

EURIDICE

and Caronte's Puppets

Opera for mezzosoprano, baritone and puppeteer



Música by Joan Albert Amargós
Idea and libretto by Toni Rumbau

THE PROJECT

“EURIDICE” is the fruit of encounters between various different impulses: in the first place the commitment of the Pocket Opera Festival, which was created by the Malic Theatre seven years ago, to programme a new opera in each edition of the festival; secondly, the desire and the necessity to learn from, and take advantage of, the lessons of the earlier experiences of what is such a difficult process, namely the creation of new librettos, scores and productions; and, thirdly, the long-held desire of La Fanfarra (the puppet company that runs the Malic Theatre) to bring together puppets and opera, picking up the secret thread which throughout the history of opera has, from time to time, revealed small jewels of lyric and theatrical art – a thread which in Spain resulted in such important works as Manuel de Falla’s “Retablo de Maese Pedro”.

“Euridice” owes its existence to the desire to create an opera that combines puppets and singers. Following the development of some of Toni Rumbau’s initial ideas, the argument of the opera became fully defined through the collaboration of a team in which Jaume Grau (producer) and Luca Valentino – who will direct the opera – were fully implicated, thus giving full attention from the very beginning to the opera’s dramaturgy. Toni Rumbau then wrote the libretto, and, following the creation of the first drafts, the composer **Joan Albert Amargós**, and the designer José Menchero became actively involved in developing the work.

In “Euridice”, the fusion and cross between opera and puppetry occurs on two levels: not only because of the theatrical and visual presence of a puppet theatre on the stage, but also because of the musical incorporation in the score of the **swazzle** - this voice that is so particular to the world of puppetry and which, from time immemorial, puppeteers have used to amplify and distort the voices of puppets. The idea of singing with the swazzle, and doing so alongside opera singers, is one of remarkable daring, and something which has never yet been done in Western opera.

The argument of “Euridice” mixes, on various levels, two different and opposing worlds: that of people and puppets, that which is living and animate with that which is non-living and inanimate, the world of life with the world of death. By speaking about the relationship between puppets and human beings, one finds oneself inevitably speaking about fundamental, recurrent themes: life and death, light and darkness, the visible and the invisible. Thus the argument of the opera is in a sense an excuse to deal with these opposing themes and concepts.

The fact that the opera being rehearsed by the characters is “Euridice”, by Peri, has been useful on various fronts. Firstly, the ambiguity of Euridice who is dramatically situated both inside and outside the Kingdom of Death coincides with the situation of Sofia, the opera’s female character, who finds herself in an analogous situation. Secondly, the coincidence that the year 2000 was the four hundredth anniversary of Peri’s Euridice (first performed in 1600), allows us to play with these dates, both conceptually in the opera itself, and in practical terms vis à vis the production.

SYNOPSIS

Sofia, a prestigious opera singer, receives confirmation that she is suffering from a terminal illness. Oscar, her partner, and also the conductor with whom she is working, does his best to make her forget this painful fact, and insists on her concentrating her energies on the preparation of the opera which should bring them international fame.

The appearance of Polichinela (the mediterranean progenitor of the English Mr. Punch) and a mysterious travelling puppet theatre, with its extravagant, traditional characters full of passion for life, fascinate Sofia. These are a magical, unconscious projection of the singer's inner voices, her desire for life and for the possibility to confront the reality of her own death. But for Oscar, they are no more than a childish distraction.

Seeing that Sofia has willingly entered into an unreal and absurd world, Oscar becomes desperate and deeply jealous of the puppeteer. But who is the puppeteer? In the little puppet theatre out in the street, the puppet of death slowly appears.



EURIDICE IS AN OPERA-THEATRE SHOW, ACCESSIBLE AND IN NO WAY ELITIST, IN WHICH LIBRETO AND MUSIC ARE CAREFULLY WOVEN TOGETHER.

THE LIBRETTO

(comença a cantar primer Oscar i després Sofia, sempre fent bromes sobre Oscar i després acompanya Sofia ja demora de paratalla d'oscars)

SOFIA - Sento que em demana el
 m'hi fafainuella
 i m'ho despatxa pelicla em mi
 Boca de mi/mandi de vida,
 vent que d'altres,
 de mit' insucltant,
 de mit' obviar i profunda,
 Anava vejar i brillant,
 barca amb t'ombra,
 exels brillants i nombrosos...
 Quina post'ni despit,
 Tronca,
 i'obriaute vos a quia mort
 de començat?
 Si mort de vida a a tal
 vejada mort de mort...
 Nesto Sues, que emi fa a
 em mato viva...

