance date in 2013 was pencilled in, but this was later brought forward to 2012 to avoid the plethora of *Rings* on offer in the Wagner bicentenary year and the inevitable competition for singers. The date change was also made to accommodate the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra which expected to be at a 'loose end' in 2012 because its principal concert venue, Hamer Hall, would be closed then for major renovations. We kept Adrian Collette of Opera Australia informed of our planning, and he in return offered to assist with scenery building and other technical services, as he had with the 2004 Adelaide *Ring*.

It soon became apparent that finding a suitable venue in Melbourne would be a major challenge. Opera Australia and the Australian Ballet occupied the State Theatre during the best months of each year, leaving only a small window for other companies during the winter months – not an ideal time in which to hold a *Ring* festival! The orchestra pit in the State Theatre had room for a maximum of 67 musicians and was clearly inadequate for a *Ring* orchestra of 110 musicians.³⁹ The battered old Palais Theatre next to Luna Park at St Kilda, which the Australian Opera had used in years gone by, had as much charm as a warehouse and, in any case, the backstage area was pitifully small and technical facilities were virtually non-existent. On the other hand, the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens, one of Melbourne's most famous edifices and a World Heritage listed building, was a distinct possibility, but would require the installation of a 'theatre-within-the-theatre' to ensure appropriate acoustical conditions. It had been designed by Dame Nellie Melba's father, David Mitchell, within a few years of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus and, tantalisingly, it was decorated with images of classical and Norse gods and goddesses! At the time of its construction, it was the largest building in Australia, and Melbourne was Australia's largest and richest city, courtesy of the gold rushes. It was in the Royal Exhibition Building that the first Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia was opened by the Duke of York, later King George V, in May 1901 and, over the years, artists such as Dame Nellie Melba, Percy Grainger, John McCormack, Clara Butt, Richard Crooks and Yehudi Menuhin performed there. The cantata trilogy *Hiawatha* by Coleridge-Taylor was staged there in 1939. The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra conducted by Markus Stenz performed Mahler's Eighth Symphony there in 2001, with soloists Joanna Cole, Liane Keegan, Keith Lewis, Birgit Reimmert, Deborah Riedel,

³⁹ The orchestra pit was enlarged in time for OA's 2013 *Ring* at a cost to the Victorian Government of \$4 million. Ref: Arts Centre Melbourne Annual Report 2011-12, p. 4.

Daniel Sumegi, Jonahan Summers and Elizabeth Whitehouse, five of whom would become associated with the Adelaide *Rings* and *Parsifal*.



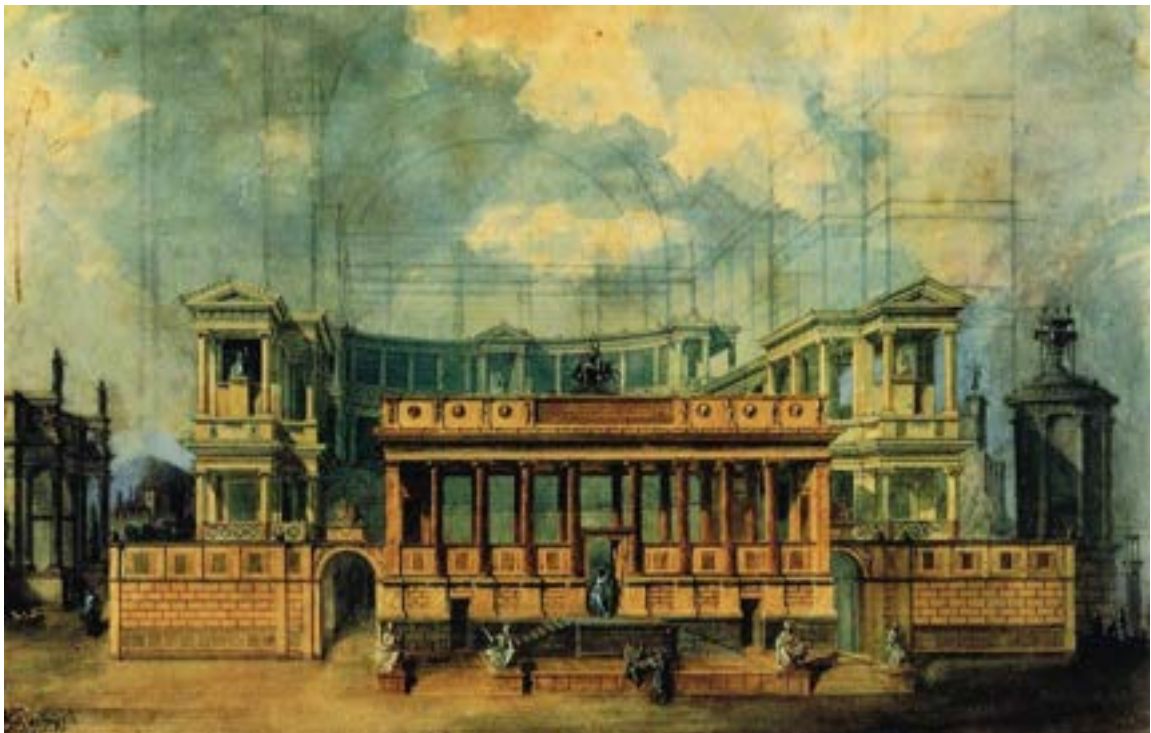
13. The Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne (built 1879-80).

In the mid-1860s, Wagner and King Ludwig II of Bavaria had encouraged the architect Gottfried Semper to prepare designs for a provisional theatre in which to stage *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. This theatre was to be installed inside Munich's Glaspalast, a huge glass-walled exhibition building constructed in 1854. Like Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building, the Glaspalast had been inspired by London's Crystal Palace, for which Semper had already designed a Roman-style theatre in 1854.⁴⁰

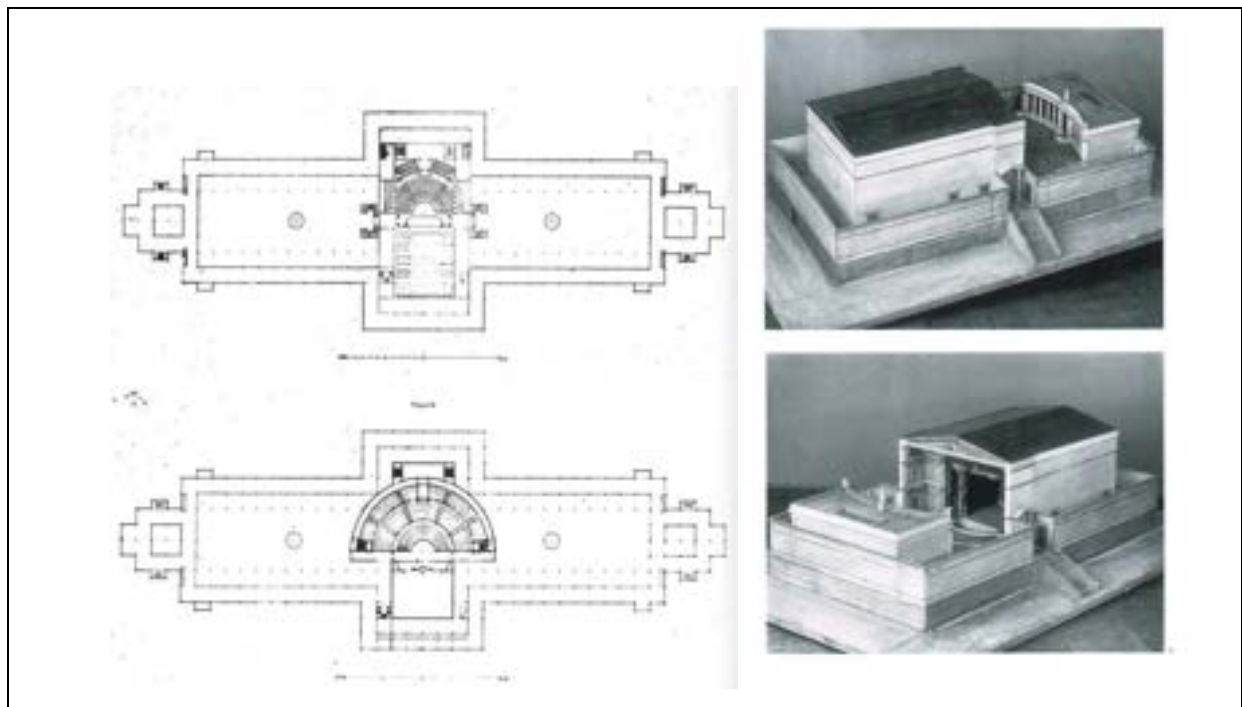
⁴⁰ See Malgrave, Harry Francis (1996). *Gottfried Semper*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.



14. The Glaspalast exhibition building in Munich (1854), for which Gottfried Semper designed a provisional theatre for Richard Wagner and King Ludwig II in May 1865, for the performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The provisional theatre was never built.



15. Gottfried Semper's design of 1854 for a Roman-style theatre in London's Crystal Palace.



16. Above left: Semper's plans for a provisional 'Roman'- style theatre inside the Munich Glaspalast exhibition building, and below, for a provisional 'Greek' theatre. Above right: Semper's 1865 model for the 'Roman' theatre.

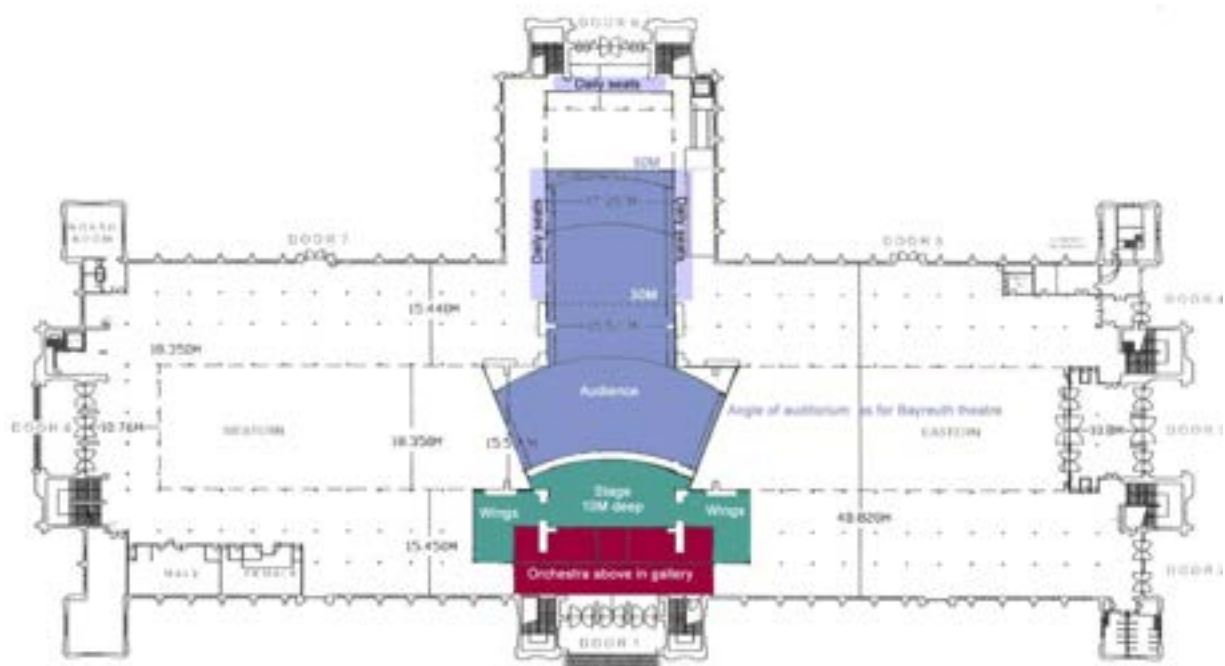
It was exciting to find a Wagnerian precedent for the creation of a temporary *Ring* theatre within an exhibition building. As early as 1850, Wagner had contemplated constructing a temporary theatre made of planks in a field outside Zürich; a theatre which would be demolished after the performances.⁴¹ In 1854 he had even envisaged performances of the *Ring* on a floating stage on Lake Lucerne - until the risk of storms put paid to that idea! By 1863 the goal had become 'a temporary theatre ... perhaps just of wood'. Wagner knew what he did not want. 'It is not possible' he told Hans von Bülow in 1861, 'that my works should establish themselves in the same theatres where simultaneously the operatic nonsense of our time – and that includes the classics – is put on, and where everything, the presentation, the whole approach and the desired effect, is basically in direct opposition to what I desire for myself and my works.'⁴² This explains why he had had no stomach for King Ludwig's plan in 1864 to build a monumental, marble-clad Festspielhaus in his capital, which Semper was commissioned to design. Neither the King nor Semper could understand why Wagner turned his back on what surely would have been the greatest dream-theatre of the nineteenth century.

⁴¹ Wagner's letter to Ernst Benedikt Kietz, quoted in Carnegy, Patrick. (2006). *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, p. 70.

⁴² *ibid.*

However, his priority was a modest, purpose-built theatre, not a civic edifice infested with troublesome courtiers and ‘wretched operatic repertory performed for subscribers and critics’.⁴³ The Bayreuth Festspielhaus, with its brick façade, wooden columns and stretched canvas ceiling, would itself be regarded by Wagner as a provisional building. The building had to be ‘*provisional* only ... it should be no more solid than is necessary to prevent it from collapsing’ he told one of his Bayreuth backers, the banker Friedrich Feustel. ‘Therefore economise here, economise – no ornamentation.’ However, everything to do with stage machinery and scenery should be treated seriously – ‘No economies here’.⁴⁴

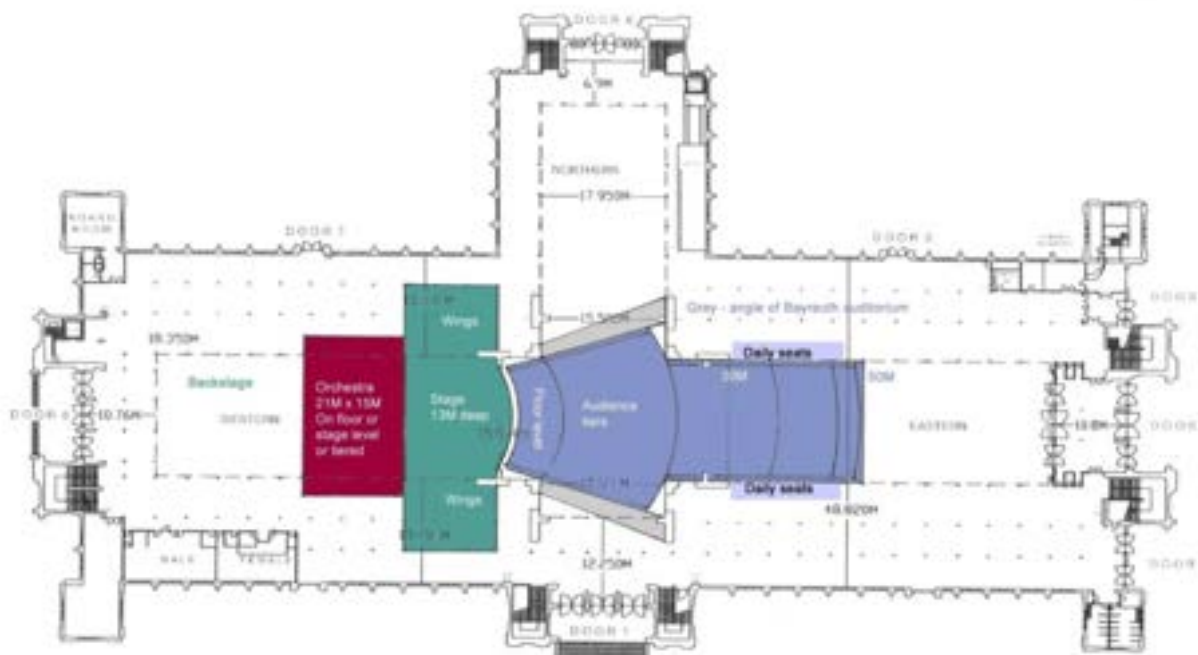
The engineering firm Arup Pty Ltd was commissioned by the Melbourne Ring Corporation to undertake detailed acoustic studies and to create a design for a temporary theatre within the Royal Exhibition Building. Impressive drawings and specifications were prepared with provision for a stage, orchestral performing space, backstage areas and tiered seating for around 1700 patrons. These studies and plans were subsequently donated by Maureen Wheeler to the Melbourne Museum/Royal Exhibition Building to be available for the use of other would-be event organisers.



17. Working drawing of 2008 by Peter Bassett for a provisional theatre in the Royal Exhibition Building in which to produce *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

⁴³ From Wagner's letter to King Ludwig of 20 November 1869 following the 'unauthorised' performance of *Das Rheingold* in the court theatre in Munich.

⁴⁴ Carnegie op.cit.. Wagner's letter to Kietz, p. 73.



18. Working drawing of 2008 by Peter Bassett of an alternative layout for a provisional theatre in the Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne. These drawings formed the basis of detailed technical drawings done by Arup Pty Ltd.

There was no doubt that high quality acoustic arrangements could have been made, although the visual effect of boxing-in the space to achieve this would have required imaginative solutions. The floor of the Royal Exhibition Building required strengthening to take the weight of several tiers of seating,⁴⁵ and the cruciform layout of the building meant that, even with the cleverest multi-tiered seating design, some seats would have been distant from the stage, although not as distant as in many famous opera houses. Ticket prices would necessarily have been high (around \$1,750 per cycle for premium category) to meet budget expectations. As events transpired, prices were set at even higher levels for Opera Australia's *Ring* at the State Theatre in 2013 (\$2,000; \$1,600; \$1,200; \$1,000) and higher still for the second staging in 2016 (\$2,150; \$1,900; \$1,400; \$1,100). These may be compared with prices for the 2004 Adelaide *Ring* (\$1,500; \$1,250; \$950; \$600), and Seattle Opera's ticket prices for its 2013 *Ring* restaging (between \$US300 and \$1,460).

⁴⁵ There had been a partial collapse of the floor during preparations for a concert performance of Mahler's 8th Symphony by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in 2001, and special arrangements had had to be made to strengthen the floor in certain places.

The creation of a purpose-built *Ring* theatre within the Royal Exhibition Building would have been both a significant innovation in terms of the modern staging of Wagner's works, and a return to the ideas of the composer himself. However, the immediate precedent in the minds of the largely Australian *Ring* audience would have been the fully-equipped, air conditioned and upholstered Adelaide Festival Theatre. Would such an audience have been prepared for something approaching Wagner's original audacious vision? More to the point, the Melbourne producer, in the end, faced with the task of bringing an entirely new *Ring* to reality, baulked at the Wagnerian-scale of the effort (and risk) involved in creating the theatrical space in which to perform it. With these and other practical considerations in mind, it was decided in April 2009 to abandon the challenging Exhibition Building idea and look for a more conventional solution.

Two options presented themselves. The first was to support a production by SOSA (either a remount of the 2004 *Ring* or a new production) either in Adelaide or Melbourne, and the second (and more promising option from a Melbourne perspective since it brought with it ready access to the State Theatre) was to support a brand new production by Opera Australia in Melbourne. Although Maureen Wheeler favoured performances in Melbourne rather than in Adelaide, she was willing to meet with Stephen Phillips, and I put them in touch.

In 2009, there were three major obstacles in the way of staging the 2004 Adelaide *Ring* in Melbourne: the State Theatre's unavailability for the required months of rehearsals and performances because of the fixed bookings by Opera Australia and the Australian Ballet; the Victorian Government's plans to close the State Theatre for major renovations from late 2012 after completion of work on Hamer Hall, and the sheer scale of the Adelaide production and its daunting technical demands. As mentioned elsewhere, after the 2004 performances Adrian Collette of Opera Australia had investigated the possibility of hiring the Adelaide *Die Walküre* for performances in the State Theatre but found that it would not fit on the stage without expensive structural changes. The reality was that the Adelaide production had been custom-made for the Adelaide Festival Theatre, and even that theatre had had to be modified to accommodate it. It was just too big and too complicated to go anywhere else without major modifications.

Prospects of a new Adelaide *Ring*

Stephen Phillips and Maureen Wheeler met in Melbourne in August 2009 on her return to Australia from London, and discussed various possibilities for staging a new *Ring*. Her clear

preference was for the performances to take place in Melbourne, which effectively ruled out a remount of the 2004 *Ring* for the practical reasons described above. Phillips too had moved on and was now excited by the prospect of a brand new production, for which he intended to seek SA Government backing. He informed Wheeler of Minister Hill's enthusiasm for a new *Ring* to be staged in 2013, the Wagner bicentenary year. However, in order to attract SA Government funding, the new production would have to be staged first in Adelaide before moving to Melbourne on completion of the refurbishment of the State Theatre, probably for 2014 or 2015. Just how the production was going to be staged in the State Theatre at a suitable time of the year and for a sufficient number of weeks without the participation of Opera Australia was not explained. A formal submission was put to the Minister by Phillips in December 2009. As part of his case for a new *Ring*, Phillips asserted that the physical condition of the 2004 production would have deteriorated after being in storage for five years. He was quoted in the press as saying that 'it could cost thousands, millions even, to repair [the 2004 scenery]'.⁴⁶ This argument contradicted the 2008 Ernst & Young Feasibility Study report which said that: 'We have been advised by SOSA that the sets from the 2004 production have been well stored and it is unlikely that major renovations will be required.'⁴⁷

Lyndon Terracini was appointed Artistic Director of Opera Australia in July 2009 and took up his appointment in October that year, moving from the Brisbane Festival. In Brisbane he had almost managed to secure Valery Gergiev's Mariinsky *Ring* from St Petersburg before the Festival Board and the Government of Premier Peter Beattie called a halt to his plans.⁴⁸ The Mariinsky *Ring* had been a lucrative Russian cultural export since 2004, having been staged in Germany (Baden-Baden), Japan, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom (Cardiff, London and Birmingham), the USA (New York and Orange County California), Spain and Slovenia as well as St Petersburg and Moscow. In terms of transportability it was the antithesis of the 2004 Adelaide *Ring*, and for a precedent we would have to go back to the travelling companies of the 19th and early 20th centuries, including the Quinlan Opera Company and Angelo Neumann's company in Wagner's own time.⁴⁹ Even before moving to

⁴⁶ Frew, Wendy. (2011, March 18). Valhalla for sale in twilight of director's stellar operatic term. *Sydney Morning Herald*.

⁴⁷ Ernst & Young. (March 2008). *The Ring Cycle Feasibility Study Update. Addendum to The Ring Cycle Feasibility Study Report date 21 December 2006*, Section 2.1.3.4. Appendix 16.

⁴⁸ Lyndon Terracini brings world to Brisbane Festival. Retrieved from: <http://www.news.com.au/national/lyndon-terracini-brings-world-to-brisbane-festival/story-e6frfkp9-1225771872264>.

⁴⁹ Even Gergiev's progress pales in comparison with Neumann's, whose troupe gave one hundred and thirty-five performances of the *Ring* operas and fifty-eight Wagner concerts all over Europe in the nine months between September 1882 and June 1883.

Sydney, Terracini had been exploring with Collette ways to improve Opera Australia's standing with Melbourne audiences, many of whom had never been reconciled to the merger of Victoria State Opera with the Australian Opera in 1996.⁵⁰ In 2004, for instance, when Opera Australia and the Victorian Government entered into talks, Victorian Arts Minister Mary Delahunty said she was very unhappy at the way the opera company was treating Victoria, not least because of the New South Wales dominance of OA Board positions (10 out of 13 in 2004) notwithstanding Victoria's major financial contribution. For his part, a frustrated Adrian Collette said he had 'drawn a line in the sand'.⁵¹ It was a tense relationship and seemed to be getting worse. *The Age* described it as 'the classic Mexican stand-off, two people with daggers drawn and nowhere else to go. At issue is the future of opera in Melbourne and how much is needed to fund it.'⁵² In this toxic atmosphere, a new *Ring* specific to Melbourne was seen as offering somewhere 'else to go'. And so, in its own way, the Melbourne Wagnerian adventure was as much a politically motivated one as its Adelaide predecessor.

