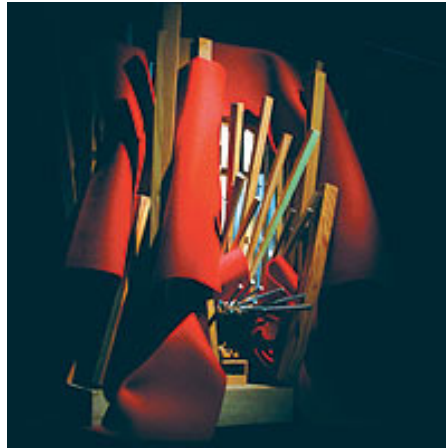


La Opinión

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Frank's Place

Fado singer Mariza to perform in updated Portuguese taverna designed by Gehry

Para Debra Levine, especial para Espectáculos

Five years ago while working on a project in Lisbon architect Frank Gehry first heard Mariza sing. He was enchanted by the city and its music. A friendship grew, and Gehry, who had never collaborated with a performer, offered to design Mariza a temporary stage-set of a Lisbon taverna inside his own architectural gem, Walt Disney Concert Hall. La Opinion chatted recently with the LA-based creative genius about his rare foray into set design:

What's behind your futuristic version of a centuries-old taverna?

A Portuguese taverna is a tough place. I've visited several in Lisbon: okay, they're bars! Now I happen to like that kind of toughness. Fado music is neither cute nor pretty—it's edgy and intense. And Mariza's voice is extremely powerful. Altogether I enjoy this aesthetic. I consider Bilbao [Gehry's 1997 highly acclaimed Guggenheim Museum in Spain] to emit a similar tough, powerful feeling.

Why do this? Isn't it an awful lot of trouble for just one performance?

Um, yes! And, it's superfluous. Because Mariza doesn't need set design; she's more than capable of creating atmosphere with her voice. But it's fun. It evolved out of a special friendship. I did it

to honor her performance in my concert hall. Unfortunately, there's a concert Saturday night preceding our performance, and one the following night. So we have to build the set and knock it down all in one day, Sunday. Nerve-wracking, but that's show business.

How will the space be transformed?

We're putting 40 table-and-chair sets on the stage, and using special lighting to enhance intimacy. By covering the blond-wood stage with black flooring, we mute the light that normally bounces around the room. A blood-red drapery will twist its way through the "McDonald's french fries" pipe organ. Rather than completely hide the organ (the Phil does this when it presents opera), I prefer to play around with the organ pipes.

Mariza's costumes will coordinate with the decor. She designs her own, and her costumes are a big deal for her. They seriously impact her performance. She and I have discussed what she will wear. But I am *not* Mariza's dress designer!

How did you and Mariza connect?

It's sort of strange because I don't run in those circles. I was working on a project in Lisbon's Parque Mayer to refurbish four decrepit theaters dating to the 1920s called *revistas*. Time passed, controversy flared, and the newly elected mayor cancelled the project. In the meantime, my wife, a cultural anthropologist and world music fan, introduced me to the great fado diva, Amália Rodrigues. On a later visit to Lisbon, I heard Mariza and I was floored. I bragged to my wife that I discovered the new Amália Rodrigues. My wife archly informed me she already owned a Mariza c.d. But my true friendship with Mariza was born.

A group including Esa-Pekka Salonen, Ernst Fleishmann, and Deborah Borda attended Mariza's L.A. debut at the House of Blues. The Philharmonic folk fell in love with her music and invited her to perform at Disney Hall. Sunday will be her second concert there, and her first with a custom-designed taverna.

Will you re-use or recycle the set?

Absolutely not. This is a one-time-only thing and we're creating it on the fly. To tell you the truth, I'm a bit anxious whether we can pull it off. My goal right now is to not screw up my own hall!