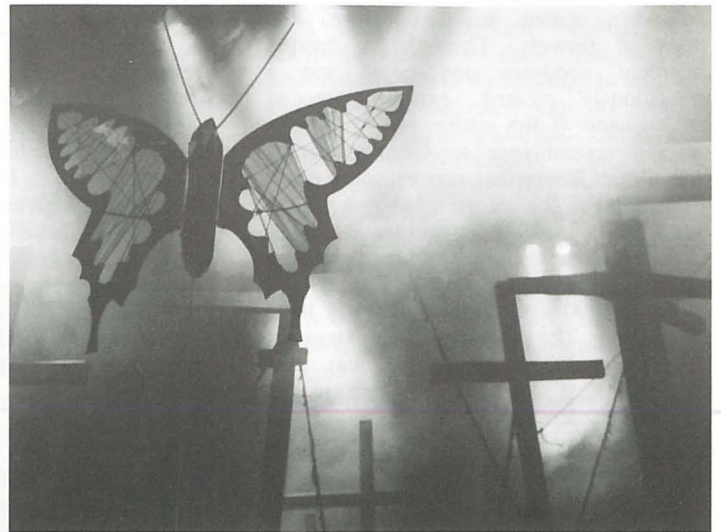




RSC's production of *Richard III* at the Barbican. Director: Bill Alexander, Designer: William Dudley, Lighting: Leo Leibovici. Photo Reg Wilson.



Part of Farrah's set at the Barbican for the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Red Noses* by Peter Barnes. Directed by Terry Hands, Lighting: Terry Hands with Clive Morris. Photo Ivan Kynel.

effect was fussy yet apologetic and half-hearted. Let us hope that the new season at the Royal Opera House has better things in store.

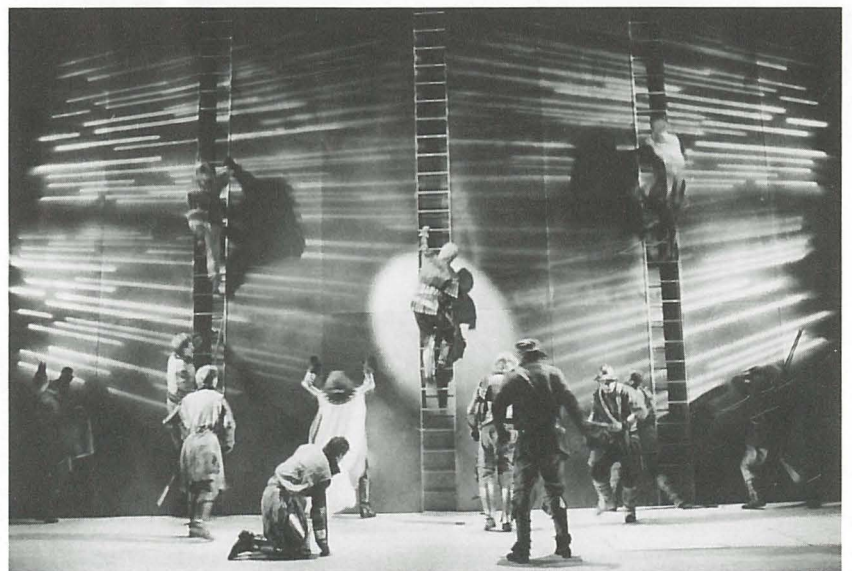
At the Coliseum both ENO's final productions of the season were of comparatively recent operas. First came Sir Michael Tippett's *Midsummer Marriage*, to celebrate the composer's 80th birthday, in a production by David Pountney, designed by Stefanos Lazaridis with costumes by Sally Gardner and lighting by Nick Chelton. I did not find it an entirely successful enterprise, not because the design was in itself poor, rather that both director and designers seemed to have had too many ideas, insufficiently worked out. Predictably perhaps this was an urban and political, rather than pastoral and romantic 'Marriage', heavy with symbolism and with Lazaridis providing an elaborate cut-out abstract set, rather reminiscent of Joan Mirò's for the Catalan company which came to Riverside Studios some years ago, but lacking Mirò's discipline beneath the freedom. With globes, placards, computers, pyramids, ladders, ropes, and furniture all jostling for place on stage it was hard to follow a theme. Nor did Sally Gardner's plastic macs over leotards for the clumsy Ritual Dances assist, though the rest of her costumes were admirably evocative of the mid-1950's when the opera was composed. Perhaps when this production is revived it will have benefited from a certain amount of reconsideration and excision: there are good things there, but a feeling that little had been fully thought out.

No such lack of clarity impeded David Freeman's production of Philip Glass's fascinating work *Akhmaten*, which also happened to have been brought to London from Houston. Here Freeman and his designer David Roger took us back to the world of Egypt 1370 B.C. by powerful imaginative suggestion. Sand and water dominated the stage, backed by a thrilling cut-out disc of the sun; threshing and brick-making continued eternally on stage and the

capital of Akhetaten was built in sandcastles and then destroyed. There was remarkably vivid use of colour and space and splendidly firm choreography for the production. Richard Riddell's lighting was likewise masterly, using great banks of floods and spots above the stage to achieve an atmosphere of their own. This was music theatre at its most stimulating and powerful. There was a similar contrast between two productions at the National Theatre. At the Olivier David Hare and Howard Brenton's new play, *Pravda*, directed by Hare himself, looked as if it had burst the seams of the smaller Cottesloe Theatre and thus taken refuge in the larger auditorium. Hare's direction seemed inept and Hayden Griffin's succession of trucked cameo sets seemed undecided, apart from a passable reproduction of the Morning Room of The Garrick Club, as to whether they intended to

be realistic or stylised. The uncredited lighting seemed similarly indecisive. Against that Philip Prowse, making his NT debut, showed no such visual uncertainty in his production of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* in the Lyttelton. His series of enclosed halls in grey and white, presided over by the black, cowed figure of Death, pervaded by the smell of incense, and peopled by mainly black clad characters, impressed strongly by their atmospheric power and operatic effect. So too did Gerry Jenkinson's immensely skilful shadow-play lighting. But eventually the effect seemed mannered and self-conscious and one began to wonder what purpose was being served and whether Prowse has as strong a grasp of direction as unquestionably he has of design.

Finally to the Barbican where the Royal Shakespeare Company have offered in the past few months, in their main theatre, three



*Siege of Harfleur* from *Henry V* at the Barbican. Design and Costumes by Bob Crowley. Lighting by Bob Bryan. Director: Adrian Nobel. Photo RSC.