Discussions commenced between Opera Australia and Maureen Wheeler soon after Terracini's arrival in Sydney. A detailed proposal followed, and this ultimately won the day. By that time it had become known that the refurbishment work on Melbourne's State Theatre had been postponed and that the theatre would be available for 2013 after all. There was therefore no need to consider a relationship with SOSA. Given that Wheeler's preference all along had been to stage the *Ring* in Melbourne, there was now no obstacle in the way of achieving that goal and accessing the State Theatre for the required periods of time. The result was Opera Australia's *Ring* of 2013 and its reprise in 2016.

Initially, Terracini's intention was to stage the new *Ring* one opera at a time. On 10 November 2009, a few days before his meeting with Wheeler, he had told *The Age* newspaper: 'If we raise enough money to do *The Ring*, we will premiere it in Melbourne, beginning with *Das Rheingold* of course and then doing one a year.'⁵³ This would have suited Richard Mills, Terracini's first choice as conductor, for Mills had not conducted any of the *Ring* operas previously although he had conducted a concert performance of *Tristan und*

⁵⁰ Gill, Raymond. (2009, November 10). Bringing Melbourne in from the operatic cold. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/arts/bringing-melbourne-in-from-the-operatic-cold/2009/11/09/1257614998370.html>.

⁵¹ Usher, Robin. (2004, April 16). Opera Australia faces the music south of the border. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/04/15/1081998286630.html?from=storyrhs>.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Gill, Raymond, *op.cit.*

Isolde in Brisbane in 2005 when Terracini was running the Queensland Music Festival.⁵⁴ The chosen stage director for Melbourne, Neil Armfield, in an ABC interview broadcast on 12 July 2010, also spoke about undertaking the task in stages: ‘They’re doing it year on, like, over four years (*sic*). So we actually start in 2013.’⁵⁵ Since it was also announced (a month later) that Opera Australia’s *Ring* would be a co-production with Houston Grand Opera and performed in Houston one opera at a time between 2014 and 2017, Armfield may have been referring to the combined arrangements. However, Houston withdrew from the co-production arrangement in January 2013 and opted instead to hire an established *Ring* production from Valencia.

On 25 August 2010 it was announced that the *Ring* would be staged in its entirety in Melbourne in November-December 2013. Richard Mills withdrew in June 2013 citing ‘a lack of unity, chemistry and vision’,⁵⁶ and was replaced by the young Finnish conductor Pietari Inkinen who had become available at short notice after the Palermo *Ring* he was conducting was postponed after *Die Walküre*. Three of the principal Melbourne singers (performing the roles of Siegfried, Wotan and Alberich respectively) also withdrew for various reasons late in the day and were replaced. These problems were reminders of just how challenging the staging of a complete *Ring* in a single season can be, especially when planning has to be done so far in advance. Media reports put the initial budget for the 2013 *Ring* at \$15.5 million, with contributions of \$5 million from Maureen and Tony Wheeler and \$2 million from Victorian Major Events.⁵⁷ Final costs (unconfirmed by Opera Australia) were reported to be at least \$20 million.⁵⁸ By comparison, the final costs of the 2004 Adelaide *Ring* (\$15.1 million) were unexceptional and, under other circumstances, would barely have attracted comment. However, two factors had been at work in Adelaide which had led to the budget becoming a major issue – the high level of government exposure, both financially and politically, and the frequent and substantial adjustments to expenditure levels which raised concerns about the quality of management and decision making.

⁵⁴ I compiled the program and gave the pre-concert talk for the Brisbane concert.

⁵⁵ Ross, Peter. (2010, July 12). Interview with Neil Armfield. Retrieved from: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/talkingheads/txt/s2945193.htm>

⁵⁶ Cuthbertson, Debbie. (2013, June 5). Conductor calls time on The Ring, *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/opera/conductor-calls-time-on-the-ring-20130605-2nppu.html>.

⁵⁷ Boland, Michaela. (2010, August 26). Opera Australia to scale Ring’s epic heights. *The Australian*. Retrieved from: http://www.ampag.com.au/_blog/News/post/Opera_Australia_to_scale_Ring's_epic_heights.

⁵⁸ Nicholson, Anne Marie (Reporter). (2013, November 18). *Philanthropist helps bring marathon opera to Australia*. ABC Lateline. Retrieved from: <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2013/s3893804.htm>. s

After the announcement of Opera Australia's plans for a new production, Phillips was reported as saying: 'It is impossible for this [the 2004] production to be revived because of the lack of funding and now, with Opera Australia doing a production in Melbourne in 2013, that put a complete end to it.'⁵⁹ Clearly he was referring to two different productions, although readers would not have realised this – the 2004 *Ring* which had been abandoned because of a lack of funding and its export difficulties, and an entirely new *Ring*, the prospects of which had been ended by the Opera Australia/Wheeler agreement. By 2010, the real issue was not whether the Neidhardt production would be seen again - it wouldn't - but whether the producer of a new *Ring* would be the State Opera of South Australia or Opera Australia. Early in 2011, accompanied by much publicity, the sets and properties of the 2004 *Ring* were auctioned off and otherwise disposed of. The public was left to assume that the OA decision had finally killed off all possibility of a remount. No mention was made of the fact that, at least two years earlier, SOSA had been actively pursuing the idea of a completely different production.

Opera Australia had won the day with its Melbourne proposal, but there were some connections remaining between the earlier Adelaide Wagner productions and the 2013 Melbourne *Ring*. Nine of the singers engaged for Melbourne in 2013 had appeared in the Adelaide productions: Elizabeth Campbell (Fricka and the *Götterdämmerung* Waltraute in Adelaide 1998 and again in 2004); Merlyn Quaife (Flower Maiden in 2001); Richard Berkeley-Steele (Loge in 1998); Stuart Skelton (Siegmond in 2004 and Erik in 2009); Andrew Brunsdon (Froh in 2004); Daniel Sumegi (Hagen in 1998, Klingsor in 2001 and Daland in 2009); Warwick Fyfe (Fasolt 1998 and cover Alberich 2004); John Wegner⁶⁰ (Wotan 1998, Alberich 2004 and the Dutchman 2009), and Benjamin Rasheed (Chorus *Rings* 1998 and 2004 and *Parsifal* 2001). For the 2016 Melbourne restaging, Liane Keegan will sing Erda, a role she performed memorably in both the 1998 and 2004 Adelaide productions. Warwick Fyfe and Daniel Sumegi have also been re-engaged for 2016. From a broader perspective, the Melba SACD recordings of the 2004 Adelaide *Ring* are a superb reminder of a high point in Australia's operatic life. There are also complete video recordings of the 1998 and 2004 *Rings*, although these are of documentary rather than commercial interest because of the 'live-relay' circumstances of their making. So, in these respects at least, the Adelaide

⁵⁹ Frew, Wendy. (2011, March 21). Melbourne Ring curses Adelaide production to fire sale. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/opera/melbourne-ring-curses-adelaide-production-to-fire-sale-20110320-1c25q.html>.

⁶⁰ John Wegner was obliged to withdraw from the Melbourne *Ring* on medical grounds.

Wagner decade has enjoyed an afterlife, albeit in ways unforeseen when, in December 1994, Bill Gillespie and Tim O’Loughlin prepared their submission proposing a new and thrilling way to rejuvenate the performing arts in South Australia, and stimulate cultural tourism.

Conclusions

The performances of the *Ring* and *Parsifal* in Adelaide during the decade 1995-2005 marked high points in the history of opera in Australia, achieved the objectives of governments in terms of artistic impact and cultural tourism, and laid the foundations for a Wagner performance tradition in South Australia.

At least two thirds of the audiences for the *Ring* productions came from interstate and overseas, as did a third of the *Parsifal* audience. Collectively, the three productions returned estimated economic benefits to South Australia of \$26.6 million. The cultural tourism success of the 1998 *Ring* and plans for an on-going Wagner performance tradition after the example of Seattle, led directly to SOSA's designation (unique amongst Australian opera companies) as a 'niche' company with entitlement to 50/50 Commonwealth/State funding. Commentaries in the domestic and international media were consistently laudatory and, in the case of the 2004 *Ring*, extravagantly so. The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra's reputation was enhanced by its experience of preparing and performing these works under the guidance of first class conductors; the number of its permanent musicians was increased as a consequence of the 1998 *Ring*, and this led to lasting benefits for the orchestra. The Adelaide Wagner experience provided a model for Opera Australia's first complete *Ring* in 2013, and a number of artists who had performed in Adelaide also went on to perform in Melbourne.

Political considerations provided the primary motivation for staging and funding the Wagner productions in Adelaide after 1995, and those productions could not have been staged without substantial government involvement. The importance of the role of governments was demonstrated in 2003-04 at a time when the second *Ring* production had got into difficulties because of its flawed management model. It is likely that without the intervention of governments and government agencies at that time, the performances would not have been realised.

The 1995 decision to produce a complete *Ring* for the first time in Australia since the visiting performances of 1913 was essentially a political one, made by a newly-elected State Government anxious to find replacement tourism projects after the loss of the Formula One

Grand Prix car race to Victoria. There were expectations in political circles that Adelaide should emulate Seattle as a centre for the performance of Wagner's works, and this led to broader parallels being drawn between Adelaide and Seattle as centres for artistic and technological innovation. The 2001 performances of *Parsifal* (the first staged performances of this work in Australia) confirmed Adelaide's suitability as a centre for the performance of Wagner's stage works.

The unique position of the State Opera of South Australia (SOSA) among Australian opera companies as a statutory authority, meant that not only was there close governmental and parliamentary scrutiny of its activities, but also it was ideally placed to receive high levels of government funding. This relationship was reinforced by a decision to create the State Opera Ring Corporation (SORC) under the Public Corporations Act 1993, to produce, stage, market and promote the *Ring* in Adelaide. SORC was chaired by Donald McDonald, then Chairman of the ABC and a former Chief Executive of the Australian Opera. Its functions were not limited to any particular *Ring* production, and it could have continued to operate under its Regulations until 2006. However, it was left in abeyance after 1998 and was formally wound up in 2003. This proved to be an unfortunate decision.

The planning of the 1998 production was notable for the direct and substantial involvement of the Minister for the Arts, Diana Laidlaw and her departmental head Tim O'Loughlin, who had previously been SOSA's Chairman and was one of the authors of the original *Ring* submission. Experienced opera administrator and long-time Wagnerian Bill Gillespie (also a co-author of the 1994 submission) decided to relinquish the General Directorship of SOSA in 1995 in favour of becoming the *Ring*'s Artistic Director on a consultancy basis. His place as General Director was taken by Stephen Phillips, formerly the company's Production Director. Gillespie's involvement with SOSA ended with the final *Ring* performance in December 1998 which, given his deep knowledge and experience, was regrettable in terms of the State Government's plans for developing an on-going Wagner performing tradition.

The State Government had begun to consider a new and original *Ring* production as early as 1995. This was given a sense of urgency by the need to consolidate South Australia's Wagnerian position in the face of possible productions in eastern states. Serious work on planning a future *Ring* commenced in 1996-97. There were reservations in the higher echelons of Arts SA about the capacity of SOSA to manage a new and, inevitably, more

demanding *Ring*. In fact, consideration was given to handing over production responsibility to Opera Australia (OA), and exploratory approaches were made to OA although these were not taken up. An elaborate planning process was initiated by Tim O'Loughlin with the creation of a specially funded Ring Consortium which he chaired, and which involved inter-agency and inter-governmental representation. Phillips and SOSA played a subordinate role in this process. The Ring Consortium commissioned Adelaide Festival Director (and former Artistic Director) Anthony Steel to undertake a comprehensive inquiry into the structure, requirements and appointments for a new *Ring* for Adelaide. The Steel Report was delivered in the second half of 1999 although, in the end, its recommendations were almost entirely ignored by SOSA management.

Early in 2000, amidst reports of growing interest in the eastern states in producing a *Ring*, the South Australian Government seized an opportunity to negotiate very favourable terms with the Commonwealth, under which the latter would contribute 75 percent of the combined government subsidies for a new *Ring*. This had been made possible by the fact that, at that time, applications for Commonwealth funding of state opera companies were handled directly by the Commonwealth Minister and his Department, and not by the Australia Council. But in October 2000, in response to a recommendation of the 1999 Nugent Report, the Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council (MPAB) was created to (amongst other things) handle applications from state opera companies. By acting when it did in a favourable political environment, the State Government had been able to secure majority Commonwealth funding before it became necessary to direct all such applications to the Australia Council. As a further consequence of the Nugent Inquiry, the Commonwealth and State Governments agreed to pump \$70.2 million into major performing arts companies across Australia over four years, of which \$45 million would come from the Commonwealth. This was the source of the Commonwealth subsidy for the 2004 *Ring*, and it was a one-off provision. The State Government had taken advantage of its good standing with the Commonwealth Minister and his Department, but the scale and circumstances of such a large subsidy reduced the likelihood of the MPAB approving any further amounts for the 2004 production or for its restaging. In fact the MPAB (along with the State Government) did eventually agree to provide additional 'rescue' funding but under strict conditions. The MPAB indicated, at least as early as 2006 and probably earlier, that it would not be willing to fund a remount.

The possibility of a remount of the 2004 production was not raised with the Commonwealth during the 2000 funding negotiations, which was unfortunate, since a bipartite commitment then would have laid the groundwork for continuing Commonwealth and State investments in the project. It would also have been consistent with the findings of the Nugent Inquiry which had recognized the importance of an on-going Wagner program in general and *Ring* performances in particular to South Australia's performing arts future. Seattle Opera's practice was to commit in advance to four *Ring* seasons over a twelve year period, and this would have been a desirable model for South Australia to follow. However, enthusiasm for emulating the Seattle model was greater in political circles than within SOSA. The short-sighted policy of SOSA management had been to delay seeking a commitment for a remount until it was clear that the 2004 production had been a success. When, years later, the question of funding a remount was finally addressed, circumstances were very different - new Commonwealth and State Governments were in office, and the decision was no longer one for the Commonwealth Minister but for the MPAB which, by then, was unwilling to contribute.

As events transpired after 2000, effective control and oversight of *Ring* planning shifted from the State Government to the State Opera. O'Loughlin, who had had a unique grasp of the Wagner initiative, was promoted out of Arts SA in October 2000. The State was now the minority funding body as far as the *Ring* was concerned and, crucially, in 2001 the State Government became distracted by a crisis engulfing the Adelaide Festival of Arts. Politically speaking, this could not have come at a worse time, and it eclipsed memories of the highly successful 1998 *Ring*. The Liberal Government lost office after the February 2002 elections. The incoming Labor Premier Mike Rann reserved the arts portfolio to himself (with John Hill appointed as Minister Assisting for the Arts) but displayed little interest in the *Ring* until questions began to be asked in Parliament about budget over-runs and the Auditor-General's critical reports.

With the former government's close oversight of the *Ring* now a thing of the past, State Opera's management was left with an unusual degree of freedom. The result was a number of regrettable decisions. The broadly based Ring Corporation was not reconstituted, and *Ring* oversight was left with the eight-member Opera Board. This suited SOSA management because it left oversight to a small group whose loyalties were first and foremost to the State Opera, but it ignored the fact that the SOSA Board had a wide remit, being responsible for all

of the company's opera productions, on-going seasons, and general operations. The SORC Board for 1998 on the other hand had focused exclusively on the *Ring* and had operated through several specialised committees, including one dedicated to the oversight of *Ring* Audit and Finance matters. A revived SORC Board could have facilitated the involvement of representatives of the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT), the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and the SA Tourism Commission, which were all major partners in the *Ring* process. The treatment of the AFCT as a client rather than as a partner led to problems with set building and back-stage labour costs which might have been avoided by a more inclusive and less defensive management policy.

Indicative budgets were prepared in the early stages of planning although, to begin with, these were loosely modified versions of the 1998 budget of \$8.3 million. The first attempt in 1998, by Arts SA's Tim O'Loughlin, anticipated a figure of about \$11 million. Figures of \$11.7 or \$12 million were also mentioned at different times in the media and in Parliament. In 2000, SOSA came up with a Board-approved figure of \$9.3 million although, at the same time, artists' agents were being informed that the total cost would be \$13 million. Eventually the figure reached \$15.14 million. The failure to establish a credible budget process was a damaging shortcoming and reflected confusion in the early days over who actually had the running of the project. It also reflected the haste with which the new *Ring* project was advanced in an effort to head off possible rivals in the eastern states.

The most unfortunate decision affecting the 2004 production was the failure to appoint a separate Artistic Director and/or Production Manager. To this decision can be traced the loss of the cost-effective set building arrangements with the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust (AFCT) workshops, and the loss of management control over the design process and the design budget. The resulting problems threatened the viability of the production itself and, ultimately, led to the alienation of the principal funding bodies, the loss of export opportunities and the undermining of prospects for a remount. In the vacuum created by the absence of an Artistic Director, Elke Neidhardt's role expanded well beyond that of a stage director and, eventually, became a source of friction with the General Director. During most of the design development, the Sydney-based design team operated independently of SOSA management. Stunning designs were developed, and these were approved by the Board in December 2002 even though the costs were largely unknown at that time. Eventually, the original budget of \$1.9 million for sets and costumes blew out to \$4.7 million. The finished

product was undeniably spectacular but it came at an unbudgeted-for cost, as the Stuart Report noted. This report also noted that the designers should not have been given responsibility for managing the set construction budget.

In 2003, because of the alarming budgetary increases and the threatened collapse of the project (the State Government contemplated its cancellation, but decided that there was greater financial risk in cancelling than in continuing), the Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council and Arts SA got together and commissioned theatre consultant Richard Stuart to look at what was happening and to recommend solutions. As a consequence, the Australia Council agreed to provide rescue funding of \$1.3 million on condition that technical and production experts were brought in. These experts were to be employed by the governments, not by the opera company. Arts SA also contributed an extra \$1.68 million on condition that these changes and appointments were made. This happened just nine months out from opening night. Noel Staunton was brought in as executive producer; Pamela Foulkes became Assistant Producer; Christopher Potter from Opera Australia was appointed Technical Director, and other key staff from Opera Australia and elsewhere were engaged as a matter of urgency. There is little doubt that these interventions rescued the production, but it was a traumatic (and for the State Government a rather thankless) exercise and one that neither the Australia Council nor the South Australian Government was anxious to repeat. The final cost of the 2004 Adelaide *Ring* (\$15.1 million), though high, would barely have attracted attention under normal circumstances. However, two factors had been at work in Adelaide which led to the budget becoming a big issue – the high level of government exposure, both financially and politically, and the frequent and substantial adjustments to expenditure levels which raised concerns about the quality of management decision making.

Opera Australia considered staging *Die Walküre* as a stand-alone production in Melbourne but found that it would not fit on the Arts Centre stage without expensive structural work. Hopes of exporting it to Beijing for the 2008 Olympics or to Singapore, Hong Kong or Los Angeles also fell through because of the sheer size and technical demands of the production. The option of modifying some of the more challenging design elements to facilitate performances in other theatres at home and abroad was not contemplated.

In late 2006, two years after the final performances of the *Ring*, the accounting firm Ernst & Young was commissioned to undertake a Ring Feasibility Study to consider a remount and

other options. The resulting report acknowledged that the Australia Council had indicated that it would not contribute funding towards a remount. This was well ahead of the 2007 Commonwealth elections and change of government. The Ernst & Young Report flagged the possibility that Tourism Australia might be in a position to assist, although in reality this was a slim prospect given the scale of the funding required. Nevertheless, the tourism angle was pursued in the ministerial correspondence in late 2007 as something of a last ditch effort.

Initially, the Ernst & Young Report proposed a governance and management structure led by SOSA, paralleling the 2004 model. However, during risk assessment consultations after the presentation of the first report, the proven risks inherent in such a model were highlighted. In an addendum to the report of March 2008, the model was dramatically modified to recommend removal of governance responsibilities from SOSA and the creation of a separate Ring Corporation. The revised proposal was that a new Ring Corporation should have fewer SOSA representatives than for 1998 (when the entire SOSA Board was included on the SORC Board) and should be made up of representatives from SOSA, the ASO, the AFCT, the SA Tourism Commission, and three 'appropriate and relevant' members from interstate. Thus the narrow 'SOSA command and control' formula which had been so problematic for the 2004 production would be replaced by a more inclusive model in which all of the major stakeholders, as well as qualified 'outsiders', would be able to make a contribution. This was an eminently sensible recommendation but it was never implemented because the whole matter was overtaken by the public announcement of the Commonwealth's decision not to contribute funding for a remount. Consequently, the State Government too announced that it would not be able to provide funding. Immediately after the 2008 announcement, Phillips proposed to Opera Australia management that OA should undertake the remount of the 2004 Adelaide *Ring*. That proposal was not taken up.

Information that substantial private funding by Melbourne resident Mrs Maureen Wheeler might be available for a *Ring* production, led Phillips to propose the creation of an entirely new *Ring* with a new creative team, utilising a combination of South Australian Government subsidies and private donations. It was proposed that this new *Ring* should be staged firstly in Adelaide in 2013 and then in Melbourne when the State Theatre, scheduled for refurbishment, became available. This proposal coincided with Opera Australia's ambitions to produce its own *Ring* in Melbourne. By 2010, the issue was not whether the Neidhardt production would be seen again (it would not) but whether the producer of a new *Ring* would be the State Opera

of South Australia or Opera Australia. By November 2009 it had become known that refurbishment work on Melbourne's State Theatre had been postponed and that the theatre would be available for 2013 after all. The result was that, in August 2010, Opera Australia announced that, with funding assistance from Mrs Wheeler, it would produce a new *Ring* in its entirety in Melbourne in November-December 2013 to celebrate Wagner's bicentenary year.

Early in 2011, accompanied by much publicity, the sets and properties of the 2004 *Ring* were auctioned off or otherwise disposed of. The public was left to assume that all hope of a remount of the Neidhardt production had been killed off by a combination the Commonwealth's unwillingness to subsidise a remount and Opera Australia's announcement of its Melbourne *Ring*. No mention was made of the fact that, at least as early as 2006 and probably as early as 2004, both SOSA and the South Australian Government had known that Commonwealth funding for a remount was unlikely, that SOSA had offered the Neidhardt production to Opera Australia in 2008 and that, in 2009, SOSA had proposed the creation of an entirely new *Ring* for Adelaide with a new creative team. Nevertheless, the outcome was the same, and the dream of an on-going Wagner performance tradition in Adelaide had finally come to an end.

GENERAL APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Peter Bassett - relevant roles and functions.

1992-1999	Official Secretary to the Governor of South Australia, who was patron of the State Opera and patron of the <i>Ring</i> after 1995.
1996-1998	Member, Ring Lead-up Events Committee (a committee of the State Opera Ring Corporation Board).
1997	Convenor of <i>A Weekend with the Ring</i> symposium (Adelaide, 26-28 September). Program at Appendix 3.
1998-2000	Board Member, State Opera of South Australia. Board Member State Opera Ring Corporation (this Board was dormant after the end of 1998 and was wound up in 2003).
1997-1998	State Opera <i>Ring</i> publications editor and speaker.
1998	Author of the book <i>A Ring for the Millennium</i> .
1998	Lecturer - 12 one-and-a-half hour pre-performance lectures for the 1998 <i>Ring</i> at Elder Hall.
1999-2000	Director Projects, Arts SA, with a particular focus on South Australia's international arts connections, including the development of an arts cooperation and exchange agreement with Seattle, and in the whole-of-government application of the arts. Voluntary assistance to the State Opera in planning the 2004 <i>Ring</i> , including liaison with potential conductors through their agents. See examples at Appendix 11.
2000-2001	Public relations; publications editor, writer and speaker on <i>Parsifal</i> . (Overlapping with work on the 2004 <i>Ring</i> .) Lecturer - 4 pre-performance lectures for the 2001 <i>Parsifal</i> at the Festival Theatre.
2001-2002	Consultant to Arts SA on advancing the Seattle links through the Arts Exchange Agreement.
2001-2003	Artistic Administrator (part time) for the 2004 <i>Ring</i> (singers' contracts, rehearsal schedules etc).

