

# THEATRESCOPE

BY WILLARD MANUS



Los Angeles Opera recently announced its 2004-2005 season, which will be the largest in the company's nineteen years. Four brand-new productions, three productions new to Los Angeles, two revivals and three recitals will combine for the fullest season in history (100 performances in all).

The company premieres are **ARIADNE AUF NAXOS**, **VANESSA**, **ROMEO ET JULIETTE** and **DER ROSENKAVALIER**. Productions new to L.A. include **IDOMENEO**, **CARMEN AND SWEENEY TODD**.

The revivals are **LA BOHEME** and **AIDA**, **A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC** is a special summer event; the recitals include Bryn Terfel, Renee Fleming and Susan Graham.

Among the scheduled principal singers are Plácido Domingo, Kate Aldrich, Milena Kitic, Richard Leech, Petra Maria Schnitzer, Marco Berti, Ana Maria Martinez, Kiri Te Kanawa, Michele Crider, Franco Farina, Rolando Villazon, Anna Netrebko, Celena Shafer, Adrienne Pieczonka, Alice Coote, Jeremy Irons and

Juliet Stevenson.

Season subscriptions are currently on sale at Los Angeles Opera, (213) 872-8001. For further info visit [www.losangelesopera.com](http://www.losangelesopera.com)

**TOPDOG/UNDERDOG** is a tragicomedy that mixes satire, pungent language and in-your-face drama to tell the story of two impoverished African-American brothers, Booth (Larry Gilliard, Jr.) and Lincoln (Harold Perrineau), who are struggling to get out from under the weight of history. Written by Suzan-Lori Parks, the play has been successful in New York and regionally, winning the 2003 Pulitzer Prize.

Parks uses the metaphor of three-card monte, the street card game, to epitomize the brothers' struggle for survival. Lincoln was a past master at the scam, capable of fleecing the suckers of nearly a thousand bucks a day. But a violent incident (seeing an accomplice gunned down by an enraged victim) caused him to quit the game for a straight job—dressing up in whiteface as Abe Lincoln in a carnival

shootout gallery. Booth, the younger brother, is a wanna-be monte hustler, surviving meanwhile as a petty thief.

The play takes place in a dingy one-room apartment where the brothers shuck and jive, trading insults and jokes as they vie for power over each other (and over their own frailties, some of which stem from their bleak, abandoned childhood). Violence is never very far from the surface, especially with characters named Booth and Lincoln (Parks toys with this obvious symbolism in many ironic ways).

Director George C. Wolfe (who recently resigned as top dog at NYC's Public Theatre) has encouraged Gilliard and Perrineau to think of themselves as vaudeville—or even minstrel-show—performers. Their use of body language, voice inflection and comic patter is truly masterful. Their work combined with Parks' kinetic text makes for an astonishing evening. (Mark Taper Forum thru March 28), call (213) 628-2772 or visit [www.TaperAhmanson.com](http://www.TaperAhmanson.com)

The Anteus Company, an L.A.-based classical theatre ensemble, recently unveiled its brand-new home with an enjoyable production of four short plays by Anton Chekhov. Under the umbrella title of **CHEKHOV X 4**, the evening offered versions of *The Proposal*, *The Anniversary*, *The Bear* and *Swan Song*, all of which had separate directors and casts.

With a large part of its 70-person company showcased, Anteus delivered the goods, Working from fresh translations by Nicholas Saunders and Frank Dwyer, directors Sabin Epstein, Michael Michetti, Stephanie Shroyer and Andy Robinson mined Chekhov's comedies for maximum laughs, going over the top only once (with *The Anniversary*, a farce that Michetti allowed to become a burlesque).

There were many splendid performances, production values were solid, and Eugene Alper provided appropriately lugubrious Russian song interludes. (Thru March 21, New Place Theater Center, 4860 Vineland Ave., NOHo. (818) 506-5436)