

Opera group's rousing frolic

"FLASH, Bang, Wallop, what a show" claims the publicity for the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of **Half a Sixpence** and I for one will be making no complaints under the Trades Descriptions Act.

There are some tremendous things in it and you can see for your self all this week at the Civic Theatre. The big set pieces are exuberantly danced, stunningly choreographed, and enthusiastically sung. The banjo number ("Money to Burn") had me quite out of breath just to look at it and "Flash, Bang, Wallop" is most amusingly done. "The Party's On The House" is also very exciting to watch and even the curtain call is a delight to see as the whole company weaves its way onto the stage and takes a well deserved bow.

There are several very fine individual performances. I've never seen Peter Smith better than as Arthur Kipps. He is at all times excellent. Margaret Burgess is quite superb as his wife and has a most impressive way of belting out a number; but at the next moment she can be loving and sad as well. Stan Parsons grabs the role of Chitterlow with both hands and turns in a magnificent portrait of the grand old Victorian actor.

If other performances don't quite come up to these three outstanding interpretations individually, nonetheless as a company they are splendid together and provide a rousing evening's entertainment. Ray Jeffery is

the producer responsible for all this excellence and the Musical Director is Robert Ladkin who keeps his players under control and ensures some good playing.

Unfortunately, two things marred the opening night and both were, I suspect, due to lack of rehearsal. The lighting and scene changing were abominable. It's not often you hear derisive clapping because the scene-shifters have left something on stage or something has gone very wrong but on Monday nothing seemed to go right. I am sure that by the time you read this the doors will open, the curtains will close and the properties will be struck, all at the right time, but it was all very slow and dreary on Monday. However, nothing could dim the vitality of the performers and that came over bright and sure.

JON RICHARDS