

Arts reviews

FOR the second time in just over a decade, The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic And Dramatic Society are presenting **Half A Sixpence** at the town's Civic Theatre and making a Flash, Bang Wallop success of it!

In the intervening period, director Ray Jeffery, who directed the first CAODS production in 1974, has rethought his approach to this musical adaptation of H. G. Wells' novel, *Kipps*, about a Victorian draper's assistant who comes into a fortune, loses it, but finds true happiness.

The result is a still more exciting piece of theatre which always avoids the obvious and has colour, style, thrilling choreography brilliantly executed, comedy, pathos and good acting and singing.

If ever there was a show to prove my point that a good amateur show with professional purpose can be as good as a professional show, then it's *Half A Sixpence*.

In the lead roles Patrick Tucker as Arthur Kipps and Christine Nicol as Ann give the show of their lives. Not only do they support each other but they capture the essential innocence of their characters in numbers such as *Long Ago* and, of course, the title-number.

As the actor Harry Chitterlow, Robin Sampson is suitably histrionically flamboyant and Roy Treloar as the socialist Sid Pornick, Richard Clements as the pessimist Buggins and Alistair McIlwraith, as the dandy Pearce make up a team of lively apprentices.

Gill Plumtree, Valerie Massey, Joy Wallace and Peter Smith make up a quartet of odiously snobbish Victorians smugly confident the rich man will always stay in his Castle and the poor man will get no further than his Gate!

Ray Jeffery is a past master at creating exciting dance routines to fill the entire Civic stage and he does so again with stunning effect in *If The Rain's Got To Fall* and, of course, *Flash Bang Wallop!*

His handling of the *Solarium Dance*, a scene that little has been made of in all the other productions I've seen is a masterpiece of comic invention just as the increasing bewilderment on Patrick Tucker's face is a masterpiece of comedy acting.

To play against the audience's sympathy in a musical is never easy but Leo McGiff succeeds brilliantly as the haughty Folkestone draper Mr Shalford, and the children, almost steal the show every time they're on stage with the naturalness and discipline of their performances. So does Edwin the cat.

Apart from the occasional overload passage which momentarily drowns the singers, musical director Judy Adams does a first-class job.

Monday's audience was enthralled and delighted by it all. And it's a long time since I came away from the Civic with my hands so sore from so much clapping!