

1983 OKLAHOMA!

BWT Review

Old favourite was a popular choice

WITHAM Operatic Society's revival of that triumphant musical, Oklahoma!, at the Public Hall last week, was a most popular choice. If there were no show stopping moments of sheer excitement this time the level of entertainment was high indeed and Stephen Kenna's musical direction extracted full value from all the well-loved melodies.

Stewart Adkins and Lara Barber looked just right at the attractive young couple in love and Lara's graceful dancing was an added bonus. Pat Briggs used the 12 years since she starred in the leading role to build up a comforting picture of Aunt Eller as did Geoffrey Coverdale with his richly comic, larger-than-life Ali Hakim.

Often in amateur productions the dream ballet is a prolonged hiccup and can be a bore. Not this time, however, thanks to some splendid choreography by Cynthia Stead and her part-time ballet dancers. Particular praise must go to Kathryn Adkins, Brian Henderson and Ron Howe together with the gorgeous cancan girls Helene Jones, Patsy Doy and Julie Hampshire - the economy-sized programme did not identify them which was a pity. Cynthia Stead, herself, contributed a most diverting impression of Ado Annie, full of expression and Simon Mitchell, although his costume appeared to have come from Stratford-upon-Avon, was a lively Will Parker.

But the serious actors turned their backs on any suggestion of a fancy dress ball and Nicholas Clough's study of tortured Jud Fry was as good as they come. Ernie Law's elderly Andrew Carries was masterly and Tim Sheppard's make-up as Cord Elam was good enough for Metro Goldwyn Mayer. Lydia Clough screamed her way into the principals' list as giggling Gertie with Ron Howe, Ewart Cornfield and Malcolm Lowe sound in smaller parts. They have a very fine chorus line here but the line, this time, seemed a little straighter than usual especially for the men. Peter Green's direction resulted in a smooth-running production of this old favourite.

The Wednesday performance was distinguished by the re-appearance of the 1971 leading man. Business duties prevented Stewart Adkins taking the stage that night so David Fletcher, now resident in Yorkshire, returned to the scene of his former triumphs. As Curley, his fine voice and assured stage presence provided an evening of pleasure to a packed house and revived many happy memories of the days when he was a prominent figure in local operatic circles.

Gilbert Sutcliffe