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 IDOMENO, 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 Placido Domingo, Kate Aldrich, Milena Kito, Richard Leech, Petra Maria Schnitzer, Marco Bertl, Ana Maria Martinez, Kiri Te Kanawa, Michele Crider, Franco Farina, Rolando Villazon, Anna Netrebko, Celena Shafer, Adrainne 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.operaplace.org

TOPDOG/UNDERDOG is a tragicomedy that mixes blackly, 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 epitomise 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 shooting gallery. Booth, the younger brother, is a wannabe monte hustler, surviving meanwhile as a petty thief.

The play takes place in a dingy one-room apartment where the brothers shack 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.TaperAnmanson.com

The Antaeus 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, Antaeus delivered the goods, working from fresh translations by Nicholas Saunders and Frank Dwyer, directors Sabin Epstein, Michael Michetti, Stephanie Shroder and Andy Robinzon 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, 4160 Vineland Ave., NoHo. (818) 506-5436)