

# CUE

## Technical Theatre Review

8. November – December 1980

### Cover picture

Original Rambusch sketch for the lobby of the Mark Hellinger opened in 1930 as The Hollywood. Iain Mackintosh describes this among many other historical American Theatres on page 14 of this issue.

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Managing Editor  
James Twynam

Editorial Advisory Board  
Anthony Pugh  
Francis Reid  
Jeremy Twynam

Editorial,  
Advertising and Subscription Office:  
Twynam Publishing Ltd.,  
Kitemore, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 8HR.  
Telephone 0367 21141  
Telex: 44226

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## Audience Power

We live in an age of pressure groups. Confrontation by strength or stealth is the order of the day. Consumer groups are a growth area. Where stands the entertainment industry? Will the audience soon rise in unified voice to vote with a corporate show of absentee bottoms?

Withdrawal of labour is the traditional sanction available to dissident theatregoers. But, as in other industries, the strike weapon can often destroy the situation that it seeks to reform.

An empty seat, however, is usually the result of an individual decision: audiences are reluctant to follow their leaders.

The professional critics are frequently spurned. Critical advice to 'Black the Bard' resulted in a sold out Old Vic, followed by a touring bonanza with box-office returns rivalling the traditional pantomime budgetary salvation. 'Sending to Coventry' acquired a whole new meaning.

And there has been little recent evidence of audience respect for the dramatic judgement of their community leaders. The pronouncement of a municipal backer's dissatisfaction with his investment only resulted in a National Playgoer's charge across the Thames to study the facts of Roman life.

For how long will the T.U.C. allow this undisciplined behaviour to continue? Why should theatregoers be denied the right to reason with the rhetoric of a flying picket?

Most theatres have a *Theatre Club*, a *Playgoer's Society* or a *Friends of the Theatre*. Admittedly, the act of subscribing to one of these organisations is often regarded as an honourable alternative to actual theatregoing. However such societies do represent a hard core of committed audience and most are affiliated to their national federation.

Ever eager to detect early signs of industrial unrest in the audience sector, CUE infiltrated the Twenty Third Annual Conference of the *Federation of Playgoers Societies* at Tewkesbury. We are happy to be able to report that audience power seems set to remain in the hands of enthusiastic rationalists with a commitment to support the developing art of theatre with their critically aware – but sympathetic – attendance.