

1968

### ***Acting and dancing skill in lively "Kiss Me, Kate"***

"Kiss Me, Kate" presented by the East Surrey Operatic Society at the Market Hall, Redhill, last week demonstrated the interesting development that has been taking place over the past few years in the society's image. This has shown a marked raising of the standard of acting and dancing, without for a moment sacrificing the quality of singing and musical interpretation which has always been the strength of the society. "Kiss Me, Kate", a play within a play, certainly demands all these qualities, because the main characters have to switch constantly from the modern American idiom to a version of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew".

Michael Macdonald as Fred Graham and Petruchio dominated the stage in a full-blooded performance, particularly in "The Shrew" scenes, and won the audience even quicker than he tamed his Kate. This was a performance in which a penetrating sense of humour shone through the richness of his singing. Barbara Lee, as Lilli Vanessi and Kate in a part of fewer contrasts, nevertheless succeeded in songs like "Wunderbar" and "So in Love", in allowing us to glimpse a capacity for loving underneath the well-played shrew, which made his final submission a believable and convincing finale.

This play within a play demands a skilful producer to hold the "bits and pieces" together and it was apparent that Elsie Rendell has lost none of her sureness of touch.

Fred Harrison and Joyce Gascoine-Pees played and sang well together, despite the latter's problems with coping with a score written rather low for a soprano. The more obvious laughs came from the two gangsters played by Andrew Glass and Malcolm Howe, and these two well-contrasted characters excelled in their solo number "Brush up your Shakespeare". A comparative newcomer to the society, Robert Cosser was admirably cast as Paul and effective both in his libretto and his solo song "Too Darn Hot". Jack Palmer, John Fallon and Fred Harrison made a fine trio of lovers whose voices blended well. The impact of Gillian Jarvis as a vivacious Hatti was probably her unerring ability to become "involved" in every scene in which she is on stage as well as putting over a lively musical number. John Rapley and Douglas Chantler made the most of two non-singing roles which nevertheless, skilfully helped along the plot.

Without doubt the visual aspect of the show owed a great deal not only to the colourful costumes and effective lighting but also to the dance team and the choreography of the ballet mistress, Shirley Knight. Caroline Harris and Corinne Pratt shone in the solo spots but were beautifully supported by Elizabeth Cook, Susan Harris, Angela Hirst, Victoria Leach, Tina Morris and Anne Spurrett.

If one leaves the chorus until last it is merely because "Kiss Me, Kate" is less demanding for them than some past productions, but their fine singing was a credit to the musical direction of Christopher Slater who really swept the show along from a lively opening to a grand finale.

