

## Re-framing the Classics: La Cubana Reinvent Rusiñol and the Lliure Revisit Beaumarchais



Since 1980, La Cubana has been offering theatrical happenings that disrupt the fabric of the everyday. Whether intruding on market trading conventions in *Cubana Delikatessen* (1983) or breaking the cinematic frame with *Cegada de amor/Blinded by Love* (1994), it has provided entertaining ruminations on theatre and its constitution that have surprised, delighted and inspired audiences. No surprise then that the company was recently referred to as the “most therapeutic troupe in the country” by *El Periodico’s* critic Imma Fernández (12 October 2016). The company has a dedicated following which spans a wide demographic and its shows often prove sell out affairs. Its latest production is no exception, a backstage musical that takes a well-known Catalan classic and re-envisages it across four time frames.

*Gente Bien* is a bilingual (Catalan and Spanish) *sainete* (short comic vignette) by the writer and painter Santiago Rusiñol first staged in 1917. Rusiñol made the Mediterranean town of Sitges—where La Cubana was founded—its home, so it seems particularly appropriate that on the eve of the play’s centenary, La Cubana (which has equally made bilingual theatre a feature of its work) should turn to *Gente Bien* as the springboard for its new venture.



Metatheatrical game-play: The Count of Rierola played by actor Moncho Ferrero (Jaume Baucis) ridiculed by his mother the Dowager Countess (Mercè Comas in the role of the established actress Cedas Solé) with his snobby wife played by the music-theatre actress Rita Vilanova (Laia Piró) looking on in Act 1 of *Gente Bien*. Photo: David Ruano.

*Gente Bien* satirizes the new Catalan bourgeoisie with its airs and graces, obsession with protocol and respectable behavior, and its insistence that Catalan is not a language to be aired in polite society but rather relegated to the intimacies of the home. The title has a double meaning—good people and *nouveau riche* people—with the protagonists more concerned with the wealthy than the good. The musical begins in 1917; the Count of Rierola (whose title in La Cubana’s adaptation has been bought using the lucrative proceeds of his booming charcuterie business) and his upwardly mobile wife, the Countess, are keen to ingratiate themselves with the old-money of established Barcelona society. This involves hosting events at home to which the Count invites the “go to” figures in the city and a friendship with the pretentious dandy Don Enric of Peratallada. The show begins as a “straight” musical—show tunes from (among others) *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968), *Life of Brian* (1979), and *West Side Story* (1961) are playing as the audience come in and thus position *Gente Bien* within an esteemed generic tradition.

The opening song is an upbeat chorus number, “Gente Bien,” which sees the cast in black rehearsal gear wheeling on hat boxes from which they produce the attire to change into their 1917 servants’ outfits. Each performer prominently displays a gloved left hand adorned with rings which showcases the jewels—30 kilograms of them are displayed during the performance—that testify to the importance of social

standing to these “good people”. A mutating screen replaces images of Rusiñol with immoderately framed paintings and family portraits exhibited on the walls of the Rierolas’ opulent drawing room. Lavish furniture litters the room—further testament to the culture of acquisition that marks the Rierola family. An elderly butler leads the chorus of servants into the second number “Si señor, Conde” (“Yes, Mr. Count”), all fawning and bowing as they prepare to greet a boss who insists on airs and graces. The butler carries a huge tray of Ferrero Rocher chocolates which are deployed as the steering wheel for a musical number that incorporates a Scottish jig and the Count being driven around town.

In contrast to the portly Count comes the family matriarch, the Dowager Countess, whose no-nonsense comments, poor Spanish, and refusal to play out the genteel customs of bourgeois life—that include taking afternoon tea at five—drives her son to frustration. Whereas the Dowager Countess marches across the stage, her daughter-in-law tiptoes in her fur-lined fitted suit and giant hat. When the furniture refuses to dance around the stage, along with the performers, Armando—the show’s director played by La Cubana’s director Jordi Milán in one of the staging’s many levels of metafiction—stops the show. There had been earlier indications that all was not as it should be: a technician charging across the front of the stage; rustling in the wings; the show’s musical director not looking best pleased sitting stage right, waving his baton gently to conduct the musical numbers to a playback track. Armando apologizes and explains to the audience that this is a rehearsal at the Coliseum theatre where the company is in residence while preparing for the show’s grand opening at the Tívoli. The Coliseum is a brief 10-minute walk from the Tívoli—a theatre that has played host to some of the company’s most resonant works, including *Blinded by Love* and *Campanades de boda (Wedding Bells, 2012)*. A false stage arch has been created to match that of the Tívoli, pasted on to the Coliseum’s proscenium. The production goes on to make repeated references to the improvements that will have been made by the time the production opens at the Tívoli.

