

Live from the Teatro Gran Rex

Liza makes Buenos Aires go around

MUSIC

BY DAN FASTENBERG
FOR THE HERALD

The Academy Award, BAFTA, Emmy, Golden Globe (twice), Grammy, Tony (twice), winning actress, dancer, and singer Liza Minnelli has been tearing through South America at a pace that could make Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín blush.

Minnelli's eleven-day swing through Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil, included a stop here in Buenos Aires where she performed to a sold-out Teatro Gran Rex on June 13.

Despite the late start to the show, once she did finally appear on stage, Minnelli didn't take long to show the crowd that she still has her stuff. Backed up by a 12-piece band, Minnelli opened the night with Johnny Nash's oft-covered standard, *I Can See Clearly Now*, and delivered its optimistic lyrics with a quiet, understated intensity

that underscored one plainly obvious fact: north, west, east, or south of Washington Square Park, Liza is a survivor.

Mindful of her storied past, Minnelli presented the two-hour performance as a much-welcomed celebration of her life. A large portion of the evening was dedicated to Minnelli's godmother – her *madrina*, as she instructed the crowd – Kay Thompson.

Thompson, who died in 1998, was among other things the author of the *Eloise* children's series and an accomplished vocal arranger. As a retrospective of sorts, Minnelli devoted a large portion of the programme to Thompson compositions, which even included a song entitled *Liza*, after which Minnelli was named. Aiming to recreate the nucleus of the 1940s Thompson act as much as possible, Minnelli even temporarily brought onto the stage four actors – including Johnny Rodgers and Clark

Therell – to play the part of the accompanying Williams brothers, who were made famous in their own right by Andy after their partnership with Thompson.

Minnelli's choice to approach her latest round of appearances with a bit of upbeat nostalgia was foretold by herself at a press conference at the chic Puerto Madero Faena Hotel a day before the performance.

In spite of all the well-documented ups and downs – struggles with substance abuse and the four divorces top the list – Minnelli beamed the



Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires: Liza Minelli sings to a sold-out crowd at the Teatro Gran Rex.



AP FILE PHOTO

"For the first time in my life I am out there for myself, not tied in with a man. I feel liberated."

same showmanship at the conference she would display on stage the following day.

"I only go forward," she said with a laugh, as if to say, 'watch what I do next,' to the standing room only room of journalists. "For the first time in my life I am out there for myself, not tied in with a man. I feel liberated."

Minnelli also impressed the press with her familiarity of their city and their culture – she had not just spent time at a Buenos Aires milonga on a previous trip, but she was also once seriously considered for the title role in the 1996 film *Evita* of Madonna fame.

And she even made sure to tell the Gran Rex audience a more personal story that tied in with Buenos Aires. When Minnelli was still struggling to forge her own identity in the entertainment industry, no doubt struggling to step outside the large shadow cast by her famous parents, Judy Garland and filmmaker Vincente Minnelli, Thompson brought Minnelli to her home one day. She then brought Minnelli into a room with three

closets. In the first closet was a framed picture of the Champs-Élysées. In the second was none other than a framed picture of Avenida 9 de Julio. And in the last was a mirror. Thompson then quickly asked the young Minnelli, "Now, how do you like what you see?"

Minnelli's latest performance in Buenos Aires left no doubt that she has long since gained that self-confidence, for it was her singing and dancing, delivered without a trace of self-doubt, that stole the night.

Whether Minnelli was paying tribute to Thompson or digging deep into her archive with such classics as *World Goes Round* from the 1977 Martin Scorsese movie *New York, New York*, Minnelli's ability to still belt it out with all the right dance moves, even at age 61, was undeniable.

Not that anyone needed convincing, for Minnelli was preaching to the choir. The audience may have not yet mastered the past perfect progressive tense in the English language, but when it came to

the lyrics of the Minnelli classics, the concertgoers had little difficulty matching Liza word for word. That the crowd had its very own start power, including a who's who of Argentina, talk-show hostess Susana Giménez among the seat-fillers in a 400-peso row, seemed only to matter during the intermission, when Giménez's bodyguards stood in the aisles to protect her from her adoring fans.

But once the curtain was raised and Liza was on stage, there was only one person who truly mattered, and the likes of Giménez found themselves in the foreign territory of being just another anonymous awe-struck *porteña* in a sea of them.

Indeed the woman in the spotlight couldn't agree more herself.

Before breaking into her penultimate song of the evening, *New York, New York*, Minnelli instructed the crowd, "One of the best things that someone can say is that this song was written for me." Then, without even pausing for reflection, she added, "this song was written for me."

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CRITIC'S CHOICE

BY RAMIRO ALBINO
FOR THE HERALD

This week there will not be an enormous number of concerts. We will have neither symphonic music nor many visits. The greatest musical event of the week is the premiere of *Samson and Delilah* by Saint-Saëns at the Teatro Coliseo, where the opera season of the Teatro Colón is being held.