OSCAR - Sofia, a l'ho que imparte
 aca es Euridice!
 Queta ceats veja de l'opora
 i l'hoit, per jo
 d' l'obant de la vester m'ama.
 Et vira m'oi?...
 ... Nova York, L'lain,
 London, Paris...

(Sofia aprisa el caser i'ndersera cantant i au-
 fencia ras el cantellat de l'itella)

The libretto, by Toni Rumbau, can be understood as a homage – in all humility – to opera and to puppetry.

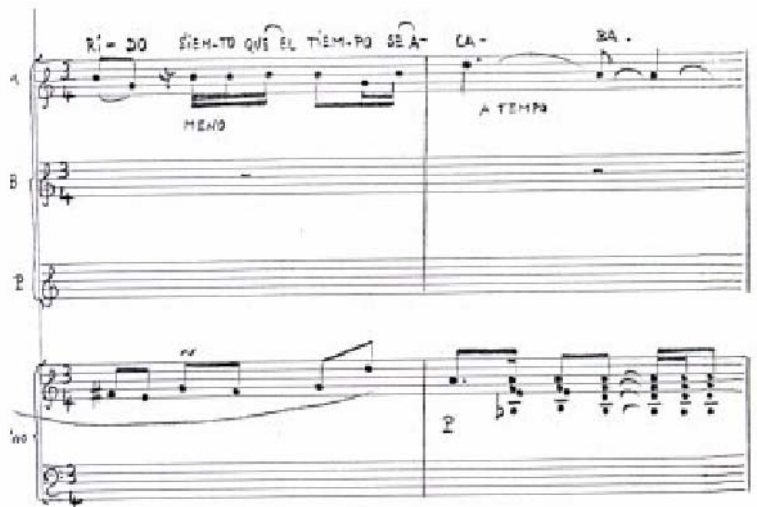
As homage to opera, because of the reference to G. Peri's "Euridice" (the first score considered as an opera) and because this story has been frequently employed from the beginning of opera onwards; here, the characters of Sofia and Oscar are crossed with the mythical characters Euridice and Orpheus. At the same time "Euridice" is a homage to puppets and puppetry, exhibiting directly the symbology and profound meaning of this theatrical genre, which has the capacity to animate that which is inanimate, and which for centuries has served to express humanity's hidden and magical imagination, our most secret desires – unconscious, and often unconfessable.

THE MUSIC

Amargós has composed with wisdom - music full of contrasts, using to the full the possibilities of the instruments of the quintet.

Amargós includes in his score elements of popular, street music, creates scenes of a more classical feeling, and colours the whole with a tone that is clearly contemporary.

The inclusion of the "swazzle" (a traditional instrument used by puppeteers in the production of voices) with its incredible range, makes of this music a score that is absolutely unique and extremely interesting.



OPERA FOR MEZZOSOPRANO, BARITONE, SWAZZLE, PIANO, VIOLIN, 'CELLO, BASS AND ACCORDION.

AMARGÓS

Joan Albert Amargós, composer born in Barcelona, is one of the Spain's most respected musicians. Pianist and clarinetist, he has composed chamber and symphonic works and has written for cinema, theatre, television and dance. His experience, furthermore, in arranging and orchestration of all kinds of music underline his aesthetic versatility.

He founded the group "Música urbana" with which he made two records and recently the international label "Harmonía Mundi" has brought out a CD of his "Concert for clarinet and orchestra" and other chamber pieces. His most important pieces are: chamber music –"Concert of the South" for violin, cello and orchestra; "Sonata for two guitars" and "Sonata for flute and piano". For orchestra – "Variations for orchestra" (1981), "Concert for clarinet and orchestra" (1995) and "Los Tarantos" (ballet, 1985). For orchestra and choir: "Flamenco Requiem" (for Mario Maya, 1993) and "Earth Cantata" (1992).

For the theatre he has written music for "Pygmalion" (theatre company Dagoll Dagom), "Tierra de Nadie" (María Rovira, New York) and "La Luna de Valencia" by J. Salom. In cinema he has collaborated with the directors Bigas Luna, Jaime Camino, and Gonzalo Herralde, among others. He has written arrangements for Alfredo Kraus, Joan Manel Serrat, Plácido Domingo, Mayte Martín, Camarón de la Isla, Paco de Lucía, Monserrat Caballé, Amancio Prada, Los Sabandeños, Mecano, Cómplices, Ana Belen, Miguel Ríos, Tontxu, José María Cano, Tomatito, etc.

