

RIGHT MERRIE IS THEIR ENGLAND

A Colourful Show

THIS is Festival Year, a year of ambitious undertakings and ventures. Not least among them, in Chelmsford, is the Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of Edward German's "Merrie England."

Obviously it will be a great success, for it is a colourful and impressive show.

To the principals goes the main credit for the success. They sang well, they acted ably when the occasion demanded, and not least of all looked attractive as though the England they were in really was "merrie."

The chorus were guilty of occasional injudicious footwork, but they improved with every appearance and any inopportune footwork was nearly always forced on them, either by lack of stage space, or packed scenery.

The chorus singing was excellent, especially the better known and more impressive numbers such as "Who were the Yeoman" and "God Save Elizabeth."

Diane Lawson played her part of a reputed witch most appealingly. With just the fleeting touch of over-accentuation which the part demanded, she was very expressive, paradoxically building her wildness round a charming face. Incidentally she sang very sweetly, if only softly.

MAY QUEEN

June Gisbey, likewise, sang prettily as the May Queen, whom she played in a competent and unperious fashion. But she seemed happiest for the short moment of comedy as the Egyptian princess in the masque.

In the scale of values Dorothy Cox's voice outweighed her acting, but mainly because her singing, which has now become a "must" for Chelmsford shows, was so good. Vera Warner made a regal Queen Elizabeth; her singing of "O Peaceful England" was one of the highspots of the evening.

On the men's side an admirable comedy performance came from Frank Morgan as a strolling player. It is not easy to bring personality into a show. In a straight play it is difficult, but in a show where both story and characters are of less value, it is far harder. Yet that is precisely what Frank Morgan did. His appearance was worth a laugh for every phrase he uttered or every droll expression that crossed his face.

Alfred Nice and Maurice Bond as Sir Walter Raleigh and the Earl of Essex both contributed dash and vigour in their singing and acting. Alfred Nice's performance was particularly noteworthy, especially as, I understand that this was his first performance in a show. A tenor asset to the show. The company's thanks, and those of the audience, for that matter, are due to Maurice Bond, who stepped into the part of Essex to replace Leonard Pease at fairly short notice. Bond is a member of Colchester Amateur Operatic Society, which is something we in Chelmsford must remember when the other society put on a show.

Comedy honours also go to the four men of Windsor, Fred Gisby, Tom Taylor, Peter Smith and Jack Clarke. They progressed during the evening through various stages of boobery and buffoonery to achieve finally real clowning.

Having run through a long list of those who acted well, we come to two people upon whom success so much rests—George Horrey, the musical director, and Robert Vernon, the producer. Eighty performers take a lot of adroit handling to bring into place both musically and theatrically. They were in place; the show was a delight. The inference is obvious.

THE CHARACTERS

Marjory, Kathleen Amery; May Queen, June Gisby; Four Men of Windsor, Fred Gisby, Tom Taylor, Peter Smith and Jack Clarke; Long Tom, Kenneth Collins; Big Ben, Nick Carter; Jill-all-Along, Diane Lawson; Walter Wilkins, Frank Morgan; Silas Simkins, William Rondel; Sir Walter Raleigh, Alfred Nice; Wine Vendor, Herbert Heisterman; Kate, Cicely Harris; Bessie Throckmorton, Dorothy Cox; Earl of Essex, Maurice Bond; Queen Elizabeth, Vera Warner; Queen's Fool, James Michael.

Ladies-in-waiting, Patricia Coward, Jeanne Hann; Lord-in-waiting, Reg. Cornell; trumpeters, Raymond Lowes, Christopher Udall (by permission of Headmaster, Grammar School); heralds, Joyce Bungay, Pam George; pages, Eileen Malden, Carole Thompson; beefeaters, Tom Eldridge, Len Lawson; soldiers, Peter McKenzie, Les Sharpe; dancers, Kathleen Amery, June Davies, Beryl Goulden, Cicely Harris, Joyce Mansfield, Pat Smith, Elsie Sweetman, Betty Wager.

Townfolk, (Ladies): Jane Andrews, Barbara Braun, Gladys Brookes, Audrey Brown, Margaret Burgess, Flora Cook, Sheila Cottee, Patricia Coward, Elizabeth Dutton, Sylvia Easton, Helen Eldridge, St. Helen George, Jeanne Hann, Beryl Keable, Ellenore Kent, Norah Taylor, Elizabeth Thompson.

Townfolk (gents): George Betts, Sidney Collicott, Kenneth Fox, George Harvey, Herbert Heisterman, Tony Lawson, John Morella, Terence Mulrenin, Stan Parsons, Victor Perry, George Pheby, John Richardson, Tony Richardson.