

# Floating Theatre

SIMON SHAW

At first sight this floating, touring theatre which brings drama and other entertainment to the inhabitants of the Stockholm archipelago, resembles a collection of floating boxes.

The Teaterbåt – once a royal steam yacht, the 'Nyttig', was converted by Per Edström in 1966 so that it could be manoeuvred in the shallow waters and approaches to the small islands. The boat is 25 metres in length, with a beam of 15 metres and a draft of 2.5 metres and travels at a modest 5 knots between the islands. It will accommodate an audience of just under 200 in its three-sided arena and its company of 10 give up to 150 performances during the summer.

The most popular play of all is *Faust*, but the repertoire includes comedies for the many children who come flocking to be entertained at every port of call.

No less than eighty places were visited last year and whilst adults are charged a small entrance fee all children are allowed on to the boat for their special entertainments completely free.

Incidentally, those who do not wish to pay for entrance to the productions on the boat are allowed to pay in kind – that is, they are allowed to give the equivalent in fish, potatoes, vegetables, wood or fruit. And even working on the boat for a couple of hours is taken as being token payment for watching the performances.

Of course, there are those who criticise the whole idea of a floating theatre, especially when it is subsidized to some extent by public funds. Others regard it as a gimmick but the inhabitants of the Stockholm archipelago take it all very seriously as constituting a vital element in the cultural life of the area.

Not only Swedes watch the performances here. Visitors to Sweden are often among the enthusiastic audiences who come aboard.

Per Edström is very proud of the fact that he and his players were invited by a Chinese cultural delegation to bring the



Teaterbåt all the way by sea to China where it would then bring its performances to people in the vicinity of the Yellow River.

This exciting venture would certainly never have got off the ground were it not for the energy of Per Edström. A visionary and a jack-of-all-trades on the boat, he has the drive and charisma which attracts sup-

port for his venture from the most unlikely sources.

Every member of the cast is expected to play his part in running the boat. It's not enough to be a good actor, but one must also be a very handy seaman if one is to be accepted by Per Edström in his productions. The maintaining of the boat and the steering as well as more domestic duties aboard all have to be attended to by each and every member of the cast.

The inside of the boat is truly a fantastic storeroom of things needed for dramatic productions. There are bookshelves which bulge with volumes of plays, theatrical costumes of all kinds needed for modern and medieval plays, boxes of programmes for the public as well as a vast array of all sorts of props needed for the stage.

All these are packed in with nautical charts, paraffin lamps and telescopes and other equipment needed for getting the boat safely from island to island.

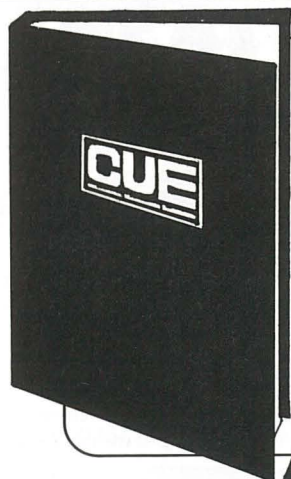
Someone once said that this Teaterbåt is very much like a small circus with a distinct tang of salt to it all, intermixed with the idea of a touring theatre with premieres night after night.

Per Edström is proud of his venture. He is the sole captain of the ship, and he is responsible for steering the ship through the most awkward of places between the archipelago traffic lanes which he does expertly from the bridge of the ship which is also the roof of the theatre.

And to make certain that no accidents occur at sea, the Teaterbåt is fitted with the most modern nautical equipment such as radar, radio telephone and up-to-date charts of the area.

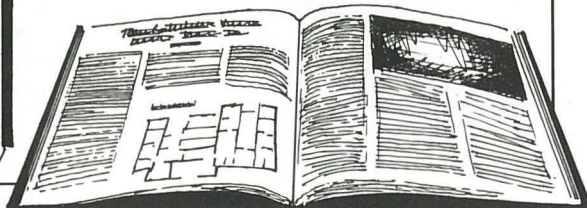
As the Teaterbåt makes its way to an island, it is always greeted, by an enthusiastic crowd of people who turn up with the children and pet animals ready to enjoy the performance on the decks of this unique ship. People will queue for hours on the quayside awaiting the arrival of the boat, so eager are they for a taste of culture. When the boat eventually leaves for its journey to another island, the audience clamour to know when it will return.

The arrival of the Teaterbåt is a major event in the lives of everyone who lives in this special island world of the Baltic, where its standard of drama and entertainment is appreciated by everyone.



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