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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Sumptuous Spectacle: Die Csárdásfürstin

Volksopera of Vienna, 14.03.2025 [ENA]

Few operettas capture the charm, romance, and bittersweet nostalgia of a vanishing world quite like Emmerich Kálmán's *Die Csárdásfürstin*. In this latest production, director Johannes Erath delivers a deeply evocative staging that not only embraces the infectious energy of the piece but also underscores its underlying themes of societal constraints, longing, and transformation.

While the production soars musically and dramatically, it is the breathtaking visual splendor—courtesy of its lavish costumes and imaginative stage design—that leaves an indelible mark. From the moment the curtain rises, the audience is transported into a world of contrasts: the exuberance of Budapest's vibrant Orpheum, the stiff, aristocratic grandeur of Vienna, and the dreamlike, ephemeral spaces that hint at the operetta's deeper existential questions. The set design is nothing short of mesmerizing, seamlessly shifting between dazzling cabaret scenes and the rigid, gilded salons of nobility.

The Budapest nightclub in the first act is a feast for the senses—glistening chandeliers, velvet drapery, and mirrors reflecting a world of indulgence and fleeting pleasures. It is a space alive with movement, laughter, and an underlying melancholy, a realm where Sylva reigns supreme. In stark contrast, the Viennese setting of the second act exudes a cold elegance, its towering marble columns and pristine gold accents symbolizing a rigid society on the brink of change. The final act, more abstract and dreamlike, immerses the audience in an almost surreal landscape, hinting at the dissolution of old norms and the uncertainty of the future.

Johannes Erath's vision is one of both grandeur and introspection. The stage transforms fluidly, allowing the narrative to unfold dynamically while subtly reinforcing the characters' emotional journeys. Every visual choice serves to heighten the tension between romance and duty, tradition and individual freedom. A production of *Die Csárdásfürstin* demands sartorial splendor, and this staging delivers in dazzling fashion. The costumes, rich in detail and historical inspiration, paint a vivid portrait of a society at a crossroads.

Sylva Varescu's wardrobe is a highlight unto itself. At the Orpheum, she is draped in sumptuous, jewel-toned gowns that shimmer under the stage lights, reflecting both her status as a celebrated artist.

As the operetta progresses, Sylva's costumes evolve, mirroring her internal conflict. In Vienna, she appears in a regal yet restrained gown, a deliberate attempt to assimilate into aristocratic expectations. Yet, despite

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its elegance, the attire feels like a gilded cage—exquisite but not truly hers. In the climactic moments, as she rips apart the wedding contract, she symbolically sheds the trappings of imposed nobility, reclaiming her true self.

Edwin's costumes subtly reflect his own struggle between duty and passion. Initially dressed in the crisp, impeccable attire of his class, his wardrobe softens as his love for Sylva deepens. By the final act, his attire has lost some of its rigid formality, visually marking his transformation from dutiful aristocrat to a man willing to follow his heart.

The ensemble costumes are equally exquisite. The nightclub performers dazzle in art nouveau-inspired creations, their beaded and fringed dresses swirling with every movement. The Viennese aristocracy, in contrast, is dressed in pale silks and structured gowns, a visual representation of a world striving to maintain its façade of decorum amid inevitable change.

While the production's visual elements alone would make for an unforgettable evening, the musical and dramatic performances elevate it to a masterpiece. Sylva is portrayed with stunning charisma, her voice soaring effortlessly through Kálmán's sweeping melodies. She captures both the defiant independence and the deep vulnerability of the character, making her struggles achingly real. Edwin's portrayal is equally compelling, his vocal power matched by a nuanced emotional depth. His chemistry with Sylva crackles, their duets overflowing with longing and unspoken words. The secondary characters—particularly the scene-stealing Boni and the tender yet conflicted Stasi—add layers of humor and warmth, ensuring that the operetta's comedic elements.

The orchestra, under expert direction, breathes life into Kálmán's intoxicating score. From the rousing *Das ist die Liebe* to the wistful strains of *Weißt du es noch?*, every note is played with vibrant energy and aching lyricism. The *Csárdás* rhythms pulse with infectious exuberance, transporting the audience to a world of swirling dances and forbidden love. This *Csárdásfürstin* is a triumph in every sense. Its dazzling costumes and evocative stage design serve not just as decoration but as integral storytelling elements, reinforcing the operetta's themes of love, identity, and societal transformation.

Johannes Erath's direction balances spectacle with substance, ensuring that while the audience is swept away by the grandeur, they never lose sight of the deeply human emotions at the operetta's core. This is a production that reminds us why we go to the theater: to be enchanted, to feel deeply, and to be transported to a world at once distant and profoundly familiar.

For those fortunate enough to witness this production, *Die Csárdásfürstin* proves once more that great operetta is not merely an escape, but a mirror reflecting our own desires, fears, and hopes. And what a

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splendid, shimmering mirror this one is.

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