

# pressquotes

## SOILE ISOKOSKI – SOPRANO

### **Marschallin Der Rosenkavalier / Bavarian State Opera**

**Cond. Constantin Trinks / dir. Otto Schenk**

'I have rarely witnessed such a magnificent portrayal of the Marschallin; Isokoski's subtle singing conveyed every emotional nuance; many of us were in tears during her monologue'.

Ako Imamura, *Bachtrack*, July 2014

### **Ariadne Ariadne auf Naxos / London Philharmonic DVD**

**Cond. Vladimir Jurowski**

"...Soile Isokoski confirms her reputation as a glorious Straussian, with her role's extended range firmly commanded, the tone unfailingly luminous. The Finnish soprano's Prima Donna in the Prologue is obviously self-important, yet very human as well, actually expressing concern for the Composer. Later, her dignity and profound expressiveness in the opera's two great monologues prove immensely moving. Brava!"

Roger Pines, *International Record Review*, September 2014

### **Countess Almaviva The Marriage of Figarro / Ravinia's Marton Theatre**

**Cond. James Conlon / dir. Harry Silverstein**

"Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski offered a bright, clear voice but also an apt strain of sadness as the betrayed Countess Almaviva."

Wynne Delacoma, *Chicago Classical Review*, August 2014

### **Mozart Requiem / Helsinki Baroque Orchestra**

**Cond. Dalia Stasevska**

"Solistinelikko oli varsinainen dreamteam. Soile Isokoski sopraano helkkyy tarkasti ja herkästi"

"The quartet of soloists was a real dream team. Soile Isokoski sang accurately and sensitively"

Riitta-Leena Lempinen, *Ita-Savo*, August 2014

### **Marschallin Der Rosenkavalier / City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra**

**Cond. Andris Nelson**

"Isokoski...with singing of great elegance and refinement"

Andrew Porter, *Opera*, August 2014

"With Soile Isokoski as the Marschallin... this was singing of the highest calibre from artists in their signature roles...."

...the transcendent beauty of the final scenes of acts one and three were most affecting, with Isokoski's elegance of line controlling both the Marschallin's emotions and her heightened awareness of the inevitability of losing her lover to a younger woman."

*Guardian*, five stars, May 2014

"Best of all was the wonderful team of soloists...And heading these was Soile Isokoski as the Marschallin, heartbreakingly dignified as she renounced her young lover Octavian to a girl much younger than herself. Isokoski phrased so creamily..."

*Birmingham Post*, five stars, May 2014

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"Finnish superstar Soile Isokoski was the image of respect commanding regal deportment. Always elegant in her Marschallin's anxiety, annoyance or happiness, Isokoski sang with a clear, focused tone that ultimately failed to secure her Octavian, but won over every man and woman in the concert hall instead."

*Bachtrack*, five stars, May 2014

"Isokoski is a lovely singer, with poise and sympathy to spare..."

*The Arts Desk*, five stars, May 2014

## **Marschallin *Der Rosenkavalier* / Bayerische Staatsoper Cond. Kirill Petrenko Dir. Otto Schenk**

"Soile Isokoski's voice boasts colours as beautiful as the fabric of the dress she wears. She is remarkably at ease in the low register - and her high notes have warmth."

"La voix de Soile Isokoski offre des teintes aussi cuivrées que le tissu de la robe qu'elle portait, avec une aisance remarquable dans le grave et un aigu chaleureux."

Laurent Bury, *Forum Opera*, March 2014

"It was an ideal performance crowned by an assumption of the Marschallin that was nothing other than perfection...Soile Isokoski is the Marschallin of one's dreams. Incredible to think that she is 57 this year since her instrument is so fresh and youthful. The peaches and cream tone, the ability to spin incredibly long lines and the impeccable diction all combined to produce a spellbinding evening. She has this innate understanding of the work and ability to phrase the conversational lines that is sheer perfection. The close of Act 1, where she looks into the mirror and contemplates her reflection will stay with me for a very long time...In a work that seems indestructible this was the greatest possible of performances crowned by Isokoski's flawless Marschallin. I feel so exceptionally privileged to have seen it."

