"UTOPIA" AROUSES INTEREST

D'Oyly Carte Directors at Winchester

Although Winchester Amateur Operatic Society took something of a gamble this year in staging the little-known "Utopia Limited" instead of one of the usual Gilbert and Sullivan favourites, their enterprise appears to have been well rewarded. All houses have been good with the exception of Tuesday, which was slightly down on average, and few operas put on by the Society can have created such wide-spread interest. Directors of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company have attended with the view to considering whether the piece—which they had not seen before — should be included in their repertoire, and representatives of operatic societies from other towns as far afield as Leicester will have been among the large and appreciative audiences when the curtain rings down on the final performance this (Saturday) evening.

After dress rehearsals and performances for schools and old people, the opera opened its main run at the Guildhall last Saturday—Civic Night—when there was a distinguished assembly including the Mayors and Mayoresses of some eight Hampshire towns, the Consular Corps from Southampton and members of the City Council.

The Mayor of Winchester (Councillor Miss E. M. Barnes) was accompanied in the Mayor's box by the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire (the Duke of Wellington), the High Steward (Lord Simonds) and Lady Simonds, Dorothy, Countess of Malmesbury, and Sir James Mann, and the party in the Council boxes included the Mayoress (Mrs. Jack Le Brocht), Sir George Dyson (President of the Society), the Dean of Winchester (Dr. E. G. Selwyn) and Mrs. Selwyn, Lady Cynthia Colville, the Deputy Mayor (Councillor P. H. B. Woodhouse), Mrs. Peter Smithers, Mrs. Howard Whitbread and Mr. D. Lane.

Also with the Mayor's guests was

of the Society), the Dean of Winchester (Dr. E. G. Selwyn) and Mrs. Selwyn, Lady Cynthia Colville, the Deputy Mayor (Councillor P. H. B. Woodhouse), Mrs. Peter Smithers, Mrs. Howard Whitbread and Mr. D. Lane.

Also with the Mayor's guests was the General Manager of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, Mr. F. Lloyd, who is a personal friend of Mr. R. H. McCall (the Town Clerk), one of the Society's Vice-Presidents. Mr. Lloyd said he was rather anxious that the Musical Director (Mr. Isidore Godfrey) and the Stage Director (Mr. H. Newby) of the Company should attend if it could be arranged and they came down from Oxford, where the Company is currently appearing, on Tuesday.

Neither had seen the opera before—although Mr. Godfrey knew the music. Both really enjoyed it and are to discuss further with the directors as to whether it should be brought back into the D'Oyly Carte repertoire. During the interval, the producer (Gladwys Starling) and the Winchester Society's musical director (Mr. John Sealey) were invited to the Mayor's Parlour to meet the guests, who immediately went into a huddle with them over the merits of "Utopia" and the problems of staging the piece, which from the amateur point of view at any rate is the most expensive of all the Savoy operas to put on because of the changes of costume involved. Mr. Newby had already realised from Act I. the limitations of the Guildhall stage, which tends to give a crowded picture when the full company is on the stage and lacks room in the wings, and complimented the Society on the smooth exits and entrances of the chorus in the circumstances.

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As stated last week, there is no overture to the opera as such and an abridged version of the Concert Selection arranged by Patrick Barrow is being used for the purpose. Mr. Barrow came down from his home at Bletchley, Buckinghamshire, to see Thursday night's performance and was delighted with the orchestral work under Mr. Sealey, the Society's musical director, who had collaborated with him in reducing the 15-minute Concert Selection to a 6½-minute Overture. Among a party of five with Mr. Barrow was Mrs. Frances Thomas, who before marriage was Miss Sewell and for many years with the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company as musical coach for principals and chorus.

Representatives have attended from the Gilbert and Sullivan Society; the Alton, Bournemouth, Eastleigh, Farnham, Petersfield, Romsey, Thornycroft and Basingstoke, and Southampton Amateur Operatic Societies; and others from the Leicester Amateur Operatic Society will be present this afternoon.

The opera concludes to-day (Saturday) with matinee and evening performances.