

# CUE

Technical Theatre Review



March-April 1980

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*Artistic Review*

*Osbert Lancaster*

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*Managing Editor*  
James Twynam

*Editorial Advisory Board*  
Anthony Pugh  
Francis Reid  
Jeremy Twynam

Editorial,  
Advertising and Subscription Office:  
Twynam Publishing Ltd.,  
Kitemore, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 8HR.  
Telephone 0367 21141  
Telex: 44226

# CUE

## Technical Theatre Review

4.

March-April 1980

### 'For we that live to please . . .'

With – is it ten? – West End theatres dark, the horror musical VAT still running, minimal casts, and minimal staging becoming de rigueur . . . but contrariwise, new theatres and new *kinds* of audiences rising and flourishing in pubs and bubbles, and a new wave of student drama breaking over the stage of the Collegiate Theatre . . . one doesn't know whether to feel like poor gloomy Jeremiah or poor silly Pangloss.

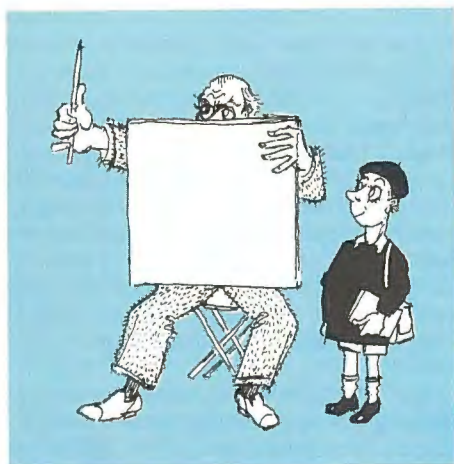
On the whole, perhaps, to behave like Pangloss is the better bet. He was certainly the first of the marketing and advertising men with a firm belief that the customer, if not always right, was always convertible – specially if he or she was wooed and cosseted and made to feel comfortable.

The new (or found again) idea that management is all about filling a lot of seats rather than filling a few heads with foolish fancies is all very well as far as it goes. But it begs the question of how management and front and back stage people should collaborate to identify and present a *product* that sets out to give pleasure rather than punishment.

To adopt Puritan or Roundhead philosophies in these decisions can easily breed much more repelling disincentives than VAT (a Leveller, if we ever met one). But to be Cavalier in the elitest sense is just as bad. We would have thought, for example, that many of the Royal Court's continuing problems stemmed from the fact that, for a period, its ceremonies and rites and levees became as intellectually privileged and inaccessible as those of royal courts usually are.

There may be some sort of moral in the successes now being enjoyed by dance and ballet groups which, at a shamefully low subsidy rating compared with that, say, for 'experimental' theatre, easily manage to produce 80% – 90% capacities in quite large theatres. Maybe, in a drab age, Terpsichore and Euterpe do seem more attractive propositions as muses than Melpomene and Calliope.

A question that some artistic directors, all managements, and even some technical people may need to ask themselves is 'am I working to *please* other people – or am I working to please myself?'



Above Osbert Lancaster by Osbert Lancaster whose design for Cranko's *Pineapple Poll*, Sadlers Wells 1951 is shown on the front cover. On page 16 Anthony Pugh describes a conversation with Sir Osbert at a Retrospective Exhibition of his work at the Redfern Gallery last month.

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# Autolycus



## Have bag will travel

Seeking the Bubble reputation in the Camden's mouth, as it were, CUE paid a visit to Bob Carlton, recently appointed artistic director to the Bubble Theatre Company, which Glen Walford inaugurated in 1972, and which, with some gentle puffing from the Greater London Arts Association, has been merrily bouncing along ever since.

The bubble itself, that remarkable amalgam of two Tensi domes, which provides seating for around 200 and green room and dressing room besides, was hibernating in a pantechicon down Guildford way, quietly gathering strength to blow itself up for its progress round the (mostly) outer London boroughs from June on. It takes about 40 people and 48 hours to get it up, and will go almost anywhere you have a space about 20 metres by 12 metres and a convenient standpipe and a convenient convenience (parks preferred). In a later issue, CUE hopes, Peter Bennett-Jones the technical director will be dealing with the what, how and why of its lighting and sound.

