

Pickwick at The Regent

1972

BEFORE writing this review I allowed 24 hours to pass after seeing Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of "Pickwick" at the Regent Theatre.

But it made no difference. It still seemed a rather slapdash production with the first performance looking no better than a rough dress rehearsal.

I know it's a tremendous undertaking; I know there's a big cast; I know that the company gets all too short a time for technical rehearsals in the Regent; but this just should not be apparent when the audience has filled the theatre on the first night. It should—and ought—to settle down by the time you read this. But I have to write as I found it last Monday.

There were some good performances. But the overall impression was of lots of people not knowing quite where they should be and lights and curtains operating just too early or a bit too late.

When Fred Costello has committed all his lines to memory and no longer needs the conductor to tell him across the footlights what to sing, then his portrayal of Dickens's jovial character Pickwick will be very enjoyable.

He appears to be a most likeable, capable, inventive performer but apparent inadequate rehearsal prevented him from realising his full potential.

The show is stolen by Peter Smith as Sam Weller. Singing, dancing, performing, acrobatics, this was a gutsy, lively, full-blooded characterisation and one I thoroughly enjoyed. "Talk Yourself Out of It" was superbly sung.

The members of the Pickwick Club were all competently played by John Cave, Eric Sutton and John Daldry although there was perhaps not quite sufficient differentiation in their characterisations.

Peter Farmer made a good job of the likeable rogue Mr. Jingle and Pat Viles thoroughly enjoyed herself as the unfortunate Mrs. Bardell.

The courtroom scene was the most successful in sustaining the humour although from where I was sitting it was impossible to see the Judge, placed as he was in the stage left box, masked by a screen.

J. Armitage-Fuggle led the small, tuneful orchestra through Cyril Ormandel's music with skill and control. But he couldn't disguise the ponderously slow and inaccurate movements on stage.

A genteel Edwardian air pervades the whole Society with its programme request for ladies with hats to remove them and "Hon" this and "Hon" that. An injection of new talent and new management might well rescue the group from the doldrums in which they apparently find themselves.

JON RICHARDS