

1964

NOSTALGIC BRIGADOON AT MARKET HALL

“Waitin’ for ma Dearie” and “The Heather on the Hill”, two haunting melodies from the delightful Brigadoon, staged for five nights at Redhill market Hall last week by East Surrey Operatic Society, brought some nostalgic memories of the great musicals of the forties and early fifties.

The delightful Scottish fantasy, with its own special quality of sentiment, was brought to life vividly in this exquisite production, highlighted perhaps by its ballet, and notable for its musical content under the expert direction of the youthful Christopher Slater. Mr Slater’s masterly handling of some extremely difficult rhythm, and his exposition of sweet broad-bowing tone contributed much to the instant success of a presentation that was always entertaining, colourful, and full of interest. Elsie Rendell’s production contained the sure touch of someone who knows and loves their work, and the hours spent in rehearsal were well worthwhile.

This charming musical tells the story of two Americans who find a non-existent village Brigadoon in the mists of the Scottish hills. The clock turns back for them for just 24 hours a day in the life of the 18th century village once every hundred years. Tommy Albright falls in love and the tale “of how he solves the problem of being always with his chosen wee wife”, Fiona MacKeith, is told in music, dance and song with some exquisite scenic effects.

In a big cast which somehow manages to make the Market Hall stage twice as big as its limited space, the principals were outstanding, the singing of the well-trained chorus was fine toned and beautiful ballet dancing was produced by exponent Angela Penfold. Her graceful choreography in the funeral scene accompanied by the mournful wail of piper, Pipe Major Quinn, will not be easily forgotten by the packed houses.

Andrew Glass was exceptionally well cast in the role of Tommy, a tall handsome foil for petite and dainty Molly Greaves as Fiona. Their singing together was romantic and easy on the ear. Malcolm Howe (what a discovery) made light-hearted work of the bantering fellow-American, Jeff Douglas. His delightful Brockie Bothy scene with Meg, played by Gillain Hayter, was one of the best in the show. John Fallon with a pure tenor voice and looks and stature to the role of Charlie Cameron, but tended to strangle his tone against the weight of a full orchestra. Fred Harrison played the dramatic role of Harry Ritchie with some distinction, while Douglas Chantler was in his usual good voice with a competent performance as Clan-head Andrew MacKeith.

Bearded Scotsmen in kilts, tartan-sashed women, bright gaudy splashes of colour and some good Scottish sets, were rewarding indeed for those who appreciate the detailed work which goes into the staging. Earning special mention, too, was the high-speed sword-dance and reel produced on the turn of a sixpence by Eugene Crawley and

Godfrey Hill. Last, but by no means least, but merely because he seems to be a being apart in the intentions of author and lyric writer, Frederick Lowe, was the mysterious Mr Murdoch. The village 'mystic', a 'broth' of a part, required special characterisation and it was given full treatment at the expense of a beautiful bass voice by Michael Macdonald.

Also taking part were Paddy Clarke, Harold Dibben, John Pettigrew, Shirley Knight, Paul Elliott, James Thomas, John Rapley, Joan Passingham, Susan Webb, Anne Spurrett, Caroline Harris, Stanley Barkham, S. Beresford-Clarke, Paul Brough, John Murray, David Annis, Barbara Allan, Margaret Aveley, Delia Barkby, Pam Beare, Janet Boyle, Sheila Macdonald, Hilary Nichols, Sheila Smith, Kat Watson, Shione Carden, Elizabeth Dorling, Joyce Gascoine-Pees, Joan Gascoine-Pees, Hilary Foyster, Sylvia Greateorex, Frankie Morgan, Winifred Peel, William Fry, Harry Barber, John Murray and Earnest Short.

D. E. T.