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Music

Youth climate strikes have dwindled. Urgent opera Uprising gives them new voice

With a protagonist inspired by Greta Thunberg, Jonathan Dove and April De Angelis’s work was strongly sung at its Dutch premiere

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Madeline Saputra brings fragility and strength to the part of teenage protester Lola © Joost Milde

In Maastricht's main station, three children burst into song. They are improvising, testing the limits of their range, giggling between phrases. They must be cast members from the Dutch premiere of *Uprising* the previous night. Through participation in community opera, they have quite literally found their voices.

On the same day that Jonathan Dove and April De Angelis's *Uprising* opened in the Netherlands, Fridays for Future rallied outside Berlin's Chancellery during the COP31 climate summit in Antalya. Protesters marched with lanterns through the government quarter as part of a day of action at some 70 locations across Germany.

When philanthropist Jim Potter set the project that became *Uprising* in motion in 2020, youth climate strikes were high on the political agenda. Jim and his wife Hilary supported the work, which was commissioned by Glyndebourne and Saffron Hall Trust, and the opera premiered at Glyndebourne in February 2025. Now it has come to Maastricht in a new staging with a savvy sense of abstraction and a few judicious cuts.

The story centres on Lola, a teenage protester loosely inspired by Greta Thunberg. In a slightly cartoonish condensation, big industry is personified by Lola's mother, Angela, who wins a contract that entails felling a local old-growth forest. The clearance brings ecological disaster to the area. Sibling stage directors Romy and Gable Roelofsen make extensive use of chairs and trench coats to symbolise the (singing) forest. Together with choreographer Winston Ricardo Arnon, they do a formidable job of moving a sizeable cast of children and local amateurs round the stage, keeping the action dynamic and the story clear without lapsing into cheap pathos.



The new staging incorporates a savvy sense of abstraction and judicious cuts

Madeline Saputra brings both childlike fragility and ferocious strength of will to the part of Lola, and the rest of the professional cast is strong. Most impressive, though, is the assurance with which the youth and adult choirs navigate Dove's complex four-part writing. That takes a huge investment of time, training and resources. There are few things more uplifting than hearing community singers rise to a challenge on this scale.

Dutch National Opera has invested consistently in recent years in a handful of newcomers. It is gratifying to watch the development of conductor Manoj Kamps, who can now keep such disparate forces calmly unified. The Roelofsens show both mature stagecraft and a determination to give their art form meaning for the broader community.

Climate strikes in schools have dwindled since 2020, but the movement that inspired the opera remains vocal. After the opera's floods, the chorus sings of birds and micro-organisms returning. The recovery they describe is a reason for hope, as is the resolve of the young people singing about it.

In May, the production moves to Amsterdam, where a new chorus of young people and adults will make it their own. Which is the point of the exercise. Sometimes the process matters more than the outcome. Occasionally, as here, an endeavour succeeds equally on both fronts.

★★★★☆

To May 23, operaballet.nl

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