

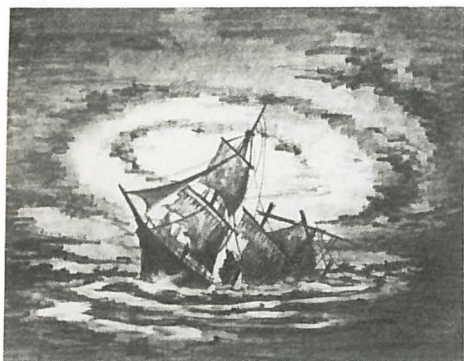
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Our cover picture is one of Robin Don's excitingly realistic sets in Basil Coleman's production of 'The Flying Dutchman' for English National Opera North. Above is a sketch for one of the slides used in the sinking sequence in the final act.

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CUE

Technical Theatre Review

3.

January-February 1980

Look both ways

With the dawn of each new year the media parade the past and probe the future. Filing systems and crystal balls are consulted simultaneously in the search for significance. With the arrival of a new decade the pace of recall and forecast quickens. Phrases are coined. Labels abound. We await the turn of the century with some apprehension.

Shall Cue enter the eighties without a backward glance? Without a prophetic glimpse of things to come? No, sir! There has been a past and there shall be a future. So we exhumed an old oracle, name of *Tabulus*, to offer a one-man-view of technical theatre in seventies past and eighties yet to come.

LIGHTING

At the beginning of the seventies there were few memory boards and still fewer that actually worked. Now instant record and instant recall are so commonplace that we can forget the mechanics of control and concentrate our energies on lighting the show. But do we? Shall we? The late seventies have seen much concentration on control cosmetics and on knobs that exist because they are possible rather than because they are desirable. Shall the early eighties bring realisation that so much lighting is grotty because, despite a marvellous control board, the wrong lanterns with the wrong colours have been hung in the wrong place and pointed at the wrong part of the stage?

MACHINERY

Having accepted that stage machinery is a temporary production device rather than an integral part of the stage structure, we are still confused about the future of flying. Shall the eighties decide that it takes a lot to beat manually operated counterweight lines, although it would be nice if there was a simple alternative to humping

weights in a loading gallery. Plus, of course, some simple power-assistance to take the sweat out of spot lines.

DESIGN

In their affection for the heaviest of materials, many designers have been accused of treating stage crew with contempt. However we suspect that the problem is one of ignorance — the design schools are concerned more with scale models than with reality. Shall we see a retreat from expensive floors and elaborate masking boxes? Perhaps a swing towards illusion? Perhaps even towards paint?

SOUND

Electronic processing of sound has come of age. Sound is now taken seriously. It is beginning to get something approaching a fair share of the budget. The actors no longer sound as if they are miming to a 78 rpm gramophone. Now they sound as if they are miming to a reasonably Hi-Fi. Perhaps soon they will sound as if they are actually making the sounds.

ARCHITECTURE

The more we thought about theatrical form in the seventies, the less we knew what we wanted. It is probably fortunate that there will be very little new building in the next decade. Perhaps, by the time we can afford new theatres, there will be building materials without the deadly finality of concrete. Meanwhile shall we restore some of our heritage that has been mothballed by the bingo age?

WHAT ELSE?

Administration will continue to flourish and expand, but on-stage it will become increasingly the age of the one-man-show. And, unlike most other industries, we have nothing further to fear from the micro-processor age. We have had our chips.