

The days when romance had a capital 'R'

AH, FOR the good old days. The days when a sheikh meant Romance. Romance with a capital 'R'. When assignations took place behind closed tent flaps and never a nipple in sight. When the moon shone across the desert and love started only when the row of chapter-

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"The Desert Song" — Civic Theatre

ending dots had positively finished. Oh, for the days when a sheikh meant all those things and there was never a mention of Cadillacs, oil, the balance of payments and the imminent threat of democracy.

I wax melancholic since I've been to see Sigmund Romberg's totally ridiculous *The Desert Song*. Ray Jeffery's production is being presented all this week by The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre.

There is obviously some historic appeal in watching this show but it was much too long and repetitive for my taste. The opening was dreary in the extreme and it was only in the third scene with the beautifully composed and impressively executed and extremely complicated *Marching Song* that I woke up and recognised the talents of choreographer and company.

However, if you can stomach the banal plot and *Colour and Romance* is what you want, then you'll come away from the Civic humming the tunes and with your heart aflutter.

There are some excellent performances. Neil Michael has a good voice, commanding stage presence and provides all the panache that the role of Pierre, alias *The Red Shadow*, needs. Gay Jackson plays Margot Bonvalet and looks very good in the *Shadow's* arms, sings nicely, but will insist on a most odd intonation when speaking, usually catching the

wrong word in a sentence.

Angela Jenner plays a native Moroccan. You know the type: long, dirty hair; dances a lot and has that way of being unable to approach a white man without leaning all over him. Margaret Burgess plays Silly Susan and screeches something awful while doing it. I can quite understand Peter Smith as Benjamin Kidd wanting to get away from it. These latter two provide the comic relief. By the end of the week's run I can imagine that all the lines will be timed correctly and some of the very funny jokes which were lost on the first night will be given their full value.

The dancing ensemble is magnificently trained. "It" (if you are as old as me you have read about "It" in the theatre text-books) is a superb number, danced exuberantly and wittily by the whole bright and breezy company.

JON RICHARDS



Neil Michael and Gay Jackson calm first night nerves with a quick drink in the Green Room before Monday's first night.