

OPERA

Ian Fox welcomes a joyous touring version of Haydn's 'Life on the Moon'

NICHOLAS Esterhazy was mad about opera and being a fabulously wealthy Prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he was well placed to indulge his passion. He built himself an opera house in his gigantic palace in the Hungarian marshes (he was also crazy about duck shooting) and entertained the high and mighty to his private shows. He ensured the high standard of those

nights by employing the best composer in the world, Joseph Haydn. In 1777 his second son married and Haydn was required to produce something suitable for the wedding. He came up with *Il Mondo della Luna*, a three act comedy based on a play by the popular Venetian dramatist, Carlo Goldoni. Opera Theatre Company's new English-language version by James Conway, *Life on the Moon*, opened in Wexford last Saturday and is sponsored by the Art Council and BT Ireland.

An elderly widower is jealously guarding his daughter but her fiancée plays on the old man's interest in astronomy,



Triumphant opening: Opera Theatre's 'Life on the Moon'

persuading him to swallow an elixir, in fact a sleeping draught. His garden is decorated exotically and he believes he has been transported to the Moon where he is so delighted that he allows his daughter to marry. Too late he discovers the trick but finally gives in, offering his daughter a resigned blessing. It is a light-hearted frolic but Haydn took a lot of trouble with the score and it is a delight throughout.

This new production by Hilary Westlake is a triumph. Dennis Looby's garden setting is charming and is wittily transformed into the exotic moonscape. Harry Nicholl is a light-

voiced hero but creates just the right characterisation as he fools Papa into believing what has happened. Christopher Purves makes his OTC debut as the bumbling father and his resonant bass-baritone is most attractive. Majella Cullagh continues to impress as one of our finest young sopranos as his daughter, excellently supported by her maid, Colette McGahon. James Nelson is highly amusing as our hero's apprentice and the 'Emperor' of the Moon. Andrew Synnott conducts with style and brio. It's another hit for OTC.

ON TOUR: Coleraine (Mon), RDS Dublin (Fri, Sat)