

"MISS PHOEBE" BLOSSOMS AFTER AN UNEASY START

"DEAR Miss Phoebe," Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's lavish musical production, which opened at the Regent Theatre on Monday, has you humming the tunes, tapping your feet, feeling happy and generally enjoying yourself—but not until mid-way through the performance. At any rate, that's how it appeared on the opening night.

The company packed the gaiety and sparkle almost exclusively into the second act, leaving the first half much too quiet and pedestrian.

In this costume musical by Christopher Hassall and Harry Parr Davies, the costumes are magnificent and the whole production has an air of opulence about it.

Less ostentatious, however, are the voices, the very essence of the show. There are some sweet little voices among the ladies of the cast, but be a voice ever so sweet it is no good if only those in the front row of the stalls can hear it.

DASHING HERO

To play the lead the company have fortunately found a man who can be heard. He is Wilfred Cosham. His is one of the few voices that reach the cheap seats at the back. Also his acting matches up to his singing, and he makes a really dashing Captain Brown, hero of the Napoleonic war.

Opposite him as "Miss Phoebe" is Vera Evans. Charming she looks and sweetly she sings, although her dulcet soprano tones tend to be lost when she turns aside from the audience.

WINNING COUPLE

It is the secondary couple, however, who jerk the production into life after an uneasy start. Diane Lawson is mainly responsible for this as the maid Patty. Not having to be genteel she is boisterous in both her singing and acting. A most enjoyable character.

Her opposite number is the big, beefy, bullying recruiting sergeant, who, underneath his gold-frogged scarlet uniform and lofty shako, is Jim Welham, ideal in the part.

Also a prime mover in keeping the show ticking over until it bursts joyously forth in the second act is Helen Eldridge. She is a real trooper and throws all her skill and experience into the part of Phoebe's sister, and sings with feeling and sincerity.

Grace Hawes, Winifred Pollett and Lillian George, as the three spinster ladies of Quality Street, wherein the play is set, all come into their own in the second

half, and, reinforced by Stan Parsons as the dashing Ensign Blades, Robin Sampson and Pat Hammett, they add their weight to the job of really putting across the gay, extravagant plot.

WELL DRILLED

A beautifully drilled team of dancers, with June Gilbey very much in evidence, and a chorus both elegant and easy on the ear, add colour and weight to the performance.

A particularly pleasing piece of team-work is the scene after the ball when Tony Richardson, as a night watchman, wends his way through a group of late-night revellers, assuring them musically and with an attractive voice that all is well, while dancers with lanterns make this a really picturesque episode.

NEAR PROFESSIONAL

With such a setting as the show has and with all the tremendous effort that has gone into making it a success, the production comes very close to professional standard.

In addition to those already mentioned the cast includes: Trixie Brew, June Gilbey, Iris Harvey, Ann Jackman, Betty Louise Jackman, Pat Matthews, Irene Scott and Betty Wager as children and dancers; and Margaret Anelli, Cherry Beckwith, Shirley Clark, June Davies, Elizabeth Dutton, Christine Eves, Jane Horrey, Doreen Hurrell, Sheila de Laspée, Jean Linn, Muriel Passmore, Ruth Robinson, Peggy Welham, Fred Anelli, Derek Ann, Sid Collicott, Ken Collins, John Daldry, Fred Gisby, John Hewitt, John Marden, John Morella and Peter Smith. Producer Phyl Payne has her cast drilled to near perfection and the scenes come and go with military precision.

Each year the Chelmsford Society's production has been the highlight of the amateur stage season in Mid-Essex. This week shows it still is.

There are further performances tonight and tomorrow.

J.N.P.



Our cameraman took these pictures at Sunday's rehearsal of "Dear Miss Phoebe." Top: Four of the Redcoats relax in the seats between calls. Top left: Some of the stagehands who worked all night to prepare for the rehearsal. Right: The producer, Phyl Payne, directing operations. Centre left: Some of the cast break for lunch. Bottom left and right: Scenes in the show.