

Really, Youngsters' 'A Country Girl' Was Very Good Indeed.

By Jim Stagg

Taken From The Exmouth Journal, Saturday April 22 1972

SO MANY SUPERLATIVES have been used in a welter of waffle about so many things in this trendy world of nauseating television advertising, pontificating politicians and the hard-sell salesmen vending anything from rugs to religion, that if anything is said to be very good it sounds almost like a condemnation.

But if one can unclog one's mind from the tawdry tinsel of sooper- dooper fab- fantastic foolishness in the use of words, and takes "very good" at its face value, the words mean high praise indeed.

And the 14-20 Amateur Music and Drama Society's presentation of Lionel Monckton's lilting 'A Country Girl' at the Pavilion last Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday was very good indeed and this neither flatters nor under-estimates the achievement of the large cast of enthusiastic young people, principals and chorus, who produced an evening of high entertainment to an all- but full house on the first night

Taking our words strictly to mean what the dictionary says they mean, **excellent**, is the word for Pamela Jones's musical direction; what hours of patience, and inspiration she must have spent in putting the music and its meaning into the young voices. And what a reward she had with the finished product.

Natural Talent

Very good was the production of Dennis Chiffers. With some he had natural talent to develop; with others it was obvious patience and hard work that had been the order of the day. But again- although perfection could not be achieved- the overall end product must have been very gratifying for Mr. Chiffers.

Accompanying the singing were two pianists, Muriel Lamacraft and Kay Gibbons, and Grahame White on the drums. They added to the success.

The piece, most of the tunes of which occupied honoured places in the top ten of Edwardian days, is a light, frothy musical set appropriately enough in Devon, and concerns a handsome sailor, a country girl who becomes a famous singer and the slight disarrangements in the course of their true love.

Monckton's melodious songs were whistled and sung up and down the country, and the 14-20s evoked the era nostalgically with their delightful interpretation of the songs.

From the whole delightful evening- and there were a number of really good performances from the principals- emerged two young ladies of high talent: Annette Cole and Felicity Leonard.

Miss Cole played the somewhat boisterous Nan, a village girl with no ideas above her station. She has a pleasant little voice and what appeared to be an innate knowledge of stage-craft.

But it was her mobility of expression, clarity and the nuances of emphasis in her voice and her obvious ability to act that were impressive. The same can be said of Miss Leonard, who as Sophie, had the part of a village girl with ambitions to climb the social ladder.

Outstanding

Again it was her acting ability, facial expression and naturalness of voice that were outstanding, and one hope that she, and Miss Cole, will graduate to Exmouth's adult amateur stage to delight town audiences for many years to come.

In the male lead was young David Ayling- a name not unknown on the amateur stage in Exmouth and district, and indeed David is the son of Alec of that ilk- in part of the handsome sailor.

There was a certain wooden-ness about his movement, but experience will soon put that right, for he showed great promise and spoke well and clearly. His singing voice- treble- would not gain him a place in a cathedral choir, but....how he can carry a tune. Every note he hit was dead on key and made a pleasant sound which the audience much appreciated. Elizabeth Yarnell as Majorie, his true love, has an extremely pleasing speaking voice, and with more experience will become a very good actress. Her voice is very sweet, but unsure at the moment- partly one suspects from nervousness, and partly because she doesn't fill her lungs with a good, boisterous deep breaths to propel the sweet sounds forth with more power. But Miss Yarnell shows immense promise.

As the conniving- all for the best- Barry, Michael Gentle had a part he obviously enjoyed; as did the audience. Another young man of promise this- and his "interlude" in drag was amusing and well done. Christine Killoran as the society dame was very good indeed; she demonstrated an acting ability that can be developed to a very high standard.

The dusky princess was played by Jennifer Anniss, who made a very good attempt at the most tuneful

and famous “Under the Deodah” song; again a pretty voice, but unsure of itself because of nerves and lack of good deep breathing.

Other parts were well played by David Blyth, Owen Smaldon, Burlin Power, Jane Pope, Michael Drew, Michael Killoran, Alan Dunstan, Colin Dance, Sheila Stone and Denise Waller.

And the chorus was absolutely first rate; good, clear, tuneful singing, and well-drilled and fluid movement when called for.

Choreographer was Diana Chiffers, and the dancing, collectively and individually was good.

If I have left the costumes to last, it reflects no order of precedent, for they were stunning, bright and gay, beautifully designed and wonderfully made. They were created by Betty McAskie, whose inspired work in this respect is already well known. She has added immeasurably to her reputation, for ‘A Country Girl’ was most beautifully dressed.

Mrs. McAskie was assisted in her work by a young member of the society, Sheila Stone, and this emphasises the depth of the talent Exmouth’s very successful 14-20 Music and Drama Society possesses.

The Society, with this latest success, has now demonstrated that it is a very important segment in the life of the town, and has added and will continue to add colour and enjoyment to the pattern of Exmouth life