

COMPACT
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 067a

Furtwängler Tristan und Isolde

PRISTINE
AUDIO
XR

No other chord in music, surely, makes so startling an emotional impact on the listener as the one first heard in the *Prelude to Tristan and Isolde*. One may have heard it a hundred times in the opera house; but when the lights dim and go out and the house grows still as the conductor raises his baton, when there rises out of the orchestral pit the almost unbearably long-drawn motive of longing suddenly snatched by the wood-wind chord of the motive of desire, we think, as if for the first time, the magic potion that will cause to be enacted within us, as well as on the stage and in the orchestra, the tragedy of the ill-fated lovers.

It was in the course of Sir Thomas Beecham's second season of opera at Covent Garden, in 1910, that I heard *Tristan* for the first time. Up to then I had heard the *Prelude and Liebestod* in the concert version, studied the work at the piano as best I could (no radio, no records of the music in that dark age!) and read and re-read a book and an essay which now are, I suppose, forgotten. These were the imaginative essay on the opera in Filson Young's *Masterpieces* and a novel by Gertrude Atherton called *The Tower of Ivory*, old-fashioned in style, no doubt, and not always musically accurate, but still absorbingly interesting...

This fine recording has the great merit of suggesting a performance in the opera house without the corresponding drawback of extraneous noises, and the balance between voices and orchestra seems to me as good as anything of the kind we have yet had, and in the last act, even better than that. It is only in the *Prelude* to Act I, for some reason or another, that the music sounds rather distant and light in bass. Furtwängler makes a finely controlled crescendo to the climax but, as in previous recordings, the timpani, in the recapitulatory passage, hardly tell at all. When the curtain goes up (so to speak) and the young sailor has sung his song, with the right perspective (though he sounds as far away after Brangäne has pulled the curtains of Isolde's cabin aside), the orchestra comes in with a reassuring vitality, depth of tone and spaciousness.

The splendid string playing is exceptionally well recorded, as is Wagner's lovely writing for the wood-wind, and the six off-stage horns give no cause for pain in the second act. But to do justice to such playing as this one would have to mention each member of the orchestra, from whom Furtwängler has drawn so distinguished and inspired a performance.

His firm control and masterly conception of the score and his unflinching response to the subtleties of Wagner's writing are shown in page after page, and I can quote only the first scene of the last act, in which Kurwenal is seen watching over Tristan. Furtwängler brings out most movingly the joyful emotions of Kurwenal when he realises that his hero lives and the swift changes to Tristan's faint replies to his trusty servant's anxious questions....

And Flagstad. It is moving beyond words to hear the great singer, with her art at the height of its maturity, as time bids her say farewell to Tristan, shifting nothing in her exacting part, pouring out her voice as generously as ever, and adding to the flood of golden tone an emotion not present in previous years. One of the loveliest things is her quiet singing, with the high notes beautifully covered, as (in the first act) Isolde offers the cup to Tristan and clearly reveals her inmost feelings, one of the most exciting the extinguishing of the torch in the succeeding act (the orchestra tremendous here) and the most poignant Isolde's bitter cry from the heart as Tristan dies...

Alce Robertson - *The Gramophone, March 1953 (excerpts from first review of HMV LP issue)*

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SARL Pristine Audio, Le Bourg, 24610 St. Meard de Curzon, France - Tel. (00) 33 553 821857
www.pristineclassical.com

COMPACT
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO067a

Furtwängler conducts

PRISTINE
AUDIO
XR

WAGNER Tristan und Isolde

Discs One and Two



Tristan Ludwig Suthaus
Isolde Kirsten Flagstad
Brangäne Blanche Thebom
König Marke Josef Greindl
Kurwenal Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau
Melot Edgar Evans
Seemann Rudolf Schock

Hirt Rudolf Schock
Steuermann Rhoderick Davies
Philharmonia Orchestra
Chorus of the Royal Opera House,
Covent Garden, London
Studio recording, 1952

