

"THE DESERT SONG"

CHELMSFORD SOCIETY'S REVIVAL

First Post War Effort is
a Good Show

PRESENTING their first show since the war, Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society are this week attracting good houses for "The Desert Song," which is being given at the Regent Theatre.

It is about 20 years since its best half-dozen tunes first swept the country — one well remembers the stirring Harry Welchman's recording of the Riff Song. Since then the big Hollywood productions have set new popular standards in musicals. But "The Desert Song" still wears well, and even those whose desert song was "Lilli Martens" will be able to enjoy the never-never desert which appears on the stage of the Regent this week.

The Society did "The Desert Song" eleven years ago, and this week they were still able to call on five of the principals from the previous show, while the aged bones of the story have been clothed with some up-to-date additional dialogue. "Have a cigarette," says Benny to a Riff, "they're British — three and fourpence."

The strength of this year's "Desert Song" is that all the principals can sing well. The experienced producer, Madge Macklin, has seen to it that they do not just stand still and sing — there is plenty of "business" to keep the eye pleased as well as the ear, and enough acting ability to satisfy the required standards.

Leonard Pease and Dorothy Cox, as the Red Shadow and Margot, are expert singers who go through their parts with real gusto and they largely make the show. Of Mr. Pease it may be said that he repeated his 1935 success, surely praise enough, while Miss Cox, making her first appearance with the society in the soprano lead scores the success which ability deserves.

On the comedy side Fred Munnion, long a stalwart of the Society, had a nice line in comic cowardice. Some of the gags may be old; others were new, and Mr. Munnion's expressive face gave them all full value. His scenes with Cecil Bocking, who was Hassi also in 1936, were rich comedy.

Audrey Parrett, another member of the old cast, had a flashing eye and serpentine sinuosity as Azuri, queen of the harem. Vera Stock sang notably well as the lady of the Brass Key, and Odette Clarke reminded us that the Dumb Blonde is, in musical comedy, always with us. Other principals were Jan Frewer, a dignified General; Reginald Bowler, Jim Welham, Douglas Catt, Phyllis Rowe, Richard Wood, Tom Harper, Jose Hadler and Reg Brown.

The orchestra is conducted by Bert Sharpe, and the chorus master is Mr. R. Gilbert.

The chorus and dancing girls had rehearsed well. On the opening night few seemed wholly happy in their work, but by Tuesday wreathed smiles replaced the frowns of concentration on their singing and dancing, which was so well done in itself.

The sets were colourful; the dresses decorative but decorous; the production — nearly three hours of tunes and laughter — moved fast; and the properties include an alarmingly loud stage pistol which resounds in the theatre like a 25-pounder.

Altogether it is a good evening, and all who support the remaining three performances will have the satisfaction of knowing that any profits go to charity.

The Society, whose President is Mr. Sidney C. Taylor, has already given more than £1,000 to local charities. More than that, for over a quarter of a century they have given pleasure to thousands of local people, and "The Desert Song" keeps up that tradition.

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THE DESERT SONG — The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society are presenting the well-known Musical Play "The Desert Song" at the Regent Theatre next week. It is one of the most popular and tuneful plays produced. The Society have taken on a show which goes rather beyond the usual run of amateur productions, but with the talent at their command a first-class representation is assured. The cast includes the Misses Dorothy Cox, Audrey Parrett, Odette Clark, Vera Stock, Jose Hadler, Phyllis Rowe, Messrs. Leonard Pease, Fred Munnion, Reginald Bowler, Richard Wood, Reginald Brown, Cecil Bocking, Jan Frewer, Jim Welham, Douglas Catt, T. D. Harper. There are twelve dancing girls, a ladies' chorus of fifteen girls and soldiers' wives, soldiers of the French Legion, members of Red Shadow's Band, etc. The Producer is again Miss Madge Macklin, who has had much to do with the high rank the Society has attained. The Orchestra is under the direction of Mr. Bert Sharpe.

...MATERIALISATION — At a meeting

CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA

The Dancing Girls were: Cecily Harris, Kathleen Amery, Maisie Ainsworth, Eileen Ainsworth, Joyce Manfield, June Davies, Gwen Judge, Bobbie Cheeseman, June Gisby, Florence Marjoram, Jean Ringer, and Cynthia Stone.

Azuri Girls: Beryl Hockley, Selina Richards, Betty Lomas, and Nesta King.

Ladies' Chorus: Phyllis Rowe, Beryl Hockley, Selina Richards, Dorothy Alexander, Rene Seward, Betty Lomas, Nesta King, June Puxley, Margaret Baker, Amy Warren, Peggy Welham, Doris West, and June Phillips.

Men's Chorus: H. Heisterman, D. Catt, S. Collicott, T. Harper, R. Cornell, R. Burr, K. Fox, D. Watson, J. Clarke, M. Carter, J. Welham, and E. D. Evans.

Native Attendants: George Baker, Maurice Humphreys, and R. H. Day.

The Orchestra: Violins, W. H. Bate-man, Miss Gannon, Wray Gibson, C. Oliver, Viola, Mrs. Adkins, Cello, H. Mann, Bass, W. Maxwell, Flute, J. Oliver, Clarinet, W. Lee, Oboe, F. Hart, Bassoon, J. Biddulph, Horns, G. Clarke, E. Hinsley, Trumpets, J. Thomas, E. Benson, Trombone, P. Bowyer, Piano, A. R. Barnefeld, Tympani, W. Wareham.

D.W.A.

The leading members of the Peterborough Operatic Society saw the production on Tuesday and expressed themselves as highly delighted.