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Following on the success of *Maraina*, created almost five years ago (see O.M. N° 3 p. 62, January 2006). Volland Theater has just created another opera, *Chin*. The first one recalled the installation of the island's first inhabitants in the 17th century, the second is based on a founding event in local history: in 1955, the Quartier Français sugar factory was saved from bankruptcy thanks to an "unnatural" alliance between the communist Paul Vergès (aka Chin, alluding to the Asian origins of his mother; he is brother to the famous Parisian lawyer Jacques), and a former Petainist sugar producer, René Payet, all against a background of Maoist separatist tendencies.

This highly symbolic rescue, which allowed the emergence of Paul Vergès as a political leader, had already been the subject of the play *Quartier Français*, produced in 2002 by the same Reunionese company. But we can only bow before the originality, if not to say the nerve, of the undertaking, consisting of taking as an opera character a figure still engaged in public life – engaged to the point of standing at the last regional elections and losing them, due to a lack of left-wing unity!

The ambiguity comes from the fact that if the context and the libretto are real, the thrust of the plot is romanticized, in particular the romantic ins and outs (here Chin is torn between two women, Elisabeth, the boss's daughter, and Héva, a trade unionist's). Except for the title role, the other names have been changed or invented; René Payet becomes Monsieur Roger for example. All this has evidently not made communication about this world premiere any easier, considered by some as propaganda for Vergès during the run-up to the elections! To the point where one wonders if it would not have been better to narrate the same events entirely as fiction...

Whatever the case, Emmanuel Genvrin has signed here a powerful and complex libretto, where public interests and private destinies are intertwined. Creole and French languages are mixed, as are numerous references to the island's folklore - religious in particular - to ancient mythology, and to the Scriptures. The danger was in reducing the stage to an artificial debate of ideas, obstacle bypassed by the music, which brings flesh and poetry to characters who are somewhat oversimplified.

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In this regard the enormous progress accomplished since *Maraina* by the composer Jean- Luc Trulès (born in 1956) should be emphasized. The richness and diversity of inspiration is still there, but his writing has gained in cohesion and confidence, also in orchestral variety, including the surprising use of a Chinese violin, from which Guo Gan draws some very resonant sounds. Only the French prosody sometimes seems too clumsy to us.

Topping the bill are the beautiful operatic soprano of Anne-Marguerite Werster and the deep mezzo of Aurore Ugolin. After a last-minute defection, Holy Razafindrazaka has the credit, just weeks after giving birth, of learning the role of Héva in a few weeks, a role to which she brings fervor and fragility. The tenor Karim Bouzra demonstrated valor in the role of Charles. The deeper voices seemed to us to be somewhat less enriched by the score, starting with Chin, whose charisma seems musically limited, despite the clear and seductive timbre of the baritone Heng Shi. Without doubt his lack of familiarity with French prosody prevents him from being completely convincing in this role as a leader of men. No complaints, however, about the solid paternal incarnation of Jean-Philippe Courtis, a Roger full of authority, and Josselin Michalon, a moving Darma.

As for *Maraina*, the librettist and composer are also director and musical director respectively, the result being as enthusiastic as it is spirited. The colorful scene that concludes the first part is particularly striking, a pleasing pastiche of a Communist ceremony, celebrating the alliance of the cane cutlass and the hammer, against a backdrop of moringue, a local martial art. A mention for the choir, half-Reunionese and half-Malagasy, very well prepared by Landy Andriamboavonjy.

We hope that this fine adventure will continue elsewhere, particularly in mainland France, where Reunionese history, like that of overseas France in general, is totally unknown.