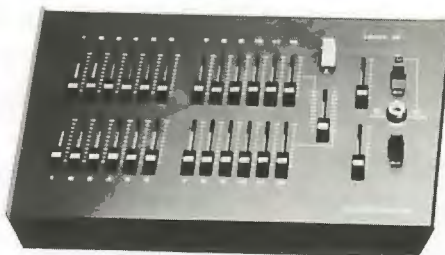
No question of subscribed-for season-tickets here, of course. The whole point and purpose of the Bubble Theatre Company is to go (or go back because they like it) to people whose attitude to a conventional theatre wouldn't be too different from their attitude to an operating theatre. As Bob Carlton says 'every night's a first night at the Bubble. We never know who we'll get, and they never quite know what they'll get'. Phil Whitchurch, who assists Bob, and devises some of the special entertainments for children, tells a nice story of a lad he heard saying to his companions after an interval, 'let's get back... the film's started'.

The company at the Bubble (and Bob Carlton is trying to make it a permanent company, which doesn't have to take refuge in commercials or playing cricket for Kerry Packer during the winter months) consists of 10 actors and 5 musicians. This

coming summer they're tackling plays as dissimilar as Ray Herman's 'They Shoot Horses, don't they?' and Francis Beaumont's (no *not* Binkie, Francis 1585 - 1615) 'Knight of the Burning Pestle'. What Southwark (where Francis used to hang out) will make of that is anybody's guess. But at least the audience will be a jolly one, the theatre will be a full one (they play to over 80% of capacity), and the feeling will be a good one (helped by some new 'intimate' seats, four up and a table for beer).

All of which is more than could be said of conditions in some parts of that House of Correction on the south bank, known as the National Theatre.

## Grand Raffle and Draw



Among all the schemes for saving the British theatre nobody, as far as we know, has come up with the idea of a national lottery. CUE is not (yet) able to offer Covent Garden as a grand prize, but we *are* raffling, for a very modest investment, exactly the sort of stage lighting system that any small theatre, touring company, or happy band of pilgrims setting out to convert a disused non-conformist chapel for total entertainment, would certainly sell their souls for. It's the neat and splendidly portable combination of the CCT/Electro-sonic 12-way Linkit Desk and Flatapak rack, with a capacity, for the future, to

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## To everything there is a season-ticket . . .

Hands up those who remember the old 'twofer' shows of the Forties run by Payne, Jennings and Killick or, as they were sometimes known, Kill, 'Jennings and Panic. The idea was to encourage more people to visit the theatre by offering seats at two for the price of one. It worked to some extent. But the rub was that the actors had to take a cut in their wages in order to pay for all those free tickets. It was a crude method of encouraging full houses and not one which Equity would lightly tolerate today.

But it illustrates the point that there is nothing new in marketing the arts at a discount. Merely that today's technique, as espoused by American Danny Newman in his theory and practice of Dynamic Subscription Promotion, is much more sophisticated.

Mr. Newman, a sort of whiz kid in promoting the performing arts, has devised what amounts to an arts marketing man's bible and he was in London to preach extracts from it at a series of seminars in January.

The essence of his creed is that you can virtually eliminate empty seats in concert halls and theatres by persuading people to buy what amounts to a season ticket for a series of productions at, initially at any rate, a reduction of anything up to 33 per cent. The time has come for theatre managers and proprietors to re-think their whole attitude to the casual ticket buyer on whom they depend. Why are so many theatre people seemingly willing to accept that a proportion of seats will always be empty every night simply because potential customers have casually NOT bought tickets. Not only is this a luxury no theatre can afford, but, says Mr. Newman, it is a positive moral affront. The answer is to get people to take out subscriptions in much the same way that they would for a book club or a football club. The problem lies in persuading the theatrical establishment that its withering financial arm needs a shot of the old hard sell to get the money supply flowing again.

And this is where Arts Marketing comes in. It has acquired the British rights to

Newman and set up a company called *Subscribe Now (U.K.) Ltd.*, which is offering its expertise at a fee of around £4,000 a year, including a year's after sale service. The firm's complete package, including slick promotional material and the cost of printing and postage runs to around £20,000. The business is run from a top floor office in Covent Garden's Floral Street within singing distance of the Royal Opera House. And the men behind the enterprise are Hugh Barton and Keith Diggle, both well-known in the arts marketing world, and accountant Tony Gamble.

