

1982 South Pacific

Evening of Enchantment

Certainly an evening of enchantment when the wonderful songs of “South Pacific” filtered through the Dorking Halls, East Surrey Operatic Society delighting audiences in a precise fashion. The story is based on the Pacific war days when gum-chewing GIs regarded themselves as God’s gift to women and uniform-glamour attracted the girls.

Lighting lacked the bright Pacific intensity but, aided by large-stage advantage and the astute direction of producer Sylvia Bryant, the men’s chorus thundered around with freedom and harmony. With songs like “There’s Nothing like a Dame” they looked and sang as if they really meant it. Though improperly dressed on parade in today’s regulation battledress of T-shirts and figure hugging shorts, East Surrey chose the dames for their undisputed beauty – the girls looked great and make-up had the right sunny balance. They were a formidable crew from which emerged Nellie Forbush (Sheila Walton) who sang well but needed more bounce and perhaps a trifle more cheek (a forgivable pun).

Falling in love with French planter Emile (Fredrick Harrison) was no difficulty for her. He seemed distant in the more tender moments, excelling in song but wrestling with an acute accent and determined to apply brakes where musical director Colin Copestake insisted on acceleration. This could be attributable to the battery of microphones unusual for amateurs, for this vast hall becomes more resonant when seats are emptier than anticipated and voices are detached and floating.

The crafty Bloody Mary is a gem of a part and Joyce Gascoine-Pees was most likable with her extrovert interpretation. In “Bali Ha’i” she delighted in song also. The orchestra was in fine form, producing the sweetest sounds, impressively in command of music and mood in sympathy with Rogers and Hammerstein’s melodious musical.

DON LANCER