

LA TRAVIATA REVIEW

What Verdi's opera *La Traviata* lacks in eloquence it replaces with a certain musical elegance that the Edmonton Opera Association's Monday evening performance came close to capturing. There was some difficulty determining whether the times when the cast lapsed into the garish were due to the ill-fated course of this opera's run, or were indeed inadequacies of the performers and the director. A good deal of the problem, historically, has been the way in which Verdi himself thwarts the dramatic tension of the work by interspersing some rather splendid musical material with some undeniable hack writing. The EOA seemed intent upon being true to Verdi's inconsistency by juxtaposing some gracious, intense characterizations with some rather flacid passages and gave its audience a choppy, albeit enjoyable, performance.

The most heroic effort of the evening came from Joan Patenaude-Yarnell, the soprano who replaced the highly acclaimed Anna Moffo in the lead role of Violetta. Although Ms. Patenaude-Yarnell does not have Ms. Moffo's voice, she has a well-developed ability to create a great deal of dramatic tension by her presence upon the stage. Her voice is not unpleasing and in the aria *Sempre libera* of the first act, it was more than evident that she had the power and the sensitivity to produce an unquestionably silken texture. There were moments, however, when she did some unexpected

things with her voice that sounded as if she were snarling into a note.

She seemed to be trying to vocally enrich the pathos of certain passages with this technique, but there were times when it did not work and sounded decidedly misplaced. Her triumph for the evening was the way in which she maintained the dramatic momentum of the opera, vocally as well as visually, even when the composer, the other members of the cast, and her costume placed some undeserved difficulties in her path.

The gracious acting of Ms. Patenaude-Yarnell was contrasted with the heavy-handedness of the director Irving Guttman, and the set designer Robert Darling. Both seemed to concentrate more on a desire to create a spectacle than to provide a clear vision of the misbegotten love affair between Violetta and Alfredo. Guttman's attempt to foreshadow the death of Violetta by providing the audience with a view of her upon her death-bed during the orchestral prelude was an unnecessary touch considering the fact that she is quite obviously consumptive throughout the course of the opera. It was unquestionably misplaced: the introspective introduction of the motive by the strings seems more appropriate than the place where the orchestra were playing a more raucous merry passage.

The director's handling of

the chorus also lacked a musical respect for balance. If in the first act he wished to keep the numbers down in order to have a point from which to build, he should have been aware of the contrast between the powerful solo passages and the barely audible chorus passages and made more sensitive use of that contrast, at least by communicating that desire to the conductor, Charles Rosenkrans. The orchestra could have attempted to balance itself with the chorus. As it was, it came as a structural weakness in the performance.

Both the director and the designer are to blame for the lack of focus that occurred in the third act. Even though Guttman justifiably wanted to furnish this act with spectacle, he could have remedied the clutter that occurred by some rather more careful attention to the movement of his performers on the stage. Had the designer chosen a more expanding colour for his set than the tedious brown, that worked well for the last act (serving to set off Violetta's impoverished, invalid state), there would not have been the visual constriction that there was.

The EOA did provide its audience with two extraordinary fine male voices in the roles of Alfredo Germont (tenor Jose Carreras) who was Violetta's lover and Giorgio Germont (baritone Wassili Janulato) who was Alfredo's father, the man who put a stop to the affair. Carreras is developing into an

exceptional tenor, in that his voice is always full and rich; even in the very high parts of his tessitura where tenors often become reedy. He began weakly in the first act but by the time he reached his aria, *De' miei bollenti spiriti*, in the second act, his power and presence were overpresent.

Janulako, who played the staid old father whose conservative ways won't let him allow his son to carry on his illicit relationship with Violetta, sang with one of the better baritone voices heard in Edmonton. His aria in the second act, in which he pleads with Violetta to leave Alfredo, is a classic *tour de force* for a baritone. The challenge lies within the sustained notes which he must sing very high up in his

tessitura after having just completed a duet with Violetta.

Janulka's voice proved capable of technically achieving the notes as well as evoking the stern passion of a pleading father. There was only one objectionable passage in the opera where he sounded as if he had sang his note while inhaling, but for the rest he remained impressive.

The audience, as well as being treated to the traditional coloratura of this prima donna of all musical events, the opera also were able to witness the equally traditional, always comic, attempts by the baritone and tenor to upstage each other. This excess of ego is inherent in the operatic form. But then what makes good music does not necessarily make good opera.

Allen Bell



theatre lives

Child's Play by Robert Marasco and directed by Richard Ouzounian. Opens at the Citadel January 5 and runs to February 2, 1974. This production stars John Neville and Vernon Chapman. There will be a student preview January 4 with a question period following the performance. Tickets for this evening performance are \$1.50 for students.

Have You Any Dirty Washing Mother Dear? written by Clive Exton and directed by Warren Graves. Next at Watterdale Playhouse, Nightly at 8:30, January 15 thru 26 inclusive. Tickets at the Bay Box Office or phone 424-0121 for reservations. Do it now or you'll be out of luck.

10 Women, 2 Men, and a Moose with Mia Anderson. One night only. January 25 at the Jubilee, 8:30 p.m. Tickets \$2.50, \$3.50 and \$4.00 available at the Bay. Canadian talent at the fore and at its very best.

L'Effet des Rayons Gamma sur les Vieux-Garcons by Paul Zindel, translated and adapted by Michel Tremblay. Directed by Jean-Marcel Duciaume at Theatre Francais d'Edmonton, 8406-91 rue. Feb. 1, 2, 3, and 8, 9, 10th. Students \$1.25. Tickets at the door or phone the box office at 467-3626. En francais.

dance

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet Company will be at the Jubilee January 31, February 1 and 2 with their production of the NUTCRACKER. Student Prices are in the \$3.00 to \$5.50 range. A classic more talked about than performed. This is your chance to get caught up and find out what all the talk is about.

cheap thrills

The Ruling Class, directed by Peter Medak. A brilliant script by Peter Barnes and a fantastic performance by star, Peter O'Toole. It's a fine madness. Friday only. 6:30 and 9:30. Student Cinema.

