



## ELECTRIC ELEKTRA

### SOME STAGING BITS DIMINISH WORK'S VOLTAGE

By [GLENN SUMI](#)

ELEKTRA by Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal (Canadian Opera Company). At the Four Seasons Centre (145 Queen West). To May 19. \$20-\$275. 416-363-8231. Rating: NNN

More than a century after it premiered, Richard Strauss's Elektra can still shock, especially if you think opera is all about lovely arias and impassioned duets.

There's passion in this Sophoclean story of murder and revenge, but it's twisted and gnarly, filled with sarcasm and self-loathing communicated in harsh chords and shrieks of pain.

The Canadian Opera Company's staging, its first since 1996, captures a lot of the work's power, but some casting glitches and a few inconsistencies in the design diminish the wattage.

There's no problem with the title performance, belted out by former COC Brunnhilde Susan Bullock with savage fury and acted with an appropriate mix of mockery and guilt. If her high notes screech rather than soar, and her gentle moments don't quite pierce the heart, that's forgivable. This is one of the toughest roles in all of opera.

Bullock's scenes with Ewa Podles, as the murderous mom Klytämnestra, are the dramatic high point of the fast-paced 103-minute opera. Podles commands the stage as the self-dramatizing queen, and her low notes grab you by the neck.

That kind of passion is missing from the rest of the cast, who range from competent to forgettable.

Thankfully, there's lots to look at in Derek McLane's expressionistic set, which resembles a neglected child's playroom – appropriate for a work about one of Greek literature's most dysfunctional families.

Unfortunately, some design motifs – like the slaughtered pig in the opening scene – aren't carried through. And director Thomas de Mallet Burgess's use of figures to represent the family before tragedy struck doesn't always resonate.

On the other hand, Thomas C. Hase's lighting design is superb at creating mood, and the orchestra, under Richard Bradshaw, brings out most of the colours of Strauss's complex score. Of all this season's operas, I was most looking forward to hearing this one in the acoustically fine hall. The sound is murderously good. 🎧

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