*Opera Traveller*, March 2014

"Soile Isokoski provides a highlight right at the end of the opera: The beginning of the trio in the third act is rarely sung as masterfully and touchingly."

"Setzte [Soile Isokoski] ein Highlight kurz vor Schluss: Selten hat man den Beginn des Terzetts im dritten Akt so souverän und anrührend gesungen vernommen."

*Abendzeitung München*, March 2014

## **Strauss's Three Hymns, Op.71 / BBC Philharmonic Cond. Juanjo Mena**

"The soprano in this instance was Soile Isokoski, a fine Strauss singer, with a marvellously gilded tone and a wonderful way with floated high notes."

Tim Ashley, *Guardian*, January 2014

## **Strauss Lieder / Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra Cond. Mark Elder**

"[Soile Isokoski] has a way of singing that has less emphasis on volume and vocal gloss, and more focus on intonation and expression. She sounds as though she has been very economical with her instrument – a well-trained soprano who knows exactly what to do with her voice.

What appealed to me the most was that Isokoski used a style which was very reminiscent of a song cycle. She was extremely well-presented, sang with subtlety, and gave no impression that she was fighting against the orchestra. It seemed as though she were singing with only a piano, which gave

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an immediacy to her interpretation. Instead of using the grand gestures that often seem to be required of singers with a large orchestra behind them, Isokoski managed to stay close to the text and story.”

“...heeft een manier van zingen die minder nadruk legt op volume en vocale glans en meer focust op intonatie en expressie. Ze is, zo te horen, erg zuinig geweest op haar instrument en klinkt als een getrainde sopraan die weet wat ze met haar stem kan.

Wat me zeer aansprak is dat Isokoski een stijl hanteerde die heel erg deed denken aan die voor een liedrecital. Ze had een heel gedetailleerde presentatie, intoneerde subtiel en vermeed de indruk dat ze ‘tegen het orkest op moest zingen’. Alsof ze naast een enkele vleugel stond, zo leek het, en dat gaf een mooie directheid aan haar interpretatie. In plaats van het grote gebaar dat het zingen van orkestliederen bij een grote formatie ongetwijfeld van een vocalist vraagt, bleef ze dicht op de tekst en het verhaal.”

Francois van den Anker, *Opera Magazine Nederlands*, January 2014

## **Recital / ‘Convergences’ series / l’Amphithéâtre de l’Opéra-Bastille**

“Soile Isokoski’s beautiful Lieder interpretations, with all their rich nuances, make her one of the very few singers today who is capable of moving freely in this repertoire, without compromising either music theory or the text.”

*Forum Opera*, November 2013

## **50th Birthday celebrations for the Berlin Philharmonic**

### **Cond. Simon Rattle**

“Soile Isokoski brought wonderful phrasing to the songs of Tove.”

Jesse Simon, *Mundo Clasico*, November 2013

## **Ariadne Ariadne auf Naxos / Glyndebourne**

### **Dir. Katharina Thoma**

“Soile Isokoski’s mature, passionately sung Ariadne isn’t an abandoned ancient on a desert island; she’s a hallucinating casualty of war.”

*Times*, May 2013

“Soile Isokoski lavished her silvery tone, scrupulous musicianship and excellent German diction on Ariadne’s big, shining phrases...”

*Sunday Times*, May 2013

“Soile Isokoski... radiantly sung...”

*Independent*, May 2013

“Experience pays, too, in the casting of Thomas Allen as the Music Master and, most notably, his leading lady – the Prima Donna/Ariadne of Soile Isokoski... in a house this size her wholeheartedness and musicality shine through.”

Edward Seckerson, May 2013

“Isokoski, by contrast, showed why she is one of the world’s leading Strauss sopranos with a fabulously adorned account of Ariadne. Her voice is powerful yet sure and evenly produced across her entire register and it was a privilege to hear what was – surprisingly – her role *début*.”

*Classical Source*, May 2013

“...Isokoski striking form when he sweeps her off, the final duet provide an opportunity to close one’s eyes and let the authentic Straussian rapture work its enveloping magic.”

