

Festival Best Is Still To Come

Apart from Lurgan's presentation of "The Gipsy Baron", the real big guns of the Festival have not yet been seen in action. This week-end, apart from the production of "South Pacific," which would break all attendance records here if the theatre was big enough to hold them, there will be a great deal of interest in the performance of new entrants, Sharnbrook, with the not-too-familiar "Lisbon Story." On Sunday night, Gendros will present "The Vagabond King" and it will be most interesting to see how this young Welsh Society have improved since their visit last year.

Then, on Monday night, come St. Agnes from Belfast. Last year, I thought this society got far less credit than they deserved. They opened the Festival with a really fine performance of "Iolanthe" and one which was greatly appreciated by the audience. But they received a rather severe adjudication and were not placed in the final markings. This year, they return with "The Mikado" and I am looking forward to a really good show from such talented exponents as Tony Gilmore, Colm Finnegan and Michael Cannon on the male side and these four very talented young ladies, Margaret McCavana, Maria Gatt, Maria Hughes and Maria McGlade. Because this show has been performed so frequently here in recent years, I understand that booking has not been as heavy as most and that there are still a few seats to be had. Well, if anybody is looking for a good night's entertainment, I would recommend that they pick up a ticket as fast as possible.

On Tuesday night, we may see the most colourful performance of the week when Penarth present "Magyar Melody." This is another opera new to Waterford, but Penarth can be counted upon to give us excellent entertainment. I note with surprise that Rosemary Parton, who was one of the big successes of last year's Festival is in the chorus, which seems to indicate a big reserve of talent.

Tom Hogan will again be seen on the stage on Wednesday night when Clonmel bring their Student Prince to town. This performance has been completely booked out and there is a waiting list for cancellations, testifying to the popularity of opera and company. With their talented tenor in the title role, this should prove to be first-class entertainment and I know that the society has been working very hard to eliminate any flaws which may have existed in their Clonmel production some months ago.

Then, on Thursday, we have another new show "Viktorla and Her Hussar," and I am promised that this will be the Waterford debut of the best soprano we've heard in the Festival to-date. Considering the merits of Jeanne Pearse of Carmarthen, Margaret Gale of Idle and Thackley (and

Mary Doods, of Rhos Aelwyd), this is no inconsiderable claim and if Anita Whitehouse lives up to that reputation, this will be a big event.

Yet Another Highly Successful Festival

The glittering opening last Friday to the Fourth International Festival of Light Opera, which was attended by distinguished representatives of all four Estates, was an indication that this unique gathering of music lovers had now attained full stature. Elsewhere there will be comments and reports on this aspect of Festival affairs, while this column concerns itself exclusively with what happens on stage and behind the scenes.

Satisfying "Maritana"

When the Festival Committee decided to invite the Waterford Grand Opera Society to present a commemorative performance of "Maritana" within the framework of the Festival, the time was short and the opportunity of engaging first-class principals was limited. But, in spite of the difficulties, this was an excellent presentation and well worthy of the City in which Wallace was born. Playing "Maritana" in Waterford is rather like presenting "Hamlet" in Stratford-on-Avon and the audience, now well schooled in the finer points after three years of adjudication, are more critical of their own opera than others might be. So the fact that this capacity crowd trooped from the theatre highly delighted with the presentation is a fair indication of the worthiness of the efforts of the W.G.O.S.

Production could be faulted on a number of points and there was a certain woodiness about movements, but, musically this was one of the best things the Society has achieved. The chorus work was, at times, magnificent and, at all times, above average and the day is not far distant when Waterford will be able to match these renowned Welsh choruses in their own field.

But the Society were extremely lucky in their choice of principals. Violet Twomey in the title role has never sung better nor given such a pleasing interpretation and the sweet quality of her voice was warmly appreciated. Opposite her as Don Cesar was Clonmel tenor, Tom Hogan. Waterford has seen many talented vocalists and actors in this role and while Mr. Hogan may fall a little short in the strictly histrionic sense, he has a tenor voice, which has few equals in this country, and which must eventually bring him to greater and greater successes. His breathing control was a treat and, of course, his virile appearance just suited the part.

A most pleasing performance was given in the part of Lazarillo by contrato, Patricia Lawlor and a newcomer to the Theatre Royal Stage, baritone Jeffrey Taylor, put sufficient conviction into the part of the villainous Don Jose and won such an ovation for his rendering of "In Happy Moments" that he will be very welcome to return at any time. Particularly satisfying was Frank Devlin's King of Spain and, like another Frank, he seems to get better and better as the years pass.

