

1988 Kismet

Chronicle Review

What a wonderful wizard Wazir he was

"WITHAM Amateur Operatic Society proudly present Kismet," it says on the front of the programme for their production at the town's Public Hall. And they have every right to use that word "proudly". The performers, musicians, costumes, and scenery in the show equalled anything you're ever likely to see by forking out inordinate sums to see a professional company.

Kismet, produced here by Derek Collins, is the Borodin-based musical set in and around the Baghdad of yore. It's the tale of a happy-go-lucky poet called Hajj, who cheerfully accepts his lot as, in the space of a few days, fate changes him from poor man to beggar man to rich man to cheat.

Hajj, played with beaming smiles and obvious enjoyment by Howard Brooks, has a daughter, Marsinah (Helene Jones), who captures the heart of local royalty in the shape of Stewart Atkins' Caliph. The only trouble is, the wicked Wazir of Police, the bent chief cop, has money problems which will only be solved if he can get the Caliph to marry three sulky, puffed and rather ferocious princesses of Ababu. And the Wazir has Marsinah in his harem.

There are some lovely performances in all of this; the Wazir's henchmen are a sort of Middle Eastern Keystone Cops with a Windsor Davies figure in charge. Stewart Atkins, sounding very like Howard Keel in his younger days, fills the stage every time he opens his mouth to sing . . . and Helene Jones simply warbles like a bird.

Colourful costumes, witty choreography, stunning scenery (how did they change it so quickly and quietly?), clever props, and a company that makes a glorious noise in the chorus numbers. There are a few seats left on Friday night, and one or two on Saturday.

Treat yourself.

Pauline Causey

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