

Spa Opera
presents

ROBERT AND ELIZABETH

Producer: Denzil Pugh Musical Director: William Bosworth

ROBERT AND ELIZABETH

CAST LIST

John Fenner Elizabeth Compton David Biddle

Vendors	William Wakem, Derek Rees	Alfred Charles	Paul Fisher
Policeman	Trevor Hughes	Septimus	Philip Bosworth
Sweeper	Graham Shurvinton	Bella Hedley	Jeremy Haynes
Lamplighter	Norman Stevens	Henry Beven	Adam Schumacher
Elegant Ladies	Jan Jones, Daphne Plummer, Carole Morgan	Captain Surtees Cook	Jill Grant
Working People	Margaret Bosworth, Britta Brown, Catherine Date, Sue Fretwell, Gill Maurer, Janet Tilden-Smith, Maureen Wanless	Wilson	Don Fuller
Chloe	Johanna Lovelock	Doctor Chambers	Richard Foster
Claire	Samantha Jones	Elizabeth	Helen Henderson
Edward Moulton-Barrett	David Biddle	Mr. Macready	Jess
Henrietta	Jayne Jones	Stage Manager	Trevor Hughes
Arabel	Hayley Moore	Mr. Harrison	Elizabeth Compton
George	Neville French	Mrs. Butler	Eric Taylor
		Evans	Jan Jones
		Robert Browning	Norman Stevens
		Travers	Maureen Wanless
		Ticket Collector	Bernard Petty
			John Fenner
			Norman Stevens
			William Wakem

Poets' true story sparkles

ROBERT AND ELIZABETH, Spa Opera, Loft Theatre until Saturday. Running time 2 hrs 45 mins

ROMANCE and menace dominate the stage in this sparkling production retelling the true story of the poets Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. The romance comes from Elizabeth Compton and John Fenner in the title roles. The menace is provided by David Biddle who deserves an award for his magnificent study of Victorian values as the chilling Mr Barrett.

Altogether there are eight brow-beaten young Barretts in the Wimpole Street household, all with good voices and excellent dramatic presence.

Producer Denzil Pugh can feel proud of the cast and his well-paced production.

There are some lovely comic moments, especially from Richard Foster as Captain Surtees and Jayne Jones as Henrietta. John Fenner as the dashing Browning sings some fine duets with Elizabeth Compton but I much preferred the busier ensemble pieces.

Barbara Goulden.

Touching romance

Robert and Elizabeth - Spa Opera

The true story of the romance, against the odds, between poets Elizabeth Montton-Barrett and Robert Browning brought touchingly to life by Spa Opera.

Most aspects of the play, especially the acting and costumes, had obviously been given plenty of attention.

The scene changes, however, should have had more as they were over long and seemed to tax the musical director William Bosworth and his crew.

Jill Grant as Bella revealed a fine comic talent while John Fenner as Robert and David Biddle as the domineering father were superb under Denzil Pugh's direction.

The only fly in the ointment was the overly operatic voice of Elizabeth Compton, who played Elizabeth. Her singing, while accomplished in itself, seemed to jar with the rest of the cast's voices, which were more suited to musical.

Still, a beautiful tale and an enjoyable performance.

Kathryn Hinchliffe

Robert and Elizabeth - The Leamington Spa Opera Group, the Loft Theatre until Sunday

THIS is the musical of the play of the film The Barretts of Wimpole Street.

It presents problems of production for any group, probably only solvable if there is a revolving stage, on one half of which Elizabeth's bedroom can be permanently built.

Every second scene seems to take place there, requiring frequent lengthy scene changes in both halves of Spa Opera's current production of this musical at the Loft Theatre.

The first-night audience got very restive, eventually laughing and applauding musical director William Bosworth's rather audible instructions to his instrumentalists as they reprised the current number, accompanying the scene-shifters.

Dramatically there is little to offer - the love story of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, a third-hand précis from a film script with characters as one-dimensional as celluloid.

Musically, it is banal, the standard is at best 'sub - Radio 2'. Lyrics are claimed to be based on the subject's poetry - perhaps Ronald Millar had their collected works in a volume near his typewriter!

With this unpromising material, the cast struggled nobly to present an entertaining evening, succeeding to some extent. The three leading players (John Fenner as Browning, Elizabeth Compton as Elizabeth and David Biddle as Barrett) are excellent actors, and the first two also have good singing ability, so that their portrayals became most credible, Elizabeth a convincing invalid, Browning and impetuous poet.

Their music was a delight, particularly the

mock-Italian duet which crackled with operatic fizz. David Biddle really was a brooding, repressive Victorian paterfamilias, and delivered his one song competently.

Perhaps the real 'stars' of the evening were the brothers (Neville French, Paul Fisher, Philip Bosworth, Jeremy Haynes and Adam Schumacher), who sang, danced and clowned their way through their supporting roles with great gusto.

Helen Henderson, Elizabeth's maid Wilson, adeptly extracted maximum comedy from her smallest part, and Jayne Jones made a brave attempt at Henrietta's music in a sweet, if unsupported, soprano voice.

This show has a large cast of supporting players - far too numerous for individual mention - who all gave their best. But the maxim 'never work with children or animals' still holds good. A spaniel, 'Flush', is called for. She is beautiful. She stole the show.

Christina Rex.



