

LA CUZZONI

GROTESQUE TRAGI-COMEDY OF A VOICE

Chamber opera



Foto: Alfonso Romero

Agustí Charles: Music

Marc Rosich: Libretto

Alfonso Romero Mora: Scenic direction

• ARTISTIC CREDITS

Music: **Agustí Charles**
Libretto : **Marc Rosich**
Musical director: **Tobias Engeli**
Stage director and lighting: **Alfonso Romero Mora**

La Cuzzoni (old): **Gerson Luiz Sales** (counter tenor)
La Cuzzoni (young): **Sonja Gerlach** (soprano)
Charles Burney: **Werner Volker Meyer** (baritone)

With the **Soloists of the Staatstheater Darmstadt**

Set: **Inna Wöllert**
Costume: **José Manuel Vázquez**
Dramaturge: **Karin Dietrich**

Fotos: **Barbara Aumüller**

Co-production: **Staatstheater Darmstadt and FOBNC**
In collaboration with: **L'Auditori**
With the support of: **The Goethe Institut**

WHEN/WHERE

CHAMBER OPERA for counter tenor, soprano, baritone and string quartet

Duration: **1h 23m**

Language: **Catalan with overtitling in english, german, spanish**

WORLD PREMIERE

Performances Darmstadt
Barcelona, Auditori Barcelona
Madrid, Teatro Albéniz

12 October 2007, Staatstheater Darmstadt

14, 19 October 2007, 22, 24 and 28 February 2008

9 and 10 November 2007

5 and 6 April 2008

- **INTRODUCTION**

The brilliant career of Francesca Cuzzoni began when Handel discovered her and brought her into the Royal Academy of Music. Her talent and character turned her into a legendary diva, even if it was only in 1727 that she achieved fame throughout Europe when, at the King's Theatre in London, she got into an on-stage fight with Faustina Bordoni.

Her luxurious life-style put her in debt to the extent that she ended up working as a button maker and even, on two occasions, landed in jail. *La Cuzzoni* by Marc Rosich and Agustí Charles is a comic opera of dramatic content; a portrait of this aged, wrung-out glory who returns to London to give a charity concert...but for whose benefit?

- **ARTICLE**

My unhealthy fascination with opera has always gone hand in hand with a feeling of incredulity in the face of the over-the-top artifice which, for me, opera represents; the sum of so many different arts combined in a strange alchemy. So it is logical that, on being commissioned to write an opera libretto by the Festival, I thought of creating a homage to the fabulous absurdity which opera means to me, this world where dramas reach a safe port or perilous end via exhibitions of vocal virtuosity and where extreme passions, worthy of soap operas, are transformed by music into noble endeavours.

For some time now, I had in my head – always full of Handelian chirpings – the idea of writing something about one of the muses of the Baroque genius: La Cuzzonii, that diva of histrionic biography and fantastically decadent end, which is to say a real monster, a completely convincing character for the protagonist of an opera. It wasn't the intention, however, to make a historical reading, either from a musical point of view or that of the dramaturgy. On the contrary, what interested both myself and Agustí Charles, responsible for the music, was to offer an ironic look at strict Baroque forms from the point of view of today's language. Agustí's music has been fundamental in breathing rhythm and life into the decadent world sketched in the pages of the libretto, extracting dramatic force and sonorous contrasts from a reduced ensemble, (string quartet and three singers), to the point of complete exhaustion! Thus, the sporadic quotes from Handel swim around in surprise, within a bold score which, for me, is a leafy forest of stimulating notes.

That at the end of this story *La Cuzzoni* has been "sponsored" by the artistic team of the Darmstadt State Opera is simply an added stimulus in a project which, both for Agustí and me, has been a challenge on a grand scale given that, after all, it is our first foray into the complete creation of a new-made opera, the first time we have tasted the fruits of this mysterious alchemy between text, stage and music.

Marc Rosich

- **ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES**

AGUSTÍ CHARLES

Musical studies at the conservatories of Manresa, Barcelona, Badalona and the Liceu. Piano with Àngel Soler and teaching qualification in jazz piano for children. Studied in Italy with Franco Donatoni and Luigi Nono, and in New York with Samuel Adler. He has worked with composers and conductors such as Joan Guinjoan, Cristóbal Halffter, J.R. Encinar and Ros Marbà. His work has received prizes in more than forty national and international competitions, such as the *Concurso de Composición Musical* of the AEOS. He has received commissions from prestigious institutions and performers. He is the author of many articles on composing and musical analysis and, furthermore, holds a phd in History of Art, is Professor of Composition and Instrumentation at the Higher Conservatory of Music of Aragon and teaches composition at the ESMUC.

