

# The Apotheosis of a School Gymn

I have no immediate plans to commission a new theatre – I have a theatre already, thank you very much, and although it is rather old it can teach most of them younger upstart playhouses a thing or two.

However, if I *were* needing a theatre I think that I would just pop up to Edinburgh and knock on the door of some chaps called Law and Dunbar-Nasmith (they have a likely young lad name of Colin Ross associated with them, but he has not yet gotten his name on to the brass plate).

Now these chaps in Edinburgh obviously know a thing or two about building theatres. They did a great job in Inverness and now, would you believe, they have built a school theatre that upstages our National Theatre.

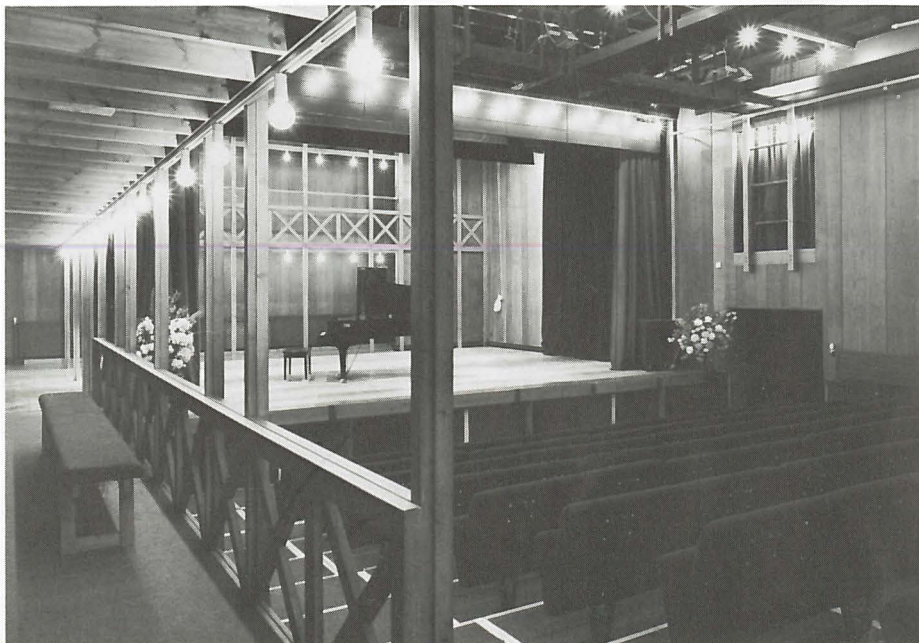
I exaggerate not.

Now I do agree that it does not take much to upstage the Lyttleton – that poor copy of a 1950s German provincial opera house. The Olivier is more debatable but my own personal feeling is that there was no need to go as far as pouring concrete to prove that the much hallowed Bel Geddes ground-plan was a theory that could well have remained theoretical. The NT foyers are super for street theatre and itinerant musicians but for genuine sit-down theatre the Cottesloe is the NT tops – only one basic fault: no colour.

And this is where Law and Dunbar-Nasmith (not to forget their man Ross) have been so clever. They have built a Coloured Cottesloe. And they have built it for the kind of money that, in NT terms, is the pettiest of petty cash.



Format	Capacity		Event
	Adults	Boys	
(1) straight rake	239	273	concerts/musicals using small pit for up to 32
(2) extended rake	299	341	plays behind pros. arch, cinema, recitals on stage
(3) full pit	179	205	chorus on stage, full orchestra of 50 in pit
(4) thrust stage	239	270	plays on thrust stage with fourth wall in position
(5) flat floor	N/A	N/A	40 boys in examination; social events



It is a conversion job. Loretto School has lost a Gymnasium but gained a theatre. To someone who always stuck firmly on top of the vaulting horse, a school gymnasium is one of the more gruesome structural achievements of mankind. Therefore to convert into one of mankind's finer temples – a theatre – is a manifestation of civilisation at its purest.

This is an adaptable theatre and it is genuinely adaptable: there is an excellent handbook which describes each boy-move with clear words and clear graphics. This is not one of those allegedly adaptable theatres where the form-changing is so complex that the building very quickly settles down into one fixed form. This theatre is used in all its planned shapes as detailed in the accompanying table (seating capacities based on 15 adults or 17 boys per row).

Loretto is an audience's theatre – a theatre which is as sympathetic to inter-audience relationships as it is sympathetic to actor-audience relationships. The only flaw in this is the asymmetry of having a