

BRILLIANT PERFORMANCE OF "THE REBEL MAID"

EAST SURREY OPERATIC SOCIETY SCORE ANOTHER TRIUMPH

Within two years of its Golden Jubilee, East Surrey Operatic Society shows symptoms of approaching senility in production of "The Rebel Maid" at Redhill Market Hall this week. This "romantic light opera" by a Surrey composer has been given by the Society before, but that was over twenty years ago, and in spite of its having been the subject of a concert version performance Redhill only a few months since, it had sufficient appeal to draw a more than moderately full house for its first night on Tuesday. When the curtain went up on the first scene it was at once evident that the Production would be at least bright and colourful, and as the evening progressed it became clear that in the quality of the singing, acting and dancing this was a worthy successor to the "Merrie England" and "Student Prince" of the last two years. How far Montague Phillips' music will bear comparison with that of Edward German and Sigmund Romberg may be a matter of opinion and taste, but at least "The Rebel Maid" has plenty of pleasant, singable tunes, its setting in the post-Restoration time when James went out and William Of Orange came in gives scope for picturesque period costuming, there is a real story on mildly melodramatic lines, and the piece has all the other conventional concomitants of amusing dialogue, comic byplay, rousing choruses and kaleidoscopic dances.

In this week's show local audiences renew acquaintance with a number of amateurs performers who have entertained them well in past years, and are introduced to one or two newcomers who make a distinct accession to the Society's stock of talent. Molly Greaves in the part of Lady Mary Trefusis, the Rebel Maid of the title, confirms the excellent impression she created last year as Kathie in "The Student Prince", investing the role with a gay and gracious quality using a delightful voice to effect, moving with instinctive grace and wearing thee raiment of a seventeenth century lady of quality as to the manor born. Of the newcomers, Shirley Court has little opportunity to make a very pretty picture as Dorothy and show that she has a singing voice to match, but these things she does convincingly. Roy Williamson is a veritable find for the Society as a comedian, his performance as Solomon Hooker being a thoroughly hilarious piece of work. There are no dull moments when he is on the stage, and the scene in which he tells of how he led the King's soldiers a wild goose chase in the pursuit of the Rebel Maid is (with full co-operation from the chorus) one of the most uproarious bits of clowning that Redhill has seen for years. Mr. Williamson acts with deceptive ease, suiting word to facial expression, droll gesture and what the boxing ring knows as skilful footwork, and if he had a voice with a little more volume for the funny songs he has to sing, his would be a contribution of really professional quality. The part of Lady Elizabeth Weston is handled with skill and discretion by Leila Williamson, who succeeds in conveying the character of an ever-hoping old maid without making it into a seventeenth century version of Suzette Tarry.

Of the established "regulars" among East Surrey operamateurs, Douglas Chantler brings to bear all the robust masculinity one look for from him the hero part of Derek Lanscombe, and shows that he can sing in stirring style such numbers as the familiar "Fishermen of England". Don Nicol is as saturnine and villainly snarling as could be desired as the Bad Hat of the play, Sir Stepen Crespigny, and seldom can E. Lovell Hewitt have had a role that has given him more opportunity for comic character acting than he exploits with such outstanding success as Septimus Bunkle, the genially rascally innkeeper. Another sprightly and smile-provoking performance is that of Shelagh Daniels as Abigail, Lady Mary's maid. Frank Tatham has one or two opportunities as Captain Percy Jerome of exercising a the tenor voice of above average quality; Bryan Mason plays with stately dignity and speaks with praiseworthy clarity as Lord Milverton; William Malcomson has a quite convincing Dutch accent in the little that is seen and heard of him as William of Orange; and other parts are effectively handled by Gordon Hill as Sam and Jack Hieatt as a Sergeant in King James's army. The chorus work, reaches a high standard both musically and in the manner of concerted movement and the performances are under reliable direction with Elsie Rendell once again as the producer and Stanley Collett as conductor of an orchestra recruited from such a body of sound musicians as the Redhill Society of Instrumentalists.

G.W.B.