

# The super seven

THERE'S no doubt 1981 will be remembered as the year when the recession took a tighter grip on Chelmsford's economy than at any other time during the previous half century.

But it will also be remembered as the year in which the recession made no impact on the quality or quantity of entertainment offered in and around the county town.

I make this claim with confidence, having sat in the Weekly News' critic's chair for 30 years, and starting my 31st at the end of October.

Picking The Show Of The Year proved to be the easiest part of selecting my Super Seven for 1981. Ray Jeffery's production of Fiddler On The Roof for the diamond jubilee of the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic And Dramatic Society in March had something no other show I've seen this year possessed.

Besides the standard Jeffery hallmarks of excellence – thrilling dance routines, exciting and colourful movement, lusty chorus singing and fine performances from the principals – there was a keen awareness of the pathos, forever present just below the surface, in even the Fiddler's most extrovert moments.

If I could live again one moment of 1981, it would be the final scene between Audrey Hinton's Golda and Joy Wallace's Yenta for the manner in which both actresses portrayed the dignity of human beings in adversity.

Ray also directed the outstanding youth show of the year – Chelmsford Young Generation Amateur Musical Society's **The Boy Friend** (July) – and staged, like Fiddler, at the Civic.

Some people felt the show was sent up overmuch, but I found it a brilliant re-creation of the atmosphere of the twenties with razor-sharp dance routines, true-to-life flapper movements, and a large dollop of period sentiment in the last act.

Rachel Parsons and Simon Fisher were an appealing pair of lovers, Sally Lorkin an unusually sympathetic Madame Dubonnet, while Simon Coates and Philip Gill, as Lord Brockenhurst and Percival Browne, showed how convincingly gifted teenagers can portray middle age on the stage.

Room must be found for not one but two straight plays. Right at the start of 1981 John Newman's production of **Bent**, as part of the Newpalm Civic Theatre professional season, set a new standard of repertory acting in the county-town.

And Philip Linney, for Chelmsford Theatre Workshop, gave the best account of **The Heiress**, a dramatisation of Henry James's novel, Washing-

## Roll of honour,

**Show Of The Year:** Fiddler On The Roof, Chelmsford Amateur Operatic And Dramatic Society, (March).

**Best Youth Show:** The Boy Friend, Chelmsford Young Generation Amateur Musical Society, (July).

**Best School Show:** You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown, Chelmsford County High School, (February).

**Play Of The Year: Amateur:** The Heiress, Chelmsford Theatre Workshop, (November).

**Professional:** Bent, Newpalm Productions, (January).

**Most Promising Show:** Eden, Boswells School (March).

**Concert Of The Year:** Timothy Carey, Martin Sanders-Hewitt, two piano recital, (November).

**Best Drama Performances – Amateur:** Ruth Ling, Catherine, The Heiress, (November). **Professional:** John Dryden, John Griffiths, Max and Horst, Bent, (January).

**Best Performance, Opera or Musical:** Marian Martin, Carmen, (June)

**Best Supporting Roles – Straight:** Rita Ronn, Aunt Pennyman, The Heiress, (November). **Musical:** Joy Wallace, Yenta, Fiddler On The Roof, (March).

**Producer Of The Year:** Joyce Webb-Cornwell, Habeas Corpus, Moulsham Lodge Amateur Dramatic Society, (June).

ton Square, it has been my good fortune to review, in November.

Both directors brought out their plays' essential truths and I can still conjure up the near-frightening intensity with which the Civic Theatre audience watched John Dryden and John Griffith as two homosexuals in a pre-war German concentration camp prove that love and the life urge can triumph in the most adverse of circumstances.

I was no less impressed by the overall attention to detail in The Heiress, and by Ruth Laing's chilling Catherine, Walter Greaves' weak but amicable Morris, and Rita Ronn's quite perfect simpering Aunt Pennyman.

Most difficult choice of all was choosing the Concert Of The Year as there were five strong contenders. Finally however I opted for the Timothy Carey, Martin Sanders-Hewitt piano recital in November which was outstanding because every piece, whether it was Ravel's delicately precise transcription of Debussy's Fetes or the rumbustious Rachmaninov Suite, was charged with musical excitement.

There was no doubt in my mind that the best school show in 1981 came from Chelmsford

County High School, but it was far more difficult to choose between the merits of **You're A Good Man Charlie Brown** (February) and **Wizard Of Oz** (May).

In the end I went for Charlie, where the girls of the County High were joined by the boys of King Edward VI School, because of all the productions I saw in 1981 it had the strongest claim to be the most perfect.

No-one stood out because everyone was so good, acting well not just as individuals – but as a member of a team.

For the second year running the same small dramatic club has made the Super Seven and in part for the same reason – the excellence of its teamwork in comedy playing.

But in Alan Bennett's **Habeas Corpus** (June), there is a rich vein of sadness to be tapped alongside the laughs and it is vital for the play's success that the director achieves a delicately poised relationship between these two contrasting facets.

And it was because no producer has achieved this more successfully than Moulsham Lodge Amateur Dramatic Society's **Joyce Webb-Cornwell** that she richly deserves to be producer of the year. ~  
**PETER ANDREWS**