

imperial thumbs down. Come to think of it, and pace the conventional wisdom, there's precious little *opera* in Italy either, if we except Milan and that splendid restaurant in Traste Vere where one's eating is enlivened by huge bursts of Rossini from the management, the staff, and what appears to be a whole company of mounted soldiery. Over *here*, on the other hand, there seem to be almost more performers on our stages than there are people in the audiences. Take the Fringe at Edinburgh, for example. The sheer volume of theatrical entertainment available was really formidable. If we are to believe The Festival News, the organ of John Drummond's belief in the Benthamite principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest possible number, no less than 454 different groups took to the stage (a friend of ours saw a spirited performance of Steven Berkoff's "Decadence" in the left-luggage office of the Caledonian Hotel), and gave altogether 8868 performances. 'Cor . . . but we don't necessarily mean "encore". There was, and is now trailing all round the country, an awful lot of fringe: but, also, an awful lot of dandruff. To get back to the numbers game . . . Even if *all* the 120,000 people watching and hugely enjoying the Festival Parade (a small but perhaps significant incident in which was the sight of the NSDF's "Best Actress", Rebecca Harbord, in full fig and wig as Sarah Siddons, mounted on a ramshackle car that finally went up around her in black smoke) had actually attended the huge number of performances the average audience for each would have amounted to about 14 determined souls. What management is to make of the combination between this plethora of talent and this sparsity of audience we cannot imagine. The trouble with 'marketing' in the theatre, which is now becoming fashionable, is the trouble with marketing in general: that it wants to see what has *been* successful, and then tries to sell a *series* of more or less carbon or cardboard copies, using cheaper or less talented materials, at a far greater promotional cost. How is it to avoid being hoodwinked, by the cheers of an audience (the cast's immediate family) or the approval of the critics (the reporter on the local paper where most of the cast lives), into investing in one of the numerous bald patches behind the fringe? It would be a help, we think in this welcome theatrical renaissance, if within any group of, say, 20 talented performers (this to include writers, writer-directors, actors, technicians etc) there had to be, by law if necessary, just one editorial or play-doctor figure able to distinguish in *advance* the difference between refulgence and self-indulgence. We're not suggesting (the Gods forbid) more *critics*—they have their own rows of newsprint to hoe. But what so many companies emerging from the Fringe seem to need and very seldom seem to get—even from *professional* directors who, after all, have been paid to *love* them—are the honorary services of a kind of permanent under-secretary of show-business, capable from time to time of asking the question: "why are we doing this and *how*?"

The biggest multi-purpose of them all

DENIS IRVING

The Sydney Entertainment Centre, was born of the New South Wales Government's general desire to accommodate larger audiences for productions of all kinds, at admission prices within reach of all.

The Centre now under construction, will seat 10,000 around three sides of an extended thrust stage, and with temporary seating on part of that stage area, increasing to 12,000 for pop concerts and the like. The forward portion of the thrust stage, in the centre of the whole building, has provision for suspension of masking and lighting from 12 fixed speed multi line winches, plus twenty 3-speed scenery batten hoists and 18 divertable spot lines. These facilities together with removable full height masking panels and drapes, enable the seating capacity to be adjusted to 7,000 with an open thrust stage 20m wide by 18m deep, or 3,500 using the same stage area fully masked to proscenium form.

The main arena is about 120m wide by 100m deep (totally clear span) height from stage floor to under side of roof trusses is 16.7m, with an extra 5m over the centre stage flying area. Good lighting angles are provided from a catwalk and gallery just

below roof truss level, running on three sides of the stage and some 12m back. The five lighting battens are in fact large size self climbing units and can be rigged anywhere across the thrust stage, or parallel to the 'long' side if need be.

The design allows for 496 lighting circuits with a dimmer permanently in each, with a 'soft' control patch down to a 150 channel memory system.

At the rear of the stage is a large dock area with access doors allowing large set pieces or whatever to be brought in from street level.

Although for a substantial amount of the year the Centre will be used for sporting events of various kinds, there is no doubt that in the largest arrangement, it will be attractive to promoters of rock concerts. Being provided with high quality sound reinforcement, the 7,000 seat mode should be good for trad. jazz or folk music concerts, as well as open stage opera or ballet productions, which command good houses in Sydney these days.

We all look forward to completion in 1982, to see which of the three modes excites most interest, and how often changes one to the other will be required.

