



IGNACIO GARCIA

“I BELIEVE THAT, MORE THAN BE AN INVENTOR, A DIRECTOR SHOULD BE A DISCOVERER. THE WORLD OF CONTEMPORARY ART IS DEEPLY OBSESSED WITH INVENTION, BUT I BELIEVE THAT A DIRECTOR IS SOMEONE WHO APPRECIATES THAT WHICH ALREADY EXISTS, WHO RELATES TO THE VIRTUES OF THE TEXT, WHO KNOWS HOW TO READ THEM, WHO LEARNS HOW TO VALUE THEM AND TO TRANSMIT THEM TO THE PERFORMERS WHO IN TURN MAKE THEM THEIR OWN AND WHO ARE CAPABLE OF COMMUNICATING THEM TO THE AUDIENCE IN AN ORGANIC WAY, REAL, IN AN IMPULSIVE WAY, IN A DEEP AND MEANINGFUL FORM.”

Text by José Gabriel López Antuñano

Ignacio García (Madrid, 1977) graduated in Theatre Directing at the Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático (RESAD) in Madrid and completed his training as assistant director with leading Spanish directors. Between 2004 and 2009, he was associated to the Artistic Director of Teatro Español, Madrid. He integrated his theatre training with music studies in solfège, piano and clarinet, and with various courses, workshops and work placements at Teatro alla Scala, Milan and at other Italian opera houses. From a very early age he felt attracted to the stage, not just as a performer, but also to literature and music. Together with an innate talent for managing projects and creating imagery and emotions, the word and its study (as much in the form of works of literature as in music) have always been a central part of his life and work. The word as a means of communication to convey attitudes and values that condition and influence the personal growth and social awareness of an individual. His commitment to engaging with the individual and society is always evident in García's work. As much in the outcome that we can enjoy on stage as in his way of understanding his profession and the relationship with others involved in the staging of a production. Ethics plus individual and social commitment. Humanity, in short. His work as stage manager runs parallel with directing theatre productions, operas and zarzuelas. Since 2000, he has brought to the stage over twenty drama titles, among the most prominent: *Los empeños del mentir* by Hurtado de Mendoza and Quevedo (Festival de Almagro, 2000); *Flor de otoño* by Rodríguez Méndez (2005, Centro Dramático Nacional, Madrid/Spain); *En la roca* by Ernesto Caballero; *Las Meninas* by Ernesto Anaya (DramaFest/Mexico/2010); *Los habitantes de la casa deshabitada* by Enrique Jardiel Poncela; *Arizona* by Juan Carlos Rubio (INBA/Mexico-CDN/Spain, 2013); *La sangre de Antígona* by José Bergamín (CNT/Mexico, 2014); *Enrique VIII y La cisma de Inglaterra* by Calderón de la Barca (CNTC/Spain, 2015); *El secuestro de la Cuquis* by Dario Fo (Mexico/2016); *De algún tiempo a esta parte*, by Max Aub (Teatro Español/2016); *Kijote Kathakali* (Festival de Almagro/2016); *La hija del aire* by Calderón de la Barca (Compañía Nacional de Teatro, Mexico); *Historia del cerco de Lisboa* by José Saramago (Almada Festival, Portugal, 2017) and *24 horas de la vida de una mujer* (La Abadía, Spain, 2017). For opera productions he has staged over thirty

