

most of this time. Indeed, the reason for the under-construction photographs (used here) was to report progress to my hospital bed.

As the photographs show, the lighting in the wall recesses was, unlike the remainder, patterned. This was achieved by placing short sections of 3-colour ground-row either side of a spot set to diverge appropriately. Its amber filter only covered $\frac{2}{3}$ of the lens: an enthusiasm of mine – ‘broken-colour’. The whole recess was covered-in by a sheet of moulded glass with a very large pattern. Goodness knows what it was called! I learnt of it when supplying a special ballroom lighting scheme for Charles Laughton’s brothers in one of their hotels in Scarborough. Being a special the job was entirely in my care and I remember frantically charging as much as possible on all the extras when I realised that I had forgotten to add in the estimate for the main job any profit.

Anyway, this glass broke up the light – especially when colours were mixed together – and became a lighting mural which could be varied. This plus the crushed-silver tabs lit by a 4-colour float centre and ends and eight spots, set narrow, behind apertures in the float ramp made the place gay and bright when needed. These spots coloured alternately amber and blue-green, all on separate dimmers plus two

1-kW profile spots, with remote 4-colour change flat-on from the circle front, were very useful for beating out ‘Hot Rhythm’. The whole auditorium – all 36 circuits – used to get involved in Bugle Call Rag in a recording by Sydney Torch on the Regal Edmonton Christie organ. To match his cymbal-crash and the like, our console had a toe piston giving float white centre at first touch, adding the ends at second. What fun, and so little time to enjoy it!

On the Light Console we could either flash to out or to full across the dimmer. The emphasis could thus be altered by adjusting the dimmer levels.

Alternatively, the dimmers could be set to run down and could be played to bounce up against this action. A sort of visual equivalent to the vibraphone. There were *no facilities* for direct modulation of the light by the sound. And quite right too! All lighting was a matter of artistic interpretation of the music, whatever the kind, by *playing* upon the console:

If this auditorium could be gay, it could also be solemn (Bugle Call or Traviata Preludes!). The cove way up above the beams in the ceiling on the one hand, and light coming from float level below eye-line and extending right around the audience into the wall coves on the other. Or the joining of the two by the growth of intensity of the pencil beams and so on.

The console dimmer bank represented a great advance on the one in the original Seecol theatre in Floral Street. Here we had sixteen transformer dimmers among our resistances – the first time we had used such things. There was also remote patching by contactors so that the dimmers could do both auditorium and stage. Also they need not be tied-up with the many spots under traps in the stage. All this came in useful when the equipment was rescued after the bombs and resuscitated for the Palladium in our spare time. Only one of the two manuals could be made playable and on that, not the green keys; nevertheless it behaved well at the Palladium and when a new full installation went in there post-war, it and the dimmer rack returned to us; eventually to take part in colour music recitals in much reduced surroundings from October 17th 1958* and occasionally thereafter.

Back at the inauguration of our own theatre in February 1939; instead of my well-known stirring finale on the cyclorama shadow set to the 1st. movement of Tchaikovsky’s 4th. our revels were ended with his Pathétique symphony. Seeing that the fabric of this vision, this insubstantial pageant, was to fade so soon and leave but a dimmer rack behind, it was a prophetic choice.

* TABS Vol. 16, No. 3 pp. 23–32

REIDing SHELF

CURTAIN CALLS is an anthology of reminiscences about actors. Many of the pieces are written by actors. Mostly 19th century. Their selection is by Bernard Miles and J. C. Trewin. Their origin is a collection of books made from browsing in provincial antiquarian booksellers by Bernard Miles while touring as a variety act in the 1950s. The collection was subsequently sold to fund the Mermaid Theatre, but not before Miles had got his secretary to transcribe cherished passages.

The resultant book is organised into chapters of roughly related material like Shakespeare, stage effects, opera, fans, management, etc . . . and a splendid section on touring by strolling players, entitled ‘The Popping Folk’. The quoted passages are not linked but most are prefaced or followed by comments which clarify or complement. These comments are a happy combination of Miles anecdotes and Trewin scholarship.

It would be easy to describe the book’s contents as essentially trivia. But for anyone trying to evoke the atmosphere of a departed theatre age it would be more accurate to talk of essential trivia. A book for dipping into perhaps. Yet the mere dipper can miss interesting things – witness a colleague of mine, one who cares deeply about such things, bypassing a reference to

the nature of the ‘green’.

My aunt gave me an impulse forward, and I ran straight across the stage, stunned with the tremendous shout that greeted me, my eyes covered with mist, and the green baize flooring of the stage feeling as if it rose up against my feet; but I got hold of my mother, and stood like a terrified creature at bay, confronting the huge theatre full of gazing human beings.

This was Fanny Kemble remembering her 1829 debut, fifty years on. Is the *green baize* recalled with the clear vision of a traumatic expression or is it merely a figure of speech used automatically after half a century of conforming to the conventions and superstitions of the language of the green room?

Does it matter? Not really. But if you share my pleasure in contemplating our theatre’s past while working to develop its future, then you will enjoy this sort of thing, and therefore this book, enormously.

I wonder whether Theodore Shank enjoys going to the theatre? I wonder how he rates the achievements of **AMERICAN ALTERNATIVE THEATRE**? I have read his book of this title and I do not know the answer to either of these questions. I think that he must like theatre, at least in its alter-

native forms, because he has obviously seen a lot of productions. But rarely have I read such an objective book on theatre: not a trace, not a hint of qualitative judgements by the author. He sets out to describe what happened because, as he sets out in his introduction

If a script exists, it has either been devised after the performance or served as a step along the way; it is not an end in itself. In some instances a text is not extractable from the production. The text, if there is one, can only vaguely suggest the finished work . . . A book dealing with such work must take a different form from one concerned with plays that are predominantly verbal . . .

So, with the help of 120 photographs, Mr Shank sets down, in matter of fact descriptive terms, what actually happened in these largely non-verbal productions and the reasoning that motivated them. After discussing primary explorations, he identifies as principal categories the Theatre of Social Change, Environmental Theatre, New Formalism, and the theatre which draws on Self for its Content.

Reading the book, one soon becomes relieved that the author has not introduced his own responses as a source of value judgements. With a subject as complex as this, one welcomes the clarity of simple description. I learned a lot.