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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Majestic Pique Dame at the Vienna State Opera

Vienna State Opera, 06.07.2025 [ENA]

On a radiant summer evening at the Vienna State Opera, Tchaikovsky's Pique Dame (The Queen of Spades), directed by Vera Nemirova and conducted by the young Timur Zangiev, was presented with electrifying force and emotional resonance. Featuring a cast led by Anna Netrebko as Lisa, Elena Zarembo as the Countess, and Yusif Eyvazov as Hermann, the performance was a masterclass in dramatic intensity and vocal artistry.

At barely thirty, Timur Zangiev delivers a gripping and nuanced interpretation of Tchaikovsky's score. His command of orchestral color—crafting tension in brass, allure in woodwinds, and haunting lyricism in strings—imbued every scene with purpose. From the chilling atmosphere of the Countess's past to Hermann's fevered delirium at the card table, Zangiev maintained a taut narrative thread through the music. His leadership elicited both fiery climactic moments and intimate musical reflection.

Vera Nemirova's staging, rooted in the 1990s post-Soviet context, eschews fantastical excess in favor of grounded realism. The set—a dilapidated communist-era building—functions both practically and symbolically, collapsing Lisa's genteel upbringing, Hermann's alienation, and the Countess's decay into one multi-use structure. Minimalism is tempered by vivid theatrical moments—like the sea of black umbrellas that dramatizes Lisa's emotional turbulence. Nemirova's Menschenregie is measured but potent: she avoids bombast, preferring psychological precision and letting the characters' inner worlds unfold subtly yet unmistakably.

Anna Netrebko (Lisa) makes her role with astonishing depth. Her soprano glows with warmth and innocence, but she's no ingénue: line and nuance convey layers of yearning and despair, especially in her duets with Hermann. This was a debut worth the wait.

Elena Zarembo (Countess) commands the stage with aristocratic gravitas. Her aria based on Grétry is a haunting highlight—radiant yet chilling—and her presence, regal to the end of the ball, deservedly elicited stunned silence before applause. She portrayed the Countess as more than a relic; she was a living embodiment of memory, power, and curse.

Yusif Eyvazov (Hermann) delivered a compelling portrait of obsession. His voice, taut with intensity, tracked the progression from infatuation to madness. At the gambling scene he sang with feverish

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desperation, compelling in both tone and dramatic conviction.

Supporting roles were of equally high caliber: Elena Maximova's Polina was beautifully blended with Netrebko; Boris Pinkhasovich's Yeletsky offered lyrical refinement; and Alexey Markov's dual roles (Tomsky/Zlatogor) added musical color and narrative contrast.

The Vienna State Opera Chorus brought power and nuance, especially in the final Orthodox hymn—its impact so visceral it sent shivers through the audience. Meanwhile, the Orchestra, under Zangiev, was a living, breathing organism—each section contributing to the emotional and dramatic architecture of the evening. Johannes Leiacker's set—a single, decaying, multifunctional building filled with slot machines—became a haunting metaphor for obsession and psychological collapse. Costume designer Marie-Luise Strandt dressed characters in realistic period garb that commented on social hierarchy and inner desolation. Nemirova and Leiacker created a world simultaneously claustrophobic and expansively tragic.

Dramatic Highlights:

Act I: Tense courtship scenes between Lisa and Hermann; a chilling card-table climax.

Act II: Poetic duo between Polina and Lisa. Yeletsky's aria shone here—lyrical and heartfelt. Then came Hermann's breakdown at the gambling table: a haunting high point.

Act III: Psychological terror meets supernatural allure as Hermann confronts the Countess's ghost. Elena Zarembo's spectral portrayal remains etched in the mind. And the final chorus hymn resonated as spiritual reckoning.

This production of *Pique Dame* confirms the Vienna State Opera's status as a crucible of profound operatic storytelling. It succeeds in transcending the familiar by telling an old tale anew—with fresh psychological insight, musical vigor, and theatrical intelligence. Zangiev is a rising star in the pit, Nemirova demonstrates psychological realism, and Netrebko, Zarembo, and Eyvazov deliver performances that will linger long after the lights dim.

In terms of unity and depth, this *Pique Dame* ranks among the most compelling in the company's recent decades: a production that feels both timeless and vividly present. It holds a mirror to Tchaikovsky's genius while capturing our anxieties around obsession, memory, and mortality.

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