

# Give us the job, and we'll finish the tools

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Apart from the occasion when we lost five trowels in one day and recovered three of these set fast in an abandoned barrow-load of cement the above slogan, adopted by various Job Creation/Work Experience schemes has, thankfully, not seemed appropriate to the Norwich Puppet Theatre project.

For the last twelve months a team of fifteen young people on a salary of £23.50 per week have converted a disused mediaeval church into an exciting and unique theatre, already described by the press as becoming one of the most delightful buildings in Norwich. From a technical point of view the most exciting features are the special facilities being installed to allow for many types of puppet operations and, at the same time, allowing sufficient flexibility for the presentation of almost all the small scale performing arts, including drama, music and dance. The diagram (1) shows the two operating bridges which track up and down stage. These are both 3.20m from floor level and the front bridge in its forward position serves as a proscenium top and control gallery. The

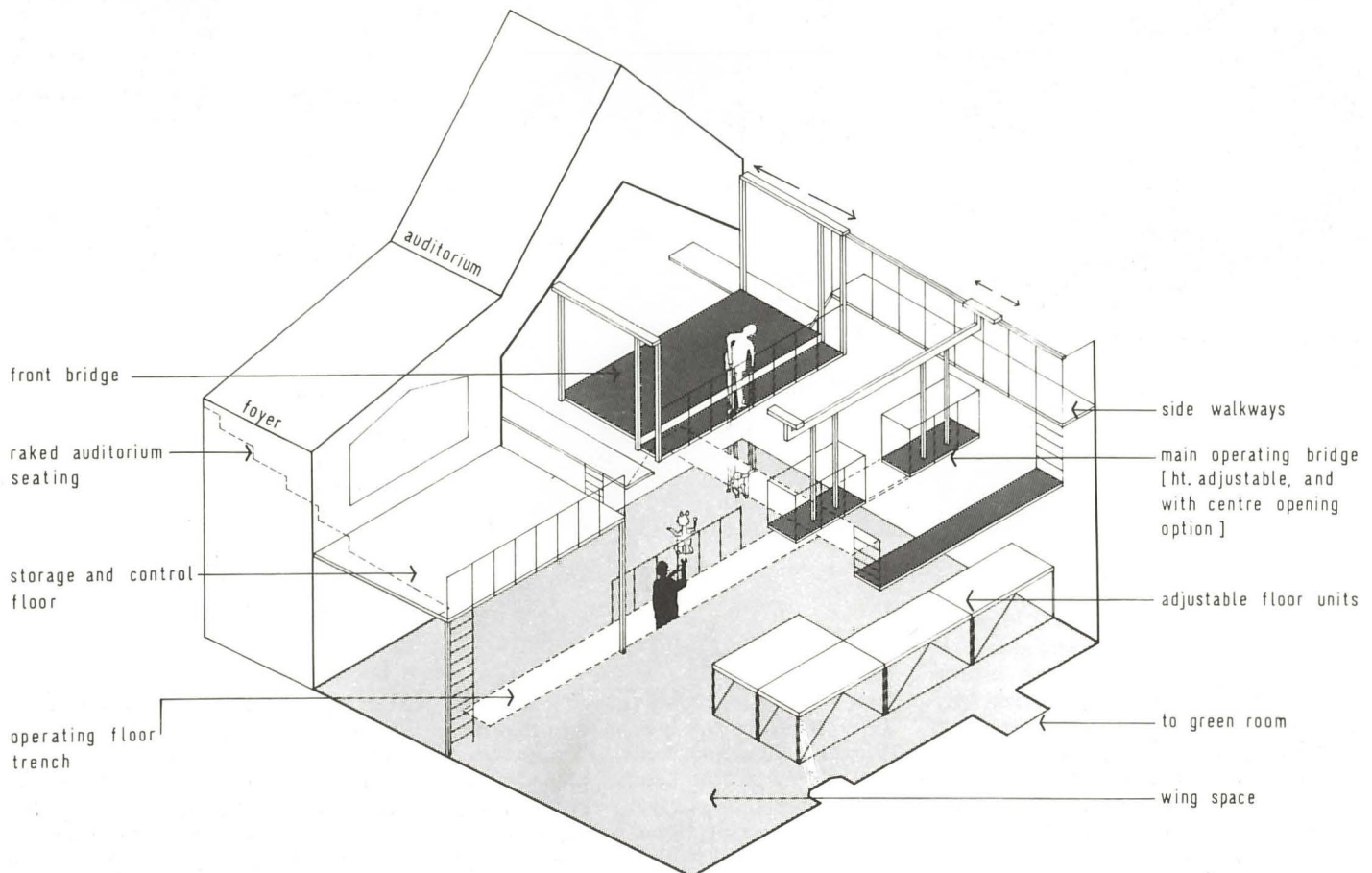
lighting board (Green Ginger, 40 way, 3 preset in two 20 way units) and sound control (not yet selected) will be situated on this bridge with an optional position in a control room at the rear of the auditorium. The second bridge serves as the main operating platform and will allow puppeteers to animate marionettes over the entire stage area. It is height adjustable to allow for different string lengths of visiting companies and splits in the middle to allow centre entrances and exits. Each of these features is unique in this country and to the writer's knowledge are not combined in this way anywhere.

The stage floor will consist of height-adjustable trolleys so that live theatre and puppet theatre can take place at various levels while a trench across the width of the stage allows rod puppet operation in front of the house tabs, which can be raised through a slot in the front bridge. Large scale rod or shadow puppet productions and live presentations are possible by the movable proscenium which, when tracked upstage, gives a total performing height of six metres. These facilities allow all the

traditional, contemporary and experimental type of puppet theatre to take place under good conditions.

The auditorium seats from 198 to 204, depending upon the size of bottoms sitting on the six bench seats at the front. These benches are removable in order to accommodate wheelchairs, to allow extensions of the stage and for accommodating television cameras.

Every available space has been used to its advantage for the theatre's various amenities (see plan) and the architect, Peter Codling, has sensitively preserved and enhanced the original character of the building. A rood staircase has been restored and connects to a balcony above becoming an extension of the performing area. The timber beamed roof of the auditorium has been left exposed and the whitewash repainted a cherry red. Internal brickwork has been faced with handmade bricks donated by the Istock Group. The infilling of the auditorium windows leaves the original lines of the arches exposed on the inside and lights will be placed between the infill and the glass so that the building will



ISOMETRIC VIEW OF THE STAGE AREA  
TAKEN FROM UPSTAGE LEFT CORNER