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# HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

## LA Opera's 'Dulce Rosa' to Open at The Broad Stage

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Operas and movies are like opposites that attract but can rarely live together. New movies, like old operas, get the big houses. New operas, like old movies, get the small houses. Got that?

The LA Opera did, and has turned the pattern to their advantage. As the company closes its regular season of usual suspect composers like Puccini, Verdi and Wagner at downtown LA's venerable Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, they are sending something new and quite intriguing to Santa Monica's jewel box Broad Stage. It's the world premiere of *Dulce Rosa*, an opera by composer Lee Holdridge and librettist Richard Sparks (who also directs this production), based on Isabel Allende's short story "An Act of Vengeance." Opening Friday, May 17, it runs for six performances through June 9. It promises to be as cinematic as anything Hollywood has ever produced.

*Dulce Rosa* is set in the horrifying aftermath of a violent South American political uprising during the

early 1950's. Its subject of rape could be torn from today's grim headlines, as women continue to be subjected to sexual violence in wartorn countries. *Dulce Rosa* deals in revenge but finds redemption in the story of a young woman who confronts a guerrilla fighter that violated her and her family. As Allende (who wrote the story nearly thirty years ago in California) explains, it's "...the tragedy of a young woman who spent years planning how to punish the man who raped her and killed her family. It doesn't sound like a love theme, does it? Trust me, it is. The story came to me whole, like a gift; I wrote it down in a sort of trance, in one sitting."



The story's Latin setting and emotionally charged climate would seem tailor-made for operatic catharsis. I asked Holdridge -- one of Hollywood's most successful and versatile composers and a frequent collaborator with LA Opera for the past two decades -- what we could expect from the score.

Had he infused it with music redolent of Latin composers or with colorations specific to Latin America? Holdridge:

My own take on the work is basically that I did not set out to write a folkloric opera. This is in a symphonic language, which makes it more universal. It is very emotional and very passionate and heart-felt. When it is meant to be jagged or tense the music certainly reflects that, but when it is lyrical, I don't hold back. I don't subscribe to the now passé 20th century notion that a work has to be 12-tone or minimalist or whatever. This is all about personal

expression. I write what I feel is appropriate for the story, for the characters and for the moment.

With *Dulce Rosa*, LA Opera launches its new "Off Grand" series that will focus on innovative and eclectic repertoire. As the name implies, Off Grand productions will take place in locations other than the iconic (but to some, intimidating) Chandler Pavilion. The Broad Stage's intimate size and neighborhood setting does seem a logical launching pad for the series. Director Dale Franzen has enjoyed a close working relationship over the years with LA Opera super-tenor cum General Director Plácido Domingo, who will conduct five of the six performances of the new work.



Much of LA Opera's most interesting work in recent years has taken place on the margins, as it were, of its regular season repertoire. Music Director James Conlon has championed the Recovered Voices series, focusing on composers persecuted by fascism in the last century. In like manner, Domingo has promoted Latin American and Spanish works such as zarzuelas. The late Daniel Catán's *Il Postino*, a favorite with audiences, must be included in this latter category, along with *Dulce Rosa*, both of which have story-lines that derive from current events in South America. Two impulses strike me as relevant here: Angelinos often prefer arts programs near their homes and the region's large Latino audiences are interested in cultural influences of their heritage.

Domingo has released a statement on this work:

LA Opera's ongoing partnership with Lee and Richard dates back nearly two decades. We had great success with their multi-media concert piece *Concierto Para Mendez*. They are also the creators of several operas for young audiences that have been performed throughout Los Angeles County for tens of thousands of appreciative students--most experiencing live opera performances for the very first time. It is, of course, a great honor for us to collaborate on their newest opera with one of the most important literary figures of our time. Not only is Isabel Allende perhaps the world's most widely read Spanish-language author, she is also a formidable human rights advocate, dedicating her time and energy to the protection of women and children throughout the world through The Isabel Allende Foundation.

The opera is the largest-scale collaboration to date for Holdridge and Sparks. The title role will be sung by Uruguayan soprano María Eugenia Antúnez, who makes her LA Opera debut. The cast also includes Mexican baritone Alfredo Daza as Rosa's nemesis Tadeo Cespedes; and American tenor Greg Fedderly as Rosa's father, Senator Orellano. Directed by librettist Richard Sparks, the creative team also includes scenery designer Yael Pardess; costume designer Durinda Wood; lighting designer Anne Militello; and projection designer Jenny Okun. The chorus director is Grant Gershon.

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**What:** World premiere of *Dulce Rosa*, opera in two acts by composer Lee Holdridge and librettist Richard Sparks, based on the Isabel Allende short story, "An Act of Vengeance." Sung in English, augmented with English subtitles.

**When:**

- Friday, May 17, 2013, at 7:30pm (opening performance)
- Saturday, May 25, 2013, at 7:30pm
- Tuesday, May 28, 2013, at 7:30pm
- Monday, June 3, 2013, at 7:30pm
- Thursday, June 6, 2013, at 7:30pm
- Sunday, June 9, 2013, at 4:00pm

(All performances conducted by Plácido Domingo except June 6, which will be conducted by LA Opera Resident Conductor Grant Gershon.)

**Where:** The Broad Stage at the Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center (1310 11th Street, Santa Monica CA 90401). Free parking.

**Tickets:** Range in price from \$20 to \$150. Call The Broad Stage box office: 310-434-3200. Or visit website: [TheBroadStage.com](http://TheBroadStage.com)

Photo and sketches above are used by permission of LA Opera. The top and bottom are preliminary sketches for this production by designer Yael Pardess. The middle photo of Lee Holdridge is uncredited.

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