



Wagner on the Potomac

For the study and enjoyment of Wagner's Art

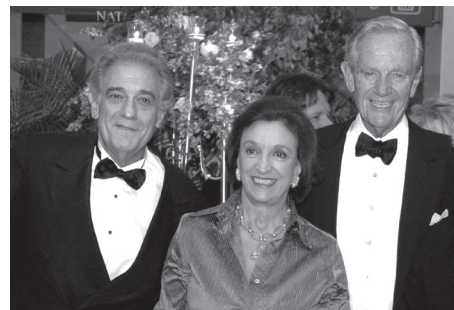
August 2006

Vol. 8 No. 1

Washington National Opera (WNO) Marks its 50th Anniversary

W

Placido Domingo, WNO General Director, with John Pohanka, WNO Chairman and WSWDC Board Member, with Selwa "Lucky" Roosevelt, Chair of the 50th Anniversary Gala. Society Members attended the gala performance and cast dinner party this season in support of the WNO. Maestro Domingo received the Wagner Society Award in 2001.



WNO LAUNCHES THE "AMERICAN" RING

Washington's first complete cycle of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* will be performed in 2010. This past spring, the WNO presented critically acclaimed performances of *Das Rheingold* in the first opera of the cycle directed by Francesca Zambello. Members

were in the enthusiastic audience for the opening night performance on March 25 and attend the cast dinner party afterwards in support of the WNO's ever new achievements. (See p. 2 for the broad range of WSWDC programs on the American Ring during this program season.)

Maestro Heinz Fricke, WNO Music Director, Celebrates the 60th Anniversary of His Conducting Career!



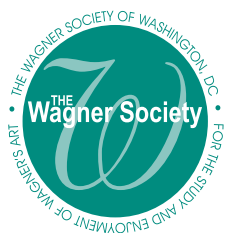
In honor of the 60th anniversary of Maestro Fricke's distinguished conducting career, German Ambassador Klaus Scharioth hosted a dinner at the German Embassy on May 16, 2006 attended by (photo left to right) WSWDC Chairman Jim Holman, WNO Director of Artistic Operations Christina Scheppelmann, Evelyn Lear, Maestro Fricke, Thomas Stewart, Bonnie Stewart, Diana Holman, and WSWDC President Aury Fernandez. Maestro Fricke received the Wagner Society Award in 2002.

THE 12th EVELYN LEAR AND THOMAS STEWART EMERGING SINGERS CONCERT with the McLean Orchestra under the baton of Maestra Sylvia Alimena was presented on June 14, 2006 at the Oakcrest School in McLean VA. (See p. 4.)

WAGNER IN DER WILDNIS VI (PARSIFAL) was a resounding success for the 6th straight year in the weekend retreat at Cacapon State Park, WV. (See p. 2)

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THE WINTER – SPRING 2006 SEASON

January 19. **Irwin Shainman**, Professor Emeritus of Williams College, spoke on “**Wagner and Strauss Songs: Women and Love**” at The George Washington University (GWU), Fungler Hall. Professor Shainman compared Wagner’s *Wesendonck Lieder* with Richard Strauss’ *Four Last Songs* using recorded excerpts that expanded our understanding and enjoyment of the works.

February 23. **Simon Williams**, Drama Department Chairman, University of California, Santa Barbara, spoke on “**Coming to Terms with History: Nietzsche and the Ring**” at GWU Fungler Hall. Professor Williams, a regular co-lecturer at the annual Wagner in der Wildnis retreat, analyzed Nietzsche’s views on Wagner’s *Ring and* described the complex relationship between the two men.

W Programs Supporting the Washington National Opera (WNO) “American” Ring Die Walküre, Goethe-Institut and Kennedy Center

Goethe-Institut March 7: Symposium with Francesca Zambello and cast; March 9 lecture by Saul Lilientstein.

Fungler Hall March 18: WSWDC Meeting with Francesca Zambello and cast.

