

Theatre Archaeology at CSSD

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approach whose formality belonged to an earlier style of rehearsal. Additions for the second edition have but a cosmetic flavour and so it has a restricted value as a study of the director's role. Embryonic directors seeking a how-to-do-it method for rehearsing and staging a production will find a surprising lack of structure. Surprising because writing, like direction is much concerned with structure and readers, like audiences, have to be identified.

Although 'Directing in the Theatre' has more than a hint of being a loosely structured book for a poorly identified readership, it is a must for the reading list of any aspiring director. But for the many truths that will stimulate the reader's personal thinking rather than for any overall concept of what directors do and how they do it.

Peter Barkworth clears away the hocus pocus that surrounds the job of acting. He acknowledges the instincts and describes the techniques. This column has enthused over *First Houses* and *About Acting*. Now **MORE ABOUT ACTING** provides us with even more understanding of the acting process. Particular insight comes from interviews with Judi Dench, Alec McCowen, Edward Petherbridge, Anna Massey, Wyn Jones, Alison Steadman, Patience Collier, Roger Rees, and Prunella Scales. In response to Barkworth's perceptive questioning, these artists reveal their creative processes in a way which cannot fail to fascinate anyone with a curiosity about theatre.

THEATRE AND PLAYHOUSE. An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building from Ancient Greece to the Present Day. Richard and Helen Leacroft. Methuen. £6.95 (Paperback) (UK).

THEATRE IN THE HILLS. Two Centuries of Theatre in Buxton. Ros McCoola. Caron Publications, Eccles Road, Chapel-en-le-Frith, SK12 6HB. £9.95 (UK)

EMPTY SEATS. Michael White. Hamish Hamilton. £9.95 (UK)

SENSATION SMITH OF DRURY LANE. The Biography of a Scenic Artist Extraordinary, Engineer and Inventor of Stage "Disasters", Soldier, Comedian and Chelsea Casanova. Dennis Castle. Charles Skilton. £14.95 (UK)

DIRECTING IN THE THEATRE. Second Edition, Hugh Morrison A & C Black (London) Theatre Arts Books (New York). £5.95 (Paperback) (UK)

MORE ABOUT ACTING. Peter Barkworth. Secker & Warburg. £8.50 (UK). £4.95 (Paperback) (UK)

Some 3 years ago I found myself charged with lecturing on 'History of Staging' at the Central School of Speech & Drama. My first thought was to take the words literally. I decided 'staging' embraced not only the shapes of stages but also the machinery and mechanical devices used at different times in and around stages. History has always been one of my passions, particularly the fascination of dissecting events and seeing how they fit into a larger overall pattern. The overall pattern is always there because human wants tend not to vary greatly in the long term. Equally well, in the theatre we are still in the same pursuit of means of surprising an audience and creating spectacle or even 'magic' that we were 2000 or more years ago. We become more sophisticated in our expectations as technology allows updated applications of old principles. The 'deus ex machina' would probably creak a bit now and might even get a laugh in certain circumstances. Nowadays we expect scenic effects to be silent and jerk free in operation.

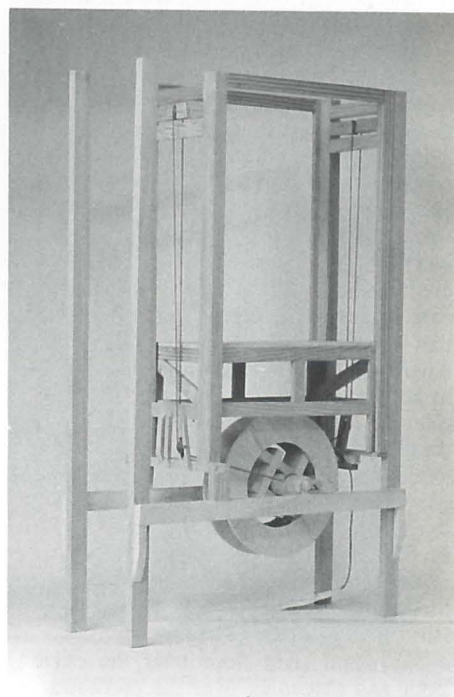
Taking this long look at staging history it appears as though there are only two really important periods of activity. The first being the development of the Ancient Greek theatre space and the second the bringing of theatre 'inside' in the 16th Century. If one looks at this for a moment it becomes a less contentious statement. The Greek Theatre developed and led to the Roman and the changes were probably occasioned more by the advance of building techniques than changes in performance needs. For several hundred years the concentric rows of seats were 'de rigueur' even in the occasional covered space. On the other hand once the theatre came 'inside' we have spent the last 400 years or so tinkering about with all kinds of seating layouts, but we are not seriously considering taking theatre outside again.

Having had these profound thoughts it seemed that architecture was the obvious jumping off point, 'staging' only being possible within the space and constraints allowed by the architect. Given that my students were intent on pursuing a career in the theatre we would need to look at machinery as well, but not delve back in this regard to the classical period. Within the architectural sphere the Ancients are certainly necessary as the performance of works from that period still continues. The general pattern of what was to be taught was taking shape, through the architectural area in the first term followed by work on machinery in the second term in which an outline of changing styles of theatre was also planned. This left the last term to be decided and after a lot of mental thrashing I decided it had to be project based work.

In my first year the project was a very simple one — we built a large open model box and different students inserted various different elements such as sloats or sliding flats. We were not working to any specific scale but simply demonstrating that we knew how various different pieces of machinery functioned in principle.

One of the things that concerns us is understanding the use of this word 'principle' and keeping it separate from 'technology'. This applies especially in respect to machinery. Technological advance may improve bearings and lubricants but the principles in which they are being used remain the same.

In the early months of 1983 we made contact with the owners of the Playhouse Theatre, Charing Cross, knowing that there was Victorian stage machinery intact below the stage floor. Our original intention was to have one visit, take pictures, observe the machinery, and do some measuring. The visit turned out to be extremely successful after a slight early hassle wiring in the floods we had brought with us. The theatre itself is charming and young eyes marvelled at the mechanical lighting control, lifts, traps and, for the intrepid, the drums and shafts in the grid. Near the end of the afternoon we found a small room up under the eaves full of papers which, fortune as ever favouring the bold, we removed.



View of grave trap model showing pulley off-centre carrying hauling line from spindle of drum to end of bridge.