

Reviews

25/11/05 EL PERIODICO DE CATALUNYA

(Major daily newspaper, Catalonia. Sales: 166,590)

A serious adventure

Duration: 90 minutes

Total audience: 1.600

Evaluation: The standard bearer of the Pocket Opera Festival achieves both well deserved and timely success.

On a stage with a conceptual design and naturalistic costumes, *Juana* by Enric Palomar with libretto by Rebecca Simpson was given its première in a co-production between the Halle Opera, the Liceu and the Pocket Opera Festival. Its journey recounts the sequestering of the daughter of the Catholic Monarchs for reasons of State with the excuse of her madness a fabrication. The musical language is accessible and modern with lyric ambition, in which I missed some melodic references to the clear Renaissance music of the period. The work of the different parties involved was magnificent and the performance of the German singers and orchestra was exceptional. An adventure deserving of all praise which justifies this festival. **LUIS POLANCO**

Luis Polanco was the artistic director of the Perelada Opera Festival until early 2007.

22/11/05 La Vanguardia (Daily newspaper. Sales: 203,703)

...a very successful creation which has been given life in a simple but effective staging...This is a product which works well, which held the public's interest and received warm applause.

... we can celebrate the appearance of a new, twenty-first century chamber opera, suitable to be performed anywhere. **Roger Alier**

27/11/05 Avui (Daily newspaper. Sales: not available)

First point in favour, the libretto by Rebecca Simpson ... a well realised synthesis of a convulsive period, that makes good use of lyrical language. ... A Festival success which reminds us (forgive me for quoting myself) of what we said in 1998, that good operas will only emerge with a regularity in the politics of commissions and/or premières. **Xavier Cester**

26/06/05 EFE. El Universal Online

Simpson made of Juana a universal symbol of those condemned to be ostracised by the machinations of power.

Preview

13/11/05

EL PERIODICO DE CATALUNYA
(Daily newspaper. Sales: 171,211)

A twenty-first century opera praises the integrity of Joan the Mad

“Juana”, the opera by Enric Palomar and Rebecca Simpson, comes to the Romea.
By Marta Cervera, Barcelona

A modern Spanish libretto and score on the historical figure of Joan the Mad have got to be of outstanding quality when an opera theatre such as Halle, in Germany, and Barcelona’s Liceu decide to make a production of the opera possible. This has occurred with *Juana*, a chamber work with text in Spanish by Rebecca Simpson and score by Enric Palomar, successfully premièred in Halle last summer and which will be programmed there again after its presentation in the Romea Theatre on 18, 19 and 20 November, directed by Carlos Wagner. It is the star production of the 10th Pocket Opera Festival.

The image of a Juana beside herself with jealousy as depicted by the actress Pilar López de Ayala in Vicente Aranda’s film shares little with the Juana of this production. *Juana* focuses on a fascinating moment of Spain’s history: the rebellion of the *comuneros*, considered by many scholars to be the first [European] bourgeois revolution. “The heir to the Catholic Monarchs had been locked away for 11 years when the rebellion occurred against King Charles, her son. The *comunero* army went to Tordesillas to discover whether the queen was really mad or whether she would join their cause. This offered her the possibility, ultimately unfulfilled, to escape her incarceration”, commented Rebecca Simpson, an Englishwoman settled in Catalonia.

Historical intrigue

The libretto focuses on the palace intrigue that surrounds Juana in 1521, during the two months between the arrival of the *comuneros* until the death of the leaders of the rebellion. “The opera is faithful to the most recent studies on Juana I of Castile that suggest that she was not mad, but manipulated”, says Simpson. “It defends her strength, given that she endured the pain of incarceration for 46 years”.

Six singers (headed by Ursula Hesse von den Steinen in the title role) and six musicians, the majority of them German, perform the work with a set that is as austere as it is effective. “My score, which is pleasant to listen to, is faithful to the traditional opera format. I don’t speculate. But nor do I write *bel canto*”, remarked Enric Palomar, an eclectic musician who has worked with flamenco artists and symphonic orchestras. “My background is formed by composers such as Falla and Gerhard. This opera has a Spanish flavour. I don’t fall into facile localisms but the rhythm, the colour, the textures sound very Spanish”.