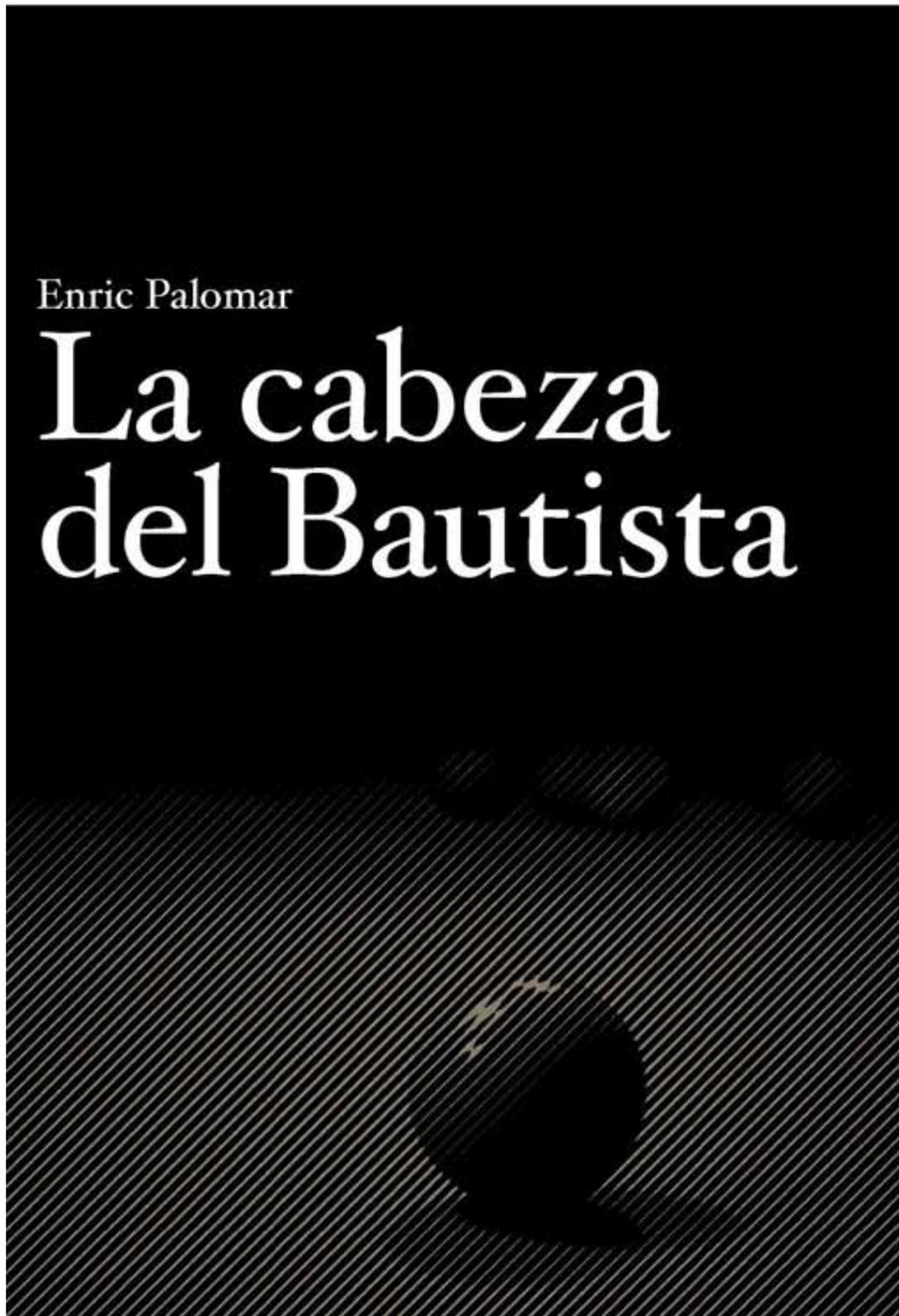


Enric Palomar

# La cabeza del Bautista



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## ***La cabeza del Bautista* – Pressestimmen**

### **A Pitiless View of Human Misery**

Barcelona - An Opera Europe conference here, April 17-19, offered attendees a preview of "La cabeza del Bautista" (the Baptist's Head), a new opera by Spanish composer Enric Palomar. (...)

