

## **Bayreuth Ticket Allocation Issue**

**I**t all began with the following letter, on Bayreuther Festspiele letterhead, dated December 15, 2011, and received December 19, personally addressed to Nathalie D. Wagner, President of the Wagner Society of New York. All Wagner societies received this letter, on differing dates.

15. Dezember 2011

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

We would like to inform you of certain important changes concerning the allocation of tickets for the Bayreuth Festival.

The modifications to ticket allocation procedure have been made following investigations conducted by the Bavarian General Accounting Office and the German Federal Court of Auditors, which are responsible for the Bayreuth Festival. The reports by both institutions explicitly criticised certain measures in ticket allocation, and proposed clear conditions to bring about tangible and lasting changes. With the aim, therefore, of introducing greater fairness in the allocation of tickets and excluding as far as possible the preferential treatment of certain groups or individuals, as well as to improve transparency, the supervisory committees of the Bayreuth Festival - the Supervisory Board and the Shareholders' Meeting – decided on fundamental and binding changes on 18 October 2011.

As a result of these resolutions it is unfortunately no longer possible for us to accord special interest groups or tour operators any privileges in the allocation of tickets. This means that you will not be sent an order form and any orders made via the Internet will not be processed. The members of your group or your customers, as the case may be, are of course still free to order tickets individually.

Thank you for the interest you have shown over the years and for the excellent working relationship.

With best wishes,

Eva Wagner-Pasquier    Katharina Wagner

Our WSNY Bayreuth Committee immediately notified all of our 2012 Bayreuth ticket applicants by email and advised that we would do our best to obtain tickets. We also immediately sent an email to the Managing Directors of the Festival with a copy to all North American societies, acknowledging receipt of this letter; and noting that we had applied for tickets in the correct annual manner. Excerpts from our initial response:

“This sudden, greatly delayed, and badly timed announcement...is extremely disturbing...Frankly, we see this as an abuse of the good faith of the many Wagner societies around the world in their submission of requests for tickets for their members, who see attendance at the Bayreuth Festival as one of the most important aspects of membership and the fulfillment of a lifelong desire. The only purpose and special interest of the Wagner societies is the promotion of a deeper understanding of Wagner's music and art.”

After intense consultation among our Bayreuth Committee and other North American Wagner Societies, we jointly decided to send a unified response to the Administrative Board. All 14 North American societies were signatories to this letter. All of the Australian and New Zealand societies also sent a unified response. We have received newsletters from many societies containing articles expressing their shock at this draconian action.. Many protests have been sent to the Administrative Board and Bayreuth officials. Text of our letter follows:

To all members of the Administrative Board of the Bayreuther Festspiele e.V.:

Mr. Toni Schmid  
Dr. Michael Bauer  
Mr. Martin Eifler  
Mr. Björn Diecke  
Dr. Michael Hohl  
Mr. Carsten Hillgruber  
Gesellschaft der Freunde von Bayreuth:  
Dr. Georg Freiherr von Waldenfels  
Prof. Dr. h.c. Stephan Götzl  
Managing Director of the Bayreuth Festival; Mrs. Eva Wagner-Pasquier  
Managing Director of the Bayreuth Festival; Ms. Katharina Wagner

January 4, 2012

Dear esteemed ladies and gentlemen:

This letter comes to you from all North American Wagner societies. Our many thousands of members are shocked by the decision to stop the allocation of tickets to Wagner societies. We plan for many years and travel great distances to participate in the Bayreuth Festival and to support it in many ways. Wagner Society members and, in fact, all lovers of Wagner's great music, strongly believe that the Bayreuth Festival needs to continue its all important task of carrying out Wagner's vision by providing powerful and beautiful productions of his work. Wagner societies, who have had a long and strong relationship with the Festival, have been an essential part of this process by bringing in new members who not only add to the Festival's audience but in a greater sense add to the world audience for Wagner's music.

However, your decision, taken on October 18, 2011, and transmitted in mid-December, to stop the allocation of tickets to Wagner Societies would make it difficult for us to support and maintain our active participation in this process. As Prof. Eva Märtson, President of the Richard-Wagner-Verband International, e.V., has already noted in her letter of 21.12.2011, Wagner societies around the world exist for only two purposes. These are (1) to promote a deeper understanding of Wagner's music and art by providing lectures, the knowledge of experts, small concerts, and support to their local opera houses when they produce Wagner's operas and (2) to provide support and assistance to young musicians, singers, and conductors who demonstrate a particular talent for the performance of Wagner's music dramas. Wagner societies are non-profit organizations whose minimal membership fees and donations from members are used to defray the costs of their promotional work. They are maintained by the love and commitment of dedicated volunteers, whose only interest is to maintain and encourage the great operas of Richard Wagner. Wagner societies explore and bring this essential part of German culture worldwide.

