

"YEOMEN OF THE GUARD" IS OUTSTANDING SUCCESS

New standard set by Burton Operatic Society

A milestone in the history of Burton and District Operatic Society was reached last night. They staged their first production ever to be directed by one of their own members. There can be no doubt that the experiment—if it is to be regarded as such—was a total success.

Though it can often be difficult, and sometimes unfair, to judge a production on the opening night certainly in the case of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Yeomen of the Guard" which is the production chosen by the society, the demand for tickets for the performances each night this week until Saturday, is well deserved. And the audiences will not be disappointed.

To sit in the hall at Horninglow Secondary School, Harehedge Lane, and watch the production immediately gives the impression of a well rehearsed presentation with a definite professional flavour.

Just how hard a society has worked in rehearsals can often be judged by the activity backstage on the first night. This indeed reflected what was to come last night in the case of the Burton society. There was no panic, and apart from usual pre-curtain nerves, nothing which indicated in any way that this was in fact a first night.

As Michael Thorne, the director, explained the background to the production, back-stage, everything around him was moving in a praiseworthy cool and calculated fashion.

Mr. Thorne, a teacher at the William Hutson School, explained that he had been a member of the society for four years, and though he had taken part in previous productions by the society, had never himself graduated to handling a principal role. Why then is he qualified for the task of director?

"Well I have always been very interested. We staged "Yeomen of the Guard" in 1957 and I have tried to look at this presentation, for which we began rehearsals last February, in an objective fashion.

AUDITION BASIS

"I have attempted to think of it in terms of 1966." Everything had gone according to plan, apart from the unfortunate illness of Mr. Reg Tebbett, one of the ten Yeomen. He was taken ill at the week-end, and because he has been advised to rest, will not be able to get back into the production. Mr. Thorne has had to make do with nine Yeomen, and certainly the gap has been filled so that there is no hint of a "short chorus."

Perhaps one would think that a director who is a member of a society would find difficulties working with people who, after all, are his close friends. Was Mr. Thorne able to be firm enough in his direction?

"All the casting was done strictly on an audition basis. I was prepared to consider the job on the basis of sacrificing friendships rather than the production—but I'm glad to say I've lost no friends!"

Mr. Thorne spared no effort to make his work authentic. He spent some days in London, interviewing "Beefeaters." One of his problems was to find an authentic Tudor dance for Act One and he wrote to a Folk Dance Society who though they were unable to help, put him in touch with the Royal Academy of Dancing who sent him a copy of a 17th century

book called "Playford's Dancing Master" in which there were details of a dance called "Jumping Joe." This was the dance used in the production.

A pleasing aspect of the presentation, which also has a Saturday afternoon performance, was the way in which Mr. Thorne has managed to achieve another of his objectives. He has been able to provide a practical and colourful contrast between the regimentation of the wardens with the mobbing crowds in the crowded stage scenes.

A word about the "props" and scenery—there are of course the two acts, making use of basically the same scenery. And very well it looks too, with a glorious Tower Bridge touch to add that true London flavour. The lighting and stage effects are all due to the successful team of Francis Bates, Michael Thompson, Jimmie Harvey, Peter Appleby, Peter Binnersley, Len Harvey, Jack Last, Derek Rudin, Ray Welton and Gerlad Wright.

FIRST PRINCIPAL ROLE

Four members of the cast, Jim Thornley (Lieutenant of the Tower), Alan Thompson (Jester), Joy Appleby (Strolling singer), and Mollie Kidger (Sergeant's daughter) all played these roles in the society's last staging of this particular production.

Jim Gould, who is playing his first principal role as Sergeant Meryll, handles his job admirably and deserves further opportunities in future productions.

Reg Brunning proves his versatility this year by his portrayal of head gaoler, for in the same production in 1957 he took the role of Colonel Fairfax. He surely could not have wished for a more contrasting part this year. Ken Lowe does well as the colonel, who is of course, under sentence of death and Terry Bassett is well-suited in the role of the sergeant's son.

Other leading roles are taken by Michael Johnson, Jack Copeland, George Bruce, Trevor Bakewell, Keith Gould, Betty Halsall and Ann Hamp-Gopsill.

In an opera-drama like this, everything naturally depends on the orchestra, and undoubtedly there is nothing lacking in this department, thanks to the direction of Arthur Ormerod, assisted by Coral Crinnell, and superbly led by George Walker.

Costumes are first class and are looked after by Mary Thornley, with the help of Agnes Cottrell and C. Dicken. Prompter is Delia Johnson and Eileen Fox and Lorna Staley look after the properties.

The chorus includes Glenna Acres, June Acton, Barbara Binnersley, Glenise Blant, Brenda Bond, Jennifer Bond, Valerie Booth, Linda Bowler, Sheila Boyce, Lily Brunning, Joy Gostelow, Stella Hambleton, Jean Hendry, Gene Jackson, Valerie Keeling, Gertrude Kirkland, Brenda Neal, Doris Postle, Lynette Postle, Ann Shorthose, Joyce Tallis, Pamela Tufts, Mabel Whiteland, Joan Williams, Joe Buckley, John Halsall, Garth Hamp-Gopsill, Joe Hickman, Clifford Howse, Stanley Hunt, Harry Scattergood, Christopher Williams and Edgar Williams.

It is well worth remembering to sit tight for the overture—not, as regular opera goers will know, a mere haphazard collection of highlights from the production, but a full-blooded and beautifully written concert overture.

And in case you have any final doubts regarding the complete dedication of the society in their work, these can be dispelled by knowledge of the fact that they are to start work immediately this production is over, for a charity concert next February. That too, should be something well worth looking forward to.