

Married Night

Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of Half A Sixpence on Monday night was a triumph of an impact if there were no faults.

John Jones and Martin Burgess and Karen Munns, Audrey Hinton, Betty Worrall and Muriel Sampson) work together splendidly, while Joy Wallace, Joan Hann and Brian Tollisen, as the creme de la creme of 1900 Folkestone, condescend horribly.

Another superb performance comes from Stan Parsons as the Edwardian actor-cum-playwright, Chitterlow, both in terms of sheer voice and presence, while David Hurst gives to Mr Shalford the right blend of obsequiousness and bully for a prosperous draper.

TO direct and play the lead in a musical as complicated to stage as *The King And I* is normally to court disaster, but then Ray Jeffery, the director of Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, is no ordinary mortal.

His production at the town's Civic Theatre all this week has all the colour, panache and imagination we have come to expect of him during his previous 22 productions with the society.

But his performance as the 19th century autocratic King of Siam who summons an English governess, Mrs Anna (Angela Broad) to teach some of his 66 children and countless wives is mesmerising in its power and detail of characterisation.

I have seen several other performances of this Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, but never one in which the depth of the story line and the developing relationship between Anna and the King is plotted in greater detail.

Ray's performance inspires all the cast to new heights of excellence, not least Angela Broad who gives a performance full of female charm, her weapon for getting her way with the King.

Moments like Anna's first meeting with the royal children and the Uncle Thomas ballet are pure visual heaven. Both the sets and the costumes are gorgeously stunning.

Patrick Tucker and Dawn Sampson as Lun Tha and Princess Tuptim are an appealing pair of lovers, every note of both their duets being flecked with poignancy.

The large number of children in the cast (the youngest is four) are impressively disciplined and beautifully naturalistic in their acting, and a special word of praise must go to Neil MacDonald as Anna's son.

As the heir apparent to the Siamese throne, Andrew Ross grows in stature with every minute that passes in the death scene, while as Lady Thiang, Gill Plumtree brings true oriental dignity to the role of a woman who sacrifices her love for the King for the good of the state.

The chorus sing well, the orchestra only occasionally is too much for the solo voices, and as for the lighting, well that's just out of this world.

The young lovers were charmingly played, and sung, by Patrick Tucker and Dawn Sampson, beautifully made up as Princess Tuptim. The costumes were a visual treat

banier, which so often weighs down the second act, was done with charming authenticity.

Musical director was Judy Adams.

Eric Ashley