

## Opera Review

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# Don Giovanni

Glyndebourne Touring Opera, Apollo Theatre, Tuesday 28th Nov and Friday 1st Dec 2000

The curtain swings back to reveal a huge pile of what looks like dirt, but could be peat, coal or something similar. The production credits in the programme reveal the hitherto unsuspected notion that this is a 'landslide' created by- boom boom- a Mr. Pyle. It is around this dominating dark mass that the action of *Don Giovanni* takes place. It also alerts one to the tone of the staging of this production- very installation art, very *Sensation*. There was no doubt of the desired effect with the unveiling of a dead horse, slung from a harness, at the beginning of the second act. This creation was a direct homage to the dead mule exhibited in the Tate a year or so ago to predictable splutters of protest.

There is an acute danger that we have become numbed against the 'shock value' of such pieces- after all, there are only so many times a pickled animal can give the spectator an uncomfortable frisson. Nevertheless, there is a strong sense of the absurd in this production, as well as fine characterisation and singing, led by the Don himself, Giovanni.

Michele Bianchini is everything that you would hope this vile seducer would be - lupine, lascivious, and at the risk of sounding laboured, louche. He struts around the stage in very tight leather trousers, cutting a swathe through the opera, and bringing an amoral, rather than immoral amusement. His lack of an extended aria means the character and motivation of the Don is never revealed, yet there is no impression that he is not fully fleshed. Indeed, every character avoided descending into caricature with some fantastic performances, especially from the slighted and tragic Donna Elvira and the clued-up Leporello, Giovanni's servant.

Every aspect of this production was layered with humour, tragedy and decadence (special mention in the last category must go to the gentleman in Donna Elvira's retinue dressed in a clear plastic hooped skirt, grotesque mask and pert, moulded breasts.) The Don's decline into degradation was well delineated : in the final scene he runs onto the stage, his perfectly groomed hair askew and his chest smeared with handprints, and feasts upon the organs of the horse - unsubtle, but effective. His descent into hell was rather less well done - he stumbled off stage right, rather than being clawed into the bowels of the earth ; but this, along with the rather scratchy translation of the libretto, is the only criticism.

Opinion seemed to be divided last night as the audience filed out of the Apollo, along predictable lines, but it would seem ridiculous to let a few props overshadow

in any way this excellent *Don Giovanni*.

Sarah Montgomery, 28 / 11 / 00