Moreover, many societies contribute donations to the Gesellschaft der Freunde von Bayreuth as part of their commitment to maintaining the excellence of the Festival; both the productions and the infrastructure.

Wagner societies have been, as far as is known, scrupulous in following the dictates of the Festival management with regard to the ticket allocation process. While scalping of tickets to the Festival and black market ticket sales are well known, members of Wagner societies decry this practice and exercise great care in their own allocation of tickets to members to ensure that their organizations never fall into this practice. In

this regard, all tickets allotted to Wagner societies are paid for at full price.

We are fully in support of measures taken by the Festival management and governing bodies to make the ticket process as transparent and open as possible and encourage such efforts in the future to ensure the smooth running of this world famous and important festival. We really do understand the value of fairness in the distribution of tickets, that tour operators and others who profit from their activities should not have any special treatment, so we would be more than willing to continue to make sure that our tickets are distributed with the same fairness as always.

For Wagner society members, especially those who volunteer their time and energy to their organizations, Bayreuth is still seen as the mecca for lovers of Wagner's music. Trips to the Festival, for many, are the high-point of their musical experience. Bayreuth also provides important opportunities for cultural exchanges such as (in 2011) hearing the president and members of the Israel Wagner Society talk about why they felt it was so necessary to found a Wagner society in Israel. Such cultural exchanges are fragile and should be nurtured.

We ask therefore that you reconsider the decision taken on October 18 and allow Wagner societies to apply for a yearly allocation of tickets, on a basis to be determined. We also request that, at the present time, the applicants for the 2012 season who have been hoping for many months to be able to attend in 2012 be allowed to send in their individual orders even though the deadline for submission has passed.

We would appreciate your response as soon as possible. We look forward to hearing from you and moving forward together to further the renowned Bayreuth Festival on the highest levels.

Respectfully Submitted,

Wagner Society of America  
Wagner Society of Boston  
Wagner Society of Cincinnati  
Wagner Society of Dallas  
Wagner Society of Florida  
Wagner Society of Hawaii  
Wagner Society of New York

Wagner Society of Northern California  
Wagner Society of Ohio  
Wagner Society of Santa Fe  
Wagner Society of Southern California  
Wagner Society of Toronto  
Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest  
Wagner Society of Washington, DC

Copy: Prof. Eva Märtson, Präsidentin

Richard-Wagner-Verband International e.V.

The Richard-Wagner-Verband International (International Association of Wagner Societies) provided an explanation of the "new situation" in translation, from Dr. Stefan Specht, Managing Director of the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation, received on January 18, 2012.

As you know, the Scholarship Foundation formerly received 750 Festspiele tickets per year for the scholars of the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation for respectively three performances of the Bayreuther Festspiele.

At the same time, all Richard Wagner Associations supporting the Scholarship Foundation had the option to purchase two Festspiele tickets for each of the three scholar performances directly through the ticket office of the Bayreuther Festspiele.

It should have become public knowledge from respective media reports that the issuing of all tickets for the Bayreuther Festspiele as well as the related special allotments have been subjected to an audit by the auditing offices within the last few months. Their critique and the results of the audits were subsequently dealt with in the committees of the Bayreuther Festspiele with the following outcome:

In future, there will only be a single ticket allotment at the Bayreuther Festspiele, which is exclusively reserved for the sponsoring of youth and new talent. Due to the persistent dedication and emphatic commitment of the management of the Festspiele in the committees it was achieved that this sole remaining allotment for the sponsoring of youth and new talent is exclusively available to the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation. For this we would like to express our sincere thanks to the management of the Festspiele, Mrs

Eva Wagner-Pasquier and Mrs Katharina Wagner.

The allotment comprises a total of 1,000 Festspiele tickets for the performances of which you have been notified. Of these - as in the past - 750 tickets are allocated to the scholars of the respective year.

The remaining 250 tickets are now specifically issued to those Richard-Wagner-Associations which participate in the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation by taking on scholarships. As of now, these tickets replace the former special tickets, which you have been able to order at the ticket office of the Bayreuther Festspiele in the past, and will instead be managed and allocated directly by the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation in the future.

We should now try to make the best of this current situation. Obviously, the total number of tickets available to the Richard-Wagner-Associations represents a clear deterioration compared to the previous situation. Conversely, I receive a number of "envious" reactions from other establishments and institutions, who formerly had their own allotments and now receive no tickets at all. They have difficulty in understanding that the single still existing allotment for the sponsoring of youth and new talent has now been exclusively and entirely allocated to the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation.

This new situation furthermore provides the opportunity to treat the former special ticket allotment for the associations differently in the future, meaning to favour those associations taking on more scholarships and thus support these Scholarship Foundations more intensely than those who only participate in the Scholarship Foundation with one scholarship or none at all.

