

# Audience voted Valerie as Chelmsford's best actress

CHELMSFORD Operatic Society's fourth straight play, "And So To Bed," is without a doubt their best. J. B. Fagan's comedy of Restoration life, based on part of Samuel Pepy's diary, is an excellent choice and with strong actors in leading roles, Producer Eric Douglas has done truly well.

A packed first-night audience yesterday applauded the show at the Regent warmly and appreciatively.

All the more credit to Mr. Douglas as the Society's first straight show amateur producer.

No doubt his experience with his chief actors in another society in the town helped him.

*Outstanding in the show is Valerie Berkeley as Elizabeth — Pepy's wife. Her portrayal of the vivacious but jealous young foreign woman showed her consummate acting ability. Her voice never lost its French accent and she showed emotion not with her face, or her hands, but with her whole tensed body.*

Her playing shows she fully deserves the title overheard given her in a Chelmsford restaurant—"Our best actress of straight stuff."

Frank Page in the major role of the diarist showed his usual care to detail. As the rogue and the erstwhile lover he was delightful, as a repentent fool he descended at times from comedy to slap-stick. His neat timing with the dubbed flageolet playing was praiseworthy.

In the scenes with his drinking companions and when he was trying to seduce Mistress Knight (a meritable performance by Helen Eldridge) he was at his best.

Of the companions, Frank Morgan outshone the others as a

ridiculous fop newly returned from France with all its so-called superiorities in art to London. His exaggeration was clever and not overdone. Perhaps he could afford to be even more flowery than last night.

## Right royally

King Charles was played right royally by Donald Leech. His characterisation of the "Merry Monarch" was a combination of majesty, jollity and regal lechery. Barbara Braun gave an interesting study as Mistress Knight's pert maid. A small role which hinted at acting powers worth better trial.

Little James Michael played a more subdued Pelling than one would expect of a naturally irrepressible comedian. Others in the drinking party were Ruth Bew and Ann Foreman (playing typical actresses of the time) and Peter Smith, too melancholy as a musician.

Alec Torry played the King's servant, Prodgers, and Martin Trump, Pepy's boy. Gladys Brookes and Rosemary Gornall played the unhappy servant-girls in the adventurous Pepy's household, with Doris Trump, who as a blackamoor needed more black to stand the strong footlighting in the Regent.

Cecil Bocking, as often demanded, filled in with a small part—a watchman.

The play itself went with a slickness (denoting much demanding by the producer in rehearsal) that collapsed at times—most obvious were when the show songs of the period were sung, as they were at frequent intervals.

*Footnote from the audience in general—when the Act Two curtain went up a "slow-clap" (showing its satirical nature) demonstrated that an interval stretching over twenty minutes between acts is too much for even a Monday night (two seats for the price of one) audience.*

Back-stage workers included Dan Matthews, Phil Berkeley, F. W. M. Powley, Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Catt, S. J. Jackman, E. P. Herries, Mrs. Mary Leech, and P. Russell.

K. W.