Hugh Barton pointed to the phenomenal success of the Newman philosophy in both the States and in Scotland as evidence of what the English subsidised theatre was missing. When Newman started, there were just six theatre companies in America using subscription ticket sales. Now there are some 200. The Brooklyn Academy of Music increased its subscriptions from 2000 to 20,000; the Seattle Repertory Theatre from none to 24,000 and the New York City Opera from none to 35,000.

Closer to home is the success story of the Scottish National Orchestra which signed Newman up four years ago. Of the 11,000 tickets sold for the SNO's 1978/79 Winter Season in Aberdeen, more than 7000 were bought by subscribers.

Like Newman, Barton is critical of the many theatres who fail to get names — 'they are your gold' — of the present single ticket buyers in order to follow up their attendance with a mailing shot.

The SNO's literature woos the potential subscriber with subtle flattery —

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But what matter, so long as the seats are filled. The SNO offered the subscriber a choice of buying tickets for a series of eight concerts at 19 per cent discount and costing, depending on position, no more than £28 or of buying tickets for four concerts at a 12 per cent discount costing around £8.60. As an added inducement, payment can be made by banker's order over six months.

Hugh Barton believes that music lovers in particular are ideal subscribers because of the degree of choice which the average triple bill provides. Most people will enjoy Beethoven even if they are not enthusiastic about Rachmaninov on the same bill. But he was quick to deny any suggestion of artistic interference by his firm in the choice of production. 'I know it worries people,' he said. 'But the subscription system actually increases the freedom of the artistic director, not the reverse.' The director could afford to be more daring in his

choice, in the certain knowledge that subscribers would attend come what may.

Under Newman's guiding hand the Scottish Opera too has attracted over 6000 regular customers who occupy 70 per cent of all the seats available. In two years the Birmingham Rep has attracted almost as many.

The beauty of the system, says Barton, is that its so easy for the consumer because he only has to go through the booking process once in a season. And with so much more money 'up front' it is also easier for the management to invest in future productions and perhaps more adventurous ones.

Subscription promotion was 'not a horribly crude approach' he said. There was the art of the product and the art of 'selling' the product and the sooner people running theatres with empty seats woke up to that fact the better.

This seems a fair enough analysis and as the Newman approach to the selling side appears to have worked in America it may well be something worth looking at in Britain.

### Within a budding grove . . .

For reasons which no-one seems able adequately to explain, the London borough of Hammersmith is spawning theatres at an impressive rate. It seems like only last week since the Riverside Studios opened its doors for the first time and only yesterday that the Lyric raised the curtain on its inaugural production of 'You Never Can Tell'. Even the nearby Bush Theatre, while not an infant, could at least be regarded as a juvenile.



*Between acts at the Grove.*

The latest in mother Hammersmith's growing theatrical family was born on February 4 at the Grove Tavern. Known as the Grove Theatre it occupies an upstairs room in the pub, which in former days of grandeur was used for banquets. For many a year long since, this particular tavern has been a plain and simple ale-house where those who earn their living by the sweat of their brow come to wash the dust from their throats with, as often as not, a gallon or so of Guinness. The juke box, with its liberal

selection of plaintive Irish ballads and jolly jigs while ye jar, bears testament to the green and misty origins of most of the regular patrons. The rapt attention on their faces as a variety of youthful and strangely exotic first nighters tramped into the saloon for their statutory pre-performance gin and tonics was something to behold. Though quite what they made of this sudden wild invasion wasn't clear.

The theatre seats just 70 people on numbing wooden chairs designed for those without pelvic bones. But aside from this slight discomforture the design and construction of the room is masterful. Rik Carmichael, seconded from the Bush Pub Theatre, has created a stage, a dressing room, a lighting box, lighting gantry and raked audience area in what, even by fringe standards, is a tiny space in which to perform a play. By painting the walls, windows and ceiling in black he has managed to create a sense of infinity which helps to enlarge the room to good effect.

The Grove theatre was started on a shoestring £1000 by two young entrepreneurs; Paul Caister, 24, an ex-Bristol Old Vic student and John Spearman, 27, an old Etonian and one-time gossip writer for the London Evening Standard. Spearman admits to a certain recklessness in throwing up a promising career in Fleet Street, but says that the magnetic pull of the theatre was too strong to withstand.

