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MASTERING

*RICHARD STRAUSS*  
*Three Hymns • Opera arias*

**Soile  
Isokoski**

*Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra*  
*Okko Kamu*

ONDINE



## RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)

### Three Hymns / Opera arias

When Richard Strauss began to devote himself to opera at the turn of the century, he was already a famous man. He had composed eight of his brilliant tone poems within only twelve years. His dramatic talent and ability as an orchestrator had developed to their full potential. Whereas in the symphonic poems he grappled with his thoughts and feelings about the world's adversities (*Ein Heldenleben*, op. 40) or transformed the fiery passion of unrestrained love into music (*Don Juan*, op. 20), from then on he was fascinated by the complexity of the female character. After several love affairs and as a popular socialite of his day, he already had a good deal of experience. Richard Strauss was interested in a particular type, however – the *fin-de-siècle* woman: sensitive, highly strung, full of yearning and dreams, ready for the dawn of a new era, with a sense of emancipation but still afraid of the responsibility associated with it. She baffled him, and he wanted to comprehend her in her entirety. The psychological and creative interplay between men and women resulting from the breakdown of social conventions at the turn of the century occupied Strauss well into his late work.

For example, in the Baroque ambience of the opera *Capriccio* he allows the Countess to violate two taboos: she must choose between two commoners, the poet Olivier and the musician Flamand, as her lover, and she wants sensual pleasure – without further commitment. “If you choose the one, you will lose the other. Do we not always lose when we win?” (closing scene). In this allegory Richard Strauss philosophizes about what is more important in opera as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – text or music. A long discourse on music theory, which preoccupied generations of composers, from Mozart to Liszt, particularly in his symphonic poems, and Wagner to Richard Strauss. The Countess will elegantly resolve the situation herself – after the act ends, however.



RICHARD  
STRAUSS  
THREE HYMNS  
OPERA ARIAS

Soile Isokoski also asks herself about the importance of text and music before learning a new opera role. “Naturally, I read the text of the opera beforehand. I have to know exactly what it is about. Eventually I form my own ideas about it. Then comes the music, which makes the text and the situation clearer emotionally. In an opera the music is always slightly more important to me.

Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski is one of the most sought-after Strauss interpreters in the world today. By now, her standard repertoire not only includes the role of the Countess in *Capriccio* but the Marschallin and Ariadne as well. It all began in 1989 at the Finnish National Opera, where she made her debut as Mimi in Puccini’s *La bohème*. This was followed by the operas *Faust*, *The Bartered Bride*, *Otello*, *Falstaff*, *Freischütz*, *Peter Grimes*, *La juive*, *Turandot*, *Eugene Onegin*, all the Mozart operas and much more, with which Isokoski displayed the lyrical spectrum of her voice. Her sensitive, refined singing moves audiences in the major opera houses throughout the world. She sings at the Met, the Vienna Staatsoper, Covent Garden, Milan’s La Scala, the Semperoper in Dresden, in Berlin, Paris and at the prestigious festivals in Salzburg, Edinburgh, Orange and Savonlinna. She learned to articulate texts clearly at an early age by rehearsing and performing sacred works. Her father was a priest. Soile Isokoski initially studied church music and directed a church choir. Her lieder interpretations are characterized by transparency and nuanced expression, which she elevates to consummate tonal beauty in the operas of Mozart and Richard Strauss. In this respect she also pursues the aim of Strauss the composer: “I work for a long time on melodies, from the first idea to the final melodic form. Everything is taught at the conservatories, but not with the necessary thoroughness in melodic structure, which seems to be the most important thing to me.”

Soile Isokoski collaborates with such distinguished conductors as Seiji Ozawa, Colin Davis, Zubin Mehta, Daniel Barenboim, Simon Rattle, Claudio Abbado, Riccardo Muti, Esa-Pekka Salonen, John Eliot Gardiner, Valery Gergiev, Christian Thielemann and Peter Schneider and with directors including Günter Krämer, Marco Arturo Marelli and Otto



RICHARD  
STRAUSS  
THREE HYMNS  
OPERA ARIAS



Schenk. She prepared for the role of the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier* with Schenk in Geneva in 2012. “An experience!” the artist says enthusiastically. “He knows so much about the interpretation of this character, and I was fortunate to work with him. Naturally, his ideas are also incorporated into the musical interpretation of the role. The Marschallin is a wonderful role, with much worldly wisdom and a marvellous musical portrayal,” Soile Isokoski says thoughtfully. For instance, she can elicit a great deal out of the lines from the first act: “One must be light, light of heart and light of hand, to hold and take, hold and let go . . . Life punishes those that are not so” – often easier said than done.

Richard Strauss was pleased about the extraordinary ease with which the musical ideas for *Rosenkavalier* came to him and wrote to his literary alter ego, Hugo von Hofmannsthal: “Received the first act yesterday, am simply delighted. . . . The closing scene is splendid; it will set itself to music like oil and melted butter. I already worked on it today; I wish I were finished with it.” Despite his fondness for dissonances, chromaticism and drama, Strauss always attached great importance to melodiousness. For him, this was the secret of every successful composition, and he was prepared to revive the Baroque period on its behalf.

