

MUSIC AND DRAMA MISCELLANY

ESSEX AMATEURS REVIVE IAN HAY'S
"THE SPORT OF KINGS"

Although the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society has been in existence for more than a quarter of a century, it has never, until this week, essayed the type of production which one would normally associate with the second part of its title. All its activities hitherto have been concentrated on light operas and musical plays. It started by running through most of the Gilbert and Sullivan pieces, and then went on to such popular successes as "Miss Hook of Holland," "No, No, Nanette," "Rose Marie," "The Desert Song," etc. The war, of course broke the long continuity of annual productions, but now that the Society has got going again, the general policy seems to be directed towards a revival of some of the brightest of past successes. Thus this Spring "The Desert Song" was given another airing, and next April "No, No, Nanette" is to be taken off the shelf again.

Midway between these two we now have this new break, which sees the Society experimentally measuring its prowess against a straight play—if any farcical caper by Ian Hay can possibly be called "straight." I imagine that, in the language of the cliché, no stone has been left unturned, no expense has been spared, and no effort has been too great to try and make the production of "The Sport of Kings" the howling success it ought to be. A presidential message printed in the programme informs the reader that the cost of putting on this show is well over £800.

ONE MAJOR DEFECT

That is a lot of money, even in these days of inflated values, and if the Society is to see this, or the greater part of it, back, two things have got to happen. For the remaining nightly performances until the end of the week, the Regent Theatre must be populated far more densely than it was on Monday night, when the attendance was embarrassingly meagre. And, secondly, if the public are to be attracted in greater numbers, the general mechanism of production and performance has got to be far better lubricated than it was on Monday night.

You may say that it is rather late in the day to expect any radical improvement. But it is not. The impression I derived from the opening performance was that the self-starter was out of action, and that somebody had forgotten to bring the starting handle. If that is so, it need not happen again. The whole company, from top to bottom, must know perfectly well, without being told, that most of the shortcomings of the evening were attributable to one cause, and one cause only—namely, that several of the chief characters simply did not know their lines well enough. Lapses of memory always have the effect of retarding a play. The matter of pace and the memorising of parts are interdependent the one upon the other. You can't have slickness of pace unless all are certain of their lines, and a rollicking play like "The Sport of Kings" without slickness of pace is like sparkling muscatel without bubble or sparkle. There were periods in the first act when the prompter earned a honorarium; in the second there was certainly a great improvement, but the hangover effect of the first was never quite dispelled.

MUCH TALENT

All this was a great pity, for there is much talent in this company, and one would like to see it fully and naturally developed. Tom Parfitt, for instance, is obviously an actor with inventiveness and variety, and his ease of style and natural wit invested the part of Algy Sprigge with much of the amusing charm that the author postulated for it. Joan Coultard was outstandingly good as Dulcie. Her performance was full of vivacity and sharp intelligence, and it should be said that she was not guilty of lapse of memory, nor did she lose her presence of mind when others were. Leonard Pease made some very good play with the puritanical character of Amos Purdie. It was drawn on rather ecclesiastical lines, but Mr. Pease squeezed a good deal of humour out of the part. Frank Page's butler was rich in fun and flavour. Donald Samuel and Diane Lawson both played aggressively for humour as the two Purdie children, and Donald Leech fooled it foolishly in simulating the maundering witlessness of Sir Reginald Toothill, though not always escaping the pitfalls with which such "silly ass" parts gape. Other characters were filled in by Dorothy Cox, Mary Leech, Phyllis Reed, Rosemary Gornall, Catherine Davies, Tony Joslin, Cecil Bocking, Jim Welham

and Jack Clark. The production was under the personal direction of Miss Madge Macklin.

SOME FORTHCOMING CONCERTS

Three Polish artists who enjoy great popularity in their own country and, by virtue of a concert tour which began in early September and continues till mid-November, are achieving considerable success in this, are giving a joint recital in the Ipswich Public Hall this (Wednesday) evening. They are Lucyna Szczepanska, prima donna of the Warsaw Opera House, who is called in Poland "the nightingale of Warsaw"; Andrzej Bielecki, leading tenor of the San Carlo Opera, Naples; and Jerzy Kropiwnicki, concert pianist. Their programme will include arias and duets from well-known operas and pianoforte solos by Chopin, Debussy, Mendelssohn, etc.

Annual performances of Brahms' "Requiem" on, or near, Remembrance Day, have become well-established features of the work of the Bach Choirs of Ipswich and of Bury St. Edmund's. One such performance is announced for Sunday afternoon next in St. Mary's Church, Bury. Mr. E. Percy Hallam will conduct. Dr. Paul Steinitz will be at the organ, and the soloists will be two well-known West Suffolk singers, Miss Elisabeth Peake and Mr. Arthur Balaam. The same work is also being performed in Ipswich on the following Tuesday.

The annual Autumn concert of the Ipswich Orpheus Choir (conductor Mr. H. Spruvenburg) will be given in the Garratt Memorial Hall on Wednesday, November 19th, when the choir will sing, amongst other things, Arthur Bliss's "Pastoral," Moeran's "Songs of Springtime," a group of Brahms' "Seven Songs of Mary," and some negro spirituals. The soloist will be Miss Winifred Roberts, whose violin playing created a very favourable impression at one of the Civic Concerts last season.

To-morrow evening, in the Headgate Schoolroom, Colchester, a concert is being given by the pupils of Miss Grace Ball, the well-known local musician and singer. The event is in aid of the "Care of the Aged" Fund.

ARPEGGIO.