

BWT Review

The Merry Widow

Witham Amateur Operatic Society

26th – 31st October 1998

Lasting appeal of Merry Widow

While Witham Amateur Operatic Society continues to present shows of the quality of last week's production of Franz Lehar's Merry Widow they will continue to play to full houses.

During the overture, silent action took place on stage behind a gauze drop. Had this not been the case, the show would have opened to applause for the colourful set and costumes.

Jerry Martin, the musical director, worked his orchestra well. They were always in sympathy with the excellent vocalists.

Cynthia Stead handled the movement of her large cast skilfully. The stage movement and choreography added to the pleasure of the audience. As Anna, the Merry Widow, Alison Brewer was outstanding. Her ability to articulate clearly ensured that all her words were clear as her voice rang through the auditorium. She was well matched by Nicholas Clough as Danilo, an attache at the. Pontevedrian Embassy in Paris who is instructed to court her for her riches. He has a natural presence on stage and played the roue with ease, his voice blending well with that of his leading lady.

The other romance which dominated the plot involved David Holman as Camille and Valerie Ditchman as Valencienee, the wife of the ambassador. Their voices were delightful and their complex relationship kept the plot bubbling along.

Patrick O'Brien was entertaining as the cuckolded ambassador, Baron Zeta. Tim Sheppard as his factotum called on his experience to exploit to the full the comic potential of the part of Njegus.

Among the visitors to the embassy, Howard Brooks as the jealous husband and Tim Clarke and Colin Bellett played their minor parts with effect.

The chorus sang tunefully and acted with energy, while the dancers provided provocative entertainment as the Grisettes from Maxim's.

This was a vibrant performance of a well known musical comedy written in 1905, before the First World War brought the fantasy world of the operettas to an end. Although the plot sometimes smacks of the pantomime, it is still entertaining and the music has a lasting appeal.

James Bright



Witham Amateur
Operatic Society

Presents

THE MERRY WIDOW

Victor Leon and Leo Stein
Music by
Franz Lehar
New Book and lyrics by
Phil Park
Music adapted and arranged by
Ronald Hanmer
by arrangement with
Glocken-Verlag Ltd.



at the

WITHAM PUBLIC HALL
MONDAY 26th TO SATURDAY
31st OCTOBER 1998

Nightly 7.30pm • Doors open 7.00pm
Saturday Matinee 2.30pm • Doors Open 2.00pm

BOX OFFICE: 01376 515871

WITHAM A.O.S. - THE MERRY WIDOW
 PERFORMANCE OF 30TH OCTOBER 1998

This production, under the Direction of Cynthia Stead possessed all the elements of Ruritanian make believe, colour, style and elegance, with well sung music, which are the hall marks of Viennese Operetta, and made a memorable evening. . Scenery and lighting were excellent, and even on the small stage the acting area became a space with the style and elegance to properly portray the locale. Costumes too were first rate making the whole a visual treat. Space was at a premium for one or two of the dance numbers, though Act III opening and Grisettes were fine. The chorus had only limited movement, and though not the 'in' thing these days it actually worked very well, not only in terms of the style, but also the high quality of the chorus singing. I have not heard better for a long time, for diction, control and quality of harmony. If there was an award for this aspect of production, this chorus (and M.D.) would get it! Women! Women!..., and the Grisettes. numbers duly stopped the show for encores. Nick Clough's Danilo dominated, as it should, though a little more colour and flamboyance would have added spice to the character. As the Widow. Alison Brewer sang the part well, but more dynamism and vivaciousness was needed to make the character fully effective. Put another way, there needed to be more of an evident chemistry between Danilo and Anna, outside of the words and music. Among the other principals, there were some very good performances, and voices, including Patrick O'Brian as a worried but worldly innocent Zeta, Val Ditchman as a Valenciienne who couldn't quite decide but settled for being a highly respectable wife, David Holman as a Camille who didn't really know why it was all going wrong, and a beautifully camp Njegus from Tim Sheppard. Minor principal support was first class. New M.D. Jerry Martin made his mark with excellent chorus work, and a well controlled orchestra, which for the most part was well in sympathy with the stage. This really was an excellent evening's entertainment, and one which I thoroughly enjoyed, along with the 80% audience over the week's run.

John Warburton

Characters

<i>ANNA (Madame Glavari)</i>	The Merry Widow	Alison Brewer
<i>DANILO (Count Danilovitsch)</i>	Attaché at the Pontevedrian Embassy in Paris	Nicholas Clough
<i>BARON ZETA</i>	Pontevedrian Ambassador in Paris	Patrick O'Brien
<i>VALENCIENNE</i>	The Ambassador's Wife	Valerie Ditchman
<i>CAMILLE (Count de Rosillon)</i>		David Holman
<i>NJEGUS</i>	Baron Zeta's Factotum	Tim Sheppard
<i>ST. BRIOCHE</i>	Diplomatic Guest at the Embassy	Tim Clarke
<i>CASCADA</i>	Diplomatic Guest at the Embassy	Colin Bellett
<i>KROMOV</i>	An attaché	Howard Brooks
<i>OLGA</i>	Wife of Kromov	Peg Harker
<i>BOGDANOVITSCH</i>	Attaché	Tom Whelan
<i>PRITSCH</i>	Attaché	Geoffrey Coverdale
<i>SYLVIA</i>	Lady Guest at the Embassy	Sue Siddalls
<i>PRASKOVIA</i>	Lady Guest at the Embassy	Sarah Wilson
<i>LOLO</i>		Marea Irving
<i>DODO</i>		Anita Collings
<i>JOU-JOU</i>		Caron Bradbury
<i>FROU-FROU</i>	Grisettes at Maxim's	Natalie Hawkes
<i>CLO-CLO</i>		Helen Clark
<i>MARGOT</i>		Judy Henderson



Guests at Embassy, Pontevedrians, Dancers: Pamela Adams, Kathryn Adkins, Pat Briggs, Julie Edwards, Helene Jones, Muriel Loveridge, Anne Marsden, Julia Reed, Joyce Ryder, Alison Taylor, Janet Wash, Anne Wilson. Richard Cowen, Jim Crimmins, Alf Farmer, Tony Furnival, Graham Green, Richard Herring, Ron Howe, Danny Mullane, Darren White.