The first version of the opera *Ariadne auf Naxos* from 1912, which was performed along with Molière’s play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and lengthy dance interludes, ended as a flop. Not until the 1916 revision did it captivate audiences – as it still does today. Maria Jeritza, with her youthful dramatic soprano, sang Ariadne for both premieres, and Richard Strauss was enthusiastic. Ariadne’s emotional anguish, in the face of which she feels helpless at first, lost in the pangs of love, was depicted brilliantly in her opening scene: “It is humiliating to be ruined as I am! One must shudder; yes, I must find the girl I once was!”

Strangely enough, Pauline de Ahna’s words sounded similarly upset after she became engaged to Richard Strauss: “Excuse this letter, but I am so confused by two feelings



RICHARD  
STRAUSS  
THREE HYMNS  
OPERA ARIAS

– happiness and fear of a new life – that I am only half sane.” At that time, she was an up-and-coming opera star and a student of Strauss. She sang the leading female role at the premiere of his opera *Guntram* and Elisabeth in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* at Bayreuth. Nevertheless, for Richard Strauss she retired from the stage and became a housewife. A new life, which she enlivened with legendary outbursts of anger and theatrical scenes, thus becoming the model for some of her husband’s operatic heroines. Almost all the songs Strauss composed during their years together were dedicated to her. She later appeared in recital singing many of them, accompanied by her husband – a collaboration that helped him achieve sensational success, not only in the US.

As a result of his intense concentration on opera, Richard Strauss’s work in the song genre was interrupted for nearly twenty years. He did not begin the orchestral songs *Three Hymns*, op. 71, until he became director of the Vienna Staatsoper. They were composed during the spring of 1921 and premiered by the Berlin Philharmonic under Gustav Brecher at the Grosse Volksoper in Berlin on 9 November 1922. The soprano was Barbara Kemp von Schillings, one of the most celebrated Wagner singers of her day and greatly admired by Richard Strauss. The songs were performed for the first time in Vienna ten years later, on 9 January 1931, and conducted by Richard Strauss himself. The soprano part was sung by Margit Angerer, whom Strauss fostered until she emigrated to London in 1938. Strauss did not number the songs in the order in which they were composed, but he completed them very quickly – No. 2 on 2 January, No. 3 on 20 January and No. 1 on 6 April 1921.

The three songs extol the all-encompassing power of love. The fact that Friedrich Hölderlin’s poems sound rather bombastic nowadays and Strauss’s choice of texts was later construed politically may explain why they have been performed so infrequently. They are nonetheless atmospheric concert pieces which already anticipate the *Four Last Songs* and are waiting to be rediscovered. Soile Isokoski points out that the creation



RICHARD  
STRAUSS  
THREE HYMNS  
OPERA ARIAS

story from the Bible was the model for the first song. "It is also about the love of nature, of mankind. What is more important than love? Strauss thus displays a modern, global awareness which we all desperately need today."

**Maria Publig**

Translation: Phyllis Anderson



*RICHARD  
STRAUSS  
THREE HYMNS  
OPERA ARIAS*

# RICHARD STRAUSS

## Three Hymns / Opera arias

### Tracklist

- |   |  |            |
|---|--|------------|
| 1 | Ariadne auf Naxos, Op. 60, TrV 228a: Ein Schones war                                 | (00:05:51) |
| 2 | Ariadne auf Naxos, Op. 60, TrV 228a:<br>Es gibt ein Reich, wo alles rein ist         | (00:05:13) |
| 3 | 3 Hymnen von Friedrich Hölderlin, Op. 71, TrV 240:<br>No. 1. Hymne an die Liebe      | (00:08:42) |
| 4 | 3 Hymnen von Friedrich Hölderlin, Op. 71, TrV 240:<br>No. 2. Ruckkehr in die Heimat  | (00:07:04) |
| 5 | 3 Hymnen von Friedrich Hölderlin, Op. 71, TrV 240:<br>No. 3. Die Liebe               | (00:06:28) |
| 6 | Der Rosenkavalier, Op. 59, TrV 227 - Act I:<br>Die Zeit, die ist ein sonderbar' Ding | (00:02:38) |
| 7 | Der Rosenkavalier, Op. 59, TrV 227 - Act I: Da geht er hin                           | (00:04:51) |
| 8 | Capriccio, Op. 85, TrV 279:<br>Andante con moto - Morgen mittag um elf!              | (00:19:59) |



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OPERA ARIAS*



## THE 2xHD MASTERING PROCESS



This album was mastered using our 2xHD proprietary system. In order to achieve the most accurate reproduction of the original recording we tailor our process specifically for each project, using a selection from our pool of state-of-the-art audiophile components and connectors. The process begins with a transfer to analog from the original DXD master, using cutting edge D/A converters. The analog signal is then sent through a hi-end tube pre-amplifier before being recorded directly in DXD using the MSB Platinum Studio ADC plus. All connections used in the process are made of OCC silver cable.

DSD and 192kHz/24Bit versions are separately generated, directly from the analog signal.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audiophile sound engineer René Laflamme.

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2xHD Mastering: René Laflamme  
2xHD Executive Producer: André Perry

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