It soon becomes clear that the audience are watching a rehearsal as “special” guests of the company. Pepita Bigordà a company plant played by Montse Amat, is one of La Cubana’s most loyal devotees and she comes down from her seat to the front of the stage to reminisce with Armando on the many company shows she has seen. When the show stops, the screens and backstage “flats” no longer display the walls of the Rierolas’ drawing room but rather posters of past Cubana shows—a reminder of the company ghosts that hover over the staging. Furthermore, ghosts physically walk through the current show. Tía Consuelo from *Wedding Bells* brings on the altar that features in Act 2; the Brazilian chorus girl from *Nuts Coconuts (2005)* wanders on in full showgear while Estrellita, the “child” star of *Blinded by Love*, can also be seen backstage. The diva from *Una nit d’òpera (A Night of Opera, 2001)* also intrudes on the action in Act 2. Spectres from the company’s past are also present in the cast, which includes two early performers, Mercè Comas (in the role of established actress Cedas Solé who takes the role of the Dowager Countess) and Mont Plans (as actress Sita Girabalt who should have been playing the Countess but has suffered a knee injury and is now working as Armando’s assistant).



The Count (Jaume Baucis) and his false friend Don Enric of Peratallada (Toni Sans) in Act 1 of *Gente Bien*. Photo: David Ruano.

As Armando and his technical team try to find a solution to the furniture that refuses to dance around the room, the show's British producer, Julia Friedman (played by Núria Benet), flounces around in her one-piece red trouser suit, bemoaning the company's naivety in thinking it has the expertise to stage a musical. While the musical director Hilario Sacalm (played by Toni Torres) explains that they have seventy-four live musicians ready for the Tívoli performance dates, Meritxell Duró's technician, Alex, with her high-pitched voice and mop of wild grey hair, charges around the stage trying to get things moving. A temporary solution has been found for the chairs that refused to move and the artistic team move off backstage, the lights go down and the show recommences with preparations for the "El té de las cinco" ("Tea at Five") number.

Tea at the Rierolas involves the moustached dandy Don Enric de Peratallada entering to try and persuade the Count to take a lover; he has an ulterior motive as he has designs on the Countess, whom he wants to convert into his mistress. The Dowager Countess, dressed in plumes with sparkling rings on her fingers, grudgingly arrives for tea while Don Enric flirts with the easily flattered Countess. Ladies dressed in cocktail dresses and fur stoles dance past the window in a video projection—one of many examples of how projections are used in the production to suggest a cast of hundreds. Projections also serve to ensure that the space of performance always remains unreal and self-consciously fictional. The drawing room walls explode during musical numbers to embody the high theatrics of the moment, mutating into patterns of colored fireworks or a string of charcuterie that testifies to the origin of the family's fortune. Armando

directs the action from the wings until the show has to be stopped again—the furniture once more refusing to move. A frustrated Cedas Solé steps out of role as the Dowager Countess and leaves the auditorium to have a cigarette. Lola Alcover (a further cast member played by Alexandra González) removes her wig and introduces a paramour and friends from Lleida—the boyfriend is an unsuspecting audience member who has been “co-opted” into the performance. Chesta, the script assistant (played also by Meritxell Duró), dressed in orange leggings and a bright Balenciaga-style shirt, floats across the stage in the hope of getting things moving. Mario Fargas, the show’s camp choreographer (played by Oriol Burés), with streaked, styled hair plastered across his face, joins Armando on stage. He is not happy with Jofre Orpinell’s embellished dance routine as Enric and takes the opportunity offered by the interruption to go over his moves. As Mario tries to get him to opt for the Fred Astaire approach, Jofre pushes for Gene Kelly moves and it is left to the audience to vote for the approach we would prefer him to take—one of a number of instances where the audience are given the opportunity of shaping the direction of the show.

Meanwhile the portly Moncho Ferrero, the “actor” (played by Jaume Baucis) taking on the role of the Count, has had an argument with Armando who tells him he is overweight, which leads him to leave the stage in a fit of anger. Armando recasts the lean Quico Ponti (played by Bernat Cot) who had taken the role of the doddering butler as the Count and prepares to resume running the show. Armando is keen to emphasise that it’s the ensemble (*conjunt*) that matters and individual egos (whether that of Jofre or Moncho) cannot be allowed to trump the collective endeavor.

