

# FRANCIS REID

**A**LTHOUGH forever travelling hopefully, I always seem to arrive the day after or depart the day before: my life is therefore a sequence of missed performances. So I suppose it was inevitable that I should arrive in Bangkok on a day when the Royal Thai Ballet were playing at the Edinburgh Festival. Nevertheless I hailed a passing Tuk-Tuk with that international phrase 'National Theatre'? To ride a Tuk-Tuk is to take part in an exhilarating street theatre ballet. With impeccable ensemble the traffic weaves complex patterns that, like all great art, owe nothing to logic. Three wheels, two strokes, and an addiction to decorative paint and chromium-plated scroll-work, allows the Tuk-Tuk to upstage any mere mortal motor.

If I generally travel with my eyes uplifted, it is only because I am constantly in search of the tell-tale sign that betrays the presence of a theatre – a fly tower. That of Bangkok's National Theatre is clearly evident but it is supported by a building whose modernity neatly absorbs elements of traditional Thai architecture without resort to pastiche, and so it relates happily to an urban landscape which is alive with the exuberance of elaborate roof contours. The doors were open and so I added my shoes to the pile and discovered a girl's school rehearsing with all the giggling chaos that is an international inevitability on such occasions. The two-tiered raked auditorium



*A Bangkok Tuk-Tuk*

with pure cinematic sightlines to a proscenium stage could be anywhere, but the plaster decoration around the proscenium is distinctly Thai as are the fierce images of serpents around the proscenium doors giving entrance to a deeply thrusting fore-stage with orchestral areas at its sides.

Connoisseurs of the art of stage lighting will be interested to know that there are two sets of footlights – one for the apron and one for the main stage. And no one will be surprised by the presence of such inevitable items of modern theatre technology as speaker bins and lighting booms (in this case sprouting an effusion of T-Spots).

For my Thai classical dancing I resorted to a theatre restaurant where, under the influence of scorching spices and soothing fruits, I made some cryptic notes:



*Above: The Pine Tree Club, Singapore.*

*Above top: National Theatre. The fly tower is extra large as it serves two stages at right angles to each other.*