

Chandler Pavilion, the operetta emerged as insignificant and kitschy. The troubles began with the sound: L.A. Opera miked the dialogue but not the singing. A series of opening-night (Nov. 22) glitches and an inevitable discontinuity in the overall sonic picture left audience members alternately plugging their ears and straining to hear.

Not that there was very much worth listening to in the first place. Soprano Ashley



PUTNAM, LA'S COUNTESS MARITZA

Putnam, in the title role, looked ill-at-ease throughout the evening. She sang tentatively, with little beauty of tone and without character to speak of. As Tassilo, her estate manager-cum-lover, tenor Kevin Anderson offered a Pepsodent smile, some impressive hoofing and a thin, musical-comedy singing voice. His rivals for Maritza's affection, baritone Robert Orth (as Popolescu) and Danish tenor Gert Henning-Jensen (as Zsupán), proved far more interesting. Soprano Constance Hauman sang Lisa with beguiling point, but her manner was cloying. Sorely needed comic relief came in the final act, courtesy of mezzo Judith Christin as Princess Bozena and actor Grant Neale as Penizek, who provided obvious but well-executed humor. Santa Fe's John Crosby conducted the lumpy-sounding L.A. Opera Orchestra. The sets and costumes were of the period (1920s) but in no way memorable.

DAVID MERMELSTEIN

PORTLAND, OR

It looks as if Portland Opera, which hosted tenor Marcello Giordani's U.S. debut several seasons back, has made another exciting Italian discovery — bass Michele Bianchini, whose debut in the title role in *Don Giovanni* (seen Oct. 4) showed an easy, flowing delivery of a velvet voice that

almost croons in its seductiveness. An athletic man, whose serenade and "Finch'han dal vino" were near-perfect, he seems to be heir to the mantle of Cesare Siepi.

Bianchini's star turn is made the more impressive because he was surrounded by a superlative cast. Enrico Fissore imparted to Leporello a matchless sense of craft, timing and the occasional naïveté essential to credibility. John Osborne's Ottavio gave much pleasure and promises more: his technical skill with Mozart's killer-length vocal lines was assured. Eric Owens, a thunderous Commendatore, summoned Giovanni to dinner in hell with the terror-striking tones of a musical Darth Vader.

Sondra Radvanovsky's Anna combined Verdian vocal heft with Mozartean elegance, providing a strong counterweight to Bianchini's seductive charisma. Michaela Gurevich effectively communicated Elvira's intensity and potential for madness, giving a strong portrayal as a title character for *Smart Women, Foolish Choices*. The peasant couple of Jee Hyun Lim (Zerlina) and Jeff Morrissey (Masetto) effectively conveyed the agonies of two trying to work out a relationship. Kim's solos, especially "Vedrai, carino," revealed an affecting, well-schooled voice with a good grasp of dynamics, while Morrissey invested nobility as well as humor in his character.

Director Sandra Bernhard implemented a cohesive vision that seemed to regard the opera as being more about aristocratic depravity than individual misbehavior. Her cast played strongly to one another, paying particular attention to dyadic relationships — Giovanni/Leporello, Zerlina/Masetto, Anna/Ottavio, Zerlina/Elvira. Conductor Stewart Robertson sustained a driving, intense mood throughout.

DEREK M. MILLS