And it is the collective spirit that is acclaimed as the audience are called on to assist the struggling company. While Quico and Rita embark on amorous embraces, Armando focuses on trying to get the show back on the road. He needs a group of volunteers to help the furniture move during the “Los muebles” number and so encourages audience members to come on stage and get involved in the making of the show; choreographed by Mario, dressed in black all in ones, they dance while shifting the furniture in preparation for the concert recital, for which they are each rewarded with a large *butifarra* sausage by the show’s producers. Eight appeared on the day I saw the performance, but it can be up to ten depending on the number who volunteer. With the furniture moved, Enric is led around the house by the Dowager Countess. Once again the trickery of theatre is invoked: Enric and the Dowager Countess pace on the stop while the projections provide the illusion of movement, showcasing the plentiful rooms of the Rierola abode.

The sense of audience participation in the show’s creation is further reinforced when the chorus of thirty are replaced by the Coliseum’s audience who provide choral accompaniment to the grand musical number “No t’assustis/que se’n parli!” (“Don’t Panic/If We Talk About It”) with the lyrics projected karaoke-style on the pliable back screen, with musical director Hilario assisting Armando in conducting the audience through their song. During the concert recital that the Rierola family are hosting, Pepita, now seated in the stalls, inspires Armando to give an audience member she has been chatting with the opportunity to replace the recital pianist—another instance where the audience is encouraged to shape the direction of the scene. “El teatro todo es mentira” (“Theatre is all a lie”), Armando comments, but it is a lie shaped by human labor, agency, imagination, and agility.

And it is the staging of this fiction, the making of the illusion that is the focus of much of the show. The move from Act 1 to Act 2—which takes place in 1951, the year in which a number of company members, including Milán, were born—sees a whirlwind of activities as the actors mutate from their Act 1 roles to the characters they take on in Act 2. It is now the Franco years and the Rierolas are keen appeasers, with a

Cardinal and the military commander of Catalonia courted in the hope of keeping the lucrative family business alive. The façade of the regime is beautifully rendered in Act 2's opening as the *jota*, the regional dance of Aragón, is rendered as tourist spectacle. The broad configurations of bodies that make up La Cubana's rendition of the dance, however, are all too human and mess up in amusing fashion with shoes flying off and wigs falling out of place. The façade that the regime tried to present of happy-go-lucky locals playing out their "diversity" is here shown to be in disarray.

Catalan, effectively relegated by the regime to the private sphere, slips out through the Dowager Countess who cannot perform in Spanish as her son and daughter in law manage to do. The Rierolas, keen to impress the regime, have replaced the Act 1 works of art with more religious iconography. A new form of charlatanism prevails: one where wives boast of piety and duty, daily mass attendance and honour. Scratch at the surface, however, and the façade falls. For the ladies of the regime are all in awe of Dr. Rocarol. His sounds a little like rock 'n roll, suggesting he brings something of an adventurous spirit to the gathering, but he turns out to be a fake and a fraudster, peddling empty tales to all those foolish enough to follow him. The fifties rock medley "Doctor Rocarol" shows the women eyeing him in awe as he marches up and down the stage. The regime may promote aperture (openness) but Rocarol is just another side of the dictatorship—a point reinforced by the doubling of Toni Sans in the dual roles of the military commander and the errant doctor. Rocarol's womanizing suggests a parallel with Act 1's Don Enric—also played by Sans—suggesting no progress has been made in the area of gender politics.



The Countess (Laia Piró) dances with the second Count as actor temperamental actor Moncho Ferrero is replaced in the role of the vain Count by actor Quico Ponti (played by Bernat Cot) in Act 1 of *Gente Bien*. Photo: David Ruano.

