

CHRISTMAS SHOWS

Continued

gotten islander, while Michael O'Halloran brings an air of dignified authority to his role of Captain Smollett. Martin Heller is a swaggering and loquacious Squire Trelawney.

In the opening scene, set in the bar parlour of the Admiral Benbow Inn, Douglas Marchie, skilfully made-up, turns in a rascally performance as Captain Billy Bones. Alan Stevens is quietly boyish as the hero Jim Hawkins. There is good work from Frank Wyllie as Israel Hands, Angus Martin as Yellow Eye, John Shedd as George Merry, and a picturesque and colourful parrot, Captain Flint, played by a parrot from Wilson's Zoo in Glasgow.

The scenery has been specially constructed and painted by the Scottish Television Scenic Workshop, and the reconstruction of the deck of the Hispaniola is especially noteworthy.

The twenty scenes (in three acts) go with gusto and right merrily. It is a pity the old Empress, which houses the Falcon Organisation, is such a draughty and barn-like building. In plusher surroundings this production would be a winner over its tamer rival, "Peter Pan". It may be the last feather in the cap of the ambitious Falcon Theatre, but it is a very definite and well-merited one.

'BLETHERSKETS'

INDIVIDUALLY, the talent is there in "Blettherskets", the seasonal revue by the company at the Glasgow Citizens'. But the overall effect is bitty and the show disappoints.

The revue is noteworthy for introducing Charlie Sim, a local television personality, to the Citizens' stage, and he shows comedy potential that is, alas, misused. His hair for Dame in pantomime is obvious, and this should be utilised to the full in future seasons. An attempt to run a musical comedy story-plot through the revue mars rather than adds to the enjoyment.

One of the all-too-few highlights is when Phil McCall, Charlie Baptiste and Tom Conti join forces as three Indians—a student, a pedlar and a bus conductor. Another bright threesome is of Nan Kerr, Geraldine Newman and Anne Kristin in "Charity Works for Us", as three ladies at a garden fete in "Shining White Crigs".

Ronald Davis has a delightful few moments when he gives a notably lifelike impersonation of Stanley Baxter, the Scots comedian, in his well-known "Professor" characterisation. Mr. Davis brings more than a physical resemblance to his clever interpretation.

Among the feminine members of a largely young company, Anne Kristin, excellent as a Bikini Girl, Moray Forsyth, and Geraldine Newman merit attention. Charles Baptiste's various portrayals are good, and Phil McCall supplies the typically Glasgow comedy throughout.

Sheila Shaw is the principal singer, and the Citizens' dancers—Julie Hamilton, Joyce-Lyell, Sheena McDonald and Bobbie Simmons—dance prettily, the choreography and ensembles being by Richard Brown. Bob Hargreaves, of the Trio Vitalities, is a brisk and personable artist throughout.

The writers are a composite force masquerading, fortunately, under the pseudonym of Ronald Emerson and Arthur Blake, who also officiates at the pianos with Margaret Rothwell, is responsible for the music. Sally Hulke is the eye behind the bright settings and costumes, and the whole is directed by Callum Mill.

CHILDREN'S THEATRE

BERTHA WADDELL and her famous Children's Theatre give special matinee performances at the Citizens', Glasgow. A company of eight provide entertainment in mime, dance and comedy which is admirably geared for child audiences. Colourful costumes add to the jollity of it all. This theatre, which has been in existence for many years, deserves more publicity than it ever gets.

GLOUCESTER

'CINDERELLA'

GLOUCESTER, again defying modern pantomime trends, is this year staging "Cinderella" at the Regal. Only one guest act, by the Dallas Boys, disturbs an almost rigid adherence to pantomime tradition—a show aimed mainly at the children.

This is contrary to general opinion, which guides the planning of humour and jokes on a high proportionate ratio of adults to children.

Glooucester is surrounded by such shows, all with the added fierce competition of big names. A.B.C. Regal's answer to a pantomime for the children, sans low jokes, yet still providing entertainment for adults and not a little scope for comedians as well.

It has been so each year since the Regal, opened in 1956, revived professional pantomime for the city five years ago. To date it has paid off.

