

1966

So many enchanted evenings

South Pacific: Operatic's biggest success

Every seat for the week sold before the curtain went up. That was the record set up by East Surrey Operatic's production of *South Pacific*. The enthusiastic reception given by the market Hal audiences left doubt that this support was well deserved. It was interesting to see how the East Surrey, which has so often proved its strength in musical talent, tackled a production which puts a great emphasis on humorous and dramatic interpretation, demanding at the same time, stage-manager slickness.

Michael Macdonald brought to the character of Emile a convincing sense of dignity and sincerity. His warm, vibrant singing, particularly in "One Enchanted Evening" had a quality rarely heard on the amateur stage. Barbara Allen, in her first leading role for the Operatic was well cast as Nellie Forbush. This was a confident, lively performance with a bubbling sense of fun to which the audience quickly responded.

As the native souvenir seller, Joan Passingham made the most of her opportunity to develop the character of Bloody Mary and achieving the difficult balance the part needs to balance the broad humour of the GIs with the more tender relationship with her daughter Liat. Liat was played by Angela Penfold, whose skill as a dancer was apparent in her clever miming to the song "Happy Talk".

American accents have proved a stumbling block for many amateur companies, even if one could criticise this aspect of many minor parts, on the whole the cast managed to sound like Americans, as well as look like them.

John Rapley made a strong impact as a convincing Capt. Brackett, and John Fallon was equally well cast in the tenor role of Lieut. Cable. *South Pacific's* humour is extracted mainly for the colourful character of Luther Billis and Malcolm Howe squeezed the last ounce out of every situation, largely because of his ability to develop visual as well as verbal humour.

Production was colourful and exciting. The quick scene changes were well handled considering the restrictions of the rather small stage, but the important blackouts would have been improved if it had been possible to subdue the orchestra lights.

The confident smoothness and flow undoubtedly reflected the wise experience of producer Elsie Rendell who is able to use and draw out individual talents – as, for example, the use of the voice of Molly Greaves in an unusual repeat of "Bali Ha'i". Colin Copestake got a polish and attack from the orchestra which captured the audience in a compelling overture and sustained an unusually high musical standard right through to the finale.