

# JUNE DONSWORTH'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE PERFORMANCE OF *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE* AT COPENHAGEN OPERA HOUSE ON 2ND JUNE 2024

This performance was attended by Queen Margrethe II. The audience stood when she arrived, and when the singers came out to applause at the finale, each singer would turn to the Queen and bow to her first before facing the audience. She is obviously held in great respect by the Danish people.

ACT 1. The set is a slightly sloping stage divided into two; behind a half height barrier are the sailors and amongst them, milling about, are Tristan, Melot and Kurwenal. In front of the barrier is Isolde's shipboard living quarters, with a lounge to upper left, and to the right a bench and a cabinet (containing the potions). Isolde is wearing a long blue dress/cloak and Brangäne a similar dark blue dress/cloak. Isolde looks youngish and has long blonde hair. Elisabet Strid has a beautiful voice, and she acts and shows intense emotion very impressively. Her recounting of her grief over her fiancé's death and her encounter with Tantris and then her discovery that he was actually Tristan who had killed Morold was particularly effective, as was her expression of fury towards Tristan and her desire for revenge. Bryan Register (Tristan) is a big bloke with curly hair, wearing a navy kilt, a navy scarf around his neck, belts, sword, pants tucked into boots. (He resembled a koala). He has quite a light Heldentenor voice— his presence lacks charisma and he was somewhat passive in his acting compared to Isolde's gripping acting and singing.

ACT 2. The set is the slightly sloping stage again, with about 10 scattered cherry blossom trees in flower and their fallen petals all over the stage. A brazier stands in the upper right. Isolde is sitting on a pale wood bench and wearing a long pale pink flowing gown. Both Strid and Register sang well, Isolde particularly. They began their love song lying on their backs, then sitting up hugging each other, then wound themselves around a cherry tree trunk. The cherry trees provided a useful intermediary between them whilst singing of their love rapture.

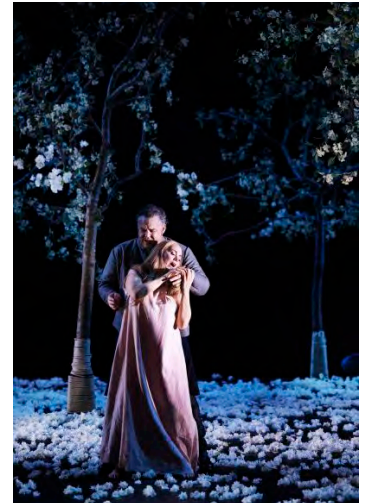
Singing the role of King Marke, Kyungil Ko, had a beautiful voice, but lacked gravitas, and in some way failed to express the terrible anguish of being betrayed by his much-loved nephew Tristan.

Hanne Fischer (Brangäne) acted the loyal servant with loving concern for Isolde, with a beautiful mellow light mezzo voice.

ACT 3. The set's bare except for a large pile of black rocks in the middle of the stage. Kurwenal is lying on his back up against the rock, his boots facing the audience. Tristan is to his left, lying on a slanted barouche. The connection between the 2 of them, and the tenderness shown by Kurwenal towards Tristan was extraordinarily moving. The bank of lights which had been overhead in ACT 1 is now vertically placed behind the pile of rocks. When Isolde arrives, there is a very moving scene sung by Isolde and Tristan. Tristan dies. When King Marke, Melot and Brangäne arrive, the struggle between Melot and Kurwenal occurs, both dying. The drama of all this and the singing was all of high quality. Strid (Isolde) sings the *Liebestod*. This is truly a transformation, sung by Isolde, because as she sings, the vertical bank of lights becomes brighter and brighter until she is transformed from Life to Death by vanishing into the void, while the audience is blinded by the dazzling lights. A magnificent finale to an enthralling *Tristan und Isolde*. Superb music played magnificently.

Note: the part of Tristan was advertised to be sung by Simon O'Neill but it was not to be. Those members of the WSNSW present were truly disappointed. Simon had been extraordinarily generous with his time and sung excerpts from Wagner operas at our recent event starring him at the Goethe Institut.

The Royal Danish Opera house was designed by architects Henning Larsen, completed 2005. Approached by ferry, the Opera House juts out over the water - all stunningly gold/orange. In the foyer, suspended balconies and stairways provide viewpoints and multi-level public spaces, all dominated by the shiny ochre coloured inner shell of the concert hall - it is warm and light-filled, and on upper decks there are great views of the city and beyond. In the auditorium the balconies are semicircular and beautifully lit with pinpoint points of light.



Elisabet Strid & Bryan Register

Conductor **Paolo Carignani**  
Italian; has conducted in all the major European music theatres, opera and symphonic.

Director **Sofia Adrian Jupither**  
Swedish stage director

Set designer **Erlend Birkeland**

Costumes **Maria Geber**

Tristan **Bryan Register**  
American Heldentenor - has sung Siegmund at Baden-Baden, Copenhagen and Singapore, Lohengrin at La Monnaie, Hong Kong and Savonlinna, Eric in Pittsburgh, Tristan in Mexico.

Isolde **Elisabet Strid**  
Swedish soprano, recognized for Wagnerian roles including Venus in *Tannhäuser*, Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*, Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*. Upcoming performances are Senta in Tokyo and Valencia, and Brünnhilde at Royal Opera House directed by Barrie Kosky.

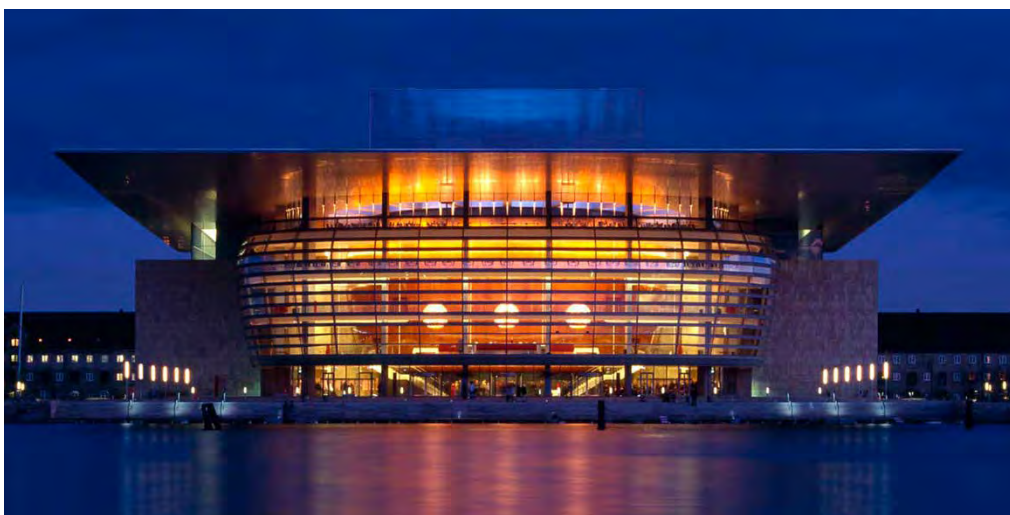
King Marke **Kyungil Ko Bass**  
from Korea, soloist with the Royal Danish Opera House

Kurwenal **Jens Søndergaard**  
Danish baritone. Future roles include Gunther at NY opera, Iago and Kothner with DKT.

Melot **Niels Jørgen Riis**  
Danish tenor

Brangäne **Hanne Fischer**  
Danish mezzo-soprano. Long term member of the Royal Theatre and guest artist at Berlin State Opera, Hamburg State Opera, Theatre Bonn.

With the Royal Danish Orchestra and the Royal Danish Opera Chorus.



Copenhagen Opera House