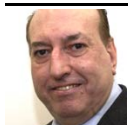


# La Cour de Célimène/Maria – review

Opera House, Wexford



**George Hall**

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The Wexford Festival's 60th-anniversary season opens in characteristic fashion with a super-rarity. In the bicentenary year of the French composer Ambroise Thomas – whose Mignon and Hamlet have both been successfully revived in recent decades - his La Cour de Célimène enjoys its first staging since its initial Parisian run in 1855. A lightweight comedy, it concerns an 18th-century countess surrounded by admirers in none of whom she has much interest; a light dusting of cynicism in the plot and characterisation prevents the result from registering as mere froth.

**La Cour de  
Célimène/Maria**  
Opera House, Wexford

Until 4 November  
Box office:  
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Though it is certainly entertaining in Paul Edwards's snazzy poster-paint designs and in Stephen Barlow's acute and witty production. Claudia Boyle excels in the vertiginous flounces of the Countess's coloratura, with John Molloy forthright as the fortune-hunting Commander and Luigi Boccia blithely lyrical as his rival, the Chevalier.

Thomas's score is a charmer, full of vital rhythms and delicate melody, with some particularly clever ensembles. The young Venezuelan conductor Carlos Izcaray sends the overture shooting upwards like a rocket, and the piece stays high in the air all evening.

It makes a striking contrast with Maria, a 1906 tragedy by the late-Romantic composer Roman Statkowski – a figure virtually unknown outside his native Poland - telling a tale of a young woman murdered on the orders of her lover's aristocratic father, who considers her too lowly for a daughter-in-law. Michael Gieleta's staging makes use of film and photographs to translate the original 18th-century setting to the period of Solidarity, which hits home powerfully in James Macnamara's designs. If the score is

too indebted to Tchaikovsky to register as individual in its own right, Statkowski nevertheless displays consistently keen dramatic instincts, on which conductor Tomasz Tokarczyk and a cast led by Daria Masiero, Rafal Bartminski, Krzysztof Szumanski and Adam Kruszewski all capitalise in their high-octane vocal performances.