



The Balcony (*Genet*) R.S.C. at the Barbican Theatre. Director: Terry Hands, Designer: Farrah, Photo: Ivan Kyncl.

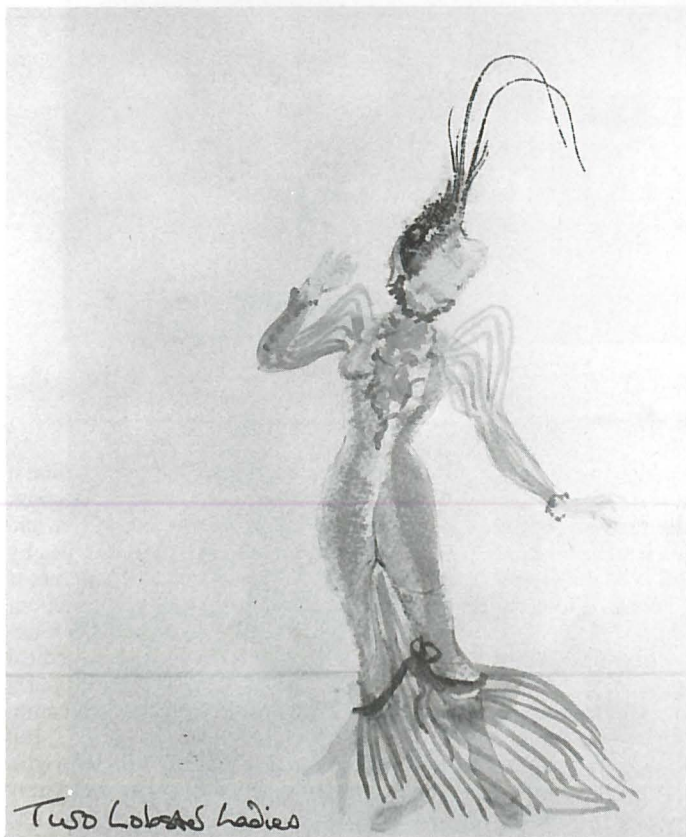
ing, and the total effect was to make the opera more dramatically vivid and readily understood than usual, and thus to enhance the pleasure of the audience.

On its opening night the audience certainly seemed to enjoy the other new production — a double bill of short operas by Ravel — with equal enthusiasm, but I felt less happy about them. For here the impression was that director Frank Corsaro, and, above all, designer Maurice Sendak had simply taken the two operas over and turned them into a visual display. *L'Heure*

*Espagnole* received the less elaborate treatment of the two, being given a toytown setting and suggesting that the action was actually taking place inside a clock. The overall effect was initially attractive but fussy, and thus progressively irritating: happily the piece lasts less than an hour. So does *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, but it is an altogether stronger work and far less in need of the kind of design pyrotechnics with

which Sendak fitted it out. The entire opera took place behind a front gauze, an alienating feature at the best of times, supplied here as a screen for projections, movies and laser shows. Even before the opera had begun we were treated to a tableau vivant of a child's birthday party which I found totally redundant, and were then taken on a cinematic journey through the woods to reach the cottage where the child learned his lesson from the household effects. Robert Ornbo's lighting was highly skilled and depicted the fire superbly on the screen, but time and again I felt my attention being drawn to the effects and away from the music. Here the design seemed to diminish the work and to turn it into a kind of operatic Tom and Jerry cartoon, which is hardly what Ravel can have intended. We all know about the beauty of *Where the Wild Things are* — Sendak's books are a joy — but what about the beauty of the opera?

The difference between strong design personality smothering or enhancing a production could be seen in National Ballet of Canada's brief visit to the Coliseum with *Alice*, choreographer Glen Tetley's latest full-length ballet. Here, from the outset, one felt that there was a strong, unified view of the work by both choreographer and designer which at the same time as it took a different approach to Lewis Carroll's story, equally presented it to the audience in terms which they could recognize. Bayliss provided a blessedly open setting with



*Alice* The National Ballet of Canada at the Coliseum. Choreography: Glen Tetley. Costume design for Lobster Ladies by Nadine Bayliss, Lighting: Michael J Whitfield.



*La Traviata* (Verdi) Glyndebourne. Conductor: Bernard Haitink, Director: Peter Hall, Designer: John Gunter, Lighting: David Hersey, Photo: Guy Gravett.