

night (or maybe not surprising, given that the venue seats 3,000) suggests there is still work to be done, but the enthusiastic reception indicated there might yet be a fan base for opera in Saudi Arabia. JOHN ALLISON



Peter Mikuláš in the title role of 'Svätopluk' in Bratislava

SLOVAKIA

Bratislava

Eugen Suchon (1908-93) is Slovakia's most important opera composer, first coming to international attention at the age of 40 with *Kvítnava* ('The Whirlpool') and ten years later producing his most well-known work, *Svätopluk*, premiered in Bratislava in 1960. It is on a grand scale, set in the period of the Great Moravian Empire (ninth to early tenth century), dealing with themes of leadership, revenge, duty, power, family, envy, sacrifice and treason.

I attended the last performance of the run on April 14 at the NATIONAL SLOVAK THEATRE (in the new house, as the historical building is closed for restoration). With a strong production directed by Roman Polák and effective stage design suggesting an industrial space by Barbora Sajgalikova, what was most striking was the quality of the music. Suchon was a master of orchestration, harmonic colours, dynamic construction and well balanced dramaturgy. Hearing this opera for the first time I was immediately reminded of Enescu's *Oedipe* in its intensity and use of large-scale choral forces, its focus on a powerful central character written for a low-voiced singer.

The expressive conductor Martin Leginus drew fine playing and singing from the orchestra and chorus. Dominating the performance was the exceptional bass Peter Mikuláš in the title role, one that he has sung many times, bringing convincing acting and rich singing to his portrayal of the character. The tenor Tomáš Zuhás was also very fine as Záboj and other roles were well taken.

MIHAI COSMA

SLOVENIA

Ljubljana

La Bohème arrived at LJUBLJANA OPERA once again, this time in a co-production with the Opéra Grand Avignon. The musical part, conducted by Kevin Rhodes, was much better than the visual. There was nothing new in Frédéric Roels's stage direction and no surprises in Lionel Lesire's sets and costumes. The Bohemians' dwelling was a bright room with large windows, the opposite of a simple garret, and Café Momus was an indifferent place with two small tables and some chairs. The best came in the third act, where Mimì found Rodolfo at a small inn.

As usual, the principal roles were double cast. At the opening performance (April 11) Martina Zadro was a wonderful Mimì with her bright, liquid, colourful soprano and