

# Burton Operatic Society's 'Orpheus' makes a hit

IF YOUR knowledge of Greek mythology is a bit weak, it doesn't really matter. You do not need a classical education to enjoy Burton Amateur Operatic Society's production of "Orpheus in the Underworld."

For Offenbach's "Orpheus" is to Greek mythology what "Up Pompeii" is to Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"—only very much funnier.

Something of a shocker when the composer first presented it in Paris 112 years ago, its satirical humour, if not its capacity to shock, has survived in the very modern book and lyrics of Phil Park.

A song during an argument between gods about a girl they both fancy contains words which should live for ever: "Pluty don't be loopy, this cutey is for Jupey." Not too highbrow for your taste perhaps?

## FIRST STARRING ROLE

In her first principal role with the society Christine George, as Eurydice, the girl all the fuss is about, reveals herself as both excellent singer and expressive actress.

The gods who vie for her favours are played by Alan Thompson (Pluto, King of Hades) and Jim Gould (Jupiter, King of the Gods), who turn in the polished performances that Burton audiences have come to expect of them.

Ken Lowe, no stranger to comic roles, hits a new peak as Mercury, messenger of the gods, while Terry Bassett, unrecognisable behind an outsize "R.A.F." moustache, makes his small part as Icarus worth remembering.

A part without solo singing, but a demanding role nonetheless, is that of the "dishy" Bacchus, whose amorous dancing wins the girl in the end. Michael Topliss's dancing is most certainly amorous, and those eyes of his say more than a dozen love songs.

## CAN-CAN

Highspot of course is the Can-Can to the famous galop. Daphne Gould, who arranges the dancing in the society's shows, deserves top marks for contriving to get so many people taking part in so energetic a romp on so small a stage without a single broken leg.

The backroom boys steal the show, in spite of the wealth of talent on stage, for their impressive thunder and lightning, and for their highly effective

balloon flight to Mount Olympus, and other good sets.

The very lightheartedness of the show makes it a difficult one, but a lot of serious hard work by the cast under the production of Charles Pole has paid off.

Last night the orchestra, carried away by Offenbach's tuneful melodies, were too loud in the first act, but put this right in the rest of the show.

"Orpheus," on the stage of Horninglow Secondary School, continues until Saturday.

The Mayor of Burton, Alderman Geoff Handley, will attend tonight's

# BRILLIANT PRODUCTION OF OFFENBACH'S "ORPHEUS"

## Another success for Burton Amateur Operatic Society

Last night at Horninglow School Burton and District Amateur Operatic Society presented their interpretation of Offenbach's comic operetta, "Orpheus in the Underworld."

It was, perhaps, rather an ambitious choice for them because it requires a combination of comic flair and genuine ability to sing in an operatic style.

While Offenbach is hardly the most demanding of composers it must be admitted that when singing comedy there is always the danger that enunciation and gesticulation can become grotesquely wooden.

This danger was safely avoided last night. Credit for this must go to the "stars of the show," Jim Gould as the blustering, hypocritical Jupiter, Christine George as the flighty Eurydice and Ken Lowe as a pansified, lisping Mercury.

My favourite line in the whole piece was when Ken Lowe warned everyone of an impending "Cosmic catastrophe."

For those who are unfamiliar with "Orpheus in the Underworld" it is based very loosely on the classical Greek myth of Orpheus, a musician, who loses his wife, Eurydice, to Pluto, the King of Hades.

### TRAGIC MYTH

Offenbach interpreted this tragic myth in a style somewhat less than tragic. In fact last night's performance resembled a Brian Rix farce more than anything else.

Briefly the story line is as follows:—When the curtain opens we find that Eurydice is having an affair with Pluto, who is disguised as Aristaeus, the shepherd. He carries her off to

Hades, and her husband Orpheus couldn't be more pleased.

However, his mother, Calliope, insists that they go to Mount Olympus—by balloon!—and request Jupiter to demand Eurydice's return.

Mount Olympus turns out to be something like a free-love hippie commune.

Jupiter, King of the Gods, is the most free-loving of all the deities but he is determined to keep up appearances in front of the mortals. And besides that he is rather keen on seeing Eurydice for himself so he takes everyone to Hades to see Pluto.

After a couple of extremely active Bacchanalias the climax of the piece arrives. Eurydice has to choose who she wants because the deities can't decide who should have her.

### TALENT FOR COMEDY

To everyone's surprise she chooses Bacchus, the god of wine.

The story line is, of course, perhaps the least important part of the operetta and it was certainly treated as such last night.

The quality of singing was, on the whole, good, but some of the cast had a little difficulty projecting their voices above the music.

The most successful at this was Christine George as Eurydice. Her voice was pure and her enunciation was crystal-clear through the whole range.

In addition to her fine singing voice Miss George also displayed a great talent for comedy. Her timing was always right on the mark.

### EXCELLENT SCENERY

Ken Lowe and Alan Mitchell, as Mercury and Styx respectively, were the outstanding comic figures. Ken Lowe was remarkably like Freddie "parrot-face" Davies, while Alan Mitchell bore a great resemblance to Spike Milligan in his voice and gestures.

Charles Pole, the producer, is to be complimented on the way he coped with fitting an enormous company on to a very small stage, particularly in the riotous "Can-Can" scene.

Offenbach's musical score was very well performed by the 16-piece orchestra, under the direction of Mr. Arthur Ormerod.

Their interpretation of the opening overture showed considerable ability.

Finally, accolades must go to "Jimmie" Harvey for his excellently designed scenery. More than once thunderous applause greeted the unveiling of the scenery—particularly his interpretation of Orpheus' balloon.

Congratulations and thanks must be offered to the Burton and District Amateur Operatic Society who proved again last night that they are far from amateur in their singing and their comedy