



The Wagner Society in New South Wales

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Bundeskanzleramt

Dr. Carsten Hillgruber, Referent
Referat Für Sociales und Angelegenheiten

Friday 6 January 2011

Dear Minister, Lord Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

We write to express our concern at the decision to cease the allocation of tickets for Bayreuth to all Wagner Societies and to request a review of this decision. Representing as we do countries that are extremely remote from German culture and with limited performances of Wagner's great operas, we are shocked and disappointed by this sudden reversal of a long-standing practice.

The Wagner Societies represented in this letter fulfil an important role in focusing attention on the music of Richard Wagner and maximising interest in it. Run entirely by volunteer committees, we provide lectures and conferences, discussions, concerts, presentations by visiting singers, conductors and performers and show DVDs of productions from overseas. We lobby local opera companies, orchestras and radio stations to present Wagner's music dramas. We also provide financial assistance for young musicians so that they can travel overseas and gain experience in performing Wagner.

We are particularly energetic in seeking to recruit new members so that more are involved in our endeavours. Indeed most societies have been making successful efforts to increase membership and to support performances of Wagner's operas in the lead-up to the bicentenary in 2013.

The Bayreuth Festival performs a vital role in these efforts, and our experience has been that members who go to Bayreuth forge close links with members of their own Society as well as with other visitors who are there. Many use the visit to Bayreuth as the centrepiece of a much longer trip through Germany, given the extremely long distances they have to travel in order to attend the Festival. This of course contributes significantly more to the German tourist industry than domestic or European Festival attendees. After their return, our members share their Bayreuth experience with other members by reporting back to meetings of the Society and often by writing reviews in our newsletters. Thus it is that information about and enthusiasm for the Festival has become widely spread amongst our members. The possibility of obtaining tickets to the Festival, and thus sharing the unique Bayreuth experience, has become a significant motivation for people to join and support the Societies.



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We encourage members to apply for tickets through the Societies, and we then allocate the tickets through a fair and transparent public process. In fact, mindful of concerns about those who profit inappropriately through ticket sales, Societies have introduced measures to achieve even higher levels of transparency and fairness by giving priority to longer standing members who have not yet had the benefit of the extraordinary Bayreuth experience.

We are therefore extremely concerned that, without access to Festival tickets, we would have difficulty in building and sustaining our membership. As a result, our work in encouraging and promoting the glorious works of Richard Wagner and in assisting young performers, would suffer irreparably.

Wagner Societies have been crucial in supporting the Bayreuth Festival. Indeed as far back as 1871 Mannheim's Emil Henkel created the idea of Wagner Societies so that people could share in contributing to Bayreuth and thereby gain access to performances. We entirely understand your concern about the need for transparency in the allocation of Festival tickets, and your desire to eliminate the "black market" which has sometimes developed in relation to tickets. We would at any time welcome scrutiny of our processes in managing the allocation of tickets to ensure transparency, fairness and consistency with the goals of the Societies.

A separate but related issue is that we have been put into a very difficult position by the delay between the decision of October 18 and our receipt of the information on December 15. Our Societies advertised the possibility of tickets in October. Many members applied, and Societies used a ballot to create a priority list of applicants. Based on previous experience, those on the top of the lists were told that they could reasonably expect to obtain tickets for the 2012 Festival. It is likely that some of them have already taken advantage of this advance notice in order to book reasonably priced tickets to Europe.

Our primary request is that the decision of October 18 be revised, so that Wagner Societies can continue to fulfil a significant role in spreading knowledge of and support for Wagner's work. We would also ask that 2012 tickets be allocated as in previous years, so that the reasonable expectations of those near the top of the list can be met.

We trust that you will accept this letter as a demonstration of our commitment to the Bayreuth Festival and that we can continue to work together to spread knowledge and appreciation of the work of Richard Wagner internationally.

Yours sincerely,

The Hon Jane Mathews AO
President, Wagner Society of New South Wales
And on behalf of the Wagner Society of Queensland
Wagner Society of Western Australia
Wagner Society of South Australia
Wagner Society of Victoria
Wagner Society of New Zealand