The show's action becomes increasingly farcical. The Count makes advances to Catalina, the military commander's sanctimonious wife, which she loudly rejects. Interruptions to the onstage action continue through Act 2. The progressively irritated Julie disagrees with Armando's views on audience participation. In her view the UK's EU referendum shows that you can't give power to the people or they vote for Brexit. But Armando is determined to offer the audience the opportunity to exert their influence. When Moncho returns in calmer mood with accommodating boyfriend Fernando in tow, he plans to pick up as the Count where he left off in the earlier act. Armando allows the audience to decide whether Moncho or Quico—who looks dangerously close to conservative prime minister José María Aznar as the 1950s Count—should assume the role. Moncho wins out with Quico flouncing off in a huff. A carpet is amusingly used to get a member of the crew from one side of the stage to the other. Rita Vilanova, the singer played by Laia Piró in the role of the Countess, loses her voice and Armando covers for her, shadowing Rita while reciting her lines as she deals with the implications of Dr. Rocarol's amorous advances. Sita prepares to take over the role from the hoarse Rita. Two audience members are recruited to act as journalists covering the Rierolas' gathering for the *Hello*-like magazine *Lecturas*. Clad in beige-brown overcoats, they snap away at the most inappropriate of moments—including the Count's attempted seduction of Catalina. Projected images of filmed doubles show the journalists' covering the shenanigans, reinforcing the idea of the all-seeing eye of a paparazzi culture cultivated during the 1950s to offer what the Rierolas hoped would be a sanitized portrait of the family at play. *Gente Bien* repeatedly exposes the fabrication of that which *Lecturas* and *Hello* would construct as "reality".

Act 3 moves to 1980 and Catalonia is now a very different place. The Rierolas have swapped their reverent religious iconography for Warhol-like pop art prints of themselves. The aesthetic is white and minimalist. There may be a new actress in the role of the Countess (Sita replacing Rita) but as the semantic overlap suggests, little has changed within the family. It's just a different set of illusions that have to be cultivated. Spanish is out and regional diversity is in with Catalan promoted as the only language worth conversing in. Holiday homes in Cadaqués and Ibiza serve as the location for large *fiestas* where business deals are conducted; a chorus of servants run round, as in the previous two acts, attending to the needs of the wealthy family. The Rierolas no longer want to be known as Count and Countess—in this so-called egalitarian society, Sir and Madam will do nicely. The Dowager Countess sits in a wicker chair, a Miss Havesham-like Buddha, grey hair drooping around her face.

Again, the company cannot get to the end of the act; when Sita's knee gives way, a cortisone injection is the only way forward. Armando asks the audience if they might wait for an hour to take effect while cast members begin to exit the auditorium. Jofre, annoyed at Mario's choreography, marches out. Julie too leaves in a huff, with her matching suitcase in tow, telling Armando that the company is simply not ready to do a musical. Armando once more turns to the audience, asking them whether they believe the company is ready to stage a musical. The answer is a resolute yes. To pass the time as the cortisone injection takes effect, Armando proceeds to sit down with Sita and Cedas—who is keen to see if anyone in the audience can give her a ride back to Sitges—and slowly a set of masks slip away; the performers step out of one role and take on another, that of three company veterans who are chatting informally to the audience: Jordi Milán, Mont Plans, and Mercè Comes. It is a moment which recognises the slippage between actor and role in the structure created for *Gente Bien*. The three ruminate on the company's history, on the unpredictability and ephemerality of theatre, on the fact that each performance is different, each moment realised in the communion between actor and audience. It's a moment of nostalgia but also of tenderness, and a way of recognizing the ways in which each show builds on the edifices of earlier

projects. A single Holy Week penitent from *Blinded by Love* that wanders across the back of the stage as the musical prepares for its final number is a further visual embodiment—along with the posters of past La Cubana productions that adorn the back of the screen—of the spectres of a thirty-six year history that cannot be evaded or erased. Rather here it is celebrated. La Cubana has always provided a theatre where the crafting of the illusion is acknowledged and acclaimed. Whereas the trio of Milán/Armando, Plans/Sita, and Comes/Sita temporarily blur the gap between actor and role, this is often profoundly marked in the company's work with actors taking on roles that move across gender and age. “Jo no pue fer miracles” (“I can't do miracles”), Armando states when Julia and Jofre leave, but it is miracles of sorts that are conjured with when a cast of fifteen take on 162 characters with 190 wigs and 180 outfits intricately positioned in the backstage area to facilitate the rapid costume changes. Doubling is inventive and playful: Jaume Baucis is both the vain Count and the corpulent soprano who he contracts to sing at the family home; Meritxell Duró is the grungy technician Alex and the chic script assistant Chesca. The cast list provides a wide range of characters that the actors are supposedly going to take on—from Cristiano Ronaldo's latest girlfriend to a politician who is affiliated to a pro-independence party, Baroness Thyssen's secretary to a Big Brother contestant. These 2017 characters never materialise as Act 4, set in 2017, is indefinitely postponed. Instead Mario suggests the audience are given the show's final number to compensate. “Come to the Tívoli” is Armando's parting message. The promise of performance both realized and delayed; action deferred as in Chekhov and Beckett. The Tívoli is both the memory of the company's past and an as yet unrealized future project, a reminder of what has been and what might be still to come.

