

The Merry Widow

— well worth a visit

THE MERRY WIDOW CIVIC THEATRE

THIS week's Merry Widow at the Civic Theatre recalls the hallowed sanctum of Hackney Central Library for yours truly.

It was there, but a few years ago, (I try to convince myself) that I discovered Lehar's hummable tunes. In an orgy of self-education the blue label Columbia long playing record was for me as instructive as the questioning of Socrates.

Lehar's piece of Ruritanian nonsense is given a stylish, accomplished and engaging performance by the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society under the guidance of their mentor Ray Jeffery.

The show looks magnificent, a riot of swirling dancers, a cascade of colourful costumes and an

ensemble playing of a very high order.

The Widow herself is played by Phyl Hart with grace and not inconsiderable charm. Russ Watson is an overwhelming womaniser as Count Danilo and Stan Parsons dithers amusingly in one of his old fogey roles as the Baron. Shelia Stiling is very fetching as his wife and Peter Smith bounces in and out and up and down as the Count's factotum.

All the well known numbers are given their full value and Women, Women, Women, sung by the main men, is beautifully managed. The orchestra accompanies most accurately and the whole show is well worth a visit — if you can manage to get in.

JON RICHARDS