

Podemos launches baseless #MeToo attack on Spanish tenor Plácido Domingo

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World-renowned Spanish opera singer Plácido Domingo made a triumphant return to the stage in Spain in June after a nearly two-year absence, receiving a lengthy standing ovation. The 80-year-old baritone/tenor last sang in his home country in 2019, before the launching of a #MeToo-style sexual misconduct witch-hunt against him that year.

Popular enthusiasm for the singer's return sharply contrasts with the attitude taken by the "left populist" Podemos party, which governs in Spain in coalition with the social-democratic Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE). Podemos politicians launched a vicious campaign denouncing Domingo's appearance and the positive reception he enjoyed as an insult to women.

On Twitter, Irene Montero—the PSOE-Podemos government's minister of equality and partner of former Podemos leader and ex-deputy prime minister Pablo Iglesias—condemned applause for Domingo, writing: "Why are there people who feel the need to loudly applaud a man who has admitted to sexually abusing various women?" This is a reference to an "apology" the singer issued early last year.

"Even those who think that the response should not be public scorn should understand that it [the response] should even less be an ovation," Montero continued. "Above all I would like them [the supporters of Domingo] to ask themselves what message this sends to women and to those who are sexually assaulted every day in our country. Because they are the same people who are then surprised when women don't press charges out of fear of not being believed."

Domingo sang to a sold-out charity concert at Madrid's National Auditorium on 9 June, titled "#VoicesRespond." The event was organised by Domingo and non-profit cultural association Fundación Excelentia, to aid the Red Cross. Funds raised at the gala went to the Red Cross's pandemic response programme.

The singer performed "Nemico della patria" from Umberto Giordano's opera *Andrea Chénier*, "Madamigella Valéry" from Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* and Manuel

Fernández Caballero's "El dúo de La Africana," among other pieces, to tumultuous applause.

At the end of his performance, the clearly emotional Domingo received an almost eight-minute standing ovation from the 1,620-strong audience, and concluded the concert with around five encores, at popular request, according to media reports. The theatre was at the maximum capacity allowed by current coronavirus restrictions in the Madrid region.

A day later, Domingo was presented with a prestigious award at the Teatro Real (Royal Theatre), Madrid's main opera house. The title of "Honorary Ambassador of the World Heritage of Spain" was conferred on the singer by the Association for the Diffusion and Promotion of the World Heritage of Spain (ADIPROPE).

Despite attempts by the media and the identity-obsessed upper-middle class to whip up a lynch-mob climate against Domingo, the warm reception he found in Madrid demonstrates the failure of the #MeToo campaign to gain broader traction among workers and significant sections of the middle class in Spain and internationally. The anti-democratic and destructive methods of this movement are widely met with distrust or revulsion.

The sexual misconduct campaign against Domingo was launched in 2019 with two Associated Press (AP) articles, in which 20 women, 18 of them anonymously, accused the singer of inappropriate behaviour. Some of the claims—which ranged from inappropriate shows of affection to unwanted touching, repeated requests for meetings and late-night phone calls—dated back almost 30 years.

When asked in an NPR interview whether she suffered "any professional disadvantages" because she "repeatedly rejected Domingo," retired opera singer Patricia Wulf, the only person to be quoted by name in the first AP article, replied: "No, I didn't. I didn't suffer anything careerwise. In fact, it was interesting: He and the company kept hiring me. And that was great."

There is nothing legitimate or progressive in the scandal-mongering campaign targeting Domingo. The claims made

against him are entirely unsubstantiated and, to date, the singer has not been charged with any crime. But solely on the basis of these anonymous, unproven and spurious allegations, many of which amount to little more than accusations of persistent flirtation, Domingo was transformed into a persona non grata almost overnight.

Numerous US cultural institutions, including the Metropolitan Opera in New York, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the San Francisco Opera and the Los Angeles Opera, immediately cancelled Domingo's scheduled performances at their venues and severed all relationships with the singer. None of them bothered to carry out any investigation into the allegations before they took these actions.

While the witch-hunt against Domingo has largely not had as much of an effect in Europe—with the singer continuing to perform in cities such as Berlin, Vienna and Verona, Italy to widespread public acclaim—in Domingo's home country of Spain, a number of musical venues also blacklisted Domingo on the orders of the PSOE-Podemos government.

Following the February 2020 findings of the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) that Domingo had “engaged in inappropriate activity” and the singer's subsequent “apology,” the PSOE culture minister José Manuel Rodríguez Uribes cancelled Domingo's part in Federico Moreno Torroba's light opera *Luisa Fernanda* at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid, which had been scheduled for mid-May 2020.

Last March, another prominent Spanish arts institution, the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia, removed Domingo's name from its training centre for young artists. The Palau de les Arts added that it “has determined to desist in possible future contractual relations [with Domingo]” in response to the AGMA report. A musical association in Úbeda, in southern Spain, also cancelled a planned May performance by Domingo.

In response to the AGMA report, Domingo issued an “apology,” expressing regret for any pain he may have caused the alleged victims. “I accept full responsibility for my actions,” the singer explained, “and I have grown from this experience.”

“I understand now that some women may have feared expressing themselves honestly because of a concern that their careers would be adversely affected if they did so. While that was never my intention, no one should ever be made to feel that way.” Domingo was also forced to withdraw from five planned performances in Verdi's *La Traviata* at the Teatro Real in the wake of the AGMA report.

Culture minister Uribes used Domingo's statement as an excuse to intensify the offensive against him, cynically stating: “Given that he [Domingo] wanted to take

responsibility, our duty was to respond to that. Therefore, it is not the time for him to take part in the program [at the Teatro de la Zarzuela], and that's what we have decided in line with the facts admitted by him.”

Faced with the escalating campaign against him, Domingo later retracted his “apology,” insisting that his words had been taken out of context and that he was not guilty of abuse or mistreatment. “It was not a *mea culpa*,” Domingo clarified in September. “My apology was published by an American newspaper along with false accusations that do not appear in the official report,” said the singer, referring to an investigation that had been conducted by the Los Angeles Opera.

The #MeToo witch-hunt against Domingo and numerous others has nothing to do with principled opposition to sexual abuse. The launching of #MeToo witch hunts is bound up with the bitter competition among upper-middle-class layers for positions and privileges in universities, the media and cultural institutions. Montero herself is a poster child for this, having posed for *Vanity Fair* to exhibit the luxury clothes and settings to which she has had access as minister for “equality.”

Moreover, the petty-bourgeois gender politics of #MeToo serve to fashion a fraudulent “progressive” veneer for the right-wing policies of the PSOE-Podemos government. Montero and her fellow ministers have overseen a disastrous pandemic response leading to over 100,000 needless deaths, while escalating austerity measures against the working class. They have also brutally cracked down on protests against their anti-democratic policies and stepped up internet censorship.

The PSOE and Podemos also implemented a fascistic anti-migrant policy, leading to a surge in violence against migrants in Spain and reports of sexual abuse of dozens of minors at PSOE-Podemos-run migrant concentration camps. For all their outrage at the message Domingo's performance “sends to women,” Podemos sheds not a tear for these victims of sexual and physical violence. This is because, just like the witch-hunting of Domingo, the mass detention and abuse of migrants serves the privileged class interests of the middle class layers for which Podemos speaks.



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