

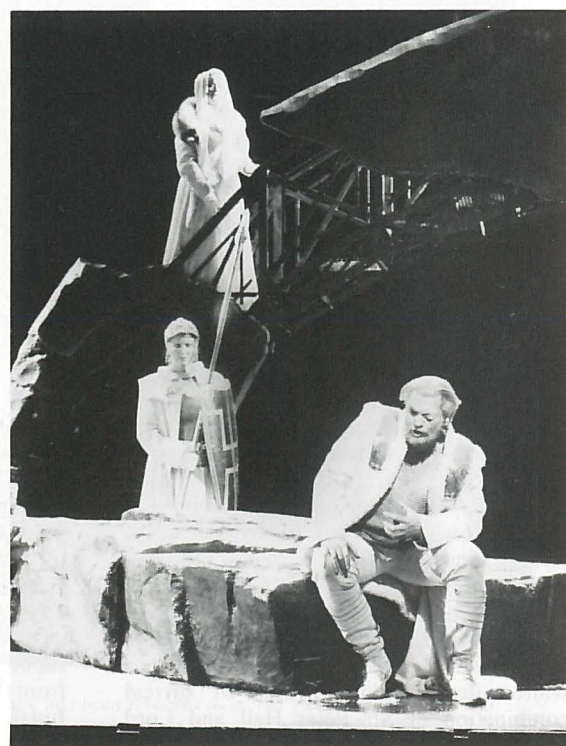
*The Mayor's wife in "Jenufa". The gist of her song can be seen if not heard in the surtitle. Photo Zoë Dominic.*



*Clare Mitchell's "Village Ladies" for "Jenufa". Photo Donald Southern.*



*Götterdämmerung and The Valkyrie from Welsh National Opera's "Ring Cycle" at Covent Garden. Producer—Göran Järvefelt. Designer—Carl Friedrich. Lighting—Robert Bryan. Photos Clive Barda and Zoë Dominic.*



concentrate on the music and the drama, undistracted by visual tours de force. What did rather puzzle me was that producer and designer in Rhinegold, the first opera of the four, seemed to have opted for the kind of politicised, industrial revolution concept that had characterised Patrice Chereau's Ring in Bayreuth. There were thus iron-girdered railway arches, frockcoated gods, and Welsh navy giants. But thereafter, although the girders continued to hang mistily around the proscenium, the cycle continued along altogether more conventional and timeless lines. As Rhinegold, with its absence of any tenable suggestion of the Rhine and anaemic Nibelheim, was by some way the least satisfactory staging of the four, this was no bad thing, and thereafter things improved mightily with a fine opening act to Valkyrie, strong work in Siegfried and a well-evoked Gibichung Hall in Götterdämmerung. Sadly the final scene of this opera, the immolation of Brünnhilde and destruction of Valhalla, was muddled and feeble, but at least here, as elsewhere, it left singers with room to move and space to sing, which they did to our very considerable pleasure. This may have been a Ring on a shoestring, and with some visual punches pulled, but it was nevertheless enormously satisfying, and I would be happy to see it again.

At the Coliseum the first production of English National Opera's new season was Jonathan Miller's staging of The Mikado, designed by Stefanos Lazaridis, with costumes by Sue Blane. For style, polish and skill in execution it is very probably the finest looking musical in town, and Dr Miller's decision to set Gilbert and Sullivan's Japanese operetta fairly and squarely in England, and to move its period forward to the 1920's was admirably served by his designers' wit and skill. Lazaridis' setting was inspired: a surreal version of the