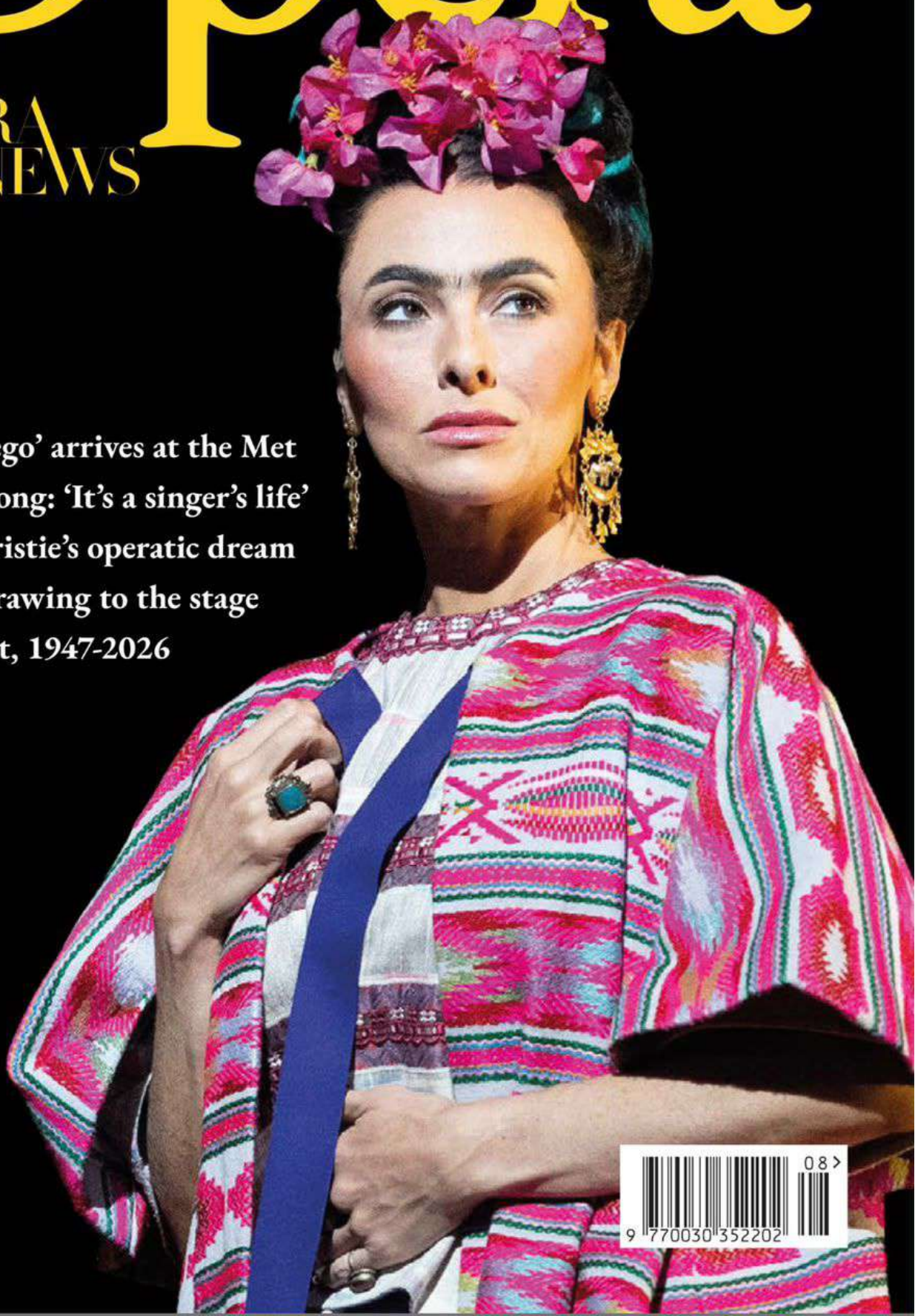


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Felicity Lott, 1947-2026





André Heller-Lopes's new production of 'Roméo et Juliette' in Santa Cruz, with Airam Hernández and Sofía Esparza in the title roles

SPAIN

Santa Cruz de Tenerife

On March 15 the ÓPERA DE TENERIFE presented a new production of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* that can only be described as ravishing. Directed by André Heller-Lopes, who staged a successful *Rusalka* here at the AUDITORIO ÁDÁN MARTÍN last season, the production was opulent, visually arresting and emotionally compelling, confirming his standing as

one of the most imaginative directors in opera today. José Luis Gómez drew playing of genuine distinction from the Orquesta Sinfónica de Tenerife, capturing the quintessentially French character of Gounod's score with conviction and emotional sensitivity.

Heller-Lopes and the set designer Renato Theobaldo reconstructed the galleries of the now-vanished Théâtre-Lyrique de Paris, where the opera received its premiere in 1867. The staging unfolded as a play-within-a-theatre, steeped in dark red and gold splendour. Yet alongside the grandeur stood scaffolding and dusty curtains suggesting instability and danger. The entire construction felt suspended between the volatile enmity of the Montagues and Capulets and the passionate, ultimately doomed love set against this. The images were opulent on the surface, yet fragile underneath—as the transition to the darkened blue of the balcony scene made clear. The birthday celebration for Juliette, spectacular if slightly overwhelming in its colourful exuberance, hinted at the possibility of reconciliation between the two families—a possibility the director deliberately left open, inviting the audience to draw their own conclusions.

Sofia Di Nunzio's costumes placed the action in the present. Romeo arrived in a leather jacket; Juliette appeared at one point in a trench coat. It all held together well. The lighting designer Gonzalo Córdova, a fixture in Heller-Lopes's creative team, again distinguished himself with focused, emotionally charged work.

The cast was almost faultless. Airam Hernández as Roméo was reportedly indisposed, yet acquitted himself creditably and remained a convincing stage presence. Sofía Esparza brought a lyric yet radiant voice to Juliette. Simón Orfila was an outstanding Frère Laurent, his expressive bass-baritone carrying both weight and nuance. Fernando Campero made an energetic Mercutio. All smaller roles were well cast, and the Coro Titular Ópera de Tenerife–Intermezzo sang with vigour and clarity.

The evening was a triumph—for the artists and, equally, for the theatre's directors, José Luis Rivero and Daniel Cerezo, who have built something remarkable here. The

first night sold out, as did two subsequent performances, all with a house of more than 1,500 seats—no small achievement for a title not generally regarded as a box-office certainty. What is happening here is impressive. Opera-loving tourists visiting the Canary Islands would do well to consult the Ópera de Tenerife's schedule in advance.

KLAUS BILLAND