



GALA CELEBRATION OF THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Well over one hundred members and friends filled the Callaway Music Auditorium in the UWA School of Music on Sunday 24 July for a gala celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Richard Wagner Society of Western Australia.

Following a welcome from immediate Past President John Meyer, a greeting was read from Horst Eggers, the President of the Richard Wagner Verband International (RWVI), the international association of Wagner societies. His message read, in part: 'As President of the RWVI whose member you are, I congratulate you on behalf of the RWVI and personally on your 30-years jubilee and your successful history...The RWVI and I personally wish your society further successful development. Our best wishes will accompany you in your meritorious work'.

The audience then enjoyed a performance of the final scene of Act I of *Die Walküre* (from 'Winterstürme' to the end of the act), wonderfully sung by Harriet O'Shannessy as Sieglinde and Jun Zhang as Siegmund, with Christopher van Tuinen bravely stepping in at short notice to skilfully play the orchestral part on the Steinway piano.

As both a foundation member and honorary life member, as well as a frequent speaker at our meetings, Dr Sally Kester was well placed to provide an entertaining and enlightening account of the early days of the Society. She drew upon her own experience as well as quoting from *A Backward Glance*, the history of the Society's first twenty years which was written by another life member, Chris Fyfe.

Sally's description of 'Wagner mania' as being what some might think should be classified as a personality disorder provided a perfect lead-in to the presentation by Simone Young, AM, the renowned Australian opera and orchestral conductor whom the Society is extremely fortunate and proud to have as its Patron. Simone admitted that she too suffers from Wagner mania, which particularly manifested itself over a three-week period of 2013 during which she conducted all ten of the Master's mature operas and music dramas at the Hamburg Opera. She started planning this project about ten years earlier, even

before she had officially taken up her dual positions of intendant and music director at Hamburg. It was imperative to have productions already in the company's repertoire prior to 2013, with a new *Ring* being mounted over four seasons in such a way that it actually took less than three years to bring the complete cycle to the stage. There were some tricky situations that had to be negotiated and Simone gave a hilarious account of the search for a last-minute replacement for the Senta in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, with Anje Kampe having to take a circuitous route from Bayreuth in order to arrive at the opera house in Hamburg literally minutes before the curtain was due to go up.

Simone went on to talk about how young singers can be trained to become Wagnerians, and illustrated how they can come from varying backgrounds. For example, Klaus Florian Vogt began his professional career as a horn player while Siegfried Jerusalem was a bassoonist before becoming the leading Heldentenor of his generation. Catherine Foster, the Brünnhilde in the most recent production of *The Ring* at Bayreuth, initially made her name as a lyric soprano in Mozart operas. So there is no one route that singers must take into the Wagnerian repertoire, Simone explained.

On the Society's behalf, Simone presented tickets for this year's Melbourne *Ring* to Kate Milligan, a UWA music student who has shown outstanding promise in her studies to date.

Judy Flower, another foundation member and honorary life member, was given the honour of cutting the special anniversary cake, after which the assembled company joined together in enjoying the celebratory supper.

Amongst special guests at the celebration, the Society was honoured with the presence of Torsten Ketelsen, the Honorary Consul for the Federal Republic of Germany (appropriately his home city is Hamburg), and Janet Homes à Court, AC, Chair of the Board of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Simone Young was in Perth to conduct a series of concerts with the orchestra, and in 2017 she will celebrate the 20th anniversary of her first engagement with WASO.



Sally Kester, Simone Young, Torsten Ketelsen and John Meyer at the 30th Anniversary Gala (photo courtesy of Torsten Ketelsen)

THE YEAR TO DATE – AND THE REST TO COME

The annual general meeting was held on 18 March and was preceded by a short recognition of the Society's 30th anniversary, with the first public screening of a Wagner work having been presented on 16 March 1986. Outgoing President John Meyer read some extracts from *A Backward Glance*, the history written by Chris Fyfe ten years ago to mark the first twenty years of the Society's existence. Of the handful of foundation members who are still with us, two (Judy Flower and Harry Cohen) were present and were duly acknowledged. Following reports from the President (see below) and Treasurer, Constance Chapman was formally elected to the latter position after having been appointed by the Committee to that role soon after last year's AGM. Allison Fyfe and Annie Patrick were re-elected for a further two-year term as members of the Committee. The constitutional limitation on a presidential term meant that John Meyer had to stand down as President, but as no nominations had been received for this position, he continued to chair the meeting.