This is a resolutely political production. 1917 has the Rierolas purchasing titles to “buy” respectability. The 1950s sees the family courting the regime; the 1980s witnesses them turning to the property investment with the accompanying corruption that was to lead to the spectacular 2007 crash. “Les corrupteles estan a l'ordre del dia” (“Corruption is the order of the day”), the notes to Act 4 state; it's an era where globalization is evidenced in a glut of offshore companies and the aggressive promotion of the family's charcuterie business in China. The fashion is to present yourself as a champion of nationalist independence while voting for the right. Act 4 never materializes because in many ways the audience is currently living through Act 4 outside the theatre. *Gente Bien* leaves us in the present with a high octave rendition of the opening number, cast decked out in top hat and tails, and bejewelled black cocktail dresses, plumes and turbans—we are all in some way perhaps *gente bien*.

Joan Vives, who is also responsible for the music for Dagoll Dagom's *Scaramouche*, currently playing at Barcelona's Victòria theatre, provides a lively score that begins with inflections of early twentieth century operetta, most conspicuously Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*, moving to a more 1950s Broadway flavor for Act 2. Show-stopping numbers open and close the show.

La Cubana's following has largely come through word of mouth and an audience that returns to share in the corrosive metatheatrical frolics that are the company's hallmark. The happenings and street theatre that were central to the company's work through the 1980s still form part of its promotion strategies: the city's urban police temporarily halted traffic from a corner of one of the city's main thoroughfares just outside the Coliseum to enable the company to stage three musical numbers outside the theatre on 27 September on the eve of the show's opening. There is therefore much amusement at the protracted announcement at the show's opening which provides the audience with a plethora of hashtag addresses which they can use on social media to spread the word about the show.



There are few companies like La Cubana, capable of delivering a tough political message through a populist format. The production's opening attracted features in the daily press (*El Periódico*, 19 October 2016) as well as gossip magazines like *Lecturas* ("Los famosos no se pierden el estreno de 'Gente Bien' de la Cubana"/"Celebrities don't miss the opening of La Cubana's 'Gente Bien'", 19 October 2016)—which are satirized in the show: the latter featured twenty-one photographs of the actors, socialites and politicians endorsing the company's cultural capital. In 2012 there were suggestions that *Wedding Bells* might be the company's swansong. *Gente Bien* shows that there is life and fire in the company yet.



The pious ladies of the Franco regime expressing disdain at the Rierola's abode in Act 2 of La Cubana's *Gente Bien*. Photo: David Ruano.

The Teatre Lliure celebrated its fortieth birthday in 2016. One of Barcelona's most adventurous companies, it has offered a model for text-based theatre staged economically and imaginatively; an actor-centred theatre where design is lean and direction clean and trim. One of its anniversary events involves a restaging of *The Marriage of Figaro*, Caron de Beaumarchais's 1778 play which was reshaped by Lorenzo da Ponte for Mozart's 1786 opera. First seen in 1989 with Lluís Homar as Figaro, it was presented over four seasons across Spain and in Düsseldorf and Stuttgart, and was subsequently seen as one of the theatre's most emblematic stagings. Homar has now taken responsibility for the revival with a new cast and Rafael Lladó reshaping Puigserver's design (originally presented at the Lliure's Gràcia venue) for the larger Montjuïc auditorium.

There is much to admire in the production. Puigserver's set of high wooden Moorish doors provides

multiple opportunities for comings and goings, entries and exits that demonstrate the play's influence on later farces. Cherubino's first appearance sees him fall out of the door to a wardrobe packed with clothes. Basilio enters through one door only to be pushed out by Susanna, reappearing through another. Outwitting the Count often involves some deft hiding behind a door and Susanna's control of her mistress's space is often related to her control of the doors that lead out of the bedroom.



Mar Ulldemolins' Susanna can't bear to look as Pau Vinyals's Cherubino is discovered by Joan Carreras's Almaviva in Lluís Homar's revival of Fabià Puigserver's *Les Noces de Fígaro/The Marriage of Figaro*. Photo: Ros Ribas.