MARC ROSICH

Journalism, Translation and Interpreting. Trained as a playwright at the Obrador of the Sala Beckett. Dramaturge, director, actor and literary translator. As a dramaturge texts performed include, among others: *Plataforma* (Teatre Romea 2006, directed by Calixto Bieito), *Entre meses variados* (Teatre Lliure 2006, directed by Antonio Calvo), *De Manolo a Escobar* (2005, directed by Xavier Albertí) and *UNHAPPY MEALS* (Teatre Malic 2002). With the Trattoria Lirica, he co-directed with Albert Tola, *Il Geloso Schernito* by Pergolesi. Dramaturge and director of the musical productions *4 Stagioni* by Vivaldi and the version of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* by the puppeteer Pepe Ota. He is a founder member of Teatre Obligatori. As co-dramaturge, this year he premieres a version of *Tirant lo Blanc*, directed by Calixto Bieito with music by Carles Santos.

TOBIAS ENGELI

Coming from a musical family, Engeli conducted an orchestra for the first time at the age of thirteen, having studied the 'cello with Thomas Grossenbacher at the Higher Music Conservatory of the Winterthur Theatre in Switzerland, and the Hamburg Higher Music Conservatory with Gmelin. He also plays the piano. His repertory includes all styles of music from Baroque to contemporary. He began his conducting career in Hamburg, with Christof Prick. He has conducted the operas *Amour et Psychée* by Mondonville, *Il Combattimento* by Monteverdi, *Infinito Nero* by Sciarrino, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Benjamin Britten and *L'histoire du soldat* by Stravinsky. He has worked at the Staatstheater Darmstadt since 2006. In April 2008 he is expected to conduct world premieres of works at the Munich Biennial.

ALFONSO ROMERO MORA

Stage director. Holds a piano teacher's degree. Founded and conducted various choirs during six years, while also taking courses specialising in baroque organ, harpsichord, and choral conducting.

As stage manager of Madrid's Teatre Real (1997-2004), he collaborated with prestigious opera stage directors such as J.Carlos Plaza, Josep Maria Flotats, Werner Herzog, John Dew, Pier Luigi Pizzi and Herbert Wernicke, among others, as well as Nacho Duato, Victor Ullate and Pina Bausch. In 1998 he was assistant director for the world premiere of *Corvo Branco* by Philip Glass. Since 2004 he has been assistant director at the Staatstheater Darmstadt. His first production as director was *La voix humaine*, by Poulenc in 2003 at the ARE-MORE International Music Festival in Vigo. His direction has been awarded various international prizes.

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

This is a night of rare power and intensity: exemplary.

Deutschlandradio, 16.10.2007

Darmstadt. The chamber opera *La Cuzzoni: esperpent d'una veu* last night received its world premiere as part of the Catalan Weeks in the Kammerspiele **to a rapturous ovation. Librettist Marc Rosich and composer Agustí Charles have brought the story of the aging singer to the stage ... in a deeply moving way.**

Darmstädter Echo, 14.10.2007

The new opera took its curtain call in the German theatre to an extended ovation, and with good reason, because this is a show that really works, constructed with the necessary elements provided by the co-producers and brought to life by the most able performers.

ABC, 15.10.2007

Catalan culture in Darmstadt: the intelligent chamber opera *La Cuzzoni* by Agustí Charles

This world premiere, very evocatively staged by Alfonso Romero, the director of the Staatstheater Darmstadt, was the Staatstheater's special contribution of the cultural programme accompanying the Frankfurt Book Fair.

Frankfurter Rundschau, 15.10.2007

The Triumph of *La Cuzzoni*

Only rarely does a contemporary opera manage to be an all-round success. Nevertheless, composer Agustí Charles has achieved just that in his lyric debut.

El Periódico, 9.11.2007

Agustí Charles writes music of exceptional timbric refinement. The musical direction by Tobias Engeli was splendid and the stage direction by Alfonso Romero Mora exactly right.

El País, 11.11.2007

Top-quality

Music theatre, art theatre, of which a good example is this work of Agustí Charles with libretto by Marc Rosich, *La Cuzzoni*, one of the star attractions of the Òpera Butxaca season...

La Vanguardia 11.11.2007

People who are not in the habit of going to a concert hall or an opera house will have no difficulty following the story, the staging and the music... .

...this opera by Charles and Rosich is enthrallingly moving.

L'Avenç, January 2008





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