

OPERA*Don Giovanni*

Glyndebourne

Hilary Finch

EVERY road to Lewes was blocked off, leaving the village of Glynde accessible by only one narrow lane. My journey took half the day and, by the time I reached Glyndebourne, I could have eaten a horse. And this *Don Giovanni* was ready to oblige: this is Glyndebourne Touring Opera's version of the summer's new Graham Vick production which ends, notoriously, with the Don and Leporello tucking into the hapless disembowelled steed.

The landslide which dominates stage right, and the collapse of the ceiling at the end of Act I, were also undoubtedly rather too near the bone for this

already flood-shaken audience. And, as the dramatic ground shifted under their feet, this new young cast hung on for dear life, through a production which still seems stronger on sartorial effect and isolated image than on coherent thought. The stagecraft of the Act I finale — when order falls apart in the masked ball — and of the finale itself, where the Don's Hell is peopled by multiple vulpine *doppelgangers*, still looks muddled and messy.

As yet, Martyn Brabbins, making his Glyndebourne conducting debut, does little to shore things up. The GTO orchestra has a lean edge to it, but this doesn't mean that Don Giovanni's seduction of Zerlina in *La ci darem* has to be so brisk and perky, nor that the urgency of Elvira's *Fuggi, traditor* should be undercut. Pacing might well settle during

the tour; and so, no doubt, will the energetic but somewhat ragged Elvira of Mary Plazas, and the beautifully poised but as yet underpowered Donna Anna of Orla Boylan.

Michele Bianchini's Don offers rich compensation. This Italian debutant looks like a young Ruggero Raimondi, and has a voice to match: a rapier of a bass within an elegantly turned velvet glove. He is nicely complemented vocally by the baritone of Jonathan Veira, whose wittily detailed Leporello seems to love every minute of his vicarious existence.

On the very morning of the opening, Stephen Rooke fell ill, and the young Icelandic tenor Finnur Bjarnason leapt into the role of Don Ottavio. His hauntingly chaste portrayal of the role found a moving counterpart in Sarah Fox's vulnerable, wide-eyed Zerlina.

TIMES 18.10.00