

# ROUS ESS!

died down. And as the Tuesday, butterflies attack people among the thousands

wing and dodging tactics of like a sunburst for the suburbs. For this was the gala — when the Nairobi City ad ingenuity into giving Nai- per holiday musical entertain-

makes one want to applaud and applaud and applaud.

The story concerns a dispute between workers and management in the Sleep-Tite Pajama Factory. The workers, headed by Prez and Babe, are demanding a 7½ cents an hour wage increase. The Boss refuses to pay it, and has brought in a new Superintendent (Sid) to help the time-and-motion expert, Hines, in increasing productivity.

Inevitably, Babe and Sid fall for each other and are kept apart by the crisis. Equally inevitably, they come together in the end.

Petal Erskine is first-rate as Babe, hitting every word and every number she has way out beyond the boundary. She's a coon-shouter, maybe, rather than a singer, but she knows how to get those songs across and how to make an attractive heroine out of what could have been a brassy bitch.

Tony Thacker's Sid is not, perhaps, a strong enough character to deserve her; nevertheless, he could charm the birds off the trees with his singing.

As the oversexed Prez, Mike Mortimer is a winner. He gives the rather nauseating bump-houseness of the character an undeserving charm, and puts across the two inauspicious numbers "Her Is" and "Seven And A Half Cents" with the bang and vitality of a veteran performer, making them show-stoppers.

## Obvious choice

The comedy element in musicals has frequently been handled by Edward Scott, and he was the obvious choice for the time-and-motion man Hines. In *The Pajama Game* he is at his funniest in an excellent performance.

He's well backed-up by Marlene Shaw as the boss' harassed secretary, who has a glorious moment in her own right when she gets drunk in Hernando's Hideaway. Ken Latham has a chance to shine as the villain-of-the-piece, boss Hasler, and makes the most of it. And there are good performances by Anne Fox and Walter Hinds.

But however much praise one may find for the principals, there's no getting away from the fact that the Chorus are the stars. Their work and energy, their togetherness are exhilarating and a tremendous boost to the show.

A word of praise, too, for Martinico who designed the excellent sets — and the stage management who kept them moving slickly from one to another — also for lighting designers Michael O'Reilly and Alex Ross, and for the doyenne of costume designers, Mary Epsom, who NEVER fails to please.

In fact, I went overboard for *The Pajama Game* in a big way. I'm sure it's one of the best City Players' shows ever.

## PLAY REVIEW

# Enjoyable but not a great musical

Scanning the song titles of *The Pajama Game* before curtain up I found there were only two that roused any chord in the memory.

Now, having seen it, I find that the same thing applies. For me, I am afraid, it was that kind of show.

That is not to say that it is not enjoyable. There is a lot of fun and frolic, a lot of gaiety, a lot of colour — for which a richly deserved word of praise for the

costume-designer, Mary Epsom — and a lot of laughs.

But, for me, it is not one of the great musicals — no tunes running tormentingly through my head, no scenes to be joyfully savoured in retrospect.

The Nairobi City Players' cast has worked hard under the direction of Robert Young, and he has put some unmistakably personal touches into it — the intrusion of a piece of fall-about comedy where one does not look for it, or the equally unexpected wryly underplayed joke where slapstick would have been more obvious, and probably less funny.

Mr. Young is one of the most imaginative producers Nairobi has had in the past few years and it is a treat to see one of his productions again.

To him — and to some considerable extent also to the designer of the quick-change settings, Martinico — goes credit for a show which is racy and slick in pace with hardly a single dead spot.

For those who do not know the show it is all about an American factory making pyjamas — I was brought up on that spelling and do not apologise for it — where a strike is brewing over a claim for an extra 7½ cents an hour.

Industrial relations become a little confused when the new production superintendent (Tony Thacker) falls for the head of the trade union grievance committee (Petal Erskine) but fails to convince the boss (Ken Latham) that a little give, as well as take, might be in order.

But everything naturally works out to a satisfactory conclusion.

Miss Erskine and Mr. Thacker carry off their romance ably but the evening's honours really go to Ted Scott, as a frustrated time-study man, and Marlene Shaw, as the light of his life — and the boss's secretary.

Mr. Scott is already well known as a comedian on the National Theatre stage, but this performance mixes the traditional "ham" funny-man with a send-up of the species. Apart from being a little too quiet in places, Mr. Scott is very funny.

Miss Shaw plays a bit harder for laughs, but turns in a performance of tremendous vitality and gusto which makes it a little hard to watch anybody else closely when she is on stage.

Also in good comedy vein is Elva MacPherson — as somebody's secretary — and Mr. Latham as a boss in the "trouble-at-mill" tradition. And watch Stephen Barefoot as a work-shy factory hand — and perhaps wonder, as I did, why the City Players failed to make more use of what seems to be an excellent singing voice.

From the chorus — or "ensemble" as the programme has it — one excellent piece for male voices and an attractive female line-up but, unhappily some lack of discipline. There is a leavening of dancers with real experience and they stand out all too obviously.

The musical director, Reg Manu, like Mr. Young has schooled his charges to be lively and overlooking what appeared to be a touch of laryngitis in the brass to blend in well with the singers.

Summing up, *The Pajama Game* is a pleasant diversion a tasty sauce for the Christmas fare but little more.

P.B.M.

Liza McKinney at the theatre

# It's lively, naughty -and so good!

WRITING a drama critique is always a more pleasant task when the production in question is as good as Tuesday night's opening of the City Players' production *The Pajama Game*. Seldom, certainly in the last two years, has the thunderous expression of approval given the cast by the audience been so well-deserved. If Nairobi doesn't make this show the success story of the year, then they don't deserve to have theatres to go to.

*The Pajama Game* is based on a novel by George Abbott and Richard Bissell and deals with the problem that arises when the new works superintendent, Sid Sorokin (Tony Walker), whose aim is to keep the Sleep Tite Pajama Factory at peak production, falls in love with Babe, the blonde leader of the union's Grievance Committee.

## ROMANCE

Just as the romance seems to be set for "full ahead," the management's decision to refuse the union's demand for a 7½ per cent wage increase intervenes. Babe and Sid find themselves on the opposite side of the fence, which comes to a head when Sid finds himself having to sack Babe.

There are all kinds of other love interests and office intrigues going on and two of the greatest scenes are the annual factory outing and a visit to a dark, romantic night spot called Hernando's Hideaway. And don't be put off by the idea of a factory and trade union theme; it's the liveliest, naughtiest factory and union set-up that I've ever seen.

Greatest laurels of the evening must go to Petal Erskine, making a return to the Nairobi stage, with her endearing and excellent performance as Babe. Superb in their sup-

porting roles were Ted Scott, Mike Mortimer (the best male singer of the lot), Marlene Shaw, Ann Fox and Elva MacPherson.

Good news for regular theatre-goers, the singing and dancing ensemble are the best-looking, most musical and liveliest dancers I've seen here since *Oklahoma*. The dance routines were good enough for international standard — and what a surprise to find such a new look and dynamic choreography for which Wolfgang Buchner, a newcomer and only 20 years old at that, must be highly congratulated!

Robert Young, who can be remembered for previous Nairobi smash-hits like *Oklahoma*, has done it again. He's not only given the City Players a likely all-time success but given this particular critic the most delightful evening in the theatre for over two years.

*The Pajama Game* is really swinging holiday entertainment for the whole family and I guarantee you'll leave the theatre humming.