Dramaturg (voluntary) for the 2004 *Ring*. Email exchanges with Director Elke Neidhardt at Appendix 4.

2001-2004 Responsible for publications and public relations/marketing/ticketing policy matters, website development and content.

Chairman, Ancillary Events Committee.

Convenor of *A Weekend with the Ring* symposium (Adelaide, 5-7 September 2003). Program at Appendix 3.

Lecturer – 12 one-and-a-half hour pre-performance lectures for the 2004 *Ring* at the Grainger Studio.

2005 Program editor and pre-performance lecturer for the Queensland Music Festival concert performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in Brisbane.

2006 Consultant, program editor and pre-performance lecturer for Western Australian Opera's production of *Tristan und Isolde* in Perth.

2008-2009 Melbourne Ring Corporation. Key role in planning a possible new production of the *Ring* in Melbourne.

2009 Consultant and program editor for the State Opera of South Australia's production of *Der fliegende Holländer*.

APPENDIX 2

PETER BASSETT - PUBLICATIONS, CONFERENCE PAPERS, ARTICLES & LECTURES (1997-2015).

Books

- (1998) *A Ring for the Millennium: A Guide to Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press.
Published in Finnish (1999, 2015) as *Uuden vuosituhannen Ring*. Helsinki.
- (2003) *The Nibelung's Ring*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press.
- (2006) *Richard Wagner's Tristan und Isolde*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press.
- (2008) *Wagner's Parsifal: The Journey of a Soul* (2 editions). Adelaide: Wakefield Press.
- (2012) *1813 – Wagner & Verdi*. Montville: PB Publications.

Recordings

- (2013) *Der Ring des Nibelungen – Explorations* (Spoken - 4CDs). Sydney: Decca/Eloquence. Limelight Magazine's Recording of the Month, August 2013.

Conference papers

- (1997) *Discovering Der Ring des Nibelungen*. A Weekend with the Ring. Adelaide, September.
- (2000) *Myths Ancient and Modern: the Ring in the Age of Virtual Reality*. International Ring Seminar. Helsinki, June.
- (2003) *The Ring as Theatre of Ideas*. A Weekend with the Ring. Adelaide, September.
- (2004) *From Page to Stage – Interpreting the Characters of the Ring*. Conference of the Australian Psychoanalytical Society: 'Engaging with the Ring', Adelaide. November.
- (2006) *The Wondrous Realm of Night - Poetic and Dramatic Imagery in Tristan und Isolde*. Tristan Symposium. Wagner Society of Western Australia. Perth, November.
- (2012) *What price love? Wagner's ideas at the heart of Das Rheingold*. Das Rheingold Symposium, Conservatorium Theatre Brisbane, August.
- (2013) *Richard Wagner on the Practice and Teaching of Singing*. 8th International Congress of Voice Teachers, Brisbane, July.
- (2013) *The Use of Buddhist and Hindu Concepts in Wagner's Stage Works*. 'Wager & Us' Symposium, Melbourne University. November.

Articles/ Papers

- (2001) *Wagner the Wanderer*. Helsinki: Wagneriaani, Spring.
- (2002) *An older Siegfried*. Wagneriaani, Winter.
- (2002) *Parsifal and the philosophy of compassion*. Wagneriaani, Spring.
- (2003) *Siegfried and the Woodbird*. Wagneriaani, Spring.
- (2004) *Götterdämmerung as a drama of reminiscence*. Program book, 2004 Adelaide Ring.
- (2005) *Wagner's Tristan und Isolde*. Program book, *Tristan und Isolde* concert performance, Queensland Music Festival.
- (2006) *Enlightenment, Love and Compassion: From the Ring to Parsifal*. Program book *Das Rheingold*, Bangkok Opera.
- (2006) *The World's fondest illusion*. Program book *Tristan und Isolde*. Perth, WA Opera.
- (2006) Essay and text translations in the program book for semi-staged performances of *Parsifal*. New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Wellington. March.
- (2007) *Wagner at the Venusberg*. Program book *Tannhäuser*. Sydney, Opera Australia
- (2008) *Albert Lortzing's 'Hans Sachs' as inspiration for Wagner's 'Die Meistersinger'*. San

- Francisco: Leitmotive - The Wagner Quarterly, 23(1).
- (2008) *Adelbert Gyrowetz's 'Hans Sachs'*. Leitmotive - The Wagner Quarterly, 23(3).
- (2009) *Image and Idea: Tristan and the Upanishads*. Wagneriaani, Spring.
- (2009) *Wagner finds his voice*. Program book *Der fliegende Holländer*. Adelaide: State Opera of South Australia.
- The Legend of the Flying Dutchman*. “
- (2010) *Wagner's Unfinished French Revolution Operas*. Leitmotive - The Wagner Quarterly, 24(3).
- (2010-11) *Winter and Spring Imagery in Die Walküre and Die Meistersinger*. Leitmotive - The Wagner Quarterly, 24(4).
- (2010) *Imagery and Idea in Wagner's Mines of Falun*. Wagneriaani, Spring.
- (2011) *Balancing the Parts: A personal journey*. Wagneriaani, Spring.
- (2012) *Die Walküre and the triumph of love*. Program book for the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra's concert performances of *Die Walküre*. July.
- (2012) *Wagner and the Ring*. Program book for the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra's concert performance of *Das Rheingold*, Brisbane. August.
- (2013) Major article on the *Ring*. Limelight Magazine. November.
- (2013) *Wagner and The Flying Dutchman*. New Zealand Opera program book.
- (2014) *The Visual Language of the Melbourne Ring*. NSW Wagner Society Quarterly.
- (2014) Article on *Tristan und Isolde* for Auckland Philharmonia's Phil News. Winter.
- (2014) Article on *The Flying Dutchman*. Limelight Magazine.
- (2015) *Wagner and The Flying Dutchman*. Victorian Opera program book.
- (2015) Review of the SSO concert performance of *Tristan und Isolde*. Limelight Magazine.
- (2015) *Wagner the Comedian (Wagner ja komedia)*. Wagneriaani, Winter.

Wagner recording booklet notes - Decca/Eloquence

Wagner Heroes

Wagner Heroines

Wagner Choruses

George London sings Wagner

Hans Knappertsbusch conducts Wagner

The Flying Dutchman (Ferenc Fricsay cond.)

Ticho Parly

Wagner and the *Ring* (booklet for the *Ring Explorations* recordings)

Names in the *Ring* “

Dramatic irony in the *Ring* “

Götterdämmerung as a drama of reminiscence “

Wagner essays – published online or elsewhere

Wagnerian influences on La fanciulla del West

The creation of The Flying Dutchman

The Jew in the Thornbush. Refuting claims of a connection between the Grimms' story and Wagner's depiction of Beckmesser

An introduction to Lohengrin

Precursors to the Ring. Wagner's plans for Wieland the Smith, Achilles and Jesus of Nazareth.

The Ring in Australia

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg and the art of reconciliation

Wagner and Beethoven

Wagner's heroines; living for art

Who was who in the Ring

The Ring as theatre

Program notes for Wagner/Strauss concert with Lisa Gasteen, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

Program notes for Wagner concert Wellington. New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, cond.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Wagner lectures and talks

Pre-performance talks for the 1998 Adelaide *Ring*, 2001 Adelaide *Parsifal* and 2004

Adelaide *Ring*; *Tristan und Isolde* concert Brisbane 2005; *Tristan und Isolde*, Perth 2006.

Series of lectures to students of the Queensland Conservatorium on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (2010).

Operas of the Grail. Patrons and Friends of Opera Australia.

Wagner and the orient. Wagner Society of Queensland.

The operas that Wagner almost wrote. Various Wagner Societies in Australia and NZ.

Tristan und Isolde under the microscope. Various Wagner Societies and other groups in Australia and NZ.

The Teplitz Mystery. “

Wagner and Schumann. Various Wagner Societies in Australia and NZ.

Interpreting Wagner in the 21st Century. “

Three riddles for a modern wanderer. Hamburg *Ring* symposium, 2011.

Off the record and between the lines. Several Wagner societies in New Zealand.

Rings around the world. Various Wagner Societies.

Wagner and Verdi. “

Tristan und Isolde – an orchestral passion. Pre-performance talk in several cities in New Zealand for an NZSO performance of Henk de Vlieger's orchestral paraphrase.

Buddhism and Wagner's Ring Cycle. University of San Francisco, 2011.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrfcS8JZ6M0>

Wagner's Die Meistersinger and Lortzing's Hans Sachs. Wagner Society of New York and Wagner Society of Chicago, 2015.

Non-Wagner articles and lectures

An Introduction to Italian Opera Part I – Living for Art

An Introduction to Italian Opera Part II – The Art of Living

For the State Opera of South Australia:

Mozart, Da Ponte and Don Giovanni

America Forever! (Puccini and La fanciulla del West)

Character development in Puccini's Madama butterfly

The many faces of Turandot

Turandot – finding an ending

Beaumarchais and The Barber of Seville

The Swan of Pesaro and The Barber of Seville

La traviata and Verdi, man of the world

Verdi and the censors

Symbolism in Hansel and Gretel

Georges Bizet and The Pearl Fishers

Addio, senza rancore

Somnambulism in Art

For Opera Australia:

The Music of Don Giovanni
The Music of Le nozze di Figaro
The Music of Così fan tutte

For Opera Queensland:

Verdi and Otello.
Sex, Power and Corruption. (Rigoletto)

For New Zealand Opera:

Verdi's *La traviata*
The Scottish Obsession (Macbeth)
La Cenerentola

Other:

Series of lectures to students of the Queensland Conservatorium on *La fanciulla del West* and *Don Giovanni* (2010).
The splendours of Russian opera. Sydney, Northside Opera Study Group.
Islam and the operas of Wagner and Verdi. Sydney, Northside Opera Study Group.
Verdi and the censors, Iford Arts Festival (UK) program book (*Un ballo in maschera*).

Non-Wagner recording booklet notes – Decca/Eloquence

Bellini and *Norma*
Cavalleria rusticana
Pagliacci
Great Tenor Arias Vol 1
Great Tenor Arias Vol 2
Siepi and London on Broadway
Virginia Zeani – Operatic Recital
Falstaff Scenes – Rossini & Donizetti Arias
Verismo Arias and Duets
Grandi Voci – Inge Borkh, Ljuba Welitsch

Opera programs compiled and edited**For The State Opera of South Australia:**

Der Ring des Nibelungen (2004)
The Barber of Seville
The Pearl Fishers
La traviata
The Elixir of Love
Rigoletto
Aida
Hansel and Gretel
A Masked Ball
The Tales of Hoffmann
The Girl of the Golden West

Dead Man Walking

Nabucco

The Marriage of Figaro

La Sonnambula

Madama Butterfly

La bohème

The Flying Dutchman

Sweeney Todd

Don Giovanni

Moby-Dick

For The Queensland Music Festival:

Tristan und Isolde (concert performance)

APPENDIX 3

Programs for *Weekends with the Ring* in 1997 and 2004, planned and coordinated by Peter Bassett.

A Weekend With The Ring

Scott Theatre, University of Adelaide

Friday, 26th September 1997

6.00 - 7.30 pm Reception by His Excellency Sir Eric Neal AC CVO, Governor of South Australia, and Lady Neal, at Government House.

Saturday, 27th September

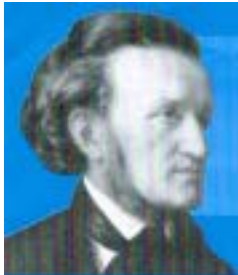
Master of Ceremonies: Stephen Phillips Managing Director, The State Opera Ring Corporation

- 9.30 am **Welcome.** *Stephen Phillips*
9.35 - 10.00 am **Discovering *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.** *Peter Bassett*
10.00 - 10.30 am **Keynote Address.** *Barry Millington*
10.30 - 11.00 am Refreshment Break.
11.00 - 11.50 am **A New Appraisal of 'Leading Motifs'.** *David Kram*
11.50 - 12.40 pm **Wagner: The Man Behind The Music.**
Maria Prerauer
12.40 - 1.40 pm **Lunch**
1.40 - 2.30 pm **Bayreuth in the 1950's and 60s.**
Lauris Elms and Nicholas Braithwaite in Conversation with Peter Bassett
2.30 - 3.20 pm **Staging The Ring in the Twentieth Century.**
Brian Coghlan
3.20 - 3.50 pm Refreshment Break
3.50 - 4.40 pm **The Ring Orchestra and the Making of the Solti/Culshaw Recording.** *Roger Parker*

7.00 - 10.30 pm **The Ring Dinner** at The Hilton International Adelaide.
Dinner Speaker Leo Schofield - on *The Wagner Virus*

Sunday, 28th September

- 9.30 - 10.20 am **The Ring of 1876 and The Bayreuth Festival Theatre.**
Christine Rothauser
10.20 - 10.50 am Refreshment Break
10.50 - 11.10 am **The Ring on Video**
11.10 - 12.00 ***In medias res* - A Director's View.** *Elke Neidhardt*
12.00 - 1.30 pm **Lunch**
1.30 - 2.40 pm ***Diversion* - Panel Discussion: Is Wagner Dangerous To Your Health?** *David Kram, Malcolm Fox, Barry Millington, John Shaw & Elizabeth Silsbury.*
2.40 - 3.10 pm Refreshment Break
3.10 - 4.00 pm **On Singing Wagner.** *Rita Hunter and Robert Allman*
4.00 - 4.30 pm **The Adelaide Ring of 1998.** *Stephen Phillips*



Der Ring des Nibelungen

Adelaide 2004

A WEEKEND WITH *THE RING*

5-7 September 2003

Adelaide Convention Centre

Friday, 5th September

8.00 pm Adelaide Symphony Orchestra Concert, Adelaide Town Hall. Conductor Asher Fisch. Sopranos Deborah Riedel and Natalie Jones. Mozart *Exultate Jubilate* Symphony No. 40; Richard Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier* Suite & *Four Last Songs*.

Saturday, 6th September

9.30 am **Welcome.** Stephen Phillips, General Director, The State Opera of South Australia.
9.45 - 10.30 am **The Ring as Theatre of Ideas.** Peter Bassett, Dramaturg and Artistic Administrator.
10.30 - 11.00 am **Sir Donald McIntyre** in conversation with Heath Lees.
11.00 - 11.30 am Refreshment Break.
11.30 - 12.20 am **Gesture and Structure in the Music of *The Ring*.** Heath Lees, Professor of Music at the University of Auckland.
12.20 - 1.00 pm **Designs on *The Ring*.** Michael Scott-Mitchell, Set Designer; Nick Schlieper, Lighting and Associate Set Designer; Stephen Curtis, Costume Designer.
1.00 - 2.00 pm Lunch Break.
2.00 - 2.50 pm **Historic Ring Collaborations.** Brian Coghlan, Professor Emeritus of the University of Adelaide.
2.50 - 3.40 pm **From *bel canto* to *The Ring*.** Margreta Elkins AM and Robert Gard OBE in conversation with Michael Shmith, author, journalist and arts commentator.
3.40 - 4.10 pm Refreshment Break.
4.10 - 4.50 pm **'Schläfst du, Hagen, mein Sohn?'** Performances from Act II of *Götterdämmerung*. Philip Kang and others. Video/DVD.
7.30 - 10.30 pm **Glimmer of Gold Banquet.** Adelaide Convention Centre.

Sunday, 7th September

9.30 - 10.30 am **They Sang for Wagner** - Lilli Lehmann, Marianne Brandt and Hermann Winkelmann. Rare recordings of singers chosen by Wagner.
They Sang for Australia - Marjorie Lawrence and Florence Austral in recordings and films. Two great Australian Brünnhildes.
10.30 - 11.00 am **Deborah Riedel** in conversation with Michael Shmith.
11.00 - 11.30 am Refreshment Break.
11.30 - 12.20 pm **Conductor Asher Fisch** on performing the music of *The Ring*.
12.20 - 12.50 pm **John Wegner** in conversation with Michael Shmith.
12.50 - 2.30 pm Lunch Break.
2.30 - 3.00 pm **Director Elke Neidhardt** launches the book *The Nibelung's Ring* and discusses the 2004 production.
3.00 - 3.30 pm **John Bröcheler** in conversation with Michael Shmith.
3.30 - 4.00 pm **The 2004 Ring.** Stephen Phillips.

Program details are subject to change.

APPENDIX 4

Exchanges of emails between Peter Bassett and Director Elke Neidhardt between October 2001 and July 2003 on dramaturgical matters relating to the 2004 *Ring*.

Wed, 17 Oct 2001 1:25 PM

From: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: P Bassett <pbassett@cyberone.com.au>
Date: Wednesday, 17 October 2001 12:31 PM
Subject: Re: Congratulations!

Dear Peter,

what a masochist you are! You attended Parsifal FOUR times??? As well as giving all those intro-lectures! Amazing. And now you are hankering for more....

Thank you for your very kind words and offer to help in the quest for The Ring. I'm sure we will gladly take you up on this sooner or later. At present I seem to be brain dead, but I hope to come back to life after a few days at home where hopefully the sun will be shining. I'm so sick of the eternally grey skies and rain here in Adelaide.

I will be leaving on Sunday and our retreat starts the following Thursday. Will keep you posted.

Thanks and best regards,
Elke

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@cyberone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Sent: Tuesday, October 16, 2001 6:45 PM
Subject: Congratulations!

> Dear Elke,

>

> I'm not sure whether you will see this while you are still in Adelaide, but

> now that I have returned home I wanted to congratulate you on Parsifal,

> which was a great theatrical experience. It was beautiful and engaging in so many respects. I ended up attending all four performances and found

new

things to admire on each occasion.

>

> You are probably up to your eyebrows at present with Chenier, but when you meet with your team to start tossing Ring ideas around, do keep me in mind.

> If I could contribute in any way, I would be very willing to do so. It is easy for me to get to Sydney from Canberra.

>

> With warmest wishes,

> Peter

>

>

Page 1 of 1

Tue, 27 Nov 2001 6:18 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: peter bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Tuesday, 27 November 2001 10:42 AM

Dear Peter,

you change e-mail addresses like your shirts, or so it seems! How are you? I meant to get in touch with you for a while or certainly since our Blue Mountain retreat where your name was repeatedly mentioned. It struck me that we don't have a Dramaturge, a situation quite untenable in German Operahouses. I think we should discuss this with Steven and then endeavour to make use of your knowledge in matters Wagner to possibly "install" you in this position. What do you think? It has always worried me when working with SOSA how little effort was spent on devising the program, research and actual dramaturgical input. O.A. is not much better, though at least they have a person in place to take care of the program and oversee some kind of coordination.

No doubt you know what a big help a Dramaturge can be to every aspect of a production, but particularly to the director. Maybe it would interest you?

At present I am having irregular meetings with various members of the design team and we are progressing very slowly, as is to be expected. But it is exciting and fruitful.

Hope you are well and looking forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Elke

Page 1 of 1

Tue, 27 Nov 2001 5:36 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Tuesday, 27 November 2001 5:11 PM
Subject: The Ring

Dear Elke,

Good to hear from you. Thanks for your suggestion that I might be able to assist as Dramaturgue for the Ring. This is something that would interest me very much. My present part-time engagement with SOSA will continue next year. Now that work on the contracts has been completed, Steve has asked me to handle Ring PR (including writing articles for the press), and writing and editing programs and other publications such as the Ring newsletters. This will enable me to coordinate the promotional material which is really necessary, as you say. I would certainly have time to assist as Dramaturgue and I think that these various functions would work well together. If Steve were happy with the idea, I would be delighted to take it on. I shall be seeing him in Adelaide next week.

When I am thinking about the Ring, I keep coming back to two ideas: first, its place in the 'outdoor' tradition of western drama (Athenian, Shakespearean, medieval street theatre, in which the drama is presented with the deliberate artifice of a troop of players) and second, that after Rheingold, its focus is increasingly on human nature rather than on human society. This trend reflected Wagner's disillusionment with 'social remedies' after Dresden, and his growing fascination with metaphysical 'remedies' culminating in Parsifal. Brunnhilde does not save the world - her apotheosis is her's alone.

Just some thoughts.

Looking forward to hearing further.

Best wishes,
Peter

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Sat, 8 Dec 2001 8:08 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Wednesday, 5 December 2001 4:45 PM
Subject: Re: The Ring

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your 2 e-mails. First of all let me tell you that we are all delighted that you might be interested and able to join us as a Dramaturge. Have you talked to Steve yet?

Your ideas are interesting, though we are possibly now too far down the track to revert to players performing. Pity, it is a nice idea and I will bring it up when next we all get together.

Secondly: I would be extremely happy if you could have A LOT of influence on the PR side of things.

(section deleted)

What can I say about the concept at this early stage? We have discussed Walkoere, and my next meeting with Michael is early next week, when we want to re-visit it, this time without Nick, who is in Germany, but with Stephen Curtis who wasn't there before, though he and I had separate talks on W. It's a real problem getting everybody together at the same time!

So as you can see, we are not that far advanced, but I can certainly tell you that it will be modern, somewhat politically relevant, clean against dirt, dark against light rich against poor, Western World against Third World without necessarily recognizable figures on stage. The gold is not necessarily gold but a substance that the superpowers want. We would like to leave it to the audience to imagine what Alberich is fossicking rather than have the invariably awful props of gold. So ours will look more sinister. So stay away from gold things in your PR, though there will be a ring, of course.

O, I guess you're now none the wiser, or are you?

I will inform you of each one of our meetings from now on and if you can't attend, I will keep you posted.

Thanks for your Christmas card. I haven't even started!!!

Best greetings,

Elke

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Sent: Tuesday, December 04, 2001 1:41 PM
Subject: The Ring

> Dear Elke,

>

> I'll be having some preliminary discussions in Adelaide with Darren

> Pfitzner, who handles the design of SOGA's publications. He will be looking

> for some guidance on imagery for Ring material, which will include

> appropriate lettering and symbols (ring etc). I realise that these are

> early days, but is there any general pointer that you can give me that

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Sat, 8 Dec 2001 11:49 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Saturday, 8 December 2001 11:48 AM
Subject: Re: The Ring

Dear Elke,

Thank you for your message, which I found most helpful. I had a long chat with Darren Pfitzner and he is starting to work on some ideas for imagery that we could use for 'branding' purposes. I'll keep you in the picture as his sketches emerge.

Steve is enthusiastic about my joining you as a Dramaturge, and I would be happy to participate in the discussions whenever you think this appropriate. I can jump on a train and be in the centre of Sydney in a few hours. So, I am at your disposal.

Following discussions in Adelaide yesterday, it is confirmed that I shall be responsible for the publications and media liaison. I am also very keen to give more substance to the State Opera web site. I think this is a vital tool for getting to overseas and interstate audiences. I have in mind that it should become, in effect, a perpetual newsletter, that can also be drawn upon for our hard-copy publications. It will be useful in promoting the donor program and ticket sales, as well as convincing the more discriminating Ring-goer that our production will be worth attending.

I was fascinated to learn how your ideas are progressing. All great stuff. On the subject of the conflict of opposites - light/dark, love/greed, rich/poor etc - could I inject another thought that might assist in dealing with the work's shifting focus - which I think is one of its particular fascinations. This is the 'Meistersinger Factor': that is to say, the confrontation between rigid, safe, intimidating, limiting practices and improvisatory, risky, individual, creative impulses. As Wotan puts it: 'a thing may happen although it's not happened before'. The laws that bind Wotan and the old order are not sources of happiness but instruments of inhumanity. A life without fear depends not on blind obedience and rigid controls but on a sense of self-worth. Such a life may be fraught with risks and uncertainties, as Sieglinde, Siegmund, Brünnhilde, Wotan and Siegfried discover in turn but, in the end, it is essentially the human way. One by one, each of these characters distances her or himself from the (social) forces at work in Rheingold, and the Spring night bursts in, the forest rustles, the dawn breaks and the river bursts its banks. What matters by the end of *Götterdämmerung* is not the power of collective action (enlightened or otherwise) but a sense of individual self-worth, which truly makes for a life without fear.

