

CALAMITY Jane may not be the neatest of musicals. But then what musical based on a film is? However it is capable of generating a lot of theatrical excitement.

Which is just what it's doing at Chelmsford's Civic Theatre all this week in Ray Jeffery's fast moving production for Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society.

Ray's production is unlike any other Calamity Jane I've reviewed. The running order of the numbers (and I suspect some of the dialogue as well) has been altered and a thrillingly performed Indian dance scene has turned up from somewhere.

But Ray has done more than just wring the last drop of excitement out of this musical, based on the life of a real life gal who lived in the Wild West town of Deadwood City in the second half of the 19th century.

By making the most of the big romantic numbers like Secret Love he has shown the show has the basic ingredients of the old fashioned romantic musical. And it is none the worse for it.

The chorus belt out numbers like Windy City and Careless To The Truth with a gusto that drew an immediate and enthusiastic response from Monday's first night audience.

While their rich-toned singing of Black Hills of Dakota is as beautiful as anything I've heard in any CAODS' production.

In the title role Pam Med-

croft took some time to settle down on the right wavelength. At first most of her singing was inaudible, but during her performance of Windy City she suddenly took total command and stayed that way until the final curtain.

Her singing voice is not sufficiently brassy to be absolutely ideal for the role, but her vivacity, attack and brash charm makes her a most appealing as well as a convincing Calamity Jane.

Brian Churcher is a tower of strength as Wild Bill Hickock, his singing being infused with a manly vigour and his acting suggesting a smoking volcano beneath his rugged exterior.

He and Bert Simpson, who gives the performance of his life as the volatile Henry Miller, were two of the few who did not succumb to an attack of slothful sluggishness during the first act on Monday which momentarily was in danger of bringing the show to its knees.

Simon Fisher shows there is a poet lurking just beneath the martial breast of Lt Danny Gilmartin, while Angela Jenner both charms and captivates as Katie Brown.

There is no real comedian's role in Calamity Jane, but Peter Smith does raise some laughs as song and dance man, Francis Fryer, aided by Carolyne Escott as a vivacious Susan.

Of the small cameos, that of Frank Wilkinson's Rattlesnake, the guard on the Deadwood stage coach, stands out because of the rightness of its accent.

The costumes are absolutely stunning and musical director Gerald Hines secures some beautiful phrasing and finely articulated rhythms from his orchestra.

Calamity Jane, in this production, is just the right kind of show to make you forget the economic recession and the fact that winter is approaching fast. **PETER ANDREWS.**