

# "THE GYPSY BARON"—A LUSTY PRODUCTION

## First night success for Burton Operatic Society

Melodrama, glorious costumes, convincing scenery, excellent chorus singing, humour and a happy ending—the Burton and District Operatic Society's 1971 production, Strauss' "The Gypsy Baron" has them all.

The production opened last night at the Horninglow Secondary School Harehedge Lane, and will finish at the end of this week.

The story is a classic Hungarian-style goulash of farewells and homecomings, triumph and despair, laughter and sadness and throughout it is punctuated with stirring songs.

The story, briefly, is as follows: Kalman Zsupan, the Mayor of Zrinyi has made a fortune rearing pigs — all 6,007 of them — on the estate of Sandor Barinkay.

Sandor, as a child, was exiled with his father, who committed a political offence by giving refuge to a Turkish Pasha after the Hungarians had overthrown their Ottoman oppressors.

The ancient castle of the Barinkays is in ruins and the estate is split between a band of Romanies and Zsupan's pigs.

They — the Gypsies that is — regard Sandor as their feudal leader and their aged queen Czippa who possesses traditional occult powers, dreams that the young Barinkay is returning.

### ESTATE IN JEOPARDY

This news leaves Zsupan somewhat less than thrilled for he stands to lose the estate which he has usurped.

Meanwhile, Sandor returns to a rousing welcome. He is pardoned for the crime of his father and his estates are returned to him.

Sandor was brought home by a certain eminence rise, Count Kareska, the Civil Commissioner of the Province.

This unsavoury gentleman happens to know that in the ruined castle lies buried the treasure of the Turkish Pasha. He tells Zsupan about this and between them they decide to marry off the Mayor's daughter, Arletta, to Sandor, and that way the loot will fall into their eager money-grabbing hands.

However, the best laid plans of mice and Mayors do not always quite work out and Sandor declines the offer of marriage to Arletta.

Instead, he falls in love with the gypsy queen's granddaughter, the delectable Saffri, and they, at the drop of a Romany violin, agree to be wed.

Czippa, the queen, then reveals that there is treasure in the castle and she has the legal deeds to it, which reveal that it all belongs to Sandor.

Needless to say, this results in wild rejoicing, especially when

young Barinkay tells the gypsies that it's as much their treasure as his.

### MORE WAR

But alas and rue the day, the war against the Turks breaks out again and Sandor and the gypsies march off, complete with bearskins, as the Romany Hussars.

They win the war single-handed and come back without a mark on them and everyone lives happily ever after, except the cowardly Kareska, who is banished.

With a story like that, the opportunity to sing comes up quite often, and I'm glad to say the Society took advantage of this.

The chorus scenes were excellent but it seemed, to me at any rate, that the solo singing was a little strained, a little lacking in projection.

At the beginning it was announced that Christine George, who played Arletta, was suffering from a sore throat and would be unable to sing. Her singing voice was supplied for her by a lady who spent most of the time on the side of the stage, Sheila Garsithe. And I think Sheila did brilliantly, her voice was clear and strong and by the far the best of the females.

Jim Gould, as Count Kareska, was suitably swaggering and nasty and played his part rather well. Adrian Bader's Sandor Barinkay was well-done although Mr. Bader at times had difficulty in raising his voice, the lead, above the others.

Roy Smith, as Zsupan, tended to overdo the humour at times but this was not his fault — merely that of the lines he had to read.

### CHORUS WORK

Incidentally, he and Peter Williams, who played his valet, were at times like a Transylvanian Morecambe and Wise, quite as funny and quite similar in terms of appearance.

The chorus of gypsy men and women were marvellous, the singing good and strong and the dancing most entertaining.

But the real highpoint of the show was the costumes and the scenery.

When the drab blue curtains were drawn back at the beginning of each scene the eye was treated to a veritable rainbow of colour and for that alone the show gets a top rating from me.

Mention must be made too of the orchestra, conducted by Mr. Arthur Ormerod, who did very well indeed.

The production this year is for the benefit of the Mayor's Fund and will be playing at Horninglow School until the end of this week.

—B.H.

# Show is a success —despite setbacks

BURTON and District Operatic Society overcame a major setback when they opened their presentation of Strauss's Gipsy Baron at Horninglow Secondary School last night, and gave a performance of surprisingly high standard for an amateur group.

Christine George, who was to have sung the part of Arletta, the husband-hunting daughter of Mayor Kalman Zsupan, picked up a throat infection, and had to receive medical treatment during the afternoon.

But she bravely carried on, acting and speaking the part, while from the side of the stage, Sheila Garsithe did the singing.

At such short notice, Sheila, having to sing from the sheet music, did exceptionally well. It is only surprising that she did not already have a part, as her voice was better than that of some of the major characters.

## LIFE AND COLOUR

The chorus scenes alone made the production worth seeing, and the costumes and scenery were very impressive—full of life and colour. The chorus songs were good too, sung strongly and clearly.

Several of the solo parts, though, were disappointing. Terry Bassett as leader of the Hussars, was hardly convincing in his spoken voice. His singing was a little better.

That of Valerie Keeling (Queen of Gipsies) and Doris Postle (Mayor's housekeeper) was very weak, and duets with Saffi (Ann Oakley) Valerie's voice was almost lost.

Ann Oakley was exceptionally good. Her voice was clear and

strong, she played her part well. Adrian Bader showed a good singing voice, but perhaps his spoken part could have had more emphasis.

## AMUSING

Roy Smith, as the Mayor, was amusing and sang well.

The opera will be presented each evening this week until Saturday, when there will be a matinee as well as an evening performance.

The producer is Charles Pole, musical director Arthur Ormerod, and accompanist Evelyn Woodhouse.

M.W.