

Helene

hotch potch

TAKE the ancient Greek islands of Sparta and Napula, add large quantities of music by the French composer, Jacques Offenbach, and a book and lyrics by an Englishman, Phil Park.

Add some seasoning in the form of topical illusions supplied by the cast, and you have all the ingredients in Ray Jeffery's production for Chelmsford Amateur Operatic Society of La Belle Helene at the Civic Theatre this week.

It makes for a hotch potch (or should I say hot pot) of styles and all the brilliant movement, style, polish and pace of Mr Jeffery's production cannot disguise the fact this is an unevenly constructed show.

The story is based on the legendary wooing of Helen (Gay Jackson) by Paris (Eric Sutton) who, smoothly, oh so smoothly, overcomes the girl with flowing cadences of speech and seductive movements, mentally easing the clothes off her with each sentence.

EQUALLS

This should be a wooing of equals, but for all Mr Sutton's efforts to scale down his voice to match the size of Miss Jackson's, it is not, as Helen never has the command of her role that Paris has, nor are her movements as smooth flowing.

Russ Watson obviously uses Frankie Howerd as a model for his interpretation of Calchas, the augur, and Stan Parson's hilarious King Menelaus is straight out of Coronation Street.

Robin Sampson (Agememnon), Brian Tollisen (Achilles), and Dudley Smith (Ajax) make a good set of Greek Kings with Peter Smith a cheerful, cheeky Orestes, and Betty Worrall a skilfully adept Nesta.

In the smaller roles Eamonn Grey's Mercury stands out for its grace of movement and Lynette Bendall and Margaret Burgess make Leona and Cressida a couple of flirty "flappers," ancient Greek style.

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