

The cover shows a part of the painting 'Mrs Billington as St. Cecilia' by Sir Joshua Reynolds which features strongly in *The Royal Opera House Retrospective 1732-1982*, an exhibition staged at the Royal Academy in Piccadilly from 7 December 1982 to 6 February 1983. The exhibition is subtitled *250 years of actors, singers, dancers, managers and musicians at Covent Garden as seen by the artist*. It has been devised by the same two experts who devised *The Georgian Playhouse 1730-1830* at the Hayward in 1975, Geoffrey Ashton and Iain Mackintosh who has also written the cover story.

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Cue is an independent magazine published bi-monthly by Twynam Publishing Ltd.

Available on subscription
UK £10.50 per annum (6 issues)
Europe and Overseas £13.00

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PANTOMIME, PROFITS and POLICEMEN

Policemen, too, have been the favourite objects of ill-treatment. They have been subjected to every form of indignity, been cuffed, pelted, kicked, bonnetted – but all things considered have borne it with considerable good humour.

This is not an extract from an 1982 report on the state of law and order in our inner cities. The year is 1864, the magazine is *Punch*, and the subject is pantomime. Dear pantomime, our only truly indigenous national theatre form. Probably our last truly bankable theatrical asset. The panto advance relieves autumn cash flow crises, while the ice cream profits ease the chill that can blow through box office takes when credit card statements reveal the cost of our annual extravagances at the season of trees, turkeys and trimmings.

But can this panto profit continue? The signals, long at amber, are now firmly red – rich saturated primary number six red. The consequences of recycling insufficient of the punters' pounds back into the production pot. Comedians' jokes are an area that might well benefit from an investment programme. Rehearsals are shrinking: soon they will be vestigial. And how about budgeting for a rediscovery of technological magic?

Panto is too important to treat as a terminally decaying golden goose. Not only is it the first theatrical experience for many children, it is the only annual theatrical experience for many adults. The Arts Council and the Regional Arts Association must surely add pantomime to their agenda agonies.

Meanwhile CUE extends Seasonal Greetings to all theatrefolk, whether workers or watchers – and especially to all those policemen who, twice daily, will be passed through the mangle in the laundry scene to re-emerge as flat cut-outs.