But we will be able, though, to get to know and enjoy some of the many chamber possibilities in Buenos Aires, and to discover that little ensembles cansometimes give us the greatest music.

One of these chamber recitals will be performed on Wednesday at 7.30 pm at the Auditorio Jorge Luis Borges of the Biblioteca Nacional, Agüero and Las Heras, for free.

A local vocal quartet of the highest level (Graciela Oddone, Virginia Correa Dupuy, Osvaldo Ledesma and Hernán Iturralde) and a four piano duo (Diana Schneider and Alicia Belleville) will play a programme of duets and trios by Robert Schumann, Franz Schubert and Johannes Brahms, and the 18 *Liebeslieder* (love songs) Walzer Opus 52b, published in 1869 by Johannes Brahms, on texts by George Friedrich Daumer. In these waltzes Brahms blended the folk tradition of Northern Germany (where he was born) and the more stylish waltzes and Ländler from Austria, where he lived when he composed these pieces.

The Early Music concert series at the Centro Cultural Rojas continues this week with a recital by the ensemble Música Poética of the Universidad Católica Argentina.

Entitled *Al itálico modo* (The Italian way), this concert comprises music written in the Italian manner, but outside Italy, by Pietro Locatelli, Francesco Geminiani, Georg Frederic Haendel, Domenico Scarlatti, Jean-Marie Leclair and Johann Sebastian Bach.

The "Poetic musicians" are Joelle Perdaens (violin), Gabriel Pérsico (flute), María Jesús Olóndriz (cello) and María de Lourdes Cútolu (harpsichord), all renowned performers, highly specialized in baroque repertoires.

This concert will be held at the Auditorio Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo of the Centro Cultural Rojas, Ave. Corrientes 2038. Tickets are \$10.

Another baroque concert, full of poetry too, will be held on Saturday at 6pm at the Iglesia Metodista Central, Rivadavia 4050. Organized by the Academia Bach, Buenos Aires. The Compañía de las Luces, a group conducted by Marcelo Birman, will present the motet *Heut triumphieret Gottes Sohn* (The Son of God Triumphs Today) by Buxtehude, and Bach's Cantata No. 75 *Die Ellenden sollen essen* (The Deprived Must Eat).

Both works will be played on original instruments and with origi-

nal techniques. The orchestra features trumpets and oboes, meaning it will be a joyful occasion.

Tickets will be sold at the church half an hour before the concert.

Those living in the northern suburbs of BA will next Saturday be able to enjoy a concert at the Pilar Golf (Panamericana km 60,5).

Carlos Vieu will conduct Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, a masterpiece written by Rossini in 1864 for vocal soloists, mixed choir, piano and harmonium. This mass, neither little nor solemn, is a religious work with plenty of reminiscences of opera and secular songs. The choral parts will be sung by the Orfeón de Buenos Aires, a choir created by Néstor Andrenacci and Pablo Piccinni, and the instrumental parts will be played by Fernando Pérez, piano; and Marcelo Ayub, harmonium.

There are three manners of buying tickets for this concert: by phone (02322-490-880/88/02322-491-976/77, ask for Elisabet Sauro), by email (esauro@saintpiper.com.ar), or at the Pilar Golf web site: www.pilargolf.com.ar.

The Teatro Colón will be staging a concert version of Saint-Saëns' biblical opera *Samson and Delilah*, with tenor José Cura, back in Argentina after eight years of international career.

Saint-Saëns composed a dozen operas, but only this one seem to have survived in the main opera

seasons and on the main stages in the world. This one is a blend of Wagnerian drama and the opera tradition of Italy and France with elements from oratorios and a substantial role by the chorus.

The vocal leads will be José Cura in the role of Samson. (You may remember striking version of Verdi's *Othello* at the Colón, in 1999), Cecilia Díaz (Delilah) and Luis Gaeta (the Priest of Dagon). The choral parts will be sung by the Resident Chorus of the theatre and the conductor will be Rodolfo Fischer.

The premiere is next Saturday at 8.30, and further performances are on Thursday 28, Sunday 1, Tuesday 3 and Thursday 5, at the Teatro Coliseo, Marcelo T. de Alvear 1125. Tickets, from \$25 and up,



FILE PHOTO

Back after eight years: José Cura.

are on sale at the Colón's box office, Tucumán 1171. Please note that, on the day of each performance, the box office moves to the Coliseo and opens at 5pm. More information, as always, calling 4378-7344 or visiting www.teatro-colon.org.ar

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Festivales Musicales & Nuova Harmonia

Byways of the Baroque: surprising events

CLASSICAL MUSIC

BY PABLO BARDIN
FOR THE HERALD

Both Festivales Musicales and Nuova Harmonia have recently provided surprising experiences in the Baroque field. They are indeed byways, well apart from the Bach-Handel-Vivaldi trilogy. They show how rich and varied that era was, and why it is rewarding to explore.

