

Beijing falls into Three Tenors trap

By Jessica Duchen

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Such was the runaway success of the Three Tenors' World Cup concert back in 1990 that promoters of musical and sporting events have been trying to reproduce it ever since. Sadly, it usually doesn't work.

The magic, believe it or not, was in the musicianship – Placido Domingo, Luciano Pavarotti and José Carreras were, of course, among the greatest artists of their time. The treat was hearing them together and watching them inspire each other. Now, as The Independent recently reported, three top young tenors, each with a recording contract at Universal – namely, Jonas Kaufmann, Juan Diego Florez and Rolando Villazon – are being groomed in the hope of them becoming the previous trio's successors.

Meanwhile, at the Olympic Games in Beijing, the associated events include, well, a Three Tenors concert. Music traditionally looms large at the Olympics, and the original Three Tenors lent their support to Beijing's bid in 2001. Now, though, it seems that it doesn't matter who the tenors are, as long as there are three of them. Marcello Giordani, Salvatore Licitra and Ramon Vargas, the event's designated stars, all sing leading roles in top opera houses, but they are the operatic equivalent of C-list celebrities – molto-con-belto singers whose voices are certainly powerful enough to fill a stadium, but lack the extra edge of artistry and genuine charisma that provides real magic. Without that, the concept is empty.

For the originals, the image became possible because the substance was already there.