

THE AMATEUR STAGE

"DANCING YEARS" IS BIGGEST VENTURE

Ambition Gets Its Reward

FOR NOVELLO'S romantic musical, "The Dancing Years," produced by Chelmsford Operatic and Dramatic Society this week at the Regent Theatre, may prove to be their most successful venture. It is certainly their most ambitious.

Novello's world of gaudily dressed officers, ravishing women and penniless artists has come to life in a show that the Chelmsford company had spared no pains to perfect. The casting is good, costuming effective and in period, and the sets first-class.

The cast was quick to capture the spirit of the show on the opening night on Monday and the audience responded and gave a generous reception.

THE HALL-MARK

The main leads had pleasant enough voices, though in one or two cases they had not sufficient strength. The dancing was a hall-mark of the show, and the "straight" acting warm and untitled.

The show provides a pointer or two stars of the future. William Broadley has an Alec Guinness appeal; that candid and casual way of acting which goes over enormously well.

Vera Stock's claims to fame rest more on her voice, which had an adequate range and volume, but her acting was able and convincing.

William Broadley, who takes the male lead in this his first appearance in musical comedy, plays a penniless composer who rises to fame with his haunting waltz tunes. He is well cast in a role in which he excels with a blend of egoism and dry wit.

EASY CHARM

The leading feminine role is delightfully taken by Vera Stock. With an easy charm her musical numbers "I can give you the starlight" and "My dearest dear" enchanted.

Vivacious in any show, June Gisby had a sweet appeal as an Austrian schoolgirl; her singing and dancing were well rendered, especially in "Primrose," a song and dance routine.

Ted Matthews, playing an aristocrat, took time to settle down in a part which demanded that he should be stiff and sarcastic. The faded opera star was portrayed by Ethel Brook with telling dignity, while Eric Strutt struggled manfully in two different supporting roles. But a recent bout of tonsillitis curbed his vocal strength. In a routine role Josephine Maisie made a humorous housekeeper.

As the lovesick young officer, Stanley Parsons became a favourite with his boyish exuberance. He partners June Gisby in the supporting love story. A striking achievement by Frank Morgan as a Nazi officer in the last scene was ably abetted by John Howitt as another Nazi; and a self-assured young man, Alan Sievwright, who appeared for the first time on any stage, delighted with a thorough performance.

THE CAST

The night watchman, Eric Strutt; Grete Schone, June Gisby; Rudi Kleber, William Broadley; Hattie Watney, Josephine Maisie; Lilli, Anne Fleming; Elizabeth, Peggy Welham; Hilde, Vera Sell; Franzel, Stan. Parsons; 1st officer, Peter Smith; Maria Zeigler, Vera Stock; Prince Charles Metterling, Ted Matthews; Cécile Kurt, Ethel Brook; Countess Lotte, Rosemary Gornall; footman, Robin Sampson; Lorelei, Vera Stock, The Countess, Ethel Brook, The Lover, Eric Strutt; Otto, Alan Harper, Schani, Fred Gisby; Oscar, Robin Sampson; a waiter, Herbert Heistermann; Kathie (a maid), Iris Allen; Carl, Alan Sievwright; Goetzer, Frank Morgan; Poldi, John Howitt.

Characters in the asque: Sid Collicott, Trixie Brewer, Beryl Goulden, Diane Lawson, Keith Harper, Pat Smith, Kay Trost, Derek Ann, Fred Gisby, John Trost, Tony Richardson, Margaret French, Josephine Pyson, Roy Morris, Tony Oliver.

Dancing chorus: Trixie Brewer, Josephine Dyson, Margaret French, Beryl Goulden, Una Harris, Diane Lawson, Christine Richardson, Barbara Sherman, Pat Smith, Kay Trost, Betty Wager, Pam Williams; Derek Ann, Sid Collicott, Keith Harper, Tony Oliver, Peter Smith, John Trost.

Chorus: Flora Cook, Elizabeth Dutton, Sylvia Easton, Julia Fairhead, Anne Fleming, Lillian George, Gwendoline Gibson, Joan Hann, Doreen Hurrell, Carolyn Hudson, Betty Lomas, Muriel Passmore, Vera Pope, Ruth Robinson, Vera Sell, Peggy Welham; Derek Ann, John Boyle, Sid Collicott, Ken Collins, Fred Gisby, Keith Harper, John Howitt, Herbert Heistermann, John Mella, Tony Oliver, George Pheby, Ron Perry, Peter Smith, John Trost.



Some of the cast of "The Dancing Years" take a ride in a four-wheeler in Chelmsford to attract attention to the production.

SHAPELY CHORUS

A shapely set of dancing chorus girls, obviously rehearsed to the last detail, acquitted themselves with a vivacious and provocative performance. And incidentally, their male partners surprised everyone. The choral work was wholesome and the chorists did much to achieve the spirit of the play in the opening scenes.

The staging of the Masques, which portrayed contemporary life (at the time of Novello's writing) was done with that delicate touch which hinted at much yet revealed little. The mime was done exquisitely and the dances, which had an Apache flavour, were well rendered.

In conclusion, a final handshake to producer Robert Vernon for the imposing task of welding his sixty-strong company into a unit. This was a task for any producer, but Mr. Vernon had to contend also with elaborate sets and frequent scene changes.

Those eye-catching dance routines were devised by Miss Sadie Sydney. The orchestra (conductor Mr. George H. Horrey) blended well with the vocal strength of the cast.

The production of the "Dancing Years" has cost upwards of £1,500 to stage for the seven performances this week. It continues to-night and to-morrow (Saturday) for matinee and evening performances.