Festivales started its season with a lovely concert of the Ensemble Louis Berger at the Avenida. Notwithstanding their French-sounding appellation, this is an Argentine group that has taken for its own the name and surname of an outstanding French Jesuit musician who did marvellous work in such areas as Chiquitos (Bolivia).

Over the last thirty years the steady work of musicologists has unveiled unsuspected treasures in remote areas, proving there is an important Baroque repertoire. They are still mostly unknown, even if hundreds of manuscripts have been found, untouched since the 18th century. What we heard was a selection of the Chiquitos trove, and it was a moving event.

Their concert was entitled "Music at the Jesuitic Missions" and it included mostly anonymous works

in Spanish, chiquitano, latin and guaraní. All pieces are to be found at the Chiquitos Musical Archive. The group boasts a special set of instruments; although it existed in Europe, it's very rare to hear a "tromba marina," a tall instrument with only one string played with a bow and giving out the sound of a harsh trumpet. And something decidedly new: the "bajunes," immense Panpipes that give a beautiful effect. The ensemble also has a vocal quartet.

The anonymous pieces were a procession, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (repeated at the end, it brought the artists to the foyer), a litany for two voices in chiquitano (*Ane Nupaqsiuma suchetania*, or "We have a sorrowful Mother"), a *Cánite, pláudite* ("Sing, applaud")—a very brilliant piece to end the First Part—and four pieces in *guaraní* (*Mother of God, Litany, In the Great Fire of Hell* and *Listen, men*).

These last four had a special emotional effect. Otherwise, we had plenty of Domenico Zipoli, the Italian who died in America as a priest after an important European career: *Thanks, Our God* (authenticated) in chiquitano, with "tromba marina" and "bajunes"; a

Trio Sonata (attributed) and *In hoc mundo*, a motet (attributed). And finally, an interesting Fugued Mass attributed to Giovanni Battista Bassani, a European author whose music was found at the Chiquitos Archive. The Ensemble Louis Berger is a committed group of high standard; I will only single out the intense expressivity of soprano Ana María Santorelli.

Some people felt that the concert by La Barroca del Suquia led by Manfredo Kraemer (also at the Avenida) had been a waste of fine talent; I didn't. The ensemble hails from our Córdoba (Suquia is the river that traverses the city) and is equal to the good European Baroque ensembles. The programme was called "Sonorous tableaux from Biber to Boccherini" and it certainly shows an eccentric type of Baroque, based on the picturesque, the descriptive and the humorous. You won't find prodigies of counterpoint in these pieces, but you will encounter harmonic surprises, influences of popular and folk music, special effects, etc. Nothing profound nor memorable, but often fun; some are admittedly a trifle too trivial. Kraemer presented each piece in unacademic but precise manner.

The concert started with the only non-Baroque score, Boccherini's *The night music of the Madrid streets* (1780), which ends with the Retreat of the soldiers. Three authors are little-known today, and they hail from Central Europe: Pavel Vejvanovsky, *Sonata a 6 Campanarum*; Johann Valentin Meder, *The Polish beggar*; and Philipp Jakob Rittler, *Harmonia Romana*. More substantial were the scores by Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704), an important musician at Salzburg's court: his *Battalia* is vivid and imaginative, and *The Procession of the peasants to the church* was acted out by the players. Encores: a sonata imitating the nightingale and the cuckoo by a Theodor Schwarzkopf, and an astonishing Telemann piece, *The Muscovites*, from the suite *Peoples (Voelker)* with almost jazzy syncopations.

The "Cappella della Pietà dei Turchini" visited us for the second time to start the Nuova Harmonia season at the Coliseo. It is a group specialized in the Neapolitan Baroque, very rich and little-known. They went for a programme that laid emphasis on heavy comedy of *Commedia dell'arte* derivation. Certainly all pieces were new to BA audiences, as was the rest of the music they played. The ones that gave musi-

cal quality to the evening were written by composers of the Classicist era: two splendid fragments from Niccolò Piccinni's *Didone* ("opera seria"), and Giovanni Paisiello's Duet of Pulcinella and Carmosina from *Pulcinella vendicato*. I was sorry that the two greatest Neapolitans were not included: Alessandro Scarlatti and G.B. Pergolesi. There were two good instrumental scores: *Sonata a 3* in G minor (a concerto grosso) by Pietro Marchitelli (1643-1729), and the Second Sonata for strings by Domenico Gallo, whose first movement was adapted by Stravinsky for his *Pulcinella* (he thought it was by Pergolesi).

Apart from Paisiello, comedy was represented by Francesco Provenzale (1624-1704): the parody-lament *Squarciato appena havea*; Michelangelo Fagioli (1666-1733): cantata *Sto. Paglietta presuntuoso*; and Giuseppe Petrini's intermezzo *Graziello e Nella*. There was a charming encore: José de Nebra's *Fandango*. I liked soprano Maria Ercolano, intense and possessor of a fine technique; I disliked the mincing, affected interpretations of tenor Giuseppe De Vittorio. The players under Antonio Florio were quite good.

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