Best wishes,

Peter

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 No more message 2 of 2

Subject: Re: The Ring

Date: Wed, 19 Dec 2001 21:49:37 +1100

Status: Normal

From: "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

Dear Peter,

This is the Christmas card, I just knew it would come to this! So have a peaceful time and very best wishes to you and your family for a Happy New Year. We all need it, don't we? Can hardly bear read the papers these days...

All the more important that people like us try to bring something exciting and uplifting into this world of gloom and threat. Of course, the Ring is full of corruption and threats as well, maybe we should do Rossini for a bit of light relief! I'm doing the umptieth revival of Fidelio in January to keep my bankaccount happy. Not a comedy either...

Thank you for the article on the no doubt very interesting Mr. Pisarek. Very useful to have.

We had a somewhat frustrating (for me) meeting when Michael threw out the concept for Nibelheim, which I actually liked very much. But that's how it goes and I think we will actually all start with renewed vigor in the New Year.

I had a look at the brilliantly executed white cardboard model of Acts land 4 of Rheingold, set up in the Alexandria studio. Quite exciting, of course a long way to go.

Michael is going on holidays until mid January but I said I would like one day in that time and before I start Fidelio on Jan. 15. Maybe you would like to come to Sydney for that day? But I will tell you closer to the time whether I feel it's worth your while. It will be good to have you on board! I know I am keen to really get going.

Happy Festivities and all good wishes,
Elke

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Sent: Wednesday, December 12, 2001 3:02 PM
Subject: The Ring

> Dear Elke,

>

> I thought the attached from this morning's 'Advertiser' might be of
 > interest. Pisarek is quite brilliant, and recently spent time on exchange
 > in Seattle. You might be interested in using his skills in the Ring in
 > some

> way. His CV is also attached.

No previous message



1 of 8

Subject: Ring imagery**CC:** pbassett@webone.com.au**Date:** Sun, 23 Dec 2001 19:10:50 +1000**Status:** Normal**From:** "Peter Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>

Dear Elke,

Many thanks for your Christmas wishes. I hope you will be able to take a break. I would be very happy to participate in a meeting in January if you thought this useful.

I have been turning my mind to possible imagery for mailing and PR purposes and have come up with the attached. I shall of course keep looking if you don't think it is appropriate for the production.

My idea is to make use of the Horsehead Nebula, one of the most striking and best known features in the universe. The words 'spray canned' across it form a kind of vandalism - graffiti on the universe. They reflect the misappropriation of nature by human beings, which is the curse of Alberich's ring. The nebula with its characteristic horse head shape is a link with the Valkyries, whose horses were originally suggested by wind-swept rain clouds. In this case, the cloud is a cosmic one. This vision of the universe is based on a photograph taken from the observatory at Siding Spring near Coonabarabran in New South Wales, which seems an appropriate (and outward looking) point of reference, I think, for the 'Australian Ring'.

I'd welcome your reaction to something along these lines.

With best wishes,

Peter

[ring_image.pdf](#)

No previous message



1 of 8

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☐ View headers, ☐ Variable width font, ☒ Inline Images, ☐ View as HTML ☐ Execute HTML

Sat 12 Jan 2002 12:15 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>, Michael Scott-Mitchell
<msmlp@bigpond.com>
Date: Saturday 12 January 2002 12:13 PM
Subject: The Ring

Dear Elke and Michael,

Yesterday's meeting was extremely helpful for me. I now have a much clearer idea of the design concept, which has some powerful and exciting images.

Interestingly, there is a precedent for Wotan being visibly involved in Act One of Die Walkure. Wagner's drafts for Act One went through several versions. In all of the earlier drafts, Wotan enters Hunding's hut during the meal and thrusts a sword into the ash tree, which Siegmund subsequently pulls out. Wotan is described as being "in the shape of an old man, with grey hair and beard, one-eyed, with a round hat and a grey cloak" (ie Waelse). In the first sketch, Hunding is actually living in Waelse's (abandoned) dwelling. In the second sketch Wotan even stays the night and witnesses the love scene between his offspring! In the third and fully worked-out prose sketch, he doesn't stay the night but thrusts the sword into the tree and, before leaving, says that the sword shall belong to the man who can pull it out. Hunding himself tries before Siegmund is successful. It seems that the main reason for dropping the visible intervention of Wotan/Waelse was to keep the business with the sword until the end of the act. In the earlier versions, this climax would have been dissipated much earlier on.

Wotan's main interest in getting Siegmund to Hunding's hut is to enable him to find the sword. Siegmund's primary function in Wotan's mind is to kill the dragon and regain the Ring. The longer Wotan waits, the greater is the danger that Alberich will regain the Ring and lead his 'army of the night' against Valhalla.

The love and compassion that grows between Siegmund and Sieglinde is something that Wotan didn't bargain for (and it leads to Siegmund's genuine independence of him) but Wotan is always on the lookout for something new and is prepared to go along with it. I think it would be a mistake to imply that Wotan's ultimate intention is to make possible the birth of Siegfried. At this stage it is Siegmund who is intended to be the saviour of the gods. Siegfried, by contrast, will be genuinely independent of his grandfather and doesn't figure in his plans at all. Nevertheless, I think that the lovely image of Wotan/Waelse drawing the Spring night across the scene is justifiable in that Wotan too has reason to rejoice. For him, everything in the garden is rosy - until Act Two.

If we stay with the shipping container idea in Nibelheim, I wonder if there would be a more appropriate image of the dragon in such a context. Would you contemplate a mechanical contraption (crane?) rearing up from behind the container, with an enlarged Tarnhelm on its 'head', lights flashing and smoke belching? The cradle for the container (and the container itself) could then form part of the monster's body.

I think the container idea has lots of resonances. Apart from the ones of child labour, sweatshops, crimes against humanity and stowaways, a shipping container suggests globalisation of the economy - the stifling of smaller economies by bigger, more powerful ones through unfair trade, competition and cheap labour. The latter has been the cause of violent demonstrations at meetings of trade ministers in recent years, and this is likely to remain a major issue for years to come. By 2004 I expect we shall see even more graphic examples. I think the container idea is a good one. As I mentioned yesterday, I could imagine seeing it later, lying abandoned on the banks of the Rhine near the Gibichung palace, a rusting reminder of Bagen's lineage, the source of his wealth and a comment on the way in which generations profit from the misery of others. Just a thought.

Michael, if you could email me an example of the blue for the Rhine frame I'll make sure it is matched in any logo sketches.

Best wishes,

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Sat 12 Jan 2002 4:07 PM

From: MSMLP <msmlp@bigpond.com>
To: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Saturday 12 January 2002 2:28 PM
Subject: Re: The Ring

Dear Peter,

It was good to meet yesterday & thank you for your valuable input. I spoke with Elke this morning re the 'container'. I want to sit on the idea until we see a little more of the 'design language' unfold. I feel that the notion of Hunding's hut is more in the territory that the design may move.

I will probably post you a sample of the blue if I can lay my hands on it next week.

I look forward to our next meeting. It would be good for you to see the model on the your next visit.

Talk soon,

Kind regards,

Michael.

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>; "Michael Scott-Mitchell" <msmlp@bigpond.com>
Sent: Saturday, January 12, 2002 12:13 PM
Subject: The Ring

> Dear Elke and Michael,

>

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> idea of the design concept, which has some powerful and exciting images.

>

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> One of Die Walkure. Wagner's drafts for Act One went through several versions. In all of the earlier drafts, Wotan enters Hunding's hut during the meal and thrusts a sword into the ash tree, which Siegmund subsequently

> pulls out. Wotan is described as being "in the shape of an old man, with grey hair and beard, one-eyed, with a round hat and a grey cloak" (ie Waelse). In the first sketch, Hunding is actually living in Waelse's (abandoned) dwelling. In the second sketch Wotan even stays the night and witnesses the love scene between his offspring! In the third and fully worked-out prose sketch, he doesn't stay the night but thrusts the sword into the tree and, before leaving, says that the sword shall belong to the man who can pull it out. Hunding himself tries before Siegmund is successful. It seems that the main reason for dropping the visible intervention of Wotan/Waelse was to keep the business with the sword until the end of the act. In the earlier versions, this climax would have been dissipated much earlier on.

>

> Wotan's main interest in getting Siegmund to Hunding's hut is to enable him

> to find the sword. Siegmund's primary function in Wotan's mind is to kill

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Sun13 Jan 2002 9:58 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Stephen Phillips <sphillips@saopera.sa.gov.au>
Date: Sunday 13 January 2002 9:58 PM
Subject: The Ring

Dear Steve,

I had a good all-day meeting with Elke and Michael in Sydney on Friday. The design is going well and some exciting images are emerging. We'll meet again on 14 February. Some features so far are: a 'Rhine frame', which is a blue light box framing the proscenium arch and providing a visual reminder throughout the Ring of the proximity of the Rhine; a water curtain for the opening scene, through which the Rhinemaidens cavort (plus doubles on ropes); a mesh floor down stage that can assume various angles and on which Alberich climbs and slides, and a mist curtain upstage (the 'celestial waiting room' for Valhalla) with a light box floor for the gods. Nibelheim is the subject of on-going thinking, with several ideas under consideration. We also talked about Act One of Walkure and this is coming along very well - simple but with some striking images.

Erda is associated with the depiction of the Rhinegold in its pure state. She is a kind of fecund earth-mother representing nature at its most fundamental. We see her seated, virtually naked but oiled with mud and with a vein of gold running down her. She emerges from the gloom during the prelude to Rheingold and remains behind the water curtain. When the gold on her body glows at the appropriate point, Alberich lunges for her through the water and the golden gleam is extinguished.

This image of Erda, oiled in mud with the seam of gold through her and framed by the blue 'Rhine frame', emerged during our discussions as a striking image for the 'logo'. I think it would be intriguing and memorable. If you agree, I could start talking with Darren about this and ask him to prepare a design. I don't think he needs to do all the preliminary analysis and research that he has proposed. In fact, I would hope that it wouldn't take him long at all. My feeling is that he could be tasked to prepare some sketches along these lines, from which a final image could be worked up. His fee would relate specifically to this. Alternatively we could look elsewhere?

The words 'Adelaide 2004', with 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' underneath, could perhaps be set below the image for use by themselves whenever the text by itself is sufficient.

Grateful your thoughts.

Best wishes,

Peter

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Mon14 Jan 2002 4:23 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: peter bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Monday14 January 2002 3:31 PM
Subject: re: meeting

Dear Peter,

in some haste, many thanks for your wonderful, informative letter. The things one can learn from you- as I knew we would.

I must say your claim or knowledge of Wotan not wanting to breed the superhero Siegfried took me by surprise and I would argue this point. No doubt you know better, but this really surprised me. I never took Bruennhilde telling Wotan about Sieglinde's pregnancy as something Wotan had no knowledge of. His brusque answer, I thought, was one of utter frustration since all his plans had been foiled. So I will read up some more. I'm glad you think that the man-made (god-made!)Lenz is still possible.

It's all exciting and I am very happy to have you with us. Liked your idea on Nibelheim too. Michael wants to "move it in his heart" a bit longer, which is fine. He is keen to keep progressing through the piece to determine the style: could be the container is already too concrete (i.e. deja vue). We'll see. One of the good things about this team, I feel, is that there are no egomaniacs and that the whole thing will remain a creative progress, most likely horribly over budget in its first state, until the bitter end. Which is how it should be.

I have mailed Liane Keegan to find out where she is, should we want to use her for a photoshoot.

Have not heard back from Stephren Curtis yet, who seems to have taken a holiday after the cancellation of "The Blue Room", which he had designed. Expect to hear from him tonight since I managed to talk to his father.

Must away for Fidelio. Thanks in the meantime.

Best greetings,
Elke

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Tue8 Jan 2002 4:25 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Tuesday8 January 2002 4:24 PM
Subject: Re: Ring meeting

Dear Elke,

Thanks for your message. I can imagine how difficult it must be getting everyone together at the same time. As a precaution, I booked a flight for Friday but that can be changed easily enough. I'd be very happy to come just the same for an 'image' meeting. I think we might be slightly at cross purposes and so a meeting could sort this out. My immediate need is to identify something that we can use as a simple logo, reflecting the general design concept or a particular element in the design. This would be attached to publicity material, publications, letter heads, website etc as a visual 'tag'. It could be purely textual, or it might be based on something typical of the design, that guides people's thinking from the outset. The large gold ball used for the 1994 ballet production is the sort of thing I mean. I'm attaching copies of the (not very imaginative) logos used for the Meiningen, Chemnitz and Mannheim Rings. We hope to have a new (improved) Ring section for the State Opera website up and running in a couple of weeks, and it would be good to have a logo for that.

The question of a poster is I think a separate issue, that we can take more time over.

If you would prefer to schedule another day, Thursday 10th would be a problem for me (my wife Carol's birthday and I'd be in the dog house if I'm not here). Otherwise I'm pretty flexible.

Best wishes,
Peter

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Fri22 Feb 2002 3:29 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Stephen Phillips <sphillips@saopera.sa.gov.au>
Date: Friday22 February 2002 2:51 PM
Subject: The Ring

Thanks Steve. I'll speak to Libby about getting a Lisa/Isolde piece published. Enjoyed your observations on Fidelio - I'd like to get to it but not sure that I'll be able to.

The Ring meeting last week was attended by the whole design team. We 'finished off' Act One of Walkure and moved on to Act Two, where things got a bit stuck. Michael has had his expensive imported laptop stolen in a car park and is having to rely on printouts at this stage. Fortunately he had made back-ups but it will be a while until he can get a replacement machine. He is doing the CHOEN opening next month and seems a bit preoccupied with that at the moment. Stephen Curtis is inclined to start with an idea and then try to make the opera fit, rather than the other way round, and is not fully au fait with the work, so a fair amount of background explaining was necessary. Still, the ideas are flowing and I'm sure things will work out.

The main idea for Act Two is to divide it into two scenes, the first one being in Wotan's office in Valhalla, surrounded by the trappings of executive power. He is also surrounded by (life size?) statues of heroes, frozen or in suspended animation pending future use to defend Valhalla. The main sticking point was how to move the heroes in and out on a lighting box floor. Personally I'd prefer to see them stationary rather than risk having a lot of wobbling dummies. I think Mike is coming to this view too. Anyway, there is still more work to do on this. So, I guess you can say the team is not quite half way through at this stage.

Best wishes,

Peter

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Tue26 Feb 2002 11:24 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>, Michael Scott-Mitchell
<msmlp@bigpond.com>
Date: Tuesday26 February 2002 11:24 AM
Subject: Siegfried and the Environmental Ring

Dear Elke and Michael,

It won't be long before we are on to Siegfried and it occurs to me that this might be an ideal opportunity to introduce some environmental motifs, that I know are close to Elke's heart.

Some thoughts.

Like 'Rheingold', 'Siegfried' is an allegory of the human condition, but the focus this time is not on venality but on vulnerability - both male and female.

Our young hero is an innocent abroad in a very dangerous and unsympathetic world. He has not met, nor has he even seen, another person - male or female - other than Mime the Nibelung, who has his own malicious agenda. All that Siegfried knows has been learnt from his evil guardian and from observing the forest creatures. He is, in every sense, a child of nature. To a large degree, Siegfried is a product of the forest and of his five senses. That is why he feels a kinship with his friend the bear, the birds of the air, the fish of the streams, and even the gentle doe which he associates instinctively with his unknown mother. Wagner draws attention to this sensory world through the 'texture' of instrumental sounds, the melodious evocations of nature, the clash and clang, heat and steam of Mime's forge, the taste of Fafner's blood, the flickering, menacing lights of the forest, the dazzling sunlight of the mountain top, even the 'warm, fragrant breath' of the sleeping Brünnhilde. However, nature is evoked not just for its own sake. It seems to me that in this work, more than in any other, Wagner uses the physical environment as a metaphor for psychological influences and relationships. In true fairy-tale fashion, the physical ugliness of Mime is taken to be an outward and visible sign of his evil intentions. The benign aspect of the forest, with its rustling leaves and bird songs, is more of a real home to Siegfried than Mime's bleak cave, or anything else he knows. Little wonder then that, in Act Two, it is within the comforting embrace of a linden tree and the web-like sounds of the Forest Murmurs, that his thoughts turn to the parents for whom he longs, and he wonders what they were like.

Throughout this marvellous work, the orchestra paints not only the changing physical environment (which it does with unsurpassed eloquence) but also the changing moods and hidden feelings of the characters. We cross from the physical world to a metaphysical one when we hear the dragon and the Woodbird speaking. This doesn't happen in any of the other dramas. The rams that draw Fricka's chariot don't speak, nor does Brünnhilde's horse nor Wotan's ravens; which makes them easy to dispense with. The dragon and the bird speak in Siegfried because we are in the realm of sign and symbol, allegory and allusion. We even hear the secret thoughts of Mime, as he tries to mask his murderous intentions with hypocrisy and guile. Appearances conceal hidden meanings; symbolism is everywhere; nothing is what it seems.

The shattering of Wotan's spear by the sword Notung, reversing the order of events in Die Walküre, signifies Wotan's irrelevance and makes it plain that the future belongs to Siegfried. The fire through which Siegfried passes in order to awaken Brünnhilde symbolises the last of the trials he must undergo in order to fulfil his destiny. There is an obvious parallel here with the Grimm's fairy-tale of Briar-Rose, in which the prince must pass through a wall of briars to awaken the princess with a kiss. There is also an echo of Mozart's Die Zauberflöte, a work which Wagner admired greatly. The awakening of Brünnhilde marks the point at which the adolescent Siegfried becomes a man. It is his initiation rite, for it is through his discovery of women that he learns fear and passion at the same time. Thus, from Act Three of Siegfried onwards, the characters of both Siegfried and Brünnhilde are transformed. They begin new lives, individually and together.

A thought too on the significance of the dragon in Siegfried. From one perspective, Fafner represents the pointlessness of hoarding wealth. The treasure in his cave is the equivalent of money under the bed, talent not developed, resources left unused. But a dragon also symbolises the fears which we all carry about within us - except Siegfried of course. Our own personal dragons

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Tue26 Feb 2002 11:24 AM

are the things which we regard as frightening and intimidating, and which we must overcome if we are to grow as individuals. Our irrational prejudices are dragons too. Siegfried has no quarrel with Fafner, but his mind has been moulded by Mime. He intends to destroy Fafner, just as Mime has told him to. Actually, the ring is perfectly harmless as long as Fafner has it, because he wishes only to guard it, not use it. If it is not to be returned to the Rhinemaidens, surely the next best thing is for it to remain in Fafner's possession. By killing the dragon and freeing the ring, Siegfried is only putting it back in the public domain where it can do more harm. Of course, it is not Siegfried of his own volition who wants to do this but Siegfried under the malign influence of Mime. Unfortunately, this is not the last occasion on which he will be manipulated in this way.

Wagner made a revealing comment on the difference between Wotan and Siegfried. Wotan, he wrote, "resembles us (mankind) to a tee; he is the sum of the intelligence of the present." Siegfried on the other hand "is the man of the future, willed and sought by us (mankind) but who cannot be created by us and who must create himself through our destruction." This makes it very clear I suggest that it is not Wotan who creates Siegfried but Siegfried himself. He is the spirit of nature and his murder parallels the rape of the gold by the predatory, materialistic, loveless forces characterised by Alberich and Hagen.

I hope this is of help.

Best wishes,

Peter

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Thu28 Feb 2002 11:47 AM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Wednesday 27 February 2002 11:51 PM
Subject: Re: Siegfried and the Environmental Ring

Dear Peter, quite splendid and exceptional as usual. Michael is still in Brisbane with CHOCM, so since his computer was stolen, he might not have received it as yet. I have forwarded per Fax to Stephen Curtis who is in Melbourne. I have indeed advanced to Siegfried in my preparations and copious readings so your comments arrived at the perfect time.

Allow me to point out, though, that the Ring and indeed the Tarnhelm would have escaped Siegfried's attention had it not been for the woodbird, advising him to take it. So who manipulates the woodbird? In the Kupfer production it was Wotan and that makes sense to me. Or was the Woodbird intending that through Siegfried nature would be repaired, i.e. the Ring returned to the Reinmaiden? He had his chance! but all he wanted was sex! Unfaithful to Brunnhilde AND to Gutrun! I agree that Siegfried is the spirit of nature, but as such he is totally amoral.

Terrific what you say about the dragon!

Our next meeting is in a weeks time, but I'm sure we will only talk Act III of Walkure. Still, it's good to be a step ahead.

Thanks for huge help.

Elke

I like the parallel to Grimm's fairytale and wonder why it hasn't occurred to me

----- Original Message -----
From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>; "Michael Scott-Mitchell" <mmlp@bigpond.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 26, 2002 11:24 AM
Subject: Siegfried and the Environmental Ring

> Dear Elke and Michael,
>
> It won't be long before we are on to Siegfried and it occurs to me that
this
> might be an ideal opportunity to introduce some environmental motifs, that
I
> know are close to Elke's heart.
>
> Some thoughts.
>
> Like 'Rheingold', 'Siegfried' is an allegory of the human condition, but
the
> focus this time is not on venality but on vulnerability - both male and
> female.
>
> Our young hero is an innocent abroad in a very dangerous and unsympathetic
> world. He has not met, nor has he even seen, another person - male or
> female - other than Mime the Nibelung, who has his own malicious agenda.
> All that Siegfried knows has been learnt from his evil guardian and from
> observing the forest creatures. He is, in every sense, a child of nature.
> To a large degree, Siegfried is a product of the forest and of his five
> senses. That is why he feels a kinship with his friend the bear, the
birds
> of the air, the fish of the streams, and even the gentle doe which he
> associates instinctively with his unknown mother. Wagner draws attention
to
> this sensory world through the 'texture' of instrumental sounds, the
> melodious evocations of nature, the clash and clang, heat and steam of

Page 1 of 3

Thu28 Feb 2002 2:36 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Thursday28 February 2002 2:35 PM
Subject: Re: Siegfried and the Environmental Ring

Dear Elke,

Many thanks for your reply. I agree that Siegfried is totally amoral, in the sense that nature itself is amoral and driven by fundamental urges. It is a good point you make about the Woodbird and Kupfer's interpretation. The bird takes fright when it sees the Wanderer in Act Three, which shows that it is quite aware of who he is. But why would the Woodbird be so clearly alarmed (flattert angetlich hin und her) if it is merely doing Wotan's bidding? The Wanderer's own remark: "Ein Voeglein schwartst wohl manches" also suggests that its advice had nothing to do with him. Another point, if Wotan is manipulating the Woodbird in order to help Siegfried get the ring, is he also manipulating his own ravens whose sudden flight gives Alberich's son the opportunity to kill Siegfried and (potentially) take the ring? "Rache rieten sie mir!"

I have seen a suggestion that the Woodbird's function is the legendary/fairy tale one of telling Siegfried what he needs to know - especially about Mime's plotting and about Bruennhilde. I am inclined to the interpretation that the voice of the Woodbird is Nature caring for its own. When, during Siegfried's reverie, he hears the Woodbird's song (before understanding its words) he says: "Gewiss sagt' es mir was, - vielleicht - von der lieben Mutter?" In a letter to his own mother in 1846, Wagner wrote: "Nature lovingly reminds us that we are part of her like trees. And when I feel myself as one with nature, I long for you." In the abandoned text for Der junge Siegfried, when listening to the Woodbird, Siegfried exclaims "It is as though my mother sings to me!" Again, at the end of the music for the Woodbird's warning about Mime's treachery, we hear the Walsung motif. Wagner explained this in a note to King Ludwig: "We hear, softly, softly, mother Sieglinde's loving concern for her son." So it could be said that the Woodbird is also the voice of his mother's (nature's) love, warning her son of danger and leading him to Bruennhilde.

Wagner's original idea was to have more than one Woodbird. In the first sketches for Der junge Siegfried he summarizes Act Two as: "the action in the forest (Alberich, Fafner and Wotan), the dialogue between Siegfried and Mime, the death of Fafner, the altercation between Mime and Alberich, the acquisition of the ring by Siegfried, the birds' warning, the slaying of Mime, and the news brought by the birds of the Valkyrie Brynnhilde on the rock". Interestingly, Siegfried acquires the ring before he hears the birds' speech. This was later elaborated as: "Siegfried comes out with the ring; all scatter before their new lord [at that stage Wagner had many Nibelungs present]; Mime remains concealed - Bird Song - Mime comes forward." Again, the function of the birds' speech was to warn of Mime's treachery. Siegfried had already found the ring, although he didn't know what it was.

