

the village

VOICE

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Cinderella Double Take

CINDERELLA/CENDRILLON. A work based on Massenet's opera, coconceived by Anne Bogart and Jeff Halpern with text by Eve Ensler, directed by Anne Bogart, and presented by Music-Theatre Group at St. Clement's, 423 West 46th Street, 924-3108.

BY LEIGHTON KERNER

Not unlike the Peter Brook-Marius Constant-Jean-Claude Carrière *La tragédie de Carmen*, this compression and refraction of Massenet's most charming and exquisite opera into a music-drama about a doppelgängerous Cinderella with an irretrievably and suicidally split personality is an inspired vandalism that lets us return to the original (Massenet's, that is) armed with new possibilities. To a music critic fed up with unimaginative, rote-rooted subservience to "tradition" and with merely nose-thumbing off-the-wallowing, such vandalism as the Bogart team commits against *Cendrillon* is refreshing and, more important, disturbing as only the best theater-work can disturb.

Henri Cain's original libretto dressed the Cinderella story in sweet wit and a powerful nostalgia for the unattainably perfect fairy tale in which princes can be manly and deliriously lovestruck as well as charming and in which forlorn heroines suffer without drenching their hovels in tears and so doubly deserve their happy futures. Moreover, Massenet's score is his most shimmeringly and effortlessly beautiful. Jeff Halpern, centrally involved in some of the finest recent music-theater, tastefully reduced Massenet's orchestra to a combination of string quartet, piano, reeds, and bells. He also abridged the four-act opera into one 90-minute act and deftly shuffled the order of some numbers for the sake of a new scenario.

CHOICES

THEATER

Cinderella/Cendrillon:

Anne Bogart, Jeff Halpern, and Eve Ensler have compressed and refracted Massenet's most exquisite opera into a poetically staged grimmer tale of a persona split between bliss and suicide. At the head of an uneven cast, Lauren Flanigan sings the heroine brilliantly, and Joan Elizabeth acts her Cinderella shatteringly.

Through February 5 (except Sundays and Mondays) at 8, St. Clement's Church, 423 West 46th

Street, 279-4200. Two hours before curtain: 265-4375. (Kerner)

That scenario preserves just enough of the rantings of Madame de la Haltière (City Opera's protean mezzo, Joyce Castle) and her loathsome daughters. I do wish Henry Stram's Pandolfe (the heroine's worm-turning father) had a richer baritone for his affecting music. But there's no complaint to be made about the lyric tenor of Jeffrey Reynolds's Prince (in the opera a mezzo role, but occasionally taken by tenors), the non-operatic soprano of Joan Elizabeth as the Lucette (that is, lowly house-slave) half of Cinderella—Lucette is her real name in the opera—or, above all, the musicianly lyric soprano of Lauren Flanigan as the Cendrillon-half, who goes to the ball and wins her prince. Coloratura Elizabeth Van Ingen needs only to sing the Fairy Godmother more softly (in the vision-

sequence) to bring the performance nearer to an ideal.

Finally, may a nondrama critic close by admitting he was stunned, laid out, and shattered by Miss Elizabeth's acting, particularly in her dead-mother-haunted monologue? ■