The development of such a new distribution key as well as the entire administrative and logistic processing, which is now entirely up to the Scholarship Foundation, are in full swing. I ask for your patience on this subject and assume that the issuing of the tickets will occur upon the respective change following the granting of the scholarships at around March 2012.

However, considering the current situation, I urgently advise against public expressions of displeasure, critique or other adverse reactions toward the individual foundation or administrative board members or the management of the Festspiele. In my opinion, the current situation is by no means set in concrete. Permanent and emphatic critique from the Richard-Wagner-Associations in connection with intensive lobbying by the establishments and institutions now excluded from their former allotments could therefore lead to a situation where the current regulation could be changed to the detriment of the Scholarship Foundation and the Richard-Wagner-Associations, which should be avoided at any cost.

In view of the situation, which is new for all of us, I therefore thank the associations and chair persons for their understanding. Rest assured that the Scholarship Foundation will do everything in its power to construct the pending changes amicable and just for all involved.

With kind regards from Bayreuth  
Stefan Specht

The following letter was received on January 28, 2012, from Mr. Toni Schmid, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Bayreuth Festival LLC.

Allocation of tickets to the Bayreuth Festival  
Re: Your letter dated January 4, 2012

Dear President of the Wagner Society of New York  
Dear Mrs. Wagner,

Thank you for your letter of January 4, which expresses your concern about the modifications to the ticket allocation procedure for the Bayeruth Festival as announced by the Festival management in their letter dated December 15, 2011.

Please be assured that the Supervisory Board of the Bayreuth Festival LLC fully recognizes and acknowl-

edges the important role of the Richard Wagner Societies in encouraging interest in the music of Richard Wagner and enabling young performers to travel to Bayreuth so that they can gain experience in performing Wagner. A stronger focus on the support of young talents was also one motivating factor for the resolution by the Supervisory Board and the Shareholders' Meeting of October 18, 2011, which apparently caused some irritations among Wagner Societies worldwide.

The said decision does indeed not provide for a fixed share of tickets reserved for the Wagner Societies. The move followed criticism voiced by government funding bodies as a result of investigations conducted by the Bavarian General Accounting Office and the German Federal Court of Auditors.

However, the above-mentioned decision of October 18 stipulates that members of Wagner Societies shall be given limited priority on the existing waiting lists, which results in a shorter overall waiting period.

In addition, the Supervisory Board has established a special share of 1,000 tickets for the promotion of prospective singers, musicians, or other stage artists. This share of tickets substitutes the tickets formerly reserved for the Festival of Young Artists in Bayreuth and the Richard Wagner Scholarship Foundation. It is now up to the Festival management to implement this new distribution mode. For instance, tickets could be allocated to the chairpersons of the Wagner Societies when they act as mentors for scholarship holders. If the total amount of tickets actually allocated to the Richard Wagner Societies should not suffice, the decision of October 18 would obviously have to be reviewed.

Finally, I once again wish to express my heartfelt thanks for the achievements of the Richard Wagner Societies, together with my hopes that our fruitful cooperation will be continued in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Toni Schmid

Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Bayreuth Festival LLC

Another letter was sent to the Administrative Board on January 19, 2012, from the President of the WSNY, making these points and again requesting individual applications for members who had, in good faith, applied to the Society for tickets in good time. This request has been ignored.

The WSNY Bayreuth Committee, consisting of Dr. Claudia Deutschmann (Coordinator), Danila Mendoza (Correspondent), Verena Kossodo (Coordinator for 24 years and now Consultant), and Nathalie D. Wagner (President, ex officio) has worked diligently for many years to fill as many requests as possible, to provide information, to arrange receptions and dinners for attendees, but most importantly to schedule our internationally-appreciated English-language lecture series on the days of our allotment. These lectures have been given by a number of distinguished scholars. Invitations are extended to over 50 societies worldwide and they have been the basis for a wonderful camaraderie, further enhancing the unique Bayreuth experience.

As a longtime member of and contributor to the Gesellschaft der Freunde von Bayreuth, our Society has annually, and for this year, obtained a small number of tickets from them in addition to the allotment we had always received from the Kartenbüro. We have also recently been offered tickets from people who have applied but are unable to use their tickets; thus we have been able to fill a number of requests, and this process is continuing. We plan to offer the August 24–28 lecture series this year, as announced in September, as a service to all English-speaking attendees and will notify other societies, on which we also rely to increase attendance and cover costs. We hope that we don't have to say "Leb wohl, Bayreuth." But keep in mind that there are many other opera festivals and opera houses in interesting locations around the world and in the U. S. that have high-quality performances and productions. Stay tuned for further developments.