Judging by the enthusiasm of three Boxing Day audiences for Joe Collins's latest presentation here, there seems little doubt that it will do so again.

Production is by Neville Kennard in association with Davy Kaye, and the result is a modest, polished and occasionally quite brilliant two and a half hours of entertainment. The comedy motif is strong, and leading the team of fun-makers are Ford and Sheen, who play the ugly sisters. Close behind are another pair of inseparables, Oliver Twist, who are the brokers' men.

Sheila Hannaway makes her annual return to pantomime this year as Gloucester's Prince Charming, and can scarcely be faulted either in voice or pose. The music, on the whole, is not outstanding. Miss Hannaway's singing is. So is that of Bernadette, with her guitar.

And none has more vitality than the act of the Dallas Boys, numbers given in quick succession with

such vigour that their spot, coming so near the finale, must, for some, almost steal the show.

GUILDFORD

'JACK AND THE BEAN-STALK'

GUILDFORD pantomime "Jack and the Beanstalk" by Henry Marshall, with quite a swing, though loose production and stage management prevented it being a really first-class effort.

In the cast and producer Peter Green thought that children would not notice minor defects, were quite wrong. Few adults are so perceptive or so vocally critical as children at such an occasion. For instance, they noticed and loudly remarked on a hand showing through a tree preparatory to showering fruit on Dame Durden and the King, in one of their not so romantic get-togethers.

The first act was by no means as lively as the second, when the comic characters really came into their own, with wonderfully amusing scenes between Dame Durden (Simon Oates) and the King (Joe Gieg). One particularly hectic chase round the auditorium involving the King and his bailiffs, Slosh and Wallop, was very well done, with Joe Gieg dashing on and off stage round a revolving door and finally diving exhausted and triumphant through a window. Unfortunately it was perfectly plain to see that the window was strategically placed under the said window, so Mr. Gieg's exit was not as dramatic as he would have had us believe.

Children almost invariably have a little fidget while the two principals sort out their affections, and truth to tell there is not a lot in such moments at Guildford to hold their attention. Gillian Cobbold as Isabel is sweet and fresh, and all that one could wish for, but Mary Denison makes an unsatisfactory Jack. She tends to pose for minutes on end, and her singing voice varies from the brassy to the inaudible from one note to the next.

Slosh and Wallop, the king's bailiffs (Michael Ellison and Keith Marsh) have a riotous time with funny little knock-kneed dances and some excellent rhymes. Their co-ordination is good, but on occasions they are off.

Most popular by far is Simon Oates as Dame Durden. He enjoys himself and his enthusiasm spreads. He ad lib at every reasonable opportunity, and has a wonderful way with the children who venture on stage to sing "K-K-K-K-K-K-K-K-K-K". In proportion as they like him, of course, they must dislike Giant Thunderclap, played by Peter Kent with an extra deep voice and enormous bulging shoes.

The stage is too small for the full effect of pantomime to be achieved. The dancers from the Bellairs School of Dance and Drama appear to find themselves crowded between Ian Knight's attractively designed sets. This will all be resolved, we may be sure, when Guildford gets the new theatre, which in the course of things got an honourable mention.

HADLEIGH

'BABES IN THE WOOD'

"THE Babes in the Wood" at the Kingsway, Hadleigh, Essex, is towered over by Hal Bryan, vocally, physically, and personally, for he produced, wrote the book, and plays the dame in a bewildering number of colourful and exotic creations. He gets on good terms with the children, and his book contains all the favourite tricks—the ghost, bees-and-honey, hole-in-my-bucket, and so forth.

Jessie Jewel is Robin, with a rich voice and a fine swagger; her voice blends well with Jean Edwards' clear tones, in the latter's rôle of Marion. Catherine Coleman and Nicola Salisbury make the Babes into two positive characters with personality. Sam Scott is a cheerful Simple Simon, who works well, and plays the trumpet; Jimmy Reynolds and Al Clarke play the Robbers convincingly, and they, too, have a specialty act, with harmonicas. Frank Peters, with strong voice, is not too scaringly a Sheriff, and Penny Allen, as the Fairy, both sings and dances well. Johnnie Rinaldi appears briefly as Friar Tuck, then, with a partner, plays various madcap antics, including different unicycles in a skilful spot.

