
Xavier Sabata

Selected Reviews

CASABLANCAS L'enigma di Lea (Dr. Schicksal), DVD
Gran Teatre del Liceu (February 2019, reviewed March 2022)

"...Xavier Sabata threatens to steal the show as the manipulative circus-master-turned-doctor..."

- Opera Now

SCHÖNBERG Pierrot Lunaire with a prologue: Narcissus
Gran Teatre del Liceu & Francesc Prat

"Evidentment, hi ha la veu, i això vol dir comptar amb un intèrpret que sàpiga anar més enllà dels límits de l'òpera, del lied o del cabaret, perquè la peça és una heterogènia mescla dels gèneres citats. Al Foyer del Liceu, Xavier Sabata ofereix una versió sublim, de gran contenció expressiva però al mateix temps amb una gran capacitat comunicativa, riscos inclosos i amb bon ús de la tècnica de l'sprechstimme característic de la Segona Escola de Viena. Més d'un cop hem definit el contratenor d'Avià com un perfecte cantador. I aquest Pierrot Lunaire ho confirma de nou. Sabata empra la versió catalana de Miquel Desclot que el 1998 va interpretar Nina en un memorable espectacle al Teatre Lliure de Gràcia, al costat de l'enyorada orquestra de cambra que dirigia Josep Pons. L'espectacle del Liceu, amb moviment de Maria C. de Vaca, compta amb un espai escènic doblement giratori (la plataforma dels instrumentistes i la del cantant) amb un magistral ús de la llum a càrrec de Cube.bz que desemboca en un efecte final absolutament abrusador i amb una forta càrrega angoixant."

"Obviously, there is the voice, and that means having a performer who knows how to go beyond the limits of opera, lied or cabaret, because the piece is a heterogeneous mix of the genres mentioned. In the Foyer of the Liceu, Xavier Sabata offers a sublime version, of great expressive restraint but at the same time with a great communicative capacity, risks included and with good use of the sprechstimme technique characteristic of the Second Vienna School. More than once we have defined Avià's countertenor as a perfect singer. And this Pierrot Lunaire confirms it again. Sabata uses the Catalan version of Miquel Desclot, who in 1998 performed Nina in a memorable show at the Teatre Lliure in Gràcia, alongside the long-awaited chamber orchestra conducted by Josep Pons. The Liceu show, with movement by Maria C. de Vaca, has a doubly revolving stage space (the platform of the instrumentalists and that of the singer) with a masterful use of light by Cube.bz that leads to an effect absolutely scorching finish and with a strong distressing load."

- Jaume Radigales, *ara.cat*

"En aquesta ocasió, el contratenor Xavier Sabata és l'encarregat d'interpretar la partitura vocal, una oportunitat de luxe per mostrar les diferents facetes del seu registre. El rol, més declamat que cantat, és un dels millors exemples de Sprechgesang, veu parlada, una tècnica expressionista que demana a l'intèrpret passar del cant líric a greus guturals parlats, interpretant xiuxiejos melodosos o aguts sobtats. Sabata fa mostra de la seva versatilitat atacant les notes amb intenció. Sobretot destaca en l'apartat escènic, on presència física i treball corporal li permeten omplir l'espai amb una gestualitat a voltes tendra, a voltes grotesca. Un agraït i entregat protagonista en aquesta aventura atonal que captiva malgrat els reptes que suposa transportar la partitura a un registre que no resulta tan llampeguejant com el que pot interpretar una soprano."

"On this occasion, the countertenor Xavier Sabata is in charge of interpreting the vocal score, a luxurious opportunity to show the different facets of his record. The role, more recited than sung, is one of the best examples of Sprechgesang, spoken voice, an expressionist technique that asks the performer to move from lyrical singing to spoken serious gutturals, interpreting melodious whispers or sudden highs. Sabata shows his versatility by intentionally attacking the notes. Especially noteworthy in the stage section, where physical presence and body work they allow you to fill the space with a sometimes tender, sometimes grotesque gesture. A grateful and dedicated protagonist in this atonal adventure that captivates despite the challenges of transporting the score to a record that is not as flashy as a soprano can play."

