

WILD
WILD
WOMEN
1990

TEDDINGTON THEATRE CLUB

Wide-open spaces

NINE years ago *Wild, Wild Women* became a rip-roaring Christmas hit at the Orange Tree Theatre. But the show quietly died when transferred to the clatter of a West End restaurant theatre.

The songs were heard again when composer Nola York paid an Orange Tree tribute to her librettist, the late Michael Richmond. But this week, with a revised score directed by MD Peter Roberts, and choreography by Liz Field and Peter Barnett, the show has been brilliantly revived by Ashley Hodgson in the wide-open spaces of TTC's Hampton Court Theatre.

Based on *Lysistrata* with a dash of *Romeo and Juliet* for good measure, the setting is Aggroville in the 1880s, where wives stage a love strike, telling the cow-pokes they won't get their oats until they pack away their pistols. There isn't a stick-up all week, but virtue only triumphs when the girls at the local cat-house join in the sex-denying ordinance.

Plonking gag lines are not resisted; corn is as high as an elephant's eye. But if the lyrics are pure cliché and the action stops for every musical number, the cast play the piece with an infectious sparkle that makes it a celebratory firecracker for Bonfire week, the entire run being sold out before opening night.

Heather Hodgson plays the sheriff's wife as a warmly glowing saloon keeper who instigates the strike, her voice powerfully heard throughout the evening, most notably in the key numbers, *Peaceable Haven* and the title

song. But she seems less assured in a star-spangled ballad which Chris Warden, the Aggroville Romeo, later makes splendidly his own.

Meanwhile, across the road at the Red Candle saloon, gorgeous Patti Bottomley celebrates sin with Jill Schaverein's zesty Coriander, each dressed in riotous wig and scarlet glad rags. But moments later, both ladies are playing female pillars of propriety shaking an unaccustomed leg in a wild *Wild Women* dance routine before taking the vow of abstinence.

Musical and choreographic high spot is Edward Jeffroy's gravel-voiced hanging judge, tripping fantastically in *Backward Dancin'*, with a male line-up that includes Will Hodgson, Andy Yates and Joe Early.

Happy pairings unite the Romeo with Cathy Early's exuberant Juliet (also doubling as her mama); and Neil Purdue as a newlywed whose bride Irene Palko just can't say no. She also appears as a red-bobbed 'soiled dove', and blissfully as the soul singing Sister Priscilla, gold winged from heaven after meeting her musical end in a sidewalk shoot out.

Wendy Bedford prompts (and sings) in costume; the adaptable set, lighting and construction are by Jean Goodwin. The production, highlight of a season sponsored by Fullers, has been entered for the Richmond Drama Awards.

John Thaxter