Uncouth audience fails to mar last performance of brilliant company

By DANIEL MARSH

The National Company of the Metropolitan Opera Association of New York staged five brilliant performances at Jones Hall last week.

The National Company, a select group of talented performers from the World-Famous Met, put on Verdi’s “La Traviata,” Mozart’s “The Marriage of Figaro,” Puccini’s “La Bohème,” and Benjamin Britten’s “The Rape of Lucretia.”

Traviata

Opening night Thursday saw “La Traviata” in Italian with Linda Newman, Harold Todd, and Eugene Holmes in the lead roles. Based roughly on Alexandre Dumas’ “Camille,” it featured Miss Newman as the consumptive Violeta Valéry pursued by the handsome Alfredo (Theyead) and advised by his father Germont (Holmes).

The excellent direction by Yoshio Aoyama, the beautiful sets by Rolf Gerard, and the original choreography by Rhoda Levine complemented the fine singers. The conductor of the LaMarchina of a forty-four piece orchestra was truly first rate.

Cultural Center?

Houston proved once again that it is not the cultural center of the world as the audience (what there was of it) showed its lack of color. The tittering as Holmes — a Negro — announced that he was the father of Alfredo was compounded by such remarks as, “The music was sure purty but I couldn’t quite make out the words.”

Mozart’s “The Marriage of Figaro,” a comedy rewritten in English, delighted the audience. Peter Van Ginkel as Figaro, valet to Count Almaviva (John Fiorito) and his betrothed, Susanne (Carol Courtman), the chambermaid of the Countess (Nancy Stokes) run into all sorts of difficulties trying to get married.

The action was complicated by the antics of Cherubino, a girl dressed as a boy pretending to be a girl. The part was well played by Joy Davidson.

Bohemians

Robert LaMarchina again conducted with an even smaller group, putting our local musicians to shame with their noble performance. Of note in the pit was Jona Dornemann playing an electric harpseisord.

“La Bohème,” performed Saturday night in Italian and Sunday afternoon in English, was the National Company’s best effort. The story line, concerning the struggle of young artists and poets in the Bohemian section of Paris, was top notch.

A large cast headed by Julian Patrick, Harold Enns, Carol Todd, and Linda Newman sang admirably. The audience gave them a standing ovation and six curtain calls.

Lucretia

Benjamin Britten provided an exciting night Sunday with his modern “Rape of Lucretia.” The eight singers and sixteen musicians provided a lyrical tale of love and honor in ancient Rome.

The Male Chorus, Chris LaChona, and the Female Chorus, Maralin Niska, sowed out of place in their modern dress yet were appropriate for their role of providing the thoughts of the “regular” players.

This small but excellent group, which will probably not exist next year due to a huge financial deficit, will be performing for the next two weeks in Los Angeles’ Chandler Pavilion, a music hall reputed to be better than Jones Hall.