- Albert Mena, *llegir.cat*

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BRITTEN, RAMEAU, CHALK, FAURE, HANDEL & MOZART: "Mysteries of the Moment"
GIO Symphonia & Francesc Prat (October 2021)

"El gran reclam de l'espectacle era sens dubte el contratenor Xavier Sabata, que va cantar amb la sensibilitat i el gust d'un grandíssim artista."

"The great claim of the show was undoubtedly the countertenor Xavier Sabata, who sang with the sensitivity and taste of a great artist."

- **Xavier Paset, *Diari de Girona***

HANDEL Orlando, title role
Festival Castell de Perelada (July 2021)

"The hero of Ariosto and the evening was Xavier Sabata, involved in the project since its genesis and who had previously collaborated with Villalobos. That absolute rapport with the Sevillian director gave rise to an interpretation of great dramatic stature and full of delivery. Sabata dived into the psychological recesses of the character extracting scenic and musical moments of great expressive force. His vocal line was always elegant, the coloratura precise and the accentuation adequate. A personal triumph in a role created for the great Senesino and that fits him like a ring to his finger."

- **Pablo Melendez-Haddad, *Opera Actual***

MONTEVERDI L'incoronazione di Poppea, Ottone
Wiener Staatsoper (May 2021)

"The Countertenor Xavier Sabata gives an impeccable Ottone."

- **Peter Jarolin, *Kurier***

"Countertenor Xavier Sabata celebrated an intense House debut as Ottone."

- **Maria Scholl, *APA***

"Xavier Sabata's Ottone also seems to be on the side of reason with his creamy, masculine counter. In any case, he sings his impressive part with warmth and deep feeling..."

- **Bernd Feuchtner, *Klassikinfo.de***

SCHUBERT Winterreise
Auditorium of CaixaForum (March 2021)

"Sabata has shown on many occasions that he is a stage animal, with a magnificent natural ability to represent what he sings. It is not a countertenor given, but is always an earthly experience, which is to be thankful. In this stage Winterreise had the complicity of Francisco Poyato, someone from whom we could say that it is on the piano what Sabata is in the voice, two natural performances, sensitive, far from the artifice and totally dedicated to the musical experience."

- **Manel Haro, *Llegir, Barcelona***

"[...] Sabata demonstrates excessive ability to overcome a challenge such as Winterreise and make a coherent and respectful version at the same time as personal."

- **Gemma Bayod, *nuvol.com***

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"...immense performance and hypnotic singing of a Xavier Sabata who knew how to control himself and who tore the songs apart as if they were scenes of a monodrama as contained as it was heartbreaking. His vocality made his songs his own, overcoming extreme bass without problems."

- Pablo Melendez-Haddad, *itsnews*

HANDEL Agrippina, Ottone

Orquesta Barroca de Sevilla, Enrico Onofri, Teatro de la Maestranza Seville (February 2020)

"Xavier Sabata's well-constructed Ottone also stood out from the rest of the cast because he knows Handel well: his controlled singing and beautiful timbre are ideal for this role."

- Pedro Coco, *Il mondo classico*

SCARLATTI Il Primo Omicidio, Voce di dio

Aalto-Musiktheater Essen (January 2020)

"Finally Xavier Sabata as God with a countertenor voice. Focussed singing with explosive statements of power ..."

- Andreas Falentin, *Die Deutsche Bühne*

"Xavier Sabata portrays God with a dark-timbred countertenor voice, giving him a certain dignity."

- Thomas Molke, *Online Musik Magazin*

HANDEL Rodelinda, Bertarido

Teatro Municipal Chile (December 2019)

"Xavier Sabata was a secure Bertarido, impressive in his coloratura..."

