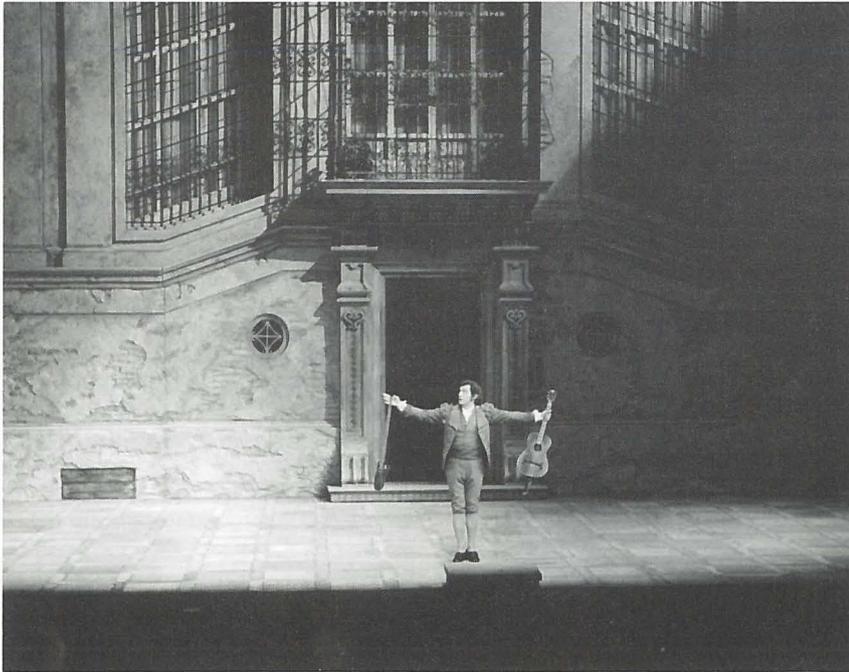


the team responsible for the National's admirable *Guys and Dolls*, director Richard Eyre, designer John Gunter and lighting designer David Hersey. Here they took as their theme the mountainous bureaucracy of Tsarist – and contemporary – Russia, and offered as a permanent setting a vast mountain of yellowing paperwork, stacks of official documents with huge flies trapped upon them, gigantic pencils and rotting files to imprison the action of the play. Using trucks and revolves each separate setting

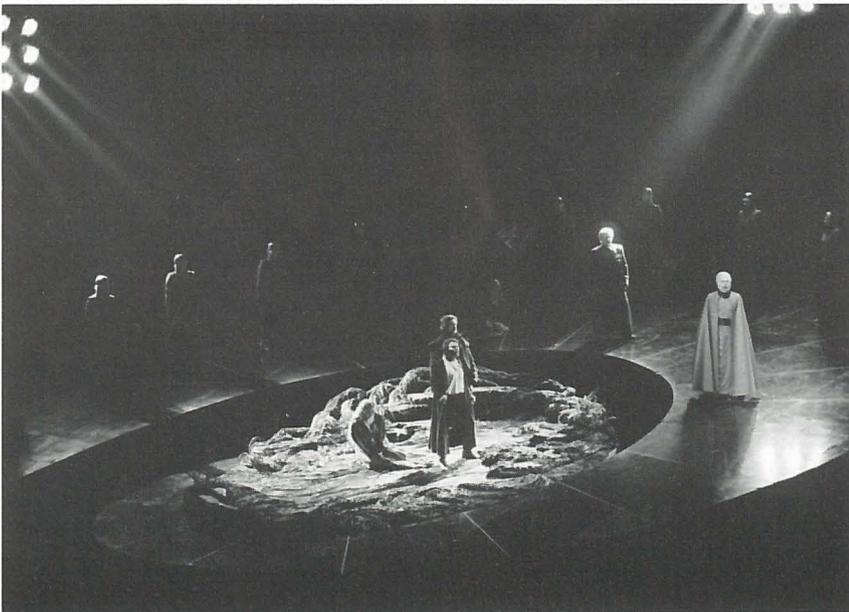
was then brought in, a succession of brilliantly realised cameos of Russian provincial life: the sleazy inn and mayoral parlour both being masterpieces of imaginative stage design. Within these settings we saw superbly apt furniture and props, and inspired, almost surreal, costumes by Deirdre Clancy that had the power and social awareness of Rowlandson or Daumier. David Hersey's harsh, overhead white lighting kept one's attention in a grip of steel in a production which provides the

National Theatre with the strongest of answers to its critics.

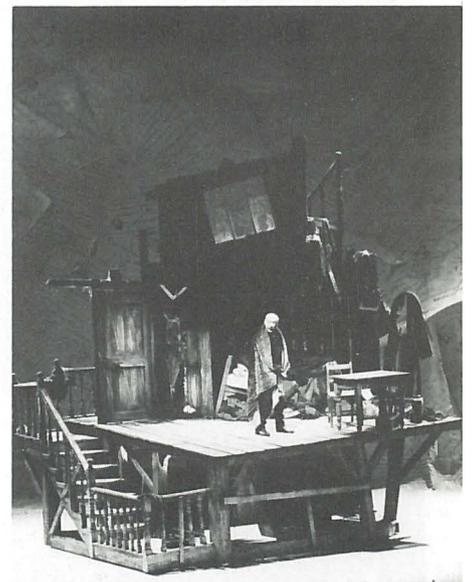
In Russia itself the problem of funding the arts, as encountered here, simply does not exist. The state has taken over and thus provides the audiences with any number of productions of opera, ballet and theatre, with best seats at the Bolshoi in Moscow and the Kirov in Leningrad for opera and ballet costing no more than £3. With repertory seasons at both these houses being the rule, some productions are decidedly dated and worn – Ivanov's settings for *Swan Lake* – I saw the 1307th performance at the theatre since its premiere there in 1895 – for example looked positively archaic. But the previous night at the Kirov I had seen a comparatively recent (1980) production of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* which displayed a remarkable degree of imagination and inventiveness. Here Filomonov's designs had reduced the stage size with a gorgeous cameo setting, with the characters beautifully dressed and including commedia dell'arte figures who had previously danced the plot of the opera during the five minute overture. At the Bolshoi too I saw a ballet double bill of recent works which offered an awareness of modern design trends that slightly astonished me. Lyemeshyev's setting for *Kalina Krasnaya* used a steep rake and relied heavily upon projections on gauzes, as well as offering light, decidedly modern costumes, and *Eskisi* (Sketches) – a choreographic fantasy on themes from Gogol had similarly exciting designs by Benediktov. This latter work, new this year, once again relied heavily on projections and offered a similarly fantastic and surreal approach to Gogol as that demonstrated in the National's production of *The Government Inspector*. It was good to know that enterprising and original work in ballet is now being done in the Soviet Union, and, that as here, choreography and design, is being used to entertain as much as to offer history or social-realist messages.



The Royal Opera's new production of Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. Producer Michael Hampe. Sets realised by Peter Davison after a design concept by Ezio Frigerio. Lighting designer Hans Toelstede. Photo. Clive Barda.



English National Opera's *Tristan and Isolde*. Producer Goetz Friedrich. Sets by Heinrich Wendel. Costumes Jan Skalicky. Lighting Stephen Watson. Photo. Clive Barda.



The National Theatre production of *The Government Inspector*. Director Richard Eyre. Design John Gunter. Costumes Deirdre Clancy. Lighting David Hersey. Photo. John Haynes.