

AMATEURS STAGE A SPARKLING PANTO AT CHELMSFORD

PANTOMIME came to Chelmsford on Boxing Day, with its full tradition of wit and rough and tumble, gaiety and sparkle.

But it had something extra this year, for it was put on for the first time by the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society. They made a first rate job of it.

Their "Aladdin," on the stage of the Regent Theatre, is a succession of gaudy clowning, good singing, gay dancing and a host of inconsequences woven around a boy meets girl story—in fact it was panto in its best form.

Panto purists will be glad to know the story was still quite recognisable; and if speciality dancers find their way into impassable treasure caves, and the Emperor of China's bodyguard sings negro spirituals, what does it matter.

An Oriental sedan chair brought on to the stage one of the prettiest princesses ever to grace the boards. Diane Lawson brought a charming freshness into the part of the principal girl and sang most pleasantly. Not often is it that the archway on to the final scene frames so presentable a picture as Diane and Vera Stock, who strode masterfully and sang enchantingly as Aladdin.

THE DAME

On the comedy side Frank Morgan played the part of the Dame as though he had been doing this sort of thing every day for years. With voluminous skirts and robust legs looking like barber's poles in their colour scheme, he, or rather she, romps breathlessly through the part.

Mr. Morgan flings himself over tables and under them with the abandon of an acrobat. He has an engaging grin and a cheerful patter that brings the best out of his gags. These, incidentally, are plentiful and some have a good local flavour.

Cheerful inanity comes in the form of Roger Massey as Wishee Washee. Bags of flour mixed with large doses of soda water daubed and sprayed on faces have always brought laughs and in Mr. Massey's hands, and on his face, the laughs are sure-fire winners. But he does even better in solo turn, cracking jokes with the orchestra stalls or back row of the balcony.

To see, and indeed almost to hear, William Rondel grind and gnash his teeth as the wicked Abanazar, would have been sufficient, but he also slinks and scowls in a manner which fully deserved all the hisses of the children.

Another exacting requirement of pantomime is there, too. The chorus dances confidently and what is more, looks happy about it, besides being aesthetically pleasing. The respective genies coincide their appearances with the required flash and cloud of smoke and even from ten rows back the costumes and scenes look out of this world.

OTHER PLAYERS

Others in the well-chosen cast were:—

Patricia Holland, Albert Miller, Peter Auger, Sidney Collicot, Nick Carter, Roy Amery, and Andrew Mackinlay. The jewels are: Pat Coward, Joan Hann, Amy Warren, Peggy Welham; the male voice quartette, Alfred Nice, Jim Cohen, Jim Welham, Kenneth Collins.

The speciality dance is by Roy Morris, and other dancers are: Trixie Brewer, Sheila Cottee, Margaret Foster, Shirley Paterson, Beryl Playle, Pat Smith, Betty Wager, Pam Williams. The chorus comprises: Deirdre Barron, June Bisset-Smith, Angela Copsey, Beryl Goulden, Una Harris, Rosemary Johnstone, June Mathams, Christine Richardson, Margery Rivett, Amy Warren, Peggy Welham, Gillian Upsdell.

The play is produced and directed by Robert Vernon, the orchestra is under the direction of Bert. Johnson; additional lyrics and script by Michael Kerr, David Smith, and Robert Vernon.

Hon. accompanist is Joan Brandon; dancing mistress, Doris Rodd; hon. prompter, Major F. W. M. Powley; hon. wardrobe mistress, Amy Warren; hon. property master, Peter Smith; hon. call girl, Rosemary Gornall; hon. call boy, Alec Torry; hon. perruquiers, Percy Russell, Frank Page and Cecil Bocking. Mesdames H. Eldridge, and W. R. Catt; stage manager, Will Patston; chief electrician, R. Burton.

The pantomime continues until Saturday, January 5th.