- Matias Perez, *Opera*

HANDEL Agrippina, Ottone

Il Pomo d'Oro, Maxim Emelyanychev, European tour (June 2019)

"...Fagioli's steely bravura found a foil in fellow countertenor Xavier Sabata's mellower Ottone."

- Rebecca Franks, *The Times*

"Xavier Sabata brought warmth to the part of Ottone..."

- Richard Fairman, *The Financial Times*

"I much preferred the gentler, warmer sound radiating from Xavier Sabata, who sang Ottone's exquisitely melancholy "Voi ch'udite" with heartfelt sincerity."

- Rupert Christiansen, *The Daily Telegraph*

"As Ottone, Xavier Sabata had a beautiful countertenor."

- Sam Smith, *Music OMH*

"Xavier Sabata's sweetly sincere Ottone ... There are no sharp edges on Sabata's baroque flute of a countertenor. Soft-grained and woody it makes for an exquisite "Vaghe fonti", duetting delightfully with the two solo recorders. Where Sabata is creamy smooth."

- Alexandra Coghlan, *The Arts Desk*

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“By contrast Xavier Sabata’s Ottone and Elsa Benoit’s Poppea stood out for the sobriety of their portrayals in the only two really sincere roles in the opera, both sounding pure and mellifluous.”

- Curtis Rogers, *Classicalsource.com*

“Countertenor Xavier Sabata convinced as Claudio’s loyal general Ottone, for whom true love was more important than ascending to the imperial throne. In another of Handel’s wonderful duets for voice and oboe, ‘Voi che udite mio lamento’, Sabata sang with heart-breaking sweetness of tone.”

- Chris Sallon, *Seen and Heard International*

“Ottone fits Xavier Sabata like a glove: his full voice rather unique among counter-tenor colleagues, is here perfectly used. His ‘Voi che udite il mio lamento’ is the most moving moment of the evening.”

- Guillaume Saintagne, *Forumopera.com*

“Ottone ... the outstanding countertenor #2, a lyrical, showstopping Xavier Sabata)...”

- Richard Sasnow, *Broadway World*

CASABLANCAS, L’enigma di Lea, Dr Schicksal Teatro del Liceu, Barcelona (May 2019)

“With his remarkable and histrionic and vocal powers, it was Xavier Sabata as Schicksal who brought the most life and energy to the performance.”

- Josep Maria Vidal, *Opera*

CD: L’Alessandro amante Vespres D’Arnadi, Dani Espasa, Aparte (released December 2018)

“... a singer whose work has always combined beauty, intelligence and psychological perception in equal measure...Sabata sings this complex programme with his customary elegance and flair. His dark, warm alto has always sounded good in slower arias, where the long lines flow with ease and his breath control is exemplary.... His coloratura, always placed at the service of characterisation or drama, can be spectacular.”

- Tim Ashley, *Gramophone*

“Sabata is now firmly established as one of the leading lights in the large constellation of countertenor stars.... The intrinsic beauty of his well-rounded voice, and a technique that allows him to articulate passaggi with fluent panache... There is, too, much evidence of musical intelligence.”

- Brian Robins, *Opera*

“Velvety timbre, intonation as perfect as the diction ... Precise ornaments merge into the expression alternately and sometimes at the same time vehement, ecstatic or tender.”

- Bénédicte Palaux Simonnet, *Crescedo-magazine.be*

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"Throughout Sabata consistently produces his outstanding countertenor voice which has radiance and a bright decisive tone with surprising warmth.. Sabata is in stunning form, singing with glorious expression, believably portraying Alexander's intense yearning to return to his lover after the end of the battle. From the same serenade is the aria 'Da tuoi lumi' sung with great appeal, focus and clarity. Sabata affords palpable sensitivity to the meaning of the text and displays impressive breath control. Also outstanding is the Handel aria 'Vano amore' from his opera Alessandro, the title role originally created by Senesino. Here Sabata provides a determined portrayal of the great hero that absolutely fizzles along, generating often frantic anxiety and bitterness, the soloist responding tremendously to the significant coloratura demands."

