

## THEATER: THE DEBUT OF *VICTOR VICTORIA*

### The musical everybody wanted to produce

On Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup>, El Nacional Theater will celebrate its first one hundred years with a gala performance. The super production with leading figures Raúl Lavié, Valeria Lynch and Fabián Gianola, meant an investment of a million and a half pesos. The daring sets will impact the audience as they represent the atmosphere of the 1930's Paris. It will open for the general public on Friday the 12<sup>th</sup>.

"I was born to wear a tuxedo," Raúl Lavié says jokingly as he walks around the stage elegantly dressed and donning a red flower in his fine jacket's buttonhole. Just a few feet away, an unrecognizable and euphoric Valeria Lynch is waiting for him. The singer's new look is realized by a wide suit, her hair cropped short, and her manly gait. A few moments later, a shy Fabián Gianola, his hair in a slicked-back style, comes on stage. Supported by a troupe of dancers who show off their skills, the men donning high top hats and the women in low necklines, the three main characters finish polishing the details of what they anticipate will be "the number one musical of the year." All this fuss is highly justified: El Nacional marks its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary (it was commemorated on April 5<sup>th</sup>) and its major celebration will be the opening of *Victor Victoria*, one of the most sought-after gems by show business producers and theater owners. For a few years now, several important names aspired to negotiate the rights of this musical comedy, based on Blake Edwards's movie that Broadway turned into a hit musical. This time, Alejandro and Diego Romay prevailed and closed the deal in December. Immediately after, they summoned the three stars. "From the start, we had several names in mind, but all the time we knew that Valeria Lynch was going to be Victoria," a confident Diego Romay tells us just before the debut. As the three of them are rehearsing, they interrupt their routine to anticipate to (the newspaper) *Clarín* the details of this super production which will debut on May 9<sup>th</sup> with an exclusive gala for the most important theatrical figures of this city. None of the three can disguise the tingling caused by such a big challenge. They are tired, but they know how to mask it. Not even the hundreds of hours they have devoted to the project could erase their smiles. As for Lynch and Lavié, this new challenge means they are the Argentinian singers who have had the most leading roles in Broadway musicals staged here. On the other hand, Gianola will be on stage for the first time in a musical comedy for adults.

"For years now, I had wished to be part of this musical. To make this dream a reality now is quite incredible. This show will be a highlight in theatrical history and we are part of that history," Lynch comments emotionally while resting in her dressing room. She also admits that since she got the news about her role, she decided not just to say goodbye to her big hair but she also started a strict diet and lost about 15 pounds, therefore she's become more agile and graceful. "I do not consider this a sacrifice. On the contrary, I'm living a dream. The thing about the hair was sort of a demand for the role. I was offered the option of wearing a wig as Paloma San Basilio did in Spain. But I thought the character deserved more than a prefabricated look. My goal was to become Victoria Grant, and the truth is I wasn't about to stop until I got the role," she blurts out. Lynch does not hide her pride. She is aware she got the role that many actresses have been dreaming of. For quite a number of years, those who intended to import the musical were considering several important names, such as Susana Giménez, Nacha Guevara, Inés Estévez, and Flavia Palmiero. The process to get to the debut of the show required patience, a big investment as well as hard work. There were huge considerations not only from the artistic aspect but also concerning sets and architecture. Once all the mentioned obstacles were overcome, on top of the drafting of contracts and all the bureaucratic paperwork that the Romays were able to solve satisfactorily, a new hurdle appeared when Nacha Guevara declined to play Norma Cassidy (Karina K will perform in that role). Though there were many candidates for the role, the major problem was timing because they were ready to start preliminary rehearsing in just a few days. "She had several TV commitments and it was impossible for her to meet our dates," Romay, who came out of the situation successfully, clarifies. "I love musicals because they are a complete discipline, but this is very different to anything I've done before," Lavié explains. The actor has changed Man of La Mancha's big belly and beard (just a few months ago, also at El Nacional) for the extravagant gay Toddy's exaggerated traits. "My role may become dangerous if it gets out of hand. It's not an easy task. An epic role is quite different from something like this. Also, to rise above the image people have of you implies to convince them twofold. Besides, prejudice exists. Some people take it as a joke, and might say, 'He'll frolic around as being gay,' but the truth is I must build the character lovingly", Lavié explains convincingly while fiddling around among hundreds of wigs and magnificent dresses. Fabián Gianola, the newcomer for this genre, accepted another difficult task: the role of King Marchan, a Chicago mobster who woos Victoria. "Now I try to work in plays that keep me sleepless, plays I fall in love with," he confesses totally fascinated with this musical. His character has singing parts, so the expectations about his performance

have become a puzzle. "I'm working in order to learn. I know working with these two stars has raised the bar. On one hand, they are teaching me all they know, but on the other hand, people will be comparing my performance to theirs. I acknowledge that I am not a singer, I am an actor who is able to sing and I am aware of that," he admits humbly just after Lynch herself has said that Gianola "will be the revelation that will surprise many." The story takes place in the 1930's Paris. Victoria, an unemployed soprano meets Toddy who, in order to make a star out of her, pushes her to play a male female impersonator. Trouble arises when King Marchan arrives from Chicago and falls in love with the protagonist. But the mobster has not come alone, he is accompanied by two funny characters: Norma Cassidy, his former girlfriend, and Squash (Omar Calicchio) his bodyguard. The first performance will be a VIP advance showing for one hundred personalities who have performed on the stage of El Nacional. Susana Giménez, Libertad Leblanc, Amelita Vargas, Nati Mistral, Carlos Perciavale, Antonio Gasalla, Jorge Luz, Juan Carlos Copes, Norma and Mimi Pons, and Zulma Faiad have already confirmed their attendance. "After a year of hard work, we hope that people will like it. The story has all the elements to become a hit," Romay predicts. Lynch adds passionately, "Eleven years ago I did *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. When I visited Broadway, I purposely went to see that musical and I felt an intense emotion. Liza Minelli's strong performance was thrilling. She is a force on the stage. I swore it would be my next musical. I contacted several producers, but it didn't happen at the time. Now, it's my turn to become Victoria Grant."

