

1972 Kismet

'Difficult' opera ably presented by Society

There is no doubt that “Kismet” was musically the most difficult show East Surrey Operatic Society has ever tackled. Apart from three well-known tunes with easily-recognisable melodies the bulk of Borodin's music is almost unsingable, with tricky rhythm, difficult intervals and frequent lack of any lead from the orchestral score. The high standard of success achieved by both singers and orchestra was due in large measure to the untiring work and patience of the Musical Director, Christopher Slater.

Beautiful costumes, attractive and subtle lighting greatly enhanced the Arabian Nights atmosphere, and skilful production by Elsie Rendell brought out clearly the details of the plot.

The story centres round a penniless poet, Omar, who, while impersonating the beggar Hajj, is given a bag of gold by the brigand Jawan for lifting a curse on his son. Wrongly accused of stealing money, he is employed by that crafty individual as his tame magician (much to the delight of the Wazir's amorous wife Lalume.) Meanwhile, the Caliph has fallen in love with Hajj's daughter Marsinah but the course of true love runs very rockily before the happy ending.

As the Hajj, Andrew Glass had the most difficult songs, but he brought to the part the increasing fluency and musical competence, combined with an ease of stage presence, which has been noted in each successive role he plays. A welcome return by John Fallon as the Caliph gave the opportunity to hear again his fine tenor voice in the well-known melodies “Stranger in Paradise” and “Baubles, Bangles and Beads”. He was ably partnered by Diana Read as Marsinah, a well-balanced performance of good singing and sincere acting.

Following his success in last year's production “The King and I”, Fred Harrison was quite at home in an Eastern role, though this time as a “baddie”. He played the rascally Wazir with great relish, and made the most of his comic song “Was I a Wasir”, as well as contributing some fine singing to the beautiful quartet “And this is my Beloved”. Joan Passingham's Lalume was a delight. A subtly balanced performance. She didn't fall into the trap of overplaying the Wazir's sexy wife.

Smaller roles well taken were Malcolm Howe (Omar the Poet), Ralph Chapman (Jawan the Brigand) and Douglas Richman as the Chief Policeman. With Shirlev Knight as Ballet Mistress and Choreographer, one has come expect a high standard of dancing and once again we were not disappointed. Led by Angela Terribile, Corinne Pratt and

Penny Lambert, the variety and quality of the dances played an integral part in this colourful show, and splendid support from the orchestra added greatly to its success.

SHEILA SMITH