

Between Cues

The thoughts of Walter Plinge

COMEDY PRESERVED

Timing and movement are the bones of comedy and mime. Can an exhibition recapture the essence of a visual comedian? I never saw Karl Valentin work, so I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the portrait that emerges from his centenary exhibition in Munich's City Museum. But I came away with so strong an impression of his work that he seemed almost as familiar as my childhood hero in the same genre, Dave Willis. But the exhibition had a wider value than Valentin alone: from the juxtaposition of displayed material it was possible to put together an impression of the architectural, production and acting styles of a whole era of light entertainment. Fortunately the films, both silent and sound, owed little to the art of the cinematographer: they were shot as simple records of his matured stage acts. Like the classic of the desk and chair



whose legs are alternately shortened in the hope of achieving a match.

DEMOCRATIC FISHING

I have never disguised my lack of competitive spirit. Including a lack of desire to enter into a trial of wits with a fish. This was apparently shared by a fisherman in Sibenik harbour who demonstrated his equality with the fish by what appeared to be random throwing of his five-pronged harpoon. The elegance of his stance in the prow of his boat and the gracious trajectory of his javelin were reminiscent of an earlier performing art recorded on vases and friezes. But today's concepts require an alienation effect: the boat was fibreglass, the propulsion was a ferocious outboard, and the steersman was a girl.


BOOKALIKE

Reid has never recommended Helene Hanff's *Underfoot in Show Business* so Walter must tell you that it has been allocated honoured residence on the depression relieving shelf of the plingular library. I grabbed a copy at Heathrow in some haste because my last call had been flashing for so long that I was in danger of being off rather than taking off. The book did not seem over stuffed with words, its pages were all about being stage struck so I could identify, and the author had gathered good notices for a play that I had decided was not me. But after reading the book, that play *84 Charing Cross Road* moved into priority one. The book is full of witty reality – and there are very few pro books that you can say that about. The play is a lovely evening – and in a lovely theatre (the intimate elegance of Sprague's Ambassadors with its


witty boxes is really rather more to my taste than the alleged matchlessness of Matcham). And marvel of marvels: Doreen Mantle played H. Hanff exactly, yes exactly, as I had projected her from the book.

LYRIC ANNIVERSARIES

Prosit! on the occasion of their 75th anniversary to the *Buhntechnische Rundschau*, doyen of theatre technology journals. For some twenty years I have been fascinated by BTR pictures which have frequently stimulated me to struggle to translate the juicier bits of text. It is a magazine all about the stage technology of something that does not exist in Britain: purpose-built lyric theatres. Our theatre is virtually all dramatic although opera is showing some signs of growth. Goodness me, we have now had a permanent national


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opera company for nearly 27 years! So let us couple this toast with another one: to the Covent Garden Theatre Site which has housed the whole gamut of performance across its 250 years.

NATIONAL READING LIGHTS (Reprise)

If the National Theatre or their Theatre Consultants read CUE, either they do not read this page or they prefer to ignore the plingular advice which is all included in our modest cover charge – just about the only consumer durable which can claim more than three years of zero inflation. What I am moaning about is that the quite splendid Performing Arts Book Fair was for a second year lit by a job lot of anglepoises. Come on NT, how about ringing TP. Or TP, ring them if they don't ring you. Otherwise the licensing authority might step in and that would be a terrible thing indeed since the second book fair was even better than the first and so it must become an annual.

GARGLING TO STARDOM

One of my own purchases at the NT Book Fair was a little pamphlet containing some valuable hints for actors. All my readers are, I am certain, aware that *Gargles are always preferable to drinks, and stimulants of an alcoholic nature should always be shunned*. But we all know an actor or two who might with advantage study the list of 39 emotions which can be conveyed by a careful deployment of the craft of facial expression. For example, are all academies of dramatic art aware that *DESPAIR bends brows, clouds the forehead, rolls the eyes, bites lips, head hung on breast, fist clenched, and the whole body strained and violently agitated; bitterness of tones. This part must not be over-acted*. This wisdom comes from 'The Golden Road to The Stage' written by a Mr A. E. Bennett who is described as 'Author of How to Play the Piano without a Tutor, etc, etc.'