



■ Allison Cook as the Duchess in 'Powder Her Face' at Warsaw's Teatr Wielki

Treliński has turned *Powder Her Face* into a tearjerker. He leaves ample space for the opera's wit, hard edge and devilish comedy. The famous scene in which the Duchess gives a waiter a blowjob takes place not in a hotel but at a petrol station. She drives a sports car in and orders from 'room service' on a pay phone; he appears looking fittingly virginal, like a 1950s youngster selling ice cream cones. And don't think the car's bonnet goes unused. In stylish sets by Boris Kudlička, the staging respected the opera's 'chamber' dimension by accommodating the audience—more than 700—on the theatre's stage in a raked tier of seats. On one side

is a hotel hallway, on the other are cubicles where men are exhibited like prostitutes in Amsterdam windows. In the centre a turntable allows the action to flow quickly, with the hotel appearing as a recurring venue. Felice Ross's lighting keeps much of the stage in darkness but never obscures the action, and Marek Adamski's costumes have period appeal.

Allison Cook's portrayal of the Duchess—a triumph in one of the New York City Opera's last productions—remains a *tour de force*, brilliantly sung and stunning in its psychological breadth. Kerstin Avemo, in sparkling voice, displayed an engaging laugh and a bright upper register—essential attributes for the Maid (and other roles)—while Leonardo Capalbo brought energy and an appealing tenor to the Electrician/Waiter. In a breathtaking display of hypocrisy, Peter Coleman-Wright, singing the various baritone roles, emerged from the Duchess's bed and proceeded to ascend a podium, from which, as the officiating judge in her divorce, he condemned her in weighted tones. The conductor Bassem Akiki (on May 19) and the orchestra dealt skilfully with Adès's fascinatingly eclectic score.

GEORGE LOOMIS

South Africa

Cape Town

It was good to have the veteran director Angelo Gobbato back at the helm for this production of *La traviata* at the ARTSCAPE OPERA HOUSE (April 30). His immense experience and obvious love of this work shone through in the subtle detailing. Indeed, aided by Faheem Bardien's lighting, Michael Mitchell's sets and stylish costumes, and Sean Bovim's lively choreography, the audience was treated to a thoroughly enjoyable

evening of operatic entertainment. The production was produced by Cape Town Opera in collaboration with the UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN OPERA SCHOOL, and it speaks volumes for the latter's credit that they could field three different casts during the run.

Noluvuyiso Mpfu (Violetta) is a gifted young performer who combined some beautiful singing with movingly convincing acting. After a somewhat nervous start Thobela Ntshanyana (Alfredo) settled down and sang with passion; he now needs to colour his singing with greater subtlety. Mandisinde Mbuyazwe gave a sound performance as Germont but perhaps lacked some of the authority and sensitivity needed to convey the moods of this complicated character.

The many smaller roles were sung with confidence, Marco Titus (Gastone) in particular displaying a promising voice and pleasing stage manner. The chorus was lively and disciplined, and the impressive University of Cape Town Symphony Orchestra gave sensitive support. Kamal Khan conducted with confident flair, his accompaniments beautifully judged, and he was constantly aware of the young voices he was nurturing.

The aim of the annual six-day SUIDOOSTERFEES (Southeaster Festival) is to celebrate Cape Town's culture and heritage 'with concerts, plays, comedy and more' and 'to pay tribute to the exuberance of Cape Town and all her people'. During this, the 12th festival, audiences were treated to three performances of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Medium* at the ARTSCAPE THEATRE (May 1). This was the first presentation by the newly-formed AFRICA ARTS, an organization that aims 'to make classical music accessible to a larger demographic in South Africa' and is 'dedicated to delivering musical productions that are relevant to South African audiences but have international appeal'. It certainly got things off to a good start, with the highly talented Matthew Wild as director and Alex Fokkens ably conducting a chamber orchestra of fine local players. Wild had chosen to set the action in an

American trailer park, an idea which worked extremely effectively, adding an uneasy, sleazy atmosphere to the fake séance and the brutal drama played out in the finale. There was a strong cast of singers. Elizabeth Frandsen (Madame Flora) was in excellent voice and her acting was totally convincing. She was well supported by her colleagues: Amanda Osorio as her daughter, Monica, Riaan Hunter and Numsa Mpfu as Mr and Mrs Gobineau, and Monica Voysey as Mrs Nolan. The role of the deaf mute, Toby, was played by Roelof Storm, subtly insinuating his strange and tragic presence throughout.

BARRY SMITH

■ (l. to r.) Elizabeth Frandsen, Amanda Osorio and Roelof Storm in 'The Medium' in Cape Town

