

## MARKET HALL'S JUDY IS A WINNER

### EAST SURRY OPERATIC SOCIETY'S RENDERING OF "DADDY LONG LEGS"

"Little orphan girl, makes good" has provided the basic plot for many a novel and play, and anyone who has an ounce of sentiment is invariably an easy target for so simple and yet so touching a theme. Jean Webster, in her novel "Daddy Long Legs," embellished this time-honoured story line in a delightful way by introducing a handsome fairy god-father whose wealth transformed the waif into a beautiful, yet still faintly urchin young woman and with whom "Daddy Long Legs" fell hopelessly in love. Alas, the true cause of love was never a smooth one, and there are some anxious moments before the ex-waif and her benefactor are finally and firmly united.

A trite story? Thus rendered, perhaps, but set to the charming music of Hugh Martin and adapted for the stage by Eric Naschwitz and Jean Webster herself, "Daddy Long Legs" comes sparkingly to life across the footlights under another name "Love From Judy".

And at the market Hall, Redhill, this week, the East Surrey Operatic Society, with a warm and full blooded interpretation of the piece, makes one wonder why it has not enjoyed greater popularity since it was first performed in London nine years ago.

No one who takes even a passing interest in the trials and tribulations of new London shows will have forgotten the impact Jeannie Carson made as Judy in the London production. Much of her success was due, doubtless, to her own gamin and vibrant personality, but she would be the first to admit that she owed a great deal to the authors of the piece for making the part of Judy such a choice one. Now at the Market Hall, a similar chance has come the way of Joyce Gascoigne-Pees. And what a thumping success in she makes of it!

Whether in the drab reach-me-downs of the orphanage "uniform" or prettily got up in college graduation gown, Miss Gascoigne-Pees conveyed just the right nuances of emotion in an exhausting role that called for considerable acting ability. Nor did her talents end there. She has a pretty voice, well-suited to the frequently wistful lyrics, and her playing of the letter scene - in which she sings "Dear Daddy Long Legs" so touchingly was beautifully done.

As the tall, elegant Jervis Pendleton - alias Daddy Long Legs - long time favourite of East Surrey productions, Andrew Glass has a role streets removed from the memorable Billy Bigelow he gave us; in "Carousel".

It is a measure of ability as an actor that he makes us forget the brash, bad Billy and charms us with a polished performance which the benevolent, "uncle" figure is gradually replaced by the tender suitor of the girl he had once looked on as nothing more than "a child in pigtails".

His pleasant baritone voice is never better than when singing the haunting title number.

Light relief comes in the performances of Ted Holding and John Fallon as youthful and slightly love sick collegiates, and Mr. Holding's plentiful powerhouse of vitality suggested that an electric light bulb placed in his mouth would respond with a brilliant array of wattage.

Cupid's arrows fly thick and fast and Mr. Holding eventually finds a target in Julia, Judy's room-mate, engagingly portrayed by Angela Penfold who danced as sweetly as she sang. Another breaker of many hearts is Sally, and in a rewarding part, Gillian Hayter set out feet tapping with a brace of lilting songs.

Acting honours are also due to Sheila Hobbs, who gave us a perfect vignette in the opening scenes as a hard-hearted and blackly-scowling Mrs. Lippett, a matron with seemingly few mother-like virtues. Of a perky bunch of orphans, the tiny Anne Greaves caught the eye with her bouncing vitality and complete lack of

stage-fright. Molly Greaves has: an important supporting role as Mrs. Pritchard, the kindly-disposed confidante of Judy, and gives the part grace and dignity with just the right hint of match-making propensities.

Others who made notable contributions to the whole, either in song or prose, included Janet King, as Butterfly, the wiseacre of a coloured mammy, and John Rapley, Butterfly's long-suffering helpmate.

A feature of every East Surrey production is the chorus work, and in their current offering the high standard is triumphantly maintained. The producer, Elsie Rendell, has handled the full stage scenes with considerable effect and capably overcomes the limitations of a less than full-size stage.

One of the highlights of the second act is the ballet scene; and the society have been fortunate indeed to secure the services of Shirley Knight, a ballerina of delicate skill, who was splendidly supported by Angela Penfold and Andrew Glass.

Finally, a word of warm praise for the accompanists, Patsie Smith and Robin Gritton (also the musical director). Two pianos expertly played can produce a very pleasing sound, and such was the case here.

To sum up, this "Judy" is winner - and how heartening it must have been for the entire company to see virtually a full house for the opening night on Tuesday.

W.J.L.