



THE CRITIC

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TONY CURTIS

THE
ANSWER TO
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MAIDEN'S
PRAYER.



Operetta Hilarity at Hamrun

By ALBERT M. CASSOLA, F.I.L.

Elvio Calderoni's Operetta Company "Gran Festival" is one of the best that have visited Malta since the end of the war, Calderoni himself is a witty comedian that delights the audience with his lucky hits and antics. He is very well partnered by Tilde Teldi, a young and vivacious soubrette. Soprano Franca Diani has a sweet voice and a very fine personality while tenor Luciano Innocenti is a good counterpart. But the Company can boast of yet another soprano and another tenor who couple their pleasant voices with their gentle poise.

P. Abraham's "Vittoria e il suo ussaro" was, however, below expectation. Obviously the Company had not yet settled down and the orchestra was not always perfectly in tune. Dario Ghirardi in the part of the tipsy burgomaster made a hit and both Ann Panter and Mino Dimelli proved deserving leading dancers.

"La danza delle libellule" by Lombardo and Lehar was the first proof of the Company's real worth. Mino Dimelli's choreography and the elegant costumes worn by the principal actors helped to make the performance a success. The orchestra was this time more compliant with Nino Scarpa's direction and both duets "Com'è dolce pattinar" and "Bambolina" were loudly and deservedly encored. The violin intermezzo that precedes the "Gigolette" dance was delightfully played by Prof. Valente.

In F. Lehar's classic "La vedova allegra" the audience missed the sprightliness of Tilde Teldi but her absence from the cast was compensated by the singing of Elena di Fiore and Ivan Cecchini, the additional soprano and tenor. In the part of Valencienne, the former sang very well. The popular arias "Vo da Maxim," "Sciocco, sciocco cavalier" and "Con le donne" were feathers in the singers' and musicians' caps.

"Il paese dei campanelli" and "Cin-Ci-Là", both by Lombardo and Renzato, are favourite operettas with the Maltese public, but there was a sharp contrast on Sunday, February 26, between the hasty way in which the former was played in the matinée and the elaborate manner the latter was performed at night. Outstanding in the matinée show were tenor Ivan Cecchini

(Ciclamino) and the comical actor A. Sollazzo. "Luna tu" was encored as usual. In the soirée, "Cin-Ci-Là" drew the applause of the packed house, particularly after "Nel Pencilli" and the comic duets "Piccadilly" and "O Cin-Ci-Là".

C. Lombardo's "Madama di Tebe" was a great disappointment. Some of the actresses were miscast and the comedian himself was not at his best. It seemed that the whole Company lacked rehearsals. At times the prompter was hushed down by the audience and again there was little coherence between the singers and the orchestra. "Spesso in cuori e picche" and "L'amore, ahimè, passa da sè" made little impression and were coldly received.

The last of the three acts of Lehar's "Eva" was rather the best. Calderoni and soubrette Teldi were grand in the final scene and provoked some belly-laughter from the audience. The "musical chairs" scene in the second act could have been much more lively. L. Solari played the part of La Rousse with the necessary emotion. Diani sang as satisfactorily as ever, notwithstanding her indisposition.

G. Pietri's "Acqua cheta," which is more of a farce than an operetta, proved to be Calderoni's pièce de résistance. From the very first tune, "Com'è bello guidar i cavalli," he stole the show with his droll interpretation of Stinchi. He kept his body under such control that carriage, movement and gesture assisted portrayal every moment he was on the stage. His make-up was perfect. E. Beffa (Rosa), M. Marzi (Ida), L. Solari (Ulisse) and A. Sollazzo (Alfredo) supported him creditably. Calderoni gave an extra number when he ably impersonated Charlie Chaplain in a scene from "Limelight."

Nady Bella was good in "Scugnizza," by Lombardo and Costa, and in the last act she was superb in the duet "Salomè." Innocenti sang sweetly "Napoletana" but his way of speaking could sometimes be less monotonous. E. Beffa sustained her part with verve. Otherwise it was a weak production.

