



1

Theatre, the company moved to a permanent performance base in the Theatre Royal in 1975. Used as a television studio since the mid-1950s, the theatre was purchased by Scottish Opera and restored to its former Victorian splendour by Arup Associates. Subscription booking (the first in the UK) was introduced, and Scottish Opera's Glasgow seasons were extended to six months.

From the earliest days, Scottish Opera had commissioned stage designers on an ad hoc basis and the system continued with the expansion into the Theatre Royal. However, several lasting collaborations were set up at that time, instigated by the young director of productions, now DOP at the ENO, David Pountney. It was Pountney who introduced Maria Björnson and Sue Blane to opera design. Both had worked at the Citizens' Theatre and their fresh, often vivid, approach to design fitted well with the general mood of optimism felt in artistic circles at the time. With Björnson, Pountney embarked upon a joint Scottish Opera/Welsh National Opera cycle of works by Leos Janacek. In their production of *Jenufa*, *Katya Kabanova*, *The Makropoulos Case*, *The Cunning Little Vixen* and *From the House of the Dead*, Björnson and Pountney created a brilliant series of reference points to the great Czech composer's work. Björnson's

remarkable talent has not gone unnoticed by the commercial theatre and among her many credits are the London production of Stephen Sondheim's *Follies* and designs for *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Another designer introduced to large-scale opera in the 70s was David Fielding, whose set for a Pountney *Seraglio* — the crumbling exterior of a fading Ottoman empire — swung open to reveal a gloriously extravagant red and gold harem interior. Fielding has since collaborated with the young American director David Alden on productions of Verdi (the notorious *Rigoletto*), Berg (*Wozzeck*) and Weill (*The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*) for Scottish Opera. And it is with Weill and Pountney that he returned to the company in 1989 for Britain's first fully professional staging of *Street Scene*.

In a co-production with the English National Opera, Fielding had to come up with a design which would fit comfortably into all of the Scottish Opera's major touring venues as well as the greater expanse of the London Coliseum stage. The result, an apparently realistic New York brownstone, contained the action onto the stoop and sidewalk in front of the building. At certain moments the production spreads its wings with bursts of neon lighting and a giant ice-cream cone for one of the numbers. But it is towards the end

of Act I that Pountney and Fielding play their ace card when, in the middle of "moon-faced, starry-eyed," the entire building sweeps back through 90 degrees to reveal a highly-polished dance floor and a huge, illuminated Manhattan skyline.

Effects like this don't come cheap, but Scottish Opera's production costs — around £70,000 (US \$119,000), £140,000 (US \$238,000) for a full-length work — are

Portability has not hampered designers in their quest for visually striking images

low by European standards. The trend towards co-production is one way to keep costs down and in recent years the company has embarked on joint ventures with opera companies in Brussels, Geneva, and Madrid. With an average of five new productions every year, the 50-strong technical/wardrobe team are kept busy maintaining the repertoire. Although the construction work, especially metalwork, is done in England by companies like Bert Richman, Delstar, and Flint Scenery, all of the painting is done in Scottish Opera's own workshops in Springburn, an area to the north of the city. Within two workshops giving an area of 11,000 square feet,