

## Opera in Review

this demanding role and certainly the acting chops to make sure the vocal characterization of her isolation—from the repressed longing in her first aria through her decline and ultimate betrayal by her murderous lover—remains the focal point of the opera. Russian tenor Oleg Balashov made for a very smooth Sergei, Katerina's lover, both vocally and dramatically, while Vadim Zeplechny, although perhaps directed to play the dimwit a bit too broadly, was nonetheless effective in the less-well defined role of Katerina's husband, Zinovy. Baritone Timothy Noble made a welcome and rewarding return to the company as Katerina's father in law, Boris. A large cast of lesser characters and chorus make up the dead-end community of which the dysfunctional Ismailovs are leading citizens. Suffice here to single out the very funny turn of bass Robert Pomakov as the Chief of Police and the male chorus of Keystone-like cops as representative of the excellent ensemble work in this production. Director Curran and designer Knight are back next season to mount a new *Tosca*. Let's hope they bring what Joseph Kerman described as Puccini's "shabby little shocker" as vividly to life as they did Shostakovich's shabby big one. —Wayne Gooding

**Opera York** closed its season with a perennial audience favorite, Verdi's *La traviata*. Normally this work pretty much guarantees a sold-out house, but the opera gods were not kind on this occasion. Opening night (Mar. 1) coincided with the worst ice storm of the season, with roads to Markham Theatre so hazardous that only about 200 brave souls made the trek. (Fortunately, the bad weather abated by the second performance, which played to a full house.)

Sadly, soprano Sinéad Sugrue had to withdraw from the run due to severe

laryngitis. With one-and-a-half days' notice, Natalie Rogerson, already engaged as Violetta by Toronto Opera Repertoire, spent her nights off stepping in to save the show. Singing three per-

and the surtitled gremlin reared its ugly head again. Let's hope these little mishaps will be a thing of the past when the time comes for next season's *Madama Butterfly* and *Don Giovanni*. —Joseph So

Nicola Beller Carbone (Katerina) and Timothy Noble (Boris) in the COC's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*



formances in four days does not exactly contribute to one's vocal health, but Rogerson managed this feat honorably. Once the Act I coloratura fireworks were over, she settled down to give an affecting performance.

Partnering her was veteran tenor Keith Klassen. Looking dashing and acting with dramatic commitment, he brought a bright, clear tenor to Alfredo. As Germont père, baritone Neil Aronoff sang musically, although he didn't quite dominate the stage as any good Germont should. The secondary roles were well sung, with mezzo Louisa Cowie (Flora/Annina) deserving special mention.

The modern-dress production by Frank Pasian did the job reasonably well, although Violetta's frock in Act II was a major miscalculation. Unfortunately, the lighting changes were much too abrupt—good lighting should be imperceptible.

Conductor Geoffrey Butler led the chamber-sized Opera York Orchestra with assurance, and it is sounding better with each hearing. However, using the keyboard as accompaniment for Alfredo's offstage singing in Act I was not ideal,

**Toronto Operetta Theatre's** mid-season offering (Dec. 27-Jan 7) was a lively, cabaret-like staging of Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*, a show that remains musically and theatrically fresh half a century on from its October, 1956, premiere. TOT used a version prepared for Britain's National Theatre, with a 14-piece orchestra, here under the lively direction of the Montreal-based conductor and composer, Julian Wachner. As is often the case with TOT, what was lost in the stripped-down sets was made up for by ingenious costumes (Mireille Vashon) and lighting (Elizabeth Asseltine). The phantasmagoric *auto-da-fé* scene and colorful Venetian episode were also great examples of how creative direction (by TOT General Director Guillermo Silva-Marin) can make a little go a very long way. With the hard-working orchestra providing the underlying energy, TOT assembled an accomplished vocal cast that was both individually distinguished and impressive in ensemble. James McLennan showed a nice light, lyric tenor in the title role, while soprano Carla Huhtanen rightly stopped the