Kennedy Center Millennium Stage March 23: *Die Walküre* Lecture by Society Chairman Jim Holman.

WNO March 25: opening night performance and cast dinner party.



Gordon Hawkins as Alberich. Critics agreed: “he stole the show.”

April 13. **John Edward Niles** spoke on “**The Carriers of the Flame: Humperdinck, Pfitzner, and von Schillings**” at GWU Fungler Hall. Niles is on the WSWDC Board, is the Program Director of the Emerging Singers Program (ESP), and is the Artistic Director/Conductor of the Opera Theatre of Northern Virginia (OTNV). His presentation included rarely heard excerpts of works of the three composers considered to be Wagner’s less well known successors.

May 12. **The WSWDC Banquet**, which alternates with the Gala Benefit, was held at the Arts Club of Washington DC, the historic home of President Monroe. Society members enjoyed a lovely dinner followed by a Wagner solo sung by ESP participant tenor Jason Saxon, accompanied by pianist Betty Bullock.

May 18. **Professor Carolyn Abbate**, Professor of Music, Harvard University, gave us “**New Perspectives on The Flying Dutchman: Reverberations**” at GWU Fungler Hall. Professor Abbate is known for her scholarship at Princeton. Members and Friends recall her talks on Wagner’s music and cinema at previous Fungler Hall and Smithsonian programs. Her perceptive talk included excerpts illustrating the subtle cinema usage of music from *The Flying Dutchman*.

June 2 to 4. **Wagner in der Wildnis, VI (Parsifal)** the 6th annual weekend retreat at Cacapon Resort State Park WV. (see report and photos, page 3)

June 14. **The 12th Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Concert** with the McLean Orchestra conducted by Maestra Sylvia Alimena. (see report page 4).

Upcoming Programs of the 2006-2007 Season

September 21. An Evening with Jeffrey Swann, “Chopin as Proto-Wagnerian” at the German Embassy. Jeffrey Swann, gifted concert artist, is a special favorite of WSWDC Members and Friends. He was praised in the New York Times (June 17) for his “consistently illuminating” comments at his New York City Bargemusic performances of Chopin’s works. (NOTE: Space is limited at the German Embassy. Reserve in advance. Members: Free. Non Members \$20.)

October 20. The 13th Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Concert at the German Embassy (see page 4 for details)

November 8. Robert Bailey, Music Department, New York University, distinguished Wagner scholar will speak at Fungler Hall. (Note: The program is on Wednesday, instead of the usual Thursday.)

December 7. Donald Collup at Fungler Hall will present a two-hour documentary on the life of Astrid Varnay titled: “Never Before”, a multimedia essay about her career.

The exciting Winter- Spring 2007 Season!

Dates and speakers for additional programs – including those with Jonathan Dean and Thomas May – will be announced.

March 24. Opening Night of WNO *Die Walküre* directed by Francesca Zambello as the “American” Ring will continue with *Siegfried* in 2008, *Götterdämmerung* in 2009, and a complete WNO Ring in 2010. There will be Wagner Society programs all along the way! The Society will have opening night performance and cast party tickets for Members and guests.

Spring. WSWDC Bi-annual Gala Benefit (Members and Guests).

June 1-3. Wagner in der Wildnis VII (*Lohengrin*) (Members only.)

August 2007. Bayreuther Festspiele (Members only). Ticket availability will be announced by January.

Wagner in der Wildnis VI (2006) Parsifal

W

Our sixth annual weekend retreat devoted to a single Wagner opera – *Parsifal* this year – achieved the purposes of our motto: “..the study and enjoyment of Wagner’s art.” The West Virginia countryside at Cacapon Resort State Park, near Berkeley Springs, was again the site of the event. Our two main speakers – the “dream team” of Jeffrey Swann (music) and Simon Williams (drama) – inspired lively discussion, in the lecture hall, over meals, and during social evenings, among the 60 participants. The traditional Saturday-night libretto reading, by a cast of well rehearsed Members, was accompanied by Jeffrey Swann at the piano and Simon Williams reading (the role of) Gurnemanz.



