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## HIGHLIGHTS OF JANUARY

### Wednesday 11

The San Francisco Symphony under Edo de Waart gives the premiere of Louis Andriessen's *Velocity*.

### Saturday 21

The Sarasota Opera marks the opening of the refurbished A.B. Edwards Theatre with a new production of *Eugene Onegin*; Marc Embree sings the title role.

### Saturday 28

Donald Erb's *Prismatic Variations* (for orchestra and children in the audience) is premiered by the St. Louis Symphony, Leonard Slatkin conducting.

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# "The Photographer"

U.S. premiere of Glass theater piece reveals a new simplicity

**Joan La Barbara**



When I first saw *The Photographer* in its Holland Festival premiere in June 1982 it was a disaster.

The distracted onstage activity de-

The three-part form of the theater piece is given without pause. Part I is a melodrama, a singular event taken from the life of Eadweard Muybridge (*The Photographer*, himself) in which Muybridge shoots his wife's lover and is later acquitted for his crime of passion.

Akalaitis' brilliant direction manages to give the flavor of Victoriana with quirky touches to indicate the cynical distance from which we view it. And the sumptuous costumes and sets by Santo Loquasto give us not only the overstuffed frippery of Victorian drawing rooms but re-create aspects



Tom Caravaglia

Margaret Hoeffel, Susan Eschelbach, and Setterfield in *Photographer*: less than magical

signed by Rob Malasch looked like a pale imitation of Robert Wilson, and the music by Philip Glass had been so badly orchestrated that every instrument had to be amplified and the balances adjusted in the mix to ensure that each would be heard.

For the opening of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in October 1983, the entire production had been reworked. JoAnne Akalaitis had been called in to direct. A new book was commissioned by Robert Coe. Dance and movement choreography was designed by David Gordon and the same music had been rescored for Glass's own ensemble, an instrumental combination he is more familiar with: amplified winds, voice, electronic keyboards, and violin. Even the name had been changed to *The Photographer/Far from the Truth*.

Part II is a lengthy musical work accompanied by series of the photos which made Muybridge famous: his still shots of moving figures presented in motion and layered by use of projection on scrims placed at different points on the stage (this section replaced an interminable onstage developing of an oversized photograph, in the original production, a cute effect but not worth the effort). In part III, dancer Valda Setterfield brings to life the stilled motions of the photographs as characters from the melodrama swirl about, all choreographed by Gordon.

## Victorian theater

The evening was designed as a Victorian theater event in which a melodrama, a lecture, music, dance, and inventions were all part of the night's entertainment. Indeed,

of Muybridge's photographs in exquisite detail.

Philip Glass's music is the simplest he has produced to date. Gone are the intricately growing and changing modules, the curious details that made his works in the '70s so compelling. Now we have just a few simple chord changes, arpeggiated, broken down to single lines, built up again, electronicized to fill out some timbral variation. But all in all, the music for the evening consisted of a single piece, heard first as incidental music to the melodrama, then in full force as the accompaniment to the photographic and dance sequences.

The audience seemed pleased, I might add, but not overwhelmed. No roaring standing ovations, just two curtain calls. A pleasant evening's entertainment but less than a magical theatrical event.