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Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph*, May 2013

"Isokoski has a long and illustrious career behind her as a singer of Strauss heroines (I heard her last as the Marschallin in Geneva last year) and has nothing left to prove.... holding her line beautifully, phrasing with intelligence and projecting the inner intensity of an abandoned heroine with some lovely hushed tone. [A] performance, that was warmly received."

*Musical Criticism*, May 2013

**Elsa in Wagner *Lohengrin* / Dresden Semperoper  
cond. Christian Thielemann / dir. Christine Mielitz**

"Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski played Elsa with a dignified, well judged balance between innocence and disenchantment. Her voice fluctuated effortlessly between the larger, luminous registers and gentle pianissimi of her dream song 'Einsam in trüben Tagen'. Her dramatic outbursts with the evil Ortrud were particularly expressive".

Courtney Smith, *Opera Now*, March 2013

**Recital: Wigmore Hall**

"Soile Isokoski's voice shouldn't really fit in the Wigmore Hall. Hers is a true opera-house voice, a glorious, full-bodied, sparkling soprano with the power to ride over the orchestra pit. Yet Isokoski's projection comes from vibrancy rather than sheer heft. So here, in what has been called classical music's sacred shoebox, that voice also sounds thrillingly at home.

It was at its best straight away in five songs from Wolf's Italian Songbook, effortlessly big yet poised and flexible. Marita Viitasalo, who has been Isokoski's pianist in recital for 25 years, was with her at every turn. The duo was back in command in the second half, starting with Richard Strauss's three darkly quirky Songs of Ophelia and continuing with five genially eccentric numbers by Charles Ives. She conveyed them brilliantly. Four Dream Songs by the Finnish composer Aulis Sallinen were sombre and compelling, and needed an encore to clear the air; we got three. The last one, Strauss's Zueignung, was glowingly heartfelt and crowned with a crescendo that would have set any opera house's walls ringing".

Erica Jeal, *The Guardian*, January 2013

**Marcellin *Die Rosenkavalier* / Semperoper Dresden  
cond. Christian Thielemann / dir. Uwe Eric Laufenberg**

"Above all it is the three female singers who give such a magnificent performance. And the first and foremost of these is Soile Isokoski in the role of Feldmarschallin Fürstin Werdenberg. It is no exaggeration to say that she is the ideal singer for this part. She played the role with superb depth and sincerity, radiating a noble maturity which is seldom seen on stage. Her voice has great adaptability, carrying long-sustained phrases and producing sparkling high notes with ease, then touching even the most hard-hearted listener with her wonderful piano and rounded tone. Her interpretation of this role was unpretentious and ruthlessly sincere, moving the audience to tears. Soile Isokoski gave the Marschallin an exceptional greatness in her battle with growing old, and her final renunciation of her hopeless love for a younger man".

„Es sind vor allem drei wunderbare Sängerinnen, die von Thielemann getragen, diese Aufführung so grandios gestalten. Allen voran Soile Isokoski in der Rolle der Feldmarschallin Fürstin Werdenberg. Man darf sie ohne Übertreibung als eine Idealbesetzung für diese Partie ansehen. Sie gestaltet die Rolle mit einer grandiosen Innigkeit und strahlt dabei eine edle Reife aus, wie man sie selten auf der Bühne erlebt. Ihr Sopran ist von einer großen Tragfähigkeit, der weit gespannte Bögen und leuchtende Höhen mit Leichtigkeit erzeugt, um dann wieder mit wunderbarem Piano und sphärisch anmutenden Klängen zu berühren. Ihre Interpretation dieser Rolle ist unprätentiös und schonungslos ehrlich und rührt emotional zu Tränen. Ihre Auseinandersetzung mit dem Älterwerden

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und ihr letztendlicher Verzicht auf eine hoffnungslose Liebe zu einem Jüngeren verleiht Soile Isokoski in der Rolle der Marschallin eine besondere Größe“.

Andreas H. Hölscher, *Opernetz.de*, November 2012

“The Ensemble was lead by the wonderful Soile Isokoski as an experienced Marschallin. She sang with sophistication, a warm timbre, all the necessary nuances of expression and magnificently beautiful top notes”.

