

[Met Performance] CID:134100

Tristan und Isolde {295} Metropolitan Opera House: 12/4/1942.

(Reviews)

Metropolitan Opera House
December 4, 1942

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE {295}

Wagner-Wagner

Tristan.....Lauritz Melchior
Isolde.....Helen **Traubel**
Kurwenal.....Julius Huehn
Brangäne.....Kerstin Thorborg
King Marke.....Alexander Kipnis
Melot.....Emery Darcy
Sailor's Voice.....Emery Darcy
Shepherd.....Karl Laufkötter
Steersman.....John Gurney

Conductor.....Erich Leinsdorf

Director.....Lothar Wallerstein
Set designer.....Joseph Urban
Costume designer.....Mathilde Castel-Bert

Tristan und Isolde received five performances this season.

[**Traubel**'s costumes were designed by Adrian.]

Review of Olin Downes in the New York Times:

Miss Traubel took this part for the first time on any stage. She sang it very carefully, very intelligently, always with a lofty purpose and with a sincerity that was manifest in every measure. Naturally she is not wholly at ease or completely her artistic self in a part just emerging from the study and rehearsal stage. But the first act was admirably proportioned, more than competently sung, and well worked out in detail.

In the second act, Miss Traubel sang the second act so discreetly that at times she was hardly audible. She and Mr. Melchior held the passage down dynamically so that there was a real impression of intimacy, and it was refreshing not to hear the superb music bawled. But the phrases needed the freedom, spontaneity and warmth of color they readily can have when Miss Traubel sings, for there is plenty of that in her voice.

For the voice is more than a soprano with exceptionally brilliant high notes. In fact, the high notes were made less of than is customarily the case and Miss Traubel can confidently make of them. She avoided the high C's and she kept well within her powers so far as sonority is concerned. It was a restrained interpretation, one that went very carefully over difficult ground and left nothing to impulse and chance.

At present, Miss Traubel's Brunnhilde of "Götterdämmerung" has a dramatic line that her Isolde has yet to gain. In acting Isolde, as indeed in most of her acting, she is now limited. Fortunate that she did too little than too much! To what degree we can expect romantic illusion of her is debatable. She can and we believe she will do much more in this direction than she does now. Her gestures are exterior.

Let us wait a little. Here is an American soprano very gifted who in three seasons has learned the Sieglinde and all the Brunnhilde parts of the Ring, and last night essayed a first, thoughtfully studied and competently realized Isolde. This takes account of Miss Traubel's performance up to the end of the second act.. It does not chronicle her singing of the Liebestod.

Review of Jerome D. Bohm in the Herald Tribune

Perhaps one should be grateful to have "Tristan und Isolde" back in the repertoire under any circumstances, after not having heard it for a season. There would have been more cause for rejoicing had the performance last night been one which did greater justice to the composer's desires. It was no easy task for Mme. Traubel to sing her first Isolde on any stage with the tonal effulgence of Kirsten Flagstad's Isolde still lingering in the memory, It would be a pleasure to state that the American soprano's assumption of this arduous role was a

satisfying one, but such a statement would be misleading.

Mme. Traubel gave every evidence of having carefully prepared her delineation from every aspect, vocal, musical and dramatic. She did better with the first act from the tonal angle than with the second, which was quite disappointing throughout. What surprised me most was the fact that the soprano's voice did not have the strength demanded for a really convincing delivery of the great climactic moments of the score, either in the first or second acts. No effort was made to sing the two high C's in the tumultuous meeting of the lovers. The high B's in the first act were wanting in resiliency and glow.

Much of the time Mine. Traubel's utterances were so confidential that while they might have been audible to Brangaene or Tristan they failed to reach the members of the audience, who, after all, had some interest in them, too. Such tonal subtlety has its place in a lieder recital with piano accompaniment, but hardly with Wagner's sumptuous orchestration.

There were, of course, some impressively voiced things. Passages which were neither too low for Mme. Traubel, so that they could not be heard at all, or too high, so that the quality of the voice thinned out and failed to have the essential sheen and expansiveness, frequently sounded round and full. But her singing for the most part did not dwell on an exceptional plane of excellence.

Histrionically viewed, the traversal of the first act, in which Isolde gives vent to untrammelled emotions in which injured pride, imperiousness and irony are but a few of the constituents, was an accomplishment worthy of respect. There was little indication of profound imaginative insight; but it was easy to see that Mme. Traubel had taken infinite pains with her gestures and poses, although they were obviously the result of meticulous coaching and devoid of inner compulsion.

Less felicitous was the ardent, love-swooning Isolde of the second act. Here Mme. Traubel's unromantic figure was even more in her way than in the previous act. Her costuming of both acts was unfortunate, the first especially so in its vivid green and unbecoming cut; the second in excessive amount of material used which made her movements more gauche than necessary. Her waving of the scarf to the approaching Tristan was not a vision to treasure in the memory.

All of the other singers concerned are familiar here in their roles. Some were better disposed vocally than others. Mme. Thorborg's Brangaene was visually and dramatically compelling but unevenly sung. The Warning Call from the Tower was tonally unsteady. Mr. Melchior, aside from minor wanderings from the pitch, sang well and his delineation had its customary good points. Mr. Kipnis was inclined to staginess. Kurwenal is Mr. Huehn's best role.

What "Tristan" needs most is a conductor of the highest imaginative qualities; a conductor who combines flaming intensity, tenderness and inwardness along with the ability to make his musicians play persuasively. Unhappily, Mr. Leinsdorf possesses none of these attributes. His pacing of the score was unconscionably fast and his insensitivity inhibited an even passably good realization of Wagner's intentions. There were some new cuts in the second act made to shorten the performance to conform with the new 11:30 ending regulations now prevailing at the Metropolitan.

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Met Careers

- *Castel-Bert, Mathilde [Costume Designer]*
- *Darcy, Emery [Tenor]*
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