
Classic News

operas

CRITIQUE opéra. NICE, La Cuisine [Théâtre National de Nice], February 20, 2024. Laurent PÉTITGIRARD: Guru, French premiere. Armando Noguera, Sonia Petrovna,... Nice Philharmonic Orchestra. Laurent Petitgirard, conductor

 B y Alexandre Pham February 21, 2024 578 0



The Opéra de Nice and composer **Laurent Petitgirard** have a long-standing relationship... Almost 21 years ago, [dec 2002] his previous opera "**Elephant Man**" (on exclusion), was premiered in France on the Opéra de Nice stage. A fortunate and precocious conjunction that testifies to the Nice Opera House's commitment to the arts. modern and contemporary repertoire.

A major artistic line confirmed recently with the excellent production, as delirious as it is gripping, of the opera based on [Franck Zappa's "200 motels" - The Suites](#) [read our review of 200 Motels, Opéra de Nice, Dec 2023]. The credit goes to Nice Opéra director **Bertrand Rossi**, who knows how to place the august Théâtre sur la mer among the most committed opera houses in France. For the French premiere of Laurent Petitgirard's 2nd opera, the Opéra de Nice even entered into an exemplary partnership with the Théâtre National de Nice, whose director **Muriel Mayette Holtz** is staging her first opera, between hyper-realism and marine escapism...

AGAINST THE DELIRIOUS AND MORTIFYING "GURU"... IRIS, MARTHE, MARIE, 3 FIGURES OF DENUNCIATION



The interest lies less in the choruses [excellent presence and masterful singing by the **Opéra de Nice chorus**], ultimately expected and predictable [- what could be more annoying than a passive crowd that accepts without batting an eyelid, the toxic hold exerted over it by its self-proclaimed guide?], than in the singing of the orchestra, here of delectable eloquence, constantly supple and ductile, convincing when it introspects the soloist profiles in particular; it is here that the listener counts the finest surprises.

At the center of the conception, the figure of the Guru gradually takes shape; the orchestral finery details every nuance of this edifyingly self-assured guide, producing a thousand shades between madness and manipulation.

At the same time, the Orchestra probes the superb portraits of women, each of whom composes a gallery of the best-characterized portraits: it is they who humanize the action and enable the denunciation of the subject; they are the gaze of lucidity that opposes the general blindness and passivity. Guru's muddy ideology is a hodgepodge of untruths and conspiracy shortcuts, with a spirituality as confused as it is incoherent.

As the action unfolds, each character thickens and asserts herself as a force of opposition. Her companion Iris [**Anaïs Constants**], Marthe her mother [**Marie-Ange Todorovitch**], truly captivating roles, thanks to the commitment of the singers; they provoke and rebel at the cost of their lives; not forgetting the central figure of Marie, conceived for the wife of the conductor himself - the impeccable **Sonia Petrovna**, a spoken role that embodies the critical gaze of the piece: she constantly denounces and exhorts [to no avail] everyone to pull themselves together. Her final cry, a long, infinitely deep, half-human, half-animal rattle, unleashes all the tension that has been building up from the start, of which she is, in spite of herself, the witness, marked for life.



The action would only be sadly sickening if it weren't for the baby's fate, which occupies the focus of a good number of scenes; it's sometimes hard to support the images of the poor infant being infused with the liquid that's supposed to nourish him.... clear reference to the collateral victims sacrificed without the slightest hint of regret, on the altar of abject certainty. On the contrary, the baby's death serves the vicious and devious phraseology of the despicable "Guru".

But the libretto goes even further: in addition to the collective suicide, the sacrifice of the children, it adds the horror of the most brutal rape of Marie, the only clear-sighted voice, all the more hated because she has come to "destroy the false prophet" [but at what price].

Musically, **Laurent Petit Girard is brimming with ideas and moods**, whose constant activity feeds the drama with a balance between realism and dreaminess. It is above all from the aria of the bereaved mother who understands that she has let her child die, and then the Guru's great solo, which expresses his awareness of his omnipotence, that the sequence of tableaux gains a certain breath, just and progressive.

The guru's demented madness, hyper-violence and demonic duplicity are perfectly portrayed.

Generally speaking, the raw realism admirably serves the ignominy of the subject; the concern for intelligibility is constant, especially embodied by the baritone **Armando Noguera** who, as "Guru", makes a striking take on the role, his character truly inhabited by the infinite [and nuanced] darkness of the character; the singer gives the illusion of one who pokes fun at the faithful as if they were his prey - true, willing, manipulated sheep - with an overt sadism; as if intoxicated by the enjoyment of omnipotence over lost, debilitated souls; this delirious guru tests his manipulative power over all, to the ultimate limit, the expression of their total submission : their own death. There's no escaping it...

A productive and valuable presence, the composer at the desk delivers sublime moments of suspended symphonism, intranquil, strange, moments all the more appreciated for being rare among contemporary composers, more eager to surprise with strident convulsions than with neo-tonal syntax - which, incidentally, Laurent Petitgirard masters perfectly. The sound balance produced by the almost 80 musicians on stage, at the back of the stage, is remarkable, creating this continuous orchestral ribbon; the video animation offers superb portraits of the conductor in action (despite the discrepancy between the real movements of his arms and their image multiplied from front to back on the big screen); the device happily reveals the maestro's incessant activity during the performance; master on board, and defending his own work with the utmost energy, he ensures synchronicity, clarity, balance and intelligibility. And all the more so when he conducts with his back to the singers [soloists and chorus].

In 2 continuous hours, with no intermission, the action moves between tragedy and societal realism. Some passages could be tightened up (the chorus is often repetitive), ...- trivialities really, as the score deals with a sadly widespread social issue with force and bite.



Armando Noguera (Guru) and his denouncer Marie (Sonia Petrovna) © Opéra de Nice

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Laurent PETITGIRARD: Guru, French premiere. Armando Noguera, Sonia Petrovna,... Nice
Philharmonic Orchestra. Laurent Petitgirard, conductor. Encore **at Théâtre National de Nic, La
Cuisine, February 22 and 24, 2024** - event production in Nice

Book your tickets directly on the Opéra de Nice website:

<https://www.opera-nice.org/fr/evenement/1041/guru>

and also on the Théâtre National de Nice TNN
website: [https://www.tnn.fr/fr/spectacles/saison-2023-2024/guru-
opera](https://www.tnn.fr/fr/spectacles/saison-2023-2024/guru-opera)

distribution

Musical Direction: **Laurent Petitgirard**

Stage Direction: **Muriel Mayette-**

Holtz Sets and Costumes: Rudy

Sabounghi Video Production: Julien
Soulier

Guru: **Armando Noguera**

Marie: **Sonia Petrovna**

Iris: **Anans Constans**

Victor: Frédéric Diquero

Carelli: Nika Guliashvili

Marthe: Marie-Ange Todorovitch

Six followers: Rachel Duckett; Noelia Ibacez; Aviva Manenti; Raphael Jardin; Eduard
Ferenczi

Gurban ; Trystan Daguerre

Сһъur de l'Opéra de Nice
Nice Philharmonic Orchestra