

'TERRIBLES' AT OAKLAND OPERA THEATER

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OAKLAND---Oakland Opera Theater has taken a stab at Philip Glass' chamber opera after Jean Cocteau, "Les Enfants Terribles" (1996), rising occasionally above the level of student performances.

The hard-to-translate title---try "Impetuous Youth"---is taken from a novel and 1950 film, both by Jean Cocteau, an *enfant terrible* in his own right. Consistent with the original, this dance opera is in French, though English-language narration is provided.

In his quickie opera-tragedy with just three pianos (no orchestra) doing minimal diatonic ostinato figures into the night, Glass adroitly moved the setting to French Indo-China, thus adding further exoticism to Cocteau's Symbolist sensuality swirling around the three central figures traced from pre-adolescence to early adulthood. The tale might have been inspired by Ravel's far more successful opera on a child's fantasy-filled life, "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges."

The continual conflicts between the siblings Elisabeth and the younger, immature Paul are difficult to capture with operatic impact. And until the entry of Agathe in a growing-up triangle of sorts, the drama never takes wing. Particularly problematical is game-player Elisabeth's sudden turn to a manipulative bent in midstream, preventing Paul from developing his love affair with Agathe and ultimately leading to his disastrous ending. Suggestions of unisex relationships also surface via the male alterego of Agathe and the ambiguities of the Elisabeth-Agathe ties.

The very modest OOT production used a clever multi-level set which however left the (student) dancers of Danny Nguyen's Dance Company in their sizable dramatic interplay precious little room to maneuver. Stage Director Tom Dean needed a lot more rehearsal time than he got with the cast of soprano Joohee Choi and baritone Axel Van Chee as the siblings, and mezzo Cary Ann Rosko as Agathe. Deidre McClure conducted, with little rhythmic flexibility. Supertitle translations---very much needed, as not even my French companion could catch much of the singers' diction---were provided most of the time on Oct. 8, at least when the system was not blacking out.

OOT is in its sixth season, recognized for imaginative mountings of several other operas by Glass and Virgil Thomson in its intimate space adroitly reconstructed for each new production.

Oakland Opera Theater in Glass' "Les Enfants Terribles," a chamber opera in French, through Oct. 22. Two hours 5 min., one intermission. Oakland Metro Opera House, 201 Broadway, Oakland. For info: (510) 763-1146 or go [online](#).

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D. Rane Danubian has been covering the dance and modern-music scene in the San Francisco Bay Area with relish -- and a certain amount of salsa -- for years.

These critiques appearing weekly (or sometimes semi-weekly, but never weakly) will focus on dance and new musical creativity in performance, with forays into books (by authors of the region), theater and recordings by local artists as well.

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