
Hilary Summers

Selected Reviews

ADÈS The Exterminating Angel, Leonora Palma Opéra National de Paris (February 2024)

"Among the singers, all excellent and brilliantly meeting the demands of writing that favors ensembles... the very embodied mezzo of Hilary Summers/Leonora Palma" - **Michèle Tosi, ResMusica**

"Hilary Summers embodies this troubled character by covering the entire expressive spectrum of her sometimes deliberately buffoonish contralto voice, particularly when she falls prey to a delirium of persecution." - **Julian Lembke, Forum Opera**

"Hilary Summers (Leonora Palma) explores the lower range of her range, with a dark and soft timbre that draws one of the most fascinating characters in opera." - **CJM, Olyrix**

"...the female roles dominate: sumptuous voice, through the density of the bass and the mobility of the line, the contralto Hilary Summers embodies a Leonora subject to sudden attacks of paranoia as to dark meditations haunted by Wagnerian memories." - **Jérémie Bigorie, ConcertoNet**

"Special mentions finally to Hilary Summers, accomplice of Pierre Boulez, who treats us to his contralto in a haggard interlude (Act III, scene 3)" - **Pierre Brévignon, Première Loge**

"The twenty soloists, among whom the distinguished Hilary Summers stands out..." **Gilles Charlassier, La Terrasse**

CD: 'Circus Dinogad' Dudok Quartet, Zefir ZEF9701, November 2023

"Summers runs the gamut of her unconventional but highly expressive three-octave range. In her haunting unaccompanied opening ballad, 'I will give my love an apple', she is a countertenor, sexless and ethereal; later, she blooms into a gorgeously sensuous high mezzo in Purcell's 'Sweeter Than Roses'. She relishes words, caressing and projecting every syllable, and brings theatrical panache to the 'Seven Deadly Sins', 40-second vignettes threaded through this musical medley, biting arch and hilarious." - **Ashutosh Khandekar, BBC Music Magazine (Performance*****, Recording*****)**

HANDEL Messiah Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, August 2023

"Particularly the Alto was outstanding; She sang with well-founded depth and easy height, her interpretation was powerful and characterised with deep intimacy and enormous expression."

"Herausragend vor allem die Altistin: Sie sang mit fundierter Tiefe und leichter Höhe, ihr Vortrag war ausdrucks- und druckvoll und geprägt von tiefer Innigkeit und gewaltiger Expression." - **Jurgen Feldhoff**

KURTAG Fin de Partie at L'Opera de Paris Opera de Paris, May 2022

"Nell, played by Hilary Summers peeks her head out of her dustbin to the sound of a snake charmer's music [...] The contralto deploys her deep, sweet, legato voice, very tenderly intoned and articulated."

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'Nell incarnée par Hilary Summers sort la tête de sa poubelle au son d'une musique de charmeur de serpents. [...] La contralto déploie sa voix grave, douce et longue, très tendre, vibrée et articulée.'

Charles Arden, Olyrix

GILBERT & SULLIVAN HMS Pinafore, Little Buttercup English National Opera (October 2021)

"Hilary Summers, with her rich contralto, is his funny, yet touching Little Buttercup..." - Tim Ashley, *The Guardian*

"Hilary Summers as Little Buttercup is an absolute delight with her fantastic comic timing and quite formidable singing voice"
- *Musical Theatre Review*

"Cue floating pedlar Buttercup, who nurses a terrible secret, and who is sung with robust wit by Hilary Summers"
- Claudia Pritchard, *Culture Whisperer*

KURTAG Fin de partie, Nell Palau de Musica Paseo de la Alameda (November 2020)

"The performance of [...] Summers [...] is simply outstanding." - Ramon del Buey Canas, *bachtrack* (5*)

BARRY Alice's Adventures Underground, White Queen Royal Opera House (February 2020)

"It's almost invidious to pick out other names from either cast in what is such a brilliantly executed piece, but Hilary Summers is a formidable White Queen." - Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*

HANDEL Jephtha Scottish Chamber Orchestra BBC Proms (August 2019)

"Her portrait of maternal despair was vivid." - *The Times*

"Hilary Summers, as the hero's mother Storge, brought velvet smoothness to her forebodings." - *The Scotsman*

MENDELSSOHN Die erste Walpurgisnacht Scottish Chamber Orchestra (November 2018)

"Hilary Summers' warm and expansive contralto added gravitas to the Old Woman." - Susan Nickalls, *The Scotsman*

KURTAG Fin de Partie, Nell Teatro alla Scala (November 2018)

"[...] Hilary Summers as Nell, whose gentle, confiding delivery of the Roundelay gets this extraordinary, unforgettable piece under way." - Andrew Clements, *The Guardian* (5*)

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“Nell (British contralto Hilary Summers touchingly, absurdly romantic).” – Fiona Maddocks, *The Observer* (5*)

“Old Nagg (the tenor Leonardo Cortellazzi) and Nell (the contralto Hilary Summers), stuffed by Beckett into side-by-side ashcans, exist in a sphere of ethereal nostalgia and thread-thin high notes that Ms. Summers, in particular, spins with the eerie softness of elderly skin.” – Zachary Woolfe, *New York Times* (Critic's Pick)

HANDEL Giulio Cesare, Cornelia Early Opera Company (August 2017)

