

Unhealthy

THE Voluntary Health Insurance Board refused this week to answer their indictment by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on State-Sponsored Bodies for treating Limerick patients as second-class citizens. Well they might. The charge is in fact unanswerable.

They have undoubtedly, as alleged., failed to sanction a private hospital for the region, thus forcing Mid-Westerners to travel as far as Dublin for treatment. It wasn't as if a hospital had to be built: vacant possession of Barrington's was until recently a practical proposition.

The VHI's attitude to Limerick is similar to that of successive governments of various political complexions. Patients have to travel outside the region not simply because of a lack of private facilities but because the region's public hospitals are not allowed offer the range of services available in Cork, for example. And all the while—with a few honourable exceptions such as Deputy Michael Finucane—Shannon-side politicians acquiesce.

Must we wait for foreign insurance companies to correct Irish officialdom's prescription of discrimination against Limerick?

Paddy thought he was the world's best lover... then found his wife had asthma



Funny peculiar: The Sun

Sick joke

WHAT else would you expect from what was once described as the voice of Britain's white working man? The Sun has just devoted the best part of a page to what it terms Irish jokes. In fact, of course, they are anti-Irish jokes, predictably depicting Paddy as a fool.

The Irish are rightly as ready as anyone to laugh at themselves. But not for the first time The Sun goes far too far. It reinforces the racial stereotype and thus breeds prejudice.

The really sick joke is not only that the British rag sells itself here as "The Irish" Sun but that people in Limerick actually buy it.

Hear, hear

LADIES and Gentlemen,

Unaccustomed as we are to public speaking, it gives us great pleasure to propose a vote of thanks to Seamus Kennedy for bringing glory to his native County Limerick and, by extension, to this great Treaty City of ours.



Leading Limerick lady: Suzanne Murphy.

Suzanne's American Dream of Valentino

By JOHN O'SHAUGHNESSY

A PPLAUSE and accolades are ringing across the United States for internationally-known Limerick-born soprano Suzanne Murphy.

Over the past month she has endeared herself to audiences in the specially commissioned opera *The Dream of Valentino*, based on the life of the great Italian actor.

Suzanne, who started her singing career with the folk group We 4, has been attracting rave notices for her performance in the part of June Mathis, who introduced Rudolph Valentino to Hollywood but who was arguably the most disinterested woman in his private life.

A new full-scale opera is in itself an act of daring but the boldness of choosing Dominick Argento, one of America's most seasoned opera composers, to write the music, and making a matinee idol the subject, has paid off with a string

of resounding reviews from the critics of all the influential newspapers.

The Washington Opera Company was also ambitious in its casting, and its decision to offer the role of June Mathis to Ms. Murphy has shown to be justified.

The Washington Times' Jean Battey Lewis had this say about Suzanne: "Mr Argento gave the best of his writing to June Mathis, performed by Irish soprano Suzanne Murphy. She was expressive throughout; her last aria was a highspot of the evening—a rapturous moment when vocal writing and radiant, sensual voice met to magic effect".

Edward Rothstein of the New York Times was equally impressed: "Suzanne Murphy was strong in the dramatic soprano role of June Mathis".

Music critic Lucia Anderson was also enthusiastic in The Virginia Free Lance Star: "Suzanne Murphy, also making her Washington Opera debut, gives a strong performance as screenwriter June Mathis. Hers is a soaring soprano voice, shown to great effect in her solo numbers".

The Baltimore Sun

critic Stephen Wigler said that Suzanne Murphy's powerful delivery touched the heart.

There was a very favourable review also from Michael Killan of the Chicago Tribune: "As much as the music allows, the singing is beautiful. The two real stars are Irish soprano Suzanne Murphy, as sweet in voice as she is as an actress, and Metropolitan Opera veteran Julian Patrick, who dominates his every scene as the cynical Hollywood mogul".

The Wall Street Journal's Manuela Hoelterhoff reported: "Two fine singers, Suzanne Murphy and Julian Patrick, managed to inject some pathos into their platitudes".

Since *The Dream of Valentino* is a new opera, one can well imagine the pressures on the cast. There are no past performances from which it can be measured.

The reaction has been more than favourable, even from the most hardened of critics, and Ms. Murphy is certain to come to the attention of other American opera companies.

Sixty-eight years after his premature death as

of the silent screen's greatest legends, Rudolph Valentino gets to sing-in an opera, and American audiences love it.

This, one of the most ambitious new productions ever staged by the Washington Opera Company, according to the city's main newspapers, had its world premiere at the Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts, and is playing to standing-room only and largely enthusiastic audiences.

Suzanne's brother Michael, general manager at the University of Limerick Concert Hall, said the family were very pleased for her.

"Given that this is not an established work, its success was dependant on the critics. Well, their reviews have been most encouraging, and, needless to say, my mother Una, sister Noëlle and my aunt. Brid Murphy, are all delighted for Suzanne who has been keeping us in touch with happenings."

The family do not have any immediate plans to travel to the United States to see her perform. "We might prove something of a distraction... she needs full powers of concentration in this demanding role and it would be most unfair of us to impose ourselves at this stage."

This is not Suzanne's first experience of a principal role in opera on the other side of the Atlantic, as she had previously performed with The New York City Opera in a highly successful production of *Norma*.

There was further good news for the soprano this week when Sony announced that her Christmas release, *There Is An Isle*, had reached number 21 in the charts. The album is now to be released in Great Britain.

Suzanne, who is freelance and who retains great affinity for the Welsh National Opera Company, who gave her her first major break, intends to return home for a brief visit later in the year.

'Dream of Valentino' is a multi-media extravaganza

act work to both a chronicle of an Italian immigrant's fabulous and ultimately tragic American experience and also a walk in Hollywood's decadence, narcissism, cynicism and greed.

Opera
work is a stunning success. It's sumptuous and sensual, with lush, fabulous art deco settings that shift from gilt and silver to smoky red and black, waxy choreography and seductive period costumes (by modern couturier Valentino).

invest in voice as she is an actress, and Metropolitan Opera veteran Julian Patrick, who dominates his every scene as the cynical Hollywood mogul—overcoming what the Washington audience are the comedic affects of his being inadvertently costumed and made up to look the spitting image of Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.).

STYLE

THEATER

'Dream of Valentino' depressing but worth seeing

By LUCIA ANDERSON
Theater Critic

Argento will be lauded to top opera houses as the composer of "The Dream of Valentino," performed by the Washington Opera at the Kennedy Center.

Monday, January 17, 1994

By the Washington Post

Arts & Entertainment

Opera tucks into 'Dream' of a work

By Joseph McLean
Theater Critic

Dominick Argento's new opera, "The Dream of Valentino," could have been called "The Man Who Was Cynic." Well worth seeing, it is the story of a man victimized by a seductive hero.

Argento Work Gets Rousing World Premiere

American newspapers acclaim our sweet soprano.