It is too early to make predictions about the success of the duo, who have blended audacity with courageousness in setting up an entirely self-supporting theatre in an area which already has two heavily subsidised theatres vying for our attention. But the fact that critics from the national press, who are not known for zealously reviewing fringe productions, bothered to turn up at

all is an indication of the professional approach of Caister and Spearman.

Their first production, 'True Facts', a new play by American Bill Elverman and directed by Caister, received mixed notices as they say. The Grove is hoping to gather momentum on March 20 with its own shortened version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which, because of the smallness of the stage, has been pared down to eight characters.

Hmmm . . . interesting.



### The play's the thing

French's, the theatrical publishers, who live in Southampton Street, Covent Garden, next door to the house that belonged to David Garrick, are 150 years old this year, and have produced a scholarly guide-book to themselves to celebrate their birthday. It contains, among much else, an ABC of the playwrights and authors (round about 1800 of them) whose work bears their imprimatur, and records that, as early as 1856, the original Samuel French, who was an American, was boasting that he had 100,000 plays on hand. 'Plays! Plays! Plays! Plays!', his company advertised. 'For Reading Clubs, for Amateur Theatricals, Temperance Plays, Drawing Room Plays, Fairy Plays, Ethiopian Plays' (the black comedies of their times, one presumes) . . . and everything else besides from wigs to waxworks.

French's have prospered by catering for the greater optimism, diversity, and, indeed, the greater prosperity of the amateur theatre. Their 'Acting editions', full of explicit instructions on casting, costumes, movement, set-dressing and stage-business, which up to the 50's included also the full professional lighting plot even if it was to be used only on the boards of the village hall, are still the definitive manuals for fine as well as coarse acting. Their *Guide of Selecting Plays*, and its sister publication in America *French's Basic Catalogue of Plays*, are still essential start-points for every person mad enough to see himself (or increasingly herself) as a producer.

We must regret only that the *Guide*, moving with the times, has had to abandon its stringently restrictive classifications of character, which assumed easy familiarity in stock companies with how to play 'the tragedian', the 'light comedian', the 'low comedian', the 'ingenue', the 'Heavy Lead' and the 'Heavy Woman' (no, not Tessie O'Shea, Lady Macbeth). In wishing French's a jolly Birthday year, CUE suggests to them that some new acting exemplars might be brought back to the pages of the guide. How about the 'Liberated Woman', the 'Failed Romantic Male', the 'Unfulfilled Juvenile'?

*Autolycus column contributed by Mike Walker and Anthony Pugh.*

# Sound as an artist's medium

PHILIP CLIFFORD

Harold Burris-Meyer, Vincent Mallory and Lewis Goodfriend: *Sound in the Theatre*, pub. Theatre Arts Books, 153 Waverly Place, New York, N.Y. 10014, pp. 93, \$12.95.

This is an important book, not superseded in the twenty years since its first appearance. Its reappearance, although badly mishandled in one isolated but important respect, is very welcome. If the arrival of review copies here signals the publishers' intention to get the book into bookshops, we are fortunate.

The authors' ambitious and radical aim is to treat of 'sound as an artist's medium' (foreword) in a broadly inclusive field which they define concisely and elegantly: '... any instance in which a sound is produced by man or instrument and in one operation travels to the listener's ear, and where between source and hearer, control may be applied . . . this definition excludes television and radio transmission, since there control is divided . . .'. The theatre's resources of sound are understood to be the artist's performance and the acoustical behaviour of the building as well as specific items like mechanical sound effects and electrical control systems. In progress from considering sound itself through hearing, acoustics, systems and equipment to matters of organization and operation, the authors simultaneously maintain their concern with theatre sound as a medium and present a remarkably well-organized view of theoretical and technical aspects of their calling.