„Angeführt aber wird das Ensemble von der wunderbaren Soile Isokoski als erfahrene Marschallin. Sie singt kultiviert, mit warmem Timbre, allen geforderten Ausdrucksnuancen und herrlich-schönen Kopftönen“.

Kirsten Liese, *dradio.de*, November 2012

## **Recording: Richard Strauss – Three Hymns; Opera Scenes / CD Ondine ODE 1202 Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra / cond. Okko Kamu (Ondine)**

“Isokoski’s voice remains in pristine shape, it’s steadiness and accuracy of pitch a joy to hear. Ariadne’s two monologues show exhilaratingly steady and controlled vocalism over a wide range. Restraint characterised Isokoski’s Marshallin in 2007; since then the soprano has honed the role in several major European houses. Her work here indulges in neither interpretive heavy breathing now swoopy mannerism, two of the modes most commonly heard from acclaimed recorded exponents of this repertory. Isokoski holds firmly to the notes, hit dead-on, and the words are intelligently and discerningly uttered (with a little imitative nod towards the “kleine Fürsten Resi”). For home listening, that comes as a considerable relief.

Isokoski sounds glowing and apt – and more emotionally transported than she does as Ariadne or the Marshallin (The *Capriccio* final scene). She’s one of few recorded Madeleine actually to make clear via tone colour that part of the text is digetic music.

This radiant traversal by Isokoski and Kamu may win fresh attention for these hymns to various aspects of love”.

David Shengold, *SI Opera News*, February 2013

“This follow-up to her memorable account of the Four Last Songs a decade ago has the world’s loveliest Strauss soprano offering a foretaste of her Ariadne at Glyndebourne next summer”.

*The Sunday Times*, December 2012

“Now we have this superb collection of music of Strauss that includes excerpts from three of her signature roles: Der Rosenkavalier, Capriccio, and Ariadne auf Naxos. We also have Three Hymns, three songs about the power of love to texts by Friedrich Hölderlin composed in 1921. It is remarkable that these beautiful songs are seldom performed—they would have been perfect for Leonie Rysanek. Currently there are only two other recordings, with Felicity Lott and Karita Mattila. Isokoski’s singing is equally radiant, and it is a pleasure to experience her confidence and beauty of tone in their very difficult music”.

R.E.B., *ClassicalCDReview.com*, October 2012

“Soile Isokoski is one of the most outstanding Strauss singers of our time...”

“In both of Ariadne’s monologues, Isokoski concentrates on purity and beauty of tone, whilst as the Marschallin in Rosenkavalier, she weighs each word carefully. [...] In ‘Drei Hymnen’ Op.71 to texts by Friedrich Hölderlin, the singer continues her study of Strauss’ orchestral songs... Just as in the three operatic roles, her voice comes across as unspent and fresh, blossoming into truly triumphant luminosity in the high notes”.

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„...Soile Isokoski, eine der herausragenden Strauss-Interpretinnen unserer Zeit...

Während sie in den beiden Ariadne-Monologen den Text weitgehend dem reinen Schönklang opfert, legt sie als Marschallin im Rosenkavalier die Worte gleichsam auf die Goldwaage. [...] Mit den Drei Hymnen op. 71 auf Texte von Friedrich Hölderlin setzt die Sängerin ihre Beschäftigung mit den Orchesterliedern von Strauss fort... Hier wie in den drei Opernrollen zeigt sich die unverbrauchte Frische der Stimme, die in der Höhe wahrhaft hymnische Leuchtkraft entwickelt.“

Ekkehard Pluta, *Klassik Heute*, November 2012

**Desdemona in Verdi *Otello* / Vienna State Opera  
cond. Bertrand de Billy / dir. Christine Mielitz**

“As Desdemona, Soile Isokoski created long, lyrical lines, and her ‘Ave Maria’ had moments of the most heartfelt rapture.”

„Soile Isokoski kann als Desdemona große lyrische Bögen zur Entfaltung bringen – und findet im „Ave Maria“ zu Augenblicken innigster Entrücktheit“.

