

Houses full for My Fair Lady

HOW nice to be able to report all the seats have been sold for the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of *My Fair Lady* at the town's Civic Theatre this week.

And it's even nicer to be able to add in all sincerity — they deserve to be!

Once again maestro Ray Jeffery has come up with a show which combines elements of the spectacular, pathos, beauty and polish.

Once again Mr Jeffery displays new facets of his skills — his handling of the operatic society's chorus has never been better, their work is snappy, crisp and bursting with life throughout the show.

Indeed one of my very few grumbles is that in moments like the cockney wedding dance following *I'm Getting Married In The Morning* there is almost too much going on on the stage to take in at one viewing of the show!

INTENSITY

Mr Jeffery also reveals himself as adept at bringing out the drama of the verbal exchanges between the professor of phonetics, Henry Higgins (David Hawkins) and his spirited pupil, Eliza Doolittle (Pam Medcroft) which are invested with an almost Shakespearian intensity of emotion.

This is the second time David Hawkins has played Higgins for the society and, while I enjoyed his earlier performance, it pales into insignificance alongside his more dynamic alert characterisation of 1978.

Everything about Higgins — his self-satisfaction, smugness, complacency and the gradual reluctant realisation that Eliza means something more than just a servant to him — is brought out that bit more vividly.

And his handling of Higgins talk-through songs like *I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face* and *I'm An Ordinary Man* are delivered with greater conviction and built up into climaxes with far greater skill.

Pam Medcroft's Eliza is no less magnificent a performance, full of Cockney fire and temperament,

spitting like a cat and showing claws when roused, yet full of genuine good heartedness underneath.

Her singing of *Wouldn't It Be Lovely* has pathos, *I Could Have Danced All Night*, a childlike joy, while her acting in the Covent Garden flower market scene in act II brings a lump to the throat.

But perhaps her most effective moment occurs at the start of act II where she wanders around the stage, ignored by Higgins and Colonel Pickering too full of their own triumphs at the embassy ball, seething and miserable, without saying a word, her face telling the whole story.

I can't pretend I'm altogether happy with Robin Sampson's *Doolittle*. I think he plays his part in keeping the show moving at a spanking pace.

Neville Shreeve, taking over the role of Colonel Pickering, following the untimely death of Stan Parsons, brings an air of old world courtesy and charm to the part and Patrick Tucker makes Freddie Eynsford-Hill's infatuation for Eliza seem genuine.

Joy Wallace is graciousness itself as Mrs Higgins. It's almost worth

the price of a ticket just to hear the subtle inflections she puts into such lines as "Charles, you had better stay close to the car. I may be leaving abruptly."

DIGNITY

And it's lovely to see Peggy Green Back on stage as the queen of Transylvania. She doesn't have a great deal to do, but everything she does is invested with a true regal dignity.

The society's new musical director, Anton Archer, is drawing crisp, strongly rhythmic playing from the orchestra, and gives magnificent support to the singers on stage.

He also allows us to hear and appreciate composer Frederick Loewe's many fine touches of orchestration.

My Fair Lady is a long show — three hours 20 minutes on Monday — although by now one or two of the first night snags will have been ironed out and it may be slightly shorter.

But the highest tribute I can pay to this the fourth or fifth *My Fair Lady* I've reviewed, is that I would have been happy to have sat all night watching it!

LOOKING FOR THE MEN IN THE DESERT

THE Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society members virtually work all the year round. Within 96 hours of the curtain coming down on *My Fair Lady* on Saturday they will be holding auditions for their autumn show, *Desert Song* in September.

"And we're particularly looking for men. We find them always a little harder to come by for our autumn shows,"

Chris Yorke-Edwards explained to me over the phone on Tuesday morning.

Auditions for principals are being held on Wednesday April 12 and for chorus on Thursday April 13 at Great Baddow School's Primmer Hall starting at 7.30 pm, and anyone interested should certainly try and go along to the pre-audition rehearsal on the Tuesday as well — same place and same time.