Probably the most famous part of the book is the long series of formally-presented 'problems' in chapter V, in which a specific requirement is tackled in the light of an overall conception, often fully explained (e.g. Herbert Graf's version of the church scene in 'Faust'). The proposed solutions are reached by utterly direct methods that, in the case of 'Faust', must have involved formidable hard work and (for its time) technical complexity. The one-page section on audibility (p. 33) contains an astonishing amount of well-founded practical advice as well as the most important single observation on theatre P.A.: '*The response of the reinforcement system must . . . be adjusted whenever level is changed.*' (The authors' use of italics is sparing and always justified.) The uncompromised directness of the practical advice in the pursuit of an artistic conception is well seen in problem 15 (page 38), the performance of Widor's F major organ Toccata in a 'dry' theatre acoustic: 'Calculate the reverberation time of St. Sulpice where Widor was organist.' Well, of course — but how many of us would do it?

The authors' appeal to their own experi-

ence is elsewhere less formal. For example, they recall that virgin effects discs were employed at every performance of Erwin Piscator's production of 'King Lear'. Magnetic recording has made this a purely historical anecdote, but there is a clear value in knowing that Piscator's management spent the time and the money and thought it well spent. (They were not unique, of course; the Royal Opera House possesses more than a dozen unplayed identical 78's entitled 'Pigs in brushwood'. They sound remarkably like pigs in brushwood.)

By now it will be clear that the clarity, directness and method of the book make it uncommonly proof against obsolescence. The chapters concerning specific equipments were an exception and it is a great pity that the work of revision has not been sufficiently thorough. What appears is so out of date as to be misleading or time-wasting. For example, two block diagrams (pp. 48-49 and p. 51) show control desks in which the level of the signal is not uniform at the conventional access points. This can't be recommended, or even justified except on cost grounds, since it makes use of the patchfield a matter of time-consuming thought (and, in emergencies, unacceptable risk). This is a nonsense in a facility which should increase flexibility and convenience. One reason for this kind of design is that passive combining networks are employed instead of the virtual-earth mixer designs which have replaced them. The system recommended for floating transformer coupling of mixer to power amplifier results in the signal being as much as 20dB below mixer output level on its long, interference-prone journey to the amplifiers. The programme equalizer described on p. 61 appears to be a passive device, but active equivalents made in the U.S.A. have been available in the U.K. for at least eight years. Cheap and small transistor equipment has made constant-impedance faders, and their insertion loss, unnecessary. The provision of a table of amplifier output voltages with corresponding power values (p. 89) would be more useful if the circuit impedance were 8 ohms instead of the now uncommon 16 ohms. I have already laboured the point, no doubt; but the authors' account of purpose-built theatre sound equipment using transistors and integrated circuits would be worth reading. This reproach, for such it is, is aimed at the authors' and publishers' bookmaking strategy, and certainly not at their competence, which is elsewhere convincing.

Both publishers and authors, for example, deserve praise for their unstinting and effective use of diagrams, graphs and tabulation in presenting complex and valuable information. Acoustic properties

of materials and sources of interference are two such. The authors are masters of the useful one-liner, well-employed in dealing with microphone floor stands or carbon tetrachloride. Their recommendations concerning onstage equipment are simple and conclusive, and the three pages on magnetic tape recording are an amazingly concise guide to good practice, dealing with the big issues in the right order.

The last two chapters, *Organization and Planning* and *Installation, Operation and*

*Maintenance* are a wonderfully methodical statement of the case for method. It is notable that the administrative order advocated by the authors is directly related to the artistic order which is their, and our business; and characteristic that the very last pages are a series of step-by-step routine equipment checks which are models of clarity, the outcome of hours of work and worth in themselves the price, admittedly high, of the book.

I have documented my objections to the

equipment section of the book in some detail in order to make them clear. I should make it clear also that I attach no great importance to them when they are set beside the major, dateless, part of the book. They can, in any case, be met when the book is next republished in another twenty years' time. I envy very much those about to start their first reading of this radical, far-sighted, elementary, exciting and good-tempered guide to our work in theatres.

## 'Whither Student Drama?' and, of course, whether

With 19 productions (it seemed like more) staged in a fortnight, a vast fluttering of fringe activities (including George Melly and the Abracadabra Fools Theatre Company which stopped the Tottenham Court Road traffic *twice*), the London Students Drama Festival was obviously a spiritual success and deserves to run and run. Despite the financial support it got from quite a few enlightened sponsors (us, for example) it probably won't turn out to have been yer actual box-office success, but that's show business. One reason for this says Eric Graham, who shared the concep-

tion and direction of the Festival with Graham Frost and Jane Gibbins (which should qualify them for some sort of post-graduate degree in its own right) must be that, with every night, most afternoons and some mornings being a *first* night, the paying public only found out what was worth going to when it had already closed and they couldn't; which doesn't seem too different, as it happens, from life in the grown-up theatre.

