

# Bitter-Sweet is big success for amateurs

By John Parker

PERHAPS the offer of "two seats for the price of one" had something to do with the crowded audience at the Regent Theatre on Monday for the first performance of "Bitter-Sweet." It was the best first-night crowd Chelmsford has seen for many years.

Noel Coward's fascinating music, ingenious plot, and sparkling libretto demand a high standard of performance. In her first production in Chelmsford, Mavis Ward has cleverly disguised the weaknesses that must exist in every Amateur Dramatic Society, and given us a show that for move-

ment, colour, and sheer enjoyment has not been seen in Chelmsford since the war.

Every credit must be given to the Chelmsford Society for its courage in launching such a lavish musical. There were weak spots, certainly, but very few, and some of the effects (such as Carl Linden's voice booming from the roof of the auditorium) were most impressive.

The strength of the production lies in the chorus, the backbone of the show. Young, lively, obviously having a wonderful time, whether waltzing, singing, or mopping up the floor, they bring out the true spirit of Coward's scenes. Special mention must also be made of the "Ladies of the Town," and the four "Naughty boys, haughty boys," wearing their green carnations.

Individually "Bitter Sweet" was stolen by "Manon," Helen Eldridge. She is a fine actress, with a lovely voice and a superb sense of comedy.

She received a cheer all to herself when, as she made an exit, the door stuck fast in the scenery. It was the only technical hitch. After rattling it unsuccessfully, she turned with all the ease in the world, swaggered across the stage to the wings, with the words:

"IT'S STOOK—ZE DOOR!"

Dorothy Cox, a favourite, fills the double leading roll adequately.



PRODUCER MAVIS WARD

"I am very pleased with the Society," she said this week. Miss Ward, a professional producer, runs an acting school at Brighton.

She has a great deal of charm and an easy, full soprano voice, but her performance was, to my mind, qualified by a tendency to over-act.

Dick Glanville played Carl Linden, the music teacher, with the ease of an experienced musical comedy star, but in only three scenes does he show enough fire.

There is no space to mention the host of excellent supporting parts. Perhaps the production would have been the better for a fuller, richer bass-baritone to lead the chorus in the spirited "Tokay," but that is a minor criticism. As also is the point that the pace sometimes flags and that the intervals seem long. Maybe, however, that is because one wants to get back to the play!

Congratulations, everyone, on giving Chelmsford a fine piece of musical comedy. It should break all records for a production in the town, on merit alone.