



■ *Véronique Zuël-Bungaroo as Leïla in the Mauritius Opera Festival's 'Pêcheurs de perles'*

performance as Zurga. Véronique Zuël-Bungaroo, singing Leïla, was the star of the evening. Her voice was fresh and natural—not large, but with easy coloratura, allowing the music to communicate through understatement.

The Cape Philharmonic sounded magnificent under Martin Wettges, playing with clarity and body, and if at times some of the principal singers faltered, the drama was carried by taut and powerful instrumental playing. The chorus, performing with surprising strength and sophistication, was mostly local, with some supplementation from Germany. Dancers choreographed by Art Academy also gave accomplished performances. Altogether, this production was an astonishing achievement given the logistics involved.

JONATHAN RICHMOND

Mauritius

Port Louis

Opera has a surprisingly long history in Mauritius. Nicolas Dezède's *Blaise et Babet* was staged in a Port Louis warehouse in 1790 by a French troupe still recovering from the four-month ocean journey, and an elegant theatre built in Port Louis in 1822 staged full productions throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The theatre has now faded, consigned to little other than occasional school drama productions. In neighbouring Réunion, the French government encourages all manner of arts; in contrast, the Mauritian government has focused on attracting tourists to luxury beach resorts.

Enter the entrepreneur Paul Olsen, who promotes many of the arts events in Mauritius and who realized this *Pêcheurs de perles* in the SWAMI VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE (September 4), part of the MAURITIUS OPERA FESTIVAL. On an island known for its wealth gap, \$10 ticket prices and organized buses aimed to widen access to the event.

Olsen imported an international cast and South Africa's Cape Philharmonic to perform alongside Mauritian artists, and the results were mostly inspiring, though with a few crucial disappointments: Francesco Petrozzi sang Nadir with unsettling coarseness, lacking in range and dramatic involvement, Michael Schopper was mechanical in voice and action as Nourabad, and Matias Tosi offered a mixed