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Armando Noguera, high school guru

Fine

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The opera 'Guru', by Laurent Petitgriard, with Armando Noguera © Opéra de Nice / Dominique JAUSSEIN



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Nice Opera

Laurent Petitgirard: GURU

New production

Armando Noguera, Sonia Petrovna, Anaïs Constants, Frédéric Diquero, Nika Guliashvili, Marie-Ange Todorovitch and others. **Musical direction:** Laurent Petitgirard. **Stage direction:** Muriel Mayette-Holtz. February 20, 2024.

Like Musorgsky's *Kovantchina* and Marcel Landowski's *Montségur*, **Laurent Petitgirard's** opera *Guru* (2010) **takes up the** mournful theme of collective suicide, except this time the reason is not politico-religious, but metaphysical: the followers of the Guru sect (the name of the organization's spiritual director) aspire to and believe it possible to live in a better world, in a perfect world. Starting from this premise, librettist **Xavier Maurel** developed a family history within the group of proselytes, justifying the dark ending, based on the event that took place in Jonestown in 1978, where over 900 people committed suicide on the orders of their guru, Jim Jones. The opera, which has never been performed in France, was first performed in Poland.

Petitgirard, the work's author and promoter, decided to go for a full orchestra; he composed a rhythmic, *ostinati-based* score with little or no melody, a strong *woodwind* presence and frequent, sometimes deafening use of drums. Vocally, he provided five soloists to drive the plot, with recitatives in various tessituras, with no trace of singable melodies. A sixth character simply recites the text.

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Needless to say, the libretto gave Guru, the work's central role, special attention and assigned him long, difficult passages that only a great baritone could get through. [Armando Noguera](#), at the peak of his physical powers, tackled them without fear or pitfall at the [Opéra de Nice](#). The Argentinian artist, the undisputed hero of the evening with his Guru, added to his well-known qualities - stage presence, perfect emission with a few metallic touches adding aggression - dramatic elements typical of the indeterminacy (proximity-distance) a guru is expected to display in front of his unconditional fans.

He was supported by interesting voices, such as those of tenor **Frédéric Diquero** (Victor), with his clear delivery and well-controlled power, and **Nika Guliashvili** (Carelli), a bass-baritone of great solidity; **Anaïs Constants** (Iris), rightly applauded for the lyricism her recitatives conveyed to the audience as Guru's former lover and mother of the tyrant's son; and **Marie-Ange Todorovitch**, who played Guru's mother Marthe, opposed to her son's final decision. The ambiguous character of Marie, present in the community and totally opposed to Guru's philosophical considerations, gave **Sonia Petrovna the opportunity to** demonstrate unfailing personal courage and first-rate dramatic skills.

Muriel Mayette-Holt, a theater director and first-time opera director, had to overcome the technical difficulties inherent in the chosen setting. She was able to count on the support of set designer **Rudy Sabounghi**, but the absence of an orchestra pit forced her to place the maestros at the back of the stage and to use video (**Julien Soulier**) more often than necessary. For the rest, he has always ensured that the gesture is as close as possible to the spoken word, and that the dramatic tension is constant.

The production could not have found a better musical director than **Laurent Petitgirard**, the composer himself, who knows his work better than anyone. The Opéra de Nice chorus, conducted by **Giulio Magnanini**, amply fulfilled its mission. * **Jaume ESTAPÀ**, *correspondent in France for OPÉRA ACTUAL*