Wagner Tristan und Isolde

Disc One

- 1 Act 1 - Prelude (11:04)
- 2 Act 1, Scene 1 - Westwärts schweift der Blick (6:28)
- 3 Act 1, Scene 2 - Frisch weht der Wind der Heimat zu (4:17)
- 4 Act 1, Scene 2 - Hab acht, Tristan! (5:34)
- 5 Act 1, Scene 3 - Weh, ach wehe! (1:57)
- 6 Act 1, Scene 3 - Wie lachend sie mir Lieder singen (7:43)
- 7 Act 1, Scene 3 - O blinde Augen! (12:05)
- 8 Act 1, Scene 4 - Auf! Auf! Ihr Frauen! (1:20)
- 9 Act 1, Scene 4 - Herrn Tristan bringe meinen Gruss (6:56)
- 10 Act 1, Scene 5 - Begehrt, Herrin, was Ihr wünscht (9:22)
- 11 Act 1, Scene 5 - War Morold dir so wert (11:12)

Disc Two

- 1 Act 1, Scene 5 - Tristan! Isolde! (7:35)
- 2 Act 2 - Prelude (2:39)
- 3 Act 2, Scene 1 - Hörst du sie noch? (13:01)
- 4 Act 2, Scene 2 - Isolde! Geliebte! (19:43)
- 5 Act 2, Scene 2 - O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe (9:14)
- 6 Act 2, Scene 2 - Lausch, Geliebter! (5:08)

Philharmonia Orchestra Wilhelm Furtwängler

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

PACO 067a

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Front cover artwork based on a photograph of **Kirsten Flagstad** as **Isolde**

Rear cover artwork based on a photograph of **Wilhelm Furtwängler**

Recording producer: **Walter Legge**
Recording Engineer: **Douglas Larter**
Recorded 10-21 & 23 June 1952
Kingsway Hall, London

First issued in 1953 as HMV LPs
ALP.1030-35

Total duration: **4hr 16:25**

For a full catalogue visit
www.pristineclassical.com
or call : (00) 33 979 622713

© 2011 **Pristine Audio**

PRISTINE
AUDIO

COMPACT
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 067b

Furtwängler Tristan und Isolde

PRISTINE
AUDIO
XR

The King may be the work of Wagner's that is nowadays most in demand, but it is Tristan und Isolde that changed the course of musical history (and some other history too), and which is most quintessentially Wagnerian. It is, in many ways, a work that so challenges our ideas of what we may expect from opera, or indeed from any kind of art, that it is tempting to create a new category in which to place it. For in an adequate performance - rarer for this than for any of Wagner's other works - one is so stirred that the demands being made seem to go beyond enjoyment, involvement, even the pain-pleasure of great tragedies. Instead one is challenged to believe something, to examine some presuppositions of living, at a level that I feel compelled to call religious, and to come to terms with a vision that is both exhilarating and terrifying. Its composer was the first to feel this - no one had a chance to hear it until six years after it was completed - but many have felt it since, and have felt, as Nietzsche did, that it is by far Wagner's most radical work, and one that is, in the strictest sense, incomparable.

When Wagner first thought of writing it isn't clear, but he mentioned his idea for it in a celebrated letter to Liszt dated December 1854, when he was composing *Die Walküre*. But that work took another fifteen months to complete, and then Wagner started work on *Magical* - the opera that took him longest to compose, and from which he broke off in the middle, in order to write *Tristan*. The usual claim made by his biographers is that it was his love for Mathilde Wesendonck that compelled him to write it, but that is to take a naive view of the connection between his life and his creations. Certainly he fell in love with Mathilde - wife of Otto, a rich businessman who was his patron - around this time, and his love seems to have been fully reciprocated, though probably not consummated. And by the time Wagner finished *Tristan*, in August 1859, his feelings for Mathilde had waned. Even if it was their passion that kickstarted his work on *Tristan*, which he wrote at an unusually rapid rate, it was the inner intensity of his vision, and the world of feeling in which the protagonists live and die, that maintained it - and it is an intensity that increases from act to act, though anyone who had heard and appreciated only Act I would find that impossible to credit.