The idea of multiple birds was derived from the legendary sources. In Thidriks saga, Siegfried tastes broth made from the dragon and understands the speech of two Woodbirds, one of whom advises him to kill Mimir. In that version, it is Mimir, not the Woodbird, who sends Siegfried to Bruennhilde for the purpose of getting Grane. In the Poetic Edda we find all three of the Woodbird's instructions to Sigurd as used by Wagner: to kill his treacherous foster-father, to take Fafnir's treasure, and to awaken the sleeping Valkyrie.

I'll be heading overseas on 3 April and shall be away all of April and May (but contactable by email). If I can be of any help before then please let me know. I'll be in Sydney for the donor launch on 14 March, and also on 15 March.

Warm regards,

Peter

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Subject: Re: Siegfried and the Environmental Ring

Date: Tue, 5 Mar 2002 22:12:35 +1100

Status: Normal

From: "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

Dear Peter,

Thanks for woodbird thoughts. I have been reading lots of different (German) opinions, quite funny since they all vary but are vehement in their opinion. More often than not I came across the "woodbird being Wotan's tool", which surprised me. Your argumentation makes colossal sense. Also plenty about Mime, poor chap. Mostly the German Dramaturgues seem to feel sorry for him, manipulated and maltreated sod that he is.

Our next meeting is on Thursday, at last. I must say the long pauses drive me nuts.

I see with glee that you will have the pleasure of hearing my all-time favourite singer in Berlin: Johan Botha in Lohengrin. What IS he going to look like! I want to hear all about it!

I hope I'll be able to see you at the donors launch! I am having my eyes lasered the day before and don't know what state I will be in on the 14th or 15th for that matter. I think Michael plans to show Steve the model on one of those days, so surely, if you have time, you will be invited as well.

I have, as usual, printed out your latest thoughts for the team. It makes my work a lot easier. So thank you once again.

Hope to see you soon (and more clearly than before)

Best wishes,
Elke

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>

To: "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

Sent: Thursday, February 28, 2002 2:35 PM

Subject: Re: Siegfried and the Environmental Ring

> Dear Elke,

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Sat 16 Mar 2002 4:49 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Saturday 16 March 2002 4:48 PM
Subject: Siegfried

Dear Elke,

It was good to see you and Michael and Nick again. The model presentation on Thursday was most impressive. Steve wasn't feeling his brightest at the time but his subsequent comments to me were very positive and I believe he is entirely happy with the way the designs are developing. I'm sure he will say as much when he is over the 'flu.

Our discussion yesterday got my imagination going, and prompted the following, which might stimulate some further thoughts.

ACT 1

Attracted as he is to any source of power, Mime has set up house under the legs of a huge electricity pylon at the edge of the forest. A corridor has been slashed and bulldozed through the forest, and the leafy branches have been replaced with a 'canopy' of high voltage power lines. A shanty of boards and rusting iron, fastened to the pylon, is now home to Mime and the young Siegfried. Their furniture is a collection of abandoned cable drums, and their cooking utensils are left-over tins and bottles. Construction rubbish litters the landscape. Mime has salvaged some welding equipment and is attempting to weld the pieces of Nothing with it. A putrid cesspool is used for cooling hot metal and for the 'brew' that Mime concocts for Siegfried. The boy restores Nothing, not by welding it but by forging it anew. In recreating the sword, Siegfried is recreating himself and asserting his independence.

ACT 2

Common to all the scenes in Act 2 is a sense of 'enclosure' or 'embrace', which may take either a malign or a benign aspect.

In the malign embrace of the forest at deepest night, Alberich and the Wanderer confront each other in a wonderfully grim scene. At the entrance to the malign enclosure of Neidhoele, Fafner tries to kill Siegfried and is himself killed, the Nibelung brothers display their mutual loathing and distrust, and Mime attempts to murder Siegfried before meeting his own end. Your idea of a giant and to represent Fafner as dragon offers a potent image of a grasping, crushing, enclosing force.

Within the benign embrace of the forest at noon, Siegfried tries to imagine his parents and hears his mother speaking through the woodbird. Thus he returns to the womb, so to speak, and even the comforting womb-like sounds of the Waldweben.

What scenic device could convey a sense of enclosure or embrace in its various aspects, both benign and malign? I don't think balloons could do this. They might convey Siegfried's vulnerability and child-like qualities, but they also say 'party time', which would be quite misleading. I doubt if they could convey the sinister qualities of the other scenes. However, I think that tendrils/strips hanging at various lengths would be effective and versatile. Appropriately lit, such tendrils could suggest inky depths for the Wanderer/Alberich encounter, the classy crypt that is Neidhoele, and the ravishingly beautiful embrace of the forest, in which Siegfried (like a young bird in its nest?) comes closest to his true nature.

Hope this helps.

Warm regards,

Peter

Page 1 of 2

Wed20 Mar 2002 6:13 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: peter bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Wednesday20 March 2002 6:04 PM
Subject: Siegfried

Dear Peter,

thanks for your extremely useful thoughts and comments re. Siegfried. Some very nice ideas here, maybe you should go into directing, it's never too late!

All my team is still sick, seems to be the same bug as Stephen has, truly nasty and longlasting, so we only had a couple of short phone conversations since last we met.

I am intrigued by the idea of the woodbird impersonating Sieglinde. That has never occurred to me and I certainly will give it a lot of thought, not ignoring the fact, that Siegfried has never seen any woman nor knows a womans voice. I would like to show the bird, not sure how as yet.

I think you underestimate the effect of balloons. They wouldn't be the only element in the set, but possibly part of a ceiling, maybe imbedded in other materials. Michaels little son had a birthday on St. Patricks day, last Sunday. So Michael had covered one ceiling of his house in green balloons with long ribbons. Looked rather good the way they moved in the breeze. As you say: kids party! I never imagined they would be part of Neidhoele.

Anyway, I'll have to wait until the troupes are back on deck and am hopeful to squeeze in one meeting with Stephen Curtis before Perth to get him up to scratch.

Thanks again. I thought the launch was very good. Let's hope it'll bring results.

Best greetings,
Elke

Page 1 of 1

Dear Elke,

What is the central issue of scenes 1 & 2 of Siegfried Act 3? If I were to give these scenes a title it would be: 'How Wotan at last finds peace'. 'Wotan's last ride as he descends once more to the underworld', to use Wagner's words, is a desperate appeal to Erda for advice on 'how to stop a revolving wheel'. The imagery here is of the Buddhist 'Wheel of Becoming' - the process of 'dependent arising', the way things are. But what Wotan really wants to know - though at first he doesn't know what he needs to know - is how to come to terms with the inevitable.

There is nothing Wotan can do that will change the course of events; Erda had long since declared that 'all that exists will end'. Events will work themselves out regardless. It was neither Alberich's theft of the gold nor Wotan's theft of the Ring that set events in motion; these incidents were themselves symptoms of a deeper malaise. The institution of Wotan's rule constituted the first step out of a state of Nature and towards civilisation or, if you like, socialisation. He drank at the spring of wisdom, tore a branch from the World Ash and imprinted the law upon it, just as Adam ate of the fruit in the Garden of Eden. After such actions, the world can never be the same again; the rot sets in and the only way is down. In Wagner's view, human society is, by its very nature, poison to spontaneous perception and spontaneous life. This might not be intentional but it is inevitable. Wotan's overweening ambition and despicable behaviour may have exacerbated and

(Text continues in non-email format)

Siegfried Act 3, Scenes 1 & 2

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What Wotan really needs to know is how to accept the inevitable. Government (human society) is intrinsically flawed and doomed. It can easily be made worse - and Wotan has made it worse - but it can never be returned to a pristine state. The revolving wheel can never be stopped.

Wotan's all-consuming problem, gnawing at his vitals, is that he cannot find inner peace; he cannot reconcile himself to the inevitable. As Wagner himself put it in 1854 after his Schopenhauerian revelation: 'This is everything that we have to learn from the history of mankind: to will the inevitable and to carry it out oneself.' When Wagner came to set the final scene with Erda to music, he deleted two lines of Erda's text, for musical reasons. The deleted lines read: 'Friedloser, lass mich frei! Löse des Zaubers Zwang!' 'Man without peace' certainly describes Wotan when he begins his conversation with Erda but, gradually, he moves closer to what he truly needs to know: 'how a god can conquer his dread'.

When Erda had 'plunged the dagger of worry' into Wotan's heart in *Rheingold*, he had pursued her to the depths of the earth. There he learned wisdom from her but she exacted a pledge. What was this pledge? We are not told, either in *Walküre* or *Siegfried*, but the fruit of that visit was, of course, Brünnhilde. I

suggest that by giving Brünnhilde to Wotan, Erda was giving Wotan the means of finding the inner peace he so desperately craved. That is why Erda tells him again to go to Brünnhilde for advice. I think his pledge was, in effect, to 'will the inevitable and carry it out'. Who was Brünnhilde if not 'his other self', as the Valkyrie herself puts it. When she disobeyed him over Siegmund, it was because he was denying his other self, his true nature and deepest wish. Her punishment was not only unjust, it was self-tormenting for Wotan. This denial of himself lay at the root of his anguish and left him a 'Friedloser'. So, Wotan's betrayal of Siegmund initiated the trouble with Erda, not because the god did not keep his promise to the Volsung, but because it had made him deny his 'other self' - once given to him by Erda in return for the promise of inner peace. Brünnhilde was the embodiment of the pledge which Wotan broke when he denied himself.

Towards the end of the conversation with Erda, Wotan acknowledges that what once he resolved in despair he now embraces joyfully and freely. I often wondered what the words 'once resolved in despair'; referred to. It now strikes me that he is referring to that earlier meeting with Erda and his pledge to her. Now he welcomes the end of the gods and will happily bequeath the world to the glorious young Volsung who does not know him. The Buddhist/Schopenhauerean features of Wotan's new contentment are dealt with on pages 118-121 of my book.

Siegfried doesn't suffer the same self-torments as Wotan since he is still at one with Nature, not Society. (And Society does terrible things to Nature's children, as we soon see.) So, what is the significance of the confrontation between grandfather and grandson? Has Wotan forgotten so quickly his newly found peace of mind? Is he pig-headedly clinging to power in trying to prevent Siegfried reaching Wotan's 'other self' Brünnhilde? Remember, at this stage, Brünnhilde is still Wotan's 'other self' (albeit dormant). Later she will become Siegfried's 'other self' as we hear in scene 3 and the prologue of *Götterdämmerung*, and see in the last scene of all. Brünnhilde could never return with Waltraute to Wotan because she is no longer part of him; he made sure of that.

If you take the view that Wotan has had a relapse, then the end of scene 2 is profoundly anti-climactic. The once-mighty Wotan, authority shattered, slinks off into the darkness with his tail between his legs, given his comeuppance by the younger generation. Nothing about that makes sense to me, since it suggests that all that has gone before was a waste of time or, at best, a simple tale of pride coming before a fall. So what? The evidence suggests that Wotan's apparent humiliation is in fact the fulfilment of his destiny - which is why (in my view) we should not see him again, even in mummery.

Wotan's yearning for a truly free man to resolve the world's problems is unequivocally expressed in his monologue to Brünnhilde in Act 2 of *Walküre*.

Only one person could do what he is unable to do - a hero who acts without the god's assistance; 'only a free man, unwitting and unprompted, driven by his own motives and using his own weapons...How can I find this man who is opposed to the gods but will fight for me - this friendly foe? How can I create a free agent whom I have never protected and who, by defying me, will be dearest to me? ...A free man has to create himself.' That free man has created himself and now, by defying Wotan, is dearest to him. To my mind, Wotan's departure from the stage marks a 'revolving of the wheel' but it is far from a humiliation.

Steve Phillips

From: elke neidhardt [eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au]
Sent: Saturday, 1 June 2002 19:09
To: steve phillips
Subject: RHEINGOLD RUNNING ORDER (1).xls

RHEINGOLD RUNNING

PRESET	LX PORTALS IN LX FLOOR OFF WITH LES CHAISES PRESET MASKING TRUCK IN D/S ERDA LX BOX EXTREME U/S...ERDA IN POSITION POP UP FLOOR UP (WATER CURTAIN DRAIN) BLACK SHARKS TOOTH GAUZE IN D/S D/S BLACK SMOTHER IN U/S OF GAUZE NIBELHEIM TRUCK PARKED OP RAINBOW BRIDGE PARKED PS CHERRY PICKER PARKED PS RHEINMAIDENS RIGGING PARKED? LX LADDERS FLOWN IN
PRELUDE	IN DARKNESS AS ORCHESTRA PLAYS D/S BLACK SMOTHER OUT...11 ERDA LX BOX BEGINS TO GLOW IN VERTICAL POSITION ERDA LX BOX BEGINS TO TRAVEL D/S & TO TILT DURING TRAVEL D/S RHEIN FRAME LIGHTS UP WATER CURTAIN RELEASE AS ERDA LX BOX ARRIVES AT D/S POSITI
ACT 1	RHEINMAIDENS APPEAR THROUGH THE WATER CURTAIN RHEINMAIDENS RIGGING SET IN POSITION ALBERICH APPEARS THROUGH THE WATER CUTAIN WITH A BUNCH (FORESTAGE PLATFORM TILTS UP SLOWLY FORESTAGE PLATFORM TILTS DOWN SLOWLY ERDA REVEALED ON LX BOX WATER CURTAIN TURNS GOLD ALBERICH REACHES FOR THE GOLD-GOLD LX OFF& ERDA SNAPS O ALBERICH EXITS U/S OF WATER CURTAIN MIST CURTAIN ON WATER CUTAIN OFF
ACT 2	MIST CURTAIN ON U/S & LX LADDERS FLOWN TO ABOVE HEAD HEIGH POP UP FLOOR DOWN MASKING TRUCK TRAVELS U/S THROUGH MIST CURTAIN REVEALING BLACK SMOTHER IN LX FLOOR ON WITH LES CHAISES, FRICKA ON ONE SIDE , WOTAN ON LX LADDER FLOWN BACK IN CHERRY PICKER/GIANTS ENTRANCE THROUGH MIST CURTAIN CHERRY PICKER EXITS & IS STRUCK PS LX LADDERS FLY TO HEAD HEIGHT LX FLOOR SPLITS LX PORTAL 1 & 3 TURN OFF LX LIFT DESCENDS AS LX PORTAL 2 FADES OUT
ACT 3	REVEAL OF NIBELHEIM U/S THROUGH MIST CURTAIN WITH CHILDREI MIST CURTAIN OFF

03-June-2002

HATCH OPEN (p142)
LADDER DOWN
WOTAN & LOGE ENTER VIA LADDER
HOARD X7 CRATES
DRAGON REVEALED ON UPPER LEVEL
ALBERICH APPEARS IN HATCH
ALBERICH, WOTAN, LOGE START TO ASCEND LADDER AS LIGHTS FA
CHILDREN REVEALED ON UPPER LEVEL
MIST CURTAIN ON
NIBELHEIM TRUCK TRAVELS U/S THROUGH MIST CURTAIN

ACT 4

MIST CURTAIN LIT
BLACK SMOTHER U/S FLOWN IN AS NIBELHEIM TRUCK CLEARS
NIBELHEIM TRUCK STRUCK TO OP, RAINBOW BRIDGE & VALHALLA I
LX PORTALS BEGIN TO LIGHT FROM
LX FLOOR TRAVELS ON WITHOUT SINGERS EXCEPT ERDA, WITH RE
LX LADDERS FLOWN IN
LX LIFT ASCENDS TO ALBERICH CHUCK HEIGHT
LX LIFT TO FLOOR LEVEL
LX LIFT DOWN TO PICK UP HOARD
LX LIFT UP WITH HOARD X6 KIDS + X6 CASKETS X3
GODS ENTER
GIANTS ENTER VIA AUDITORIUM
BUILDING OF THE TOMB (LOGE & FROH p212)
EXIT ERDA
HOARD TROLLEYED OFF BY FAFNER
U/S SMOTHER OUT
RAINBOW BRIDGE TRUCK D/S
REDUCE/LOOSE MIST CURTAIN
GODS EXIT UP RAINBOW BRIDGE
BLACKOUT
SMOTHER IN D/S

03-June-2002

THE WALKERS RUNNING ORDER

PRESET	CHARING REF IMAGE NO	THEIR FRAME ON BLACK SMOTHER DIS TEN MESH DOORS US CLOSED BLACK SMOTHER DIS IN RAISED LX FLOOR PRESET US RING OF LX PRESET IN LX LADDERS IN XZ CHAIRS SET JUST OFF STAGE BEHIND PORTAL 1 POOL, RESET PRESET SPRINK DOWN PRESET SPRING CLOTH PRESET IN TRACKS OFF WUNDER BAR OFF ANGLED SHUTTERS PRESET OUT
ACT 1 SC 1	PRELUDE	A 1 DESKING REVEALS CLIMBING DOWN MESH DOORS WOTAN ENT WITH SWORD & SPEARS B 2 WOTAN PLUNGES SWORD INTO FLOODPOOL C 3 MESH FLOOR DESCENDS REVEALING THE POOL/LIMB, SURROUNDING THE SWORD WITH IT DESKING REVEALS DIS OF MESH DOORS WOTAN SETS CHAIRS XZ WOTAN DRIVES DESKING TOWARD THE POOL WOTAN DESCENDS A CIRCLE WITH HIS SPEAR D 4 SPEARS ASCEND FOLLOWING HIS SPEAR SWAPPING WOTAN E 5 OPEN MESH DOORS TO 1M WIDE FOR ENTRANCES & EXITS DESKING ENTERS WITH BOTTLES OF MEAD (BLACK BOTTLES) HENDING ENTERS FROM US DESKING EXITS US SPEARS FROM PT 3 OF SURROUNDING THE SPEARS SC 2 SC 3 SC 4 A 6 WOTAN APPEARS OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE ON "VOLJA VOLJA" POOL GLOWS DESKING RE ENTERS WOTAN RE ENTERS "WHO CAME IN" B 7 WOTAN DRAWS THE SILK SPRING CURTAIN FROM UP ON "THE SPEARS SMILES INTO THE ROOM" C 8 SPEARS DESCEND AS CURTAIN IS DRAWN SWORD IS DRAWN CURTAIN DRIPS... RAINING STYLE AT END OF ACT INTERVAL BLACK SMOTHER DIS IN AFTER AUDIENCE LEAVE STRIKE THE CLOTH STRIKE THE RING OF LX CLOSE MESH DOORS DISCONNECT POOL REPLACE POOL PLUG BLACK SMOTHER DIS OUT BEFORE AUDIENCE RETURN ACT 2 SC 1 A 9 RAKED LX FLOOR TRACKS DIS WITH LX DESK & FROZEN ARMY (COPIES OF WOTAN-FROZEN TO MATCH FLOOR AT BASE UP TO CLEARANCE AT THE HEAD) ACCESS RAMP PULLS OUT AS LX FLOOR TRAVELS DIS... RAMP LENGTH 1M NOMINALLY B 10 WOTAN & BRUNNHILDE TRAVEL WITH LX TRACK MESH DOORS CLOSE TO 1M OPENING BRUNNHILDE EXITS DIS FRICKA ENTERS FROM US BRUNNHILDE ENTERS FROM DIS FRICKA EXITS US SC 2 A 11 WOTAN THROWS BRUNNHILDE OFF RAKED FLOOR DIS LX RAKED FLOOR TRACKS US WITH WOTAN ON "THIS IS THE VOLJA WOTAN" MESH DOORS CLOSE AFTER LX FLOOR PASSES (30 SEC ENTERS CHANGE) BLACK SMOTHER IN US BRUNNHILDE LEFT ON EMPTY STAGE... EXITS DIS SC 3 A 12 3 BLADES FLOWING SC 4 A 13 MESH DOORS OPEN FOR BRUNNHILDE'S ENTRANCE (2M) MESH DOORS CLOSE AFTER BRUNNHILDE'S EXIT AT THE END OF THE SCENE SET BLUNDER US OF MESH DOORS

SC 5	A	14 BLADES FLY IN TO 2ND POSITION FOLLOWING "NEEDY WILL PAY HIM HIS DUE" SUPERS ENTER PS & OP BEHIND BLADES WITH SIEGMUND, SIEGMUND! MESH DOORS OPEN WITH FADE UP OF AUDIENCE BLINDER MESH DOORS CLOSE WITH FADE DOWN OF AUDIENCE BLINDER WOTAN & BRUNNHILDE ENTER VIA THE AUDITORIUM FROM PS & OP STOPPING AT TOP OF STAIRS 15 DIS BLADE FLYS TO FLOOR TRAPPING WOTAN DIS AS HUNTING FALLS DEAD TO THE GROUND ALL BLADES FLY OUT ON PLAY OUT STARTING FROM DIS MESH DOORS OPEN MESH DOORS CLOSE ON WOTAN'S EXIT
INTERVAL		
ACT III SC 1	A	BLACK SMOTHER IN US OF MESH DOORS STRIKE THE ICEMEN & DESK FROM THE RAKED LX FLOOR SET WUNDER BAR ON RAKED LX FLOOR MESH DOORS OPEN 16 RAKED LX FLOOR TRAVELS DIS WITH WUNDER BAR (CLOUDS ON MONITORS) 4 VALK'S ON BOARD WOTAN APPEARS ON THE MONITORS GETTING CLOSER IN JUMP CUT ACTION
SC 2		WOTAN ENTERS PROMPT SIDE AUDITORIUM WOTAN SWITCHES OF THE BAR LIGHTS, NEON, GLASSES & RADIO ON "DOES HER FATE TERRIFY YOU?" ON "TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE" (WEH, WEH) THE RAKED FLOOR & BAR EXIT US WITH EIGHT VALK'S ON BOARD MESH DOORS CLOSE
SC 3	A	17 BRUNNHILDE & WOTAN ON EMPTY STAGE WOTAN LAYS BRUNNHILDE OUT AFTER "THUS HE KISSES YOUR GODHEAD AWAY"
	B	18 WOTAN DRAWS THE CIRCLE WITH HIS SPEAR, FLAMES IGNITE AS HE PASSES (FLAMES IGNITE TO 1M NOMINALLY ON "LOGE, LISTEN")
	C	19 CIRCLE LIFTS TO 3M IN STRAIGHT VERTICAL LIFT
	D	20 2ND LIFT ON "SHALL NEVER PASS THROUGH THE FIRE" 3M AT FRONT & 4.5M US (PLATFORM INCLINES AS IT TRAVELS IN NOMINALLY 1MIN)

Wed5 Jun 2002 4:19 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Steve Phillips <sphillips@saopera.sa.gov.au>
Date: Wednesday5 June 2002 4:19 PM
Subject: Re: The Ring - 2004

Dear Steve,

Thanks, I'll check the schedules this evening and get back to you tomorrow.

I'm not aware of the Alberich/Hagen scene being done without Alberich on stage, but there is no reason why it couldn't be done this way. Actually, that would be rather effective. A possibility might be to have Alberich's face enlarged and projected behind Hagen (a la Titirel?) while his singing is done off-stage. That would certainly give the impression that he has taken possession of Hagen's mind. The stage directions say that Hagen 'is sleeping' and, later, that 'he appears to be sleeping on although his eyes are open'.

Water

on 5/6/02 3:50 PM, Steve Phillips at sphillips@saopera.sa.gov.au wrote:

> Dear Peter
>
> Here's the 2004 schedule complete. If you wouldn't mind having a look
> through for any omissions, errors I'd appreciate.
>
> <<Proposed stage schedule 2004.doc>>
>
> Warwick Pyfe is contracted to cover Wegner for the Gott rehearsals, as well
> and Siegfried in 2004, but I still think if John were around it might be
> worth getting him here for a couple of days just to do the beginning of Act
> 3. Otherwise Elke will have to manage with Warwick. Is this scene ever done
> Alberich offstage?
>
> Steve
>
> Stephen Phillips
> General Director
> The State Opera of South Australia
>
> PO Box 211, Marleston BC, SA 5033
>
> Phone: + 61 8 8226 4790
> Fax: + 61 8 8226 4791
>
> www.saopera.sa.gov.au
>
>

Mon10 Jun 2002 6:23 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Monday 10 June 2002 6:23 PM
Subject: Back home

Dear Elke,

Home from my wanderings! Many thanks for your last email. It was a fascinating trip but I must say I'm glad not to be living out of suitcases any more. I hope all is going well with the design meetings. I have lots of photos of the Berlin productions and so could bring them along to the next gathering.

