

"THE BELLE OF NEW YORK"

A SPIRITED CHELMSFORD PRODUCTION

FINE WORK BY ORCHESTRA

Forty-one years ago this month "The Belle of New York" was presented for the first time in England at the Shaftesbury, and this week audiences are still finding a fresh delight in the ever-popular musical comedy at the Regent Theatre, Chelmsford, where it is being presented by the Chelmsford Operatic and Dramatic Society.

DELIGHTFUL MUSIC.

The fact that a musical comedy is musical makes its success depend on those lyrical strains that tell the story; and the fact that "The Belle," a product of the days of the hansom cab and the bustle, still draws crowds in this stream-lined age, is the highest tribute that can be paid to its music. Mr. Charles Hambourg is in charge of this all-important section of the production, and the choice could not have been bettered. Mr. Hambourg is a well-known figure at the Queen's Hall, where he conducts the London Symphony Orchestra, and at the Regent this week he gave me the impression that he was equally at home with the music of Kerker as he would be with that of Tschaikowski. His technique with the baton is a joy to watch, and the way he holds the chorus and the orchestra together is masterly. Such old-established favourites as "Teach Me How to Kiss," "They all Follow Me," and "She is the Belle of New York," flow from the orchestra with a graceful ease that can only come after many hours of hard rehearsing.

GOOD DANCING.

The fabric round which the music is centred—the plot and dialogue—is not so important, and perhaps it is well that this is so. With the exception of one or two modern touches that have been added by the producer, the libretto is liable to show traces of its antiquity, and the humour to be a little heavy. However, this is no fault of the producer or the cast, and the fact remains that the production is a good one and well worth seeing. The dancing scenes are exceptionally well done, considering that every player is an amateur, and some of them, notably Pat Rollason (Kissy Fitzgarter) and Don Harris (a fifteen-year-old local boy, who does an intricate tap dance in the second act), reveal exceptional talent.

THE PLAYERS.

In the lead as the Belle is Joan Howard, a dainty and attractively demure figure, whose voice seems considerably improved since she had her first important role in "The Arcadians" two years ago although it may be that this music suits her better. The solos called for are well within her vocal range, and she has plenty of confidence without any uncomfortable straining. Her enunciation and that of her leading man, Mr. Alex. Ogston, is clear which cannot be said of all in the cast. Mr. Ogston has the right personality and voice for a leading man, and he has a natural actor's gifts.

Newcomers are always interesting, and one this year has made a real "hit." He is Pat Hobart, whose sister, Eileen, was such a success when she made her first appearance in "Rose Marie" last year. Mr. Hobart makes a grand Blinky Bill McGuirk (described as "a mixed ale pugilist"), and he has quite a powerful and pleasing baritone voice. The scene in which he makes purchases at a candy store doing nothing but whistle to the accompaniment of the orchestra is a riot, and calls for encores. He and his sister make a rollicking pair.

Peggy Green as the much-married Cora Angelique enters into the spirit of her part with gusto. Mr. Leonard Pease is well suited to the part of the hero's father, and his mature experience and fine tenor voice give him a stage presence which stands him in good stead. Audrey Parrett is a graceful Fifi, and her dance with Mr. Ogston to "Teach Me How to Kiss" is beautifully executed.

Mr. Alec Torry brings a laugh every time with his spasmodic appearances as the polite lunatic, and Fred Bates is sufficiently pompous to be convincing as Cora's father. Four other personalities with small parts, but sufficiently diverting to be worthy of special mention, are: Stan Hunt and Eric Bruce (the Portuguese twins), Maurice Phillips (Kenneth Mugg), and Alfred Heather (the Rev. Sheep). The cast is completed by Guy Bevington (a butler), Geoffrey King (a private secretary), Alfred Heather (a press photographer), and John Brittain (a newspaper reporter). The last named gives a rather cruel portrayal of what members of our profession are supposed to be like, but I take comfort in the thought that the action of the story is on the other side of the Atlantic.

THE PRODUCER.

Once again the producer is Madge Macklin, and once again she is to be congratulated on this, her seventy-third production. The regularity with which Miss Macklin turns out these successes tends to make one take them almost for granted, but each one means months of hard work and endless rehearsals.

CHORUSES.

The choruses are: Mary Archer, Doris Barnard, Mary Barneveld, Olive Burton, Audrey Cutts, Betty De'ath, Sheila Doe, Hilda Etherden, Peggy Guest, Marjorie Hunt, Audrey Long, Muriel Millington, Patria Minturn, Marjorie Moon, Betty Pearce, Deenie Radford, Phyllis Rowe, Peggy Seary, Dorothy Staniland, Barbara Thorn, Mabel Treloar, Amy Warren, Josephine Wells, Sybil Whittaker, Timothy Bevington, Leslie Bland, John Clarke, Sidney Collicott, Peter Duffield, Jack Gane, Frank Hopkinson, Geoffrey King, Jeffrey B. Ransom, Albert Taylor and Donald Wylie.

The orchestra is composed of the following: Violins, Mr. W. H. Bateman (leader), Miss B. Clarke, Miss B. Duncan, Mr. J. H. Duncan, Mrs. M. Cole, Mr. V. F. Waldau; viola, Mrs. W. Adkins; 'cello, Mr. E. Hinton; bass, Mr. W. L. Barclay; clarinet, Mr. W. E. Dann; flute, Mr. H. D. Dove; oboe, Mr. F. Hart; bassoon, Mr. J. Biddulph; trumpets, Mr. G. Dann, Mr. J. Thomas; horns, Mr. V. F. Waller, Mr. G. Clarke; trombone, Mr. H. Groombridge; percussion, Mr. W. Wareham; piano, Mr. A. R. Barneveld.

The prompter is F. W. M. Powley; accompanists, Mr. A. R. Barneveld and Mr. A. T. Heather; call boy, Mr. F. J. Parrett; property masters, H. and D. Evans, G. Geoghegan; perruquiers, Claire Arnold, Miss Gladys Butcher, Mr. Percy Russell, and Mr. R. H. Fish.

G. S.