

# THE DUNDEE REP.



by Kathy White  
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## FOREWORD

THE handsome new Dundee Rep opened its doors during April. It is probably the last new theatre for a professional company that will be seen in the U.K. for quite a few years.

In honour of this opening, the Theatre Consultant, Andre Tammes, has promised to tell all — or nearly all — in our next issue.

In the meantime, as a trailer for this event, we offer:—

I HAVE just been to see a very interesting, and very nostalgic, exhibition staged by the Dundee Repertory Theatre in the City Library. One more worthy attempt in their tremendous and determined efforts to foster public support and enthusiasm, and so hasten completion of their splendid new purpose built theatre.

The exhibition represents a quarter of a century of memories of the Dundee Rep., displayed in a collection of splendid photographs taken over the years by Alex Coupar, a well-known local photographer. So many famous personalities have been connected at one time or other with the Dundee Rep. Since the time of its inception in 1939, it has been notable throughout Britain for the fine quality of its work, and high reputation in the theatre world. Early on in their careers, stars such as Virginia Mackenna, Richard Todd, Hannah Gordon, Jill Gascoigne have graced the stage of the Rep., as well as many other young actors and actresses, many of whom have gone on to become household names.

We owe much to our Repertory Company. Back in the Twenties, professional live theatre looked like coming to an end in Dundee. Thanks to Mr Arthur Henderson and his perseverance, however, the Queens and the Alhambra continued to provide live entertainment. But in 1939, theatre was forced to succumb to cinema. However, due to the efforts of the Manager of the last visiting company

to the Alhambra, new permanent premises were found for a live theatre company. This was achieved due to the sympathetic help and support of the Dundee Dramatic Society, an amateur group still very active to-day. So was born Dundee Repertory Company in May, 1939. At the end of December, the public was admitted to the Foresters' Hall for the inaugural performance of "Hassan".

All through the War and after, the Company flourished, gaining ever-increasing acclaim, and establishing its fine reputation. Memories, memories! In nineteen forty something, I went to see Richard Todd three times during the run of "The Hasty Heart". I was truly "sent". And possibly, too, felt I had a personal stake in the production since one of the six hospital beds on stage sported a pair of my mother's white linen sheets. Some props being difficult to get in those hard-up years, the Rep. had appealed for the loan of white sheets. An avid play-goer, I was eager to oblige. My cup overflowed on the way home from the theatre one night, on the top deck of a swaying tramcar. Sitting in front of me was the young Richard Todd himself, on his way home to "digs" in the West End. International stardom was some way ahead of him, but in my book he was already "the greatest". I may say I studied the back of his neck very closely.

In 1963, a disastrous fire destroyed the theatre. Once again, the search for premises was on, and finally a "temporary" home was found in a converted church. Here the Company has stayed for the past eighteen years, working under appalling conditions, and continuing to stage productions of great merit and imagination. Its reputation has in no way suffered despite difficulties and limitations, calling for admiration and respect from both profession and public alike.

All this time, there were hopes and aspirations for a permanent home for the now firmly established Company. Negotiations with the Dundee City Council and the Scottish Arts Council to provide a new theatre were constantly plagued by problems, and as the years went by, the dream seemed to recede further and further into the future. And so they battled on in the unsuitable old church where, if you were unlucky in your seat, you had to peep round a pillar, or try to forget, as my sister did, that you once sat here in a pew at Sunday School. Somehow, she found it difficult to get into the right mood to enjoy the show.

At long last, in 1979, work was commenced on the Dundee Rep's new theatre, and it is now very nearly completed. Since the beginning of this year, we have been temporarily without the Rep. squeezed out by inflation and unable to continue in the old church. But surely now we can be confident of a future for our excellent Repertory Company, housed in surroundings worthy of their talents, and of which Dundonians like myself can be justifiably proud. ■

AMERICA'S love affair with Shakespeare began on September 15, 1752 in Williamsburg, Virginia when the Lewis Hallam Company performed *The Merchant of Venice* to an enthusiastic colonial audience starved for the cultural advantages of England. From that first professional performance in the New World to the current BBC productions, the works of William Shakespeare have intrigued American audiences. Nowhere is this fascination more evident than in the Shakespeare festivals that abound on summer nights in almost every state in the Union. Most of the festivals run four to eight different plays in repertory, providing an excellent training ground for young actors and technicians as well as a showcase for established performers. Of course, they are also the perfect application for Strand Century memory control systems. The speed at which the designers must work during the all too brief technical rehearsals, as well as nightly changeovers and revolving crews make the Light Palette a mid-summer night's dream for the artist and the accountant. This is the story of one such summer Shakespeare festival, its humble beginnings, phoenix-like rise from the ashes of arson, and its subsequent happy marriage with a Light Palette.

Our story begins in June of 1935 in San Diego, California, on the stage of a hastily constructed open-air theatre. A hardy band of twenty-one actors presented fifty minute condensations of eight different plays each day as part of the California Pacific Exposition. This salute to Shakespeare was intended to be only a temporary cultural boom in Southern California, but at the end of the two year Exposition, Shakespeare and theatre has gained a permanent place in the heart of the residents of San Diego, and a community theatre had been born. Money was raised not only to save the temporary stage from the wrecking ball, but to enclose it and create a viable working space that was to survive for the next forty-one years. By the early 1960's, The Old Globe Theatre in Balboa Park was no longer an amateur community theatre but a widely recognized professional Shakespeare company, attracting classically trained stars eager to feel boards beneath their feet, from nearby Hollywood.

Then, as they say in the movies, tragedy struck. On the night of March 8, 1978, arson reduced the old theatre to rubble. With the summer season already planned for a June opening, a group of incredibly determined community leaders took the phrase "the show must go on" quite seriously and once again, money was raised and construction begun on yet another temporary open-air theatre to house the festival until a new and better Old Globe could rise. This particular temporary theatre and determined group of people hold a special place in our collective heart at Strand Century as this was the first-ever home for a Light Palette. At the time of the fire, Light Palette was in the early prototype

# 'SAN DIEGO ON THAMES'

by Susan Dandridge  
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*She originally joined the company in 1977 after completing her Master's Degree in Lighting Design at Purdue University. Based in the New Jersey office until 1981, where she had risen to the position of Manager of the Design Department, Susan has now relocated to the more gentle climate of Southern California.*

*She continues to put her lighting experience to use by taking on freelance design work whenever her schedule allows. Her credits include a number of Shakespearean productions from her fondly remembered days at the College of William and Mary in Virginia.*

stage and had just been introduced to our sales force as the national U.S.I.T.T. Convention in Phoenix, Arizona. Three months later, the console was on-site and operating in the Festival's new home.

Within days of the fire, a design team had been drawn together to work on both the temporary Festival Stage and the plans for a new theatre. Those involved included Tom Hall, Managing Director of the Globe staff, Paul Landry of Landry-Bogan, Theatrical Consultants, Richard Hay, theatre designer, and Dirk Epperson, lighting consultant. At the time, the location of what was to become the Festival Stage was no more than an overgrown ravine. An army of crew people, working in three shifts from 7:00am to 3:00am cleared the ravine and erected a platform stage on a forest of telephone posts sunk into the hillside. The ravine is so deep that the back of the stage is approximately 45 feet from the ground, a fact that has been put to good use for rapid disappearances (there is of course, a catwalk running below and behind the stage to catch the otherwise suicidal actor).

More telephone posts were pur-