The “dream team”: Jeffrey Swann at the piano and Simon Williams (left) with Betty Byrne (libretto-reading director) and Aury Fernandez (moderator).



Member Henry Bardach (Klingsore) waves a prop cape to RG Head (Parsifal), Carole Hoover (Kundry), and other readers in the background – who shared in the applause.

W

The Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart

The 12th Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Concert

The McLean Orchestra, under the baton of Maestra Sylvia Alimena, accompanied the Emerging Singers, on June 14, 2006, at the Oakcrest School in McLean VA. The concert added new dimensions to the Orchestra's repertoire of successful performances. The evening opened with a brilliant playing of the Prelude to Act I of *Die Meistersinger* which established a spirited tone for the evening's concert. The second half featured a riveting performance of the Magic Fire Music from *Die Walküre*. The singers distinguished themselves with excerpts from *Tristan und Isolde*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*.

The singers had prepared for the concert in master classes and rehearsals with Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart and the Orchestra. A DVD of the concert was presented to Members of The Golden Ring 2006 (see page 6), who had been designated as sponsors for the event in appreciation of their generous contributions.



Bravos and Kudos at the end of the concert!

(Photo, left to right) Thomas Stewart, Evelyn Lear, mezzo-soprano Jennifer Roderer, Maestra Sylvia Alimena, tenor David Smith, sopranos Gail Sullivan, Kara Harman, and Luciana Cecille (who sang from a balcony as the Waldvogel accompanying David Smith's Siegfried).

The Washington Post

Style

Music

Friday, June 16, 2006

Wagner in McLean: Refreshing, if Distilled

The work of Wagner, who stitched his music dramas together so brilliantly, does not fit the concert format very well. All his works are so tightly knit that unraveling them into excerpts produces an ill-shaped garment.

Nevertheless, the Emerging Singers Program — a partnership of opera singers Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart and the Wagner Society of Washington — offered a mostly effective showcase for upcoming talent on Wednesday night.

The McLean Orchestra, conducted by Sylvia Alimena, was one reason, presenting a sturdy, stirring "Meistersinger" Overture —

aided by the resonant acoustics at Oakcrest School in McLean — as well as the "Magic Fire Music" from "Die Walkure."

But the evening belonged to the singers — including two Isoldees. Kara Harmon's strong voice and dramatic delivery brought power and pathos to the "Narrative and Curse" from Act I of "Tristan und Isolde." Gail Sullivan was less successful in the climactic, dauntingly difficult "Liebestod," her rich tone impaired by too much tremolo and some pronunciation difficulties (perhaps from nervousness).

Mezzo-soprano Jennifer Roderer brought a dark-toned voice,

dusky and intense, to "Waltraute's Narrative" from Act I of "Götterdämmerung," but sometimes had to shout to be heard over the orchestra.

Tenor David Smith's rather light voice in the "Forging Song" from "Siegfried" filled out with power and stronger character in the "Forest Murmurs" scene, with soprano Luciana Cecille a clear and effective Forest Bird.

Irritatingly, a half-hour intermission, late start and pre-concert speeches added up to nearly as much non-music as performance. Next time, more Wagner, please!

— Mark J. Estren

The 13th Emerging Singers Concert October 20, 2006 at the German Embassy

Singers: soprano Kara Harman, tenor Christopher Owens, tenor Jeffrey Spring, and baritone Jason Stearns will sing excerpts from *Die Meistersinger*, *Lohengrin*, *Das Rheingold*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Tristan und Isolde* accompanied by pianist Betty Bullock. An information flyer will be sent to readers on our mailing list. (Questions? Call 301.907.2600)

See www.wagner-dc.org

Stewart Emerging Singers Program

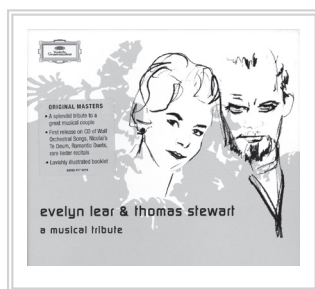
Master Classes, Support, Advice, Contacts, and Financial Assistance for Emerging Singers

