



■ Nozuko Teto sells her strawberries in 'Porgy and Bess' at ENO

staging centred around a rotating wooden structure with two winged extensions. In the right corner was Porgy's room, with a bed and chair; at key moments the chorus spilled extravagantly across the stage, in Dianne McIntyre's expert choreography. Much crucial action took place up and down the stairs, with numerous cameos also capitalizing on the structure's different levels and exposed rooms. For the Act 1 finale, the action moved to a grubbier dockyard, where Crown stripped off before luring Bess offstage. Moments of physical comedy were deftly handled throughout, and the direction of individual singers and chorus displayed real verve. But overall, this production appeared anxious about engaging too closely with its subject matter, offering a slick but bland take on this fascinating if frustrating piece.

Frustrating, yes—because *Porgy and Bess*'s problems are also partly musical. Gershwin's opera contains some of the finest and best-loved arias of the 20th century, as well as some superb ensemble writing, but the opening night performance lasted nearly three and a half hours, and the first act in particular dragged badly. Thank goodness, then, for the musical contribution, because this was one of the finest teams that ENO has assembled for a long time. As Porgy, Eric Greene suffered from a slight bleatiness, but had power and charisma to spare, and sang 'Bess, you is my woman now' and 'I got plenty o' nuttin'' with total command of the style. As Bess, Nicole Cabell appeared cast against type, and had some trouble at the top, but her poise and gorgeous middle register were strong compensations. No such reservations need to be made about Latonia Moore (Serena) nor Nmon Ford (Crown), both of whom easily matched famous past performers of the roles. 'My man's gone now' was the vocal highlight of the evening, sung with sumptuous tone, excellent diction and brazen commitment—a reminder once again that Moore is a truly world-class artist. Ford was a virile and exciting villain, rock-steady in tone and oozing malice and sexual self-confidence. Alongside them, Frederick Ballentine was a playful Sportin' Life, a