

Joan's theatre was about energy, vitality, blood and sentiment. It could be very common, it could be very vulgar. But it was very alive.

In this plethora of experimentation in the German theatre one can discover, if not the absolute origins, at least a major stage in the development of all the following theatre styles: abstract theatre, the theatre of cruelty, absurdist theatre, happenings, satirical cabarets, agitprop theatre, documentary theatre and environmental stagings.

The second volume in *Theatre Production Studies* (following Michael R. Booth's *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910*, discussed in CUE 12) is Michael Patterson's **THE REVOLUTION IN GERMAN THEATRE 1900-1933**. A subtitle might well be *The Theatre of ist and ism* for this was a period of agonising search for the fundamental nature of the theatre experience. A period when the audience were to be torn away from the subjective emotional pleasures of hole-in-the-wall magic-box theatre so that they might be enlightened by a more objective intellectual approach. Words like Abstractionism, Absurdist, Collectivism, Constructivist, Expressionism, Formalism, Futurism, Idealism, Impressionism, Naturalistic, Postivism, and Realism abound. Either singly or in combination.

Michael Patterson examines the background to this theatrical revolution—the political, social, philosophical and technological climate of the period; and the production styles and administrative format of the theatre that was being reacted against.

In an endeavour to reconstruct the performances he uses all the standard sources and the book's introduction includes a brief but valuable discussion of the relative validity of (1) Playwright's stage directions, (2) Manifestos and theoretical writings by writers and theatre practitioners, (3) Prompt books, (4) Set and costume designs, (5) Photographs, (6) Sketches made during performance, (7) Programmes, (8) Contemporary reviews, (9) Critical works, (10) Personal reminiscences and (11) Films.

The most difficult reconstruction is the acting style. Acting is a four dimensional art with time as the predominant dimension. Whereas the third dimension of depth can be projected with some success from a study of the (essentially) two dimensional sources listed above, the fluidity of the acting style is much more difficult to conjecture. Moreover it is always more difficult to develop acting styles than design styles—departures from naturalism are relatively easier for the designer than for the actor who cannot readily dispose of his structure as a human person. However, both in his general discussion and more particularly in his production case histories, Michael Patterson has some success in projecting an impression of the acting style as part of the general production concept.

This is not a particularly easy book to read (all these *ists* and *isms!*) but full of

thought provocations for all theatre stylists including scenographers and lighting designers.

There are parts of the author's analysis to provoke discussion. I personally cannot agree with

In Toller's *Masse Mensch* a number of pauses are indicated as follows: 'Silence flickers', 'Silence is about to settle heavily in the hall', 'Silence staggers', 'Silence of impending death', and 'Silence swings aloft'. Obviously such stage-directions bear little relationship to the realities of stage technique, of what the actor can actually communicate to the audience. In this respect, they are little more than a self-indulgence on the part of the writer.

Surely there is a progression of timing in the imagery which might just be the clue to trigger off a realisation of the author's intention. There have been times when I have certainly had to build on vaguer indications from my director!

However throughout much of this revolutionary period in German theatre, there was a gap between concept and realisation at a technical level. Piscator's conveyor belts may have solved the problem of mobility in an epic play, but they were so noisy that the actors had to shout above them.

Expressionism (whether abstractionist or primitivist or any other finely argued *ist*) was a tiny segment of a German theatre which was (and still is) predominantly a lyric theatre. But its influence upon our stage has been profound. Michael Patterson's book clarifies the origins.

This is the golden jubilee year of the Lilian Bayliss rebuild of Sadler's Wells Theatre in 1931. Although the Old Vic had been the home of Opera as well as Shakespeare, it was the opening of the Wells that gave the real stimulus to the development of our national lyric theatre companies. Consequently 1981 has been observed as the Golden Jubilee of the Royal Ballet (formerly Sadler's Wells Ballet) and the English National Opera (formerly Sadler's Wells Opera).

As part of these celebrations, the English National Opera at their Coliseum home have produced a couple of handsomely illustrated A4 volumes, both written by Richard Jarman. **A HISTORY OF SADLER'S WELLS OPERA AND ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA, The Story of fifty years of Opera in English, 1931-1981** is precisely what it says, while **LONDON COLISEUM, The Story of London's largest Theatre** takes us through the history of that theatre from its opening in 1904, through its conversion into a home for the opera company in 1968 until today.

Both books are full of photographic goodies and are well designed. The opera pictures are arranged to offer a comparison between different productions of the same opera. This demonstrates the changes in production styles and the rises in budgets

over the years. Although not every new production necessarily represents an improvement on the earlier ones!

The Coliseum—not my favourite auditorium, too much stone—has had a varying career and there are riches indeed in this collection of information and photographs of its past architecture, technology and productions. This Coliseum book is quite simply indispensable for the bookshelves of anyone who savours theatres as buildings, and tingles when confronted with ephemeral fragments of their passing shows.

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THE THEATRE WORKSHOP  
STORY. Howard Goorney. Eyre Methuen.  
£8.99 (UK)

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THE REVOLUTION IN GERMAN THEATRE  
1900-33.  
Michael Patterson  
Routledge & Keegan Paul (Theatre Production  
Series).  
12.50 (UK)

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A HISTORY OF SADLER' WELLS OPERA  
AND ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA.  
An illustrated booklet, published to mark 50  
years of the Company's work. First published in  
1974 as a History of Saddler's Wells Opera,  
revised and updated in 1980. Written and edited  
by Richard Jarman.

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THE LONDON COLISEUM. A History of the  
London Coliseum 1904-1981.  
The story of the home of English National Opera  
published on the occasion of the Company's  
Golden Jubilee.  
Written by Richard Jarman. Designed by Sue  
Chennells.

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### Performing Books at the National Theatre

Theatre Book Lovers have a magnificent browse in prospect with the announcement of a major *Performing Arts Book Fair* at the National Theatre. Over 4,000 books will be on offer plus a considerable amount of music, periodicals, posters, prints and programmes together with a wide selection of photographs, autographs, original costume and scene designs, and film stills. June Bronhill will open this nostalgic bonanza, presented by the Provincial Bookseller's Fairs Association, in the stalls foyer of the Olivier Theatre on Friday 30th October (3 pm to 9 pm) and Saturday 31st October (10 am to 8 pm). Your CUE bookman and his colleague Walter Plinge are all aglow at the mere thought of wallowing in all this ephemera.