

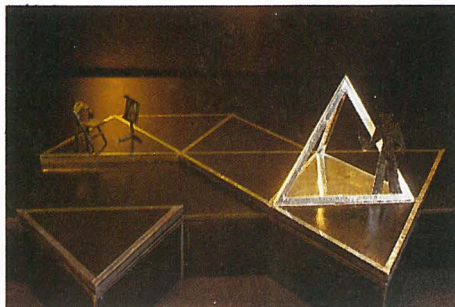
Front cloth for "Mother Goose" Theatre Royal Norwich. Designer Inigo Monk

Theatre Designers, and it immediately set about the first crucial task, to know itself and its aspirations. About four hundred and fifty designers were identified working or available for work in Britain. Within a year over half had joined the Society. A process of consultation and ballot was carried out to ascertain the representation the membership desired to work on the matter of conditions of employment. Should the SBTBD do the job itself or would an existing union be more satisfactory? The membership voted to be represented by Equity, who had already taken directors on board. The SBTBD also needed to learn more about the work its members and other designers were producing, and accordingly an exhibition with open participation was mounted at the Central School of Art & Design in 1977. This exhibition while interesting seemed rather unplanned and haphazard and didn't attract the success that had been hoped for it. This spurred the SBTBD to plan, with financial assistance from the Arts Council, a further better planned and properly designed exhibition at the Riverside Studios, again open to all comers, for February 1979. The next PQ was to take place in June of that year, and this time it was essential that the British contribution should represent the full range of design work going on in Britain. The work on display at Riverside, in addition to showing off contemporary British design to all who cared to know (and in the event well over 2,000 cared enough to visit the exhibition), would also provide the opportunity for selection of much of the work to go to Prague.

During this period the SBTBD also began,



The Golden Triga, top prize for the best national team exhibiting at the Prague Quadrennial, awarded last time to the British competitors.



Model of set for 'Facade' for The Childrens Music Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 1981. Designer James E. Grey.

in conjunction with the Association of British Theatre Technicians to whom it became affiliated, to organise specialist theatre study tours, mainly to countries in which a theatre worker travelling independently might find local bureaucracy a problem with regard to any really worthwhile contact with his opposite numbers. Since 1976 visits have been made to the Soviet Union, East Germany, China and India. The SBTBD was everywhere recognised and respected, and the British success at PQ75 opened many doors, and provided many welcomes. Where practical, the tours were planned to coincide with meetings of the OISTT, or the opening of a showing of Britain's award-winning work from Prague, for this exhibition was toured extensively both in the UK and overseas, with theatre organisations in many countries queuing for the chance to display the British designs.

The return to Prague in June 1979 took place in a heat wave. The city looked glorious, and the Original Pilsen Beer was nectar. The British contingent, numbering eight designers, and again many supporters, felt this time that they were present as a member of an international family, rather than the slightly tentative stranger who had knocked on the door in January 1976. The work to be exhibited while certainly the best available was intended primarily to demonstrate the different areas, scales and styles of British theatre design. Britain had received her prize at PQ75, and it was not expected that honour would be once more bestowed. The pleasure of participation would be reward enough. But it didn't work out that way. At a ceremony in the beautiful Wallenstein Palace, and to great acclaim, the British exhibition was awarded



Set design for 'Terra Nova', Chichester Festival Theatre 1980. Designer Pamela Howard.



Costume design for pimp and whore "Berliner Requiem" Ballet Rambert 1982. Designer Pamela Marre.

the Golden Troika.

There may be many reasons for achievement and success, but it is hopefully not immodest to suggest that Britain's high standing in international theatre has been further enhanced and consolidated by our successes in Prague, and by the work of the SBTBD in fostering links with colleagues and sister organisations overseas. More than ever British designers are invited to work in Europe, the Americas, Australia. Britain is currently on the Executive of the OISTT. The winning exhibition from PQ79 is still on an extended tour of the world. To all who have participated in any way in all this, there can be no doubt that international contact is not only fruitful but essential. Britain is a world leader in theatre and many other countries look to us for guidance and assistance. We in turn must keep close touch with the achievements of others if we are to avoid complacency, and remain vital and innovative. (Is it not ludicrous therefore that for the second time in a decade The British Centre of the International Theatre Institute is threatened with closure due to lack of proper funding? But that's another matter).

What of the future? Mathematically inclined readers will have realised that 1983 returns the Prague Quadrennial to Centre Stage, and Britain will once again participate. Before that the SBTBD is organising another exhibition of contemporary British theatre design, with commercial sponsorship and Arts Council funds, to take place at the Round House in London from 24th February to 19th March. Whether or not glory will again be Britain's in Prague cannot yet be told, but one thing is certain: the value of international cooperation and shared knowledge will be enhanced, theatre will be the richer for it, and that richness will help feed the vitality of what theatregoers see on the British stage.

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