

A Feast Of Entertainment

Those who felt last Sunday week that Lurgan's Gipsy Baron would be uncatchable in the rave for the International Trophy, have had good reason since to revise their forecasts, because the Festival fare has been improving with practically every performance and what, at first, appeared a rather easy job for the adjudicators has now been transformed into a very close contest.

After the rather disappointing performance by the St. Gabriel's youngsters, the Celebrity Concert came as a very necessary boost for Festival prestige. This was magnificent entertainment and left the audience almost exhausted from applauding. From the Festival Orchestra's opening salute with the "Light Cavalry Overture" to the crashing finale from the Royal Showband, this was a non-stop feast for the music lover. Without detracting from any of the other performers, there is no doubt that Kenneth McDonald stole the show. The Covent Garden tenor was delightful last year — this year, he was magnificent. Heard at his best in "On With The Motley" and "A Wandering Minstrel," and in the Love Duet from Lucia de Lammermoor with Lucille Graham of Sadler's Wells, he has grown in musical stature and greatness and would have justified the concert on his own. But the repast was

rich and to suit all tastes. Lucille Graham sang the light numbers "La Pastorella" and "Merry Widow" sweetly and appealingly but she did seem to have made a rather unwise choice in "The Holy City."

Baritone Jeffrey Taylor, who had earlier played in "Maritana" was also an instantaneous favourite. Of course, our Irish representatives in Frank Ryan and Patricia Lawlor did us credit with their contributions and the haunting "Danny Boy" brought the house to a deluge of applause for Patricia. To add a colourful touch were the Trov School of Irish Dancers, and their display was more appreciated by the cross-Channel members of the audience, who had several nice things to say about their grace and skill. The Festival Orchestra were probably heard to best effect in their delightful medley of Gilbert and Sullivan music in the second half of the programme and great credit to these talented musicians and their invaluable director, Stanley Bowyer, who with Mrs. Nan Power also played the accompaniments. A complete contrast was provided by those effervescent youngsters of the Royal Showband, who displayed their ability and their versatility with a well-chosen selection of popular airs, but possibly the best appreciated was Brendan Bowyer's rendering of Boolavogue.

director, Fr. K. O Gorman, who tried hard to keep the pace from flagging and got little co-operation from the cast.

Emphasis On Production

The adjudicators are going to have a difficult task in deciding where the Producer's award will go this year. On Friday night, the Sharnbrook Society paid their first visit to the Festival with "The Lisbon Story." This work is not calculated to bring out the best in singers, but any shortcomings in the score were more than amply compensated for by the excellence of the production and the wonderful acting of the principals. There isn't much scope for the full-blooded Welsh chorus to show their qualities in this work, but what singing there was, was very pleasing but the emphasis must be on other matters. Producer, Poppy Lilley, can feel very proud of her achievement and the acting honours go to Mary Wills, who was a great success in the role of Gabrielle. Striking too, was the performance of F. Lilley as Karl Von Schriener. He brought just the right touch of the arrogance and suavity of the professional German Civil Servant cum S.S. man. Robert Hart as David Warren also deserves praise and Geoffrey Sanders was quite good in the "Pedro The Fisherman" number, although the chorus could have got a great deal more from this catchy piece. Costuming was excellent and a special word of praise to Stanley Bowyer, who took over the orchestra at short notice and handled a strange score with great adaptability.

South Pacific

The long-awaited and most ambitious show ever staged in the Theatre Royal, "South Pacific" was the success that the heavy pre-booking forecast. With 25 changes of scene, the precision and slickness of the performance was surprisingly good even from a society as talented as Idle and Thackley. Here we had admirable production allied with a little more scope in the vocal line and it can be safely stated that the company got as much out of it as could be expected considering the limitations of stage and cast. Charles V. Curry in the lead role of Emile was a huge success and has a grand voice and, playing opposite him, Dorothy Goodwin, combined a sweet voice with a very charming personality. However if there was to be a Festival Prize for the best-looking actress I think that Michele Booth as Ngana would be very high on the short list. Another who impressed was Ciive Balmforth as Lt. Cable, but Dave Leslie, who has become a firm favourite with Waterford audiences, got every ounce out of his comedy part as Luther Billis. This was a performance which must have been noted with an eye on an award. The part of Bloody Mary is hardly a sympathetic role and Mary Stanley got just the right touches into it. Taken all round this was a wonderful example of dovetailing teamwork, between producer, cast and back-stage team. It may not be reckoned the best performance at the Festival, but it certainly was the most efficient and, I think, was a grand night's entertainment. Which is only what we've come to expect from Idle and Thackley.