He was awarded the first Composition Prize for Big Band for "Jazz Contemporáneo" (Madrid 1988), the prize for "Best Record of the Year" with Carles Benavent, and the prize "Altaveu" (1996) for his musical trajectory and international profile. For television he wrote symphonic pieces for the closure of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games conducting himself the City of Barcelona Orchestra.

RUMBAU

Toni Rumbau, co-founder and artistic director of the Malic Theatre, and founder member of the puppet company La Fanfarra (founded 1976), has extensive experience in the creation of shows for hand- shadow- and string- puppets. Writer for the majority of the Fanfarra's productions, in recent years he has developed a personal discourse which aims to unite elements from the tradition of popular puppet theatre with a considered and modern vision of puppet work. Shows such as "A Dos Manos" (*For Two Hands* – a hand puppet show for a solo performer which has been half-way round the world, being seen in festivals in China, Russia, Egypt, Lebanon and many other countries), o "El Doble y la Sombra" (*Double and Shadow*), first performed in Barcelona's Festival Grec'99, illustrate perfectly this desire for creative dialogue with tradition.

A constant element in these shows is the use of the "swazzle"; an instrument that is hundreds of years old and which has given voice to the old street puppets of the Western world, it is a secret of puppeteers who pass it on from generation to generation. Toni Rumbau learned the use of the swazzle from Portuguese and English puppeteers, and has achieved great virtuosity in its use. Employing specific voice and breathing techniques, he has developed the ability to sing with the swazzle, a rarity that has made it possible for Joan Albert Amargós, the opera's composer, to include it in the score as one of the singing parts.

BARCELONA 216

The orchestra Barcelona 216 was founded in 1985, as the result of a proposal made by the “Catalan Association of Composers” made to Ernest Martínez Izquierdo; with the objective of performing the younger composers of the Association. Later, together with David Albet, Barcelona 216 decided to widen its repertoire with works by international composers, maintaining as objective the diffusion of twentieth century works and, more specifically, promoting composers by means of commissions and first performances. Until the year 2000, Barcelona 216 was the orchestra associated with the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona.

The orchestra develops its own programmes for its season of concerts in Barcelona, with exchanges with other musical formations – national and international – and in productions with institutions and companies from other artistic fields: the dance companies DANAT DANZA and TRANSIT, the opera companies OPERA METROPOLITANA and the GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU, IRCAM-George Pompidou Centre, the writer LLUISA CUNILLÉ, and the actor ROSA NOVELL and director CARLOTA SUBIRÓS.

Barcelona 216 has made recordings with the following recording companies: HyadesArts, Discmedi and Strtadivarius. With the latter it has recorded the complete chamber works of the composer Robert Gerhard.

Since its founding the group has had occasion to participate in numerous festivals and concert cycles such as the Zagreb Biennial, the Holland Festival, Ars Musica - Brussels, Festival Musique Aujourd’hui – Strasbourg, International Festivals of Alicante and Torruella de Montgrí, the Quincena Musical Donostiarra, the Festival Grec of Barcelona and the Festival of Contemporary Music of Barcelona.

In 2000 the group Barcelona 216 received the prize **Premi Ciutat de Barcelona de Música**, for its trajectory of diffusion of the contemporary repertoire, specifically in the performance of “Metrópolis” by Martín Matalón, in the Auditori de Barcelona and for the recording of Robert Gerhard’s chamber music.

ARTISTIC TEAM

Euridice has been premiered at Barcelona Grec Festival in July 2001.

Music

JOAN ALBERT AMARGÓS

Libretto

TONI RUMBAU

Singers

CLAUDIA SCHNEIDER

MARC CANTURRI

Puppeteer

TONI RUMBAU

Assistant to puppeteer

PAVLOS NOWAK

Orchestra

BARCELONA 216

Director

LUCA VALENTINO

Set

JOSÉ MENCHERO

Lighting

QUICO GUTIÉRREZ

Puppet construction

AGUEDA MIGUEL, MARIONA MASGRAU, PAVLOS NOWAK

Production

FESTIVAL GREC 2001/PRODUCCIONS CALIBAN/TEATRE METROPOL/LA FANFARRA

EURIDICE: AN OPERA-THEATRE SHOW FOR TWO SINGERS, PUPPETS AND AN ORIGINAL INSTRUMENTAL QUINTET.



