

ANOTHER SUCCESS FOR BURTON OPERATIC SOCIETY

"Merrie England" is Excellent

First-class performances are becoming something of a tradition with Burton Operatic Society, and last night's first performance of "Merrie England" was no means an exception. It was once again a superbly produced example of light opera, worthy of a much larger audience than that which supported it last night.

Not that the spacious Hillside School hall at Stapenhill was empty; far from it, for at least three-quarters of the seats were taken, but such a fine production deserved a full "house."

There was not one thing about which one could complain. The orchestration, under the direction of Arthur Brumerod, was excellent, the scenery was first class, and throughout the evening the whole programme went without a hitch—something highly commendable for a first-night performance.

The only thing that did slightly mar the enjoyment of those present was the seating. There was not sufficient room for one's legs between one's own seat and the one in front. As a result, members of the audience were inclined to lift about.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Briefly, the story of the play is of the private battle between the Earl of Essex (Alan Thompson) and Sir Walter Raleigh (Gordon Oakley) to gain the favour of Queen Elizabeth (Brenda Rumsey).

Essex holds a trick card. He knows of Raleigh's secret love for Bessie Throckmorton (Joy Appleby). Fate intervenes in the person of Jill-all-Along (Gena Jackson), a reputed witch, who gives him a paper—a love letter from Raleigh to Bessie—which he then shows to the Queen.

Overjoyed by what she believes to be a declaration of love by Raleigh, her anger knows no bounds when she learns of his avowed love for Bessie. She condemns Jill to death for witchcraft, banishes Raleigh, and imprisons Bessie. But all works out happily in the end.

EXCELLENT PERFORMANCES

Of the members of the company, everyone—from leading roles to stage hands—must have put all they had into turning out a first-class show.

But perhaps one of the favourites with the audience was Gena Jackson as Jill-all-Along. Maybe her role of unwanted outcast had some bearing on this, as, maybe, did her tortoiseshell kitten, her only friend, which she carried in her arms. But the fact remains that she played the part admirably, singing and speaking—both happy and sad—with clarity and deep expression.

Joan Fletcher, as the May Queen, several times earned an extra round of applause, which was richly deserved.

Alan Thompson, as the Earl of Essex, and Gordon Oakley, as Sir Walter Raleigh—both fighting for the Queen's favour—certainly pleased the audience with their respective portrayals, and also notable were Bernard Emery and Jim Thornley, as two brothers and royal advisers.

Reginald Brunning, as a player in Will Shakespeare's company, and Ken Lowe, as his friend, delighted the audience with every appearance they made.

Credits also go to Joe Hickman (a butcher), Joe Buckley (a tailor), Jack Copeland (a baker), and Edgar Williams (a tinker), the latter earning laughs with his effective stutter.

Miss Bessie Throckmorton was por-

trayed by Joy Appleby, another person with a most pleasing voice.

The first Queen Elizabeth was admirably portrayed by Brenda Rumsey.

Margaret Woollett and Carole Shotton played two royal pages, and Ettie Cottrell portrayed Kate.

The rest of the cast included.—Lords, ladies, townfolk, beefeaters, etc.: Jean Atkin, Barbara Binnersley, Glenise Blant, Margaret Brambley, Edith Broughton, Lily Brunning, Coral Crinnell, Valerie Ellis, Sheila Emery, Peggy Fisher, Joan Gilbert, Jean Hendry, Dorothy Jeggo, Mollie Kidger, Brenda Neal, Doris Postle, Veronica Redfern, Ann Shaw, Ann Skeemer, Lorna Staley, Dianne Taylor, Monica Welton, Mabel Whiteland, Christine Wint, Terence Bassett, Reginald Fletcher, Alvar Gowtridge, Samuel Harley, Norman Hasshill, Clifford Howse, Bert Macey, Harry Scattergood, Robert Smith, Richard Thomas and Peter Williams.

Members of the orchestra were: Leader, George Walker, L.R.A.M.; first violin, Paul Buxton; second violin, Louis Tanti, Ralph Palin; viola, Lucy Eades; violoncellos, Honor Upham, Keith Harrison; double bass, Charles Eades; flute, Lyle Reid; clarinets, Michael Bourne, Jim Thompson; bassoon, Peter Billson; horn, Reuben Benniston; trumpets, Peter Smith, John Smith; trombone, George Benniston; percussion, Edward Prince; piano, Evelyn Woodhouse, L.R.A.M.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Other credits are due to: Chairman, Alan Thompson; vice-chairman, Jim Thornley; secretary, Joan Gilbert; treasurer, Norman Hasshill; performance secretary, Joy Appleby; public relations and advertising, Charles M. Boyce and Robert Smith; accompanist, Evelyn Woodhouse, L.R.A.M.; house manager, Irene Hasshill; stage manager, Ray A. Welton; assistant stage manager, Peter Jackson; stage carpenter, Jack Last; lighting, Peter Appleby and Francis Bates; wardrobe mistresses, Jean Smith and Jean Last; prompters, Mavis Clark and Jean Morgan; properties, Mildred Harrison and Pam Woodcock; make-up, Harold Newbury and helpers; scenery designed and constructed by Gladys M. Harvey and Alfred V. Peace; Peter Appleby, Geoff Boyce, John Brambley, Brian Deakin, Len Harvey, Peter Jackson, Jack Last, Ray Welton and John Woodcock.

"Merrie England" is being produced once nightly at 7.15 until Saturday night this week, at Hillside School. There will also be a performance on Saturday afternoon at 2.15.

Incidentally, this is the third time that the society has put on this production, previous shows being in 1910 and 1920, as the New Burton Operatic Society.

"A.L."