

concerned with a dynasty which provides what is surely the most unique and still branching acting tree ever to flourish in Britain. I suspect that she does not think of the Redgraves as of such key importance in theatre history, nor realise that her book will be analysed, phrase by phrase, by researchers working for their doctorates in the centuries ahead. Actors tend to be today people and so it is no surprise to read after a visit to Vicenza of (presumably) Palladio as 'a wonderful old theatre, with old-fashioned scenery, but we did not see a production'.

Rachel Kempson is a leading actress in her own right, irrespective of her Redgrave connections, and a particularly interesting feature of her book is the change in rehearsal conditions over her working life. Stratford 1933 had a six week rehearsal period for six plays, two days at a time to each play in rotation. The opening week of six first nights was preceded by a week of dress rehearsals until four or five each morning. But read page 209 to discover who said the following about whom: 'They had a little company, they went away for three months, and they never opened'.

The book starts slowly and accelerates. I personally would have preferred less childhood and more theatre. But I did not put it down once during those dead days between boxing day and hogmanay.

THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE is in a somewhat different mould from earlier volumes of *Theatre Production Studies* which sought to reconstruct an impression of the production style of a particular theatre company or an era in theatre history. Anyone seeking an overview of how plays were staged *At the Royal Court* should still turn to Richard Findlater's 1981 compilation, under that title, of essays by key figures who wrote, acted, directed and designed during the first twenty five years of the English Stage Company.

Philip Roberts' new book approaches the Royal Court through its boardroom rather than its stage. In adopting this viewpoint it mirrors a fundamental, and to many of us a disturbing, trend that was beginning at that time (1965-72) and has been accelerating ever since—the growth of the act of administration from being merely an enabling device towards becoming a full self-sustaining ritual that often seems irrelevant to tonight's performance. But at least the artistic administration at the Court was motivated to serve only the writer/actor/audience triangle. Or so I thought until this book seeded just ever such a tiny little doubt.

Never have we been offered such an insight into the decision making processes of subsidised theatre. Philip Roberts has had access to the committee minutes of what might be called the Gaskill years (although Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page joined him in triumvirate for the second half of this period) and his book is a fascinating read—as was, and still is, Richard Findlater's. What we continue to need, however, is a book that attempts to analyse the Royal

Court's developments in staging style which, with those of Joan Littlewood's Stratford E.15, were the seminal influences on the couple of decades of British theatre which are now drawing to a close. But perhaps the degree of objectivity required for such a book can only be achieved by an author as yet unborn.

There are no illustrations in **THE LAST EMPIRES** and that is exactly how it should be in an anthology which seeks to evoke the world of the Music Hall through the verbal imagery of those who were there. The book owes more to Benny Green than might be surmised from his billing as editor. If he were playing my Empire, I would be happy to bill him as

BENNY GREEN

Well Read and Reads Well

By which I mean that his 'Music Hall Companion' reads well because he is so well read that he is able not just to select the right excerpts but to juxtapose and link them so that they become mutually supportive in recreating a past ambience in a way that no single commentator can.

The music hall inspired many writers to attempt to capture its special flavour and, while none of them in my view used words with the success that Sickert used paint, there are many jewels in the prose of such acknowledged literary giants as Shaw, Beerbohm, Arnold Bennett, Neville Cardus, T. S. Eliot, J. B. Priestly, Thackeray, Dickens and many many more including specialists like M. Wilson Disher, William Haslam Mills, Dan Farson, James Agate and John Osborne. Indeed it would probably be easier to list those who have *not* contributed! And full credit must go to Benny Green himself for the clarity and perception of his own contributions which interleave the fruits of his literary research.

I read "The Last Empires" as a continuous narrative and I shall now cherish it for future dipping. Although it does not quite make me wish that I had lived in the bad old days, I am nevertheless glad that I am old enough to have seen the second house at Collins and to have played the Royal County in Bedford.

When discussing the Rosco **SUPERGEL GUIDE** in last Cue, I promised that I would report on my experience of referring to the Guide while choosing panto filter colours. None of the cast or production team muttered 'yuk'—well not in my hearing anyway! I got the palette that I wanted and expected, so I shall continue to consult the Guide. I will still trust my eye but the suggestions in the Guide will provide a comforting confirmation of what my eye thinks it sees. And a useful warning of secondary tendencies in particular filters—a large part of a lighting designer's work is devoted to anticipating and controlling side effects.

I confess to being something of a Rosco fan, but my admiration has been sadly shaken by their new advertising approach. Come on Rosco, with products as good as

yours there is no need to resort to knocking your competitors. Think positive! . . . as in the Supergel Guide!

Did Ibsen know that 'The Wild Duck' was a Mallard with Cointreau and Cream Sauce? Was Chekhov's orchard the source of Drunken Cherry Ice Cream with Hot Sauce? Give a cook a job in a theatre museum and it is inevitable that 'Pineapple Poll' will inspire a soufflé. 'Goodbye Mr Chips' means hello Potatoes au Gratin. 'Red Peppers' will inevitably get stuffed, and so does 'Albert Herring'—but in caper sauce. I am not at all sure that carrot and yoghurt would make a 'Bonne Soupe'. And, whereas 'Little Lamps Eat Ivy', I personally would prefer to eat my Lamb Chops en Croute.

The theatreloving cook with one spoon in the kitchen and the other in the Theatre Museum is Catherine Hail with whom I would gladly spend my 'Salad Days'. She shares her love of food and stages with all of us in **THE THEATREGOER'S COOKBOOK**. Her method is simple. Let the titles of shows suggest the dishes, illustrate the recipes with archive pictures of these shows and give the cook some interesting anecdotal to read while waiting for the brown sugar to bubble. The result is fun and I read it straight through like an ordinary book. But now I'm off to the kitchen because Almond Ice Cream with Raspberry Sauce sounds just the 'Bitter Sweet' for 'The Chocolate Soldier' while I 'Share my Lettuce' with 'The Amorous Prawn'. But 'Don't Start Without Me' at 'The Cocktail Party'!

GIVING IT AWAY. The Memoirs of an Uncivil Servant. Charles Osborne. Secker & Warburg. £15 (UK).

A FAMILY & ITS FORTUNES. Rachel Kempson, Lady Redgrave. Duckworth. £12.95 (UK).

THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE 1965-1972. Philip Roberts. Routledge & Kegan Paul (Theatre Production Studies). £18.95 (UK).

THE LAST EMPIRES. A Music Hall Companion. Edited by Benny Green. Pavilion Michael Joseph. £15.95 (UK).

SUPERGEL GUIDE. Suggestions on How to Use Supergel Colour Filters. Also available as a poster. Roscolab Ltd. Free.

THE THEATREGOER'S COOKBOOK. Catherine Hail. Threshold Books. £5.95 (paperback) (UK).