

1965

Pink Champagne bubbled – thanks to Opera Society stars

In “Pink Champagne”, the popular adaptation of the Strauss opera *Die Fledermaus* staged at the market Hall by East Surrey Operatic Society, audiences were plunged straight into the territory of masked balls and dalliances, of mistaken identities (sometimes hardly credible), wives with pure-but-adoring lovers and husbands with discreet little dancers. But who cares – it is of secondary importance to the strong waltzes of Johann Strauss and the gaiety and colour of springtime in Vienna.

A thoroughly professional approach characterised the whole run. The orchestra, smoothly directed by Christopher Slater, kept up a fine pace throughout, but it was the singing of chorus and principals that demonstrated how skilful musical direction and coaching can lift an amateur cast almost to professional standard.

In an almost entirely musical production the one character that stood out was a comedy one. All the singing principals performed admirably but it was the superb comic business of Malcolm Howe as Frosch, the chief warder, that left its mark on the audiences. It says much for the talent of Douglas Chantler that he was able to compete on equal terms in a drunken scene that gave him ample opportunity to shine in his own particular brand of clowning.

Joyce Gascoigne-Pees (Adele) revelled in the lovely melodies with that certain sort of attractive mischief which seems to pervade all her roles. Angela Penfold, in a relatively small part, displayed that rather rare and intangible quality – style, no doubt of her training as a dancer. John Fallon, in a more difficult part, succeeded in winning the audiences by his characterisation and with his singing.

Another pleasant little bit of comic business was provided by John Pettifrew as the lawyer who became a sort of human football between Gabriel and Dr Falke (Michael Macdonald). Suitably smooth and avuncular, very poised and assured, the doctor projected a rich bass voice above the chorus. Fred Harrison was a suitably bored Count Orlovski – a part that strangely enough is traditionally played in the original version by a woman, while Anne Spurrett and Gillian Hayter were well cast in tow vivacious supporting roles.

To the last on has to leave the tow leading roles. Andrew Glass has for so long been the anchor man in these productions that it was no surprise to see him there again, gathering parts of the action together and moving them on, and obviously, as always, enjoying himself. It was interesting to note how effectively he changed his voice for the impersonation of the old lawyer. Five years ago, Molly Greaves played the Merry Widow, and here she was back again, back in the same sort of country. One of her great qualities is the invaluable one of stillness. When everyone else is moving she has the magic quality which roots attention to this small, poised, serene figure, beautifully composed. “Pink Champagne” gave her some lilting melodies of which she took full advantage.

The audiences appreciated the dancing arranged by ballet mistress Shirley Knight. One was impressed not only by her skilful choreography, particularly in the Blue Danube ballet, but by the overall standard of dancing. Perhaps this is inevitable in the company of such professional performers as Shirley Knight herself and Angela Penfold.

The production drew full houses almost every night with the mayor (Coun. Mrs A.S. Oakley) and Mr Oakley at the final performance.

J.D.