

Sedate pace kills off Novello's King

KINGS Rhapsody limps to the finishing line at the Civic Theatre this week in three hours 15 minutes. The Ivor Novello musical is presented by Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society under the direction of Ray Jeffery.

I'm afraid the master of movement has lost his touch. A slow dignified pace would have been right, but crawling tedium is not.

Of course the story and

lyrics do not help. The mood of the musical moves between sweet syrup and turgid treacle into a mess of sentimentality. No wonder the actors get cloyed up — but oh, if only they could desist from a delivery of five words a minute.

A brilliant exception is Joy Wallace who takes the part of the Queen Elana of Murania. Fancy a mother-in-law stealing the show! Good grief, one thinks, as she commands

the boards, someone who can act, instead of posturing. She has tons of stage presence and a rich mature voice which projects effortlessly to the back of the hall.

However there are other features one can admire and enjoy if one adjusts to the creaking pace. Gay Jackson as the heroine Princess Christiane has a lovely voice and charming manner. It is a pity that her best songs have to reach us from the back of

the stage, where she sits playing pseudo-piano to the strains of a harp.

Peter Smith as Nikki, her secretly adored husband who for 20 years preferred the company of his actress mistress to any other women, is so limp in speech and deportment that it undermines the authenticity of the women's passion for him.

Diane Watson as Marta Karillos — the other woman — is very fine indeed. She looks good and sounds good.

The sets are attractive on the whole, though a bit tatty, and the scene shifters do a miraculous job with one or two thunderous exceptions. You will enjoy the dazzling changes of dress and as the second half proceeds several glittering, regal scenes dazzle the eye.

The memorable songs under the direction of Ian Hayter include Some Day My Heart Will Awake, Mountain Dove and the Chorus number Take Your Girl which comes over with the old vigour. I suppose that this group has been belting out less restrained lyrics for so long that they are slightly non-plussed with the change of direction and generally are unsympathetic to Novello's niceness.

As for the story . . . well with three hours and fifteen minutes to digest it so slowly,

