J. Mark McVey as Valjean leads fabulous Miz

LES MISÉRABLES
Based on the novel by Victor Hugo.
Written by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schonberg.
Lyrics by Herbert Kretzmer.
Directed by Trevor Nunn.
Starring J. Mark McVey, Robert DuSold, and Susan Dawn Carson.
At the Shubert Theatre through May 26.

By SHANNON MOHER

Les Miserables, the award-winning musical based on Victor Hugo's novel, has returned to Boston for a 10-week engagement at the Shubert Theatre. Les Miserables, as many call the musical, is a must-see. The National Company, which first toured the United States with the hit last spring, puts on a fabulous performance led by J. Mark McVey, who is amazing as the musical's protagonist, Jean Valjean.

Adapted by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schonberg from the novel, Les Miserables is set in 19th century France and follows the multi-faceted life of Jean Valjean. We first see Valjean doing 19 years hard labor for stealing bread for his sister's starving family. Valjean is released from prison after realizing people's reluctance to give him a second chance.

Sang excellently in At Dreamed a Dream,' many of the actors who played the students seemed to have gained more confidence and were able to give the song the emphasis it needed and deserved.

Melissa Errico, who is making her professional debut in the role of Cosette, was a good actress but had a rather annoying voice. Her range was good and she adapted her part to show off her excellent soprano talent. As a soliste, though, her voice was too harsh to portray the character of Cosette. Peter Gochter, who played Marius, seemed very comfortable with his part. His duets in "A Heart Full of Love" and "A Little Fall of Rain" were very well done.

The set and lighting, created by the pair of John Napier and David Hersey, created an appropriate atmosphere for the action of the musical. Napier made excellent use of the Shubert's tiny stage by using a circular disk in the middle of the stage on which both set and actors could be moved. The resulting effect was of continual life-like movement. The most minute details were worked out by the team: from the appearance of stars in the sky during Javert's solo "Stars" to making it seem as if Javert had really jumped off a bridge in his suicide scene.

The performance, on the whole, was excellent, nearly perfect. This is one musical "sensation" not to be missed by anyone.

Bashmet gives profound reading of Schnittke concerto

Gennady Rozhdestvensky, conductor.
Tanglewood Festival Chorus.
John Oliver, conductor.
Yuri Bashmet, viola soloist.
Program of works by Schnittke and Berlioz.
Symphony Hall, April 5, 7 & 10 at 8 pm, today at 2 pm.

By JONATHAN RICHMOND

Aleksei Schnittke's Violin Concerto, given its American premiere last night by Yuri Bashmet, was a treat for the ears. Bashmet, who performed at the 1988 U.S.-Soviet Cultural Exchange Festival in Boston is an extraordinary violinist, drawing both a richness and an intensity from his instrument like nobody else. Schnittke's work has its core an intense lyricism, and for his reading of it Bashmet produced a hypnotic sound of profound and spiritual beauty.

There are many passages of darkness, and Bashmet soared insightfully through their nooks and crannies. He found immense but tightly-controlled power to drive home dissonances, but also a sly humor during some of the faster, most circus-like passages.

There are powerful rhythms at play in Schnittke's work, and Bashmet was sharply attuned to them, whether in the world of the waltz, or in the many complexes, most unworlly measures that make up this unusual concerto.

There are no violins in Schnittke's score, giving the orchestral sound an unusually deep and piquant coloration. There is much percussion, a harp, celesta, and piano. The Boston Symphony Orches-stra performed energetically, but somehow seemed uncomfortable with the score; the audience's attention was focused especially on the soloist. And the performance Yuri Bashmet gave was gripping, and of a religious level of significance.

The concert ended with the Berlioz Deux Trios, performed by the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, which celebrates its 200th birthday this weekend. The choral sound was exceptionally well-balanced, and singing served to effectively underline the dramatic content of the work. The power of voices and unity the chorus achieved was important in giving shape and coherence to the work. There were, nonetheless, some lapses in clarity.

The orchestral sound drummed up by Gennady Rozhdestvensky was certainly exciting—the audience was grateful for some active participation from the brass section. But it was over-powering, and at times buried the chorus, making for an unattractive blend.