After the AGM there was a screening of the documentary *The Colón Ring – Wagner in Buenos Aires*. This 90 minute documentary captures very well the backstage drama of the production, planned for Wagner's Bicentennial year of 2013. It survived countless trials and tribulations and almost did not happen, yet it was successfully performed in a day, as an abridged seven hour version of *The Ring* cycle. A number of members suggested that it might be worth screening the complete film (of this incomplete version!) so the Society may look for a day in the future when this can be done.

In April we watched the production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* from Zürich in 2013, with a stellar cast of Bryn Terfel as the Dutchman, Anja Kampe as Senta, Matti Salminen as Daland, and Marco Jentsch as Erik. Because Wagner's birthday (22 May) fell on a Sunday this year, it was decided to resume the practice of a few years back of having a birthday lunch. This was held at the home of Committee member Allison Fyfe and her partner Sieg, and both their hospitality and their menu were more than appropriate for the occasion. Another resumed tradition was that of the Wagner quiz, which was designed with 22 questions (as per the date) for a possible 30 points (as per the years of the Society's existence). While nobody achieved a perfect score – and rightly so – for the questions which were a combination of difficult, less difficult, and tricky, all three of the groups into which the assembled company was divided were far from disgraced.

June saw a visit from one of our regular and favourite speakers, Peter Bassett, who gave an excellent presentation on 'Die Meistersinger and the art of reconciliation', in which he showed how Wagner combined artistic tradition with creative freedom in that particular work. This event was designed as a prelude to the screening of the 2013 Salzburg Festival production of *Die Meistersinger*, but unfortunately disaster struck at our July evening. This was scheduled for the last week of the university inter-semester break, and the School of Music had taken the opportunity of having some electrical work done in the lecture theatre that we use. Nobody had thought to check whether everything was back in working order before we were due to use the venue. The control podium had been moved and we found that absolutely nothing would work, not even the buttons for lowering the screen and turning on the projector. Being after hours, the phone number provided for technical assistance elicited no response, so there was nothing to be done except make a few announcements then linger longer than usual over supper before heading for home. Profuse apologies were received from School of Music staff once this embarrassing state of affairs was communicated to them.

This unprecedented occurrence has necessitated an adjustment to the schedule for the remainder of the year, so that Acts I and II of *Die Meistersinger* were eventually shown at our August evening – when everything worked perfectly, to great relief all round! The future schedule is now as follows:

- 21 September *Die Meistersinger*, Act III (Salzburg Festival 2013)
- 26 October *Tristan und Isolde*, Acts I and II (Bayreuth Festival 2009, with Irene Theorin and Robert Dean Smith)
- 16 November *Tristan und Isolde*, Act III, preceded by an introductory talk by Sally Kester and followed by the Annual Christmas Party

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE 2016 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Two special events opened and closed the Society's programme for 2015. In February Professor Heath Lees gave an entertaining as well as informative illustrated presentation entitled *The Ups and Downs of Wagner on Film*, which sketched the various approaches that film makers have taken to the subject of Wagner, as well as providing some illuminating insights into some of the challenges and joys that Heath had in making his own four-part series of DVDs, *Wagner's Ring: A Tale Told in Music*.

The November evening was moved from our usual venue to the Callaway Music Auditorium in order to accommodate the audience of over 100 who flocked to hear Asher Fisch give some of his practical insights into the music of *The Ring*. This provided us with a preview of what is intended as another DVD project, in which Asher will explore *The Ring* in a series of lectures with musical illustrations being supplied by the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. This project is being driven by a UK based company, Fugue State Films, which specialises in making films about classical music. The Society is supporting the project as one of its patrons and has committed some funds towards its production.

Most of the year was devoted to watching the La Scala *Ring*, which was recorded from live performances in Milan between 2010 and 2013, conducted by Daniel Barenboim and directed by Guy Cassiers. On the whole this production seemed to be well accepted by our members, and certainly the performances from some of the leading Wagnerian musicians of our generation were generally of a very high standard. We were delighted that Sally Kester was available to provide commentaries on the two nights on which only one act was being screened.

Following the 2015 annual general meeting there was a report and short performance by Fleuranne Brockway, recipient of the Society's scholarship to the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School in Brisbane in late 2014. Also at that evening, Mandy Farmer from WA Opera gave a talk about the time she spent at Covent Garden working with the production team on the Royal Opera House's *Tristan und Isolde*.

