

Amsterdam Again

Theatric Tourist FRANCIS REID returns to a Favourite Museum

In the distant days of 1980 and Cue 8, I started a series of visits to theatre museums with the intention (as I then wrote) of considering their interest not to the academic researcher but to the casual theatric tourist. With but the very minimum of exceptions (the backstages of three historic theatres), I have never sought any especial facilities that might be accorded to a journalist or a theatre specialist. My purpose has been only pleasure: to enjoy, in a relaxed anonymous way, such moments of theatre past as are openly displayed around the world.

To anyone thinking that these opening words are leading up to an announcement that I have reached the end of my theatric tourist trail, let me hasten to give assurance (or warning) that there are still enough museums and sites of theatre history to extend my trail to the end of Cue, the end of me, or to the end of Natwest tolerance for my travel bug. No, there is a trail of some considerable length still a-winding. But first a pause to return to the museum featured as the first in this series — one of my nearest and dearest, the one in Amsterdam.

Amsterdam's theatre museum is now entered through the Netherlands Theatre Institute which occupies the adjacent tall elegant 17th century merchant's house on the Herrengracht canal. Indeed neither *Theater Museum* nor the earlier *Toneel*

Museum are now used. The collection and its exhibition appear on posters and in listings under **Nederlands Theater Instituut**. Current policy is to run a major exhibition for a year in conjunction with a series of shorter smaller specialist displays. The system is very flexible and, visiting in the Decembers of 83 and 84, I caught interesting periods of transition at the beginning and end of *Een Huis Vol Theater* for which the obvious translation of "a house full of theatre" is correct.

Lights rising and falling sequentially on models can be a little irritating when one is trying to concentrate on detail, but they do infuse a feeling of existence in time into an otherwise static object.

A particular strength of this museum is not just that it is assiduously collecting the material of today's theatre but exhibits the history of the recent past with as much care as it devotes to that of earlier centuries. And the collections seem to be equally strong in all areas of performance, no matter how popular or esoteric. Thus films of musicals not much more than a decade old may be found playing on video in a roomful of their costumes, supported by designs, posters, etc.

Celebrations of eminent living artistes can be given an extended treatment. While Annie M. G. Schmidt's latest revue plays at the Carre Theatre, the top floor of the museum looks at her life as theatre writer, performer, cabaret singer, and writer of children's books. A two-hour interview with her runs on video while individual listening posts relate to the various pictures, books and production ephemera on display. What treasure for the future!

In the past decade I must have made at least a dozen visits to this house of theatric pleasure. I have never ever been other than delighted and stimulated. Whether by an exhibition which brings a lost theatrical moment alive again by careful juxtaposition of memories . . . or by the prints of theatres past, an area in which the Netherlands are particularly strong — both in the quality of the prints and in the interest of the architecture . . . or the models displayed in the house's original reception room with eighteenth century murals. A model of the Schouwburg in 1894 which had stood by the box-office window to assist buyers in their seat choice. Reconstructions of the London Globe, the Ghent Rederijkerstoneel, and that gorgeous

