

Summer Song hits right note

Burton and District Operatic Society had a hit on their hands with "Summer Song" last night thanks to some fine individual performances and one of the liveliest choruses yet to grace the stage of Wulfric School.

Although it was a nervous opening night, with a couple of principals fluffing their lines and failing to ad lib their way out of trouble, the production did not suffer.

Sheila Boyce played the part of Milli — the good hearted American gal determined to get her man — with an astounding professionalism.

This girl even sang in an American accent and it was her vivacity that lifted a number of scenes from the mundane to the highly entertaining.

She was a perfect foil to Christine George, whose role as Karolka the starry eyed Czech immigrant, required more seriousness and depth.

The contrasts in style were outlined in a duet sung by the two girls, "One boy sends you a rose," where the sweet voice of Karolka mingled with the saucier one of Milli's.

The performance of Phillip Beeson as Abe, the negro-man-of-all-work would have brought tears even to Al Jolson's eyes — especially the number "Cotton Tail" which suited his deep rich voice.

Singing was certainly not the order of the evening. Alan Thompson, who as the composer Dvorak was hardly off stage for well over two hours, gave a polished and convincing performance which would have been a credit to a professional.

He managed both the serious parts of the role — such as a soliloquy in which he reads a letter to his wife — and the humorous parts just as well.

In this case his foil was the remarkable Sheila Webber who as "Ma" Flannagan gave such a convincing performance as an old dragon it was surprising that she wasn't breathing fire.

However, her rendering of "Murphys Pig" showed us that she was human after all, who but a real life lady could show long white frilly knickers while she was can-can-ing?

Mark Fellowes gave a nervous and at times strained performance as the Irish boy thwarted in love. He looked very uncomfortable in a duet with Christine George at the end of Act One. This seemed to be a fault in direction as both were singing a love song and were yards apart from each other.

Joe Gianello as the travelling salesman hooked by Milli, gave a sound performance of a fast talking city-slicker and his loud check suit was a brainwave of the wardrobe department.

The chorus were a great bunch of performers who infected the audience with their enthusiasm, but the dancers were less lucky.

Their numbers suffered from bad choreography and the girls looked as though they were doing a progressive barn dance rather than the grandly named "Furiant Ballet" in the Second Act.

Their "Burlesque-Ballet" costumes were marvellous, but the girls were badly out of step in their can-can line-up during this number and at least two of them looked as though they were hating every twist of the wrist.

The orchestra under the direction of Coral Gould was also a delight.

J.S.