titles of the standard repertoire and five world premieres of contemporary opera. Among the most prominent are: *La scala di seta* by Rossini (Festival Internacional de Música, Galicia, 2001); *Cantata del café* by Bach (Teatro Real, Madrid, 2003); *The Little Sweep* by Britten (Teatro Real, Madrid, 2005); *Il tutore burlato* by Martín y Soler (Teatro Real, Madrid, 2008); *Adriano in Siria y Livieta e Tracollo* by Pergolesi (Festival Pergolesi Spontini, Jesi, Italy, 2010); *Oberto conte di san Bonifacio* (ABAO, Bilbao, Spain, 2007), *La forza del destino* (ABAO, Bilbao, Spain, 2013), *Il trovatore*, Aida (Greek National Opera, Athens, Greece, 2009), *Macbeth* (Teatro Colón de Bogotá, Colombia, (2016), *Nabucco* (Teatro Cervantes, Malaga and Ópera de Vigo, Spain 2016) and *Otello* (ABAO, Bilbao, Spain, 2015) by Verdi; *Emilia di Liverpool* (European Opera Centre and European Capital of Culture, 2008, Liverpool, England), *L'elisir d'amore* (Teatro Cervantes, Malaga and Ópera de Vigo, Spain, 2015) and *Poliuto* (ABAO, Bilbao, Spain, 2008) by Donizetti; *Faust* by Gounod (Teatre Principal, Mallorca, Spain, 2009); *Werther* by Massenet (Teatr Wielki, Poznan, Poland, 2010); *Susannah* by Carlisle Floyd (ABAO, Bilbao, Spain, 2010); *Die Hochzeit des Camacho* by Mendelssohn (European Opera Centre, Liverpool, England, 2011); *Madama Butterfly* by Puccini (Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa, Italy, 2011); *Hamlet* by A. Thomás (Teatr Wielki, Poznan, Poland, 2013), and *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo (Teatro de la Zarzuela, Madrid, Spain, 2014). In addition, he has directed contemporary operas such as the premiere of *La Celestina* by Joaquín Nin-Culmell (Teatro de la Zarzuela, Madrid, Spain, 2008); *Un parque* by Luis de Pablo and *Orfeo* by Jesús Rueda (Venice Biennale, Italy, 2005); *Il carro e i canti* by Alessandro Solbiati (Teatro Verdi, Trieste, Italy, 2009), and *Oh, eternidad* by Marta Lambertini (Auditorio Nacional de Música, Madrid, Spain, 2016). The zarzuelas he has directed with major success: *Ensalada de ensaladas* with works by Mateo Flecha and Garcimuñoz (Utrecht Festival, Holland, 2009); *Égloga de Plácida* and *Vitoriano* by Juan del Encina (CNTC, Madrid, Spain, 2013); *Don Giovanni Tenorio* by R. Carnicer (Teatro Español, Madrid, 2008); *Gloria y Peluca* by Francisco Asenjo Barbieri and *El estreno de una artista* by J. Gaztambide (Teatro de la Zarzuela, Madrid, 2010); *La eterna canción* (Teatro Español, Madrid, Spain, 2004); *Black el payaso* by P. Sorozábal (Teatro Colón de Bogotá, Colombia, 2015); *Las Labradoras de Murcia* by A. Rodríguez de Hita (Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia, 2011); *La del Soto del parral* by Soutullo y Vert (Gran Teatro Nacional, Lima, Peru, 2015); *Marina* by E. Arrieta (Teatro de la Zarzuela, Madrid, 2013), and the

spectacle *Una noche española con Carmen – Zarzuela* show at the soccer stadium in Wrocław (Poland) for the European Capital of Culture, Wrocław 2016.

His dedication as artistic director is complemented by teaching, as Professor of Lyric Theatre and Sound Space at Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático de Castilla y León (Spain), at Accademia di Belle Arti Santa Giulia in Brescia (Italy) and at Escuela de Cine Bande a Part, Barcelona (Spain). Director or professor in various master's degree programmes relating to the scenic arts or opera, and director of educational performances on operas in different countries. In the management sphere, Director of Programming of DramaFest in Mexico and as a literary undertaking, author of over thirty essays and articles in scientific publications.

