



*Beggars Opera by John Gay.
Director Richard Eyre. Designer
John Gunter. Lighting Peter
Radmore. Plans Tim Foster.
Photo: Jem Wilsher.*

NATUS!, the endurance of the audience and the resources of the Cottesloe's then rather limited catering facilities.

The simple nature of this removable seating, provided a flexible layout beneath which elevators could be installed at a future date.

The Theatre has happily accepted settings varying from a single feather for Stephen Berkoff's *FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER*, to a natural exterior by Jane Martin for Julian Mitchell's *HALF LIFE* (Director Waris Hussein), about the demise of an elderly politician played by Sir John Gielgud.

This play transferred to the Duke of York's Theatre for 205 performances, where we reduced the width of the set by three feet an interesting reflection on the Cottesloe's not so small stage. The set whilst eminently suitable for the proscenium theatre, was quite at home with the Cottesloe's galleries running on over the stage, their horizontal line drawing the spectator's eye through. *HALF LIFE* was subsequently seen at the Royal Alexander Theatre Toronto (Proprietor Ed Mirvish, whose London venue *The Old Vic* reopened in October 1983), and Washington DC.

In April 1980, we presented *EARLY DAYS* with Ralph Richardson, (David Storey, Director Lindsay Anderson, Designer Jocelyn Herbert), and tried for the first time a steeper pit tier rake.

The seats for a traverse season examined later, had come within two or three feet of linking with the first gallery. Jocelyn

Herbert wanted to play on a flat floor, with the audience block rising steeply up from it. Now was the moment to build a layout whose risers would take us all the way, and enable the audience to enter at the first gallery which is at street level as one approaches the auditorium through the foyer.

One catch however: Lindsay Anderson wanted the axis of the setting, and the seating block, to be turned gently through seven degrees! On being asked by several groups of visitors groups why this should be so, I could only answer that I had Christened the arrangement "Lindsay's Angles" and that it "challenged the rectilinear nature of the space!"

We achieved the uplift of each row with scenic folding rostra in such a way as to be able to straighten out the tier for future use, should it prove a successful alternative to the provided shallow raked seating. By preparing the front rows under stage level at the same time, although these were covered over for *EARLY DAYS*, we reverted to a full straightened form, which we have kept ever since for *End Stage* work. It has lowered the seat count, as some of the mobile pit surround seats were obscured by the tier, but the benefit in terms of increased intimacy, and the effect of drawing together the pit and first level audience is marked.

One recent end stage production is notable in two respects: John Gunter's setting for the *BEGGARS' OPERA* (John Gay 1728, Director Richard Eyre, Music arranged by Dominic Muldowney) drew directly from the architectural nature of the room itself, in that by using an existing

bridge, a one level "fourth wall", (originally envisaged by Iain Mackintosh, and realised by Bill Dudley for the first of the *Mysteries*), its alloy frame dressed with rough timber, it created a mid-victorian workhouse. The audience entered a smoky galleried room lit by gas light overhead, peopled by the beggars, whores and pimps whose world is celebrated by John Gay in contemporary ballads, in what has become known as the worlds first musical.

A collaboration with Warner Communications led to the first television recording to be made wholly within the Cottesloe itself, with all the necessary recording equipment installed behind the raised pit tier seating, and cameras accommodated in front of the acting area by decking over the front seating rows.

Although the majority of plays in the last ten years have been on the end stage, the most significant continuous achievement must be what have become known as the *Promenade Productions*, under the direction of Bill Bryden, and conceived visually by William Dudley, with lighting by William Dudley, Stephen Wentworth and Laurence Clayton.

The Cottesloe was transformed rather to brewhouse than kitchen for the first of five major works to be staged in this form, at the beginning of 1977. Three of them started when the English poet Tony Harrison proposed an exciting, but challenging 20th century adaptation of a selection from the continuously performed *Mystery Plays*, drawn largely from the York and Chester Cycles of some 400 years ago.

Bill Bryden wanted to reflect the traditional staging method of using carts or platforms that had originally toured the streets of the city, pausing to perform individual parts of the Bible stories. We needed a sense of popular jostling town life, together with a feeling of progression necessary to recreate in a modern idiom the *Stations of the Cross*.

Bill Dudley and I examined the provided end stage seating layout used for the first two productions. By removal of all the seats from the lower pit section of the Theatre to a chair store in the basement, and turning over the rear rostra blocks into the front