- **Michael Cookson, *musicwebinternational.com***

"Arias by Handel, Bononcini, Pescetti, Vinci, Leo and Mancini offer a smorgasbord of musical styles and an opportunity for Sabata and the brilliant Vespres D'Arnadí under Dani Espasa to display their copious technical and artistic abilities."

- **Will Yeoman, *Limelight Magazine***

**CD: STRADELLA La Doriclea
Arcana (released November 2018)**

"Xavier Sabata's Fibaldo, who turns ornaments more pleasingly than anyone."

- **Brian Robins, *Opera***

**CD: HANDEL Ottone
Decca (released May 2017)**

"...the beauty of Xavier Sabata's countertenor gives his lustful Adelberto a drooping, honeyed tone entirely appropriate for an aria such as 'Bel labbro'..."

- **Brian Robins, *Opera***

"... he [Xavier Sabata] brings emotionality and intelligence to the role of Adelberto, delivering an exquisitely poised account of 'Bel labbro'."

- **Anna Picard, *BBC Music Magazine***

**CD: CESTI L'Oronhea
Oehms (released March 2017)**

"There are stylish performances from Guy de Mey and the countertenor, Xavier Sabata, who makes an impressive debut in the role of the destitute painter Alidoro."

- **Iain Fenlon, *Gramophone***

**CD: CATHARSIS
Aparte (released March 2017)**

"... a supple, communicative voice that is honeyed and forthright by turns."

- **Erica Jeal, *The Guardian***

"...this recital album's intelligent variety of dramatic atmospheres give Xavier Sabata and Armonia Atenea a vivid workout. The music-making is never devoid of interest and richness ..."

- **David Vickers, *Gramophone***

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"...his singing of lyrical music is unfailingly rewarding, especially since he also boasts an excellent messa di voce... Sabata is also excellent with passaggi, articulating with precision and a high level of musicality..."

- **Brian Robins, *Opera***

HANDEL Ariodante, Polinesso Scottish Opera (February 2016)

"In his first fully staged role in a British production, Sabata adds swagger and star quality, using his huge hands, opulent vibrato and baritone laughter with panache."

- **Anna Picard, *The Sunday Times***

"At the heart of that cycle is Ariodante's love rival, Polinesso. In the expert hands of Catalan counter-tenor Xavier Sabata, this evil schemer becomes a cross between cartoon cad Dick Dastardly and Shakespeare's loathsome villain Iago."

"Sabata is so experienced in playing opera's anti-heroes that he has recorded a solo album of demonic arias entitled *Bad Guys*. Unsurprisingly, then, he plays Polinesso with an effervescent wickedness that almost steals the show."

- **Mark Brown, *The Telegraph***

HANDEL Tamerlano Il Pomo d'Oro - Barbican Hall, London (November 2015)

"You could also cherish sections of Xavier Sabata's *Tamerlano* (honeyed but heated) ..."

- **Geoff Brown, *The Times***

"Sabata's *Tamerlano* remains one of the finest Handel operatic performances, outstandingly sung, waspishly characterised and dangerously attractive: you fully understand why his cast off fiancée [...] should still be in thrall to him."

- **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian***

CD: I Dilettanti Latinitas Nostra / Chryssicos, Aparte (released October 2014)

"Then there's Sabata's singing, intelligent yet risky, and frequently deploying baritone chest tones as well as his immaculate alto. ... Outstanding."

- **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian* (5 stars)**

CD: HANDEL Bad Guys Il Pomo d'Oro / Minasi, Aparte (released January 2013)

"Sabata has one of the richest of counter-tenor voices, his warmth of tone carrying intimations of decadence. A perceptive vocal actor, he gets to the essence of his protagonists... The beauty of Sabata's singing is breathtaking, however unsettling his characters..."

- **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian***