



Picture 5.

number of musicians. There has been a tendency, fostered by the trivial accompaniments to revivals of Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton on television, to suggest that the musical side of the silents was primitive. This certainly was not so in any of the real picture palaces — as well as the organs there were orchestras. Attending some of the ‘classics’ at the National Film Theatre on the South Bank it often seems to me that the accompaniment fails to come up to the mark. It is not sufficient to rely on a veteran extemporizing at the piano. With the revival of the great silent “Napoleon” there has been a movement to use or compose a proper score, whether live from the pit or by adding a sound track.

One thing is certain; that whatever has happened to the British Empire or the Empire Leicester Square or the Plaza Regent Street or the guard at Buckingham Palace during the past forty years, there has been no changing of the light inside the palace. Leaving aside the crystal chandeliers there is a lot of concealed lighting behind the cornices. This is typical of the twenties and thirties super-cinemas. From Verity’s Shepherd’s Bush Pavilion of 1923 on, line upon line of low-wattage lamps at close centres were shoved behind

every architectural promontory which afforded the slightest chance of concealment. Another favourite was the laylight; a glass-panelled ceiling with lamps mounted behind in such a way as to look like daylight. Sometimes a further skylight above allowed the real thing to be admitted also. Such a ceiling way up aloft runs the entire length of the picture gallery where we three were now drinking and nibbling with all the others to celebrate the centenary of our Art Workers Guild, while gazing sporadically at the superb paintings hanging along the walls. Due to the great height of the gallery relative to its width the lighting of them presents a problem. This has been solved by the time-honoured linolite fittings bracketed from the top of each frame — with two exceptions. And what exceptions; the Van Dykes of Charles I on horseback and the one with his children.

I was quite unprepared for the size of these. No wonder no one had bothered to bracket any fitting from the top of their tall frames. Some experiment had been made however and it would appear quite recently. There on the top of the great doorway through which we had all entered was a piece of unpainted white wood and screwed thereto — one old Patt.23! Aimed at King

Charles, it was not alight and if it had been the specular reflection at that angle would have been most disturbing. As it was, it was not until after a couple of whiskeys that I noticed it up there. To meet that dear old friend from my past shoved up there on a bit of wood among all the treasures in the heart of that gilt and crystal palace, was spot on as the crowning touch to the evening. One niggler remains: how *should* one light those two paintings!

*Sightline Vol.14 No.2

+ Modern Theatres and Cinemas (published by Batsford 1930)

++ The Buildings of England, London (Penguin 1973)

Key to Illustrations:

1. The staircase of the Los Angeles Theatre by S. Charles Lee (from *The Best Remaining Seats* by Ben Hall, pub. Bramhall House 1961)
2. Auditorium of Titania Palast Berlin (from *Modern Theatres and Cinemas* by P. Morton Shand, pub. Batsford 1930)
3. Auditorium of New Victoria London in 1930s
4. The staircase of the Troxy, Commercial Rd. Stepney. (*The Builder* 22/9/1933)
5. This impressive portrait in The Queens collection measures more than 12ft in height.