

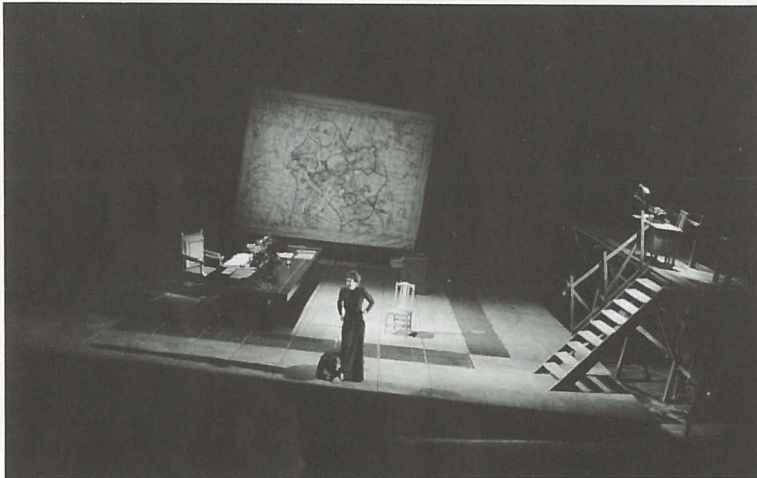
designed against black cloths, and most imaginatively lit, by Ewa Starowieyska. This too held one most rewardingly enthralled.

Whatever may be one's reservations about some of the individual designs at Teatr Wielki – and at what opera house in the world would one not have them – no praise can be too high for their execution. Scenery and costumes were all beautifully made, and even the most elderly productions came up looking crisp and pristine. Furthermore lighting was invariably precisely controlled with every cue spot on, and the work of the stage crew deserved the greatest admiration. Poland is a labour intensive country and crews are therefore more numerous than here, but they worked with such skill and care that every instant scene change went as though on oiled wheels, and in total silence, intervals were never protracted, and it was extremely rare to witness even the smallest scenic mishap on stage. The abundance of productions in Warsaw leaves little space to comment on recent events in London. At the Coliseum

E.N.O.'s new production of Puccini's *Tosca*, by Jonathan Miller, was designed by Stefanos Lazaridis and had come to London by way of the Teatro Comunale in Florence, where it had been the centre piece of last year's Maggio Musicale. Dr Miller had decided to update the opera to Rome in 1944, during the German Nazi occupation, and Lazaridis presented a huge fixed setting, set at a vertiginous angle across the stage and extending out over the sides of the pit. It did not work: the bomb-damaged church in Act 1 was acceptable, if one closed one's ears to Puccini's music, its use as Gestapo boss Scarpia's office in the Palazzo Farnese for Act 2 more convincing, though the torture chamber – previously the Attavanti chapel – was now far too remote, extreme stage left over the pit, from Tosca's battle with Scarpia, and as a setting for Act 3's Castle Sant'Angelo it was disastrous. It made a nonsense of the shepherd boy's opening song, Cavaradossi's aria about the stars, and Tosca's supposed plunge from the ramparts – here "achieved" by way of a fake window in the



Anthony Dowell's new production of *Swan Lake* at Covent Garden had Yolanda Sonnabend as its designer. Photo: Donald Southern.



Puccini's *Tosca*, ENO's new production by Jonathan Miller at the London Coliseum. Designer Stefanos Lazaridis. Photo: Clive Barda.



John Copley's new production of Bellini's *Norma* at the Royal Opera House. Set design by Robin Don. Costumes by Bob Ringwood. Lighting Robert Ryan. Photo: Clive Barda.

back wall. And whoever heard of an indoor execution by firing squad anyway? Dr Miller's intention, apparently, had been to make *Tosca* more relevant and accessible to contemporary audiences, but this production singularly failed to do so. John Copley's new production of Bellini's *Norma* at Covent Garden, with sets designed by Robin Don and costumes by Bob Ringwood was no more successful. Don's basic scheme of raised circular stage with circular canopy above it was a good one, but had become fussily over-embellished, and Ringwood's costumes were untenably crude, inapposite and over-coloured. The production evoked neither the spirit of Bellini's own day, nor of ours: it merely floundered. Far better was Ian Judge's production of *Ruddigore* for New Sadler's Wells Opera, which made a positive effort to get away from the 'send up G & S' school of contemporary stagings. Judge approached the piece on its own terms as a skit on 19th century melodrama, and Gerard Howland's witty and economical designs, within the framework of an intimate Victorian proscenium, succeeded admirably, as did Deirdre Clancy's well-observed costumes and Nick Chelton's adroit lighting. Back at Covent Garden, Anthony Dowell's new production of *Swan Lake* had Yolanda Sonnabend as its designer. Her work, perhaps predictably, evoked controversy, being as idiosyncratic as anything Ms Sonnabend does, and bearing her familiar hallmarks of gauze, wire, and the collage effect. Personally I liked her designs a lot. They were romantic, Russian, and powerfully evoked the fairytale element of the ballet. My only concern was whether the detail of the delicate costumes, and indeed of the dancers themselves, might not have been lost amongst the elaboration of the scenery.