REPERTOIRE AND LIFE

There are two aspects of stage directing that, following the teachings of Meyerhold, Ignacio García puts into practice with care and efficacy: the concept of the *mise-en-scène* as the art of composition coupled with the need to establish a dialogue with the dramatist; in other words, referring to the second point, the obligation to carry out a deep study of dramaturgy, just as we know it today. García believes that a stage production possesses an interdisciplinary component, whereby text or musical score, scenic space in its broadest sense, interpretation, elements of significance, and so on, are transmitted to the spectator by way of “an ecumenical perception”, according to Barthes, that is harmoniously constructed within the scenario through “sensual artifice, gesture, tone, distance, substance, lighting...” (1964:41). The stage director is the architect of this elaboration who, in García's case, doesn't set himself up as a totalitarian demiurge, quite the contrary, he leaves the task of outlining and putting forward ideas to the artistic team, in order to devise a game plan with a distinctly personal touch, García's in fact, though enriched by his collaborators. Along these lines, in García's productions appear many of the conditions formulated by Wagner, and later by Appia, concerning total art (see Appia, 2000:293 and ss). His stagings of *Black, el payaso*, by Pablo Sorozabal (2006 and 2014), are a wonderful example of where the stage design, lighting, costumes, performance, music, vocals, dance and sleight of hand with panache sparkle yet always with ascetic simplicity, leaving aside all grandiloquence and not distracting the spectator from that which is really important: a well-rounded opera, ambitious in its music, that is critical,

profound and ironic, given the period in which it was written. This intent also ties in with the second aspect of Meyerhold's theory, critical for Ignacio García: the dramaturgy. His interest in establishing dialogue with the author is expressed in the exhaustive study of texts, librettos and musical scores, likewise for contexts or historical and cultural references that aid himself and the spectator to glean the essence; that is to say, independently from the period in which the opera is first written, it continues to be relevant for society and the individual of today. In his work he always enforces an explorative and detailed reading that enables him: a) to ascertain the motivations and social standing or existential outlook of each author in order to write texts or scores, because in this second case it is not about a bilingual work (musical notes versus text) but about languages that complement each other, to express the interior world of a composer who intends to transmit an idea (see García); b) to burrow deep into the characters so as to draw nearer to behaviours and reactions as the dramatic action unfolds; c) to explore the corporeal, sound, aural and lighting elements and the proxemics of performers within a given space, in order to create the right atmospheres for the development of the action; d) to adapt the tempo and rhythms for scenic narration. The elements set out in the preceding paragraphs are at the service of the “nucleus of dramatic conviction”; in other words, those to whom García wants to relate during the performance, in communion with the composer and the dramatist. The spectator always reaches a conclusion from Ignacio García's approach of his perception of the contemporary world, his social standing or experiential outlook, his reflection or critical thought in the light of approaches not shared. The audience will demonstrate its agreement or disagreement with this interpretation of the written word, but will never leave the theatre with the sensation of having witnessed a mediocre performance. This desire to narrate and bring visual dramas closer to his social and existential standpoint leads him to produce interpretations and, on occasion, to rework the drama by detaching certain elements rather than others, but without forcing or falsifying the author's original idea: the productions are staged with vitality and freshness, because they say, have an impact on and remove or deconstruct the enduring elements of a classic text or a musical score for opera or a zarzuela. In line with the first night of *La cisma de Inglaterra*, by Calderón de la Barca (2010), García stated: “My guiding principle from the very start was to focus on a contemporary reading of the text and to boldly chop the excess, reshaping it

entirely; I mean what was considered excess in our opinion, and I think that it is acceptable to give a contemporary reading of a classic”.

