

Wine on the brain in the Poble Espanyol

Memoria de Vino opened last night as part of the Grec festival and continues until July 31

MICHAEL BUNN

"It's not an orgy, it's a wine carnival, or a fiesta" says director Enrique Vargas about his theatre experience Memoria de Vino (Memory of wine), which opened last night at Barcelona's Poble Espanyol as part of the Forum-Grec festival. "However, I should warn people," he adds, "that they should leave their children at home". This event - which features Vargas' group Teatro de los Sentidos (Theatre of the senses) - is a show which is the last in his trilogy, following *El hilo de Ariadna* (Ariadne's thread) and *Oráculos* (Oracles). The former was one of the great hits of last year's Grec festival, thanks to spontaneous word-of-mouth publicity. While the first part of the trilogy tells the history of a grain of wheat, Memory of wine offers spectators - and quite literally a chance to immerse themselves in wine, and focuses on the audience's "curiosity" and, paradoxically their ability to lose themselves in something which, at first, they might not understand. The show will give members of the audience the chance

to tread grapes, make wine juice, ferment it and then drink it, though Vargas adds that there is more than enough space at the venue both for more outgoing members of the public who want to join in the fun and for those who prefer to look on as spectators.

"The only way to find something in life is by losing yourself", Vargas says, and to maximise the audiences' surprise he refused to reveal any details about the show, preferring to focus on the spirit of the work. Though Vargas does not only consider Dionysus to be "the god of wine, he is also the god of otherness, of the condition of being another person". And that is one of the themes of the production, the idea that "we should release the "other" that we carry within us, and accept the resulting paradox". Another theme is death, which Vargas insists we should lose our fear of, "like the Mexicans, who believe we should be very alive at the point when we reach death". The show - which no doubt needs to be seen to be believed, let alone understood - goes till 31 July.



A scene from the show *Memoria de Vino* directed by Enrique Vargas and performed by Teatro de los Sentidos

Conca de Barberà: from monastery to modernisme

JORDI URPI

Today we will be taking a look at an area where vines were first grown over 800 years ago: Conca de Barberà. This region roughly coincides in terms of its area with the eponymous Denominació d'Origen which covers the wines grown here. The land is physically limited by the erosion of the river Francolí basin, which 1,000 years ago formed a natural frontier between Christian and Muslim lands.

The monastery of Santa Maria de Poblet was founded in 1150 by monks from the Cistercian order, who were the first to grow vines here. The area reached its zenith in the 14th century, after which it fell into decline until the 18th century, when the Spanish Crown abolished the prohibition against the Crown of Aragon using this land, in order to encourage trade with America. The first state co-operative winery was founded in Bar-

berà de la Conca, and it promptly built the modernist wine cellars of Pira, Montblanc, Rocafort de Queralt, Barberà de la Conca and l'Espluga de Francolí. These "wine cathedrals", as they became known, were the work of architects such as Cèsar Martinell (a disciple of Gaudí), and Pere Domènech, whose father designed the Palau de la Música Catalana.

Espluga de Francolí is where you will find the Rendé Masdeu family winery. The Rendé family decided to begin producing quality wines in 1989, using two fields where they planted Cabernet sauvignon. They used international grape varieties because they believed the region had the perfect soil and climatic characteristics for such grapes. Thus they planted Merlot and also Syrah. Although they are using very young plants, they have succeeded in producing an excellent, very personal red using the Syrah variety called l'Ar-

nau. This monovarietal wine joins the other four which are already on the market, produced from Cabernet sauvignon and Merlot.

Close by l'Espluga de Francolí lies the walled town of Montblanc. On the outskirts lies Mas Foraster, a family winery. In 1995 they decided to change from their traditional harvest producing base white wines for cava and planted Cabernet sauvignon and Tempranillo, and two years later they build the wine producing cellar in an old farm building at Mas Foraster. In 1998 they produced 9,000 bottles of young red and 10,000 for ageing, which came on to the markets in 1999 and 2000, respectively. They set aside the best part of the harvest to produce 2,982 bottles of Negre Selecció, a red which is the winery's star product.

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Gazpacho and vichyssoise are the very definition of cool

The poets might say that the colours of gazpacho and vichyssoise embody the different temperaments of the countries that have given us these marvellous cold soups. They are the two most popular and most refreshing cold summer soups, and they also both derive from humble historical origins. Generically speaking, gazpacho is an Andalusian dish, in spite of the fact that there are some equally delicious soups in La Mancha and Extremadura, though they are completely different.

Vichyssoise as we know it today was created at the Ritz hotel in New York by a French chef called Louis Diat, who used an old recipe of his mother's that he recalled from his childhood in Vichy. These two soups arrived in our country by different routes - restaurants and Andalusian immigration. The *gazpacho andalus*, as it was then called, originally appeared in Catalonia 50 years ago as a

essential item in the great restaurants' summer tourist menus, together with the ineffable prawn cocktail. However, gazpacho did not become common in Catalan households until the 1980s. Meanwhile, vichyssoise was completely unknown here until television programs began to show recipes for cold cream soups. Though vichyssoise is a blend comprised of heavy notes (including potatoes, leeks, lard, cream and milk), the end product is mild, whether eaten cold in summer or hot in winter. And though everyone knows that gazpacho tends to be a very personal, improvised mixture of garlic, bread, oil, salt, vinegar, water and any vegetables that you feel like adding, nowadays tomato has clearly come to be one of the essential ingredients. Strictly speaking, gazpacho and vichyssoise are two basic recipes which can be adapted as you wish. It is all a question of imagination and personal taste.