

STAGE DESIGN

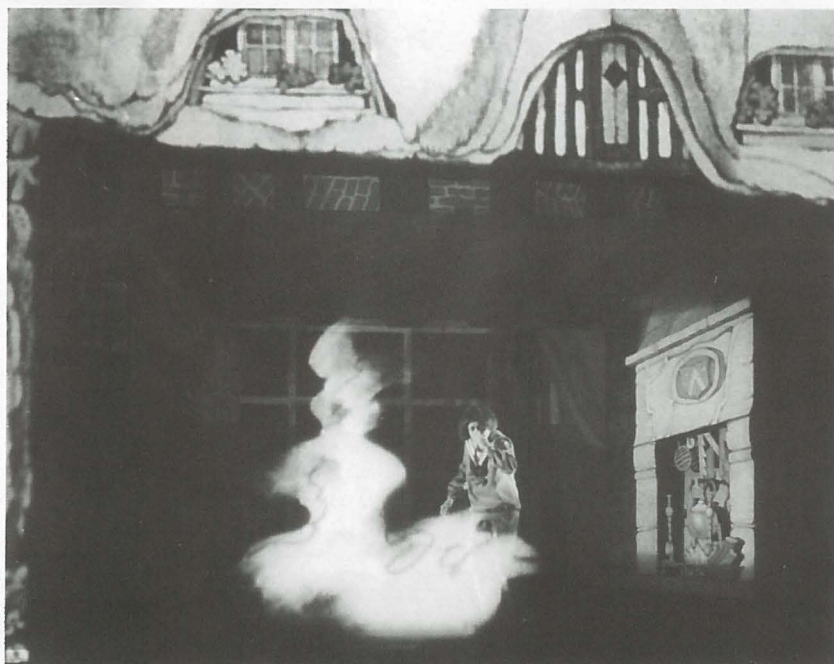
DAVID FINGLETON

A beautifully realised *Traviata* from Glyndebourne □ *Alice* successfully choreographed at the Coliseum by Canada's National Ballet □ A unified and cohesive view of *A Small Family Business* at the National Theatre □ Boots and black bikinis at the Barbican □ Marathon dancers at the Mermaid □ High technology plus lots of money equals an exuberant *Follies* at the Shaftesbury Theatre □ The Theatre Design Degree Exhibition reveals an abundance of talent at the Central School of Art and Design.

Given the costs of seats at Glyndebourne Festival Opera – £50 was this year's top rate – and the cost of both getting there and being there, and given too that those who do go there are probably not the world's most operatically educated audience, it is hardly surprising that the management should aim to provide its customers with something of a show. But, that said, there is a great deal of difference between a show that enhances the opera in question, and makes it easier to enjoy and comprehend, and one that actually replaces it. Glyndebourne's two new productions this summer provided examples of each. The season's opening production of Verdi's *La Traviata*, being seen at Glyndebourne for the first time in the festival's history, was directed by Sir Peter Hall and designed by John Gunter. Gunter's work at Glyndebourne tends to be straightforwardly realistic, rather than ambitiously stylised, and is certainly none the worse for that. For *La Traviata* he provided four different settings and each one felt absolutely right, both in period and social milieu, and was thus entirely convincing. Hall saw the opera in terms of a clock ticking Violetta's life remorselessly away, and there was thus a clock-face prominent in each scene, the minutes ticking away in double time. Both Violetta's opening party, and her friend Flora's later one, which possessed a higher degree of decadance, with under-age prostitutes and death-masked dancers, felt absolutely correct in terms of scale, period, and atmosphere, and Hall showed his habitual command of the full depth of Glyndebourne's stage. Costumes were exquisitely accurate, and so too, for once, were the wigs, and the fact that these parties were taking place in an intimate, rather than grand opera house environment heightened the dramatic impact. Violetta's country retreat in Act 2 was beautifully realised by Gunter: the room impeccably proportioned and furnished, an attractive and useful enclosed terrace beyond it, and beyond that a gloriously depicted rolling landscape. The working fireplace and dulled mirror above it showed laudable attention to detail, as did the partially removed furniture in Violetta's bedroom in the final act. Clearly the bailiffs were already knocking at the door, and for once we could believe in her demise as readily as in her earlier success. Added to all this was David Hersey's habitually imaginative and technically flawless light-



L'heure Espagnole (Ravel) Glyndebourne.
Conductor: Simon Rattle, Director: Frank Corsaro, Designer: Maurice Sendak,
Lighting: Robert Ornbo, Photo: Guy Gravett.



L'enfant et les Sortilèges (Ravel) Glyndebourne.
Conductor: Simon Rattle, Director: Frank Corsaro, Designer: Maurice Sendak,
Lighting: Robert Ornbo, Film animation and slide design: Ronald Chase,
Choreographer: Jenny Weston. Photo: Guy Gravett.