

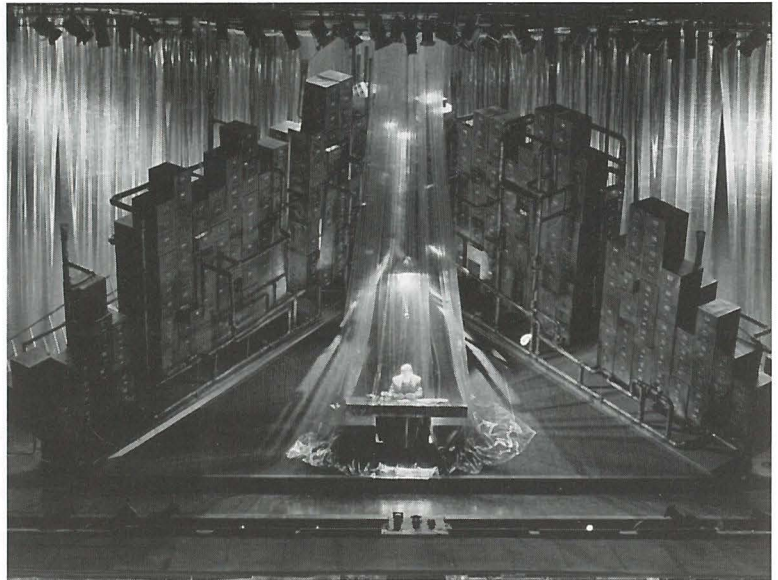
run. For the second act, the Hall of Song, Koltai used a curved wooden, terraced structure, reminiscent of Shakespeare's Globe, upon which the inhabitants of the Wartburg, beautifully played by the Grand Theatre's Chorus, took their seats to watch the song contest. The effect was vivid and made the act come alive to an extent I have not previously experienced, and Koltai's own lighting here, as in the final act, was immensely sensitive, subtle and restrained: there was clearly advantages in having an experienced designer light his own show. In the final act we returned to the curved platform, this time turfed in burnt orange, and again most effective. I did not entirely follow the reason for masking the returning Pilgrims, but costumes otherwise, in which Koltai had been assisted by Annena Stubbs, were apt and persuasive. In all this was a laudable design for an opera that abounds in visual traps: here the design never distracted, and yet one was never bored — a considerable achievement.

There have also been two admirable and exciting stagings of opera in Britain recently, the first from Welsh National Opera which has the great advantage, for the public, of taking its work widely on tour, and the second from English National Opera at the Coliseum. WNO's production of Verdi's *Otello* had the eminent theatrical director, Peter Stein of the Berlin Schaubühne company, in charge, with sets by Lucio Fanti and costumes by Moidele Bickel. Though Stein is a comparative newcomer to opera, he displayed a total grasp of the form as *dramma per musica*, and together with his designers achieved as compelling and satisfying a production of an opera by Verdi as any I have seen since La Scala, Milan visited Covent Garden in 1976 with Giorgio Strehler's magnificent staging of Simone Boccanegra, designed by Ezio Frigerio. The design concept for *Otello* was a picture frame enclosing a boxed platform stage, with a front apron onto which characters could step and reveal their inner thoughts to the audience, having been released from the 'picture'. Within the 'frame' one saw paintings of the Italian renaissance, with appropriately foreshortened perspectives, and with sliding panels to provide hidden entrances, exits and listening posts, as well as revealing a rear cyclorama to add a dimension of stylisation and fantasy to the enclosed drama. The set itself was also roofed, sometimes by a ceiling, sometimes by drapes, and this further compressed the drama and at times produced an almost unbearable sense of claustrophobia. Ms Bickele's costumes were splendid: utterly in period and in character, and looking as though they actually belonged to their wearers; and lighting, by Fanti with WNO's own Chief Electrician, Clive Pleasants, totally supported the design, even on a touring date at Oxford's Apollo Theatre. This production was a superb achievement, and one that was realised on a very small budget: it is great news that Peter Stein will be returning to WNO to stage Verdi's *Falstaff* in 1987.

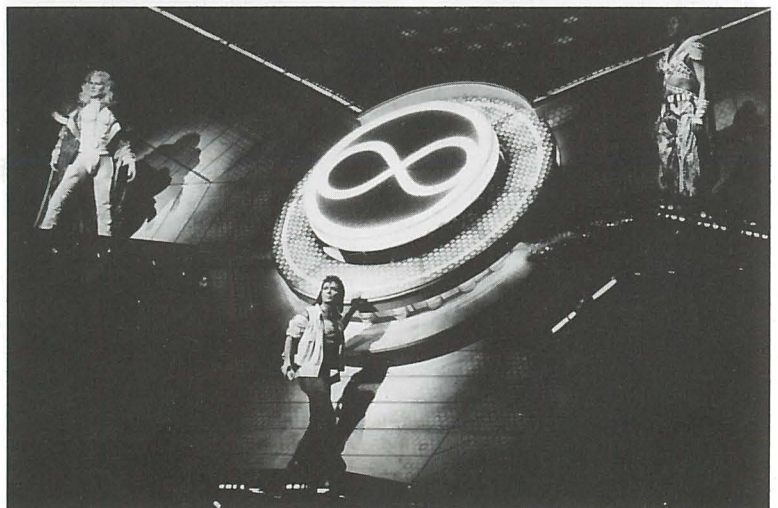
David Pountney's masterly staging of



The picture frame set for Welsh National Opera's *Otello* designed by Lucio Fanti. Costumes by Moidele Bickel. Lighting by Fanti and Clive Pleasants. Director: Peter Stein. Photo: Clive Barda.



ENO's production of Busoni's *Doctor Faust* at the London Coliseum. Designer: Stefanos Lazaridis. Producer: David Pountney. Lighting: Nick Chelton.



Set for *Time* designed by John Napier.