

1987 Merry Widow

BWT Review

A Merry time for Everyone

ALL this week, at the Public Hall, Witham Amateur Operatic Society is presenting Franz Lehar's light, sparkling, romantic, musical comedy, The Merry Widow.

The action takes place in Paris and is centred on the troubled romance of a wealthy young widow and a nobleman. They both declare at the start they will never marry one another. This, though, is musical comedy and we all know before the final curtain they will be together and live happily ever after.

Patsy Doy was the merry widow. She had some lovely songs to sing and from her beautifully created entrance to the final chorus, she had the first night audience entranced. Count Danilo, played by Howard Brooks, was a good leading man though he tended to lack variation in the pace of his delivery.

There is a maze of sub plots, most of them concerning romantic liaisons. Pat Briggs as a scheming flirt and Simon Mitchell, as the sophisticated object of her attentions, gave interesting performances. Baron Zeta, the simple grey haired doddering cuckold, was played by Tim Sheppard and was very well balanced by Peter Green, who made the most of his every line in a dry, camp caricature of the Factotum Njegus.

Betty Blower's hand as producer was visible right from the light hearted action during the overture. Her handling of the crowd scenes, especially at the start of Act Two, was a feature of the show and the septet Women brought the house down.

In the first act the pace was rather uniform but John James, the musical director, introduced a lot more pace and vitality into the last two acts.

Cascada, played by Tony Court, and Stewart Adkins, playing St Brioche, raised a lot of laughs as a pair of characters lifted straight out of a Christmas pantomime. Geoff Coverdale and Edward Maltby, even though they only had minor roles to play, were frequently the centre of the audience's attention. Helene Jones, Alison Brewer, Ann Marsden and Tim Clark completed a strong cast of principals. The six young grisettes in the scene a la Maxim bubbled with enthusiasm and Cynthia Stead, the choreographer, added a lot to the show. The chorus was, as usual, a very strong feature.

This lavishly and colourfully dressed musical will be added to the long list of successes already achieved by the society.

JAMES BRIGHT

