

IT starts with a simple song and ends with a lump in the throat, and in between times it successively sparkles and dims, as it builds up to the crest of an enthusiastic wave, only to slip back into occasional depressions.

It, of course, is Chelmsford Operatic and Dramatic Society's 41st production—"South Pacific"—which is drawing a near-capacity crowd each night this week to the Regent Theatre.

The roaring songs of the male chorus of American servicemen on a lonely Pacific island give the show zest and zip as they full bloodedly and in a heartfelt way insist "There is nothing like a dame."

But then the show slips back into patches of slow-moving sadness before bouncing up again. And so it goes on.

In any more humble settings and surroundings it would be impressive.

Against the professional glittering background and atmosphere one suddenly feels a disappointment when now and again it does not keep up a professional standard. Maybe that is the price of setting such a high standard.

By now we have become so accustomed to the Society's productions being a success that this tends to be taken, rightly or wrongly, for granted. It is now rather the case of: "How much of a success have they made of it this time?"

AVERAGE

Well "South Pacific" is averagely successful. It is lavish, colourful, amusing and at the same time poignant.

It has the distinction of being, for a change, a two-voice show.

For some years now the burden of singing has fallen fairly and squarely on leading man, Freddie Costello, who has handled it nobly and who again, this year, sings in his usual assured manner in the part of a self-exiled French planter living on a Pacific island.

But this year, taking the stage for the first time, comes the Society's latest recruit, Arthur Staniland, whose fine tenor voice makes one forget that this is his first stage venture.

And when he sings, seated on the floor of a bamboo hut, with a native girl coiled up in his lap, one can only frankly admire his ability to sing so well under the most distracting conditions—and his self-control!

ENDEARING

David Hawkins brings to the richly humorous part of Luther Billis, the "wide boy" of the American outfit, a degree of acting above the musical show average. His expressive face and movements and his corn-crake singing voice are endearing characteristics of a plum part.

One can only admire the efforts of Monica Guavitt as the leading lady, Nellie Forbush—dizzy, impulsive and warm hearted, who falls in love with the planter. She puts an immense amount into a part but it is, to my mind, a part just out of her reach.

NEWCOMER

Another newcomer to the Society, Beryl Manaton, takes the rough, tough role of Bloody Mary, the sly native woman who sells, with a gap-toothed grin, almost anything from grass skirts and drunken heads to lonely Polynesian daughter, Liat.

exceptionally fine performance with a supple grace that is a pleasure to watch.

Two of the most endearing characters are the children of the French planter, played with delightful ingenuousness by Mary Chegwin and Mark Mulrennin, whose little song "Dites Moi", remains in the memory after much else is forgotten.

Many others in the cast merit individual mention, but where is one to stop? Mike Reed, Peter Smith and Jim Welham, of the men, contribute their quota to the success of the show, as also

do David Platt and Jim Williamson.

The cast also includes Neville Burt, Terry Mulrennin, Trevor Church, Richard Kenchington and Robin Sampson.

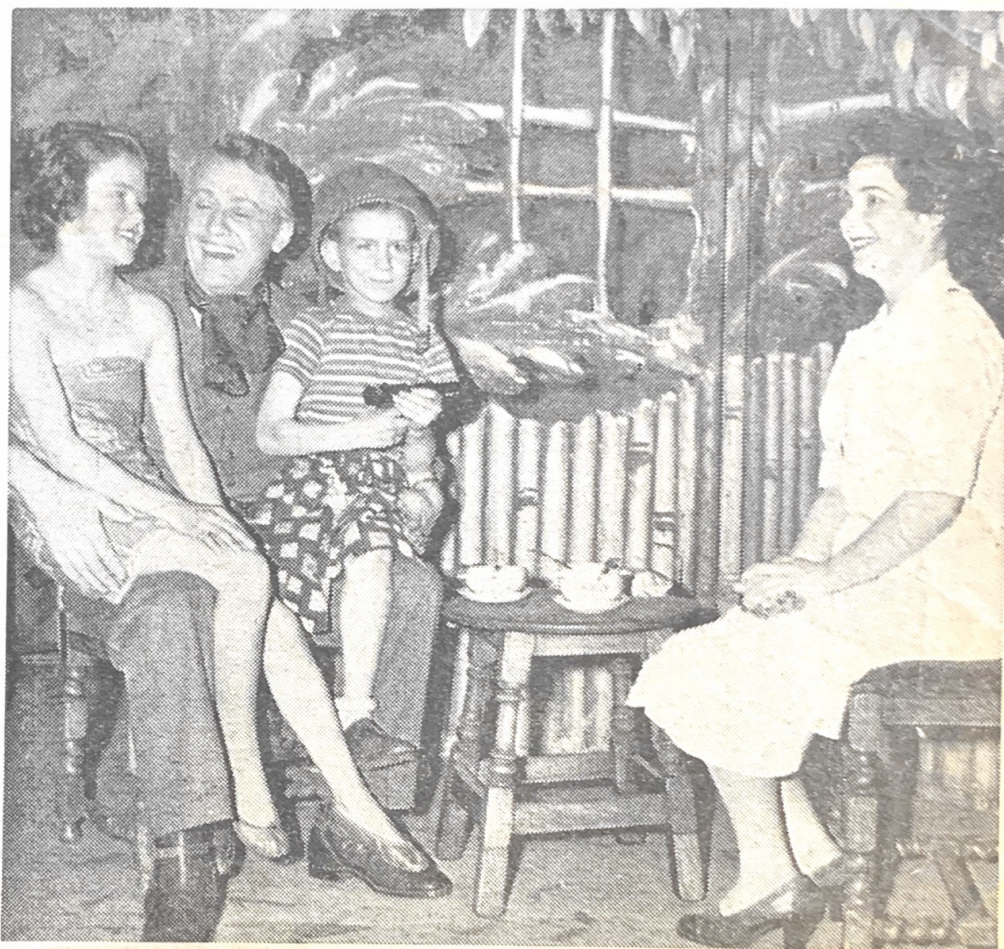
In the chorus are Ian Brown, Sid Collicott, Ken Collins, Derek Fisher, Philip Goulden, Stan Mold, Iris Ford, Linda Smith, Doris Ketley, Margaret Francis, Peggy Welham, Lillian George, Audrey Adler, Jennifer Bulmer, Maureen Gore, Brenda Hartley-Smith, Audrey McAuliffe, Pat Page, Anne Palmer, Muric Sampson, Kobel Shroust, Pam Turner and Kay Trost.

Production is again by Phyl Payne, with George E. Clarke as musical director.

There are further performances tonight (Friday) and tomorrow afternoon and evening.

Sales Note.—Seats for the show are completely sold out for tonight and tomorrow night, but there are still seats available for the Saturday matinee performance.

J.N.P.



Freddie Costello and Monica Gravitt with the children, Mary Chegwin and Mark Mulrennin, in the final scene.