



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

A Majestic Revival of Strauss Operatic Gem

Theater an der Wien, 23.01.2025 [ENA]

The Theater an der Wien's revival of the famous Johann Strauss II's operetta, *Das Spitzentuch der Königin*, is a masterful blend of historical homage and contemporary artistry. Premiered on January 18, 2025, this production not only commemorates the 200th anniversary of Strauss's birth but also reintroduces a work that had long been absent from the stage in Vienna and globally.

The operetta, which debuted in 1880, quickly became Strauss's most significant success at the time, yet it vanished from repertoires following the Mayerling incident in 1889. This revival is a testament to the timeless appeal of Strauss's music and the enduring relevance of the operetta's themes. *Das Spitzentuch der Königin* (The Queen's Lace Handkerchief) is an operetta in three acts, with a libretto crafted by Heinrich Bohrmann-Riegen and Richard Genée. The narrative is set in 16th-century Portugal, a nation under the sway of a manipulative Prime Minister who conspires to cede the country to Spain.

King Ferdinand, portrayed with both humor and pathos, is depicted as a monarch more enamored with culinary delights and extramarital escapades than with matters of state or his queen. The plot takes a turn with the arrival of the playwright Miguel de Cervantes, who, through wit and ingenuity, thwarts the Prime Minister's schemes, rekindles the royal marriage, and finds inspiration for his seminal work, *Don Quixote*.

Musically, the operetta is a treasure trove of melodies, showcasing Strauss's unparalleled ability to weave waltzes into the fabric of operatic storytelling. Notably, the main musical theme was later adapted into the concert waltz *Rosen aus dem Süden*, which remains a staple in concert repertoires today.

Under the meticulous direction of Christian Thausing, this production pays homage to the original while infusing it with contemporary sensibilities. Thausing's vision brings a fresh perspective to the operetta, highlighting its satirical undertones and drawing parallels to modern political dynamics. The set and costume design by Timo Dentler and Okarina Peter are a visual feast, capturing the opulence of the Portuguese court while incorporating subtle modern elements that resonate with today's audiences.

The lighting design by Sebastian Alphons enhances the mood transitions, from the comedic to the dramatic, effectively supporting the narrative's ebb and flow. Evamaria Mayer's choreography adds a dynamic layer to the performance.

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The dance sequences are both intricate and expressive, reflecting the operetta's rhythmic vitality. The cast delivers performances that are both vocally impressive and emotionally engaging. Diana Haller, in the role of King Ferdinand, brings a nuanced portrayal, balancing the character's comedic folly with moments of genuine introspection. Her mezzo-soprano voice navigates Strauss's melodies with grace and agility.

Elissa Huber, as Queen Isabella, delivers a compelling performance, her soprano voice conveying both the vulnerability and strength of her character. The chemistry between Haller and Huber adds depth to the royal couple's tumultuous relationship, making their eventual reconciliation both believable and moving.

Maximilian Mayer's Cervantes is charismatic and witty, his tenor voice bringing warmth and charm to the role. His portrayal captures the essence of the playwright as both a cunning strategist and a romantic idealist.

The supporting cast, including Beate Ritter as Donna Irene and Michael Laurenz as Count Villalobos, provide strong performances that enrich the narrative tapestry of the operetta.

Martynas Stakionis leads the Wiener KammerOrchester with precision and sensitivity, bringing out the lush textures and rhythmic vitality of Strauss's score. The orchestra's performance is both vibrant and nuanced, capturing the essence of the Viennese waltz while supporting the singers effectively.

The Arnold Schoenberg Chor, under the direction of Erwin Ortner, adds depth to the ensemble scenes, their cohesive sound enhancing the production's grandiosity.

The decision to stage *Das Spitzentuch der Königin* in 2025 is both a celebration of Strauss's bicentennial and a re-examination of a work that offers insightful commentary on political manipulation and personal responsibility. The operetta's themes of power, deception, and redemption are as relevant today as they were in the 19th century, making this revival a poignant reflection on contemporary society.

The Theater an der Wien's production of *Das Spitzentuch der Königin* is a triumph, seamlessly blending historical authenticity with modern relevance. The stellar performances, innovative direction, and superb musical execution make it a must-see for opera enthusiasts and newcomers alike. This revival not only honors Johann Strauss II's legacy but also reaffirms the enduring power of operetta to entertain, provoke thought, and touch the human spirit.

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