

# "LA BELLE HELENE" IS BURTON SOCIETY'S BEST-EVER SHOW

"La Belle Helene," the Burton and District Operatic Society production at the Wulfric School until Saturday, is an absolute smash.

It is a smash because it has all the qualities one expects of a thorough professional musical show: good strong singing, energetic and well-projected acting, colourful costumes, admirable sets, a well-rehearsed and lively orchestra.

This show has some generous extras. There are those hummable Offenbach tunes that bring on an instant smile of recognition, there is a lot of comedy, and there are some beautiful girls. Not a bad evening's line-up.

"La Belle Helene" is set in that remote part of ancient Greece that lies roughly between Derby and Ashby-de-la-Zouch. In the updated English version it has the flimsiest of plots, which centres on the beautiful Helen—who loves Paris, and not just in the Springtime.

Helen is played superbly by Christine George, who bears more than a passing resemblance to a young Bette Davis, not only in looks but in sheer stage presence. She also has a very good singing voice, not something all the cast can claim.

As the Chief Augur, Calchas, the man who arranges the future and then predicts it—David Wynne nearly steals the show, especially when arriving at the ancient Greek seaside resort dressed like a skin-diving stick of rock.

This is a very inventive and well-timed comic performance, much more disciplined than in "Land of Smiles" a year ago. Indeed, it looks as though the remark of the society's chairman, Mr. Jim Thornley, at last year's annual dinner—that the acting needed improvement—had generally found its mark.

## HARD WORK

Enough of that, the show's the thing. It starts with three beautiful goddesses (Joy Appleby, Sylvia Copestake and Sheila Boyce) and after that there is no looking back. Betty Booth and Marian Yeomans, as tempting young ladies of Sparta, make one

wonder why Greek men were inclined the way they are supposed to have been; Margaret Gordon is a pert Orestes; and Alan Thompson makes a good job of Helen's awful husband Menelaus, "the humdrummiest thing ever."

There are three solid-looking kings: the ineptly-named Alban Little (six foot two if he is an inch), Roy Smith—whose gravelly bass voice ought to be exploited more—and Terry Bassett, who helps stop the show with the duet that a lot of people must know as "We're The Bold Gendarmes".

In fact the only member of the cast not thoroughly caught up in the fun and energy is John Gould as Helen's lover, Paris. He gave a low-key performance that seemed uncomfortable and ill-at-ease. A case of first-night nerves, perhaps.

Chorus and orchestra are excellent, really putting the music over with a punch, and no doubt owe much to the hard work of musical directors Coral Gould and Myra Mesaritis. Add a dash of Daphne Gould's uncompli-

cated choreography, a touch of imagination in the props department and a good slice of efficient stage management to producer Frank Doran's recipe, and you have a feast of a show. As the man said, this one should run and run.

Members of the chorus are:—Mary Bader, Glenise Blant, Anne Holmes, Susan Neal, Julie Boulton, Rhoda Hutton, Jean Rogers, Joyce Burton, Anne Clarke, Jenny Tomlinson, Maureen Woolley, Pamela Clarke, Mabel Whiteland, Glenna Acres, Stella Hambleton, Violet Smith, Jean Hendry, Sheila Webber, Marion Hart, Carol Hussey, Monica Welton, Arlene Thompson, Sue Briggs.

Ivor Betteridge, Joe Buckley, Jack Copeland, Ken Lowe, Richard Dean, William Poole, Sam Harley, Jim Thornley, Stan Hunt, Robert Hughes, Adrian Bader, Cliff Bull, Mark Fellows, Ken Durey. N.D.W.



A SCENE DURING DRESS REHEARSAL for Burton and District Operatic Society's production of "La Belle Helene" presented at Horninglow Secondary



"LA BELLE HELENE" by Offenbach is currently being presented by Burton and District Operative Society at the Wulfric School and pictured are some of the principals.