The seminarial side of things — sessions on directing, characterisation, movement, voice, technique, lighting (Nick Firth),

sound (John Leonard) etc. — seems, as is often the case, to have raised hopes and fantasies beyond the dreams of managements. It is heady stuff, after all, to have Charles Marowitz demand of you that you play Richard III *and* Hamlet *and* Romeo all in one speech, or that you adjust your emotions to the *Ring* speech from *Twelfth Night* while running on the spot.

But Eric Graham and his colleagues are nothing but pragmatic in their views on how those students who graduate into a theatrical world should be prepared to practise, insisting stoutly that there need be no



*On the Road*, Visions of Cody, adaptation of Jack Kerouac's novel. Brad Monj who won the CUE Lighting Award is far right.



*Circus of Circus*, Concorde and the Pope by Pierre Hollins.



*Stoned Tortoise*, Out of the Flying Pan, by David Campton.

conflict between art and commercialism, and expecting that most students in theatrical disciplines, whether front-stage or back-stage, would have their eyes firmly fixed on the main chance. This being so, it was slightly puzzling to find no work-shops on, for example, the economic aspects of management – in which, one would believe, far more opportunities exist than are ever considered, and which might provide for far more creative people a back-stairs way of utilising the many skills this festival brought to light. Stopping traffic is all very well: stopping the rot might be better.

### Decisions, decisions . . .

Though the Festival was more concerned with satisfactions and rewards than with competitions and awards a night of judgement inevitably arrived – nicely handled, incidentally, by a sort of instant company called F.O.L.D.S. who pleasantly parodied the *Evening Standard's* Drama Award ceremonies at the Albert Hall; not, of course, that the *Evening News* one of the sponsors of *this* festival would have acknowledged anything like that.

What students are expected to make of the final choices by the distinguished judges must depend on their knowledge, their enthusiasms and the 'schools' to which they adhere. Who, after all, would quarrel with the serious, seriously-worried and disarmingly humble comments of the playwright



Phase Four Theatre Company, *Agamemnon* by Steve Berkoff.



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Edward Bond as, with some reservations, he granted the *Evening News* award (a bur-sary of £500 to the author of 'the most distinguished piece of new writing') to Rikki Beadle and his North London Col-lege group for their production of *A-Z*? Well, nobody who is anybody perhaps, except a great number of theatre-goers, and a great number of people who know just why they *aren't* theatre-goers.

Not that *A-Z* (which was more a crowd-scene than a production, more a party than a play, and whose author apologised or boasted that it had only taken four days to write) might not prove *commercially* viable. It had the sort of rough energy and panache that so often tricks an audience into thinking that a statement has been made – an illusion worked by successes as dissimilar as *Zigger Zagger*, *O Calcutta*, and Carol Channing in *Hello Dolly*. But, despite Edward Bond's approval, its sprawling theme of 'Us *now*... Our



Jane Gibbings and Graham Frost who together with Eric Graham were the Directors of the Festival.



Two of the five productions from the Goldsmith's College Drama Society, *Private Lives* by Noel Coward and *Stevie* by Hugh Whitmore.



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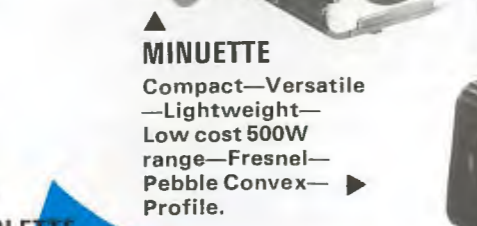
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(above and right) Kingston Polytechnic Drama Society all of whom acted well particularly Carol Rees who took the lead role, Laura, in Philip Tong's *Elm*.  
(left) London School of Contemporary Dance, *The Missing Links* by Richard Mansfield.

problems... Our answers' seemed curiously old-fashioned, self-indulgent and forgettable. It made a theme of 'Them... and Their problems', as exemplified perhaps in the Stoppard-derived *Missing Link* by Richard Mansfield and the London School of Contemporary Dance, or Anthony Clark and the Track Theatre Company's *Yellow Monday* seem a much more attractive proposition as a starting point for dramatic exploration.

