

GUYS AND DOLLS? JUST ONE GLORIOUS ROMP

EXOTIC, EXCITING AND EXHAUSTING

IT looked more like a rugby scrum than a dance in an exotic Cuban night-club. Actually, it was one of the funniest, most unexpected climaxes in the production of "Guys and Dolls" by the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, at the Regent Theatre, Chelmsford, this week.

After a fast and furious Cuban-type dance sequence the guys flung their dolls with joyous abandon in a heap on the floor. Then added themselves to the seething mass of humanity.

It was perfectly timed. And it was hilarious. It must also have been quite exhausting. But that's how the whole show was. So fast, slick and smooth it wasn't until the final curtain that I remembered the cast had probably used up enough energy to win an Olympic gold medal apiece.

These nights out in Runyonland (the show is based on a Damon Runyon novel) have been most refreshing for the people of Chelmsford. After all, the next best thing to a bout of bracing exercises is seeing someone else practically kill themselves. Especially if it's purely for pleasure — particularly yours.

But as the curtain went up for the fourth time at the end of Monday night's show there wasn't a wilting chorus girl among the lot of them. In fact they looked more

than game for a repeat performance, and I mean right away.

THE ROMANCE

Not that the show was all fun and games. There were a few romantic moments, and a very few wistful ones.

But the show's exuberance could not be contained for very long. And this tremendously live society gave it everything they had.

The story is simple but not a bit sweet. I think the players were glad to get away from the sometimes cloying comparatively slow-moving productions of the past few years.

The main scenes were in a Salvation Army Mission Hall, assorted streets on Broadway, the hot box night-club and the equally hot Café Cubano in Cuba. Then there was a tense game of crap (or dice if you prefer it), which took place in a most artistic sewer.

THE BETTING

Sarah, a sweet, innocent Salvation Army lass is pursued for the sake of a bet by arch-gambler Sky Masterson. Sky wins his bet by transporting the gentle Sarah to a Cuban night-club that oozes sex and sin.

Sarah loves every minute, once Sky has suppressed her doubts with a milk drink flavoured with "something the natives use."

Well and truly plastered, Sarah makes the most of her night out and is carried off by Sky to catch the plane home.

There is a romantic farewell outside the Mission Hall followed by the unromantic exent of Sky's friends from the hall which they have commandeered in Sister

Sarah's absence—for an illicit crap session. But he looked good and, as always, acted well.

THE PROOF

It takes Sky the rest of the show to prove to Sarah that he isn't as bad as she thought he was. And she isn't as good as she thought she was. So they should get married.

But that's only a brief outline. What really makes the show "go" are the disarmingly sinful characters that have made Damon Runyon a famous author.

For instance there is Nicely-Nicely Johnson, the most miserable — and lovable — rat that ever lived. Arthur Staniland, in this role, was at his best. I have only seen him in romantic parts before. And one fact stands out a mile. As well as having an extremely good voice Arthur Staniland is a fine comedian.

THE COMEDY

Pat Viles was rather wooden at first as Sister Sarah. But her voice is lovely and you can't have everything. It was with pleasure that we saw Pat loosen up, particularly when we got to the hilarious scene in Cuba. I think she enjoyed that bit as much as Sister Sarah did.

Freddie Costello, who played Sky Masterson with his customary suave assurance did not come over quite so well as usual. His voice seemed to lack power and during his solos the orchestra could have played it

THE ACCENT

A honey of a performance was given by Beryl Manaton, as Adelaide the night-club "broad" who has been engaged to Nathan for 14 years. Pert and decidedly vulgar, but with a heart of gold, everyone was mighty relieved when Adelaide finally got her man.

Beryl's Brooklyn accent was the most convincing in the cast. It didn't even flag when she half-sang her cynicisms on the crooked course of true love. Stan Parsons, as fiancé Nathan, was loud, clear and extremely funny.

THE GIANT

Nathan and Nicely - Nicely's partners in crap, played by Jim Allen, Neville Burt and giant-sized David Warder, would have been better had they been audible.

And that's just about everybody except the chorus — who in fact MADE the show. Their dancing has improved beyond measure — many of the solo "spots" were of professional standard. Their timing was perfect and their enthusiasm . . . well, I've already commented on their marathon performance.

This show is probably the biggest romp these guys and dolls have had for years. Let's have another one sometime.

J.A.S



Adelaide (Beryl Manaton) and Nathan (Stan Parsons), the couple who have been engaged for 14 years but never got around to the wedding, in a scene from "Guys and Dolls" presented by the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Regent Theatre, this week.

