

Opera at the Sherman

# This surreal mixture was so uninteresting

By IFAN PAYNE

THE ITALIAN writer and dramatist Luigi Pirandello was concerned throughout his works with the dichotomy between reality and illusion and in his short story, *The Jar*, that vessel and the events which surround it epitomise his distinctive mixture of naturalism and surrealism.

The story would seem to be a natural one to form the basis for a short opera. However, I have been trying to decide why I found Giles Chaundy's opera, currently being presented at the Sherman Theatre, so uninteresting.

The production, by the Sherman Arena Music Theatre Company, has a number of felicities. The singing, by local music theatre stalwarts Derek Barnes and Selwyn Jones amongst others, is uniformly attractive.

The staging starts out promisingly enough with an effective slow-motion opening scene. It ends equally strongly with a convincing and appropriately-fevered orgy of sex and fruit. In between, though, the production loses its way in over-

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activity and a failure to develop characters and situations beyond broad generalisations.

The music is well-played by a chamber orchestra conducted by Wyn Davies. But it is what they play that, in the end, is the real drawback.

That Chaundy has little feeling for the setting of words was made apparent in his song cycle, strongly sung by Helen Fehily, which preceded the opera in this cycle. *My Sad Captain*, it was clear that, at least as heard in these performances, his music is neither emotionally engaging nor responsive to the text, and these characteristics did little to enhance the production of *The Jar*.

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