In May I had the opportunity of attending the International Richard Wagner Congress in Dessau, Germany. The Congress is held each year in a different European city by the Richard-Wagner-Verband International (the International Association of Wagner Societies) and normally includes Wagner performances as well as lectures and a meeting of delegates from Wagner societies. As our Society has not been a member of the 'Verband', I was unable to attend the delegates' meeting. However, our application to join has just been accepted and we will be able to have either a representative or a proxy at the 2016 Congress meeting in Strasbourg, France, in early May. Being a member of the Verband not only brings our Society closer to what is happening in the Wagner world, but also allows us to participate in the restored scheme by which member societies are eligible to receive an allocation of tickets for the Bayreuth Festival. In this regard, we will shortly be calling for expressions of interest from those who may like to attend the 2017 Festival.

As usual your Committee has worked very hard behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of the Society, and every member of the Committee deserves our thanks for their contribution. We were pleased to have Connie Chapman join the Committee as Treasurer. Not only has Connie kept an eagle eye on the Society's finances, but she has also assumed a watching brief on proposed changes to the Associations Incorporation Act, under which the Society is incorporated. Provisions in the legislation will require a number of changes to the Society's constitution, so at some stage we will be looking for members or friends with legal expertise to assist in this process.

The Society's new website has now been in operation for a year and has received positive comments about its attractive presentation, for which we thank Dave Robartson from Red Kinetic. But to further enhance the value and currency of the website, and even to bring it into the new world of social media, we really need somebody from within the Society to take on this responsibility.

It has been a privilege to be the Society's President for the past three years and I would like to thank you all for your support. An exciting programme has been planned for the 30th anniversary year of 2016 to which we can all look forward and it is my hope that the Society will continue to grow bigger and stronger as it furthers its aim of promoting the amazing works of Richard Wagner.

John Meyer

WAGNER TO BE FEATURED BY WASO IN 2017 AND 2018

The Society has been excited by the announcement that the West Australian Symphony Orchestra will be presenting two special concerts at the Perth Concert Hall in 2017 with the theme “Wagner & Beyond”. Under the direction of Principal Conductor Asher Fisch, the first half of the concert “Inspiring Wagner” on Wednesday 6 September will include works by three composers who inspired Wagner (*Der Vampyr* Overture by Marschner, the Overture to Schumann’s *Scenes from Goethe’s Faust*, and *Mazepa* by Liszt), followed by some of the famous orchestral excerpts from the *Ring* cycle. On Saturday 9 September, “Wagner’s World” begins with the Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*. Following arias from *Die Walküre* and *Die Meistersinger* sung by Australian bass-baritone Shane Lawrence, Wagner’s musical legacy will be explored through the slow movement of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony, the overture from Chabrier’s opera *Gwendoline*, and *Don Juan*, the orchestral poem by Richard Strauss.

As Asher Fisch explains, “Wagner is one of history’s truly transformative composer. His music is endlessly fascinating, dramatic and deeply moving. For a conductor, the chance to explore Wagner’s revelatory works with a wonderful orchestra and audience is quite simply a joy”.

Both concerts will be preceded by pre-concert talks at 6.30pm by our Society’s life member, Sally Kester.

These concerts will be followed in 2018 by two concert performances of *Tristan und Isolde* in the Perth Concert Hall, on 16 and 19 August, 2018. Also conducted by Asher Fisch, the stellar cast is to be led by Stuart Skelton as Tristan and Eva Maria Westbroek as Isolde. They appeared together at this year’s Baden-Baden Festival with the Berlin Philharmonic and Sir Simon Rattle, in what was described by Eva Wagner-Pasquier as one of the best *Tristans* that she had ever encountered. These performances will be the centrepiece of WASO’s 90th anniversary celebrations.

Since assuming the position of Principal Conductor of WASO, Asher Fisch has mounted two composer-based mini-festivals, with Beethoven’s symphonies featured in 2014 and the symphonies and concertos of Brahms in 2015. He has been gradually introducing Wagner’s orchestral music into the orchestra’s repertoire, and so it is now exciting to see that composer becoming the centre of attention over the next two years. See more at <http://www.waso.com.au/>



STUART SKELTON ON TOUR (AND SCREEN) IN AUSTRALIA

Perth Wagnerites do not have to wait until 2018 for the opportunity of hearing Stuart Skelton, because he will be appearing with Asher Fisch and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra in two Masters Series concerts in the Perth Concert Hall on Friday 25 and Saturday 26 November of this year. He will be singing well-known tenor arias from *Rienzi*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Parsifal* and *Die Walküre*, while the orchestra will play the preludes to *Parsifal* and Act III of *Lohengrin*. The second half will consist of Bruckner’s Ninth Symphony.

