

OPERA NEWS

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Rigoletto

BARCELONA
Gran Teatre del Liceu
12/13/04



Carlos Álvarez and Inva Mula

Carlos Álvarez and Marcelo Álvarez are sought-after specialists in the roles of Rigoletto and the Duke of Mantua but had not sung them together until Graham Vick's production of *Rigoletto* in Barcelona (seen December 13). So these performances marked "an Álvarez family get-together," said Argentine tenor Marcelo Álvarez at the press conference before the premiere. At his side, Andalusian baritone Carlos Álvarez smiled. Of

course they are not relatives; Álvarez is as common a last name in Spanish-speaking countries as Smith is in Anglo-Saxon ones.

But there was nonetheless a "familiar" atmosphere in the performances, perhaps due to the fact that both singers have matured into roles they now master backwards and forward, and that here they were accompanied by an excellent cast of Verdians. In the end, it was an overall success in one of the trickiest of operas, to which most patrons come with their ears full of their favorite voice.

The triumph was especially notable for Carlos Álvarez, an intelligent actor and full-blooded singer, with a robust, versatile voice well suited to Verdi. His *Rigoletto* has grown in depth and complexity since his debut in this same Vick production in Madrid, two years ago. His theatrical instincts are sharp throughout the performance, from the half-scornful, half-defeated smile he gave the audience when the curtain rose during the overture to the moment of his final farewell to Gilda. His dark voice sounded notably fresh and clean in his carefully built emotional progression through "Corteggiani."



Carlos Álvarez

Marcelo Álvarez, whose Duke of Mantua is a more well-toured performance (he has sung the role in New York, London, Paris, Toulouse, Verona, Trieste, Macerata, Buenos Aires and in a best-selling BBC filming from Covent Garden), sounded somewhat more tired than the Andalusian. The tenor's upper register has lost some of its former power, and his noticeable weight gain does not help him project the playboy as well as he once did. (His costume here, which made him look like John Goodman dressed like John Travolta in *Grease*, did not help matters.) But Álvarez's musical interpretation remains as accurate and mischievous as ever, and the quality of his beautiful voice was undeniable, especially in Act III.

The delicate Albanian soprano Inva Mula was an almost perfect Gilda. The crystal clarity of her projection and the miraculously sustained soft notes were most effective in Act I. Mula realized a very difficult aspect of Gilda's character: she managed to show that although Gilda loses her ignorance, she does not lose her innocence. Mula played the progression with great emotional power.

Bulgarian bass Julian Konstantinov and Georgian mezzo Nino Surguladze almost stole the show as the sinister, ingratiating Sparafucile siblings. Konstantinov really looked and sounded the part (which he has sung from the Met to La Scala), while Surguladze made her Maddalena a younger sister of Carmen. Her participation contributed to a memorable quartet. With the participation of these well chosen singers, Graham Vick's symbolic staging, which revolves around *Rigoletto*'s rage and permanent feeling of displacement, worked like clockwork. I had previously seen this production in Madrid, and the beauty and power of the moving circular sets remains intact.

In the pit, veteran Jesús López-Cobos - the most international of Spanish conductors - kept the tremendous forward motion of this opera going, achieving the velvet sound needed for the arias and a frightening force for the storm music. The Barcelona public does not seem to get tired of *Rigoletto*. After a performance such as this one, it is easy to understand why.

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