Mona Johnson's San Toy Girls and Wonder Kiddies, with Miss Johnson's choreography ranging from Tiller-type routines to tap and ballet, dance well. The music, played by the London Orchestra, leader Ivy Wilson, ranges from "The Sound of Music" to "Summertime" to "One Finger, One Thumb" and "September", with "A Kiss for Christmas" for audience participation. The costumes are fresh and bright and the décor good. The whole cast work well together to make a success of the first pantomime the Kingsway has ever had.

HANLEY

'ROBIN HOOD'

POTTERIES pantomime lovers might well have gone without their traditional Christmas season this year because of the pre-Christmas take-over by the Mecca organisation of the only live theatre in Stoke-on-Trent, the Theatre Royal, Hanley.

But due to the efforts of officials of Stoke-on-Trent Operatic Society, who made the initial negotiations with the Rank Organisation for the use of the Hanley Theatre Cinema for a pantomime production, and to Izna Roselli and Ray Lamar, who presented the pantomime by arrangement with the

operatic society officials, the show went on on Boxing Day for a run of six weeks.

The production, "Robin Hood", has evidently overcome several difficulties by lack of equipment, for after a seven-hour dress rehearsal on Saturday, Tuesday's show drew a full house and was well received. It lasts over three hours and caters for both the traditional juvenile and more sophisticated adult audiences.

John Hanson's Robin Hood is, for the first time in the Potteries—a "real" Robin Hood, engages in fights and duels as well as singing. He is on top of his form and his rich, powerful voice has rarely been heard to better advantage or in a better environment.

Max Wall makes a likeable dame and reminds us that he is a clever dancer and wonderful artist. The part of Martha, the children's nurse, fits him like a glove.

Twenty-one-year-old Pamela Penford, who starred in the part of Lady Marion at short notice when Caroline Aylett was taken ill, is to be congratulated on filling the rôle and leaving nothing wanting. She has the looks and the voice.

A local man in the cast, Richard Hazell (Little John), has an easy, winning manner and would like to hear more of his rich and full bass voice.

This is one of the only two adverse criticisms of the show. The other is that although all scenes maintained a fair-to-high standard for eye appeal, not one stood out.

In fairness, it should be stated that one gimmick scene involving falling water, failed to make the deadline due to technical difficulties already mentioned.

HARROGATE

'DICK WHITTINGTON'

INGENIOUS staging effects are shown in the Harrogate Opera House to make this year's pantomime, "Dick Whittington", a really first-class production. It opened on December 23rd and runs for four weeks.

While the traditions of pantomime, which over the years have proved themselves so popular, are adhered to, this production by Robert Chetwyn is refreshing and vital.

The clowning of Douglas Byng, as Dapple, the clown, is a joy. He has perfected the art of portraying a pantomime dame, which while being excessively funny is never vulgar. His repartee is brisk and topical. Notable among many humorous scenes are Mr. Byng's encounters with Idle Jack (Frank Tregear) and Sherry John (John Carlisle), in a shop, a haunted room, and in foreign climes.

Mr. Tregear, an accomplished comedy actor, excels himself in the youthful guise of Idle Jack, with his cheeky antics and pert voice. Despite the limitations imposed upon her singing by an attack of laryngitis, operatic singer Edvina Gray gives a delightful performance as principal boy.

Making her pantomime debut is leading lady Vera Johnson, whose dancing and singing are very pleasing. Guest artists Jo, Jac and Joni make a substantial contribution to the humour and high spirits of the show, as three jolly rats.

Notable among a large cast are White Rose Players John Carlisle, Adrienne Finch (who makes a most appealing cat) and Frank Smith as the fearsome King Rat.

Lavish costumes, exotic settings, thoughtful choreography, and ingenious production make this a show to delight audiences of all ages.

HEREFORD

'JACK AND THE BEAN-STALK'

TOM E. BRADLEY is back again at the Kemble, Hereford, to present "Jack and the Beanstalk", the last pantomime before this old theatre is closed for demolition in the New Year. It will re-emerge as a store.

