

THE MODERN DUEL.  
 Taken from *MISS in her TEENS*, as it's now, led at Covent Garden.



aspects of our theme. For although first rate theatrical painting provides the central theme to the 250-year story there are other dimensions.

The first is the architectural sub-text. The author had long been irritated by the reference to the 'three' Covent Garden theatres – the first of 1732, Smirke's neo-classical theatre of 1809 and the present theatre by Barry of 1858. But this is an oversimplification that positively misleads. Not only was the first auditorium gutted and rebuilt in 1782, but what was virtually a new building was put up in 1792 by Holland, who was shortly to rebuild Drury Lane at a similarly greater scale in 1794. Holland's Covent Garden Theatre burnt down in 1808 and the auditorium of the

new theatre that replaced the old continued a tradition (Holland's) rather than creating a new one.

Similarly the transition from all-purpose big theatre to Opera House did not, as some suppose, take place on the building of the present theatre by E. M. Barry in 1858. Then the manager, Frederick Gye, asked of his architect no more than a replacement for the theatre he had lost. This was the Albano opera house auditorium inserted in 1847 into Smirke's older theatre. Indeed Albano's opera house of 1847 with its six tiers of boxes was, if anything, even bigger and grander than Barry's with four tiers.

The exhibition and accompanying catalogue redefine the turning points in the architecture – 1792 not 1808 and 1847 not

1858 – by establishing Chapter headings which correspond both to the changes in style of acting and of painting and also to the developments in policy. Thus the period 1732 to 1947 fits neatly into three parts and the three parts into three rooms at the Royal Academy.

This leaves the last 35 years. Since 1947 the Royal Opera House Covent Garden has been our largest single state-supported theatrical organisation. The achievements have been immense. Opera and Ballet in London had been previously episodic, dependent on individual talent like Beecham or on hazardous finance such as that raised by the Grand Opera Syndicate. Since 1947 we have had the continuity of two great companies, the Royal Ballet and the Royal Opera, which have not merely attained but maintained international stature. But there have been no great theatrical painters to record the great performers. Accordingly in this exhibition we have decided to take the theatrical photographer seriously and rely on his or her eye to give us more than a documentary account of singers and dancers. We hope that his or her own insight into movement, into performance and into beauty itself will show that the theatrical photographer has inherited the role of the theatrical painter. You must decide whether the seventy-six photos which we have selected succeed in doing this.

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