

dedicated to
the memory of
ADAM KURAKIN
8.10.45–8.4.89



T H E R E S E M A L T E N

WAGNER'S
DEVOTED
KUNDRY

Aspects of the singer's life in Bayreuth,
St Petersburg and Dresden

Reviews and hitherto unpublished
photographs, notes and correspondence
and César Cui's 1898 critique of *Die Walküre*

Michael Letchford

GOAR LODGE 2010

Published in the UK in 2010 by **Michael Letchford**

Distributed in the UK, by the author

ISBN: 978-0-9564796-0-0

Text copyright © 2010 Michael Letchford

The author has asserted his moral rights.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

All photographs copyright © Michael Letchford.

Designed by Smith & Gilmour Ltd.

Printed by Go Digital Print Ltd.

*fig 1: Frontispiece Therese Malten as Elisabeth (Tannhäuser)
Portrait by Helen Eichler 1886 (Stuart-Liff collection)*

Contents

List of Illustrations	06
Foreword	07
Preface	08
Introduction	11
PART 1 St Petersburg 1898	22
PART 2 Farewell	42
‘Leaves from the diary of a Bayreuth Kundry’	52
Personal notes	66
Important dates in the career of Therese Malten	110
Personalia	113
Historic recordings	116
PART 3 Appendices:	
(1) Hans Richter’s letter	120
(2) César Cui’s critique of <i>Die Walküre</i>	122
Index	142

List of illustrations

- Frontispiece: Therese Malten as Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*). Portrait by Helen Eichler 1886, *By kind permission Stuart/Liff Collection*
- TM as Senta (*Der fliegende Holländer*), page 9
- TM as Brünnhilde, page 10
- Richard and Cosima Wagner, page 13
- TM as Kundry (*Parsifal*), page 14
- TM cabinet photograph c 1897, page 17
- Photographer's proofs 1896, pages 18–19
- Programme *Siegfried* St Petersburg 1898, page 23
- Programme *Die Walküre* St Petersburg 1898, page 24
- Programme *Tristan und Isolde* St Petersburg 1898, page 27
- Cast list for *Tristan und Isolde* St Petersburg 1898, page 28
- Programme extracts from *Tannhäuser* and *Siegfried* 1898, page 31
- Cast list for extracts of *Tannhäuser* and *Siegfried* 1898, pages 32–33
- Poster for *Tannhäuser* 1898, page 35
- Photographs of Malten, de Reszke, Elmblad etc., in *Novoye Vemya*, page 38
- “God bless our darling”, page 43
- “Tano comes to supper with us;”, page 44
- Kunst und Kultur – Deutsche Wacht*, 15.2.03, page 49
- “got to sleep at 7am this morning”, page 50
- TM as Kundry (*Parsifal*) at Bayreuth, page 53
- TM as Eva (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) at Bayreuth, page 54
- TM in unusual costume 3.05.08, page 67
- “flowers planted on it”, page 68
- “From the Cemetery we drive ...”, page 69
- “From the flowerpot, given us by our Darling at Xmas 25.12.02”, page 70
- Torgau Poem, pages 73–74
- By the 6pm train to Niedersedlitz. 31.12.01, page 77
- Luise Dauckschadt's death notice 31.12.01, page 78
- “Taken at the Bastei in August 1904”, pages 79–80
- TM Postcard to Gräfin Marie Pontiatine 1906, pages 83–84
- Postcard signed and dated 1907 to Gräfin Marie Pontiatine, pages 85–86
- “Darling Wavvee,” Postcard 24.1.08, pages 87–88
- “Siegfried with the erstwhile Brünnhilde.” 26.12.12, page 91
- “In the Sybil Garden Winter 1914”, pages 93–94
- Letter card, pages 96–97
- Letter card signed “Therese” 1918, pages 99–100
- Letter card to ‘Marusche’ on her 70th birthday 4th March 1920, pages 102–103
- TM with unknown companion, page 104
- César Cui, page 123
- TM 1896, page 141

Foreword

Although Therese Malten lived well into the 20th century, her career ended in 1903, placing her among the celebrated, but now almost-forgotten, divas of the late Victorian period, such as Ilma di Murska, Minnie Hauk and Christine Nilsson. Malten sang mainly in Dresden and Bayreuth making few trips abroad, although she sang with great success in London and St Petersburg. If she is little remembered today it maybe because she did not appear in America and because she left no recordings of her voice and art for collectors to acquire and discuss.

This book should be read as a footnote to an as-yet unwritten biography of an important and highly-praised singer. Malten was chosen by Wagner to sing Kundry in the first production of *Parsifal* under his own watchful eye, in the company of Liszt, Levi and her illustrious colleagues, at the comparatively young age of twenty-seven. We read of her hours of greatness, the public acclaim and private moments of despair. There are hitherto unpublished notes and letters from Malten herself and thoughts and comments of those close to her, including the mysterious Countess Marie Pontiatine. Most of the material in this book has not been previously published. I have, however, included photographs from my own collection which were published in the singer's lifetime.

I thank most warmly Vivian Liff for his generous permission to reproduce (probably for the first time) Helen Eichler's 1886 portrait of Therese Malten from the Stuart-Liff Collection.

Michael Letchford
Takeley, 2009