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## For the sake of peace, rout Hamas



Bret Stephens

### OPINION

As of this writing, terrorists in Gaza — the word “terrorist” fits people who take indiscriminate aim at civilians to achieve political goals — have fired some 1,750 rockets at Israel since Monday.

That's a number worth pausing over, and not just because it has had the effect of overwhelming Israel's Iron Dome missile defense. Gaza is often said to be sealed off and utterly destitute. Yet Hamas, which rules Gaza, seems not to have had too much trouble amassing this kind of arsenal, or too many qualms employing it in a way it knew was sure to incur a heavy Israeli response.

The goal of U.S. policy is to support Israel's efforts to defang, deflate and disempower the terrorist group.

The usual rule in life is that if you throw the first punch you can't complain if you're counterpunched. The test of Western policy and public opinion is whether they will let Hamas break this rule.

That's a test the Biden administra-



Israel said artillery at the Gaza border had shelled a tunnel network in the territory. Egypt has sent negotiators, but the intensifying conflict presents delicate challenges.

## Israel strikes on ground before talks can begin

BRUSSELS

Artillery attack in Gaza raises level of violence with mediators en route

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

As United States officials and Egyptian mediators headed to Israel to begin de-escalation talks, the antagonists were weighing delicate internal considerations before agreeing to discussions on ending the violence.

But even before the mediators got to work, Israel's caretaker prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, appeared to have calculated that brute force was required first.

Israeli ground forces bombarded the Gaza Strip with artillery on Friday, in an escalation of a conflict with Palestinian militants that had been waged by airstrikes from Israel and rockets from Gaza.

The Israel Defense Forces said that no Israeli troops had actually entered Gaza. Instead the army had amassed troops along the Gazan border and had shelled a tunnel network in the territory from Israel.

It was not immediately clear if the attack was the prelude to a ground invasion against Hamas, the Islamist group that controls Gaza. A ground invasion could extend the conflict and significantly increase the number of dead and

## Picture perfect, but costly

## THEATER

## WEEKEND

# A drama where trauma runs deep

LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND

After two canceled runs, a trippy production of 'The Pond' takes the stage

BY LAURA CAPPELLE

There is a feeling that streamed theater can't quite replicate. It's the sense of being immersed in a performance, to the point that you hang on to every sentence, every sound, every gesture. Distractions fade away. All that matters, briefly, is the actors' next move.

In "The Pond" ("L'Étang"), a new production by the French director and choreographer Gisèle Vienne, no move is inconsequential. Its two leads, Adèle Haenel and Ruth Vega Fernandez, aren't just in the room with the audience: for much of this trippy exploration of family taboos, it feels as if you're breathing with them.

After six months of uncertainty because of the pandemic and two canceled Paris runs, "The Pond" finally made it to the stage earlier this month — in the Swiss city of Lausanne. While theater performances in France and Britain won't resume until later in May, playhouses in Switzerland cautiously reopened on April 19.

Restrictions still apply: No more than 50 audience members are allowed per show. Still, it's a start. At the Vidy theater in Lausanne, where "The Pond" ran through Wednesday, tickets for the season sold out within hours. (The production is set to tour Europe this year, with a presentation at the Holland Festival, in Amsterdam, in June.)

In a way, a world premiere in Switzerland was fitting for "The Pond." Vienne's show is based on a short play by the Swiss writer Robert Walser, about a child who pretends to drown in order to test his mother's love.

Walser wrote "The Pond" as a gift to his sister, Fanny, and it was arguably



Above, Ruth Vega Fernandez, left, and Adèle Haenel in "The Pond," a production by the French director Gisèle Vienne. Right, some scenes feature life-size puppets. Above left, Fernandez in the show, which is based on a play by Robert Walser.

never intended for the stage. (For starters, it is only 20 pages long.) That suits Vienne, a trained puppeteer whose work is rarely driven by text. Her adaptation is in no way literal, yet it takes a magnifying glass to the unsettling allusions in Walser's play — to child abuse, incest and family trauma.

It is also a feat of polyphony, which builds on Vienne's interest in altering and distorting the voice. (In 2015, she took a close look at ventriloquy in "The Ventriloquists' Convention.") Between them, Haenel and Fernandez play 10 characters: Haenel embodies Fritz, the central character who fakes suicide, as well as his siblings and young friends, while Fernandez stands for the adults in the story.

Theirs are virtuosic performances, built out of seemingly disparate elements. When the lights first go up on a large white box, designed by Vienne, the audience is greeted by seven puppets — life-size teenage girls, some of them huddled on and around a bed, with clothes strewn on the floor. One by one, to deafening club music, they are carried offstage by a technician.

Haenel and Fernandez enter as the



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ESTELLE IANAWA



**Virtuosic performances, built out of seemingly disparate elements.**

last doll disappears, and eerily, the actors appear to have taken their cues from the inanimate characters. Every step they take is in extreme slow motion, yet it doesn't look robotic: Haenel, in baggy pants, an oversize sweater and a cap, has the slight hunch of an angsty teenager, while Fernandez exaggeratedly sways her hips.

When they start speaking, on the

other hand, Walser's lines come fast. The narrative arc is clear, from Fritz's squabbles with his sister to his attempts to reconnect with his mother, yet what happens visually has relatively little to do with it. When Fritz visits a sick friend, we see Haenel lying on the ground, laughing and emptying a bag of candy over her head.

The gap between story and move-

ment lends the proceedings an air of unreality, as does the accompanying soundscape. Haenel and Fernandez both wear body mics, and every sigh and groan is amplified to go with an ominous electronic score, composed by Stephen F. O'Malley and François J. Bonnet.

Haenel, who rose to fame as a film actress and has become a prominent voice of the #MeToo movement in France, makes astounding use of this setup. Her voice rises and drops on a dime as she switches back and forth between the children in the story, yet she never plays the characters in a conventionally realistic manner.

Instead, even in stillness, emotions wash over her body with affecting clarity. Time and again, in her performance, pain morphs into pleasure, before regressing back to pain. Between scenes, she climbs slowly onto the bed previously occupied by the inanimate teenage girls, with a hint of erotic charge — also present between Fritz and his sister Klara. At times, it's impossible to tell whether Haenel is assuming their roles, or making the story up in a dreamlike state.

Opposite her, Fernandez plays Fritz's parents — especially his mother — with hardened distance. While she and Haenel rarely look at each other, there is an unspoken power struggle between them: at one point, Haenel stands over Fernandez as she crumbles to the floor, and unhurriedly spits at her feet.

It's a transfixing performance, which brings to the surface emotions that are often suppressed in dysfunctional family settings. Haenel and Fernandez are by turns sensual and monstrous; Fritz is thrilled to have earned proof of his family's love after his carefully staged stunt by the pond, while his mother resolves to make amends without quite knowing how.

"Now all is good," Fernandez says. "I will make it up to you." Briefly, they walk toward each other. A resolution is in sight, until Haenel stops and bends over in pain, gulping for air. While Walser suggests a form of reconciliation, in Vienne's world, there is no such thing as a happy family ending. Trauma runs too deep.

It may sound too bleak for audiences after a tough year, yet as I emerged from the Vidy theater, my mind was as stimulated as it's been in months. For 90 minutes, artists claimed my full attention, and repaid it in spades. I'm ready for more.