A week later Stuart will be in Melbourne for two concerts with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, this time conducted by Simone Young. The concerts will be in Hamer Hall on Thursday 1 and Saturday 3 December, during (but not clashing with) the second *Ring* cycle. Together with American mezzo-soprano Michelle de Young as Kundry, a substantial portion of Act II of *Parsifal* will be presented in the first half of these concerts. As in Perth, the second half will consist of Bruckner’s Ninth.

<http://www.mso.com.au/whats-on/2016-season/young-conducts-wagner/>

Before travelling to Perth, Stuart will be in Hobart for a special concert with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Marco Letonja, in which he will be performing excerpts from *Tristan und Isolde* with the great Swedish soprano Nina Stemme, along with the Slovenian mezzo-soprano Monika Bohinec. This concert will be on Saturday 19 November in the Federation Concert Hall.

<https://www.tso.com.au/concerts/tristan-isolde/>

A new production of *Tristan und Isolde* conducted by Sir Simon Rattle will be opening the 2016-17 Metropolitan Opera season and the title roles will be taken by – none other than Stuart Skelton and Nina Stemme! This production will be captured live in the Met’s HD program, and will be screened at Luna Leederville and Luna On SX on Saturday 5 November at 11.30am and Sunday 6 November at 1.00pm. The cast also includes Ekaterina Gubanova as Brangäne and Evgeny Nikitin as Kurwenal (both making their Met role debuts), with René Pape reprising King Marke, a role he has sung to acclaim in three previous Met seasons. The staging by Mariusz Trelński is a co-production with the Festival Hall Baden-Baden (where it has already been presented), Teatr Wielki – Polish National Opera, and China National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) Beijing.

<https://www.lunapalace.com.au/select-film+1929+met-opera-tristan-und-isolde-wagner>

TICKETS FOR BAYREUTH FESTIVAL LIKELY TO BECOME AVAILABLE SHORTLY

Our Society has re-joined the Richard Wagner Verband International (the RWVI, or Verband for short), which is the international association of Wagner Societies. The Verband has 132 societies worldwide as members, now including four of the five Australian societies as well as the New Zealand Wagner Society. The stated purposes of the Verband are to create interest in and deepen the understanding of Richard Wagner's works, to provide support for the next generation of artists, to support the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation founded at the behest of Richard Wagner, to work to ensure the continuing success of the Bayreuth Festival, and to promote international co-operation.

The Verband has emerged from several difficult years and since the election of a new President and Board in 2015 it has made considerable progress in furthering these aims, especially the last one. After some significant negotiations with the administration of the Bayreuth Festival, the allocation of tickets to member societies was resumed for the 2016 Festival. This means that our Society will shortly be advised about the number of tickets that will be allocated to us for the 2017 Festival. Members should start thinking now about whether they would like to express an interest in going to the 2017 Festival, when the works to be performed consist of *The Ring*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal* and *Die Meistersinger*. The latter, conducted by Phillippe Jordan, is a new production by Barrie Kosky and will feature Michael Volle (Sachs), Klaus Florian Vogt (Walther) and Johannes Martin Kränzle (Beckmesser).

Other welcome initiatives from the Verband have included newsletters to member societies and a new and much improved website at <http://www.richard-wagner.org/rwvi/en/>

Each year the Verband holds an international Wagner congress, which is hosted by a local European Wagner society. The next such congress will be held in Budapest from 7 to 11 June 2017. These events are more like a festival than a congress as we usually understand that term. Besides a meeting of delegates from member societies (each society has one representative, usually its president or a nominee of the committee), there is a programme of musical performances and excursions in which anybody can participate. For further information about the Budapest congress, see http://www.richard-wagner.org/rwvi/en/events/calendar/?collection_id=994 for the brochure and registration form.



Horst Eggers, President of
The Richard Wagner Verband International



OPERA AUSTRALIA TO PERFORM PARSIFAL IN 2017

Opera Australia recently announced its 2017 season, and following this year's *Ring* cycles in Melbourne there will be three concert performances of *Parsifal* in the Sydney Opera House, on 9, 12 and 14 August 2017. The title part is to be sung by Jonas Kaufmann, who is now turning the 'pure fool' into one of his signature roles, having sung it at the Met and in a number of European opera houses. He will be joined by the excellent Korean bass Kwangchoul Youn (a Bayreuth regular) as Gurnemanz, together with three Australian singers: Jacqueline Dark as Kundry, Michael Honeyman as Amfortas, and Warwick Fyfe as Klingsor.

