

'Showboat' a success at Weston



IT IS hard to resist the charm of Jerome Kern's frothy, tuneful masterpiece, 'Showboat'. Worle Operatic Society's production at the Weston Playhouse, is most enjoyable.

Despite a tendency to overcrowd the stage, over-sing and to overplay some of the scenes, Ros Francombe's production is high on confidence and colour.

From the start it is enjoyable theatre: Fast, colourful, light and tuneful. Directed with tremendous gusto, it offers a civilised and entertaining evening.

There are reservations, though. This production succeeds despite its lack of visual power — many of the crowd scenes are messy and dramatic moments are thrown away because other actors or scenery are moving.

The musical delivery of Jane Dean as Magnolia, Sue Dyer as Julie and Bob Francombe as Joe is excellent throughout. Bob received well deserved applause for his powerful rendition of 'Ol' Man River'.

Jane Dean as Magnolia is hardly off stage. Her Magnolia has great charm, poise and grit. The character's motives come from her heart, but she is too tough to cry when things start to fall apart.

Jeff Prescott as Captain Andy exuded confidence and dominated the stage. He is the ideal foil, with a strong personality.

There was spirited support from Ken Fyson as Windy, Bob Gibbons as Frank and Heather Gadd as Parthy-Ann Hawkes. Trish Roberts turned in a nice performance as the struggling comedienne, Ellie, trying

to make good in films.

The show holds the attention through the sheer verve and joy of the actors, and the vigour with which the action is propelled. I cannot remember the last time I saw such speedy scene changes — the pace and vast array of backdrops were breathtaking.

For what is ostensibly a lightweight play, this makes for surprisingly compelling viewing. It is funny, down to earth, compassionate and packs a hefty punch in the final scenes.

This bright production offers enthusiastic playing, colourful sets and costumes, and some of the greatest musical songs ever written.

Final performances can be seen tonight and tomorrow night at 7.30 pm.

P.G.