

Me and my girl a show in a million

YOU could not have made a better start to your theatre-going this season than by paying a visit to Chelmsford's Civic Theatre to see the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's outstanding presentation of Noel Gray's pantomime of a musical, *Me and My Girl*.

● NEARLY a million people visited Chelmsford library in one year making it the tops in Essex. Altogether, a total of 970,757 made the trip to the central library in the county town between April 1996 and March this year.

That equals to triple the number who visit Colchester Zoo annually.

Even after 23 years with CAODS that old maestro of a producer, Ray Jeffery, is capable of producing fresh surprises for the eye and ear and Barry Hester's performance as Bill Snibson, the cockney who is pitchforked into the aristocracy has moment after moment of sheer unadulterated brilliance.

It's also the funniest performance I have ever seen in any CAODS show and I saw my first one 60 years ago at the old Regent Theatre.

What makes Barry's performance so great is that throughout his love for his girl, Sally Smith, strikingly portrayed both vocally and dramatically by Diana Baker, shines like an unquenchable beacon through all the machinations of the Hartford family to make him give her up and I've heard no more moving an account of

Me and My Girl than theirs.

Of the noble Hartford family none is more toffee-nosed and aristocratic than Gill Plumtree as Maria, Duchess of Dene, with Kevin Abrey, the epitome of the prewar silly ass as Gerald Bolingbroke and Xanthe Johnstone as a shamelessly scheming Lady Jacqueline.

Peter Smith has given no better performance on the Civic stage than his portrayal of a knight won over by Sally's charms and Patrick Tucker, besides training the chorus, has also found time to create a very funny study of the family solicitor Parchester.

The sets are stunning, the balance between orchestra and singers ideal and the ensemble work outstanding. *Me and My Girl* is a show in a million.