

edge to Doctor Caius. Colin Judson and Dean Robinson offered a neat combination of bafflement and bravado as Bardolph and Pistol. The chorus was as disciplined as ever.

It is hard to judge just how 'green' this production was. Suffice to say that the 'tree' of real antlers in Act 3, shed naturally by the herd at Harewood House, was an impressive assemblage. Nature will provide. But it was a tribute not only to Fuchs but also to Leslie Travers's set and Gabrielle Dalton's costumes that the evening cohered so beautifully despite the environmental economies. Green is not necessarily mean. MARTIN DREYER

## La traviata

*Instant Opera at the Normansfield Theatre, Teddington, October 7*

Instant Opera's 2022 staging of *Lucia di Lammermoor* (see December 2022, pp. 1571-2) took its visual cues from the authentic Victorian surroundings of the Normansfield Theatre. For *La traviata* the action was moved forward (with some gentle tweaking of the text) to the early 1960s and the time of the Profumo Affair. Without aspiring to pseudo-reportage, Valeria Perboni's production evoked aptly tawdry glamour in the two party scenes, set in a cramped, lametta-curtained cabaret in Soho. Violetta, now a showgirl and nightclub hostess and sporting a beehive hairdo and winged eyeliner, was stalked by four paparazzi as she sang 'Sempre libera'. Launching the Brindisi, Alfredo stood at a (dummy) microphone, but the real fresh take on that over-exposed number was supplied by the orchestra (35 players, both professional and amateur). If the spectral opening bars of the Act 1 prelude had sounded a little precarious, here there was an exhilarating brio and lift. In Act 2, the lilting introduction to 'Di Provenza' proved a similar ear-opener, with both melody and accompanying figures sensitively shaped and balanced. In fact, Lewis Gaston conducted the entire opera with a sure sense for detail, theatrical pacing and the idiom of middle-period Verdi.

Perboni's direction was at its boldest in Act 2, scene 2. The private dialogue between Violetta and Alfredo took place at the footlights while the members of the chorus, backs to the audience, silently watched dancers on the cabaret stage at the rear. Not only was this tableau starkly expressive of Violetta's alienation from her former milieu, it favoured a seamless transition into the public shaming and climactic ensemble. The more intimate scenes were less strikingly handled and certain key vocal moments were compromised when—even in this relatively intimate space—the singer was placed too far upstage.

The three principals were familiar from *Lucia*. As Violetta, Nicola Said matched spontaneity and warmth with plangency and refinement—she can spin a fine legato—expressing herself most richly in the final act. Anando Mukerjee struck an incongruously worldly figure as Alfredo, but he sang caressingly as an attentive lover and at full throttle rose impressively through the middle register. Less expansive of voice, Instant Opera's artistic director Nicholas George brought acute detail and an energizing spikiness to Germont *père*. Zofia Hanna sang with commanding sonority as Flora and Claudia Anghel was a tangy-toned, sharp-suited Annina—more PA than maid. Joshua Baxter made a suavely engaging impression as Gastone and Chris Swithinbank imbued Grenvil with resigned solicitude. As the Baron and the Marquis, René Bloice-Sanders and Douglas Somers-Lee tempered their cynicism with a certain swagger. YEHUDA SHAPIRO