



A Yaarab Temple in Athens, Ga. (photo Iain Mackintosh)

up art that had been so successful in the preceding, smaller, generation of theatre. Now the dream palaces, whether 'hard top' or 'atmospheric', have found a role for which they are ideal. While churches of the dourer sort close, the new revivalists have found a pitch that works. Who advised designers of theatres that a theatre is halfway between a church and a brothel and must suggest both? I can't remember, but Loew's 175th, the Regent Harlem and the Valencia Queen's certainly compound that advice.

Your Editor asked me for tales of North America with pen and pentax and I've hardly left New York. No space in this issue to tell of the League of Historic American Theatres, whose guest I was at their annual conference held at The Home of the American Musical in upstate Connecticut. This is the 1876 second floor Goodspeed Opera House seating under 400 with but a 20-foot deep stage and yet managing seven transfers to Broadway of both revivals and originals ('Man of La Mancha' and 'Annie'). This second conference switched the emphasis from movie palaces to nineteenth century theatres, a quest that in 1980 also took me to the Woodlands Opera House in Sacramento Valley, California - 1895, but in form like an 1840 English playhouse, - and most recently to a black burlesque theatre of 1910 in Athens, Georgia. More of these anon. To finish this chapter, a couple of postscripts.

On Thursday, 2nd October, on a return visit to New York, a reception at the Rambusch Studios on 13th Street. Harold Rambusch, age 89, is to receive a plaque honouring his contribution to theatre

design from the New York Chapter of the Theatre Historical Society, in the person of Joe Rosenberg and Glenn Loney, anglo-ophile professor of theatre and noted critic. The Rambusch Studios are still very active and now restore the very theatres and churches for which they designed the decor between 1898 and 1930. Rambusch reminisces on 'Roxy' Rothapfel for whom Rambusch worked on Radio City Music Hall and, most significantly, the 6,214 seat Roxy, a Florentine fantasy built in 1927 but now sadly destroyed.

Two quotes worth recording. Roxy had rejected fourteen competing decoration schemes for this stupendous Ahlschlager designed theatre. Harold Rambusch, who had refused to compete, was called in. 'I will do it, but only if you can give me a succinct instruction.' 'OK', said Roxy, 'I want the audience to feel they are *inside* a copper kettle.' And that is precisely what they got, with subtle russets, dull bronze and glowing golds - a world away from the revivalist pagan! Second quote in answer to your correspondent's journalese questioning of this most eclectic expert in the *Alhambra - Neuschwanstein - Versailles - Parthenon - Delhi - Ankor Wat* styles of the world's most prolific theatre boom: 'What single piece of advice would you give to this generation of theatre designers?' Pause. Harold Rambusch: 'Yes, this. Surely after all these years have we not learnt just one thing - that these great big theatres just do not work?' Thank you, Sir, from little England.

The final postscript is more of a visual one. It is not a holiday snap from a Theatre Projects Consultants team leader on safari

in the Gulf. What it is is the exterior of the South's largest remaining legit theatre, the 4,000 seat Fabulous Fox, Atlanta - 'an exotically clad superstar' which started life as the headquarters of the Yaarab temple of the Mystic Shrine in 1927, was sold to Fox as a movie palace before it opened, housed the Metropolitan Opera on tour from 1947 to 1967, closed in 1975, and is now being restored in all its Moorish magnificence (with rest rooms a la King Tut). What the new policy will be only Georgian Foxophiles can tell, but that *must* be another story. . . .

'Son of Pavilioned in Splendour' is the author's title for a second article on historical American theatres to appear in the March/April number.

Letters to the Editor

From Mr. Graham Walne

Dear Sir,

May I congratulate you, and your contributor, Dorian Kelly, on an excellent article in your last issue on the subject of lighting control. I would like it to be required reading for all students of stage lighting.

I have great sympathy with many of Mr. Kelly's ideas. In the days when I sold lighting controls I encountered these ideas when Mr. Kelly was resident at the Mermaid Theatre and casting his critical eye over what was then available. In the intervening years I have experienced much of what he discussed and can only reinforce his views.

Much of my work is in opera, and much of this in establishments like the Royal Academy of Music where there is a sophisticated system (see Cue May-June) BUT no resident electrical staff. I therefore have to provide an operator from the student body. In theory all I need is a button pusher but in these circumstances what I get is lighting operated as efficiently as the memory system will allow, but totally without feeling. So what I actually have is a musician, usually a singer, who is much more familiar with the score than I could be, and, what is more, able to get many more run throughs than I ever could. The result is that I have an aid who is well informed on moves and fade times and operates the control beautifully with that knowledge. On other shows I have followed this practise and extended it with a third member of the team, a good draughtsman and electrician. This leaves me free to concentrate on the central purpose behind my being there, as lighting designer.

I am currently researching a new book, on the subject of the international lighting designers themselves and it is clear that these people can achieve considerable results if they are aware of the nuts and bolts, but free of them, and assisted by a good operator. I know of no leading designer who does not acknowledge the contribution these individuals can make. I agree with Mr. Kelly that it is high time these people were duly recognised and rewarded.

Yours sincerely,

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