

Tristan und Isolde

RICHARD WAGNER

1865

**SUNG IN GERMAN
APPROXIMATE RUNNING TIME: 240 minutes**

This Wagner's masterpiece is some revolutionary piece of art; the dramatic love story with its sublime musical accompaniment was quite a shock at the time it premiered and it keeps on provoking the same feelings in the audience making it far more than just a simple opera.

The opera was composed in 1865 by Wagner, who also wrote the libretto, and it is largely based on a play by Gottfried von Strassburg. It is considered one of the most important operas ever composed and undoubtedly the most prominent piece of work written by the German composer. The musical score is often regarded as a landmark for modern 20th century music. His most remarkable feature is the deployment of Harmonic suspension, an artistic device which, through a series of prolonged and unfinished cadences, aims at causing a music tension by creating expectations and desires which are resolved only at the end.



MAIN CHARACTERS

Tristan, King's Marke nephew (tenor)
Isolde, Irish princess (soprano)
Marke, Re of Cornwall (basso)
Kurwenal, Tristan's squirrel (baritone)

THE PLOT

Isolde, engaged to King Marke, starts having feelings for the king's protégée Tristan. A love potion will seal the youngsters' mutual passion which is kept as a secret throughout the opera and freely embraced only in the afterlife.

Act 1

Tristan is shipping Isolde to his uncle's, King Marke, who is to marry her. While travelling, Isolde tells her maid Brangäne, about the first encounter between her and Tristan; upon the death of her former fiancé Morold, she bumped into a stranger, Tantris, who was mortally wounded. Isolde used her healing power to save Tantris' life but during the man's recovery she found out he was actually Tristan, the murderer of her former fiancé. She attempted to kill the man with his own sword but she eventually let him go after having him swearing to never come back. During the trip, Tristan disrespectfully disobeys one of Isolde's orders, who then prepares a potion to kill the young man. The potion, however, turns out to be a love potion and the two fall in love with each other.

Act 2

Soon after the marriage, King Marke goes on a hunting party, inadvertently leaving Tristan and Isolde free to consume their love. Indifferent to Brangäne's advices, the affair between the two young lovers comes to light and Melot promptly reports the incident to the King, who gets sad more than angry at the news. He disowns Tristan and buns him from the kingdom. Melot escorts him away but the two end up duelling and Tristan gets seriously wounded.

Act 3

Squirrel Kuwernal cures Tristan, who is mad with pain at the idea that his lover would not be able to join him. A shepherd announces the arrival of Isolde's ship, making Tristan mad with joy, he loses his bandages and runs to Isolde but dies in her arms and she collapses. Another ship arrives with Melot, King Marke and Brangäne. The King had learnt about the magic potion and had got there to bless the two youngsters love but Kuwernal, who had spotted them arriving, thinks they are there to kill Tristan and engages in a fight with Melot, resulting in both of them dying. Prey of pain and sorrow, Isolde sees her love rising up again and ultimately collapses and dies.

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