Since 2001, the Emerging Singers Program has given important financial assistance to a number of Wagner singers at the start of their careers. In addition to performance fees for those who are selected to perform in the concerts, cash grants have been awarded to some singers for their particular needs in career development. Common examples include fees for coaching in other cities and help with travel in the US and to Europe for opera house auditions -- always with the influential

recommendations of Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart. Some examples of unusual expenses have been fees for speech therapy and even occasional wardrobe assistance.

Since the start of the Program, Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart have provided career guidance to more than 70 singers who have sought their advice and contacts. More than 30 of these singers have performed in our 12 semi-annual Emerging Singer concerts.

Musical Tribute to Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart



Deutsche Grammophon has issued a five-CD set of Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart recordings in honor of their distinguished careers. It provides an extensive record of their contributions to opera-singing history.

The treats for Wagnerians in this collection include incomparable set recordings such as Stewart's recording of Wotan's *Abshied* (*Die Walküre*) and *Die Frist ist um*

(*Holländer*) and Evelyn Lear's contributions to Wagner disography such as her inimitable performances of Senta. Also represented in the recordings besides Wagner are Bach, Handel, Mozart, Schubert, von Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Grechanivo, Verdi, Offenbach, Strauss, Wolf, Berg, and Leonard Bernstein, all recorded during the span of the singing careers of the legendary Lear and Stewart. The 5-CD set is offered as a premium to Members of the Golden Circle 2007 (see page 7).

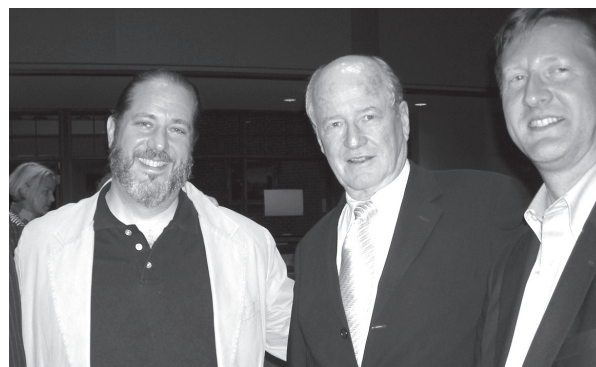
EMERGING SINGERS UPDATE

The Wagner Singer (Vol 3, No 1) (October 2006) will report on the impressive progress of selected singers who have taken part in the program such as:

- Jennifer Wilson whose *Turandot* at Opera Australia was widely acclaimed by the critics.
- Charles Robert Austin who returns to the Los Angeles Opera as the Landgrave in *Tannhäuser* after successful performances as King Hrothgar in Elliot Goldenthal's *Grendel*.
- Thomas Rolf Truhitte who reprised Froh in the Toronto Ring after successful performances in Seattle.
- Amanda Mace who was Ortlinde in Bayreuth 2006.

Supporters of the Emerging Singers Program and singers aspiring to apply for the Program will find especially informative the interview of Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart broadcast by WGMS (Washington DC) in its *Via la Voce* series. A partial transcript of the interview will be carried in *The Wagner Singer* (October 2006).

Growing interest in Emerging Singers



Concert audiences have grown steadily to include music critics such as Joe Banno of the *Washington Post* (photo left), and Jim Alison, WGMS Program Director (right), seen here with WSWDC Board Member Thomas L. Arthur (center).

Thanks to our Members and Contributors

Thanks to all our Members for their dues and donations. By mid-2006, more than 500 Wagner music fans had initially joined or renewed their memberships. (See Membership form, page 7)

The Golden Ring 2006 Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Concert Sponsors

This membership category was created in August 2005 for contributions of \$1,000 or more. Golden Ring 2006 Members received the CD of Placido Domingo's *Tristan und Isolde*, released last autumn, and a DVD of the 12th ESP, June 2006, for which they were Sponsors (See report page 3). Golden Ring 2007 Members will receive the 5-CD set of "A Musical Tribute to Evelyn Lear and Thomas Stewart" (Deutsche Grammophon 2006).

