

# The Merry Widow 1998

## BWT Review

WHILE Witham Amateur Operatic Society continue 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 role 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