

Society's 'Champagne'

Written more than 100 years ago by Johann Strauss, "Die Fledermaus" was first performed in Vienna and its rich melodies have long challenged operatic societies as well as being the natural choice for the world's light orchestras and bands at summer festivals and evenings of light to music. So it was not surprising that the East Surrey Operatic Society decided to again repeat their 1965 success last week at the Market Hall, Redhill, in its adapted form as "Pink Champagne".

The experienced baton of the Musical Director, Colin Copestake, swept the orchestra into the potpourri of the overture with its familiar waltz theme dominating but we were well into the first act before the early rawness disappeared. The orchestra then played superbly throughout and the players warmed gradually producing beautiful orchestra tone and balance under the spell of waltzes and polkas.

To credit, the ESOS have been delighting audiences for over 70 years and Redhill are fortunate indeed to have so much talent on hand. Their chorus was as usual light on tenors, but sang with strength and skill that was a joy to hear. There were at times simply too many people on stage, restricting chorus movement and trimming the gaiety and animation, especially for the famous ballroom scene.

Production from John Harris-Rees was both skilful and honest but suffered from overcrowding. Principals found it difficult to project over the top of a robust orchestra particularly during phrases of spirit and from my seat towards the rear of this large hall, even to my sensitive ears it was impossible to hear some of the vocal phrasing.

Attractive Michele Luck shone through the winter gloom, finding a lightness of touch despite a brave struggle from a severe cold. In her exacting role as Adele she and Molly Greaves blended beautifully in duets of appeal and quality. In a most accomplished performance from Andrew Glass as husband Gabriel, he looked and sang well and indeed his rich costumes were highly typical of the stunning wardrobe standards set by Bunny Emmerson. The costumes were a credit to the society bringing a richness in colour and depth to this delightful operetta.

John Fallon disappointed as Alfred, while John Rapley and Frederick Harrison were a little restrained and their natural singing ability suffered from too much control. Their sparkling wine duets and trios were of a high standard and the polka sextet was good value in an operetta that did not quite pop the champagne cork.

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