W

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Sponsors, Donors, and Patrons

Members in 2006 in these three categories received a copy of Thomas May, *Decoding Wagner: An Invitation to His World of Music Drama*. In 2007, they will receive John L DiGaetani, *Essays on Wagner's Opera Cycle*, which includes a chapter by Society Chairman Jim Holman.

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THE Wagner Society of Washington, DC

MEMBERSHIP 2007 - TIME TO JOIN AGAIN OR FOR THE FIRST TIME!

The Membership Year runs from January 1 through December 31, 2007, regardless of the time of year you join. To become a member, please complete this form and either mail it with your check or credit card authorization to P.O. Box 58213, Washington, DC 20037, or fax it to 301-907-8671, or become a Member on our website: www.wagner-dc.org.

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Annual Membership Category (Check only one category)

(Note: Membership dues are tax-deductible.)

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Golden Ring Sponsors, Donors, and Patrons As an expression of our appreciation, we would like to send you a copy of John DiGaetani, *Essays on Wagner's Opera Cycle*. Yes, please No, thanks

Golden Ring only. We are pleased to offer you a copy of the 5-CD set, "Evelyn Lear & Thomas Stewart - A Musical Tribute". Yes, please No, thanks

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PLEASE REVIEW THE LEGIBILITY OF NUMBERS AND LETTERS YOU ENTERED ABOVE.

A Tribute to Martin Feinstein by Jim Holman, WSWDC Chairman

To Members and Friends of the Wagner Society: No matter where they are in the world, everybody concerned with the performance of great works of art mourns the death of Martin Feinstein. Members of the Wagner Society of Washington DC are among those people, and we hope that we can be forgiven if we feel a special affinity to Martin and his uncountable achievements.

He was the first recipient of our Society's Award and among our first lecturers, sharing his unrepressed enthusiasm for the "*Winterstürme*." He once told me that his deepest regret at the Washington Opera was not to have had the opportunity to stage a *Ring* cycle, and surely the WNO's current *Ring* will be dedicated to his memory. None of us will forget Maestro Domingo's leading the *Siegfried Idyll*, played especially at Martin's request, at the Kennedy Center memorial tribute.

Most of all, we will miss Martin as a friend, and we hope that we can, in his honor and in his shadow, continue to make a small contribution to our city's regard for great music.

The Society gives special thanks to:

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J.K. Holman,

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Aurelius Fernandez

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Editor: Aurelius Fernandez

Assistant Editor: Nancy O'Hara

Designers: Bessie Bai and Eric Lam

- + Michelle Krisel, Assistant to WNO General Director Placido Domingo, for facilitating the Die Walküre Lecture by Chairman Jim Holman.
- + Cultural Attachée Trautlieb Huelz for facilitating our programs at the German Embassy.
- + Heribert Uschtrin and Sylvia Blume for facilitating programs at the Goethe-Institut.
- + Member McKinney Russell for his editorial advice as well as copy and proof reading assistance.
- + Member Tim Scanlon for video filming all programs, including the 12th Emerging Singers Concert and Wagner in der Wildnis weekend retreat.
- + The Bayreuth Festival 2006, including Wolfgang and Gudrun Wagner, for continued encouragement and support for the Society and Ms. Karin Benke and her staff in the Ticket Office for unfailing cooperation with our Festival ticket allotment.

NOTICE TO MEMBERS AND FRIENDS:

Please note the change in our Post Office Box number and Zip Code, below.

The telephone and fax numbers as well as the website address remain unchanged.



The Wagner Society of Washington, DC

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● October 20 The 13th Emerging Singers Concert
● September 21 Jeffrey Swann
Renew Your Membership for 2007!

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