Pete 'n' Tillie directed by Martin Ritt. Starring Walter Matthau. It's better than you'd expect but not as funny as the promos would have you believe. Sunday, 6:30 and 9:00. Student Cinema. Tickets fifty cents in advance from the SUB Box Office or \$1.00 at the door.

poetry

Gary Geddes, 7:30 at the Central Library, January 25.

Robert Burns Birthday celebration at the Citadel. January 25 at 12:15 noon. Admission is only a dollar. See article this edition for more information.

easy on the ears

The University of Alberta String Quartet will be at SUB, 12:00 noon on January 25 with Schubert, D Minor.

the eyes have it

Latitude 53 gallery is running a show of the works of Pat Martin-Bates, Janine Jakobow and Fred Owen until January 31, 10048-101A Avenue.

Street Flesh

Bertrand Lachance's latest offering of poetry, *Street Flesh*, can be best summed up as a special interest volume. It may appeal to people who have ever been classified in the rather loose category of 'street hippies', but for the average reader, it probably will not have very much to offer.

In *Street Flesh*, Lachance has taken a series of events that he presumably experiences and arranged them into chronological order using poetic form.

He chronicles approximately a year on the streets, and offers his impressions on various activities such as Grey Cup day and the approach of Christmas. I found a hint of truth throughout

most of his work, and some of it struck me as being rather humorous. For example, in a piece entitled 'life is boring again', he starts out with the lines:

*once more getting rid of the crabs
told yu to get rid of yurs a month ago...*

Lachance must be bored with life in a rather extensive manner to talk about the topic of ridding oneself of crabs.

I considered some pieces rather pretentious, or rather a rather obvious observation that has been made into a poem. For example:

*march 13
ok theres still many more nites to go*

*n we're all in this together
this whol erth of us*

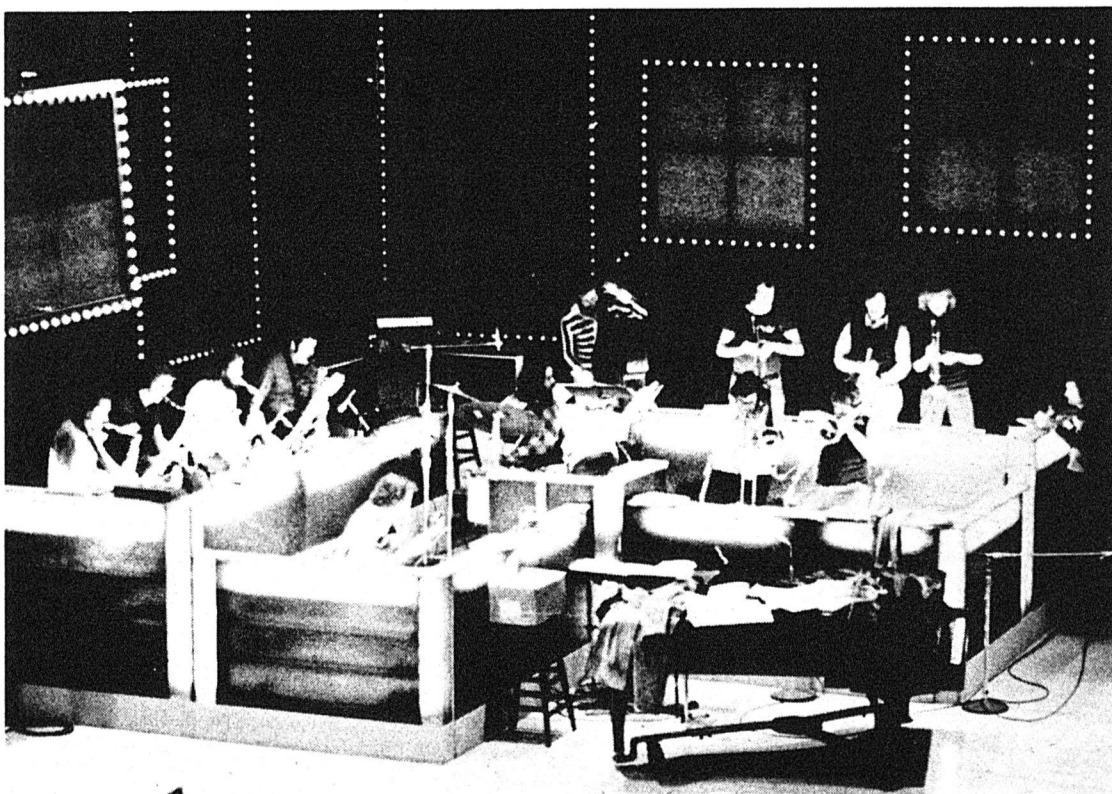
There are some rather interesting pieces describing his first encounter with drag queens, and life in a skid row hotel, but it really didn't appeal to me taken as a whole.

He has adopted the style of writing in lower case, and adopting phonetic spelling, example 'erth', 'yu', and others.

The book is illustrated by Lachance, who uses montages of pictures of the city and the country, for example, horses grazing against the skyline of downtown-major-city.

The book is available for \$2.00 from blewointment (sic) press.

Satya Das



The Tommy Banks orchestra tunes up in SUB Theatre. The Banks show tapes regularly. Tickets are free and may be obtained from the SUB information desk.