



# If only Domingo was from Reunion Island!

by Laurent Bury

Imagine a world famous tenor, whose whims no theater can resist. Let us call him, at random, Placide Domingue. For you see he would not be Mexican, but from Reunion Island, and he would speak Creole, he might even be mixed-race. What would Placide Domingue do at the end of his career? He would support local composers of course! He would encourage the creation of Reunionese operas, based on librettos recalling the island's history. For example the alliance of the communist Paul Vergès and the sugar producer René Payet to save the Quartier Français factory in 1955. And so Jean-Luc Trulès' *Chin* would not be performed at the Jean Vilar Theater in Vitry, but in Paris itself, at Châtelet for example.

Of course the title role, this rebellious son of a French doctor and a Indochinese teacher, would not be sung by the Chinese baritone **Heng Shi**, solid voice, resonant high notes, good sung French. No, the hero's role would be reserved for our tenor. Unless, aware of his advanced age, Placide Domingue preferred to fall back on the role of Monsieur Roger, who thus would not be played by **Jean-Philippe Courtis**. The former Arkel for Claudio Abbado is still recognizable, but twenty years later, the low notes seem to have become inaudible and are no longer very true. Elisabeth, Monsieur Roger's daughter, would be played by one of Placide Domingue's protégées, and not by **Anne-Marguerite Werster**, once Mélisande, or Governess in the *Turn of the Screw* at the Opéra-Comique, under Pierre Médecin. To the timbre coming from she who is now a mezzo-soprano would be contrasted the youthful freshness of a voice as crystal clear as that of **Holy Razafindrazaka**. And we would be delighted to hear amongst the second roles a mezzo voice as superb as **Aurore Ugolin's**.

Our Placide Domingue would have been singularly happy to choose his compatriot **Jean-Luc Trulès** (born in 1956), a composer capable of writing authentic operas, assisted by **Emmanuel Genvrin**, author of a dramatic and concise libretto – which avoids the ultra-intellectualism fatal to so many contemporary operas - and responsible for a staging which is just as effective (which even includes a parody of a Maoist "revolutionary ballet"! ). Trulès knows how to harmonize the instruments' timbres; he knows how to write for voices. The use of the *erhu*, Chinese violin, is not without recalling Tan Dun, who likes to combine Western and Chinese instruments in his operas. The score puts to advantage several very good duets, ensembles and choruses. Sinuous melodic lines, superimposed rhythms, very present percussion, echoes of Indian, Chinese and

Malagasy (maloya) music, this is music which is accessible without demagoguery, which imitates nobody but does not refuse an allusion to parody. A subtle homage to Italian opera, it ends with an "Air de la Folie" and with a father clutching his dead daughter in his arms.

Alas, Placide Domingue does not exist, or at least he's not Reunionese. A shame for Châtelet, which would have been well-advised to welcome *Chin* as one of its "world operas", instead of calling anything and everything an opera. A shame too for all those to whom this excellent performance will never be offered, due to the lack of an illustrious sponsor. After *Maraina* (2005), performed again at the Sylvia Monfort Theater in 2009, and now *Chin*, we eagerly await the third part of the Reunionese triptych from the excellent Trulès-Genvrin duo...