This is the opera of Wagner's that carries one characteristic feature of his style to extremes: its sensuous beauty is overwhelming, with some passages of which one can say, without exaggeration, that they make one feel weak or faint with their beauty. Yet the lovers, in their huge central duet in Act II, deal in abstractions and distinctions that suggest that philosophical discussions at the court of King Mark were rigorous and frequent. The more delicious Tristan becomes in Act III, the more metaphysically eloquent and precise he becomes, altering and eventually abandoning concepts such as selfhood and responsibility. Mix these two usually inimical kinds of ingredient - sensuous beauty and philosophical rigor - and the result is heard in a unique way.

Michael Tanner - The Faber Pocket Guide to Wagner (Faber & Faber, 2010 - reprinted with permission of the author)

Transfer notes

This recording surely stands as one of the first truly great opera recordings of the era of tape recording - at last Furtwängler was free in the studio from the stifling requirements of 4-minute 78rpm sides, and what a fabulous result he and the EMI engineers made with this opportunity. My role here has been chiefly to clean up some of the muck and noise present in the original, and to extend both the top end and very deep bass. I was also able to address some pitch anomalies previously ignored or undetected, most notably the first tape reel of Act 2, which has been heard quite a bit sharp (until now) for nearly 60 years... AR

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SARL Pristine Audio, Le Bourg, 24610 St. Meard de Gurçon, France - Tel. (00) 33 553 821857
www.pristineclassical.com

COMPACT
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO067b

Furtwängler conducts

PRISTINE
AUDIO
XR

WAGNER Tristan und Isolde

Discs Three and Four



Tristan Ludwig Suthaus
Isolde Kristen Flagstad
Brangäne Blanche Thebom
König Marke Josef Greindl
Kurwenal Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau
Melot Edgar Evans
Seemann Rudolf Schock

Hirt Rudolf Schock
Steuermann Rhoderick Davies
Philharmonia Orchestra
Chorus of the Royal Opera House,
Covent Garden, London
Studio recording, 1952

Wagner Tristan und Isolde

Disc Three

- 1 Act 2, Scene 2 - *Doch unsre Liebe* (11:29)
- 2 Act 2, Scene 3 - *Rette dich, Tristan!* (2:03)
- 3 Act 2, Scene 3 - *Tatest du's wirklich?* (13:48)
- 4 Act 2, Scene 3 - *O König, das kann ich dir nicht sagen* (10:06)
- 5 Act 3 - *Prelude* (7:41)
- 6 Act 3, Scene 1 - *Kurwenal! He!* (11:20)
- 7 Act 3, Scene 1 - *Wo ich erwacht - weilt' ich nicht* (8:02)

Disc Four

- 1 Act 3, Scene 1 - *Noch losch das Licht nicht aus* (28:57)
- 2 Act 3, Scene 2 - *O diese Sonne!* (3:48)
- 3 Act 3, Scene 2 - *Ha! ich bin's, ich bin's* (6:41)
- 4 Act 3, Scene 3 - *Kurwenal! Hör! Ein zweites Schiff* (9:37)
- 5 Act 3, Scene 3 - *Mild und leise wie er lächelt* (7:13)

Philharmonia Orchestra Wilhelm Furtwängler

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Front cover artwork based on a photograph of **Kirsten Flagstad** as **Isolde**

Rear cover artwork based on a photograph of **Wilhelm Furtwängler**

Recording producer: **Walter Legge**
Recording Engineer: **Douglas Larter**
Recorded 10-21 & 23 June 1952
Kingsway Hall, London

First issued in 1953 as HMV LPs
ALP. 1030-35

Total duration: 4hr 16:25

For a full catalogue visit
www.pristineclassical.com
or call : (00) 33 979 622713

© 2011 **Pristine Audio**