Palomar uses recurring themes and other unifying devices from the classic tradition. **Lacking neither symphonic vigour, sustained pace, nor the proper amount of dissonance to rank as "modern", or even "post-modern" or "minimalist", his writing is strongly rooted in the Hispanic dance and folksong rhythms** that originated in the Renaissance and later percolated through works by such non-Hispanics such as Domenico Scarlatti, Bizet and Rimsky-Korsakov. True, the score's vocal lines are as much word-driven as in any Britten opera, which makes a bit of a problem even for native speakers because of the libretto's multi-layered discourse, which mixes dialect and underworld lingo with lofty poetry. On the other hand, while Palomar's music the dividing line between popular and high-culture elements is hard to trace, its national flavour is unmistakable and free of intellectualism superimposed on much contemporary music.

**The largely international audience that filled the Liceu (regular patrons alongside theater managers and their staffs, critics, composers, and performers) responded with thunderous applause** far beyond mere courtesy. Credit is due as well to the principal. As wicked Blind Man, bass-baritone Michael Kraus towered in the extended prologue; soprano Ángeles Blancas lent La Pepona remarkable flexibility of utterance, as well as sensual color and physical sex-appeal, tenor José Manuel Zapata (hitherto noted for his bel canto feats) was duly neurotic, greedy desperate Don Igi (...)

Conductor Josep Caballé-Domènech and director Carlos Wagner boosted the work's surrealistic black humor with mercurial twists of pace among the landscapes, thunderstruck trees and hosts of billiard tables turned into coffins by set designer Alfons Flores.

Carlo Vitali, **MusicalAmerica.com** - New York 30 April 2009

### ***La cabeza del Bautista* makes very pleasant listening**

**... A real opera, with a solidly organized plot and strongly drawn characters, all put together in a ninety-minute production without any interval.** The framework and the editing of the libretto, in Spanish, bringing to mind the realist universe of verismo (...) Giordano, Mascagni, Leoncalvallo, Cilea, or even the Puccini of *La Fanciulla del West* or *Il Tabarro*, would have love to set *La cabeza del Bautista* to music.

Inevitably listening to the score recalls to one aspects of the work of the composers just mentioned. One notices as well the influence of Falla, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Janacek, Bartók ... in short, of all the memorable musicians of the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. (...)

**So *La cabeza del Bautista* makes for very pleasant listening: it is openly tonal music, well constructed and well organized. In the course of the ninety minutes one does not become bored for an instant.** And all the more one is captivated by the way that Carlos Wagner organizes the mise en scène, perfectly following both the tones and the inflections of the text and the music. (...) Under the baton of Josep Caballé-Domènech, who takes great care to respect the kaleidoscopic nature of the score, the casting has not one weak point. Absolutely beautiful on stage, Ángeles Blancas soars in a custom-tailored role. At her side, a special mention for the remarkable Don Igi sung by the tenor José Manuel Zapata.

We should mention that this world premiere was offered on the night of its final dress rehearsal on 17 April to delegates from 110 opera houses in the context of the Opera Europa Association Forum being held at that time.

Richard Martet, **Opéra Magazine's news editor, Paris** June 2009

### **Die Oper "Der Kopf des Täufers" in Barcelona uraufgeführt**

Palomar gibt den redlichen Handwerker im Weingut der Töne. Seine Strukturen wirken klar, von Avantgarde und Experimenten hält er nichts, Atmosphäre ist ihm lieb, und ein iberischer Einschlag klingt stets durch, ein Tonfall, der lichte Nacht mit Unbedingtheit mischt, der heftige Emotionen anschlägt und doch nie auf Eleganz, auf Fasslichkeit verzichtet. Bedrohung, Lust, Erotik und Ungestüm kann Palomar wunderbar untergründig im Orchester anstoßen, und da überzeugen Dirigent Josep Caballé Domenech und das Liceu-Orchester durchgehend. Nie überdeutlich oder grell zeichnet Domenech jene befremdliche Verschlingung aus Eros und Geldgier nach... Immer wieder taucht gleichsam die Klangkeule aus dem Graben auf, um, sobald ein Sänger auch nur den Mund öffnet, diskret zurückgezogen zu werden. José Manuel Zapata gibt einen wundervoll verdrucksten Don Igi, Alexander Marco-Buhrmeister den deftigen Macho Jándalo...

Reinhard Brembeck, **Süddeutsche Zeitung - München 23 April 2009**

## Music in harmony with breathtaking texts

The Gran Teatre del Liceu of Barcelona has once again made its contribution to opera creation with *La cabeza del Bautista* (The Baptist's Head), an opera with an introduction and eight scenes, by the Catalan composer Enric Palomar. The libretto, signed by Carlos Wagner, is from the text of the same name (1924), subtitled "macabre novel" by Don Ramón María del Valle-Inclán (1866-1936), with a few added poems from the same writer (...)