I liked Kupfer's Ring a lot - some wonderful images: the tangled roots of the world ash tree at the bottom of the Rhine, the descent to Nibelheim down a long transparent tunnel, Walküre Act I scene 1 looking up through the steel lattice of a radio pylon (Wotan's communications centre?), Siegfried I 'using the enormous copper-bladed fan of a blast furnace, and (my favourite image), Siegfried III, Wotan peering down from an uplifted stage to Erda dressed in a black body stocking and tangled in luminescent yellow rope (fibre optics?) against a deep blue background. There was a lot of stage raising and sinking to good effect. The World Ash Tree was a common visual motif, and it appeared in many forms - roots Rheingold I i), fallen trunk (Walküre I i), burnt out and chopped up branches (Siegfried II), and mere remnant (Götterdämmerung). The branch that crashed down in Walküre III iii certainly came as a surprise (for a moment I thought the scenery was collapsing!).

Just a few things I didn't like: Wotan appearing in Siegfried I i and manipulating the Woodbird in II ii (no surprise there) and turning up again in Götterdämmerung III iii. Also I didn't like Alberich wandering on stage at the end (Götts Friedrich did that too, and I thought it was a big mistake because it upsetaged Brünnhilde. It anchored the work in politics, whereas I think the ultimate message of the Ring is that politics can never be the guarantor of human happiness. While Wagner in the 1850s, despairing of social reform, was inclined to the view that Alberich and his kind would inherit the world (and said as much in a letter to Liszt), by the 1870s he no longer put his faith in political remedies. Brünnhilde offers a new way forward - but it is one that can only be approached by suffering through love. Alberich, the quintessential renouncer of love, can have no part in this. He has been swept aside (conceptually speaking) just as surely as Wotan has been swept aside.

I liked the Holländer and Tannhäuser very much. Lohengrin was shocking (Elsa really did murder Siegfried and Lohengrin was merely a figment of her wishful thinking!), and Tristan a one-idea production (all three scenes on and around a fallen angel in a nineteenth century cemetery). Meistersinger was interesting but notable mainly for the last minute engagement of Reiner Goldberg (at 63, a shadow of his former self) to sing Walter. He got the sympathy vote. The heroes of the festival were Waltraud Meier and Rene Pape (wonderful in every respect).

Hope to see you see you soon.

Warmest wishes,

Peter

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Subject: Re: Back home

Date: Thu, 13 Jun 2002 11:45:44 +1000

Status: Normal

From: "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

Dear Peter,

Thanks for detailed description of your Marathon Wagner journey and welcome back. Yes, the suitcase takes over in the end and threatens to ruin ones joy. Yours was a long trip in no doubt still cold weather, so you needed plenty of gear, though for men it's always that much easier.

Of course I'm most interested in what you describe, having seen some photos and also the Kupfer Bayreuth production. Looking forward to seeing the pics you have gathered when next we meet. I dare say you won't much feel like travelling for a while!

I have decided to keep as many meetings as possible divided between S. Curtis only and Michael and Nick only. Has proven to be more fruitful. However for the ones you are able to attend I would imagine that we should all be together.

Michael, Nick and I have (In Perth) mapped out a grid of times when we three are available until the end of October.

These dates are: June 21 (I start Ballo in Maschera on June 24)
 July 23, 26
 August 1 (then Michael in Melbourne. August and
 September has not been finally
 determined)
 (Sept. 18-Oct.20 I'll do Chenier in Brisbane. For a
 week both M.+N will be there as
 well)
 Oct.23,24

I don't think for a moment that this is enough, but these dates are definite with more to be added as we go, probably not always with Nick.

At present we don't envisage to get into Goetterdaemmerung much before end of July with a lot of loose ends to be tied up on the other three.

Please let me know how this sits with you.

I must say I am more and more inclined to think along the lines of Wotan manipulating or indeed turning himself into the Woodbird one way or the other. It makes very good sense as in many ways does the re-appearance of Alberich in the end, particularly in the current political situation. It is a very grim view to take and it is not in the music at the end which speaks of a new (tranquil?) beginning, so I won't do this.

Must run. Hope you'll allow yourself some time to get your bearings. Glad to have you back safe and sound in freezing Canberra with the golden autumn leaves.

Talk soon, I hope.

Best greetings,
 Elke

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>

To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

.../dmailweb.cgi?cmd=item&utoken=pbassett@210.8.44.14_670f6d382b322927096000&itc14/06/02

Wed19 Jun 2002 11:08 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Wednesday19 June 2002 10:58 AM
Subject: The Giants

Dear Elke,

A thought suddenly occurred to me concerning the vexed question of the giants. I don't know about you, but I have never seen a thoroughly convincing depiction of these. The usual emphasis these days is on size - literally their 'giantism', whereas I would like to suggest that the emphasis should be on their brutishness, ie complete lack of culture. It is this brutishness, not size, that is the real foil to the 'culture' of the gods and the source of their mutual antagonism. Interestingly, Wagner's own depiction of Fafner and Fasolt in 1876 was simply of men of normal stature, primitively dressed in furs from head to foot. Their roughly hewed staves, still with remnants of branches attached, contrasted with the elegantly engineered spears of Wotan et al. In the legends, the giants are the eternal enemies of the gods and are instrumental in their undoing at Ragnarok. This can be interpreted as the clash of culture and barbarism.

My thought for today!

Warm wishes,

Peter

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No previous message



1 of 13

Subject: Goetterd..**Date:** Fri, 2 Aug 2002 17:10:10 +1000**Status:** Normal**From:** "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

Dear Peter,

Of course we will need you on Goetterd..! Things are beginning to get a bit tight, the most difficult task, as usual, being to get everyone under one hat.

With the next meetings this seems no longer possible, Nick having over loaded himself totally. So Michael and I are starting on G. on August 15 (after having met with Stephen at the model) as well as on Friday 16 all day, which might be the best time for you to come. I don't know why noone is available next week but that's how things are. I'll have one meeting with Stephen Curtis next Friday 9th, long overdue, he keeps cancelling on me.

As you can see, I'm becoming slightly frustrated, particularly in view of the fact that I'm supposed to be in Brisbane for the next instalment of Andrea Chenier as from mid September. My Agent is at present negotiating for me to arrive a week later and let Ian, my assistant, do the first week. We would then have at least 4 days from Sept.19 with all of us (not Curtis) together.

So, how does any of this work for you? We "finished" Siegfried concept the day before yesterday only... Don't scare Steve with any of this. It will all be there but, I fear, only just. The model looks sensational, Rheingold and Walkure is complete and Siegfried is slightly easier. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,
Elke

Dear Peter,

Of course we will need you on Goetterd..! Things are beginning to get a bit tight, the most difficult task, as usual, being to get everyone under one hat.

Mon12 Aug 2002 11:34 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Sunday 11 August 2002 1:09 PM
Subject: A thought

Dear Elke,

I'm looking forward to seeing you and Michael again on Thursday afternoon. In the meantime, here is a thought that might be helpful in finding a way visually into Goetterdaemmerung. Its genesis is the fantastic Hagen/Alberich meeting in Act 2 scene 1. I recall seeing a movie once (can't remember which) in which a shoot-out takes place in a fair ground hall of mirrors. The pursuer sees what he takes to be the pursued and shoots at him, only to see the image shatter into splinters of broken glass. The image appears somewhere else and another shot is fired and the same thing happens. Then more and more images appear and we don't know which is real and which are merely reflections. Thus, in his dream-like state, Hagen would witness one, two, then multiple images of his father - phantom-like, insubstantial, sometimes here, sometimes there - infiltrating every corner of his consciousness before vanishing gradually as the dawn begins to break.

So much of G. is about deceit, mistaken identity, misunderstanding - illusion. The notion of multiple images, split personalities - shadows rather than substance - might spark some ideas that would give this tremendous work a distinctive and sinister quality.

See you soon.

Best regards,

Peter

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Mon12 Aug 2002 3:51 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Monday 12 August 2002 3:03 PM
Subject: Re: A thought

Dear Peter,

Sorry for not having written earlier to thank you for the very funny Ring Operetta.* I actually didn't get the time to sit down and listen to it until the weekend, but then enjoyed it quite a lot. Our Baby sure lends itself to parody, doesn't it? This one is very clever the way it uses the music, more in that aspect than the words. Thanks for going to the trouble of sending it!

Your thoughts on Goetter... are most welcome and intelligent. We haven't used horrors this time (having used them in both Tannhauser and Chénier) but this is certainly an attractive way of looking at things.

At present I'm still trying to find the ultimate solution to the Norns, you see how far advanced I am! Unfortunately the Brisbane production of Chénier proves more time consuming than I had anticipated. Can't wait until I can be singleminded with all other productions out of the way. Have said no to all offers for 2003.

As for Thursday: My mobile No is 0418151 476. Please ring before you set off to my place to make sure we are back.

Looking forward to seeing you, and again many thanks for thoughts and great entertainment.

Best wishes,
Elke

* The Operetta was a recording of *Die lustigen Nibelungen* by Oscar Straus.

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Sent: Sunday, August 11, 2002 1:09 PM
Subject: A thought

> Dear Elke,
>
> I'm looking forward to seeing you and Michael again on Thursday afternoon.
> In the meantime, here is a thought that might be helpful in finding a way
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> hall of mirrors. The pursuer sees what he takes to be the pursued and
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> insubstantial, sometimes here, sometimes there - infiltrating every corner
> of his consciousness before vanishing gradually as the dawn begins to
> break.

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Sun25 Aug 2002 4:37 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Sunday 25 August 2002 4:36 PM
Subject: Fricka

Dear Elke,

I am just working on a new edition of my Ring book and I have been thinking about the role of Fricka in the Hunding/Sieglinde/Siegmund episode. One (male chauvinistic) interpretation of course is that Fricka is a shrewish and rigidly conventional wife who makes Wotan's life a misery. The more fashionable (feminist) view is that she is a morally upright woman holding her ground in the face of Wotan's despicable behaviour and standards. Actually, I think there is a third characterisation that is much closer to the mark. The clue is to be found in the flight by brother and sister in Act Two of Die Walkure, which I have described as follows:

"The orchestral introduction to Act Two is filled with agitation. The theme that we had last heard associated with the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde is now burdened with distress. The two lovers are fleeing from Hunding. Sieglinde in particular is exhausted and overcome with guilt and remorse - not, it should be noted, because of her loving relationship with Siegmund but because of her long humiliation and abuse at the hands of Hunding. It was Hunding and his loveless marriage that had made her feel unclean and unworthy of the man with whom she now flees."

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that, in Fricka's view, even a loveless and degrading marriage is to be defended to the death (literally) whereas a loving relationship that flouts convention must be crushed. Who is worse, Hunding or Fricka? They are two of a kind to my mind and certainly Fricka emerges as a nasty, self-centred piece of work. Wagner himself explained the far-reaching ramifications in these terms:

"Alberich and his ring could not have harmed the gods unless the latter had already been susceptible to evil. Where, then, is the germ of this evil to be found? Look at the scene between Wotan and Fricka...The firm bond which binds them both...constrains them both to the mutual torment of a loveless union." His implication is that lovelessness, either deliberately chosen, as in the case of Alberich, or the product of circumstance, as in the case of Wotan and Fricka, carries the seeds of destruction. The corollary is that an act of love, especially love to the point of self-sacrifice, carries the seeds of life. In this case, the seeds of life (the unborn Siegfried) are indeed the fruits of love. Fricka doesn't know the meaning of the word.

Kind regards,

Peter

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Mon2 Sep 2002 10:58 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: peter bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Monday2 September 2002 10:15 PM
Subject: Fricka and things

Dear Peter,

Thanks for Fricka comments and sorry I haven't written sooner.

I think Fricka is the way she is because Wagner needed to justify his own "liberal" behaviour. He painted a cunning, conventional, tightlipped woman who was ill equipped to follow the "genius" of Wotan. He would let her know frequently that she wasn't up to his standard in any way. This is "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf" territory and my heart bleeds for Fricka. Sorry. Morality is all she's got left and apart from this- should she really NOT object to incest? She might have been less rigid had Wotan let her in on his dealings and assigns from the onset.

I have today written a short letter/fax to Jeffrey Smart. Just asked if he wanted any fotos or other explanations on the production. When do you think we'd need the poster?

I am also wondering whether you have got any further with Lisa Gasteen's Agent re. her attendance of the Stage rehearsals of Walkure. I urge you to give this your attention. We really need her there for more than 2 weeks!

I am struggling with some things in Goetterdaemmerung. Bruennhildes last monologue, for example, when she mentions that Siegfried indeed put the sword between herself and him. After all??? Did he or didn't he? But I think I've worked out why the Rheinmaidens don't take the Ring in Act III,2. And why is Siegfried so nihilistic, not caring about life or health? Does he know he's doomed? Is it a death wish?

Haven't found the end yet, but most of the rest. Michael has been in Melbourne, as you know, but I hope to have another session with him soon, and with you, of course.

Keep well!
Best greetings,
Elke

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Tue3 Sep 2002 11:53 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Tuesday3 September 2002 11:53 AM
Subject: Goetterdaemmerung

Dear Elke,

Thanks for your latest email. Re our 'Smart Poster', I think it would be good to launch the poster at the Weekend in September next year, when we plan to have national media in town. Which means we would need a sketch before the end of this year and the finished painting by say, end of April, to give us plenty of time to print. We'll probably print some on high quality paper for signed/numbered versions to give to special donors (and to sell during the production).

I have been whittling away at getting Lisa Gasteen to Adelaide for extra time in 2003. Her agent (who has advised her to agree) expects to have a response in a matter of days, so I'll let you know as soon as I have something. You'll be pleased to know that I've managed to get her to work week 10 in 2004 for the crucial stage rehearsals that week.

What DID happen on Bruennhilde's rock?

The strongest evidence suggests that Siegfried (as Gunther) and Bruennhilde spent the night with Nothing lying between them. If one relies solely on Siegfried's remarks (treating them firstly as ironic and, later, as deceitful), a case can be made that he did rape her. The authority for this is Thidrek's Saga of Bern (c.1260-70) which states categorically that on the fourth night, at Gunther's request, Siegfried deflowered Bruennhilde by force. However, although Wagner relied on Thidrek's Saga for material in Siegfried, he seems not to have done so for Goetterdaemmerung. In his 1848 prose sketch 'The Nibelung Myth - A Sketch for a Drama' which formed the basis of Siegfrieds Tod, Wagner describes the situation in these terms:

'Already robbed by Siegfried of her maidenhood, she has lost alike her superhuman strength, and all her runecraft has passed to Siegfried - who does not use it; she is as powerless as any mortal woman, and can only offer lame resistance to her new, aggressive suitor; he tears from her the Ring - by which she is now to be wedded to Gunther - and forces her into a cavern, where he sleeps the night with her, though to her astonishment he lays his sword between them.'

This, coupled with Bruennhilde's reference in her final monologue to which you refer (and which I had forgotten about) makes it pretty clear I think that Siegfried did not rape her when disguised as Gunther - not out of respect (his brutal action has already put paid to that) but only because of his commitment to his 'brother'. Had it not been for his obligation to Gunther, he would have raped her. It is still hardly noble behaviour.

Siegfried's Nihilism?

This, I think, is a left-over from Siegfrieds Tod - one of the odd little details that cling like barnacles to the poem of Goetterdaemmerung. It was part of Wagner's original idea that Siegfried 'takes on' the gods and Bruennhilde purges their guilt by the act of self-immolation. In that version, the gods continue to reign in glory instead of perishing, and Bruennhilde and Siegfried rise above the flames like Senta and the Dutchman. This of course reflected Wagner's political ideas at the time, in which the aristocratic/plutocratic regime would be swept away but the Saxon king would remain as father of his people and head a kind of crowned republic. After all, in 1848 Wagner was still in the king's employ!

Again, Wagner has quite a lot to say about the incident in his 1848 prose sketch:

'The Daughters hanker for the Ring, and beg it of Siegfried, who refuses it. (Guiltless, he has taken the guilt of the gods upon him, and atones their wrong through his defiance, his self-dependence.) They prophesy evil, and tell him of the curse attaching to the ring: Let him cast it in the river or he must die today. Siegfried: "You glib-tongued women shall not cheat me of my might: the curse and your threats are not worth a hair to me. What my courage demands governs my life; and what my mind determines I am destined to do. Call this a curse or a blessing, I'll follow this course and not act contrary to my nature." The three Daughters: "Would you cut-do

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Tue3 Sep 2002 11:53 AM

the gods?" Siegfried: "Show me a chance to master the gods and I'll use all my might to vanquish them. I know three wiser women than you three; they know that the gods will one day struggle in fear. Well, so much for the gods - I'll do battle with them. So I laugh at your threats. The ring stays mine, and thus I cast my life behind me." (He lifts a clod of earth and hurls it backwards over his head.) The Daughters scoff at Siegfried who thinks himself as strong and wise as he is blind and enslaved. "Gatha he has broken and doesn't know it; a prize far higher than the ring he's lost and doesn't know it; runes and spells he was taught but he's forgotten them. Farewell Siegfried! We know a noble wife who this day will possess the ring when you are slaughtered. To her! She'll give us a better hearing." Siegfried, laughing, gazes after them as they move away singing. He shouts: "If I were not true to Gudrun, one of you three would have ensnared me!"

In this version there is no suggestion (as in Goetterdämmerung) that he contemplates returning the ring to the Rhinemaidens for a bit of slap and tickle in the bulrushes. Once again, it seems, the Rhinemaidens are reluctant to play those kind of games, even if Siegfried is a better catch than Alberich. As with the Nibelung, they'll flutter their eyelashes and swish their tails but swim away just the same.

Hope this helps.

Warm regards,

Peter

Page 2 of 2

Thu12 Sep 2002 12:06 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Thursday 12 September 2002 12:06 PM
Subject: The Ending

Dear Elke,

As you have mentioned, the ending of *Götterdämmerung* poses a particular challenge. I have tried to sort out in my own mind a satisfactory way of describing the metaphysical ideas behind it and have come up with the following. Of course, how this can be depicted on stage is another matter - but I think I'm getting closer to what Wagner was on about. His philosophical point of departure was, of course, the great scene between Wotan and Brünnhilde in Act II of *Walküre*, around which so much of the drama turns.

In this scene, Wotan begins to accept the inevitability of his own demise and the end of the gods. He puts himself on the psychoanalyst's couch. At first he hesitates, not wanting to lower his guard, too frightened to confront his inner self. Only when Brünnhilde convinces him that she really is his alter ego, does he let go, and everything comes pouring out. 'With loathing, I can find only myself in all that I have created' he says. 'I must forsake and murder the son whom I love and who trusts me. ... Let what I have built fall apart. ... I desire only one thing: the end, the end!' This scene, with its graphic raising of the unconscious mind to consciousness, was completed by 1854, two years before the birth of Sigmund Freud.

By this time, Wagner had become a very different man from the stary-eyed revolutionary of the Dresden years. His idealism had gone, and he no longer looked to politics for solutions to the world's problems. He was profoundly cynical of all forms of government and the mechanisms of production, distribution and exchange. He was beginning to think that there was no remedy for humanity's ills, at least by way of collective action.

It was at this time that Wagner encountered the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer; writings that fitted his own mood like a glove and gave him an intellectual framework for the remainder of his life's work. He had, hitherto, been moved philosophically by what he described as the 'cheerful' Greek view of the world, but Schopenhauer's thesis (which is much in sympathy with Buddhism), offered the annihilation of the will and complete self-abnegation as the only true means of redemption. What does this mean?

Schopenhauer called the instinctive, driving energy within human beings, the 'will', and to this will he attributed all evil and strife. In this context the English word 'will' (and indeed the German word *Wille*) does not carry its usual, everyday meaning of deliberate intention, but refers to an instinctive, inner force at the essence of our being. It is a metaphysical notion. Willing, wanting, longing, craving are not just things that we do: they are things that we are. Schopenhauer argued that the destructive consequences of the will could be avoided only by achieving a state of detachment, in which the will was inactive, a condition not unlike the Buddhist notion of nirvana - which is literally the 'blowing out' of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion. He also argued that the arts - especially music - could offer at least a temporary means to achieve this detachment. During the last three decades of his life, Wagner became more concerned with metaphysical issues than with political ones. In his greatest works - those written after the mid-1850s - he looked inwards at human nature, rather than outwards at human society. We can see this happening in *The Ring* from *Die Walküre* onwards. It is this idea that is ultimately expressed in the dramatic closing pages of *The Ring*.

Wagner once referred to *Götterdämmerung* as 'a tragedy of fate'. The gods, giants, dwarfs and humans are all trapped in a fateful web, from which they struggle, in their own ways, to be free. In the end, it is only through the extinction of craving for power and wealth and other worldly things - which lies at the root of our suffering - that humanity can be transformed. This is the insight that Brünnhilde achieves through the intensity of her love for Siegfried.

Hope this helps.

Warm regards,

Page 1 of 2

Mon23 Sep 2002 12:17 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Stephen Phillips <sphillips@saopera.sa.gov.au>
Date: Monday23 September 2002 12:16 PM
Subject: Ring Design Meeting

Dear Steve,

The design meeting yesterday made good progress and we got through *Götterdämmerung*. There are a few loose ends to tie up but the main concepts have been worked out. The Norns scene and all the scenes on Brunnhilde's rock will utilize the existing 'lift' mechanism, so no new scenic elements for those. The Hall of the Gibbichungs will use the Rheingold portals clad in red lacquer panels - I had suggested thinking in terms of a Forbidden City, with a feeling of oriental/occidental cultural difference to imply a contrast between the realms of the Gibbichungs and all that had gone before. They liked this idea and it will make use of the portals again. The portals will move backwards and forwards on casters, so that the hall can either extend the full depth of the stage, move back to a half-way position or stack up against the rear wall like Chinese boxes - one inside the other. The most distant 'frame' will have a sloping top, to break the strict symmetry and create a sense of things being a bit out of kilter in the land of the Gibbichungs. The colour too should make quite an impact after all the grey, black and white of the other scenes.

The Act 2 vassals are Hagen's thugs; pretty rough 'skinheads', which I think is exactly right. The women on the other hand will be Otrune's friends and relatives and would be conservatively dressed. The men in the Act 3 hunting scene will be Gunther's supporters, on a sort of army reserve exercise. They would bring on half a dozen cartons of beer (to use as seats as well as for drinking), so there might be a sponsorship opening for one of the breweries here!

The Rhinemaidens scene will use the adjustable rake down stage (as the river bank), behind which they will cavort. There wouldn't be any new scenic elements for the hunting scene. Siegfried's dead body would be left in a pool of light on the 'lift'. During the funeral music a gauze curtain would be drawn (probably by Hagen) across the scene and, behind it, Elke wants 'doubles' of Wotan, Siegmund, Sieglinda etc etc to appear, coinciding with various references in the music. Then a smother would obscure the scene enabling it to be set for the final showdown. The hall of the Gibbichungs would be in half open position, with space in front. It would later move slowly upstage for the final conflagration. Siegfried would 'lie in state' with the people filing past, and then he would be carried upstage and through the partially opened screen doors and out of sight. Brunnhilde would be left alone for her long peroration and, after throwing the brand (metaphorically) on the funeral pyre, disappear through the upstage opening. A fire batten would be lowered and ignited behind the mesh screen, illuminating the red portals of the hall, other fires would spring out of the downstage vents. When Hagen dashes for the ring, the water curtain would be activated and the downstage rake (river bank) would rise and Hagen would be swept beneath it. We would then see the fires through the water curtain before both fires and water would cease for the final 'herschtes wunder' music of hope and renewal. Elke has in mind bringing forty children onto the stage at this point, dressed in contemporary, everyday clothes. A couple of ideas are being considered: either they would carry small pine tree seedlings (her environmental statement) or they could be putting on or taking off surgical masks (an environmental warning) or (?) something else. More work has to be done on the final symbolism. I have argued for a positive, hopeful ending, and this is Elke's (and I think Michael's) inclination. Nick on the other hand would be just as happy with a bleak ending but he is not firmly committed. I think the optimists will win - perhaps with a nod to the idea that if mankind doesn't get its act together then.....

