

headlights signals the pursuit by police of the feline felon McCavity: and, all stops out, as he weaves a petit point of fairground lights behind Wayne Sleep's dance for the magician cat Mr Mistoffolees. His plot has continuously to accommodate individual cat characters as they creep into crypts, dart up drainpipes and insinuate themselves into the audience itself. But at no time is any of the action in any way 'unfocused'. A lot of the credit for this must go, too, to Abe Jacob's sound, which has the complicated job of keeping Eliot's idiosyncratic verse clear and clean against some pretty heavy orchestral backing, and a fair amount of jumping around and breathing by chorus and corps.

Is 'Cats' a ballet, a comic opera, a pantomime, or just a gallimaufry in general? Whatever it is, it shows you exactly how it ought to be done.

### Look—no actors

A full report on what has been happening at the National Students' Drama Festival held this year at Hull University (favourite graffito, seen in the Union Building: 'Hull hath no fury like a liberated woman scorned') will be found elsewhere in this issue. Looking as usual for technical surprises, CUE got caught up in some performances which were weirdly, and perhaps symptomatically, distinguished by being staged without performers. These consisted of a group of 'Stories' by well-known writers presented by the Central School of Art and Design, and relied for their telling, somewhat cynically the more serious student critics thought, not on actors but on pre-recorded dialogue or narration, a careful selection of key props, and a variety of sound and visual aids, from slides to video replays to back-projected 8mm film. From time to time a seemingly disinterested stage-hand moved into the set to pick out a significant prop and 'animate' it in synch: in Ian McEwan's story 'Cupboard Man' it was a limp and lifelike rag doll; in Elizabeth Bowen's 'Last night in the old house' it was an Edwardian ballgown. Equity would have been appalled. Your reporter, entering the cavernous University Assembly Hall at the wrong time by the wrong door, himself participated, blinking foolishly at 650W Fresnel, in the Nabokov story 'Transparent things'. The audience didn't notice. In fact, it seemed fully involved and even absorbed throughout in how things were going, not in what was going on. As if promenading in a museum or in a stately home, the groundlings obediently pointed themselves at where the sound came from or at what the lights lit up, and watched carefully as various parts of the tableaux were made vivants. When the sound faded and lights dimmed, they seriously and politely clapped. The Central School, of course, couldn't take a bow because they weren't there.

All of which raises the interesting question whether, in the theatre of the future (say about Spring 1982), instead of the one-man shows which Timothy West, Prunella Scales, Alec McCowen, Peter Jukes, Richard Stilgoe and old Uncle

Emlyn Williams and all have been putting on successfully—and economically—we shall now have the no man show. Particularly miserly management please note.

### School for Scandal?

'We are the only profession without a centre' said Sheila Hancock a few months ago, explaining the need for an Actors' Centre. 'I believe it would give us a sense of unity and artistic purpose, providing also the opportunity to improve our craft'.

Well in April, Kate Mutton, the Actors'

each day of the week. The launch evening saw John Alderton, Anthony Bowles, Judi Dench, Sheila Hancock, Roy Hudd, Dilys Laye, Gillian Lynne, Ian McKellan, Ian Ogilvy and Robin Midgely, artistic director of the Haymarket, Leicester taking part. Later guest speakers have proved just as successful. Hal Prince, Julia McKenzie, Don Black, Cameron Mackintosh, Andrew Lloyd-Webber, Jonathan Lynn, John Boorman, the film director.

Initially a £30,000 budget for the first year set them on their feet, although fund-raising is now underway to allow work to be



*An evening with Hal Prince, Julia McKenzie, Don Black, Clare Venables, Jonathan Lynn, Cameron Mackintosh and Andrew Lloyd Webber*

Centre administrator, was able to confirm the lease on their first permanent premises, at 10a Dryden Street, Covent Garden. The 1,465 sq ft on the first floor comprises a large studio space, two offices and a green room-cum-information centre, with specialist magazines, Spotlight directories, PCR (the casting report service), and reference books. The Centre opened its doors for members on May 5, although the official ceremony is not until June 7, when Sir Alec Guinness has agreed to open it. There are now 1,000 members, who have enrolled regularly since last autumn.

Founded in the spring of 1977 with the aim of working towards a base for actors, singers and dancers, the Actors Centre has gained momentum at a rate that often surprised even its supporters. It has not all been plain sailing though; premises are like gold dust in central London these days, at the right place at any rate. Nor are rank-and-file Equity members known for their enthusiasm in supporting ventures of this nature. Quite the reverse, if anything. But gradually, the Centre's aims were defined and in time, temporary premises were located in Wardour Street to administrate a series of workshops, lectures and classes. This allowed them to assess the level of real interest among Equity members between February 2 and 22, 1980. Further classes were added the next month.

Classes were run under the following headings: movement, dance, verse and speech, singing, music, the art of audition, radio drama, reading, acting workshop, simple acrobatics. Taking part were 22 tutors and 15 directors with a total attendance of 2,646, averaging out at 155 for

continued. The lion's share came from Equity, with other donations coming from television companies and memberships. The long-term objectives and activities can be summarised as providing: an archive on the history of the profession; a record library of dialects and accents; a journal of analyses into acting techniques; a creche for members taking classes; a message service; concessions with relevant firms and public bodies (for point shoes, make-up, video machines, the National Film Theatre and so on); rooms for hire at reasonable rates; joint projects with other theatre bodies like ABBT, CORT, ITI, SKYPT and others. Members' evenings allow lectures by international directors and have been a distinct success so far in exchanging ideas and information on choreography, music, acting or more specialist areas.

There is much work the Actors' Centre can do to help its profession, which has always been run on the basis of survival-of-the-fittest. Look at Michael Crawford, for instance, having to pick up tightrope walking for his title role in 'Barnum' in the last few months. Would that there had been an Actors' Centre he could have turned to. There are numerous similar cases of skills that need brushing up — or even learning.

Plans are afoot to set up regional centres along identical lines. Feelers have already gone out in Manchester and preliminary finance secured. London headquarters keep a tight rein on all operations, though. It has been a slow, but admirable success story and we wish it the best of luck.

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