

1977 Orpheus in the Underworld

Society present 'musical romp'

On Tuesday, March 22, at the Market Hall, Redhill, the East Surrey Operatic Society presented its 70th anniversary' production, "Orpheus in the Underworld," by Offenbach, described as a "musical romp" with original libretto by Hector Cremieux and Ludovic Halevy and new book and lyrics by Phil Park.

In writing the original show, the librettists hit on the amusing and original idea of re-creating Greek mythology in the image of their audience. But what is more, they were able to reflect the hedonism, sophistication, and amorality of upper-class Parisian society of the time even more truthfully and wittily precisely because the characters wear Arcadian clothes and call themselves gods. Thus the lovers of classical myth become a bored married couple constantly on the look-out for opportunities of amorous intrigue with all the other characters behaving in more or less the same way. Hence the famous denouement when Orpheus looks back and loses his wife forever becomes the deliberate act of a reluctantly reunited husband. However, despite being so much part of the social scene of its time, "Orpheus in the Underworld" still remains fresh and full of wit and vitality. This is because the jokes are good and the tunes are extremely catchy, not least: the famous Can-Can.

The production is a fine one in every respect, and not least visually. The costumes and stage sets were both eye-catching and appropriate. Of the principals, Brenda Kent made a beautiful, full-voiced and voluptuous Eurydice, Kevin Copestake a splendidly longsuffering, if somewhat self-effacing Orpheus; Andrew Glass a magnificently imposing Jupiter and John Fallon a fine-voiced, if insufficiently menacing Pluto. All the other principals gave more than adequate performances, and the chorus made a particularly fine contribution but the evening was made memorable by the lovely line of girls who danced the Can-Can in such a way as to make me wish I had been born 100 years earlier.

The orchestra under Colin Copestake gave unflagging support. The show was produced by Sheila Searing.

DA VID MORGAN