

seats on one floor. There is a centre group of about 200 seats surrounded by a terrace which rises from the same level as these at the stage end. This device, which used to be known as a stadium plan in the great cinema-building age, breaks up the lines of seating, allows separate entrance at the rear of the centre stalls, and yet does not condemn anyone to sit under a balcony. It also serves the useful purpose of confining a small audience—for a meeting shall we say—instead of allowing them to spread all over the place. The provision of an orchestra lift also helps multi-purpose use since the set for the week's show could remain on the stage, concealed by the house tabs or fire curtain—while such a forestage, with or without the lift gives an ample area for platform activities.

Another obvious use is as a British Film Institute cinema and care has been taken to ensure that the screen, which hangs just upstage of the house tabs when out of use, causes minimum obstruction. This is done in a most ingenious way by ensuring that the bottom part of the screen frame carries a line of lighting—the No. 1 spot bar no less. Thus when the screen is flown away it forms the pros. border or header. This downstage position is a good one anyway since it means least interference with anything set up on the stage.

There are the usual forestage entrances under Juliet balconies with their associated lighting slots and it goes without saying that these consultants (Theatre Projects again) have provided plenty of good lighting positions elsewhere.

In addition the architect's design of the proscenium provides an unusual arrangement of two fixed columns and removable panels on the sides of the stage which allow the Juliet Balconies and forestage doors to be put right onto the stage and to face the audience instead of sidling up on them. Opening up these panels presumably also gives a larger feel and acoustic for concerts. Of course there may be some who will regard the fixed column each side as an obstruction but I feel that the 35 ft. between them is large enough, and exercises a valuable discipline. The columns are part of the design by Neville Conder to

provide an architectural reduction of the opening, further temporary columns being envisaged for the amateur productions. Like the Crucible and Birmingham Rep. the Wyvern has a studio theatre for small scale and experimental work but in this case the studio doubles as a rehearsal room.

In view of the recent Manifesto on "The Human Specification in Architecture"* by Conrad Jameson it is interesting to examine the three buildings in that light. In each case the buildings are very much architects' buildings. The architectural concept rules the terms in which the requirements would be fulfilled. It is curious that the architect at Birmingham has a thing about curves whereas at Sheffield the rule is straight lines. Consider what might have happened if the briefs had been reversed. Swindon is by a straight line architect as well.

In 1963 Peter Moro interestingly combined both a circular plan for the auditorium and straight lines for the stage and front-of-house in the Nottingham Playhouse, though later at Hull he too went for straight lines which seemed to work out very well. If we think back to Nottingham however and decide for aesthetic reasons a cylindrical stage tower would be better, with a square auditorium, the design comes completely unstuck of course. A circle for an auditorium has the desirable effect of removing any corners remote from the stage where one might be tempted to make up the seat numbers. Seating seems to take up curved lines nicely. It certainly avoids awkward gangway untidinesses and as in Birmingham, where the gangways descend a very steep rake, curving lessens any tendency towards vertigo. Curiously enough when one comes to a stage curves are very unhappy. It is difficult to orientate to a curved area. This is one explanation why so few theatres-in-the-round have a circular stage. No sooner has one written this down than one realises that one of the commonest forms of stage throughout the world and the only one whose dimensions are standard—the circus ring—emphatically contradicts the notion. Fortunately one can

**The Architects Journal* Oct. 27, 1971.