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WAGNER TRISTAN AND ISOLDE MELCHIOR/TRAUBEL

ACT I—ISOLDE'S NARRATIVE AND CURSE / ACT II—O KONIG
ACT III—SCENE ONE COMPLETE; O DIESE SONNE!; LIEBESTOD



PATRIMONIO UC

LEGENDARY PERFORMANCES

MELCHIOR—TRAUBEL
WAGNER: TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

Side 1

ISOLDE'S NARRATIVE (ACT I,
SCENE 3) (9:15)

(Recorded in 1945)

Helen Traubel, Soprano
New York Philharmonic
Artur Rodzinski, Conductor

O KÖNIG (ACT II, SCENE 3) (4:33)

(Recording date unknown)

Lauritz Melchior, Tenor
The Columbia Opera Orchestra
Erich Leinsdorf, Conductor

ACT III, SCENE 1 (Beginning) (16:15)

(Recorded in 1942 and 1943)

Lauritz Melchior, Tenor
Herbert Janssen, Baritone
The Columbia Opera Orchestra
Erich Leinsdorf, Conductor
Orchestra of the Colón Opera House
Robert Kinsky, Conductor

Side 2

ACT III, SCENE 1 (Conclusion) (16:20)

(Recorded in 1943)

Lauritz Melchior, Tenor
Herbert Janssen, Baritone
Orchestra of the Colón Opera House
Robert Kinsky, Conductor

O DIESE SONNE! (ACT III, SCENE 2) (3:27)

(Recorded in 1943)

Lauritz Melchior, Tenor
Orchestra of the Colón Opera House
Robert Kinsky, Conductor

LIEBESTOD (ACT III, SCENE 4) (6:20)

(Recorded in 1945)

Helen Traubel, Soprano
New York Philharmonic
Artur Rodzinski, Conductor

On the afternoon of February 17, 1926, a young Danish tenor made his Metropolitan Opera debut in *Tannhäuser*. He might have attracted more attention on any other day, for the town was agog over the much publicized debut that night of the eighteen-year-old Marion Talley, white hope of the coloratura repertoire. Talley stayed with the company three seasons; Lauritz Melchior was to remain as a mainstay until his final appearance in *Lohengrin* on February 2, 1950.

Melchior was one of the harbingers of a new Golden Age of Wagner in New York. After a setback during the First World War, when all German operas were banned, interest mounted during the Twenties. In the Thirties, with casts including Leider, Flagstad, Melchior, Schorr, Olczewska, Branzell, Lehmann, Lawrence, List, Thorborg, Jansen and Kipnis, Wagner became the best box-office attraction at the Met. Unfortunately, the situation in Europe made it impossible for some of these artists to remain in New York. But even when, in 1940, Flagstad decided to return to Norway, fate was kind to the opera. On December 28, 1939, Flagstad, as Brünnhilde, had shared honors with a new Sieglinde who, in quality and power of voice, was an impressive match for her. This was Helen Traubel, an all-American from St. Louis who had never traveled, much less studied, abroad.

Miss Traubel, an unusually practical and down-to-earth prima donna, believed in the principle of making haste slowly. Brought up in a musical family (her mother was a lieder singer of some reputation in the Middle West), the soprano had known and sung in German since childhood. Her talents were recognized as early as 1925 by Rudolph Ganz, who engaged her for a St. Louis Symphony concert and then brought her to New York for an appearance at the Lewisohn Stadium. She remained for a time as a staff artist with NBC radio, but then returned home. Her real break came in 1935: Walter Damrosch, in St. Louis to conduct an old-fashioned German *Sängerfest*, was so impressed with the local soprano that he offered her the leading role in his opera *The Man Without a Country*,

which the Met was to produce in its spring season of 1937. The opera was hardly a triumph, but the soprano was singled out for praise. Still, Traubel did not appear again in the house until her more auspicious Sieglinde. Meanwhile, she had made her mark as a recitalist in Town Hall and had earned kudos at a New York Philharmonic concert when she sang the Immolation Scene from *Götterdämmerung*. Clearly, the new Brünnhilde and Isolde had arrived.

Melchior began his singing career as a boy soprano and made his formal debut in 1913 as a baritone. Convinced by the American contralto Mme Charles Cahier that he was really a tenor, the young man studied with Anna Bahr-Mildenberg and with Cosima and Siegfried Wagner before appearing as Parsifal and Siegmund at the 1924 Bayreuth Festival. From that time on, his preeminence as the world's leading *Heldentenor* was unquestioned.

Deeply serious as artists, Traubel and Melchior were good colleagues offstage because both had a sense of fun. Traubel is an avid baseball fan; at the height of her career, she had to avoid going to games in order to keep from shouting. Melchior's wit is proverbial. Indeed, he inherited many of the stories that used to be credited to his great predecessor Leo Slezak (actually some can be traced even further back). He is still active. In 1963, at the age of seventy-three, he emerged from retirement to sing again his first-act aria from *Walküre*. The audience loved it. Singers were durable in the Golden Age. There were giants in those days.

—Philip L. Miller



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