Finally, a special word of tribute is due to Stanley Bowyer for his handling of the Festival Orchestra. Once again, he demonstrated that an able musical director can reach the heights with this talented group of musicians.

Controversial Choice

This year the Festival opened with the "Heart's-a-Wonder, the musical adaptation of the controversial "Playboy of the Western World." There has been some comment that this was hardly suitable for the opening of a Light Opera Festival and was hardly even a musical play, much less a light opera. But some authorities maintain that this production falls into the category of ballad-opera, which is a far more ancient form of musical play than, for instance, musical comedy. Be that as it may, it is also a rather controversial subject. But surely, nobody takes the "Playboy" seriously any longer, never mind this whimsical adaptation, which was so obviously written with the authors' tongues in their cheeks.

These things apart, this was a brilliant piece of work and could not be faulted in many aspects even by professional standards. Production, staging and dressing were almost flawless and much praise must be showered on producer Michael Garvey, production supervisor, Fr. O'Connor, mistress, Kathleen Cloney and Stage Manager, Tom Hughes. So often these backroom boys and girls are left out of their due share of credit for a first-class performance.

There can be no doubt that we saw some of the finest acting for many a long day in this presentation. My favourite was Ann O'Dwyer in the part of the Widow Quinn, but some will maintain that Lelia Doolan's performance as the passionate Pegeen Mike was the highlight. Brendan Slattery's interpretation of the Playboy was obviously based on the example of the master and the fairest tribute that can be paid to him is that Cyril Cusack would not have been disappointed with him. But, for a really fine performance, tribute must be paid to Thomas Hughes as Old Mahon. Catching the eye of the many cross-Channel visitors in the audience were the charming Irish colleens, who looked really fetching in their bare-footed dances.

"The Arcadians"

The Llangollen Society, who presented the "Arcadians" on Saturday night are a small group and lack the vocal quantity of many of the other Welsh groups. They also lack the qualified personnel to carry out all the chores necessary for staging a production of a show like "Arcadians." This insufficiency was amply demonstrated by the fact that producer Valmai Webb, not only had to carry the burden of production, but also had to play the exacting lead role of Sombra. Obviously one facet of her activities was bound to suffer, and while she gave us a beautiful interpretation of the role on stage, production was more than a little wanting. But mainly this presentation suffered from lack of, for want of a better word, punch.

Possibly, the company were somewhat nervous and overawed by the surroundings. They haven't played in a real theatre before and seemed to be more than a trifle self-conscious throughout. This could account for the fact that a great deal of talent went a-wasting. In flashes one saw something of what this group would be capable of, given more forceful direction. Individually, they weren't all that disappointing, but they lacked the kind of abandon which could have transformed this presentation.

This year, no short-listings for awards are being announced by the adjudicators but one player who must, even at this early

stage, be marked down for honours is research chemist Gordon Ensor. This talented young actor made a wonderful Peter Doody, playing his part with a restraint and a sense of timing, which got every ounce from the libretto. This performance alone made attendance worthwhile. But, in spite of the shortcomings, this was an enjoyable production in many ways. Apart from Valmai Debb, who was an outstanding Sombra, without having a really wonderful voice, Scots girl, Phyllis McCall, gave a really pleasing performance as Eileen Kavanagh, with a most convincing brogue. The chorus were somewhat too restrained in their singing, although there were moments of breakthrough by the bass line. But they didn't make their full impact until the finale, which was so spiritedly and musically rendered that it sent the audience away really happy. Llangollen will come again to the Festival and it's a safe prediction that they will be a very much improved company, because the native talent is very obviously there.

Worthy Champions

Last year's International Award winners, Lurgan re-appeared on Sunday night with a magnificent production of "The Gipsy Baron" and were every inch the champions making a strong bid to retain their title. On this showing, it's going to be very difficult to depose them. They had almost everything and won almost hysterical applause for some of their most successful numbers. Of course, they had a great deal of support from both their own adherents who travelled with them and the many local friends they have made in the last three years, but, let's be frank, the amount of work and effort put into this show deserves the utmost credit, apart from question of talent. Lurgan come here with the intention of putting on a prize-winning show and they spare no effort to achieve that end. Effort is what makes champions and Lurgan have it.

From their highly competent musical director August Toremans out front to their least significant back-stage worker, Lurgan have a well-organised team and this is demonstrated by the slickness and detail of their productions under the able direction of Maureen Filbin.