So, that's where things stand at present.

Best wishes,

Peter

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Mon23 Sep 2002 5:55 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Monday23 September 2002 5:55 PM
Subject: Ring meeting

Dear Elke,

It was good to catch up again yesterday, thanks for your hospitality. I think the designs are tremendous. The option of introducing some live vegetation into the final stage picture appeals to me a lot, as suggesting a qualitative change in human awareness. Apart from the contemporary ecological resonance, there is also a passage in the legends of the Buddha that underpins the idea quite nicely. Wagner certainly knew his Buddhist stories, as Cosima's diaries and the passage ending the *Götterdämmerung* poem (not set to music but preserved in the published text) make clear. In a First Century Sanskrit text called 'The Acts of the Buddha' we read the following. It could easily be describing the events following Brünnhilde's immolation:

'And when the Sage entered Nirvana, the earth quivered...and firebrands fell from the sky. The heavens were lit up with preternatural fire....Fearsome thunderbolts crashed down on the earth....The rivers, as if filled with grief, boiled over. Beautiful flowers grew out of season on the Sal trees above the Buddha's couch, and the trees bent down over him and showered his golden body with their flowers.'

The imagery of violent upheavals being followed by flowers appearing out of season and trees raining down their blossoms, is such a beautiful one. I can't think of a more perfect way to express nature's continual benedictions on a wounded and suffering world.

Warm regards,

Peter

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19 Jan 2003 6:44 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: peter bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: 19 January 2003 12:38 PM
Subject: Amsterdam Ring

Dear Peter,

Many thanks for passing on Bill Gillespies impressions of the Amsterdam Ring Production. Being so detailes it is, ideed, very interesting and I couldn't fail but notice some parallels to our concept. I have seen a photo(in Opernwelt?) quite some time ago of the orchestra being on stage and it might well be this production that Asher is referring to occasionally. Obviously worth seeing. The treatment of the chorus didn't convince me at all intellectually, I must say, but then it's no good judging something one hasn't seen.

My thoughts are travelling to Canberra and particularly to you. I sincerely hope that your house is nowhere near the horrorzones. It all looks terrible on TV, seemingly worse than anything we had in NSW. I would be grateful for a brief message to inform me how you are.

Would love to see you and do lunch when you are in Sydney.

Thanks again,
best greetings,
Elke

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19 Jan 2003 6:44 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: 19 January 2003 6:43 PM
Subject: Re: Amsterdam Ring

Dear Elke,

Thanks for your message. Its a bit smoky here at the moment but Turner has been spared the fires so far. Lots of blackened leaves fell on us yesterday and the sky was orange in the afternoon - very dramatic and quite beautiful in an eerie way. The orange light made the trees look bright turquoise - Nick would have been fascinated. We are keeping a close eye on developments and the hoses and buckets are ready. I think we'll be ok. Our doctor wasn't so fortunate. His house in one of the outer suburbs was destroyed. Not a good time for animals and birds, and we have had quite a few feathered refugees to our garden where we keep dishes of water topped up. The cats spend most time indoors, sensibly.

Glad you found Bill Gillespie's impressions interesting. I'm looking forward to seeing you in February and shall be in touch again soon.

Best regards,

Peter

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**Subject:** Loge**To:** "peter bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>**Date:** Tue, 11 Feb 2003 20:53:15 +1100**Status:** Normal**From:** "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>[Save Address](#)

Dear Peter,

I hope the cats are allowed out again and that things generally are easing up in Canberra. Still, it will take a long time to erase the horrors of those fires and I always feel terribly sorry for those afflicted. Doesn't bear thinking about-losing all you possess.

I wonder if you might enlighten me a bit about Loge. I never quite understood why he is so unpopular with all the other Gods, why Wotan says he is his only friend. What happened in the past???

As you remember we have costumed him rather like Mr. Teflon, smooth and surviving all upheavals. I have arrived at the moment of his entrance in my blocking/production concept and noticed that my picture of Loge is really not clear...

Have we heard anything from Mr. Smart? Are his hips o.k.? Has he had any further thoughts on the poster? Should we send him some production photos??

I'm looking forward to seeing you towards the end of the month and hope that this finds you well and not too hot.

Best wishes,

Elke

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Sun, 16 Feb 2003 10:59 PM

From: Peter Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Reply-To: pbassett@webone.com.au
To: <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Thursday, 13 February 2003 11:40 AM
Subject: Loge

Dear Elke,

I think that the key to Loge's character lies in his symbiotic relationship with Wotan. They need and use each other, and the other gods resent this. Like many leaders, Wotan makes agreements of convenience that he has no intention of keeping. Then he resorts to cunning and dishonesty to get around them and, in so doing, undermines the very basis of his own authority. Loge aids and abets him in this. The other gods have little or nothing to gain from such behaviour but everything to lose. If Wotan falls, they fall with him, and so they deeply resent Loge's involvement with and encouragement of such perilous wings-on. Wotan is playing with fire - literally!

In the closing pages of Walkure, when Wotan summons Loge, he says that they once had an alliance. Clearly, in Rheingold Wotan is desperate for Loge to appear and sort out the mess with the giants. Loge's skills as a slick operator are vital to the god if he is to maintain the balancing act of basing his authority from the law but, at the same time, trying to circumvent it. Of course this can't be done, as Wotan discovers by Act II of Walkure, and Loge is of no further use to him, except to surround the sleeping Bruennhilde. That is why we never see him again except as his fiery element. Loge is chained to the rock (like Prometheus) and, only at the end of Goetterdaemmerung is he released, to go to Valhalla and bring about Wotan's end. Because he too must be destroyed, Wotan plunges the broken spear into his heart - a fitting end to their failed and dishonourable alliance. Loge survives all upheavals in Rheingold but he is neutralised in Walkure because he is of no further use to Wotan. The god realises in Act II that he cannot have his cake and eat it - that is why he needs a totally independent man, to do his bidding 'by opposing him', as he tells Bruennhilde. Siegfried does indeed oppose him in Act III of Siegfried and so he then knows that he has at last found such a man. By that stage, Wotan is willing his own demise and so the encounter with Siegfried is (ironically) just what Wotan has been hoping for. Wotan no longer laments the end of the gods (as he tells Erda) but looks forward to it - but that's another story.

Although the other gods are deeply resentful of Loge, and Fricka has some particularly harsh things to say about him, they do find his particular skills useful from time to time. Fricka, for instance, is rather attracted to the idea of getting hold of the Rheingold if she can have some attractive jewellery as a result, and Loge assures her (like the attentive salesman that he is) that any woman so adorned would be able to keep a wandering husband under control.

One other passing thought. The leitmotifs for Loge and the Tarnhelm (and any references to magic, deceit, trickery, drugged drinks etc) are related. The Tarnhelm motif is just a slowed down version of Loge's motif. The clear implication is that all manifestations of deceit and magic share a common psychological quality.

I'm sure I'll think of a few more points but I hope this is of help.

Warmest wishes,

Peter

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Sun, 16 Feb 2003 10:58 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: peter bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Friday, 14 February 2003 6:23 PM
Subject: Loge

Dear Peter,

Thank you so much for going through the trouble of enlightening me about Loge. You really answered all my questions. I assume therefore, that there isn't a particular incident that Wotan is referring to when he says that he is the only friend who has quasi promoted him, Loge, so he can dwell amongst the Gods. It is a good explanation that the other Gods simply don't like his vulgarity/slimy dealings and certainly not Wotan's dependency on him.

So I have finished mapping out Loge's aria today. For me it becomes exciting through the very different reactions of all on stage, otherwise it's just another "story so far". Realising Rheingold is rather like directing a play, I find.

I hope you enjoyed Goetterdaemmerung in concert. I would like to hear ALL about it. Let's hope that the whole world doesn't end up a Goetterdaemmerung. The press is doing its best to make us very nervous.

Very best wishes,

Elke

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Sun, 16 Feb 2003 10:57 PM

From: Peter Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Reply-To: pbassett@webone.com.au
To: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Saturday, 15 February 2003 1:32 PM
Subject: Re: Loge

Dear Elke,

Thanks for your message. I'm sending emails via a public internet machine in the hotel foyer, which is not the easiest to manipulate so I'm glad they are reaching you in one piece. The Goetterdaemmerung concert was very enjoyable - there was some good singing and the augmented WAGO was inspired. Who wouldn't be with such music! The audience responded well to Philip Kang, whose singing was polished and strongly delivered. Physically, he is relatively slight, so he will not be an overbearing Hagen in the Salminen mould - more insidiously evil. Susan Bullock was in excellent voice and her final scene was genuinely moving. The projected scenes of the WA landscape etc were a distraction, in my view. A bit like listening to a CD with a television running in the same room. I don't think the updated text added much either, and it provoked some giggles from time to time.

There was a lot of interest in our Ring during foyer chat.

Looking forward to seeing you soon. I'll get back to Canberra tomorrow.

As ever,

Peter

* NOTE: The references are to a concert performance by the West Australian Symphony Orchestra conducted by Lionel Friend, in Perth. Philip Kang had been offered the role of Hagen for 2004 but wished to perform Hunding and Fafner as well. When we were unable to offer him all three roles he withdrew.

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Sun, 23 Feb 2003 11:11 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Sunday, 23 February 2003 11:11 AM
Subject: Further thoughts on Loge and also the Nibelheim scene

Dear Elke,

It was great to be able to get together on Friday. Here are some further thoughts that might be helpful.

Loge (Loki) has six rather contradictory functions in the Scandinavian sources: he is a free agent, unrelated to the other gods; a mischief-maker who gets the other gods into trouble and out of it again; an uncompromising teller of unpalatable truths; a mocker of the other gods; an old friend and favourite of Wotan, distrusted as such by the other gods; and the god of fire.

The first two of these functions are taken straight from the Scandinavian Loki. The Prose Edda says: 'They also number among the Aesir one whom some call the mischief-maker among the gods, the contriver of all fraud, and the shame of gods and men. His name is Loki or Lopt; his father is the giant Farbauti, his mother is called Laufey...Loki is handsome and attractive in appearance, but evil in spirit and very fickle. He surpasses all others in slyness and every kind of trickery.'

Loge's third function, as a teller of unpalatable truths, looks like Wagner's invention but there is some basis for this in the sources, as is his function as mocker of the gods. In one of the ballads in the Poetic Edda, Loki makes scandalous accusations against each of the gods in turn. In practically every case it seems he is telling the truth. In the case of Odin he says: 'Silence Odin. You settle unjustly the strife between mortal men; often favouring him who no favour deserves, letting the lesser man win.' Odin came to be regarded by the Norsemen as a treacherous god who would abandon his human followers in their hour of need (cf Siegmund).

Incidentally, Loki also accuses Freyja of having love-dealings with her brother Frey, and with all the gods and elves!

As for Loge's special relationship with Wotan, the Edda records that when Loki arrived at a feast, the god of song, Bragi, said to him: 'At the table the gods will give you no place, now nor evermore; for well they know whom they want to invite as a fellow of their feasts'. Whereupon Loki appealed to Odin: 'Remember, Odin, in olden times, as brothers we mingled our blood. You told me then you would take no drink unless it were brought for us both', and Odin gave Loki a place at the feast - only to regret it later. It's interesting to note the parallel of blood brotherhood between Wotan and Loge and Siegfried and Gunther.

It has been suggested that since Loge is the only god who is not related to Wotan, he embodies not simply Wotan's intellectual faculty, but rather the elemental power of thought which, though available to all, will serve only the individual with the determination to harness and use it, as Wotan does.

Jakob Grimm also refers to 'Loki's former fellowship with Odinn', so the connection between the two seems to be an old one and for reasons never explained - except that Wotan needed to harness the power of thought, just as he needed to harness the power of wisdom at the well of Mimir.

Loge's function as god of fire has only a dubious basis in mythology, although this is one of his prime functions in Wagner. The connection seems to have arisen through a play on words between Loki's name and the name of fire - (cf Lohe). Wagner of course indulges in all sorts of word play with Loge's name.

Loki became so evil and troublesome that the gods bound him in a cave until the coming of Ragnarok, just as Loge was summoned to Bruenzhilde's rock and remained there until Goetterdaemmerung.

On the question of the origin of the taking of Freia, I see that in the Andvari myth, Loki was, at one point, captured by an eagle, who refused to free him until Loki had enticed Idun, with her apples, from the home of the gods. Loki did succeed in enticing her and then the giant Thjazi came in eagle-plumage and took Idun away with him to his home. As a consequence of the abduction of

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Sun, 23 Feb 2003 11:11 AM

Idun, the gods became grey-haired and old. This reinforces the impression that the abduction of Freia was not Loge's original idea but served the interests of the giants.

In relation to the complicated scene in Nibelheim, the following observations (taken from my book) might be relevant in terms of dramatic structure.

Wagner's orchestration is nowhere more varied and brilliant than in this scene in Nibelheim, nor his vocal line more lively and to the point. It is a striking manifestation of his theories of Gesamtkunstwerk, the fusion of text, music, scene and action in the service of the drama. All of the considerable dramatic detail: the contest of wits between Loge and Alberich, Alberich's plan to rule the world, Loge's taunting of Alberich, the latter's transformations and the capture of the Nibelung are ingeniously arranged, as Warren Darcy points out, as a nine-part rondo in which a recurrent musical refrain - the rondo theme - alternates with four contrasting episodes. The refrain recurs each time in the controlling key of A major, while the episodes explore different tonalities and thematic material. In such a way, Wagner controls the varied forces which are at work in this extended scene. Here, as in many other instances in the Ring, the apparently free form of the work belies its carefully organised structure. This structure is disguised by the large scale of the work and the narrative function of the themes.

Hope this helps.

As ever,

Peter

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Tue, 25 Feb 2003 2:07 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Tuesday, 25 February 2003 2:05 PM
Subject: Wagner's changing motivations in The Ring

Dear Elke,

I'm glad you are enjoying the book. Don't you just love the photo of the Nibelungs - and Erdal!

I've just been revising the introduction to my book and have written the following which, I think, encapsulates the fundamental change in Wagner's thinking during his twenty-six year odyssey of self-discovery that was The Ring. It explains internal inconsistencies and the richness of ideas that one finds in the work. I think too that it puts the ending into proper perspective.

As ever,

Peter

BEGINNING

The Ring, as first conceived, was intended as a political allegory. The aristocratic regime (represented in the story by the giants, used to simple-minded inactivity and ease) was succumbing to the greedy capitalism of the industrial revolution (represented by Alberich the Nibelung), while the Saxon king and his family (represented by Wotan and the other gods) were pragmatically trying to manipulate events and preserve their position. Wagner believed that, eventually, a new and more humane society would arise, characterised by the legendary Siegfried, a man who, in a loveless world, 'never ceased to love'. During the course of the intended opera - then called Siegfrieds Tod (Siegfried's Death) - the hero would confront the gods, Brünnhilde would purge their guilt by an act of self-immolation and a reformed Wotan would continue to reign in splendour. The lovers would share a glorious after-life together. Meanwhile, in the political arena, Wagner was publicly expounding the notion that the aristocratic/plutocratic regime should be swept away while the reformed Saxon king would remain, like Wotan, father of his people and head of a crowned republic. Thus, life would imitate art.

This was soon to change. By mid-life, Wagner had become a very different person. His breath-taking idealism had gone and he no longer looked to politics for solutions to society's problems. He was profoundly cynical of all forms of government and the mechanisms of production, distribution and exchange. He had reached the conclusion that there was no remedy for humanity's ills, at least by way of collective action. In October 1854 he wrote to Liszt: 'Let us treat the world only with contempt; for it deserves no better; but let no hope be placed in it, that our hearts be not deluded! It is evil, evil, fundamentally evil. It belongs to Alberich; no one else!! Away with it!'

So, during the last three decades of his life, Wagner was more concerned with metaphysical issues than with political ones. In his greatest works - those written after the mid-1850s - he looked inwards at human nature, rather than outwards at human society. We can see this happening in The Ring from the second act of Die Walküre onwards. It certainly happens in Tristan und Isolde, where the lovers' goal is to escape from the harsh glare of separate existences. Scratch the surface of Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg and we find metaphysics even there. And, of course, we find it in Parsifal, Wagner's most mystical work, which is shot through with transcendental notions such as the denial of the will and rejection of the world. Wagner himself said that Parsifal owed its conception to his flight from the world and from a soulless age of unfeeling utilitarianism. This is an idea that burns brightly in the dramatic closing pages of The Ring.

ENDS

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Thu, 27 Feb 2003 6:16 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Thursday, 27 February 2003 6:03 PM
Subject: Re: Wagner's changing motivations in The Ring

Dear Peter,

Thank you for sharing the last pages of your book with me. While I understood most of it, I have some questions about your final conclusion, except not tonight since pushed for time.

When we met a week ago, I forgot to mention a young friend who is hoping to be introduced to you. He is an Opera and Wagner fanatic and quite knowledgeable. He owns 15 complete recording sets of the Ring, very useful for me since he kindly lends me whatever I desire.

Anyway, he'd like a chat. I think ultimately he wants to write (books, reviews, I'm not sure). Thought it might be best if he told you directly. He's intelligent and won't waste your time. I hope you don't mind that I have given him your email address.

Sorry the brevity. I continue to enjoy the book very much and am indebted to you. Never knew it existed.

Will write about your book very soon. Meeting Stephen tomorrow morning at 9 a.m., a time which I don't particularly relish...

Best wishes,

Elke

Reached the end of Rheingold Sc. 3 today with all details in place. Hurrah

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Sent: Tuesday, February 25, 2003 2:05 PM
Subject: Wagner's changing motivations in The Ring

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> As ever,
>
> Peter
>
> BEGINS
>

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Fri, 28 Feb 2003 5:52 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Friday, 28 February 2003 5:52 PM
Subject: Fire in the forest

Hello Elke,

I hope your meeting with Stephen this morning wasn't too traumatic and that we still have a production.

I'd be very happy to hear from your Wagnerian friend whenever he wants to be in touch.

On the question of whether Mime has fire in his forest smithy, I think the answer is to be found in his account of finding Sieglinde: 'zur Mühle half ich ihr her, am warmen Herd sie zu hüten'. So, unless the fire went out somewhere along the way, I think he must still have it. It is a bit amazing that a master smith like Mime can't forge Nothung whereas a callow youth who has ignored all his lessons knows exactly how to do it. But then Mime certainly knows fear (lots of it) which seems to be the point at issue.

Best regards,

Peter

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Mon, 3 Mar 2003 11:06 PM

From: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Monday, 3 March 2003 1:51 PM
Subject: Re: Fire in the forest

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your continuing thoughts given to Mime's fire. Yours is a good point, and, as we know, there is the Braten which he has roasted for Siegfried's Dinner. I assume that the Cologne Dramaturgie might have been wrong. They wanted a big effect of sudden fire after the Wanderer's departure, which he brought about, thus scaring Mime rather than the somewhat inexplicable sudden fear of Fafner. Yes, it's all about fear not about fire. So maybe Wagner wants to just transmit this, that fearful people are always the losers???

at I didn't initially understand in the ending of your book is the change from being totally defeated and negative (as depicted in the letter to List) to the ravishing finale of Goetterdaemmerung, so full of hope and positive "light" (for lack of a better word). But then, there's 20 odd years between the letter to and the end of the composition, so obviously more than his political cynicism changed?

The meeting with Stephen went o.k. He didn't seem to want to hear any of the rather alarming figures which we had prepared. So we will just soldier on and hope that he will be able to raise the much needed Corporate Sponsorships. All a bit frightening..

Thanks again and very best wishes,

Elke

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Sent: Friday, February 28, 2003 5:52 PM
Subject: Fire in the forest

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Fri, 7 Mar 2003 1:46 PM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Friday, 7 March 2003 1:46 PM
Subject: Das Ende

Dear Elke,

Thanks for your recent email. Wagner's change of heart mid-Ring is a fascinating development that few (if any) productions address. It coincided with Act 2 of Walküre, which is, I think, the most important Act in The Ring. We can be specific because Wagner describes the process in detail in *Mein Leben*, dating it in fact to September 1854. He says that on September 26th he completed the fair copy of the score of Rheingold. Then, in the tranquillity and stillness of his house, he became acquainted with 'a book, the study of which was to assume vast importance to me'. This was of course Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.

The poem for Walküre had been pretty well finished by July 1852 although some tinkering seems to have gone on until January 1853. By 1st September 1854 he had completed the compositional sketch of Act 1, on 4th September he began Act 2, and then the Schopenhauerian revelation came soon after the 26th. You might ask why, if the poem had been completed by January 1853, should the text reflect anything of his 1854 conversion? The explanation is that he had, in his exile in Switzerland, been subconsciously moving towards this new view of the world, without being able to articulate it. In fact, he says: 'At first, this didn't sit well with me at all, and I didn't want to abandon the so-called "cheerful" Greek view of the world which had provided my vantage point for surveying my "Art-work of the Future". Actually it was Herwegh [who had introduced him to Schopenhauer's writings] who made me reflect further on my own feelings with a well-timed word. This insight into the essential nothingness of the world of appearances, he contended, lies at the root of all tragedy and every great poet, and even every great man, must necessarily feel it intuitively. I looked at my Nibelung poems and recognised to my amazement that the very things I now found so unpalatable in the theory were already long familiar to me in my own poetic conception. Only now did I understand my own Wotan myself and, greatly shaken, I went on to a closer study of Schopenhauer's book.'

So, when Wagner began working in earnest on Act 2, he was no longer torn between trying to reconcile his old philosophical position with what he now felt instinctively to be right, and he proceeded with all the zeal of a man who had 'seen the light'. If Wagner now believed that the world was not worth saving (as he said to Liszt in his letter of October 1854) it was because he was convinced that he should look elsewhere for a remedy for humanity's ills - not to the power struggles of mankind but to the inner nature of man. The consequence of this is that Brünnhilde's revelation at the end of *Götterdämmerung* is that hope resides not in 'the essential nothingness of appearances' but in an inner wisdom born of love - love to the point of suffering and sacrifice. This of course, provides the philosophical springboard for Parsifal where love - as compassion - shares the sufferings of others. It is related to *Tristan und Isolde*, which was also a product of his reading of Schopenhauer in 1854, which he acknowledges in *Mein Leben*. The ending of *Tristan*, the ending of *Parsifal* and the ending of *Götterdämmerung* are all related and are manifestations of the same mind-set.

In rejecting worldly solutions that merely put us back on the same old treadmill, Wagner is suggesting that we should look to our inner nature, for it is there that hope truly resides - expressed in the ravishing finale, so full of light.

The ending of *Götterdämmerung* is a qualitative leap of the most dramatic kind - a rejection of the old (political) solutions that inevitably keep producing more Wotans and more Alberichs. 'Knowing ourselves, rather than manipulating others' seems to be at the heart of it.

Warm wishes,

Peter

Page 1 of 1

Mon, 7 Apr 2003 10:46 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: elke neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Monday, 7 April 2003 10:18 AM
Subject: Re: Greetings!

Dear Elke,

Thanks for your comments on the translation. It will be an appendix to the book. There will also be a second appendix with some musical examples - not the usual thematic guide but rather showing that, at the heart of The Ring's music is 'melody', a fact sometimes overlooked when people talk about Wagner's music. This seems to be a point close to Asger's heart and something he would like to bring out. The more I listen to The Ring, the more I'm struck by it's melodiousness. Subconsciously, I think that this was one of the things that appealed to me about it as a child.

The manuscript is with the publisher now (Wakefield Press in Adelaide) and I hope to receive proofs in a month or two, with the book being finished in time for the September Weekend launch. This time, the illustrations will be a complete set of 40 lithographs by Hugo Brause (1872 - ?) that are quite striking but rarely reproduced.

