

philharmonia orchestra

Soprano Christstine Brewer on Wagner

Christine Brewer - Soprano

The first time I heard Wagner's music performed was in St. Louis when I was a student, with Eileen Farrell. And she sang, actually she sang the two things that I'm going to be singing in the concert next week. She sang the Liebestod and then she sang the Immolation from *Götterdämmerung*. And I had, first of all never heard Wagner before. Secondly, I had never heard a voice like Eileen Farrell's voice. And I remember that she stood, not at the front of the stage with the conductor but she stood in the middle of the orchestra by the horns. And I was up in the cheap seats up in the top of the all, and I couldn't believe how her voice just carried across that orchestra, you know over as many as a hundred people playing, and it was just incredible. And my voice teacher was there with me and he said to me, you know and I was 19 or 20 maybe, he said "someday, someday you'll sing that". And I just laughed I said there's no way that I would sing that way. Umm, so that was quite a, quite a stunning moment.

I love to feel like I'm part of the orchestra. For me it feels sort of like, it's singing chamber music. I mean that sounds silly when your talking about Wagner. But it does feel like I'm more apart of the team. And I was a violinist for many years before I started singing. I do hear more nuance, there are sometimes a certain line will come out that I hadn't heard before when it's in the pit. And I'm able to really fit in to the colours of the orchestra better.

When I'm working on any role. The first few months actually, I don't really use, I don't even sing the music. I just take the text. I translate it. And I spend hours just reading the text in the original language and then reading it in my literal translation. And then putting into my words. So it's Christine's words. Until Isolde becomes meshed with Christine. And it's not until the words start to speak to my heart, that I put the music with it. And I find, doing this process, that when I do put the music with what I've been saying for the last month or so. It all just sort of falls into place.

There are such long lines in Wagner, umm not only just in a scene but the sort of arch of a whole act. And I try to find ways to make the music interesting and not sing it all so loudly. For instance, in the first act of Tristan, it could be very easy to just sing that whole act fortissimo. Angry, you know she's bitter, she's sarcastic. And when I started preparing that role the first time I really had to look at that first act especially, because if you get off on the wrong foot in the first act your'e sunk. By act two forget about it. So, I tried to find places where even in her anger and her sarcasm, I could do it in a way, sort of... umm, you know when your really angry with somebody? Sometimes you don't talk so loudly. You just say it between gritted teeth. So I try to find places like that, to pace myself vocally, but also I think it makes it more interesting for the listener. It's not all just screamed at them. I think singing Wagner for me is sort of like opening a book that's very familiar. Whenever I open a Wagner score it just seems as if it fits me.