



*La Cage Aux Folles. Settings by David Mitchell and costumes by Theoni Aldredge. Lighting by Jules Fisher. Photo. Catherine Ashmore.*



*RSC's Mephisto at the Barbican directed by Adrian Noble. Designer: John Gunter. Costumes: Deirdre Clancy.*



*The Shared Experience production of Chekhov's Three Sisters at the Bloomsbury Theatre. Producer: Mike Alfreds. Set design, costumes and lighting by Paul Dart. Photo. Sarah Ainslie.*



*Troilus and Cressida transferred from Stratford. Directed by Howard Davies. Designer: Ralph Koltai. Costumes: Liz da Costa. Photo. Chris Davies*

Busoni's *Doctor Faust*, in fact the British stage premiere of an opera first seen in 1926, was likewise achieved on the lowest of budgets. Pountney proudly told me that the set had cost just £60,000, yet in Stefanos Lazaridis' wonderfully intelligent and inspirational design of triangular moving platform, operated by pulleys, and surrounding catwalks backed by nightmare filing cabinets and iron pipes, it achieved a more spectacular and convincing dramatic power than many a million's worth of hydraulics and lasers spent elsewhere. Some effects were truly magical: the emergence of Mephistopheles as Faust's clone from beneath his cloak was a master-stroke, and the use of conventional traps beneath the stage platform's surface, covered with rubber strips, gave a wholly credible impression of insubstantiality. Nick Chelton's lighting was similarly masterly. This was an opera that truly needed visual support, and in this production it emphatically received it.

Of the three major new musicals to have opened recently in the West End, *Time* relies almost wholly on technological visual effects, *La Cage Aux Folles* uses technology to achieve the smoothest possible presentation of an old-fashioned kind of show, and *Chess* attempts, largely successfully, to blend the two, but was let down by its major computer despite the expenditure of a cool £4 million. *Time* probably cost every bit as much, but is really a pretty wretched affair. We all know John Napier to be a top-class imaginative stage designer, but here he seems only concerned with stage technology. There is a rearing, plunging, circular hydraulic stage platform that can achieve a vertical position; the auditorium side walls have spinning, flashing panels with rotating lights; there are lasers galore, all in that familiar, sickly shade of green; and there is