Carlos Wagner himself directed the staging. Drawing strength, style, mystery, lyricism and wealth, in sum, from Valle-Inclán's texts – with full respect - he confirms that he is a rising star among the directors of his generation. The stage movements - sex and violence - even they exceed sometimes the conventional drama of the early 20th century of its creation and found their perfect place in our era (...).

Enric Palomar made Pepona the central character of the piece and **Ángeles Blancas** – whom the Liceu remembers with emotion for her *Human Voice* in 2008 – **honoured it by creating a multi-faceted character, full of colour**. Her tone, not exactly pleasant, can be charming, and her treble on the edge of scream, are always in tune. The text is understandable and well performed. At her side **the audience paid tribute to José Manuel Zapata's performance** (Don Igi) and Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester in the role of Jándalo. Michael Krauss gave an exceptional version of the Blindman.

The Liceu's orchestra under the direction of Josep Caballé Domenech measured up to the circumstances, which meant considerable work for an orchestra little accustomed to such exercise.

**Strong applause greeted the work of the artists (...)**

By Jaime Estapà i Argemí, **Webthea.com - Paris** 13 mai 2009

...die erste große Oper des mehrfach preisgekrönten katalanischen Komponisten [Enric Palomar erwies sich] keineswegs als akademisch, atonal oder schwer zugänglich. Im Gegenteil: **Das etwa eineinhalbstündige Werk ist musikalisch und inhaltlich mitreißend und spannend. Es geht ins Ohr**, denn Palomar durchsetzt die Komposition mit Elementen traditioneller spanischer Musik. **Am Pult des Orchesters des Gran Teatre del Liceu vermochte Josep Caballé Domenech den rhythmischen Charakter des Werks ebenso überzeugend zu formen wie dessen lyrisch romantische und tragische Züge...**

José Manuel Zapata gelang mit der Gestaltung der Hauptfigur eine darstellerisch und sängerisch grossartige Leistung.... Ángeles Blancas machte mit ihrem vollen weiblichen Sopran und ihrer attraktiven Erscheinung aus der Rolle der Pepona ein Ereignis...

## B. Frakele, Opernglas, Hamburg, Juni 2009

### "The right track in contemporary creation"

It seems that contemporary opera is going in the right direction, as evidenced by two composers as diverse as Cristobal Halffter with his *Lázaro* and now Enric Palomar with his *Baptist's Head*, which was commissioned by the Liceu and has now been premiered. **Palomar has progressed step by step and if his earlier works suggested some interesting things, now with his third one, he is well and truly established....**

The composer has created music that while being contemporary does not reject the melody. Its more relaxed moments are reminiscent of Kurt Weill, while in those of greater dramatic force he imposes a dense orchestration full of vitality that reflects the strength of the drama, the contrasting feelings of fear and passion, the threat of blackmail, all in a sordid atmosphere where all sorts of passions are unleashed...

The work of the conductor, Josep Caballé-Domenech, who had studied the score in great depth, has been very important: he managed to bring out all the detail, the subtleties and the necessary intensity, getting a very interesting performance from the orchestra, and also from the chorus which had a far from easy task before them.

**Albert Vilardell, *El Mundo*, 22 de abril 2009**

**After two chamber operas, *Ruleta* (1998) and *Juana* (2006) - the composer Enric Palomar has taken a giant step forward in the consolidation of his work in the field of opera with this world premiere of a full-scale work at the Liceu.**

... A score of brilliant colour and symphonic vigour that Josep Caballé recreates with great results in the pit ... The opera, unquestionably successful on many scores, and the quality of Carlos Wagner's staging, were very well received in a debut that ended with almost unanimous applause...

Ángeles Blancas leaves no loose ends in her vigorous creation of Pepona. At her side the tenor José Manuel Zapata rises to the occasion in a role, Don Igi, far from his bel canto field. Palomar achieves in the chorus part -well managed by the chorus of the Liceu- suggestive nuances with a clever game of dissonance. But it is in the pit, well-controlled by Caballé-Domènech, where the resources shine at their best, with **a language of great force and rhythmic narrative** that has been nurtured by many influences and follows the language of Falla and Gerhard in the use of themes and expressions from popular music.

**Javier Pérez Senz, *El País*, 24 April 2009**