

## **1989 *La Vie Parisienne***

*Taken from a copy in the handwriting of the reviewer*

It is difficult to find enough superlatives to praise the quality of the E.S.O.S. production of *La Vie Parisienne* at the Harlequin Theatre last week. Perhaps to describe it as 'professional' is not enough – certainly it was better than some of the shows presented by touring companies recently.

Costumes were excellent – colourful, correct to period and design. Set design by director Gillian Jarvis was good for Act I (Railway Station in Paris), adequate for Raoul's house in the *Champs Elysées*, some rather dull coloured drapes for *Salon Fontenue*, but the setting for the *Café des Anglais* didn't really convince.

Of course the wonderful costumes really attracted the attention and the outstanding choreography by Shirley Knight and Gillian Jarvis made the stage a swirl of colour especially in the can-can.

East Surrey Operatic has also solved the problem of singers being drowned by the orchestra which has beset several past productions. All principals with radio mikes and stage edge microphones for the rest ensured good sound balance.

It would have been difficult to have found better casting from the suave, monocled man-about-town of Raoul (David Longes) and his friend Bobinet (Simon Braybrooke) to the ageing but amorous Baron Gondremanck of Philip Felstead. Dennis Shearman's Marcel (*maitre d'* of the *Café des Anglais*) was a wonderful "Poirot" like character with curling moustaches and accent to match. Simon Cooksey's American tourist, Orville Tafflemeir, was an impressive characterisation by this versatile actor.

All the ladies were splendid. Metella (Michele Luck) with her far ranging voice, Carol Hunt as Gabrielle showing her skill with the part originally written by Offenbach for his favourite actress and mistress, Zulma Bouffer who inspired much of his work.

Raoul's pursuit of the Baroness (Rose-Marie Collins) is the main theme of the operetta and her stunning costumes did much to enhance the part. The other eight principals and 39 chorus played their parts to perfection and Gillian Jarvis is to be congratulated on a first class production.

**Derrick Graham**