

Operatic Society's Run Of Success Continues

"I have a song to sing O,"—a song of praise for the Burton and District Operatic Society who last night gave a resounding performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Yeomen of the Guard" at Hillside secondary modern school, Stapenhill.

Perhaps the most difficult of all Gilbert and Sullivan operas, the society mastered the score and libretto, and swung into "The Yeomen of the Guard" like professionals. It was at times hard to believe that these were amateurs, and both finales were handled with a professional touch.

The principals blended well, so well that it would be difficult to pick out one as outstanding. Working as a team, they got every word over to the rear of the hall without shouting and the ladies come in for a special bouquet in that respect.

Reginald Brunning as Colonel Fairfax sang excellently, and his voice, though not loud, came across well.

Bernard Emery as Sergeant Meryll played the old soldier well, but it was not until almost the end of the opera that his acting ability came into play fully.

The Jester, Jack Point, played by Alan Thompson, and the Jailor, Wilfred Shadbolt, played by Jack Heys, must be mentioned together at the top of the list, for performances as, I think, Gilbert would have liked. Jack Heys as the slow witted jailor with his morbid sense of humour made the perfect foil for Alan Thompson's quicksilver portrayal of Jack Point, and what's more they both sang well.

Mr. Thompson achieved a personal triumph when he held the stage and the audience in the finale. It was a moving and tender scene which, if over-acted loses its pathos, but which capably handled, as it was, makes a memorable scene. He should be wary though, of speaking up stage, as because of this a few lines were lost to the audience.

HAPPY COMBINATION

What a happy combination of female leads there is in this production! Good singing combined with accomplished acting made them charming and believable, and their diction was extremely good.

With a lovely voice and a natural acting ability, Joy Appleby handled her part of Elsie Maynard with confidence and charm, and she played all her scenes, gay and sad, the same able manner.

Mollie Kidger with her role of Phoebe, Sergeant Meryll's daughter, excelled as the mischievous flirt and her humour came right across the footlights. She sang well, and really got into the part.

Dame Carruthers was played by Effie Cottrell, who held the stage from the moment she made her entrance. She used it, and moved as though she owned the tower; her singing was pleasant and never strained. Pamela Pegg played Kate, her niece, and has a very good voice.

The chorus, always important, worked well, and as well as singing, acted. They moved, were alive, and became part of the scenes.

The ladies were "breathy" at first, this probably due to first-night nerves, but they soon settled down to their performance.

The men's chorus was small but what they lacked in numbers they made up for with volume. Only once did they fail to attack the opening of a chorus,

and their scene with Dame Carruthers was particularly good.

An excellent cast, including Jim Thornley as Sir Richard Cholmondeley and Harry Scattergood as Leonard Mery were not the only ones who deserve bouquets. Imaginative lighting an attractive and realistic sets helped to maintain the high standard, and full marks are given for a scene of arresting starkness at the end of act one.

Others taking part in the show are: Alan Smith, Herbert Lacey, Edgar Williams, Richard Thomas, Robert Thomas, Robert Smith, and the chorus is comprised of: Jean Atkin, Glenise Blant, Doreen Bridges, Margaret Bradley, Margaret Brambley, Lily Brunning, Joan Burman, Molly Charlton, Jean Hendry, Rhoda Heys, Helga Hughes, Gertrude Kirkland, Barbara Pantall, Dorothy Sillita, Ivy Smith, Monica Welton, Mabel Whiteland, Joseph Buckley, Terence Bassett, Michael Bates, John Clemes, Leonard Farley, Raymond Gilbert, Norman Hasshill, Clifford Howse, Eric Jacks.

The music was directed by Arthur Ormerod, L.R.A.M., A.Mus.T.C.L., and credit for the production goes to Charles Pole.

"Yeomen of the Guard" is not my favourite Gilbert and Sullivan dish, but as the Burton and District Operatic Society has served it, it makes good, wholesome fare.

J.M.W.