Wilhelm Sinkovicz, *DiePresse.com*, December 2012

**Donna Elvira in Mozart *Don Giovanni***

**LA Opera / cond. James Conlon / dir. Gregory A. Fortner**

“Soile Isokoski, one of the most celebrated sopranos to emerge from Finland, handles the part of Donna Elvira with aplomb. She avoids the stridency that can creep into Elvira interpretations. She’s not only believable, but likeable”.

Marc Porter Zasada, *Los Angeles Downtown News*, October 2012

**Recital with Maria Viitasalo / Amphithéâtre Bastille**

“At the end of the song recital, the audience burst out into applause and cheers, not surprisingly, as Soile Isokoski and Mariita Viitasalo performed in perfect dialogue and were a great pleasure to listen to. For me, Isokoski’s singing is at the top of her profession... Her lower register doesn’t have anything of an artificial, forced sound, while her high notes are simply out of this world... And most importantly... with Isokoski the phrases come alive, and their true meaning is revealed...”

Eija-Riitta Airo-Karttunen, *Kainuun Sanomat*, July 2012

“I felt particularly moved when she sang Toivo Kuula’s songs, during which I even developed goose bumps! ... This evening’s experience was so powerful and intensive that I felt changed at the end of it.”

Riikka Jakonen, *Keskisuomalainen*, July 2012

“... the great Finnish soprano... She carries her first name (which translates as ‘Northern Light’) to great perfection. Her voice is one of the most beautiful ones of our time, and she is able to showcase it in any repertoire with utmost ease and agility... With her awe-inspiring serenity and extraordinary voice, she has become one of the most distinguished song recitalists.”

Marc Zisman, *qobuz.com*, June 2012

**Marschallin in Strauss *Der Rosenkavalier* / Grand Théâtre de Genève**

**cond. Niksa Bareza / dir. Otto Schenk**

“She is truly lovely in this part, and genuinely affecting at the key moments.... In the Trio, she was utterly glorious. The conclusion of Act One, the impassioned duet with Octavian and the reflective passage that follows was simply beautiful... and her final exit in Act Three was done with exquisite sensitivity... a wonderfully expressive performance. This was Straussian singing of a high order – and I am delighted to have heard it”

Mike Reynolds, *Musical Criticism*, April 2012

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## **Richard Strauss Lieder (Ondine)**

"The intense, silvered beauty of her tone ... and the unmannered clarity of her diction are unique in this music today. She instinctively conveys the sensuality of Strauss's flower songs ... and the rapture of his love songs... The strange Ophelia set, rarely programmed, can never have been more sumptuously sung."

Hugh Canning, *Sunday Times*, June 2012

"...this is a rich, almost heroic voice, modulating through the bigger numbers at the heart of the recital... and opening out in those that launch with deceptive modesty. Isokoski's technique has stood the test of time: she pulls off the vivacious delicacy of *Wie sollten wir geheim sie halten* and the *sotto voce* rapture of *Ständchen* alongside effulgent rhapsodies such as *Cäcilie*."

David Nice, *BBC Music Magazine*, May 2012

"There is always illumination to be had from hearing a great artist at work, and it will come as no surprise to Lieder lovers there are fine things here. 'Befreit' is gloriously sung, the evocation of parting and death climaxing in the long-held 'weinen', then the repeated, subdued final 'O Gluck!' both heart rending. Song, singer and pianist arc one powerful entity....She has the art of making us suspend our belief... she is adept at picking up every nuance: the moment when a touch of fear enters 'Die Nacht' or observing how, with the simple repeat of the first stanza of 'Ich trage meine Minne', all pain seems suddenly banished. There is a considerable amount to enjoy here, in a very distinguished recital".

Piers Burton-Page, *International Record Review*, May 2012

"That voice, one of the most beautiful of our time."

Marc Zisman, *Qobuz.com*, January 2012

"Such positive qualities burn from within during songs such as 'Zueignung' and 'Morgen' and especially in the lesser known 'Befreit', a performance whose subtle empathy is a summation of what has always made Isokoski such an endearing figure on the operatic landscape."

