

holed the sandbagged Gossage.

'You're in charge. What are we going to do? It's too late to get another director now. Do we pack up and go home, or what?'

'I suppose we do . . . I'm ruined!' Gossage realised the magnitude of the disaster. 'You'll all get your money. I'll pay you. I had no idea this man was so unreliable. . . . I always thought that the Show Must Go On, that's what they say, don't they?'

'They do, but sometimes it doesn't,' said Jeremy. 'Unemployed again!'

Bruce pushed forwards. He had come to do a show, and he wasn't going to go home without doing one.

'We must do something,' he said.

'Bloody right, you'll have to do something,' said the Theatre Manager, who had been fetched. 'I can't get another booking this late, and I'll not give them their money back. The first week is sold out.'

The ingenue, Sally Skeats, began to cry. 'What can we do?' asked Gossage, twitching. 'I can't direct the show. What could we do in less than two weeks?'

'Why not do a Christmas show?' asked Bruce. 'We got something up at Drama School last year. What about a Music Hall thing? It would go down a bomb!'

Gossage clutched at this straw. The others looked dubious.

'We could do that, couldn't we? Couldn't we?'

Julian scratched his head.

'I haven't got the music,' he said. 'Unless the local shops can come up with something.'

'I could do my stand-up patter act,' volunteered Jeremy. 'We could all of us do something, I'm sure.'

They consulted the Manager, to see if it was feasible. He clutched at lapels, sweating.

'Anything. Just give me a show. Nothing dirty, mind. It's the kiddies. No problem about publicity. I can get space in the paper as soon as you let me know what it's going to be.'

They sweated blood to get it together. The air was cacophonous with snatches of song and cross-talk acts. Gossage was everywhere at once, praising and exhorting. The show began to take shape, and one of the problems began to be its length. No-one wanted to have their 'bit' cut. Then, four days from the opening, a large lady of refined voice, certain age, and balletic walk presented herself on stage.

'I am Cynthia de Neuville,' she announced. 'What arrangements have you made for my Gels?'

Behind her stood some twenty females aged from nine to fifteen, arms folded and beadily silent.

'Gels?' asked a bemused Gossage.

'The Cynthia de Neuville Dancers. They are all local girls: They always perform in the Christmas Pantomime.'

She was a formidable woman, and they were formidable girls.

'We have prepared two main numbers, as usual. They are Chinatown and Limehouse Blues. So suitable for Aladdin.'

They had to be fitted in somehow and the running order altered accordingly. The girls ran through their routines in their lumpy leotards as if daring anyone to take the Mick or else. Bruce was up a ladder adjusting the Pattern 23's when he became aware that he had acquired a following. Clustered below, gazing up knowingly, were five of the fruitier de Neuilles. In the next few days he came to realize that the de Neuville Dancers regarded the younger company members as their own personal property. Eventually he fled for refuge to Annie Piper who made it plain to the girls that Bruce was off limits; a process which Bruce enjoyed very much.

The costumes and scenery had arrived and were adapted for their new use. They called the show 'Northern Lights! A Music-Hall Extravaganza', and posters and programmes were got out in record time. There were few cancellations and the Manager and Gossage began to breathe again. The show was to open on the 23rd, two days before Christmas Day. They had a final Dress Rehearsal that afternoon. Everything went smoothly, except for a de Neuville who kept throwing up with nervousness. Everyone went to the cafe to have a meal before the show. They had long forgotten the dreadful Ben Fenton.

Gossage paced the foyer as the house

began to fill. He took a seat somewhere at the back of the auditorium. The houselights dimmed, and Bruce in the prompt corner gave the signal for Julian to begin the overture. The show began.

It was a smash. It was a riot. Thunderous applause as the de Neuilles clumped through their numbers, and some of the audience very nearly smiled at Jeremy and Bruce's act, they enjoyed it so much. The curtain fell at the end to a storm of clapping.

Gossage was making his elated way through the Foyer, on his way to congratulate his troupe, when he was intercepted by the Manager.

'It'll be a bloody smash hit, this show of yours. Well, it's Professional, is that. We could be booked through to February with it.'

He felt as if he was ten feet tall. He turned, and shied like a frightened cart-horse. There, newly sprung, stood a blearily unsteady Fenton. He was waving an empty whisky bottle and holding on to a rococo pillar for support.

'Gossage! There you are. Lissen . . .'

He lurched over and threw an arm over his shoulders. He smiled proudly.

'That was the best bloody Aladdin I ever directed!'

Tattoos, Tournaments and Combined Operations

ROBERT ORNBO

I believe that my Theatrical-Military connections started in the early 1950's in Singapore.

In those days, I fancied myself as an actor (like all good guardsmen) but it was Mr. Lee, the chief technician of the Little Theatre, who guided me into the fascination of rigging ancient spotlights onto bamboo poles and of feeling light upon the face. In between trips up-country and wearing sandals to the Colonels annoyance, I began to enjoy the problems which always arise from mounting a production, whether large or small.

Many shows later, the wheel came full circle.

An old friend, Tom Fleming, who had taken over as Royal Commentator, asked if I could give advice on a project in Washington. This turned out to be the Scottish Military Tattoo at Wolf Trap 1976 - a major part of the Bicentennial celebrations.

The Filene Centre is a large theatre with no auditorium, just a park. Full flying

facilities, a modern switchboard, a few seats under cover but mainly seats on the grass and a feeling of space and of grace - almost a Glyndebourne. And our job was to present a Tattoo in a Military but also a Theatrical manner. Tom Fleming directed and commented, Col. Leslie Dow of the Castle, Edinburgh (what a splendid address) produced and we had a professional designer and stage manager: Colin Winslow and Barbara Stuart respectively. The theatrical team learned a great deal. Timings were exact; the last order had to be obeyed; memos had to be distributed to over thirty people, including the Yeoman Gaoler but we also learned that a quiet word could work wonders. Suggestions for bangs during a battle sequence resulted not in the traditional maroons but in the Presidential Gun Salute Platoon which sounded off all around the park to the astonishment of local residents and of course the pigeons.

But it was the use of a theatre which caused us all to re-assess the potential impact of