

A MUSICAL
REVIEW OF
THE SEVENTIES

1980

Singalonga— seventies!

ONE OF the more memorable features of the seventies was the rich crop of musicals, dominated by the talents of Stephen Sondheim (Company, A Little Night Music, Side by Side by Sondheim) and the Lloyd Webber-Rice partnership (Jesus Christ Superstar, Evita).

Ten hit musicals from the past decade, plus some lesser known concoctions, were featured in a revue devised and directed by Peter Roberts for Teddington Theatre Club at Hampton Court Theatre last week.

This ambitious musical anthology called for the combined forces of TTC, Youth Action Theatre and Bernice Warren's Children's Theatre group, who came into their own when it was time for Annie to be saluted. There were well over 50 performers and technicians involved in the show and the result was a colourful, if variable, evening's entertainment.

Ron Price took on the Ned Sherrin role of narrator, clad in a dazzling gold braid tunic and dripping trinkets. He obviously wanted to make sure we didn't lose sight of him while he waited patiently at the side of the stage for each musical item to finish.

The show started zestfully with three numbers from Grease, performed with such energy and attack by the Youth Action crowd that anyone over 30 in the audience felt about 103, by the finish. The four items from ill-fated Liza of Lambeth that followed were soporific by comparison. Mr. Roberts obviously enjoyed this show more than most.

It was good to be reminded of two of the best numbers from Billy, the musical version of Billy Liar, of which Any Minute Now, sung by Debbie Lane and Jo Harman, was the more successful; and the medley from A Chorus Line was extremely well done.

I would have preferred a less obvious number from A Little Night Music than the over-worked Send in the Clowns, sung by Patsy Soskin, and the selection from Jesus Christ Superstar failed to capture the essence of that show, despite Frankie Bligh's heartfelt singing of I

Don't Know How to Love Him.

Towering over the other extracts in the first half was Chicago, a marvellous blend of vulgarity, wit and, well, razzle dazzle. All That Jazz and Class, sung by Patti Bottomley and Rita Smidman, had me squirming with pleasure, just as they did in the West End.

The second half was a real treat for Sondheim fans, of which I am very definitely one, with two numbers from Company, again up to West End standard, especially the fearfully difficult Getting Married Today; and no less than four numbers from Follies, which Ron Price described as the most expensive musical never to be seen in the West End.

Follies was a smash on Broadway in 1971 but, for one reason or another, never opened in London. Anyone who saw Side by Side by Sondheim will surely remember Broadway Baby, Losing My Mind and the intricate Could I Leave You, beautifully interpreted here by Robin Hope-Johnston.

Another Sondheim number, I Never Do Anything Twice, from a film called The Seven Per Cent Solution, was performed with some relish by Bernice Warren, though not half as much as Guy Taylor put into Sweet Transvestite from The Rocky Horror Show, or the precociously gifted Julie Finucane put into Rainbow High from Evita.

The best treat of the evening for me was the chance to see and hear again Stephen Bentley's wonderfully lugubrious Dracula in a number from Youth Action's own production of The Dracula Spectacular. One of the wittiest and most original performances I have seen on the amateur stage, it all seems to come quite naturally and effortlessly to young Mr. Bentley, which is one way of defining real talent.—NS.