David Patrick – Stearns, *Gramophone*, May 2012

## **Mrs. Alice Ford in Verdi *Falstaff* / Theatre Du Capitole**

**cond. Daniele Callegari / dir. Nicolas Joel**

"Soile Isokoski sings with security and control."

Maurice Salles, *Forum Opera.com*, December 2011

"From her first notes the incredible Alice soprano Soile Isokoski first appearance ran thrills through the spine. We have here a very great lady of song. Voice of a perfectly round, bright timbre, perfect consistency, dramatic vocal line, a presence of femininity and nobility to which it is easy to succumb."

Robert Pénavayre, *Classic Toulouse*, December 2011

"Amongst the 'old wives', Soile Isokoski was a witty Alice; a talented actress and a first class soprano. Her tone was rich in nuances, and her top notes came easily: the Finnish singer lived up to her reputation."

Anne-Marie Chouchan, *Ladepeche.fr*, December 2011

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**Poulenc *Dialogues des Carmélites* FP159 (DVD) / Chor der Bayerischen Staatsoper / Bayerisches Staatsorchester / cond. Kent Nagano**

"Isokoski, suitably dignified in her role, is in ravishing voice. "

Roger Pines, *International Record Review*, July/August 2011

**Song Recital acc. Marita Viitasalo  
Kuopio Concert Hall**

"Isokoski comes on stage and lets the music speak with her sparkling clear voice and seamless collaboration with the pianist Marita Viitasalo" (translated from Finnish)

John Mattila, *www.savonsanomat.fi*, February 2011

**Agathe in Weber *Der Freischütz*  
Vienna State Opera**

"At the other end of the spectrum, Soile Isokoski brought supreme control to Agathe's aria 'Und ob die Wolke' from Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Under the serene direction of Peter Schneider, the orchestra collaborated with Isokoski to take us into Weber's proto-Romantic world, producing one of the most satisfying highlights of the concert."

David Laviska, *MusicalCriticism.com*, January 2011

**LA Opera in Wagner *Lohengrin*  
cond. James Conlon / dir. Lydia Steier**

"Isokoski's sweetly toned voice, however, expresses what the staging does not."

Jim Farber, *Daily News Los Angeles*, November 2010

"Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski in her Company debut as a conventional Elsa, sailed her lyric silvery-toned soprano over the orchestra"

Rodeny Punt, *Huffington Post*, November 2010

**Countess in Mozart *Le nozze di Figaro*  
Royal Opera House**

"Isokoski has such a unique tone and she can easily set her aristocratic role apart from the crowd"

Gavin Dixon, *Seen and Heard International*, January 2008

**Wigmore Hall Recital**

"...her immaculate intonation and pearly clarity of tone were a consistent pleasure."

Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph*, November 2009

"A distinguished Mozart and Strauss singer, Isokoski has a purity of tone and silvery sound which suits the smoother vocal lines of the 1948 version of the cycle – though Hindemith's writing is seldom straightforwardly homophonic, the precision of Isokoski's voice meant that the melodic line was never obscured."

*Music Omh*, November 2009

"That Isokoski made such an impression is due to the aptness of her voice and her suggestion of the ecstatic by the sparsest of means. In a work that tells us that the stars in heaven can sing, the beauty of Isokoski's tone seemed to open vistas on to the unearthly. Her refined delivery allowed her to express soaring visionary rapture and to react to Christ's passion with clipped, syllabic pain."

Tim Ashley, *The Guardian*, November 2009

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## **Marshallin in Strauss *Der Rosenkavalier***

### **Royal Opera House**

"As the Marschallin, Soile Isokoski offers taste and discretion."

George Hall, *The Stage*, December 2009

"Isokoski is an experienced exponent of Strauss's music. She imbued a natural aristocratic air to the Marshcallin, without being haughty, and her rich soprano produced ardent tones."

Kevin Rogers, *Classical Source*, December 2009

"Isokoski sang with her usual elegance – clean, shining tone, a firmly shaped line."

Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph*, December 2009

"Soile Isokoski's Marschallin is silvery-toned and dignified."