The bed—put together in the opening moments of the play by Figaro and Susanna—is deployed to productive effect, suggesting the centrality of sexual desire to the action. Figaro chases Susanna around the bed; Figaro sits on it and ponders aloud; Cherubino hides in its covers; Almaviva hides under it. Susanna darts and dances around it as she tries to warn the Countess that she has the situation in hand. Draped in a canopy in Act 2, it remains the space for clandestine encounters and secrecy. By Act 3 it has disappeared, replaced by a throne-like chair for Almaviva where he holds court as Figaro is tried for defaulting on an unpaid debt to Marcelina.

The play's subtitle is "A Mad Day"—a cock's crow one of the sound effects that testify to the play's twenty-four-hour time frame. The madness of the ensuing action is embodied in the energetic pace of the staging, and Francesc Nel·lo's nimble translation—shaped for this revival by dramatist Pau Miró. The

production's deft and witty choreography remains. Figaro enters humming the beginning of the opening duet of Mozart's opera while measuring the bed—a mode of recognizing the legacy of the Mozart/da Ponte reworking over all subsequent stagings of the play. Elements of vaudeville prevail in the frenetic comings and goings of the characters and the hide-and-seek, cloak-and-dagger games in the crepuscular garden scene.

Complicity between Susanna and her mistress is made manifest as both sigh and sit in perfectly coordinated moves at the end of Act 2. Mónica López may be a little old for the Countess, but does embody the challenges of no longer being quite as attractive as she needs to be to keep the attention of a husband with a wandering eye. Her melancholy air is beautifully captured in López's wistful performance. Mar Ulldemolins' Susanna has a light quality, skipping in and out of doors, deftly climbing up a ladder, and nippily hiding from view—she has a sense of purpose that the slightly jaded Countess lacks. It's a charming characterization, as light and airy as her lacy white dress.

Victòria Pagès's matronly Marcelina is a character in two halves: when amorously pursuing Figaro she is fierce and indignant, on hearing he is her son she melts into his arms. Weighed down by her heavy fabric dress and apron as well as by the abuses meted out by the dismissive Basilio, she is a visibly darker presence than either Susanna or the Countess.

The play's male figures are all to a greater or lesser degree wayward and irresponsible—a comment perhaps on the execution of power in Louis XVI's France. Manel Barceló's Bartolo is mean and miserly; Albert Pérez's Basilio is a bothersome bore hell-bent on revenge. Eduard Muntada's ruddy-cheeked gardener is overly keen to keep in Almaviva's good books, even to the extent of turning a blind eye to the latter's seduction of his pretty-in-pink painted doll-like daughter Francina (Aina Sánchez). Pau Vinyals' Cherubino is an infantilized adolescent clad in baby blue trousers with matching ribbons on his shirt. His broad mouth gives him something of the unsettling appearance of The Joker. His pillow fight with Susanna testifies to his childish character: a crybaby who has quite simply refused to grow up.



Joan Carreras's Almaviva and his wife Mónica López's Countess look on as Marcel Borràs's Figaro and Mar Ulldemolins' Susanna dance in Lluís Homar's revival of Fabià Puigserver's *Les Noces de Fígaro/The Marriage of Figaro*. Photo: Ros Ribas.

Marcel Borràs's Figaro has a boyish charm but in his performance appears to be trying a little too hard to play the happy-go-lucky servant. In Act 5 he comes into his own, however, as the action temporarily halts for him to deliver the famous monologue about liberty and human rights that made the play so notorious, landing Beaumarchais in serious political trouble. Xavier Clot's lighting here delineates it as entirely separate from the rest of the action. Figaro is bathed in an ethereal blue spotlight—almost suspended in time—as he engages the audience directly, speaking from another era to the audience in the auditorium.

Homar may have stolen the show as Figaro in the 1989 staging, but here it is Joan Carreras who shines as the errant Almaviva, walking tall as he marches and struts his way around the stage, boots clicking together in a pseudo-musical fashion when things don't go his way. His eyebrows rise and fall in disdain; he cuts a dastardly figure who peruses the action from the vantage point of his throne-like chair. Arraigned in a military sash in Act 3, he is vain and predatory: the face of respectability that hides a dangerous interior as his curt dialogue with Figaro shows. It's a glorious performance and one which confirms Carreras' versatility as an actor. In the final dance, as the company unite in an all's well that ends well number, he towers above the rest of the cast—a coming together to celebrate the power of theatre to provide a cautionary tale that amuses, provokes and reminds its audience—as does *Gente Bien*—of the power of theatre to bring a community together during even the most trying of times.

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