RESUME CRITICS

A happy conjunction

The inclusion of puppets in dramatic works of other genres has happened a number of times, and their presence in opera has the illustrious precedent of Falla's "El Retablo de Maese Pedro". On this occasion, however, the symbiosis is greater, because one of the puppets sings, and does so in the distinctive puppet voice created by the "swazzle", which here distorts the voice of Toni Rumbau, who is also the author of this curious story; a story brought to life by the music of Joan Albert Amargós, and **which deserved the honours of a packed house, warm applause, and tickets totally sold out.**

It is not often that one attends the premiere of an unconventional opera that deserves such a reception, but "Euridice" is a happy conjunction of an interesting dramatical argument, attractive music well written for the voices and with attractive instrumentation (the presence of a Bandoneon is noteworthy, giving the score a "Piazzolan" air), and measured directing which combines the spectacular moments of puppets theatre with performances of the excellent protagonists. In brief, a huge success.

La Vanguardia,

Amargós and his first opera

Those who see a ray of hope in the opening night of every new opera, as an expression of faith in the genre, were pleasantly surprised with "Euridice", the first opera written by Joan Albert Amargós, **a production in which all component parts advance towards a shared objective, with quality and conviction.**

An accessible score, which successfully translates the surrealist drama of Toni Rumbau's libretto, with special attention paid to the balance of timbres provided an appropriate musical framework for the simple and well thought "mise-en-scene" by Luca Valentino- with the subtle design by José Menchero and the atmospheric lighting of Quico Gutiérrez- and **was splendidly performed by Cristina Zavalloni who brims with musical ability, and by a thoroughly engaged Enric Martínez-Castignani. The treatment of the voices is a hundred percent operistic, and the mezzo contains sections of great lyricism which, as does the title itself, pay homage to the tradition of opera.**

ABC

The composer, writer and singer must forgive me, but **the king of the night was Polichinela**, accompanied by his satellites –the policeman, the dog, the devil and a disturbing figure of death- all masterfully manipulated by Toni Rumbau and Pavlos Nowak.

The ending of the performance was followed by the enthusiastic approbation of the work of all involved. And, indeed, one had just enjoyed scenes of very fine opera, in which Amargós and Rumbau had ensured that a convincing Polichinela stole the hearts of the audience.

El País

A rather peculiar triangle

In an opera season which began with the megalomaniac fireworks of "D.Q.", the premiere of "Euridice" by Joan Albert Amargós reminds us opportunely that the renovation of the repertoire does not need to pass through the big theatres and cumbersome productions.

The primary achievement of the score is its adoption to each scene. Amargós takes the appropriate tome and finds the necessary colour, both in the writing for the instrumental quintet –interpreted with skill and precision by Barcelona 216- and in the treatment of the voices.

Amargós foregoes the eternal "recitative" prevalent in so many recent new operas, to choose instead a more than valid continuous "arioso", unafraid to let the voices soar. Even more remarkable is the instrumental score in which the torrid love scene between The singer and the puppet stands out, with its magical, almost zingara tone, followed by the tragic conclusion and the evocative "vocalize" with which the piece ends.

Avui

Polichinela and the anti-diva

With its opera-within-an-opera, Toni Rumbau has rejected a possible theatrical re-visit of "Orpheus & Euridice" and has used references to these characters crossing them with a singers (Sofia) and her director and lover (Oscar) – **in order to create an opera that is fiercely modern.**

Puppets inhabit that shadow world which gods and monsters share with characters of the imagination, and where they dialogue with those of flesh and blood. Today this art is going through a process of significant diversification and I believe that its use in this opera is an expression of contemporaneity. **Rumbau's work is exemplary** both in the wisdom and dexterity of the manipulation and in the strict economy of his use of characters and accessory objects. **Jose Menchero's set design is absolutely in line with the needs of the production and Quico Gutiérrez' lighting creates moments of introspective beauty. Luca Valentino has woven and articulated all these elements in a production characterized by its internal logic and with moments of great tragic-comic intensity.**

Avui

Contact and music publisher

Dietrich Grosse
Management

MONDIGROMAX –cultivos de cultura-
Carme 3, at - 1
08001 Barcelona
tel 93 4541819
fax 93 4521440
info@mondigromax.com

