

**François LAFON** : Carefully but surely, you have made a name for yourself as one of the great opera singers of today. Did you always want to be a singer?

**María BAYO** : Yes. At first I didn't have any illusions, but once I had got involved I worked flat out. I studied at the Pamplona Conservatoire in Navarre. Then I won a scholarship to study in Germany and went to the Hochschule in Detmold, where I worked with the tenor Otto Jansen. There, each year, we put on a complete opera, which was something quite unthinkable in Spain. While I was there I prepared for the competitions: Callas (I reached the final!), Vínias and Belvédère.

**FL** : Were those competitions useful to your future career?

**MB** : They provide the only means of being heard by the decision-makers. That was how I met Teresa Berganza, who gave me warm encouragement and offered to let me work with her. She became my guide. With her, I do the groundwork on new scores, discuss my old roles and think about my repertoire. She knows what is good for me.



**FL** : Do you still work with a coach?

**MB** : Not just one. Teresa Berganza, if anyone, acts as my 'critical ear'. I work on the French repertoire with Janine Reiss, Spanish with Berganza. As for the Italian repertoire, I work in Vienna with... a Hungarian.

**FL** : How do you approach your work?

**MB** : I need to spend at least six months thinking the role over. The ideal method is to work on a role, then let it settle for a few months, before coming back to it and starting again from scratch. Then you find that certain aspects have matured all by themselves.

**FL** : Which are your favourite theatres?

**MB** : The Palais Garnier, where the acoustics are perfect and the balance between stage and auditorium is ideal; the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, which is immense but, as at Epidaurus, you could hear a penny drop from the back row of the gallery; and I can't wait to try out the new acoustics of the Liceo in Barcelona, which I'll be inaugurating in October in The Marriage of Figaro. Before then, I'll be spending two months this summer singing at that magical theatre in Salzburg: that will be a very great pleasure.

**FL** : You are the star of the series of zarzuelas that have been recorded in recent years by Auvidis. Do some of your roots lie in that repertoire?

**MB** : For a long time, the zarzuela repertoire was looked down on slightly, even in Spain, where it was performed by specialised singers-cum-actors. Since the recordings made in the 1950s by such artists as Los Angeles, Kraus and Berganza, the zarzuela had been rather neglected by record companies. I have only sung one on stage: Vives's Doña Francisquita at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, which was performed under the same conditions as a real opera. With another in the series, Marina by Emilio Arrieta—which has just been recorded for Valois/Auvidis—it is one of the greatest of all zarzuelas, with the most popular appeal.