

## BoV Opera Festival

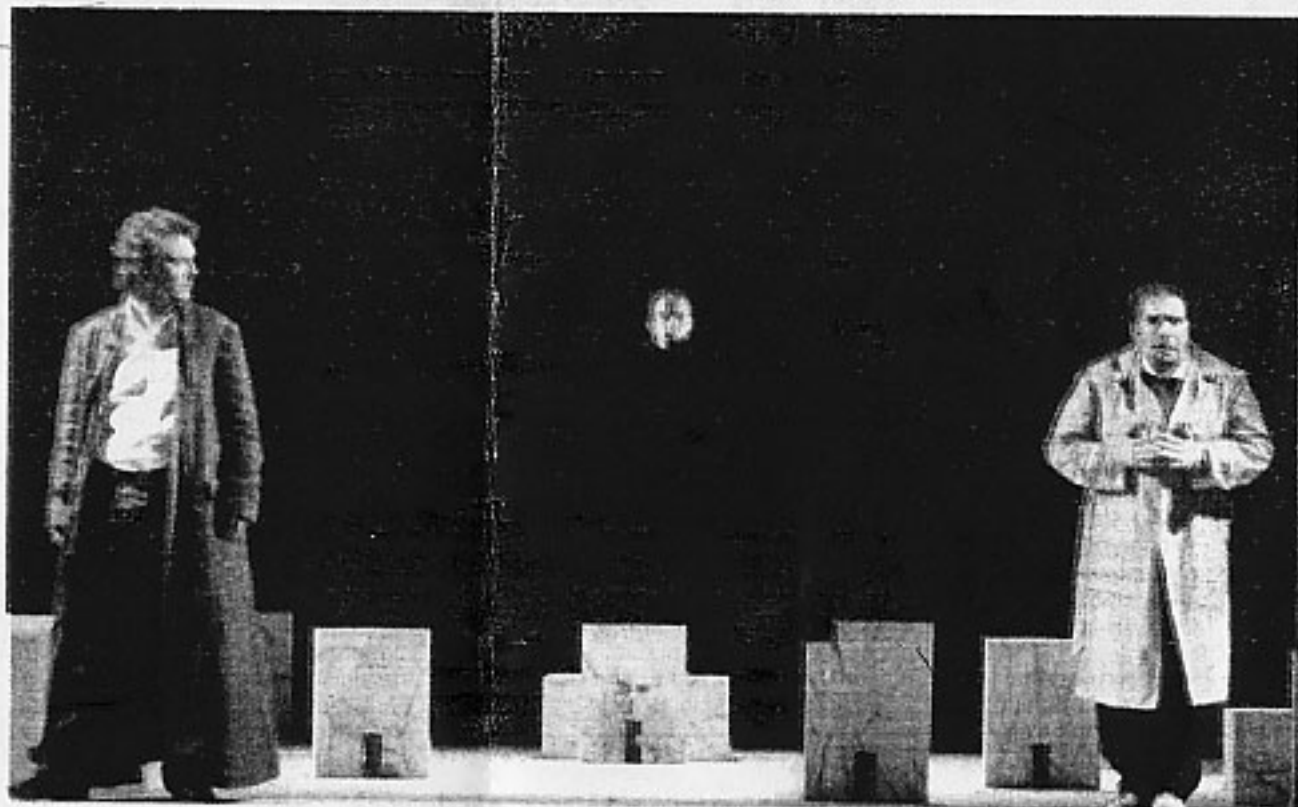
*Don Giovanni*  
Manoel Theatre

**W**ITH one exception, all the singers taking part in this production were provided by Palermo's *Operalaboratorio*. After last year's successful Mozart opera *Così fan tutte*, it was the Salzburger, again with *Don Giovanni*, which concluded the festival.

Again, this was no traditional setting. I liked Mauro Avogadro's spare, bleak production, much in keeping with the basic dramatic content of the work. There is always a debate between traditionalists and modernists. However, when there is a constant and consistently unifying streak in non-traditional productions, these can work very well. If anything there could not be much to distract from what comes out of the pit or from the stage, so one could concentrate on every aspect of the singers' performance.

To begin with, Michael Laus's handling of the National Orchestra was very good. Well-paced, incisive, balanced with perhaps a slight deviation from the latter towards the very end. Even then, when it seemed that the dramatic force of the music overcome the unrepentant Don and his ghostly dinner guest, more than a valid suspicion surfaced that this was because of some fatigue in the former and an already perceived lack of voluminousness in the latter.

Otherwise Ugo Gagliardo's handling of the title role was very good and convincing, very much in character with a pronouncedly roguish charm. Strangely disappointing was his handling of the famed *Serenade* on the second of the two performances under review here.



Ugo Gagliardo, Maurizio Lo Piccolo, Giovanni Bellavia

A faithful, patient and suffering accomplice was Giovanni Bellavia's very good Leporello, a singer with a very good comic streak. Maurizio Lo Piccolo's brief appearance as the Commendatore lacked enough power in the lower register and not being made up enough to look older further detracted from authoritative-ness. Maurizio Galli's Don Ottavio was well acted and sung but the voice is not the ideal one for the part. Vincenzo Taormina's bumbling yokel Masetto was an endearingly credible

projection offset by the charming and not-so-naive Zerlina of Lorena Scarlata.

The other two ladies, the betrayed and cheated *Donne* were respectively interpreted by Natasa Katai (Anna) and our own Lydia Caruana (Elvira). While never really at her best in the upper reaches, the former did quite well until she showed some signs of flagging well into the second act. On the other hand, Lydia Caruana was on consistently good form, perhaps the most sinned against character in the whole work.

The few appearances of the chorus proceeded smoothly... and were the country folk supposed to be smoking pot and sniffing coke besides drinking? It looked like that, a bit of stretching gone too far methinks! The novel touch of having the Commendatore brought on stage in a wheelchair may have been bizarre but not all that out of place really. One wonders what *Operalaboratorio* will come up with next year. Figaro?

**Albert-G. Storage**