



■ Michele Pertusi as Don Pasquale and Nadine Sierra as Norina in Paris

in Paris and a Rossini Figaro of international renown (not least in Pesaro and London), once again proved his bel canto credentials. The question marks hung over Nadine Sierra's Norina. She cut a lively figure on stage, looking gorgeous in a succession of fabulous frocks, but she sounded underpowered and not consistently appealing, and at times she slipped into routine, and even vulgarity.

Michieletto did not help things by opting for a kind of Brechtian alienation with

scenes where live images of the performers were projected onto a screen along with computer-generated effects. Highlighting the elements of dissimulation and deceit, he darkened the tone and suggested that Norina was in thrall to Malatesta (the relationship between the two characters was murky) and that both Ernesto and Pasquale were their victims. Unfortunately this pushed the 'special effects' scenes into melodrama, undermining moments that should be touching in their sincerity, such as the young lovers' 'Tornami a dir che m'ami'. It did not help that Evelino Pidò's conducting tended towards the prosaic.

Praise is, however, due to Paolo Fantin for his set design: a house without walls that had neon strips for a roof. Once Norina was in residence, it was transformed before the audience's eyes into a luxurious habitat for a capricious and ruthless trophy wife.

NICOLAS BLANMONT

Germany

Bremen

In his new production of *Fidelio* for THEATER BREMEN (seen on September 16), Paul-Georg Dittrich took the audience on a journey through operatic history in Act 1. While never departing entirely from the spirit of the piece, he and his designer Lena Schmid traced a succession of stagings, some of which in their time served ideological or political ends, over the course of nearly two centuries: at Vienna's Kärntner-Theater in 1814 (Biedermeier imagery); the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris in 1860 (quaint cut-outs); a *Proletkult* version in Leningrad in 1928 (the Odessa Steps sequence from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*); the Stadttheater Aachen in 1938 (a celebration of Hitler's birthday, conducted by Herbert von Karajan); the Deutsche Opernhaus Berlin in 1945; the Stadttheater Kassel in 1968 (student protests); the Semperoper Dresden in 1989, and finally the Theater Bremen in 1997 (Aldi carrier bags and workers' helmets from the Vulkan shipyard, which closed that year).

The stage action was complemented by videos of Lenin, Stalin and Hitler, bombed cities, student riots and the fall of the Berlin Wall. The dialogue was relayed as repeated