

the acting that he seemed virtually oblivious, at least consciously, to the details of the designed environment. In Hobson's personal view of **THEATRE IN BRITAIN** there are very few references to designers and only one, Oliver Messel, is indexed. But this book, perhaps rather more than one's memory of the weekly notices, makes it clear that his response was to the totality of the production, even if his discussion centred upon the plays and their players.

Harold Hobson frequently stood apart from the consensus of his colleagues. Probably no other critic, not even Tynan, has ever bettered his record of recognising the occurrence of significant moments in the development of drama. When the dailies had misunderstood and derided, Hobson on Sundays so often offered understanding and support to an exploratory playwright, encouraging the audience to approach the new with open thinking.

Theatre in Britain covers the period from 1920 until the death of Richardson and its confessed aim is to show that all theatre is politically and socially relevant. But Hobson also recognises and appreciates all that is implied in the word entertainment. Here is a man who enjoys theatre going. And it shows.

Although theatre would seem to be a potentially rewarding field for study by sociologists, there has been surprisingly little research. Certainly, if the subject has been explored, the results have not been widely published. Michael Sanderson fills the gap with a social history of the acting profession **FROM IRVING TO OLIVIER**. His chosen span of 1880–1983 takes the actor from the struggle for professional respectability through that for industrial recognition. He traces the actor's position in society through an analysis of working conditions, finances, unionisation and training together with off-stage attitudes, activities and aspirations.

Wars and new technologies are perhaps the strongest and fastest agents of social change: their effect on the actor's life is at least as positive as on those ordinary mortals whose role playing does not require a stage or screen. Michael Sanderson offers no particularly stunning revelations. His description of the evolution of the actor's life is much as we have all generally believed it to be. But his statements are backed by solid research. There are 1061 numbered notes to the text (merifully at the end of chapters rather than at the foot of pages) and 16 pages of bibliography. Many facts that were only suspicions are now confirmed, and the book has enough pointers to set researchers off in a multitude of potentially interesting directions.

Books which document their research in such detail often require a struggle of concentration to read. But not this one: it falls smoothly on the brain and I read it like the sort of novel that used to be called a jolly good yarn.

Donald Sinden received a telephone call from Ralph Richardson: "Hello cocky — I hear you're writing a book about yourself and the acting. Don't tell them how it's done." Sinden does not set out to tell us how an actor acts — well not in the analytical way that provoked another thespian to say that Peter Barkworth's books 'make acting seem difficult'. But his writing is peppered with lots of throwaway clues like 'even if the audience thinks that I look the same in every play, I convince myself that I always look different.'

As I seem to be quoting everyone else, I might as well quote from my own Cue review of the first book of Sinden, *A Touch of the Memoirs*, "Actors memoirs can be awful — they are often written in a style of platitudinous insincerity that is only appropriate for backstage visiting on opening nights. Sinden, however, knows the structure of a good tale and he knows how to use timing in the telling. But this is not just an entertaining book. It offers much more insight into the acting process than many a more profound acting text". The second volume in the Sinden saga, **LAUGHTER IN THE SECOND ACT**, carries on in much the same vein and it is therefore only really necessary for me to record that it covers the sixties from the *Wars of the Roses* to a *Girl in My Soup*.

There is a good chapter on the origins, under his chairmanship, of the Theatre Museum whereby 'all the major collections, bar one, were brought together and we were lumbered with a lot of Russian Ballet material'. In a future memoir we can look forward to Donald Sinden's account of the opening of the Museum in Convent Garden — and with the seventies and eighties still to come, his timing seems likely to remain, as ever, immaculate.

After fourteen years as an Arts Council listing, **FESTIVALS IN GREAT BRITAIN** has been privatised. A list of festivals 'with forecast dates and policies' must have a limited sales appeal: you either need it desperately or you do not need it at all. Such publications require sponsorship and John Offord, the established patron of the science of arts administration, has taken it over, assisting viability by binding in his own book catalogue.

'Festival' has developed from being a term restricted to thematic quality or orgiastic quantity into a marketing device used with about as much conviction as the now discarded 'prior to London' once offered. However this book confines its listing to those that are held regularly, are more than a one-day event and have professional input. Even so, there are about 230. All make policy statements including quite a lot which share the flavour of 'this is an annual celebration of the performing arts appealing to a wide range of tastes and age groups.' But the core is the names and addresses which makes this book an essential sales manual for performers.

Athol Fugard is no narrow polemicist. The strength of his plays lies in the way in which they transcend the simplicity of mere political stance. By exploring human relationships within a particular environment, in this case the attitudes and legalities of contemporary South African society, dramatic form is used to expose human frailty on a more universal level. Dennis Walder's **ATHOL FUGARD** in the Macmillan Modern Dramatists series, discussing the plays and the creative conditions under which they were both written and initially performed, offers a rewarding insight into the workings of a playwright who seems likely to outlast many, or even most, of his contemporaries.

Universal truths can arise from a dramatist's investigation of the interplay of traditional roles. Gender roles have recently become an area for close scrutiny and, while it is inevitable that the anti-chauvinist movement should generate plays with a tightly focussed polemic argument, many feminist playwrights have used their stance to investigate wider implications of the human condition. (Incidentally, progressive thinking on gender equality must surely soon spawn new words which have the non-sexist intent of 'human' and 'mankind' without including 'man' as deriving syllable — 'peson' has been degraded by beauracracy-inspired jokes.) Helene Keyssar observes that **FEMINIST THEATRE** has celebrated on stage the ability of men and women to resist the roles that imprison them. Successful 'ist' and 'ism' movements become absorbed into mainstream and there are signs that this is happening in theatre. Meanwhile, in what is probably the best volume so far in the Modern Dramatists Series, Helene Keyssar provides an introduction to the history and aspirations of a theatre with a feminist perspective.

ONNO GREINER Architect. Marc van der Marck (Translated by John Kirkpatrick), with an introduction by Karel Wiekart (Translated by Wendy Shaffer). Van Gennepe, Nes 128, Amsterdam.

THEATRE IN BRITAIN. A personal View. Harold Hobson. Phaidon. £19.95 (UK).

FROM IRVING TO OLIVIER. A Social History of the Acting Profession in England 1880–1983. Michael Sanderson. The Athlone Press (London), St Martin's Press (New York). £14.50 (UK).

LAUGHTER IN THE SECOND ACT. Donald Sinden. Hodder and Stoughton. £9.95 (UK).

FESTIVALS IN GREAT BRITAIN. A List with Forecast Dates and Policies. 1985 John Offord Publications. £4.95 (UK) (Paperback)

ATHOL FUGARD. Dennis Walder. **FEMINIST THEATRE**. An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women. Helen Keyssar. Both in Macmillan Modern Dramatists Series, £14 (UK) £4.95 (Paperback) (UK).