

THE PLAYHOUSE RESTORED

London's Playhouse is a survivor. Bits of Charing Cross railway station fell into her during the early years of the century, the BBC submerged her beauty in green paint and she suffered a near terminal dose of planning developer's blight. But she found a lover in Mr Robin Gonslow who crowned her with a block of yuppy flats to pay for a facelift. And now we can all enjoy her intimacy. Long may she pleasure us.

And this Playhouse is a pleasure play house. This is just the sort of theatre for plays which end happily and do not have too many traumas on the way. Plays where the acting style hinges on a delicate cadence. And here also is an opera house which though perhaps too intimate for Mozart's Figaro is just right for Cimarosa's Secret Marriage.

The Playhouse is beautifully proportioned. Or so it seems from the stalls, the forward part of the circle and the front row of the gallery. Most of the gallery, and even perhaps the back of the circle, are as ghastly as is both common and inevitable in theatres squeezed on to cramped west end sites. The restoration has been done with considerable expertise. Steels pass through the building (but not the auditorium) to provide independent support for the flats which float overhead. But they have been so cleverly disguised that it would take someone with a considerable knowledge of building construction to find them. (I cannot find them, although I saw them unplastered during a hard-hat visit six months ago.)

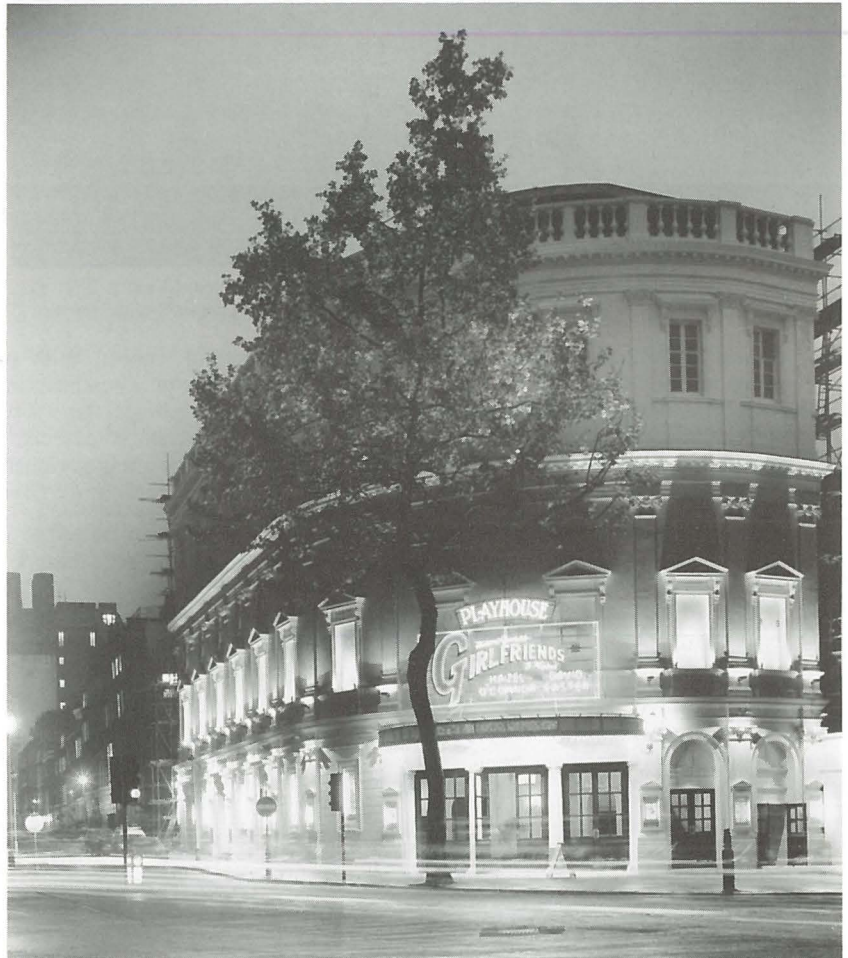
It is a pleasure to sit in the auditorium although the actual seats might seem just a little puritanical on a long-haul show. The boxes are framed in sufficiently exotic cherubims, and the lampposts at the end of the circle just avoid tweeness and so are rather fetching. The open balustrades to the circles help the intimacy and if I cannot raise enthusiasm for the unique way in which the circle springs arbitrarily from the midst of

the wall paintings, I certainly like the way in which these paintings deal with the wall space and relate to the ceiling.

The only jarring feature is the clean painting of the proscenium header. Without a decade of nicotine ahead, this paint rather

needs to be darkened down.

FOH lighting positions are always an intrusion in an auditorium such as this. However the problem has been dealt with rather sympathetically. Provision has been made for hanging an advance bar when



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