Caldwell's Traviata took time to get going, had unbalanced cast

**LA TRAVIATA**
Starring Catherine Lamy, Noel Velasco and John Brandstetter.
Opera Company of Boston,
Conducted by Sarah Caldwell,
Opera House, May 15, 16, 20 & 22.

By JONATHAN RICHMOND

There was a Traviata that took time to get going, and had an unbalanced cast. The only consistently high-caliber performance came from John Brandstetter as Giorgio Germont, the father who prays his son Alfredo apart from his loved Violetta for the sake of the Germont family reputation.

Brandstetter's voice was powerful, commanding, imploring, and convincing Violetta to do as he bids. Brandstetter went beyond the traditional interpretation of the elder Germont as some unfeeling, callous leader.

Violetta was sung with a heartfelt lyricism, conveying a sense of conviction, rather than cun-
manship. Her reading of the letter from Giorgio Germont in which the father says that the son will return to her — was very moving, her personality increas-
ingly magnetic as the opera moved to-

wards the inevitable denouement of Violet-
ta's death.

Sarah Caldwell's tempi were not brisk enough to get the opera really moving from its start, but her orchestra provided a sensitive accompaniment to the drama of the finale, heightening the sense of tragic beauty, and taking the opera to a memora-
ble conclusion.

Ron Howard's fantasy Willow is unoriginal but has good special effects

**WILLOW**
Story by George Lucas.
Directed by Ron Howard.
Starring Val Kilmer, Joanne Whalley, Warwick Davis, and Jean Marsh.
At the Charles Cinema.

By MANAVENDRA K. THAKUR

Willow is a fairly presumptu-
ous heir to The Wizard of Oz, Snow White, Peter Pan,
Qualley's Travels, and other fantasy works. Willow's plot is just as one-
dimensional and simplistic as Star Wars, and little more than a sword-and-sorcery fairy tale. While most viewers in 1977 had little memory of fantasy swashbucklers from the 1930s and 1940s, today's audi-

ences have grown up with a glut of fantasy films and television shows. Willow's own versions of C3PO, R2D2, Vader, Solo, Skywalker, and Kenobi just aren't original enough.

The film does have enough technical proficiency to be worth seeing in 70mm now — if it's to be seen at all — rather than waiting for cable or video release. The special effects by Lucasfilm's Industri-

tal Light and Magic are convincing, espe-

cially the trolls who crawl aimlessly below bridges and up and down walls during the climactic battle scene. Adrien Biddle's wi-

descreen photography will occasionally confound the pan-and-scan video transfer techniques, as it should. And the six-track magnetic stereo sound is a joy to hear, as always.

More than thirty years ago, Akira Kur-

osawa managed to stage a far more inter-

esting battle-in-the-rain sequence in The Seven Samurai with little more than a rain-maker and a telephoto lens. All the technology in the world can't make Willow the narrative or even cinematic equal of films like Escalibur, Raiders of the Lost Ark, The Dark Crystal, and, ultimately, Star Wars.