

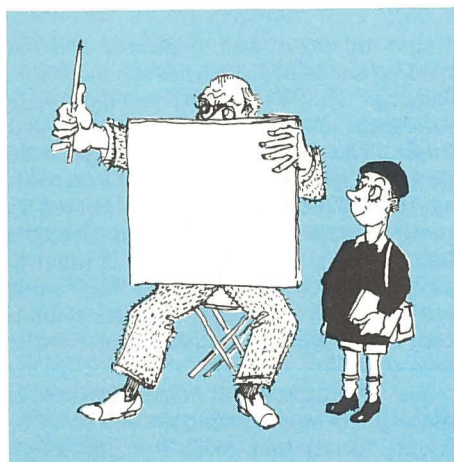
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Above Osbert Lancaster by Osbert Lancaster  
whose design for Cranko's *Pineapple Poll*,  
Sadlers Wells 1951 is shown on the front cover.  
On page 16 Anthony Pugh describes a conversation  
with Sir Osbert at a Retrospective Exhibition  
of his work at the Redfern Gallery last month.

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# CUE

## Technical Theatre Review

4.

March-April 1980

### 'For we that live to please . . .'

With — is it ten? — West End theatres dark, the horror musical VAT still running, minimal casts, and minimal staging becoming de rigueur . . . but contrariwise, new theatres and new *kinds* of audiences rising and flourishing in pubs and bubbles, and a new wave of student drama breaking over the stage of the Collegiate Theatre . . . one doesn't know whether to feel like poor gloomy Jeremiah or poor silly Pangloss.

On the whole, perhaps, to behave like Pangloss is the better bet. He was certainly the first of the marketing and advertising men with a firm belief that the customer, if not always right, was always convertible — specially if he or she was wooed and cosseted and made to feel comfortable.

The new (or found again) idea that management is all about filling a lot of seats rather than filling a few heads with foolish fancies is all very well as far as it goes. But it begs the question of how management and front and back stage people should collaborate to identify and present a *product* that sets out to give pleasure rather than punishment.

To adopt Puritan or Roundhead philosophies in these decisions can easily breed much more repelling disincentives than VAT (a Leveller, if we ever met one). But to be Cavalier in the elitest sense is just as bad. We would have thought, for example, that many of the Royal Court's continuing problems stemmed from the fact that, for a period, its ceremonies and rites and levees became as intellectually privileged and inaccessible as those of royal courts usually are.

There may be some sort of moral in the successes now being enjoyed by dance and ballet groups which, at a shamefully low subsidy rating compared with that, say, for 'experimental' theatre, easily manage to produce 80% — 90% capacities in quite large theatres. Maybe, in a drab age, Terpsichore and Euterpe do seem more attractive propositions as muses than Melpomene and Calliope.

A question that some artistic directors, all managements, and even some technical people may need to ask themselves is 'am I working to *please* other people — or am I working to please myself?'