

Report on RWVI Kongress, Budapest 7-10 June 2017

The Annual RWVI Kongress was held this year in the City of Budapest. The official function of Congress is its Annual General Meeting of Delegates at which Verband matters are discussed, attended this year by representatives of some 45 Societies including myself representing the Wagner Society of Scotland.

The Delegates' Meeting occupied only one morning and was decidedly uneventful with all business satisfactorily and speedily concluded. The four-day Congress is well complemented by various other events and Wagner-related performances.

The cultural heart this year was an outstanding performance of *Parsifal* under the direction of Adam Fischer in MüPA (Művészetek Palotája) the Bartók Béla National Concert Hall (surnames precede in Hungarian). Although billed as a "concert or semi-staged" performance, what was presented was in effect fully-staged with a wonderfully simple but mesmerising production, making full use of the available space with the principals directed over the concert stage and the chorus occupying, as appropriate, the choir stalls and organ loft. The Director/Design Team made full use of lighting to complement an elemental concept around black and white/light and dark/good and evil, with colour only appearing in Act II.

Singing was universally good to excellent from Peter Seiffert (*Parsifal*), Violetta Urmana (*Kundry*), Eric Halfvarson (a last minute replacement for Albert Pesendorfer as *Gurnemanz*), Lauri Vasar (*Amfortas*) and Jürgen Linn (*Klingsor*). There were also, for me two new musical experiences. The two younger Esquires/Knaben and the Solo Voice were performed by boys from the Wiener Sängerknaben, a very effective innovation, and the female chorus was comprised of sopranos and male altos.

The simplicity of the production provided no distractions from the faultless music from The Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Choir and Children's' Choir, augmented the Hungarian National Choir. This was without doubt one of if not the most moving performances of *Parsifal* I have ever experienced.

The other opera presentation was an excellent double bill of Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and *Mario and the Magician* by the contemporary Hungarian composer János Vajda in the outrageously ornate State Opera House. I had not heard of Vajda, far less his 1988 adaptation of the Thomas Mann story but this labyrinthine tale, with a rather tongue-in-cheek, at times light-hearted but never frivolous, production formed an intriguing prelude to *Bluebeard*. *Bluebeard's Castle* was stunningly effective making use of multiple gauzes and complex lighting to reveal, often covertly, the secrets of the seven doors. Both were conceived by Director/Designer Péter Galambos and Palerdi András performed both the Magician and The Duke. The Hungarian State Opera Orchestra was conducted under the confident baton of Janós Kovács.

Congresses are also an opportunity for the hosts to show off the local cuisine and Budapest did not disappoint. After the Opening Concert on the seventh performed by the Budapest Society's Stipendiaten/innen we were treated to an excellent buffet of Hungarian food and wine.

There are always a number of excursions arranged and Budapest has so much to offer the visitor by way of sightseeing, museums, history and of course its famous café culture of coffee-and-cake!

Congress officially closed with a Recital by exceptionally talented students from the Liszt Ferenc Musikakademie in the Solti György Kammersaal, followed by a sumptuous buffet in the garden of Restaurant Gundel.

I chose to extend my stay and attended complementary Wagner events; a recital by Florence Delaage, sponsored by the Institut Français, Budapest of piano music by Franz Liszt and Wagner arrangements by him and Hans von Bulow; a Verdi/Wagner recital by Réne Pape and a performance of Zoltán Kodály's *Háry Janos*.

Congress next year will be hosted by Innsbruck on 21 – 24 June 2018 and will include a performance of *Rienzi* and an excursion to Erl attending a rehearsal of *Götterdämmerung*. I have Brochures and Booking Forms which can also be downloaded from the RWVI website –

http://www.richard-wagner.org/rwvi/en/events/calendar/?collection_id=1249

Future Congresses are scheduled for –
Venice (2019 and a possible Ring),
Bonn and Cologne (2020 to tie in with the Beethoven Anniversary),
Munich (2021 as part of the 150th Anniversary of that Society)

The International Association of Wagner Societies (RWVI) unites some 130 Associations around the world. As a German-based Organisation it was founded in 1909 but “internationalised” in 1991 to render all Wagner Societies around the world eligible for membership. The Wagner Society of Scotland is rightly proud to be a member. While many Composers have Societies dedicated to their works these are locally or nationally based and I cannot think of any other Composer who has inspired such a world-wide network of supporting Societies. There is much pleasure to be gained from being part of that world-wide family of Wagner lovers.

The purpose of the RWVI mirrors our own, namely to promote and deepen the understanding of Richard Wagner's works and provide support for the next generation of artists through the Richard-Wagner-Stipendienstiftung (Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation) founded at the Composer's behest, to which this Society sends a Scholar every year. The RWVI also works to ensure the continued success of the Bayreuth Festival.

The Verband promotes and supports various Wagner Events around the world including the annual Giornate Wagneriane in Venice and the first Wagner performance in Singapore, a production of *der Fliegende Holländer*.

Congresses which are attended by up to 300 Delegates, are always a wonderful opportunity to explore new Cities, listen to Wagner often including rarities, and of course to meet fellow Wagnerians from all over the world. All members of our Society are welcome to attend.

Dale Bilsland