

"THE GONDOLIERS" IS A LAVISH SHOW

Team Work was the Keynote

THE fourth and last version of "The Gondoliers" to be performed in Mid-Essex this year is probably the best. Produced by the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Regent Theatre, Chelmsford, this week, it is certainly lavish and competently produced. While the opening night audience did not become ecstatic about it, they showed appreciation of a thoroughly entertaining show.

For once it is certain that no-one stole the limelight. Although all the principals had their share, they passed it gracefully on. It is such team work that makes the good show.

The first half tended to be ponderous and the diction indistinct, so that much of Gilbert's delightful wit penetrated no further than the footlights. The chorus were particularly guilty. But the second act seemed to change all that. It was real Gilbert and Sullivan—Gay, improbable, lightly fantastic and colourful.

Cecil Bocking took on a new suave urbanity as the Grand Inquisitor and proscribed torture with a genially warm voice. Victor Cooper adopted an even more rakish air in the part of the Duke of Plaza-Toro and matched this rakish air with a roguish voice.

On the ladies side both June Gisbey and Diane Lawson sang as pleasantly as they looked—no mean achievement. And, moreover, from their first moment to their final scene, their vivacity never flagged.

Helen Eldridge, the duchess of Plaza-Toro, appeared quite as haughty as the Queen of Hearts. She only needed the words "off with his head," to complete the picture.

Eric Strutt and Stanley Parsons combined the usually irreconcilable qualities of good clownery and good singing as the principal gondoliers, while Alfred Nice and Dorothy Cox coupled their singing effectively. Finally the chorus perked up, breathed more freely, and sang.

Incidentally, the off-stage experts, raised one of the biggest laughs of the evening when they propelled the gondola away before the gondolier had a chance to raise his pole.

The cast included Tony Richardson, Peter Smith, Fred Gisby, Sidney Collicott, Muriel Passmore, Jane Andrews, Pat Smith and Julian George.

The chorus of gondoliers and confadine, men-at-arms, heralds and Pages included: Drummer boy, Roy Morris; heralds, Flora Cook, Bar-

bara Davies; pages, Josephine Dyson, Jean Metson; trumpeters, Jean Smith, June Smith; boatman, Nick Carter; men-at-arms, Nick Carter, Dick Marshall. Ladies of the chorus were: Kathleen Amery, Margaret Burgess, Flora Cook, Patricia Coward, Barbara Davies, June Davies, Elizabeth Dutton, Sylvia Easton, Beryl Goulden, Jeanne Hann, Una Harris, Myrtle Hiscock, Doreen Hurrell, Sheila Johnson, Joyce Manfield, Christine Richardson, Ruth Robinson, Elsie Sweetman, Vera Sell, Elizabeth Tulloch, Betty Wager, Peggy Welham, Ann Warren-Wren. Men of the chorus: Derek Ann, Ken. Clements, Bernard Green, Herbert Heisterman, Keith Harper, Tony Lawson, John Morella, Terence Mulrenin, George Pheby, Robin Sampson. Hon. prompter, Major F. W. M. Powley; hon. wardrobe mistress, Mrs. W. R. Catt; hon. property master, Mr. Peter Smith; assisted by Mr. Roy Morris; hon. call girl, Miss Rosemary Gornall; hon. publicity, Mr. Roger Massey; hon. perruquiers, Messrs. Percy Russell and Frank Page, Mesdames W. R. Catt, Helen Eldridge and D. C. Leech; stage manager and chief electrician (for Regent Theatre), R. Burton; accompanist, Joan Brandon.

Robert Vernon was producer and director and Mr. George Horrey, hon. musical director.