One such approach entails adaptation, though not a pointless mirror image of the present day, in as much as the links between the past and the present become clear through researched analogies devoid of forcing, as in his take on Calderón de la Barca's *La hija del aire*, where “the consequences of war, of tyranny, of usurpation, the abuse of power and the annihilation of the enemy that are so much a part of Calderón's universe belong to every time and every place”. He takes on the directing of lyric operas with the same rigour and courage, and this he explains by citing the writer and musicologist Alessandro Baricco: “Baricco, referring to musical productions of a time, states that transmitting an opera and betraying it are one and the same. Because the only way to transmit a seventeenth-century opera today is to betray it, and there will always be a betrayal in that it is not an archeological reproduction, we do not want it to be archeological, we want to speak of the world of today”. His staging of Donizetti's *Poliuto* (2008) develops this concept, transferring the action between Armenians and Romans “to a world of abstraction valid for any period in time, where there will always be persecutors and the persecuted”. Ignacio García possesses an exhaustive knowledge of the universal repertoire, which enables him to seek out those operas that can best accommodate his vision of the contemporary world, developing his personal repertoire, for which he is known. Among his preferences, the dramatists of the Spanish golden age, with Calderón de la Barca in primis, nineteenth-century Italian opera, in particular operas by Verdi, and the twentieth-century zarzuela. He elucidates: “I like the Spanish repertoire because I believe in it; zarzuela and Italian opera, because I feel they're somehow related and it is a language that I can speak with fluency (Italian and musical language). I can easily relate to Strehler when he talks about the sense of every day doing and reworking a lyrical and dramatic legacy of the past for its patrimonial and mobilizing value for the consideration of today's society.” (García, 2017: 148). An additional source from which to build his theatrical repertoire are the dramatic works of Spanish authors in exile in Mexico (Max Aub, José Bergamín). However, adherence to the classical repertoire does not deter him from approaching contemporary authors, as demonstrated by his stagings of works by Dario Fo, Ernesto Anaya, Ernesto Caballero, Rodríguez Mendez or Juan Carlos Rubio, or works by Luis de Pablo, Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Alessandro Solbiati and Marta

Lambertini, among others. Aside from some rare pearls, like the staging and dramaturgy of *Kijote Kathakali* (2016), a version of *Don Quixote* in Kathakali code, the classical dance-drama language developed in Kerala (India) in the seventeenth century and declared by UNESCO a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity or the show *Una notte spagnola con Carmen – Zarzuela* show, a production for the European Capital of Culture 2016, Wrocław (Poland), watched by thirty thousand people in the city's football stadium. I refer back to two facts from what I have written so far: age and musical training, because they shape his way of approaching drama productions. Given his year of birth, this is a person educated in the culture of the image, characterized among other things by the immediacy and instantaneity of the transmission of information, the concentration of the message and a communication based more on a sensorial, synesthetic perception of how much it relates to discourse on the characters. On the second point, his musical training will have an impact on the tempo rhythm of his productions. Firstly, I want to clarify a commonplace convention, not always accurate: the comparison between the contemporary culture of the image and the superficiality in the conveying of ideas. This can on occasion occur, but not necessarily, and not with this stage director. The Spanish Baroque literary conceptualism tended towards synthesis, the condensation of ideas in order to express them in fewer words, to finer precision and in search of rhetorical figures that reinforced the sensorial experience. Ignacio García captures the main idea to essentialize it and convey it with clarity, without dispersing it in the circumlocutions of a theatrical language constructed around lengthy introductory premises, dialectic explanations in the development, a pyrotechnical language (pleasing in its formal composition, but not necessary for its comprehension) and each closed finale where all the wording and lines of argument find justification; or very elaborate productions with an endless series of secondary actions that stretch the performance without providing information or insight. Again, the work that we completed together for *Enrique VIII y La cisma de Inglaterra*, is a good example of all this. The canon of dramatic interpretations of the golden age of theatre (Shakespeare and Calderón) up to canonical works of modern drama, began with Ibsen and Chekhov, with their own characteristics of language, different dramatical structures, themes that shifted increasingly closer to the concerns of the spectator and characters that were clearly recognizable are the fishing grounds in which García cast his nets to form his repertoire. But on these works he carried

out a significant dramaturgical adaptation, in line with his intellectual, existential and societal preoccupations, to ensure that these were conveyed to the spectator with clarity, rapidity and incisiveness.

