

Arts reviews

RAPTUROUS WELCOME

CHELMSFORD Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of *The Sound Of Music* at the Civic Theatre this week is a sell out. And deservedly so.

For Ray Jeffery has taken the director's equivalent of a scalpel and cleanly removed all the excess sentiment that can so easily clog up this most popular of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals.

In his hands the natural charm of the story emerges all the more freshly while the dramatic elements of the second act, presented with a chilling realism, are purged of their melodramatic overtones.

Monday's first night audience rapturously welcomed the familiar tunes with all the enthusiasm of old friends reunited after a long absence.

They accorded a special welcome for the thrillingly sung performance of *Climb Every Mountain* by Jill Plumtree as the Mother Abbess, whose acting is also stamped with an authority truly ecclesiastical.

As Maria, Rachel Parsons catches the character's essential innocence and joyful charm, the warmth of her performance standing her in particularly good stead in the scenes with the Von Trapp children.

But her singing on Monday was not always dead in tune while, as Captain Van Trapp, Ken Cooper's acting carries discretion to extremes with the tone of his singing suggesting he is struggling with a throat infection.

The children — on Monday Caroline Escott, Jonathan Davies, Alexia Burland, Andrew Ross, Kirstie Sharp, Michele Grant and Nicola Dunbar but there is another cast for some of the other performances — stole the show.

Not only was their ensemble acting a sheer delight but each one gave a performance of real individuality, as did Patrick Tucker as the smooth-talking Max Detweiler.

Audrey Hinton displays a suitably apt surface charm as Elsa Schraeder Arthur Hull makes a realistic job of a sadistic Gaultier, and the singing of the female chorus is considerably above even, CAODS, normal high standard.

PETER ANDREWS