



The Severn Rooms with fixed seating, translation booths and television monitors.



The Avon Rooms set out for a meeting.

visual aid facilities. The stage dimensions I judge to be suited best to the chalk and chat type of entertainment, though I see no reason why a small musical presentation would not work there, subject to the high insulation claims of the steel panels being true; I can testify that they are easily movable; I had a nasty struggle with a track junction which was probably due to lack of running-in. The austerity of the Avon Suite was relieved for me by an old friend left over from the previous evening's dinner dance. The inevitable DIY Rank Strand 500 W spot (WITH COLOUR WHEEL) secured with evidence of haste to the nice new boring ceiling with its alimentary tail crammed through to a hidden source.

I was drawn most strongly of course to the Main Conference Hall, with its seating potential of 2,500. First impressions: vastness, caused by a shallow seating rake on a semi-encirclement of the large 12-lift forestage/centre auditorium floor, coupled with a very light coloured wall and ceiling finish. Quite a few unusable seats in the fixed side areas when the show is entirely on the 60 ft. by 40 ft. proscenium stage. The main hall seems to be committed by design to the use of the forestage, but performer access to this seems to be only through the proscenium, which can be tricky in a busy show, and causes overwork on the D.B.O. facility between scenes.

The main hall lighting positions, judged in relation to the available acting areas, are not very good news. Over the forestage, a selection of luminaires which can only be good for down lighters for orchestras, being too high and too steep for the pros. stage front, hard to get to for the workers, and hampered in function and access by a large number of triangular panels with adjustable rake arrangements. The rest of the shallow ceiling features the "removable" plaster panel idea, based on the EXACT dimensions of some (probably unobtainable) spotlight, and lots of 'em, and on the fixed lines of fire school of lighting and trench warfare. The present technical staff have obviously been politicking and striving, and certain curved lighting bars were in evidence,

placed in a fine heretical and more useful location below the ceiling.

For lighting designers, there is a super bonus. You know the way you run out of things to talk about while they change the set, well here you can spend the time working out a programme for fading the house lights. Seriously, there's a rather interesting brick faced pros. wall of a warm brown colour, with, I quote, "quasi-irregular projections", which are sculptured by lots of downlights, which can be phased to fade in succession or pulse in groups, and that. Some enthusiast had them going on a quarter second curve whilst I was there, which gave the appearance of a bad wiring joint somewhere, but the possibilities could be judged.

On the pros. stage, there is no feeling of vastness; judgement was impaired by what

seemed to be an enormous number of drapes, a massive sculptured backing, cinema screens, B.P. screen, and the detritus of getting things ready for Press Day, e.g. four men playing cards on a mountain of carpet offcuts. Upstage there is a smallish dock, without fire separation from the main stage, so you know what you can do with your props baskets don't you, and a lift for bringing the stuff of illusion up from the delivery area. Should any particular stuff not fit into the lift, some thoughtful latecomer to the team has caused a hole to be cut in the back wall (no doubt to be known hereafter as the Scenic Input Facility), so that the odd awkward bits can be speedily delivered via a side road, a staircase, a flat roof, and a set of glass doors and a foyer.

Mercifully, the main hall has been provided with an MMS control for 120 channels, which is pretty small for the vast possibilities for performance areas, but at least provides a chance to keep abreast of a venue designed for maximum daily usage, without excessive rehearsal time. To detail the extensive communications and audio-visual facilities would need an issue of TABS to itself. If its as good as the bumf, it will be fantastic; I was unable to gain more than an impression of numbers of men deep in thought, a hell of a lot of wiring indecently exposed and an impressive array of racked equipment which will no doubt have its covers fitted very shortly.

To the TABS reader I would say go and take a look around. The staff are very helpful and I am sure that there are lots of details to interest a wide range of specialists. I didn't enjoy the experience very much, but I was suffering from a rejection phase for concrete and lino tiles and things which combine originality with ease of application (and separation). And I had a rotten start to the day. It was still raining when I went home.



The Greenwich Room set out for a banquet with boxing ring.

*Architects: R. Seifert & Partners
Consulting Engineers: Pell, Frischmann & Partners
Main Contractor: Cementation Building Limited*