Vast Improvement

"It's hard to believe it's the same society," was the comment I heard after the Gendros performance of the "Vagabond King," on Sunday night. This may be a double-edged sort of compliment, but it was quite true. Gendros have improved out of all bounds and their performance was well up to Festival standards. They still have a certain way to go in the production line and their diction wasn't all it might have been at times but they certainly gave us plenty to enthuse about in their singing. With the possible exception of Lurgan, they were the first company to give us some first-class chorus work and their leads all had voices to look forward to hearing again. Particularly pleasing was light baritone, R. Hopkins, who played the lead role of Francois Villon. He has both voice and stage presence and was an undoubted success. Mary Thomas in the role of Katherine also had a beautiful voice and I particularly liked Hugette, played by Miss O. Lamnea, who gave us a most effective death scene. One of the most striking features of this

production were the grand costumes and although there were some aspects of make-up, and out-of-place accessories, the general effect was colourful and pleasing. If Gendros continue to improve at this rate, they could be taking home that International Award in the not-too-distant future.

Superb "Mikado"

Adjudicator, Kenneth Cooke, described this as one of the most beautiful productions of "The Mikado" he has ever seen and this, from an acknowledged Gilbert and Sullivan expert was praise indeed. Noting that Mr. Cooke used the term "beautiful", which could be applied to the pleasing picture presented rather than the production itself, I must say that this was a presentation which will take a great deal of beating. Last year St. Agnes presented a very well-executed "Tolanthe" which, I felt got less than its due need of praise from the then adjudicator, but they can't complain on this score in the present case. Here we had beautiful chorus work, with plenty of power and some of that bass quality which was missing from the concerted singing last year.

The female voices, in particular, were very effective and this was certainly short-listed for the Swift Shield. Making the biggest impression were the three little maids, Maria McGlade, Maria Gatt and Maria Hughes, garbed in authentic Japanese costume, specially flown from Tokyo. They were most appealing and well appreciated. Pick of the leads was Michael Cannon as Ko-ko, and he won high praise, although the adjudicator commented unkindly on the introduction of "gimmicks" to get the laughs. I'm afraid that there will be more and more gimmicks introduced into Gilbert and Sullivan as time proceeds and they will not be in as good taste as the harmless scooter and tricycle. The high tenor of Colm Finnegan as Nanki-Poo did not win him universal approbation but, nevertheless, he was very much in character and gave a very good performance. Because the opera has been produced only recently in Waterford, there were bound to be comparisons and there is no doubt that the Waterford production could have done with a great deal of the qualities of St. Agnes, but, in one or two parts, I think the local group had the edge. Be that as it may, one must pay tribute to all of the leads, with the possible exception of Tony Gilmore, who wasn't quite the Mikado as we know him. Sean Gilmore won praise for his Poo-bah and Margaret McCavana was an excellent "Katisha." This is one of the finest productions we've seen in the Festival to-date and St. Agnes can be really proud of themselves.

Visit Of Youth Orchestra

At St. Ursula's Ursuline Convent, Waterford, on Sunday next (4 p.m.), a concert will be given by the Cork Youth Orchestra. The visit has been arranged with the idea of giving a boost to the formation here of a similar type of orchestra, full details of which were carried in a previous issue of the "Munster Express."

"All My Sons"

The Waterford Dramatic Society's next production will be Arthur Miller's "All My Sons." It will have a four-night run in the Theatre Royal from Thursday, 15th November, to Sunday, 18th November. Rehearsals will be under way very shortly. In these days of challenge, the survival of live theatre depends increasingly on quality entertainment. It can be truly said that the W.D.S. has spared no effort in the past to raise the standard of amateur drama. This forthcoming production will be welcomed, particularly by those theatre-goers who remember with relish the Society's 25th anniversary presentation some eighteen months ago of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible." Though "All My Sons" can be compared in dramatic content with "The Crucible," it is very different in that it deals with a problem of our times in a modern American setting. The Society also announces that, directly after its November production, rehearsals will commence on "Christmas in the Market Place," by Henri Gheon. This is a fine play, depicting the true spirit of Christmas. It is the Society's effort to put Christ back into Christmas. Watch this column for further details. Auditions for prospective members will be held on Tuesday, 25th September. Further details appear elsewhere in our advertising columns.

IRISH SUGAR BEET GROWERS ASSOCIATION MEETING

Farmers and others interested in Beet, Pea, Fruit and Vegetable Growing on a Contract basis are invited to attend a meeting in the Municipal Theatre, City Hall, Waterford, on Wednesday, 3rd October at 8 p.m.

General Costello and other speakers will address the meeting and outline the future development envisaged by the Company. Do not miss this opportunity of hearing how you can help yourself.

WATERFORD DRAMATIC SOCIETY

The Waterford Dramatic Society are about to commence activities for the coming season. Intending members will be auditioned at Municipal Library, O'Connell Street, at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, 25th instant.

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Friday, September 21st (ONE day) — Howard Keel, Susan Kohner, John Saxon in THE BIG FISHERMAN. (Technicolour). With Martha Hyer, Herbert Lom, Ray Stricklyn.

Saturday, September 22nd (ONE day) — Keith Michell, Adrienne