“Musically, both evenings were a real treat. Countertenor Iestyn Davies’s Caesar and Hilary Summers’s Cornelia were both of a standard to turn a well-worn piece of musical advice on its head... one of the qualities that made Davies and Summers so unusual and exciting was the almost instrumental freedom and accuracy of their delivery, characteristics which help make Handel’s often virtuosic writing shine as it should.” – Michael Dervan, *The Irish Times*

“The role of Cornelia is arguably the most affecting since her grief at the loss of her husband Pompey is its unchanging characteristic. But the nobility of her suffering is never wearying, so eloquent is her music. Or so it seemed sung by the wonderful Hilary Summers – and her true alto timbre, richness and range has even encompassed the role of Cesare himself. If in the age of the ubiquitous mezzo-soprano designation, someone should start a Society for the Preservation of the Contralto Voice, I propose Hilary Summers as the SPCV’s first President.” – Roy Westbrook, *Bachtrack*

“Hilary Summers utilised her outstanding contralto to deliver a convincing portrayal of a heart-broken Cornelia.”
– Sam Smith, *MusicOMH*

WAGNER Siegfried, Erda Saffron Opera Group (February 2017)

“And as ever when hearing Wagner in the concert hall, there were things to discover and to delight in, as well as those moments when the whole performance seemed to transcend itself, and the lack of any theatrical setting ceased to matter. Here, the most spellbinding of those moments came at the beginning of the third act, with the confrontation between Hillary Summers’ regal Erda and Greenan’s Wanderer – It is moments like these that make ventures like Saffron Opera’s so worthwhile.”
– Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*

Hilary Summers’ majestic contralto gave Erda’s utterances a suitable glow of intensity. – Peter Reed, *Opera Magazine*

GERALD BARRY Alice’s Adventures Underground, White Queen Britten Sinfonia (November 2016)

“Hilary Summers’ inimitable contralto pairs off with a single double-bass for the dormouse reverie...” – David Nice, *The Arts Desk*

“Contralto Hilary Summers is resplendent as the White Queen...” – George Hall, *The Stage*

“Hilary Summers, Peter Tantsits and Mark Stone also thrived on Barry’s high-wire vocal acrobatics.” – Mark Valencia, *Bachtrack*

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HANDEL Israel in Egypt The King's Consort, VIVAT (March 2016)

"...contralto Hilary Summers sings the assuaging 'Bringe sie hinein' ('Thou shalt bring them in') with mingled gravity and warmth..."
- Richard Wigmore, *Gramophone Magazine*

"All the soloists make their mark, particularly Hilary Summers' even alto..." - George Hall, *BBC Music Magazine*

NYMAN War Work Michael Nyman Band (December 2015)

"Contralto Hilary Summers is the soloist, her dark, plummy tones meshing perfectly with Nyman's brassy-tinged textures."
- Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*

GILBERT & SULLIVAN HMS Pinafore Scottish Opera at Edinburgh International Festival (June 2015)

"...a cast of British singers perfectly matched to their roles [...] Her glorious dark alto was part of a lovely range of voices..."
- *Herald Scotland*

AYRES Peter Pan, Mrs Darling & Tiger Lily Welsh National Opera (May 2015)

"Hilary Summers is touching as the distraught Mrs Darling and feistily ladette-like as the bloodthirsty Tiger Lily."
- Richard Morrison, *The Times* (5*)

"Hilary Summers as the Mother and Tiger Lily gave strong, clear and well-drawn performances..." - Mike Smith, *Wales Online*

STRAVINSKY Oedipus Rex, Jocasta BBC Symphony Orchestra, Sakari Oramo at BBC Proms (August 2014)

"Then there was the extraordinary Hilary Summers whose showing as Jocasta negotiated the near-impossible register switches and freakish excitement of her big number with great aplomb and clever musicianship. The drama is most certainly in the vocal pyrotechnics - you don't need to add too much to their histrionics. I loved the plangency and sinuousness of her blue-note bluesiness..." - Edward Seckerson, *The Arts Desk*

"The cast was a fine one...Hilary Summers was a true contralto Jocasta, regal and dismissive when in full flight."
- Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*

BOULEZ Le Marteau Sans Maître Aurora Orchestra, Franck Ollu (October 2013)

"Hilary Summers delivered René Char's texts with insouciance and a sense of marvel, despite the extreme vocal challenges."
- Fiona Maddocks, *The Observer*

"Hilary Summers, hieratic and incantatory, was the alto soloist – utterly mesmerising, above all towards the close, as Boulez dissolves words into pure sound." - Tim Ashley, *The Guardian* (5*)

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PURCELL Dido and Aeneas Wiener Festwochen (June 2009)

“It was a wonderful performance, which Summers herself clearly enjoyed, made all the more riveting by her complete vocal command of the part.” - Susan Doering, *Vienna Review*

“Led by an Amazon of a sorceress in Hilary Summers...spat and shrieked their vowels, cackling maniacally and revelling in Purcell’s word-setting.” - *The Times*

CRUMB Night of the Four Moons The Nash Ensemble at BBC Proms (September 2009)

“The first of the Lorca settings, Night of the Four Moons, has a darkly impassioned sound world, beautifully captured by mezzo-soprano Hilary Summers.” - Ivan Hewett, *The Daily Telegraph*

BOULEZ Le Marteau Sans Maître Deutsche Grammophon (March 2005)

“...with Hilary Summers as the rich-toned mezzo, relishes every particle of the settings of the three René Char poems...”
- Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*