This creative work doesn't distort the work it references, but it does alter the relationship with the audience; that is to say, to the spectator it assigns a task so that he or she follows through when at home, once away from the orbit of the stage, with information that reaches him or her via two channels: sensorial and intellectual. The imposition of these tasks is added to that which derives from an open finale of a stage performance. This communication with the spectator through the senses translates into stagings that are plastic and carefully constructed, in which the coordinated sets, costumes, lighting and sound design are striking in their beauty and create the right atmosphere, but above all, they distinguish, inform and are subordinated to that which Ignacio García wants to narrate of the drama text. The baroque and gloomy world is present in many of his productions by way of referencing models such as Ribera, Velázquez or Caravaggio, but also contemporary artists like Bill Viola and his neoclassical universe. In this sense, the photographs included in this article serve to better clarify what is written, so I will refrain from analyzing more than is necessary the visual and sensorial aspect, apart from mentioning two qualities of these stagings: the synesthetic character and the signs that they convey. Synesthesia, or the spectator's perception of a sensation through an overlaying of elements introduced by different senses. Sight, already mentioned with regards to the study of scenic space and the composition of the scene, always well balanced and evocative in atmosphere; touch, relative to the perception transmitted to the spectator through the choice of materials and the performers' contact with them; hearing, with the creation of sound spaces that provide information without weighing things down. This last field, that of the creation of sound spaces and musical composition, is one of Ignacio's specialities, with numerous projects for his own shows and for those of others. "I believe that sound should be integrated into the text and the work of the performer. I do not consider music as a purely decorative element." One needs to stress the importance that Ignacio attributes to the signs given on stage, in the directing indicated by Fischer-Lichte (2011: 39 es) and more specifically to those who work together with the performer in the creation of his or her character and the organic expression of emotions through the adaptation between that which is said verbally or through music and its expressive form. And relative to this, the construction of a drama score

within the performance space, so that the positioning and the movement of the performers hold information, whether implicit or explicit in the text, which can replace words or dialogues otherwise suppressed.

At the beginning of this section I touched upon the tempo of his stage productions and how this relates to his musical training. In the article entitled *Algunas preguntas sin respuesta sobre la ópera y la dirección de escena de teatro lírico*, [Some unanswered questions on opera and lyric theatre scene directing] Ignacio García wrote about the importance of understanding the literary and musical structure in the lyrical compositions, of being aware of their proportions and from there extracting the potent relationship and the expressivity between the text and the sound, of analyzing the essential versus the casual, studying what takes priority over secondary concerns, identifying the precedent and the basic ideas of an opera and how to narrate them through the musical score. Ignacio García goes deep into this analysis to provide guidelines for the tempo of the staging that the spectator perceives on the stage; he marks the speed of the rhythm, at times derived from enunciation of verses in stanzas, in the case of theatre in verse; at other times derived from the eloquence of the characters in prose theatre, that the actors enunciate in relation to the emotional state of their characters thereby determining the progress of dramatic action in distinct rates of speed. All the characteristics elucidated in the previous paragraphs, appreciable in drama productions, one can also observe in musical productions, but García has, in addition, an enormous advantage when facing this type of production, be it musical theatre, opera or zarzuela: his musical training enables him to carry out a more thorough examination of the score thereby facilitating his drawing closer to the idea that the composer wants to transmit. This is the starting point for the staging, which is based on a personal interpretation and without dissociating the score from the libretto. The result of this way of working is the creation of plausible stories, just as they were at the time of their composition, where the text ties in with the music and is interpreted by singers who not only lend their character a voice but also transfer emotions to that character and scenic verity in the midst of given situations, evident in the musical score. Ignacio García in his staging of operas advocates a quiet renewal of operas and zarzuelas. The key to achieving this aim resides in the "reproduction of the same rhythmic and structural pattern of the musical score, and in the transmitting of a sensation that chimes sufficiently with the tale to be told" (García, 10), made credible by aiming at an

