

Breathtaking—just sheer breathtaking — that's My Fair Lady



**MY FAIR LADY —
CIVIC THEATRE**

PAM MEDCROFT is my fair lady. In the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's presentation of My Fair Lady at the Civic Theatre this week (all tickets were sold before the curtain rose on Monday night) she is completely stunning in the metamorphosis from the awful, simple flower girl with the voice like a tram screeching over the points, to the fetching society woman able to hold her head high amongst princes.

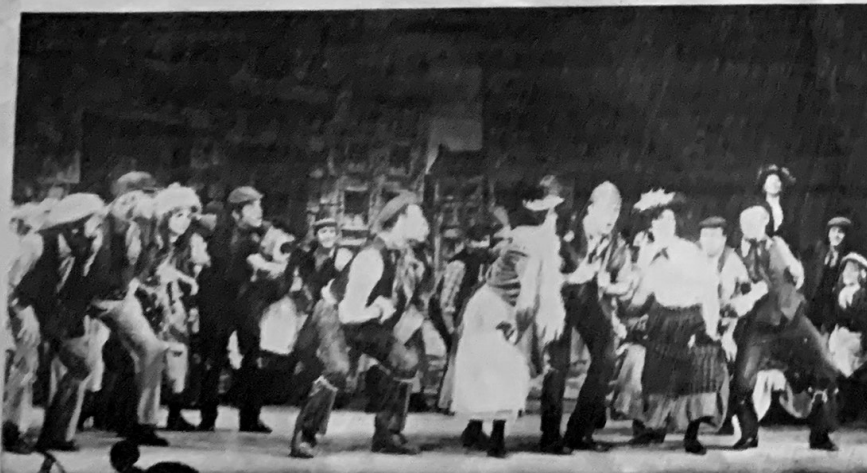
Ten years ago I wrote one of my most enthusiastic reviews about a performance. It was Pam Medcroft in The Boyfriend. Ten years later she has again taken the Civic stage by storm and made it entirely her own. If you haven't already managed to buy a ticket, I'm afraid you'll miss one of the very best professional performances the amateur stage has seen for a very long time.

As presented in Chelmsford, the show is in two halves; which makes the first half almost two hours long, too long for me, and too long for many. The second half crumbles away and not even

the magical Ray Jeffery can make it work entirely satisfactorily. The one big number in the second half, "Get me to the church on time," is splendidly and vigorously sung by the entire company in some magnificently-colourful costumes, led by Robin Sampson as the gruff and forthright dustman, Alfred Doolittle. But the rest goes for very little. As in the opening scene, Ray Jeffery's expertise in orchestrating large crowds is almost literally breathtaking. But when the scenery gets in the way, as it literally often does, then the producer's conception seems cramped by the limitations of the Civic stage. Splendid though so many of the big scenes were, the need to wait patiently while the orchestra played a reprise of what we had just heard while the stage crew worked like Trojans to prepare the next one, did take the edge off the whole show somewhat. How many times were the poor cast required to act themselves silly in front of the tabs while the sounds of breaking glass indicated just how the technicians were suffering a few feet away?

There were many other excellent performances, however, which will be long remembered after the traumas of the technical problems have faded. David Hawkins was superb as the urbane and absent-minded Professor Higgins. Neville Shreeve brought a whiff of the Indian sub-continent as Colonel Pickering and Patrick Tucker was very affecting in the comparatively small role of Freddy. His singing of "On the street where you live" was a real delight. Joy Wallace made the professor's mother a character of flesh and blood in a wonderfully judged and sensitive performance. And Jean Clements was a sympathetic and likeable Mrs. Pearce, long-suffering house-keeper of the infamous professor of phonetics.

Ray Jeffery's production was full of little touches to amuse and intrigue: the maid who in her forgetfulness sits on the master's chair; the lighting in so many ways; the grouping of the large chorus on so many occasions. Although I wondered why he found it necessary for the maids to leave every time during Eliza's night of instruction. They could so easily have stayed and thereby speeded up the action. Anton Archer



Some of the liveliness and excitement of Ray Jeffery's My Fair Lady is evident in this picture of Alfred Doolittle (Robin Sampson) centre, enjoying himself, Cockney style, with some of his friends.