One idea for the poster that Steve is attracted to is a combination of a misty, early morning, almost monochromatic scene across the water of the Torrens, with Jeffrey Smart's drawing superimposed - all put together by a graphic designer. This would be one way of combining some specifically Adelaide element along with the watery, misty elements of the production design. This might be a way to go, or it might not. I'll certainly keep you in the picture on this. If the design could be agreed in time for the September Weekend, that would be an ideal occasion to launch it - perhaps at the dinner.

It must have been nice to have had your son with you - the house probably seems quiet without him. We notice that after our son has been home for a while too. Next week, Carol and I are going to join Simon on his cruise ship for a little cruise between Hawaii and Tahiti, getting back on the 27th. Its the first time we have been able to join him and I'm looking forward to just watching the ocean go by.

Warmest wishes,

Peter

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Item: Inbox folder

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Der Ring des Nibelungen

Adelaide 2004

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1 of 4

The Ring of the Nibelung by Richard Wagner

Subject: Hello

To: "peter bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>

Date: Tue, 13 May 2003 22:14:25 +1000

From: "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

Cycle 1 - 16 November - 22 November 2004

Cycle 2 - 26 November - 2 December 2004

Cycle 3 - 6 December - 12 December 2004

Status: Normal

Save Address

State OPERA
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Dear Peter,

General Director

Stephen Phillips

are you back from your Love Boat yet?? Long time no hear..

I have had expression of interest from a German Film maker to produce a Doco on the Ring. He could not come to Australia until quite late in our Rehearsal time and would probably work with a German TV Station or with SBS. He is quite a famous guy in Germany (Norbert Belharz, at present doing film on Abbado)

Where are we at with Beresford. Has it died? There would be no point doubling up, so Belharz would like to know before he'd go any further.

There has also been a suggestion by a Bayreuth regular that we should do postcards like they do, making lots of money. I think that's a good idea, particularly since the Adelaide photographer is rather good. Altogether one should probably take a leaf out of Bayreuth's book in terms of photographic material available. Unfortunately there was absolutely nothing available for the public. There was also no dvd made nor even a decent video which I really think is a great shame

Someone has to adress this this time round. I know I won't give it a thought once we start in serious. Ultimately it's money for SOSA, and God knows we need it!

I've reached the last scene in Walkure, starting tomorrow. Then there's the Act II Wotan/Alberich scene from Siegfried that you guys lumbered me with, because I have no Walkure cast to rehearse. Then I need to revise it all. Still hoping for that ever-elusive holiday..

Hope yours was good!

best wishes and greetings,

Elke

Elke

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.../dmailweb.cgi?cmd=item&utoken=pbassett@210.8.44.14_2910713b4948651f505800&iten15-May-03
216 Marion Road Netley SA 5007 PO Box 211 Marlestone BC SA 5033

Telephone +61 8 8226 4790 Fax +61 8 8226 4791 Email info@saopera.sa.gov.au www.saopera.sa.gov.au

Part Number 316/2004



Subject: Re: Hello

To: "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

Date: Thu, 15 May 2003 16:19:53 +1000

Status: Normal

From: "Peter Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>

[Save Address](#)

Dear Elke,

Thanks for your note and my apologies for the long silence. We had a great cruise thanks and it was good to see our son in situ. He has quite taken to life on the ocean wave, which is surprising since our family is not particularly nautical. Perhaps its just the call of distant places.

Since returning, I've been doing the Cav & Pag program and writing articles on Dead Man Walking. Also did a small piece on Wagner's enthusiasm for Bellini.

Delighted to hear about Nobert Beilharz's interest in doing something on our Ring. The Beresford project has run into a brick wall I'm afraid, because, after more than two years, his producer has not been able to secure the overseas funding. This has been frustrating for me because I had worked on four versions of the script and the exchanges took a lot of time and effort. I have to say that I was not happy about the direction in which they wanted to take things in order to 'popularise' it, so I'm relieved in a way that the time has come to draw a line.

I'm now looking at using a local person to do something with a much more modest budget. We'll trial it with the Ring Weekend and rehearsals in August/September, so that we have something for the record. However, there is definitely room to have a German perspective from someone of Beilharz' standing and I would be very keen to explore this. I've mentioned it in passing to Steve and he too supports the idea. Is Beilharz likely to bring his own funding with him I wonder?? Please let him know that his involvement would be very welcome.

I agree entirely about the postcards. I'm handling the ancillary events/merchandise this time and am determined to do much more in this regard than in the past. Incidentally, I had a call from Jeffrey Smart the other evening. He has promised us his drawing by August.

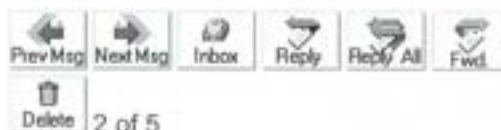
Glad to hear you are nearing the end of Walkure (for the moment). I recently picked up a recording of Margery Lawrence singing it in 1940 in Buenos Aires (Erich Kleiber conducting). Her 'War es so schmaerlich' was wonderfully moving. Exciting to hear the last Australian Bruennhilde, in the year before she contracts polio.

Looking forward to catching up again soon.

Warmest wishes,

Peter

.../dmailweb.cgi?cmd=item&utoken=pbassett@210.8.44.14_2910713b49496a1c4c5800&item15-May-03



Subject: Re: Hello

To: "elke neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>

Date: Thu, 15 May 2003 11:23:28 +1000

Status: Normal

From: "Peter Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>

[Save Address](#)

Dear Elke,

I hope you received my email yesterday. I'm in Adelaide sending messages via a link to my ISP, so I'm never quite sure that messages have gone.

You mentioned the Wotan/Alberich scene in Siegfried. My theory is that this scene is a homage to Weber. The opening, with its spooky musical atmosphere, soft tympany beats and lights in the forest is very reminiscent of the Wolf's Glen. As a little boy, Wagner was so taken by Der Freischuetz that he made a model theatre in which to 'stage' it. Weber used to dine with Ludwig Geyer, Johanna and the children in Leipzig and he encouraged Richard in his flights of fancy. So, I think this scene in Siegfried is the 'boy's' fond acknowledgement of his debt to the great man. The mood of German romanticism fits perfectly too with the general 'Grimmsian' spirit of Siegfried.

Warmest wishes,

Peter



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Fri, 11 Jul 2003 8:05 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Friday, 11 July 2003 8:05 AM
Subject: Back Home

Hello Elke,

I'm back home after my wanderings at the other end of the world. It was a fascinating trip but I'm glad to be back. The Savonlinna festival was a very professional affair and I would certainly like to go there again. Lovely Rigoletto, and the chorus work in the Dutchman was a highlight - convincing acting by the large chorus. There was a striking solution for the phantom crew of the Dutchman's ship. When they responded to the taunts of the Norwegian sailors, black slimy arms appeared through holes in the ship's walls, writhing around like maggots protruding from rotting flesh. Truly horrifying and an unforgettable effect.

peras in Riga and St Petersburg were enjoyable but standards fluctuated. In St Petersburg (Mussorgsky Theatre) we even had a black and white cat upstaging Onegin and Lensky in the duel scene. It wandered across the stage during Lensky's aria, sat for a while looking at the audience and then leapt into a box, from which it took a bow at the end to great applause!

Flat out now doing the program for Dead Man Walking, various newsletters and preparations for the September Weekend.

Hope all goes well. Looking forward to seeing you soon.

Warmest wishes,

Peter

Page 1 of 1

Tue, 15 Jul 2003 9:46 AM

From: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
To: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
Date: Monday, 14 July 2003 8:36 PM
Subject: Re: Back Home

Dear Peter,

thanks for the interesting report of your travels. I heard a bit about the Savonlinna Rigoletto from other friends of mine and I'm happy to read that you got at least one performance of Wagner somewhere! I'm looking forward to hearing more when next we have a leisurely lunch, surely it is overdue! The story with the cat reminds me of the possum in the S.O.H after it was first opened. Children and animals... notorious scene stealers.

As you no doubt have heard we have had a bumpy (financial) ride but are slowly seeing land. I am looking forward to get started rather than shunting budget figures.

The date of your book launch is equally moving closer, and I would need some details before long. In fact, I know nothink! Is it the same book, possibly second edition, expanded, that you wrote for the last SOGA cycle? Who launched it at the time? How to avoid repetition? Please advise, maybe after Dead Man Walking has opened if you are too busy now?

I would need a bit of a prompt since I have not done a book launch before. I also need to know if anything else is expected from me during that weekend (I hope not, since I need time to get into Rheingold starting rehearsals the following Monday)

I hope very much that you are well and that being back in Marleaton isn't too much of a shock after your globetrottings.

Very best wishes,

Elke

----- Original Message -----

From: "P Bassett" <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: "Elke Neidhardt" <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Sent: Friday, July 11, 2003 8:05 AM
Subject: Back Home

> Hello Elke,

>

> I'm back home after my wanderings at the other end of the world. It was a
> fascinating trip but I'm glad to be back. The Savonlinna festival was a
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> Lovely Rigoletto, and the chorus work in the Dutchman was a highlight -
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> upstaging Onegin and Lensky in the duel scene. It wandered across the

Page 1 of 2

Tue, 15 Jul 2003 9:15 AM

From: P Bassett <pbassett@webone.com.au>
To: Elke Neidhardt <eneidhardt@optusnet.com.au>
Date: Tuesday, 15 July 2003 9:15 AM
Subject: Re: Back Home

Dear Elke,

Thanks for your message. I would love to get together to 'do lunch' again soon. Perhaps in Adelaide? I'll be there for most of August. I'm reading the proofs of the book at the moment and it will be printed soon. I'll get a copy to you (or at least a final proof) as soon as possible. I have revised the 1998 version, and while much is the same, I have made some additions and changes that reflect the latest state of my thinking. I suspect it will never stop being a 'work in progress' - what fun! The major new elements are the appendices and a new set of illustrations using forty rarely-seen lithographs by Hugo Braune (b. 1872). Appendix I is a complete prose version of the libretto. Appendix II provides musical examples designed to show that The Ring is, amongst other things, a monument to melody. I am increasingly convinced of the latter.

I appreciate greatly your willingness to launch the book (also an occasion for some hints about your approach to the present production?). Apart from that, I hope you will be my guest at the gala dinner on the Saturday evening. If you would also like to attend the ASO concert conducted by Asher on the Friday evening (with Deborah Riedel doing the Four Last Songs and Natalie Jones doing Boultate Jubilate) I shall gladly arrange this.

The Ring is an obsession, I freely admit, and has been since I was a boy. No matter how old I get, I still recall my joy on discovering it for the first time. I don't think I can say quite the same about any other work of art, except perhaps some of Beethoven's symphonies. There is a 'truthfulness' about it - like a work of nature - 'as irresistible as the sea', Debussy said. That is what motivates me.

Warm regards,

Peter

Page 1 of 1

APPENDIX 5

Media release of 10 May 2000 from the Commonwealth Minister for the Arts providing details of an increase to performing arts funding from which government funding of the 2004 *Ring* was derived.

Media Release



SENATOR THE HON RICHARD ALSTON

*Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate*

ALL STATES AGREE TO BOOST PERFORMING ARTS FUNDING

The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, today announced that all States had now agreed to contribute to the Commonwealth's proposed \$70.2 million national funding boost for the performing arts.

'The Commonwealth will therefore provide a total of \$45.012 million over four years to the package, with the States providing a total of \$25.206m over four years,' Senator Alston said.

'The Commonwealth contribution comprises the \$43.3m announced in last night's budget, and an additional reallocation of existing funding. The package will secure the artistic and financial futures of the nation's 31 major performing arts companies, in line with the recommendations of the Major Performing Arts Inquiry - the Nugent Inquiry.

'These 31 companies make a major contribution to national social and economic activity. The Inquiry found that in 1998, for example, they generated \$124 million in box office revenue, employed more than 3,300 people, and generated \$2.80 of additional economic activity for every dollar they earned.

'But the Inquiry found the companies were often in dire financial straits due to rising costs, static or falling sponsorship, and pressures from other entertainment forms on box office revenue.

'The Commonwealth decided to tackle the root cause of these problems. We established the Inquiry to identify ways in which the sector could become financial stable so that it could continue to pursue artistic excellence.

'As a result of the generous contributions, constructive input and collaboration of all States, the Commonwealth's response to the Inquiry findings will achieve the longer term goal of greater earned income and therefore financial stability for the companies, while accepting the key role of government to offer immediate and ongoing financial support.'

The funding package comprises \$31.2 million in increases to base funding for the companies and \$12.1m for an Industry Adjustment Package, which will fund measures designed to improve the companies' financial, marketing, sponsorship and audience development skills.

'The companies face a dilemma - they need to earn extra sponsorship and extra box office revenue but they lack the resources and staff needed to develop potential sponsors and audiences. The Industry Package provides the money the companies need to improve their marketing and money-raising skills,' Senator Alston said.

'The Industry Package won't replace government funding, but will ensure the companies can supplement government funds.'

Senator Alston thanked the Inquiry Chair, Dr Helen Nugent, and Inquiry members David Gonski, Catherine Walter and Michael Chaney for their hard work.

'The performing arts in Australia owe these four individuals, and their support staff, a debt of gratitude,' Senator Alston said.

The Commonwealth and States have broadly accepted the Inquiry's recommended funding levels for individual companies. Details of individual company funding levels are still subject to the negotiation of performance agreements between the company and the Commonwealth and relevant State Government.

'However, the Commonwealth does not accept the proposed classification nomenclature – particularly the term "regional". For example, the Commonwealth does not believe that the term "regional flagship" accurately reflects the artistic output nor aspirations of the Melbourne Theatre Company or WA Symphony Orchestra,' Senator Alston said.

'In the case of the MTC, the Commonwealth sees no distinction between its high standards and the Sydney Theatre Company – both are truly great companies.

'The Commonwealth, in collaboration with the South Australian Government, has also decided to increase the funding allocated to the State Opera of SA. This will allow SOSA to stage an Australian production of the Ring Cycle.

'SOSA gained an international reputation for their Ring Cycle, and as a result expect significant international interest in tour package for their Wagner productions, demonstrating the clear economic and social benefits of investment in the arts.'

Senator Alston said the Commonwealth had also rejected the Inquiry's recommended merger of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and State Orchestra of Victoria.

'The Commonwealth has instead proposed a significant funding boost for the MSO, and an increase in funding for the SOV. This will provide both orchestras a more secure financial base, while allowing both to improve their already impressive artistic standards,' Senator Alston said.

'Among other initiatives, the Commonwealth will provide substantial additional funding for Circus Oz to purchase a new performance tent – thus giving the company greater flexibility in performances and fund raising – and to expand its output.'

Senator Alston thanked his State colleagues for their cooperation and input – Premier Bob Carr of NSW, Premier Jim Bacon of Tasmania, Mary Delahunty of Victoria, Diana Laidlaw of SA, Mike Board of WA, and Matt Foley of Queensland.

Media Contact: Terry O'Connor, Senator Alston's office 0419 636 879
Website www.richardalston.deita.gov.au

37/00
10 May 2000

Endnote: The way that the GST affects Budget estimates, accounting statements and appropriations is described in Budget Paper No. 4.

State-by-state breakdown of contributions and companies:

	Commonwealth contribution	State contribution
NSW:	\$19.158m	\$10.512
Opera Australia, Musica Viva, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, Sydney Dance Company, Bangarra Dance Company, Sydney Theatre Company, Company B, Bell Shakespeare Company, Symphony Australia*		
Vic:	\$10.08m	\$7.099m
The Australian Ballet, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, State Orchestra of Victoria, Melbourne Theatre Company, Playbox Theatre Centre, Circus Oz		
Qld:	\$5.639m	\$1.361m
Opera Queensland, Queensland Ballet, Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Queensland Philharmonic Symphony, Queensland Theatre Company		
WA:	\$4.401m	\$4.258m
West Australian Opera, West Australian Ballet, West Australian Symphony Orchestra, Black Swan Theatre Company		
SA:	\$5.468m	\$1.185m
State Opera of South Australia, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Australian Dance Theatre		
Tas:	\$0.266m	\$0.791m
Tasmania Symphony Orchestra		
Total:	\$45.012m	\$25.206m

* All States contribute equally to Symphony Australia funding

APPENDIX 6 Auditor-General's Report for FY 2003-04. (Excerpt)

State Opera of SA

AUDIT FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

Audit Opinions

Audit of Financial Statements

In my opinion, the financial report presents fairly in accordance with the Treasurer's Instructions promulgated under the provisions of the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1987*, applicable accounting standards and other mandatory professional reporting requirements in Australia, the financial position of the State Opera of South Australia as at 30 June 2004, its financial performance and cash flows for the year then ended.

Assessment of Controls

Audit formed the opinion that the controls exercised by the State Opera of South Australia in relation to the receipt, expenditure and investment of money, the acquisition and disposal of property and the incurring of liabilities except for the matter referred to under Production Evaluation and Approval and Relationship with the State Supply Board are sufficient to provide reasonable assurance that the financial transactions of the State Opera of South Australia have been conducted properly and in accordance with law.

Audit Communications to Management

Matters arising during the course of the audit were detailed in management letters to the General Director. The responses to the management letter were generally considered to be satisfactory. Major matters raised with the State Opera and the related responses are considered herein.

Production Evaluation and Approval

Audit observed that the State Opera does not have formal documented policies and procedures for the evaluation and approval of operatic productions.

State Opera responded that it will endeavour to develop a more formal procedure and policy in relation to the evaluation and approval of future 'existing' productions and for small scale, low budget 'new' productions.

Relationship with the State Supply Board

Last year Audit noted instances where the contracting and procurement activities associated with the construction of sets for the 2004-05 production of *The Ring* had not been undertaken in accordance with policies of the State Supply Board. Audit recommended that State Opera seek written clarification from the State Supply Board regarding its accredited purchasing delegation threshold and obtain appropriate ratification from the State Supply Board for procurement and contracting activities already carried out.

During 2003-04 Audit noted that the State Opera had not sought written clarification from the State Supply on these matters.

In June 2004 the State Opera sought retrospective approval from the State Supply Board to waive a competitive tendering process for set construction for *The Ring*. The State Supply Board has responded that it is unable to approve this request.

Risk Management

Audit observed that the State Opera had not developed a risk management plan to ensure that the requirements of its risk management policy were being met. Specifically, Audit noted that State Opera had not initiated a formal process to identify, analyse, assess, treat and monitor potential risks.

State Opera responded that during 2003-04 it had completed a detailed exercise of identifying risks associated with the staging of *The Ring*, which included undertaking specific occupational health and safety audits relevant to the staging of the production at the Festival Theatre. The State Opera indicated that this assessment would provide the basis on which to develop a formal process for the identification, analysis, assessment and treatment of potential risks for future productions.

operations	(0.6)	1.97	0.62	0.83
investing	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.16)	(0.01)
financing	-	-	-	-
Change in Cash	(0.62)	1.94	0.46	0.82
Cash at 30 June	2.91	3.53	1.59	1.13

The analysis of cash flows demonstrates the significant receipts from Box Office and Productions and the production, administration marketing and other payments all associated with the production of the Ring Cycle in 2004-05. As is discussed elsewhere these receipts are recognised as liabilities at Advance Box Office and the payments are recognised as prepayments.

FURTHER COMMENTARY ON OPERATIONS

The Ring

In June 2000 the State Opera prepared a five year business plan which incorporated initial budget estimated costs of \$9.3 million for a 2004-05 production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring). The business plan was approved by the Board in August 2000. This initial expenditure budget represented a \$1.4 million increase on the actual production costs incurred for the 1998 production of The Ring, and took into consideration that the 1998 production was an existing production which had previously been staged in Europe. The 2004-05 production was proposed to be a new production.

Audit have observed that since June 2000 a number of revisions have been made to the production budget. On the 27 April 2004 the State Opera approved a revised budget of \$14.2 million. The increase in the budget from the June 2000 estimates is due mainly to increases in the estimated costs associated with scenery and costumes, casual production staff costs to be incurred during the performances, and additional costs associated with the contracting of a full time Executive Producer and Associate Producer.

Budget projections reflecting Commonwealth and State funding, box office sales and other revenue, less production costs reflect an estimated loss of \$451 000.

In last year's Report Audit commented that:

- Audit had been unable to locate documentation which supported a conclusion that the State Opera's decision to schedule the 2004-05 production of The Ring was based on a full review and evaluation of the merits of the production;
- the designer contracted to provide a creative design for The Ring had failed to deliver completed designs by the agreed date of December 2002;
- contracting and procurement activities associated with the construction of sets for the production had not been undertaken in accordance with the policies of the State Supply Board.

In this Report under the heading 'Audit Communications to Management', Audit has noted that the State Supply Board advised State Opera that it was not able to provide approval to waive a competitive tendering process for the construction of sets.



ADELAIDE RING 2004

REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

The total revenues and expenses for 'The Ring' as provided by the State Opera of South Australia is shown in the following table:

The Ring

	Total \$'000
REVENUES	
State Government grants	2 546
Commonwealth Government grants	4 347
Box office and production revenue	5 727
Donations	849
Sponsorship	1 351
Sundry revenue	139
Total Revenues	14 959
	Total \$'000
EXPENSES	
Performers and employee entitlements	5 010
Theatre hire and related expenses	2 599
Costumes and sets	4 757
Advertising	334
Travel and accommodation	1 009
Shipping and freight	202
Administration	994
Other expenses	232
Total Expenses	15 143
OPERATING DEFICIT	(178)

Statement of Cash Flows

The following table summarises the net cash flows for the four years to 2005.

	2005 \$'million	2004 \$'million
Net Cash Flows		
Operations	(1.49)	(0.6)
Investing	(0.01)	(0.02)
Financing	-	-
Change in Cash	(1.5)	(0.62)
Cash at 30 June	1.41	2.91

The analysis of cash flows demonstrates the significant box office and production receipts and the production, administration marketing and other payments associated with the production of the 2004 Ring. As discussed previously these receipts are recognised as liabilities and the payments are recognised as prepayments.

FURTHER COMMENTARY ON OPERATIONS

Production Statistics

Unaudited statistical details for major productions over the last three years, as provided by the State Opera, are presented in the following table:

	2004-05 Numbers
Number of major productions	4
Number of performances	12
Total seat capacity	21 552
Number of seats sold*	20 260
Average number of seats sold per performance	1 688
	\$
Production costs per seat sold**	747
Box office and production revenue per seat sold	283
Subsidy per seat sold***	465
Government subsidy per seat sold****	340

* Seats sold exclude complimentary tickets.

** Excludes Opera Conference support and other production costs.

*** Subsidy per seat sold represents the amount of government grants, private sponsorship and donations received by the State Opera per seat sold.

**** Government subsidy per seat sold represents the amount of State and Commonwealth Government grants received by the State Opera per seat sold.

APPENDIX 8

Ethical approval

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

30-Jan-2014

Dear MR BASSETT

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the conditional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "NR: Playing with fire: the pursuit of a Wagner performing tradition in Adelaide in the decade 1995-2005, and factors impeding its realisation." (GU Ref No: QCM/01/14/HREC).

This is to confirm receipt of the remaining required information, assurances or amendments to this protocol.

Consequently, I reconfirm my earlier advice that you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply.

Regards

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CONFIDENTIAL APPENDICES (9 – 21) IN A SEPARATE SECTION

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The LARES acoustic enhancement system was installed in the Festival Theatre for the 1998 Ring. Its function, to correct acoustic imbalance and ‘dead spots’ was the subject of considerable discussion, and its use (also in the Berlin State Opera and other theatres) was criticised by, for example, Speight Jenkins of Seattle Opera.

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One of the unexpected consequences of orchestral performance of the *Ring*, with implications for size of orchestra and engagement of relief musicians.

SA Centre for Economic Studies in association with Richard Trembath Research and Robyn Kunko Market Research, (1999). *Wagner’s Ring Cycle, Adelaide. A Study of the Economic Impact of the Event and Associated Issues*. Adelaide: South Australian Tourism Commission.

A detailed study of the economic benefits of the 1998 *Ring*; includes responses from surveys and calculations of expenditure. A key source of information.