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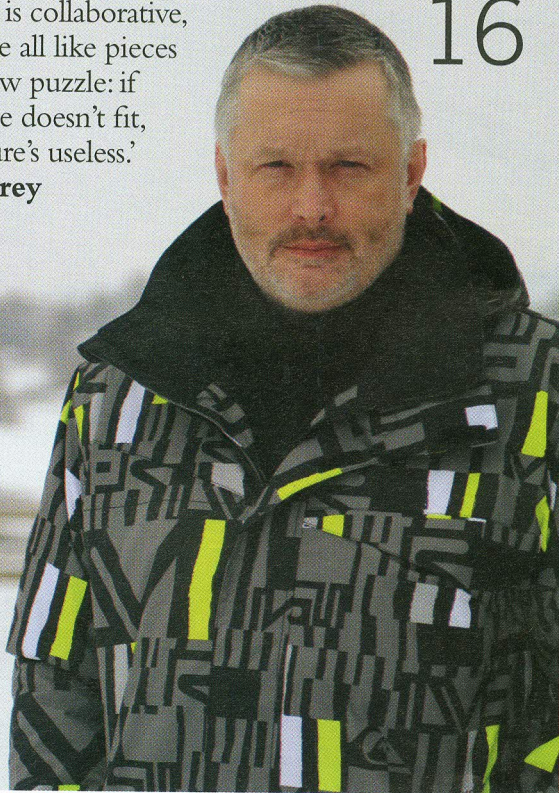


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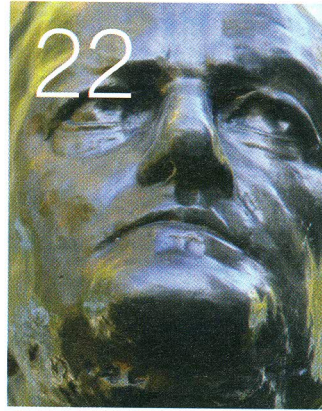
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Ian Storey



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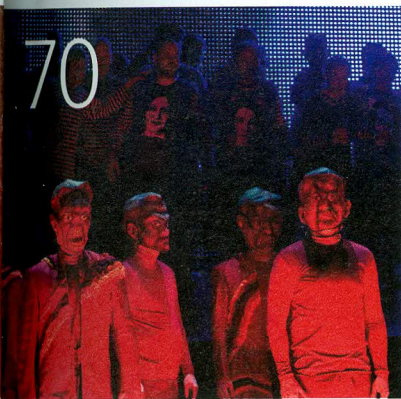
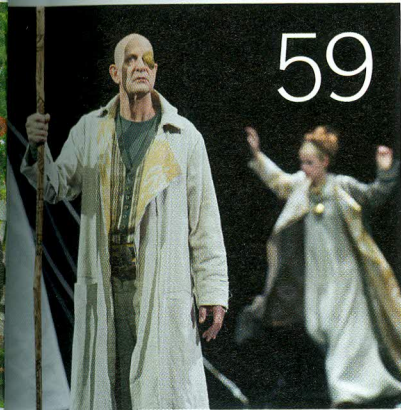
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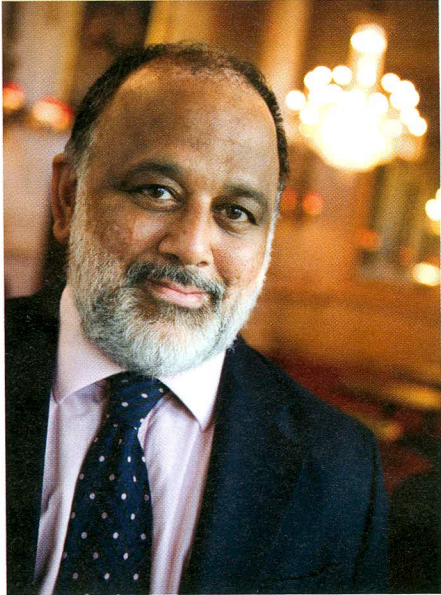


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Welcome

Richard Wagner took a keen interest in posterity. He wrote an extremely long treatise entitled 'The Artwork of the Future' setting out his vision for what his operas should mean to generations to come. So we can be pretty certain he'd be delighted by all the excitement generated by his 200th birthday, celebrated around the world on 22 May.

As Wagner's legacy comes sharply into focus this month, one question that springs to my mind is whether his operas represent a highpoint in the development of the genre that has never been equalled since, or whether they looked ahead to a new way of experiencing culture, drawing together music, poetry, art and philosophy, that continues to reverberate and grow in the modern world.

Wagner's legacy is problematic because of his anti-Semitic writings. His operas were severely tainted in the 20th century by their association with Hitler and his heinous regime. However, the last 60 years and more have shown that, as far as international audiences are concerned, Wagner's genius eclipses the less palatable aspects of his personal beliefs about race and society, expressed at a time when Europe was in a dangerous state of revolution and when national identity was, for many, insecure.

Two hundred years after his birth, we seem closer than we were a generation ago to disentangling Wagner the artist from Wagner the man. His operas are still dismissed by detractors as being 'cultish', 'difficult', 'overpowering' and even 'racist'. It seems, however, that on 22 May, we should be content to put the spotlight on Wagner's capacity to explore the transcendental qualities of the human imagination by way of visceral music and powerful storytelling.

Ashutosh Khandekar