Andrew Clark, *Financial Times*, December 2009

## **Helsinki PO with Mikko Franck / *Scene d'amore* CD**

"Deploying her well-produced and fresh tone with skill and imagination, Soile Isokoski defines eight lyric soprano heroines, each one quite different. Throughout, her control never limits expression. Tchaikovsky's Tatyana (Eugene Onegin) is credibly youthful and emotionally alert, Bizet's Micaëla (Carmen) a more mature and considered individual. Hers is a rich and complex study of Gounod's Marguerite (Faust) in her extended double solo scene, which is technically impeccable. She presents a fully three-dimensional Mimi (La bohème), finds darker colours for Liu farewell in Turandot, and in another long extract from Otello she conveys Desdemona's presentiment of death in her tone."

"It's remarkable achievement, underpinned with consistently excellent musicianship. All of this is familiar material, but Isokoski has thought it through both textually and musically. As a result, one listens with renewed attention, surprised by the wealth of possibilities she discovers."

*BBC Music Magazine*, September 2008

"More than 20 years have passed since the Finnish soprano reached the final of the 1987 Cardiff (now BBC) Singer of the World competition. Since then, her meteoric rise as one of the outstanding Mozart and Richard Strauss sopranos of our day has masked the range of her operatic repertoire. Here, she tackles Mimi's Act One aria and one of her newest roles, Tatyana, in the letter scene from Yevgeny Onegin, and it would be hard to think of any singer today who sings either more exquisitely. To these she adds Micaëla from Carmen, Marguerite from Faust and two lyric roles to which she sounds ideally suited, Desdemona and Amelia Grimaldi from Simon Boccanegra. Is there a more beautiful soprano voice in opera today? Listening to her rapt, long-breathed phrasing of Come, in quest'ora bruna, from Boccanegra, and Desdemona's Willow Song and Ave Maria, it's hard to think of one."

Hugh Canning, *Sunday Times*, September 2008

"'Patrician' and 'aristocratic' are epithets that critics habitually reach for when describing Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski, a favourite at the Vienna Staatsoper but heard all too rarely in Britain. In her early fifties, Isokoski still preserves the pure, rounded tone, dead-centre intonation and shining top notes that have always been her hallmarks. She is a scrupulous stylist, never forcing her voice, and spinning seamless lines on apparently inexhaustible reserves of breath. Voice-fanciers have long been lamenting that true legato is a dying art. With Isokoski around, it is not dead yet.

Elsewhere Isokoski is impassioned and anguished in Micaëla's 'rescue' aria from Carmen, while really caring for the curve of the glorious melody. She lightens her tone in a delightful, subtly

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coloured account of Mimi's aria from *La bohème*, soaring thrillingly at the climax, and is true and touching in Liù's farewell, with no hint of mawkishness.

Amelia's bittersweet aria from Simon Boccanegra is a model of delicate expression and fine-spun Verdian cantabile, slightly compromised by the orchestra's over-emphatic evocation of the shimmering Mediterranean night. But in the main, Franck accompanies sensitively, nowhere more so than in Desdemona's 'Willow Song' and 'Ave Maria', where Isokoski's poignant simplicity is shot through with foreboding, even terror."

Richard Wigmore, *The Telegraph*, September 2008

## **Elsa in Wagner *Lohengrin* Grand Théâtre de Genève**

"The biggest treat, however, is Soile Isokoski's shimmeringly beautiful singing. Her creamy, ethereal soprano is simply peerless as Elsa."

Francis Carlin, *Financial Times*, May 2008

## **Wigmore Hall**

"Isokoski's voice is exquisite, but what distinguishes her is her musicianship. That lithe, agile voice is informed by intelligence and a genuine sensitivity to a composer's idiom."

Anne Ozorio, *Seen and Heard International*, February 2008

## **Fiordiligi in Mozart *Così fan tutte* Opera Wroclaw**

"Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski's Fiordiligi would be difficult to better. She is a great soprano who shines in Mozart and Strauss and she offered an outstanding interpretation in the difficult "Come Scoglio" and "Per Pietà". She is one of those artists who makes the most difficult parts seem easy, such is the fluidity and naturalness of her singing."

