

**DRAFT REPORT FOR THE EASTERN AREA MAGAZINE
PERFORMANCE OF 30TH OCTOBER 1998**

WITHAM A.O.S. - THE MERRY WIDOW

This production, under the Direction of Cynthia Stead, possessed all the elements of Ruritanian make believe, colour, style and elegance, with well sung music, which are the hall marks of Viennese Operetta, and made a memorable evening. Scenery and lighting were excellent, and even on the small stage the acting area became a space with the style and elegance to properly portray the locale. Costumes too were first rate, making the whole a visual treat. Space was at a premium for one or two of the dance numbers, though Act III opening and Grisettes were fine. The chorus had only limited movement, and though not the 'in' thing these days it actually worked very well, not only in terms of the style, but also the high quality of the chorus singing. I have not heard better for a long time, for diction, control and quality of harmony. If there was an award for this aspect of production, this chorus (and M.D.) would get it! Women! Women!..., and the Grisettes numbers duly stopped the show for encores. Nick Clough's Danilo dominated, as it should, though a little more colour and flamboyance would have added spice to the character. As the Widow, Alison Brewer sang the part well, but more dynamism and vivaciousness was needed to make the character fully effective. Put another way, there needed to be more of an evident chemistry between Danilo and Anna, outside of the words and music. Among the other principals, there were some very good performances, and voices, including Patrick O'Brian as a worried but worldly innocent Zeta, Val Ditchman as a Valencienne who couldn't quite decide but settled for being a highly respectable wife, David Holman as a Camille who didn't really know why it was all going wrong, and a beautifully camp Njegus from Tim Sheppard. Minor principal support was first class. New M.D. Jerry Martin made his mark with excellent chorus work, and a well controlled orchestra, which for the most part was well in sympathy with the stage. This really was an excellent evening's entertainment, and one which I thoroughly enjoyed, along with the 80% audience over the week's run.

Other Comments (for the Society only)

1. I don't really want to say much more about a show which you all obviously enjoyed doing, and in overall terms was so good, though I must say how much I liked the opening 'Gauze Scene', as a background to the Overture. It certainly quietened the audience and allowed us to enjoy both the music of the Overture and the servants preparations without the usual background of conversation.
2. Whilst it was evident that the audience as a whole was enjoying the show immensely, I regret to say that there were those behind me who did not seem to know how to behave in an auditorium, and persisted in having conversations whilst the show was in progress, one of these occasions being during Anna's "Vilia" solo. I would not mention it if it were not for the fact that those concerned seemed to be well acquainted with the Society and some of its members, and should therefore know better.
3. I would like to congratulate you yet again on what remains probably the best programme in my Region. Always plenty in it of interest, both about the show and about the Society, and well laid out. Many thanks for including my letter about NODA, and also the useful Diary Dates column. I'd be delighted to put the programme forward for the next programme competition. If you agree, perhaps you could let me have four unmarked copies within the next few weeks, and I'll do the necessary from there.

John Warburton
8th November 1998