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Soubrette Tilde Teldi knows when and how to turn her eyes and her head, uses her feet well, gives due importance to movements, and gestures with hands and arms at the right time. So her success in the soirée d'honneur was complete. Her small voice fitted the tuneful gaiety of the music in C. Lombardo and G. Pietri's "Primarosa" and the solo "Addio, colomba" was noteworthy. She was enthusiastically applauded for the charming manequin scene and also for the amusing extra dance before the last act. Mario Magnani (Teddy) and the others were also good. The intermezzo was well executed.

"Accadde a mezzanotte" by C. Lombardo was a new musical for Malta but it had something to appeal to the taste of the public. The delightful mise-en-scène and the array of costumes were a great joy and along with the melodious music, particularly the air "A San Francisco," amply compensated for the minor parts played by the principal singers and the soubrette. If a leading role there was that seemed to be that of A. Sollazzo who was very entertaining, especially in the "dolls duet." Mino Dimelli again merited homage for his work as choreographer and as leading dancer with Ann Panter.

The Radio City version of "Marinai in bordata" by C. Lombardo looked like an amateurish variety show without any continuity. It consisted of songs by well-known authors, a few dances, some half a dozen stale jokes and a dragging, insipid sketch.

"La casa delle tre ragazze" by F. Schubert was a marked improvement on the previous night. The serenade "Nella calma della sera" and "Ti voglio ben" were nicely sung and the military march was also well rendered. A. Sollazzo gave a confirmation of his artistic abilities, and the other parts were generally done right although in the first act there were a few slips. Settings and scenery were good.

In truth some dialogues in "Mademoiselle Nitouche" (or "Santarellina") by H. Hervée are not very stagey but the *dramatis personae* make up for that fault. The first act was an orgy of laughter with Tilde Teldi (Nitouche) and Calderoni (Celestino), at their very best. The duet "Te lo giuro" brought the house down with clapping. In the second act A. Sollazzo once again achieved a very high level of acting as a comic artist while Mara Marzi, Emma Beffa, Innocenti and Solari were also thoroughly good.

In A. Gilbert's "La casta Susanna" A. Sollazzo played the part of the ingenuous son, a part usually taken by the *capocomico*, while Calderoni, evidently hoarse and tired, assumed the role of Susanna's husband. Sollazzo won the laurels of the evening and Tilde Teldi as Susan scored another personal success and showed an inherent capacity for imagination and conception of character. As on some other occasions, a few of the Company's few chorus girls sometimes seemed to forget that they were on the boards. They dropped their assumed identity — chorus girls and boys are actors too — and diminished (I was about to say: destroyed) the illusion it was their business to create. The eye roaming about and the private giggle to the girl or man next to them are instances of this sin. The singers and the orchestra gave a bright interpretation of those tunes that are always hummed and whistled after the show.

MOZART AT MANOEL ISLAND

Whilst the inclusion of Beethoven in a programme supposedly dedicated to Mozart's BiCentenary Celebrations can be tolerated, any mention of Delibes and Smetana should be frowned upon. But first things first and the question of the "Jupiter" and the profound "C Minor" Concerto served with a dressing of Living Dolls and Frolicking Comedians must come after some comments on the actual performance of the items in the concert given by The Orchestra of Her Majesty's Royal Marines Mediterranean Fleet Band conducted by Bandmaster A. E. Pottle. At the Manoel Island Theatre on February 23rd. A fitting opening to the evening was Beethoven's Egmont Overture. After a rather shaky start the orchestra settled down nicely responding keenly to Mr. Pottle's disciplined beat. The magnificent manner with which the conductor built the final turbulent "crescendo" of the Egmont augured well for the next item, Mozart Symphony No. 41. From the outset the orchestra showed its glaring deficiency; a string section that was weak in quantity, tone and technique. At times the first-class playing of the woodwind and brass did more than redeem this fault but any passage for strings made one shudder. Bandmaster Pottle's musicality is not to be questioned. He treated the "C Major" Symphony with respect and one felt that careful study had been devoted to every bar. The solemn