*Seen and Heard International*, January 2008

## **Feldmarschallin in Strauss *Der Rosenkavalier* Vienna State Opera**

"...here is a truly consummate artist, whose every nuance and gesture seems considered, yet spontaneous. She possesses the ideal silver-toned timbre for this music, combined with the fine musical intelligent and dramatic instinct. An absolute gem."

*The Opera Critic*, October 2007

## **BBC Proms**

"This was always going to be one of the season's high-spots, and it even surpassed expectations. To hear the ravishing Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski singing Strauss's Four Last Songs made one glad to be alive, eclipsing memories of some recent, enervating Proms and raising the spirits heavenwards.

The concert was dedicated to the late Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, whose name is forever associated with these Strauss songs, but Isokoski definitively showed that the art of interpreting them is by no means a thing of the past.

"First of all, there was the voice itself, a pure, rich stream of golden, russet timbre perfectly suited to the music's autumnal mood. And then there was Isokoski's wondrous way of communicating the songs' valedictory emotional sensibility, through clear diction but also through the fact that she seemed not merely to be singing the songs but living them out."

Geoffrey Norris, *Daily Telegraph*, August 2006

# pressquotes

## **Wigmore Hall**

"She ranks among today's finest sopranos by virtue of the fact that her voice is one of the greatest in the world, hitting you in the solar plexus each time you listen to it. On a concert platform, however, she's remarkably self-effacing, never indulging in self-conscious histrionics and concentrating all her energies on the expressive potential of the glorious sound that issues from her throat.

Music by Sibelius, Berg and Strauss formed the bulk of the programme. Isokoski is particularly wonderful in Sibelius. With *A Dragonfly*, Isokoski's voice seemed to hover in the air, in imitation of the creature's flight before sinking to rest in quiet contemplation of its mortality. *The Girl Came From Her Lover's Tryst*, with its balladic repetitions and morbid refrains, brought out a hint of steel beneath the gilded opulence of the sound, and a tremendous sense of feverish drama.

Isokoski's singing has sometimes been described as noninterventionist, which is far from true. If anything, her performance of Berg's *Seven Early Songs* occasionally sacrificed spontaneity to textual illumination: in *Liebesode*, for instance, a dip into her chest register during the passage about the scent of roses drifting into the lovers' bedroom was an effect of startling indecency, although it also intruded on the song's pulsating flow. In the Strauss songs, however, meaning and sound were perfectly integrated. She was breathtaking in *Morgen* and at her rapturous best in *Cäcilie*, which closed the group. Pianist Marita Viitasalo, her regular accompanist for nearly 20 years, mirrored Isokoski's every emotional shift with playing that combined lucidity with great intensity."

Tim Ashley, *The Guardian*, June 2006

## **Concert Minneapolis / St Paul, Minnesota**

"The evening's most impressive soloist, however, was the Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski, who sang Richard Strauss' *Four Last Songs*. More than a few singers have captured the mood of autumnal melancholy of these songs, but very few can surmount the technical difficulties the songs present, especially the high notes. Isokoski, on the other hand, made them sound easy, those high A's and B's, and her lack of vibrato gave a wholly appropriate sense of detachment to her interpretation. She sounded at the end, as the poet's voice longs for sleep and death, purged of human cares, offering, with the orchestra and Vänskä's astute leadership, a mood of exalted lyricism."

Michael Anthony, *Star Tribune*

## **Elsa in Wagner *Lohengrin* Vienna State Opera**

"Soile Isokoski's Elsa is gripping in its own right, fragile, intelligent and absolutely emotionally truthful."

Shirley Apthorp, *The Critics*

## **Sibelius CD**

"Isokoski interprets these inspired miniatures with a blend of tenderness and passion, a richness of timbre and subtle dynamic inflections, with soaring lines magically floated and tailored. Sibelius's orchestral accompaniments, so deft in defining different moods, are a bonus in Leif Segerstam's assured handling. Newcomers to Sibelius's songs could find no more persuasive introduction; aficionados will be entranced."

Geoffrey Norris, *The Telegraph*