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The Stage

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Glyndebourne/Touring**Don Giovanni**

Graham Vick's production of Mozart's Don Juan masterpiece, first seen at Glyndebourne this summer, was thoroughly panned by the critical fraternity. And although it remains – literally – a pile of pooh, its new cast and conductor miraculously make irrelevant the perverse staging. The opera blazes into life.

Conductor Martyn Brabbins' secure grip on the score results in a surely-shaped reading, rhyth-

mically firm, with numerous incidental felicities en route – the descant-like cello line in 'Batti batti' was absolutely ravishing. Just occasionally, the tempo seemed a mite stolid.

The orchestra responds with fresh, clean playing, intermittent lapses in ensemble between pit and stage never undermining the drama. The firm instrumental infrastructure enables on-stage performances of gripping intensity.

Michele Bianchini's Don is a true aristocrat, sleek and sexually dangerous to the end, despite having to submit to directorial inanities. He sings off words with meaningful relish, the raven-black bass-baritone especially seductive in legato. Why, for heaven's sake, wasn't he cast in the summer? It is a mesmerising portrait.

Equally impressive are the three ladies. Oria Boylan presents a dignified Anna, her vibrant soprano shaping the setpieces with an anguished reserve. Mary Plazas' Elvira may be one of the 'piccina' of Leporello's Catalogue aria – salaciously sung by Jonathan Veira – but vocally and dramatically is a real spitfire.

Sweet-toned Sarah Fox creates a sparky Zerlina, whose hard-nut Masetto is the promising young baritone D'Arcy Bleiker, while Michael Drulett is a Commen-

datore whose big, edgy bass brings menace to his final encounter with Giovanni despite a wretched costume (dressing-gown and pyjamas). The Ottavio is rather penny-plain.

David Blewitt