

PAL JOEY

1984

MUSICAL

Hampton Court heel

THE MUSICAL collaboration of Rodgers and Hart reached its Broadway zenith in 1940 with a show that had an unremitting heel as hero and an adulterous baker's wife as his temporary fancy. Not surprisingly it was unpopular with the matinee audience, and when Pal Joey came to be filmed the story was sanitised and the score was prettified by numbers from other shows.

For this week's revival at Hampton Court Theatre, director Dorothy Jones and her musical director Peter Roberts, have stuck to the original story which, nearly half a century later, takes on a surprisingly feminist flavour — casting the male as victim and villain. But the score retains the Hollywood additions of *Funny Valentine* and *Lady is a Tramp*, while losing the all-important *Do It the Hard Way*.

The excision was probably necessary because Teddington Theatre Club's Joey may have a way with a song, but Peter Slater is no hooper . . . though he manages well enough when leading the girls in *You Mustn't Kick it Around*.

Ah, yes: the girls. The magnificent girls, all eight of them. During Monday night's interval I heard someone ask: "I say, are they supposed to be as bad as that?" He will have got his answer in the second half when Clea Bartholomewsz, Carol Palmer, Laurie Coombs, Susan Bell, Barbara Phelps, Fiona Andrews, Kim Daniels and Heather Lock, gave superb versions of the awful *Flower Garden in My Heart* (magnificently costumed by Irene Palko) and *Plant You Now, Dig You Later*, which sent up Busby Berkeley something rotten. And what tap-dancing precision: professional choreographer Billie Jones must have spent weeks devising the routines and training the company.

Rich Mrs. Vera Simpson is played by Anne Lowe, who thinks of herself as a straight actress but made notable musical contributions in *Valentine and Den of Iniquity*, and deserved more audience reaction to her coolly sophisticated *Bewitched* (in the full frontal style of Sian Phillips in the 1980 revival). Bernice Slynn, last seen here as Beverly in *Abigail's Party*, took the

opportunity of a cameo role as a gossip columnist to deliver a Gipsy Rose Lee routine in *Zip* — the song of an intellectual stripper — departing to an approving roar.

I was delighted to see Lesley Cox as the nice girl Linda (in complete contrast with her Sally Bowles for *Kingston Operatic* a year ago) a lovely, if low key performance. She and Peter Slater make the magic work in *I Could Write a Book*. Fellow Kingston star Phil Rayner also puts in a comedy appearance as a Chicago hood complete with facial tics and Illinois accent — but no song, except for the chorus at the end.

Phil Hickson, in the unrewarding role of Mike the night-club owner, must be pleased that he has been given *Tramp* to sing which he does very winningly. I hope the other members of this strong cast and all those who contributed sets, props, music and lighting, will forgive me for not including them in the catalogue of names. This is a very promising start to the amateur musical season, about to break out all over the borough. **John Thaxter**