

# Arts reviews

IT IS easy to understand why audiences from all over the county are flocking to Chelmsford's Civic Theatre this week to see Showboat.

For Ray Jeffery's production of this timeless Hammerstein and Kern musical, packed full of memorable melodies, is artistically conceived and has flair, panache and style.

By drastically pruning the overlong script Mr Jeffery has created a leaner more punchy Showboat whose story of true love against a background of racial tension, is as topical today as when it first took New York by storm in 1927.

Heading an exceptionally strong cast is Patrick Tucker as Gaylord Ravehal, the courtly romantic gambler, and Christine Nicol, fresh and delightful, as Magnolia Hawks.

Comedy is in the experienced hands of Peter Smith as Captain Andy Hawks who scores laugh after laugh at the expense of his shrewish wife (Angela Broad).

Robin Sampson scores a double hit both as a singer and an actor in the role of Joe and together with Patricia Day as his stage wife the duet It Still Suits Me is a marvellous musical expression of an understanding marriage.

Dawn Sampson produces a most artistic performance as Julie with her singing of Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man being full of poignancy; Rachel Parsons makes a wholly convincing transformation from a ham actress on a showboat to the mother of a Hollywood starlet and Tony Carpenter and Roy Coburn produce an hilarious cameo as a couple of Backwoodsmen.

Mr Jeffery has also created a number of dances that are in turn exciting, charming and moving in a show that has everything.