But this would be of little use, if they hadn't the talent on stage and there they've turned up trumps once more. They must be almost odds-on favourites to take the Swift Choral Shield this year, because their chorus work was absolutely magnificent and heart-stirring. In leading lady, Mary McEvoy, we heard one of the finest sopranos in the history of the Festival and their next best vocalist was undoubtedly bass, James McCullagh. In the male lead, Jariath McConville, playing his first leading role had the personality, the acting ability and the effervescence although vocally he may not yet have requirements for this part. Aloysius Nangle as the Mayor and Thomas French as Otto, made a wonderful comedy team in a cast which had hardly a weak link throughout. If we see better than this Gipsy Baron in the 1962 Festival, it will be an extremely pleasant surprise.

"The Yeomen of the Guard"

If for nothing else but their courage, St. Gabriel Musical Society can be forgiven many of their shortcomings. This is a society founded only a short time, consisting of young boys and girls, working on a shoestring literally and without any outside professional help. Perhaps it was inexperience that prompted them to choose such a difficult Gilbert and Sullivan work as "The Yeoman," but, strangely enough, in spite of their novice approach to much of the show, they demonstrated that a great deal of attention had been paid to the more difficult passages. Unfortunately, perhaps, this was at the expense of the more general production. Nobody expected a high standard from these youngsters and nobody could say that the show was up to Festival standard, but if they have taken their adjudication to heart and learned the lesson that an audience of friends and relatives is not a reliable barometer, St. Gabriels will return one day to give us a pleasant surprise. There is definite talent which might be more obvious with a different kind of show, more suited to their resources and vocal qualities. Mind you, there were some very impressive scenes, particularly the death scene, which had pathos where many a more experienced company might have had bathos. As Jack Point, Paul Flynn did a very difficult task with surprising efficiency and, although she lost confidence as the show progressed, Mairin Hegarty as Phoebe Meryll showed a great deal of promise.

CASTLE CINEMA Carrick-on-Suir

PHONE 95

Friday, 14th September (TWO days) — Danny Kaye, Dinah Shore in **UP IN ARMS.** (Technicolour). Look out for squalls when Danny joins the Navy. Matinee Saturday at 3 o'clock.

Sunday, 16th September (at 3.0 & 8.30) — Glenn Ford, Valli, Claud Rains in **THE WHITE TOWER.** (Technicolour). The trials and tribulations of a party of six who attempt to reach the apex of a hitherto unassailable mountain!

Monday, 17th September (TWO days) — Robert Mitchum, Eleanor Parker in **HOME FROM THE HILL.** (In Cinemascope and Metro-colour). The story of a young love that fought against an unspoken family secret the whole town knew too well!

Wednesday, 19th September (TWO days) — Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe, Montgomery Clift in **THE MISFITS.** A film which everyone will now, more than ever, want to see!

Friday, 21st September (TWO days) — Romy Schneider, Karlheinz Böhm in **SISSI, MOTHER AND EMPRESS.** (Technicolour). Matinee Saturday at 3 o'clock.

The Management reserve the right to alter programme and to refuse Admission.

THE REX CINEMA, Tramore

Friday, September 14th (ONE day) — Keith Larsen, Buddy Ebsen, Don Burnett in **FURY RIVER.** (Colour).

Saturday, September 15th (ONE day) — Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel in **DAYS OF THRILLS AND LAUGHTER.** With Oliver Hardy, Pearl White, Harry Langdon.

Sunday, September 16th — Martin West, Venetia Stevenson, Bill Williams in **THE SERGEANT WAS A LADY.** Also Ray McAnally, Catherine Feller, Mark Singleton in **MURDER IN EDEN.**

Monday, September 17th (ONE day) — Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds in **SINGIN' IN THE RAIN.** (Technicolour). With Jean Hagen, Millard Mitchell, Cyd Charisse.

Tuesday, September 18th (ONE day) — Groucho, Chico, Harpo, Diana Lewis in **MARX BROTHERS GO WEST.** With John Carroll, Robert Barratt, June MacCloy.

Wednesday, September 19th (ONE day) — Terry-Thomas, Sonja Kie-mann, Alex Nicol in **A MATTER OF WHO.** With Richard Briers, Honor Blackman, Carol White.

Thursday, September 20th (ONE day) — Brian Keith, John Beal, James Drury in **TEN WHO DARED.** (Technicolour). With Ben Johnson, L. Q. Jones, Dan Sheridan.

Friday, September 21st (ONE day) — Howard Keel, Susan Hayward

