

Riot of costumes in this Camelot

THE ADVANCE billing for Ray Jeffrey's production of Camelot for the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the towns Civic Theatre this week promised it would be the most spectacular yet, and it is a promise that has been kept.

A silver for the Parsons

TWO of the best known figures on the local entertainments scene celebrated their Silver Wedding anniversary on Tuesday in the most appropriate manner . . . in the theatre.

Stan Parsons, secretary of Chelmsford Amateur Operatic Society is playing comedy lead of Sir Pellinore in the society's production of Camelot all this week.

And his wife, the former Jill Cosham, is selling programmes and welcoming members of the audience in the theatre foyer.

Stan and Jill were married just before another operatic production, The Gondoliers, in the old Regent Theatre. So obviously for them it has been a case of "we start as we mean to go on."

Aided by a truly gorgeous array of costumes which at times almost dazzles the eyes, Camelot could truly be described as the society's most visually stunning show at the civic, and certainly one of the longest.

For all Mr Jeffrey's eye for brilliance and his superb handling of the chorus in the Joust and Fie On Goodness numbers, Camelot did not warm the cockles of my heart in the way many of his other productions have.

But then I do not find Camelot a very satisfying musical. The idealistic views of King Arthur about his Knights of the Round Table and chivalry do not fit comfortably into the musical formula, and, although I have seen the show several times, I find the storyline, especially in act two, hard to follow.

The actor playing Arthur really needs to be able to act in the traditional Shakespearian mould as well as put over his numbers, and Ken Cooper makes a very good job of both facets, even

if his approach to How To Handle A Woman could be more caressing.

And he has a real stage presence as also has Russ Watson as a cocky assertive Lancelot attacking numbers like Cest Moi with gusto, although the vocal compasses did not always lie easily for him, and Stan Parsons, as King Pellinore, working hard to extract laughs from lines that are pretty barren in humour.

VOICE

Gay Jackson meets many of the acting requirements of Queen Guenvere but her singing voice is not always sufficiently strong to allow her to attack her numbers sufficiently.

Two very supple performances come from Peter Smith as Mordred, making mischief every time he sets foot on stage and from Angela Jenner as Morgan-le-Fey, fully his equal when it comes to plotting.

Chris Yorke-Edwards, Robin Sampson and Dudley Smith make up a doughty trio of knights, but Alan Merrill's Merlin is unconvincing — one does not suggest old age by forever making indecisive hand gestures.