

# High standards

## Porgy and Bess

Festival Theatre, Thursday-Saturday

**T**HE livin' is easy but life is cheap in Catfish Row. The story of crippled Porgy and his love for the weak-willed Bess is given a musically compelling production that sprawls across the Festival Theatre stage.

From *Summertime* to *I'm on My Way*, the Gershwin songs pour from the committed throats of some very fine singers indeed.

This well-constructed and well-practised show has been touring the world – and the familiarity with the music shows in the solos and the equally important choral numbers.

The production style is very traditional, where lurid lighting sweeps across the scaffolding set.

The cast build a convincing on-stage community, where gospel Christianity and voodoo coexist.

The stage direction of Susan Williams-Finch keeps everyone busy, and stays just this side of stereotyping.

La-Rose Saxon and Cedric Cannon bring emotional conviction to the title roles, though Stephen Finch's psychotic Crown sways the action his way every time he appears.

Heather Hill sings *Summertime* and immediately sets the musical and emotional standard of the show, but vocal honours go to Theresa Hamm-



**EMOTIONAL CONVICTION:** Bess (La Rose Saxon), Porgy (Cedric Cannon) and Crown (Stephen Finch).

Smith as Serena whose funeral lament hits home. Jarret Ali-Boyd as Robbins and Marvin Lowe as Jake possess equally attractive baritone voices and relish the songs they sing. The character work from Ronn K. Smith and Stephanie Beadle as Sportin' Life and the pipe-smoking Maria adds another level to the drama.

The predominantly local orchestra is

light-on in the string section, but there's some fine clarinet playing, and conductor Stefan Kozinski builds his climaxes surely.

Some people might find the production style a little dated but a rare opportunity to see this masterpiece of music theatre should never be passed up.

Ewart Shaw