

NEW YORK POST

A Wilde head trip

By SHIRLEY FLEMING

OPERA'S nastiest teenager arrived on the stage of New York City Opera this week in a new production of Richard Strauss' "Salome," and — of course — she got what she wanted: the head of John the Baptist.

"Salome" is a heavy-duty affair, a nonstop hour and a half of strenuous singing and orchestral tumult. It's probably not the kind of work you'd normally expect from City Opera, which rightly or wrongly we tend to associate with lighter stuff.

But the company pulled it off, presenting three important new singers in key roles and the durable and ever-impressive Mark Delavan as the prophet, rising thunderously out of his prison well and, to put it nicely, telling Salome to back off.

OPERA REVIEW

SALOME

New York City Opera, Lincoln Center.

The next performance is tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. For information, call (212) 496-0600.

The repulsive element in Oscar Wilde's play, which is the basis of the opera, must be captured in a good production, and debut director Ian Judge had no trouble conveying the decadence, giving Salome free rein to do all manner of disgusting things with the severed head and drumming up considerable sexual allure in the famous Dance of the Seven Veils.

Salome herself, sung by newcomer Eilana Lappalainen with untiring force, projected the character of a spoiled girl who is petulant, childish, demanding, and finally just plain nuts. Lappalainen even managed the Dance (the downfall of many an overweight soprano) without visible pain — to her or to us.

Shedding the veils didn't really count for much; nudity was scarcely suggested.

Richard Berkeley-Steele made an impressive debut as Herod — a handsome man moving with lithe grace (call it sinister in this context) and commanding a powerful, expressive tenor.

The third notable new arrival was Brandon Jovanovich, as a youthful and well-focused Narraboth.