<https://opera.org.au/whatson/events/parsifal-sydney>

SINGAPORE TO CREATE HISTORY WITH *THE FLYING DUTCHMAN*

Singapore will be experiencing the production of a Wagner opera for the first time when *The Flying Dutchman* takes the stage at the Victoria Theatre at the end of October 2016. It has been organised by the fledgling Richard Wagner Association of Singapore (formed as recently as 2012) together with Opera Viva, in association with theatre company The Finger Players. Production will be by a Singapore team that includes prize-winning theatre directors Chong Tze Chien and Glen Goei as co-directors.

There will be five performances, on 23, 25, 27, 28 and 30 October. The latter will be a matinee, commencing at 3.00pm. The production has received support from the International Association of Wagner Societies and - with the exception of the performance on the 27th when local understudies will take to the stage - the lead roles are to be sung by singers who have featured in the triennial International Singing Competition for Wagner Voices, which is conducted by the International Association.

The leads include an Australian, Kathleen Parker, as Senta. She was the winner of the Wolfgang Wagner and audience prizes in the 2015 competition. Although born in Canada, Kathleen graduated from the University of Queensland with first-class honours before undertaking further study at the Australian Opera Studio here in Perth, where she was dux of the 2008 class and went on to win the Audi German Opera Scholarship for 2009 which enabled her to study in Cologne, since when she has been based in Berlin. The other roles will be taken by the 2012 first prize and audience prize winner Oleksandra Pushniak from Ukraine (Dutchman), Andreas Hörl from Germany (Daland) and Jakub Pustina from the Czech Republic (Erik).

To make the opera accessible to a Singapore audience, the setting will be in South-east Asia. Regional influences such as wayang kulit (shadow puppetry) and Chinese opera will be added and the set will be inspired by a kelong, or fishing villages on stilts.

For tickets see <http://www.sistic.com.sg/events/dutch1016> Ticket prices range from S\$46 to S\$146

For further information see <https://flyingdutchmanopera2016.wordpress.com/> which also has a link to a local agency that is arranging travel packages.



Kathleen Parker, Senta in the Singapore *Flying Dutchman*

MELBOURNE OPERA TACKLES *TANNHÄUSER*

In a major achievement for a small opera company that receives no government subsidy, Melbourne Opera mounted an ambitious full staging of *Tannhäuser* in three performances in the Regent Theatre during August, followed by one in the Robert Blackwood Hall at Monash University. It was conducted by David Kram, whose father was a répétiteur at Covent Garden in the 1930s, and directed by Suzanne Chaundy. The first night was well received by critics, with Peter Burch writing in *The Australian* that Kram's "musical direction was powerful and nuanced, and he had a keen sense of the theatricality of great moments in the opera, such as when the guests arrive at the Wartburg Hall of Song". He added that Chaundy's approach "embodied Wagner's famous concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art. By combining different media including video in a single work, Chaundy's production compressed and heightened each element in a single totality".

The title role was sung by Romanian tenor Marius Vlad (he "sang beautifully and his compelling performance was alive to the extreme contradictions of Tannhäuser's character"), while Herald-Sun Aria winner Lee Abrahmsen was "a radiant" Elisabeth, Sarah Sweeting "magnificently persuasive" as Venus, and Manfred Pohlenz as Wolfram "delighted the audience with his delivery of the celebrated baritone aria *O du, mein holder Abendstern*".

One unusual aspect of the performance that worried some of the reviewers, however, was that the chorus sang in English while the rest of the opera was sung in the original German.

Together with Opera Australia's Ring cycles of 2013 and 2016, and Victorian Opera's *Der Fliegende Holländer* in 2015, it seems that Melbourne has now taken over from Adelaide as the nation's centre of live Wagner productions. How long will we have to wait here in Perth for a staging – as distinct from a concert performance – of one of Wagner's works, with nearly ten years having passed since WA Opera's production of *Tristan und Isolde* in November 2006?

