

AND SO TO BED

SOME day a Chelmsford Operatic and Dramatic Society production may be worse than the one before, but I have yet to see this happen, and it's certainly not the case with their latest staging at the Regent Theatre, J. B. Fagan's "And so to bed."

It will go down on that long list of productions dating back to 1920 as yet another success, and 1950 will be remembered for one more thing: the year the C.O.D.S. did "And so to bed."

Every play has moments which are real gems and which the audience mentally note and bring up again as reminiscences; but seldom have I seen a play where gem replaces gem with such bewildering rapidity.

Strangely enough the audience on the second night were rather half-hearted in their applause. Whether they were replete with satisfaction or just lack-a-daisical, I don't know, but their sense of criticism must have been hypersensitive if they found serious fault.

NO TRIPS

The company cleared with ease two obstructions over which many another has tripped—singing and lovemaking. Perhaps they are fortunate that they are "operatic" as well as "dramatic," for they coped splendidly with all the songs, bawdy or otherwise. In fact, in the bawdier lyrics there was a carefree attitude without cloying artificiality, and this was also very apparent in the love-making. Some players made love with the ponderability of a ship-of-the-line, others with more finesse; but they all looked as though they meant it.

A play about Samuel Pepys could hardly be a success unless Samuel himself could hold his part. Frank Page did that very thing with an aplomb which was thunderous or burbling and never ceased to be humorous. The click of his eyeballs at the sight of a shapely ankle was almost audible. His change from the pompous to a sorrowful, spaniel-like attitude under the torrent of his wife's invective was magnificently done. His better half was played by Val Berkeley, with captivating charm. Yet in the midst of her charm she turned an eye as hard as a gimlet on her woeful husband and, failing that, added a most pleasing pathos. Her acting was as impeccable as her charming French accent. Never overdone, it was packed with what, for lack of a better word, I call personality.

Together these two could have made the play, but they were backed up by such experienced people as Helen Eldridge, who gave the coquettish Mrs. Knight, a highly-painted sophistication, and by Donald Leech, the first person I have seen to mix successfully an amorous disposition with authority. A very useful combination if we can believe Mr. Leech. Incidentally, this is where both casting and make-up departments come in for praise, for Donald Leech's likeness to all the accepted portraits of the Merry Monarch was startling

ALL-ROUND MERITS

The best tribute that can be given to the cast as a whole is that whenever someone came on, you were never sure whether his or her's was a small part or large until they left, for their acting was uniformly high.

Some had more to say: Pelling, the plump Potticary, played by James Michael; Pelham Humfrey, a most effete gigolo, by Frank Morgan; Mrs. Pierce, extremely catty, by Ruth Bew. Some had very little: Gladys Brookes as Sue, the maid; Martin Trump as a boy; Doris Trump as a blackamoor; Cecil Bocking, who established a bucolic watchman with no more than a dozen words, Barbara Braun, as Julia; Peter Smith, as Caesar; Ann Foreman, as Mrs. Knepp; Rosemary Gornall, rosy-cheeked as Lettice, the maid; and Alec Torry, as a haughty groom. But all fell into place with an assured exactitude.

That they did this is great credit to the producer, Mr. Eric Douglas, who must also take the praise for not a single noticeable muffed line or wrong cue.

Those on the other side of the scenes were: Stage Manager, Mr. Dan Matthews; special lighting, Mr. P. Berkeley; hon. prompter, Major F. W. M. Powley; hon. wardrobe mistress, Mrs. W. R. Catt; hon. property master, Mr. S. J. Jackman; hon. asst. property master, Mr. E. P. Herries; hon. call girl, Mrs. D. C. Leech; hon. publicity, Mr. W. R. Catt; hon. perruquiers, Mr. P. Russell, Mr. C. Bocking, Mrs. W. E. Catt and Mrs. D. C. Leech.

BEOWULF.