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sympathetic. The audience and the performance are in one space surrounded by a common enclosure. The single seating tier is steeply stepped to accommodate 400 focused on a generously sized stage. The two are linked by two tiers of galleries which go right round the back of the stage. The middle gallery can be used for more seating on either side, bringing the total capacity to 436 or it can be brought into the performance and used as part of the acting area to provide, for instance, a Juliet balcony. The balustrades can be unbolted and removed if necessary for a particular production. Part of a set could be a grand staircase from the balcony to the stage for actors to make a spectacular entrance. The top balcony is for technical operations and gives access to the two lighting galleries. Provision has been made to suspend scenery over the stage area but there is no conventional fly tower. Very little has been masked from the audience; the works are there to be seen as is the structure of the building, the roof and the ventilation ducting.

It would have been technically possible to design the auditorium without columns or at least without columns showing, but we deliberately chose to make them a feature of the design. This is partly from a desire to exhibit the works of the building but also to use the structure to articulate the space within. The auditorium is quite wide from wall to wall and could, if treated in a bare and featureless manner, have a rather forbidding character which would need a great deal of scenic treatment to give it any theatrical atmosphere. The introduction of columns and the wooden balustrades forms a tracery round the inner volume of the auditorium. The dark green walls behind them recede and no longer sharply define the boundaries of the auditorium. The roof

structure is all there to be seen but the lighting galleries and the steelwork soften the hard edges and an air of mystery remains. In this way a theatrical atmosphere has been achieved without the use of any of the traditional devices of decorative additions, baroque plasterwork and crystal chandeliers. The form of the stage and auditorium is not traditional but the visitor will nevertheless find the interior theatrical

and not alienating as has regrettably been the case in many new auditoria.

There is an inner stage which can be used as part of the stage setting and will also serve to store scenic items for the current production. The section of the middle balcony at the rear of the main stage can be hoisted up completely out of sight into a recess in the top balcony. The opening between the main and inner stage is thus enlarged and provides opportunities for scenic treatment in considerable depth. The space under the balcony can be part of the action or can be screened off to suit the type of production. For some plays a set can be built entirely on the main stage masking off all the balcony fronts.

The stage floor is made up of sections which can be removed to provide entrances from below. It is possible to dismantle the whole of the main stage and to build a set rising from the floor of the stage basement. It would also be possible by removing the front floor panels of the stage to form an orchestra pit, but this has not been considered as a simple or frequent operation. The building is for a resident community repertory company, not for large scale musicals, opera and ballet. That is not to say that touring companies of the right scale will not be able to play there successfully. There are many travelling ballet and opera groups who with a little ingenuity would be able to perform there perfectly satisfactorily. However the building has not been designed as a venue for the English National Opera or the Royal Ballet or any company depending upon the extensive use of flying scenery and painted cloths.

The lighting and sound control rooms are situated at the rear of the auditorium, from where they have a complete view of the



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