NEWS OF YOUNG MUSICIANS WHO HAVE BEEN SPONSORED BY THE SOCIETY

Fleuranne Brockway (Lisa Gasteen National Opera School Scholar 2014) presented her graduation recital at UWA in February, consisting of works by Bach, Handel, Mozart, Gounod, Brahms, Berlioz and Sibelius. She was awarded a High Distinction for this recital. Fleuranne was able to attend the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School again in late 2015, this time being given the Janet Holmes à Court Scholarship. She is now participating in the Professional Development Program of Victorian Opera and has taken solo roles in their productions of Massenet's *Cendrillon*, which is based on the Cinderella story, and the world premiere performances of *The Pied Piper* by Richard Mills. These productions will be touring regional Victoria during October and November. During 2016 she has been the only WA singer selected for the semi-finals of the Mietta Song Competition and the Australian Singing Competition, and for the finals of the Noosa Federation of the Arts Joan Sutherland Award. At the end of this year she will again be attending the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School in Brisbane on a full scholarship.



Perry Joyce (Bayreuth Scholar 2010) is enjoying a varied career as a teacher, choral conductor and solo singer. Last August he led two of his choirs to victory in the inaugural Go Gospel Choir competition at the Regal Theatre in Subiaco. Rejoice Gospel Choir won the first prize of \$10,000 plus a four-hour recording session with one of the sponsors of the competition (Galactix Studio). Perry had formed this choir about a month earlier and they had only had six rehearsals prior to the competition. His youth choir West Australian Young Voices won third prize. This choir, for students aged between 8 and 16, was formed by Perry over two years ago and is a premier, auditioned youth choir, which rehearses every Saturday in the Perth CBD. In 2016 Perry appeared with the University of Western Australia Choral Society as tenor soloist in the *Stabat Mater* of Dvořák and the *Petite Messe Solennelle* by Rossini, and also gave a highly acclaimed interpretation of the role of Don Ernesto in *Lost and Found Opera's* production of Bizet's early opera, *Don Procopio*.



Perry Joyce in *Don Procopio*



Perry holds aloft the Go Gospel Choir winner's trophy

Michael Grebla (Bayreuth Scholar 2011) has been awarded a prestigious General Sir John Monash Foundation Scholarship for 2016. These national postgraduate scholarships are awarded to outstanding young Australians with leadership potential who wish to study overseas. Michael is using his scholarship to embark on a two-year masters degree course at the New England Conservatory in Boston, having completed his Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering and Bachelor of Music in composition with First Class Honours from UWA. As his graduation concert for the latter degree, he presented *Portraits of UWA* which combined musical and photographic compositions inspired by the art, grounds and wildlife of UWA's Crawley campus. Michael has made a significant impact as Music Director at St George's College, which included the founding and direction of a concert series which has expanded to provide performance opportunities for emerging musicians by engaging with both the college and the wider community. His work as an outstanding undergraduate was recognised by UWA Convocation with the Bryant Stokes Matilda Award for Cultural Excellence for 2014. This is an annual award given to a student who has achieved excellence and outstanding achievement in any form of cultural pursuits such as music, literature, public speaking, dance, visual arts or drama. Because of Michael's leading role in helping to organise our Wagner 200th Birthday Gala at St George's College in May 2013, the Society was very pleased to support his nomination for this award, along with the College and the School of Music.



Michael Grebla shows his Bryant Stokes Matilda Award for Cultural Excellence trophy and certificate to Alex Cohen, a former Chancellor of UWA and a member of the Wagner Society.

Alessandro Pittorino (who made a stunning impact with his organ transcription of 'The Ride of the Valkyries' at our Wagner 200th Birthday Gala in 2013) has completed his first year of study with Paul Jacobs in the Master of Music program at the Juilliard School of Music in New York, where he was the first Australian organist to be accepted into that leading music school. In June he was one of ten organists (only three of whom were from outside the US) chosen to compete in the second Longwood Gardens International Organ Competition. Along with works by Bach and Widor, Alessandro also played an edited transcription of the Overture to *The Flying Dutchman*, thus continuing to develop his Wagner repertoire. During a return visit to Perth in July, Alessandro included this piece in a recital that he gave at the Church of St Mary the Virgin in South Perth.

CONGRATULATIONS TO DR PETER BASSETT

Talking about Adelaide having passed the baton to Melbourne as far as Wagner productions is concerned (as we were earlier in this Newsletter), it was shortly after Peter Bassett had visited our Society in June that we heard that he had been awarded a PhD from Griffith University for his thesis entitled 'Playing with Fire: The pursuit of a Wagner performance tradition in Adelaide in the decade 1995-2005 and factors impeding its realisation'. That decade covered two *Ring* cycles and a production of *Parsifal*, and Peter was well placed from his own involvement, and with additional access being provided to relevant documents, to write the story of what happened. He hopes that in due course his dissertation will be turned into a published book. Congratulations have been sent to Peter on behalf of our Society.