



■ *Houston's new season: (l.) Alexey Dolgov as Cavaradossi and Liudmyla Monastyrka as Tosca; (r.) Megan Samarin as Olga and Katie van Kooten as Tatyana*

1997. The revival director Paula Suozzi, set and costume designer Michael Levine, and lighting designer Christine Binder conjured up striking images on a mostly bare stage. Five pole-thin tree trunks and a carpet of autumn leaves made up Madame Larina's garden; a ring of chairs circumscribed Tatyana's name-day party (with the colourfully costumed dancing guests packed inside like sardines) as well as the less claustrophobic society ball.

As Onegin, Scott Hendricks acted with starchy hauteur and sang robustly if not always ideally steadily. He did float a nicely heady *piano* at the end of his first-act aria, however. Katie Van Kooten deployed a lustrous, shimmering soprano and thrillingly thrusting top register as Tatyana and evolved affectingly from shyness to emotional strength. Norman Reinhardt's light tenor traced Lensky's poignant aria touchingly, and Dmitry Belosselskiy (who had been luxury casting as *Tosca's* Angelotti) was a richly resonant Gremin. The HGO Studio member Megan Samarin made a frisky and fresh-toned Olga while Larissa Diadkova was a ripe-toned Filippeyevna. Cynthia Clayton sang sweetly as Madame Larina and David Cangelosi delivered Monsieur Triquet's couplets brightly. The conductor Michael Hofstetter adopted an uncommonly leisurely tempo there and for Gremin's aria, and didn't linger over Tatyana's Letter Scene either, but he accelerated when emotions got heated or there was dancing to be done.

A long-running Broadway duo in 1947, Menotti's *The Telephone* and *The Medium* are enjoyable as trifling comedy and juicy melodrama respectively, and *OPERA IN THE HEIGHTS* conveyed their musical and dramatic qualities on October 30 in LAMBERT HALL.

In the former, Lucy won't get off the phone long enough for Ben to propose marriage. Because the run coincided with Halloween, Ben was given Frankenstein's monster make-up and Lucy's piled-high hair had a Bride of Frankenstein streak. This

seasonal approach seemed to prompt a good deal of mugging, but Julia Engel delivered Lucy's coloratura twitterings enjoyably and Thomas Richards voiced Ben's thwarted ardour with a strong, craggy baritone.

Staged straight by the director Lynda Keith McKnight, *The Medium* boasted a solid cast. In the role of Madame Flora, the fraudulent fortune-teller who accidentally unleashes mystic powers, the mezzo-soprano Claudia Chapa sang and acted with commanding power and conviction. As Monica, Julie Thornton contributed a sweet soprano and characterization to her mother's efforts to fleece the grieving parents Mr and Mrs Gobineau (Gwendolyn Alfred and Thomas Richards) and Mrs Nolan (Monica Isomura). Alex Scheuermann acted the mute role of the bullied Toby with fitting trepidation. The 14-member band played Menotti's ingeniously orchestrated score a bit noisily under the conductor Eiki Isomura but showed polite restraint when people were talking on the phone.

WILLIAM ALBRIGHT

Milwaukee

Both the spotlight and the shadows fell on David Kravitz's psychotic Scarpia in this blood-and-gore *Tosca* from SKYLIGHT MUSIC THEATRE (opened September 25). Kravitz's penetrating voice projected with a manic focus that had the audience transfixed by his lust for torture, rape and killing. He is a first-rate actor, too, and his glittering, devilish silver-and-black costume (designed by Kristy Leigh Hall) made him even larger than life.

Kravitz had the advantage of singing only in English, whereas Cassandra Aaron Black (*Tosca*) and Chaz'men Williams-Ali (*Cavaradossi*) switched into Italian for their big numbers; Skylight's music director Viswa Subbaraman said he could not bear to lose the beauty of Italian sounds for Puccini at his greatest. Those arias found Black and Williams-Ali at their best. Black's 'Vissi d'arte' was gripping and not at all sentimental. Williams-Ali sang a rapturous 'E lucevan le stelle'. However, the switching between English and Italian unfortunately disrupted the flow for both these performers, particularly for Williams-Ali, whose English sounded banal following his mellifluous Italian. Black was the stronger actor of the two, giving us a character as consistently mentally sick as Scarpia, one who could logically integrate killing with overpowering religious conviction.

The director Jill Anna Ponasik, in league with the lighting designer Jason Fassi, kept the shockwaves coming, with red flashing lights for the scenes of torture and killing (made more gruesome with a massive, red-pulsating crucifix cut into the stage backdrop) and a graphic staging of Cavaradossi's shooting. Subbaraman has worked hard to develop the forces in his pit since arriving in Milwaukee, and his orchestra was crucial to this production's dramatic power. Taut string playing kept the action going; subtlety from the woodwinds focused us on the darkness of the impending tragedy; unrelenting brass and thunderous percussion hammered out the path to grim destiny.

JONATHAN RICHMOND

New York

William Kentridge's production of *Lulu*, due at ENO next season, was reviewed extensively by the Editor after it first appeared at the Dutch National Opera (August 2013, pp. 1003-5). Not having seen the show in Amsterdam, I cannot comment on whatever minor tweaks may have been made to the original conception by the time it arrived at the METROPOLITAN OPERA (seen on November 9); precious few, I'd wager.