Tom Bradley also stars as Simple Simon, with a specially humorous of a naughty schoolboy, while again co-starring with him is Ossie Rae as a majestic and Junoesque dame who plays the dame with a gay and gallant leer and a twirl of the skirt.

In these hands the comedy is well taken care of, while principal boy and girl are tunefully played by Kay Butler and Barbara Rogers respectively.

Speciality acts come from Pat Dawson and Arnold Crowther, with a novelty act, Johnnie St. George, a new 22-year-old rock-and-roll singer, Tristie Jackson, Ray Victor and the two stars.

Playing principal rôles also are Norma Leigh, Sandra Gray, Terry and Stern, Brian Woodhall, Peter Boyce and Vic Ramond.

The Jacqueline Jenner Girls and the Maudie Jenner Girls provide the chorus, while much of the success of the show is due to the talented young blind organist, Bernard Glover, who provides the whole musical score of the show on an electronic organ.

This is strictly a traditional pantomime on almost old-fashioned lines which, none the less, seem acceptable to young audiences.

HORSHAM

'SLEEPING BEAUTY'

HOPES that Horsham Urban Council would engage professional companies of a higher standard for the council-owned Capitol, to encourage people to come away from other forms of entertainment, were dashed by the presentation of the pantomime "Sleeping Beauty" which runs from Boxing Day to January 6.

FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS ENTERTAINMENT HOWARD AND WYNHAM LTD.

BRITAIN'S PREMIER THEATRE CIRCUIT

STEWART CRUIKSHANK

presents

OPERA HOUSE, MANCHESTER

GALA OPENING PERFORMANCE THURSDAY, 14th DECEMBER, at 7.30 p.m.

THEREAFTER EVENINGS at 6 p.m. & 8.35 p.m.

Matinees every Saturday at 2 p.m., also 26th, 27th December and 1st January.

KEN DODD

Starring in

THE KEN DODD SHOW

A Spectacular Comedy Revue

with

THE NITWITS

with Sid Millward & Wally Stewart

and

THE GLAMOROUS BLUEBELL GIRLS

From the Lido, Paris and the Stardust Hotel, Las Vegas

ROYAL COURT THEATRE, LIVERPOOL

Gala Performance Friday, 22nd December, 7.30 p.m.

Monday to Friday 2.30 p.m. & 7.30 p.m. Saturdays 5 p.m. & 8 p.m.

TV'S FASTEST SPECTACULAR

BLACK and WHITE MINSTREL SHOW

with

THE GEORGE MITCHELL MINSTRELS

STAN STENNETT MARGO HENDERSON

Supported by Top Line Artists

ALHAMBRA THEATRE, GLASGOW

Commencing Friday, 8th December

Evenings 7 p.m. Matinees 2 p.m.

KENNETH
McKELLAR

RIKKI
FULTON

in

Howard and Wyndham's
Record-breaking Scottish Pantomime

A WISH FOR JAMIE

with

FAY LENORE

REG VARNEY

and STAR CAST

THEATRE ROYAL, NEWCASTLE

Commencing Friday, 22nd December

Evenings at 7 p.m. Matinees at 2 p.m.

JIMMY LOGAN

in

Loganberry Pie

with

THE BARRY SISTERS

TIBOR ALEXANDER and his Wonder Dogs

LENNY THE LION with Terry Hall

Paul & Peta PAGE'S PUPPETEERS

The IDEAL FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

KING'S THEATRE, EDINBURGH

Commencing Friday, 15th December

Evenings at 7 p.m. Matinees at 2 p.m.

LARRY MARSHALL

(Mr. 1 O'clock)

in

A Dazzling and Comedy Production of GOLDILOCKS and the THREE BEARS

with

EILEEN
KEEGAN

UNA
McLEAN

SALLY
LOGAN

and STUPENDOUS Star Cast

KING'S THEATRE, GLASGOW

Commencing Tuesday, 19th December

Evenings at 8 p.m. Matinees at 5 p.m.

WEST SIDE STORY

After a sensational 2½ years run at Her Majesty's Theatre, London.