

1990 *Half a Sixpence*

ESOS's Half a Sixpence full of action and colour

East Surrey Operatic Society staged their version of the musical "Half a Sixpence" at the Harlequin on Saturday night, in the knowledge that the original show's creator David Honeker was celebrating his 84th birthday in the audience.

Maybe this caused some nerves in the cast, who took a little time to get into their stride. The early scenes lacked flow and there seemed to be too little cohesion between those on stage. The problem soon dispersed, however, and by the time the play reached 'the bar of the Hope and Anchor', it had become typical ESOS, full of action and colour with excellent singing and dancing.

The scene rated as one of the best of the evening, raucous and unrestrained, but overall it must be said that ESOS have done better. In the main this was not the fault of those on stage, but of irritating technical problems. Too many times the cast members failed to project their singing voice, the sound drowned so much in the orchestra that even sitting in the second row it was difficult to distinguish the words. The orchestra itself could not be faulted, under the ever enthusiastic direction of Angela Barker. A company with the calibre of ESOS should not have to suffer the amount of back stage noise which was present.

The acting was as ever of extremely high quality. Paul Longhurst portrayed the lead role of Arthur Kipps with all the spirit and vitality essential to the part, though occasionally there were suggestions that he had spent too much time studying Tony Steele's acclaimed version of the role. Susan Hazel was excellent as Ann Pornick, Kipps' love and wife, and her skill was matched by all those in both lead and lesser roles. However, special mention must be made of Philip Felstead who was the eccentric actor Chitterlow.

Criticisms apart, "Half a Sixpence" proved to be an excellent evening's entertainment.

A.G.C.