environment that is familiar to and close to the spectator, and that is supported by living characters that personify a human being, they are there as a physical incarnation, not just to lend their voice to the notes of the stave. From the moment in which the characters come to life the aim becomes clear: throughout the dramatic action each one strives to reach that which involves the creation of conflicts to produce the desired dramatic tension, evident in García's stagings. This causes a destabilization in the spectator, in as much as they are not only enthused by harmonious song heard from the comfort of a theatre seat, as if they were listening to a recording while sitting on their couch at home, but gratification also derives from feeling challenged, moved, relieved, even thrilled by the behaviour of some characters, who manifest their emotions in the language of music. Working with the singers aims to ensure that the characters are brought to life on the stage. This objective begins with the casting (assuming it is possible to hold auditions) to find those who are better adapted to the character and who can narrate the story in a realistic manner. In particular, there are four qualities that are always looked for: vocality (the quality of vocal timbre, ability in phrasing, vocal progressions and contrast, and expressivity); the singer's intellectual comprehension of the character; the method of dramatically personifying the character's intentions, and the physical bond between character and performer. On the first night of *Poliuto*, García commented: "It seems strange to me that the director so rarely respects the work of the singers, or their needs, and upholds the staging in favour of the music. For me, it is the very least I can do professionally and it is something for which I need not be thanked, on the contrary, it is to be expected of me. The story has to be told with the singers, not against them. The scenic discourse cannot take place either at the margins, or in parallel, or beyond what is happening. We all work towards giving a sense to the opera". Respecting the musical score, the experience of lyrical creations and the knowledge of a receptive tradition accustomed to a concrete way of seeing musical productions on the stage does not hinder us from reviewing and revising these works, busting the clichés in order to be more in line with the expectations of today's audience. With zarzuelas it's okay to intervene and cut chunks of dialogue that is often overlong and linked to historical or social factors, to relieve it of costumbrismo elements or excessive weight in the spoken word. Ignacio García maintains the same discourse for his lyrical and drama stagings, the difference being that these are genres that are close but with specific qualities, that he recognises,

respects and applies, and with the instinct to capitalise on his research and the outcome of some stagings in order to overturn them in others.

There is a final aspect to his artistic career that I would like to address for the peculiarity, difficulty and courage as creator that is implied, other than the aspect that emerges within the panorama of Spanish theatre: the international nature of his work. In the last fifteen years he has premiered in Spain, Italy, Greece, England, Holland, Switzerland, Poland, Portugal, Mexico, Peru, Colombia and India. Moreover, several of his productions have toured in the United States, France and Finland. To the difficulty inherent in the work of a director is added the challenge of working with international groups (accustomed to opera productions though to a lesser extent for theatre productions), playing away from home, if you'll forgive me the soccer term, and with the handicap of language, customs and diverse receptive traditions. In addition, he has succeeded in igniting interest in the zarzuela from theatres around the globe. In brief, the plasticity and beauty of the scenic compositions, the contemporary eye in the approach to storytelling and characters and a connecting with the contemporary spectator, the search for what is essential in the theme and the storyline, the technical perfection, and the vindication of a Spanish repertoire of quality, are the notes that define the career trajectory of this director.

Notes:

Appia, Adolphe (2000), *La música y la puesta en escena*, Madrid. Asociación de Directores de Escena de España.
Barthes, Roland (1964), *Essais critiques*, Paris. Le Seuil.
Fischer-Lichte, Erika (2011), *Semiótica del teatro*, Madrid. Arco Libros.
García, Ignacio (2004), *Algunas preguntas sin respuesta sobre la ópera y la dirección de escena de teatro lírico*.
García, Ignacio (2017), *Algunos directores de escena y sus circunstancias*, Madrid. Revista ADE-TEATRO, nº 164.