#### Bring in the clowns

That said, it should also be said that

A-Z also got one of Thames T/V's touring tickets to further performances; it goes on to the Kiskidee Arts Theatre in the Caledonian Road. Other offerings similarly rewarded were *Visions of Cody* (an adaptation of Jack Kerouac's novels) by the On the Road troupe from E15, which goes to Jackson's Lane, and the Circus of Circus' *Concorde and the Pope*, which will be seen again at Theatre Space. *Cody* and *Concorde* received respectively the CUE awards (in real money) for Lighting and Design, which John Ashford of the ICA was kind enough to judge on. Under the circum-

stances ('next production on stage now!') an elegant lighting plot could hardly be asked for, but Brad Monj got his recognition for the way he made lighting act almost as a member of a very good cast.

The Design award went to Pierre Hollins for his clown play *Concorde and the Pope*, which by its very nature needed to be a spectacle throughout, and for which he contrived moving pictures out of actors, musicians and the costumes they wore that immensely cheered up the Collegiate Theatre's rather dreary basic stage.

A final award, the chance of playing the

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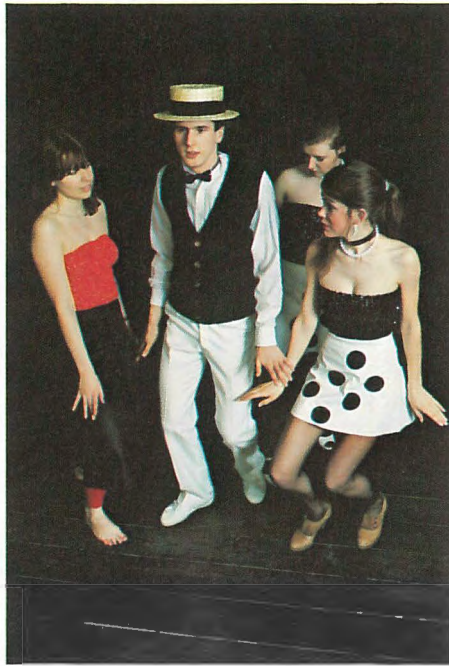
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Simon Hughes, President of the Goldsmith's College Drama Society whose efforts resulted in five entries from Goldsmith's and who won a Special Award.



Royal Holloway College, Mankind/Everyman.



Pierre Hollins (centre) who won the CUE Design Award for his production of Concorde and the Pope.



(left) North London College of Drama, A-Z by Rikki Beadle. (right) Rikki Beadle who won the Evening News Drama Award.



ICA Theatre for a fortnight offered by Thames T/V went to one of the several one-man or one-woman shows of the Festival, Alastair Campbell's *Mother*, a King's College Drama Society enterprise premiered at last year's Edinburgh Festival. There is probably a moral here for students as writers or performers: small theatres, radio, and television companies all find soliloquy interesting, easily produceable and potentially profitable. Lydia Stryk also scored here, though as she did Cocteau's *Human Voice* rather than an original work of her own, she didn't qualify for an award. This happened, of course, and perhaps a little unfairly, to many other groups who chose to exemplify interpretation and technique in established works. Phase Four Theatre Company's *Agamemnon* (less bent than John Barton's) and Goldsmith College Drama Society's version of Yeats' *The Maids* came in for acclaim. Goldsmith's, with their ubiquitous entrepreneur Simon Hughes, were responsible for at least five productions, which shows perhaps where theatrical winds of change are blowing most strongly, though the actual title *The Winds of Change* was used, in fact, for a gentle and sensitive offering by the London School of Contemporary Dance; that made the stage look prettier too.

Because of all this diversity, and some perversity no doubt, it would be dangerous to draw too many conclusions. Trying to sum up the general position of the Festival, and of the student-bodies who participated, the F.O.L.D.S.' John Cutrara, in a nice parody of a drunken super-critic, judged it as being 'one of bewilderment'. We're not so sure. CUE has a feeling that even the few names of groups or individuals we've dropped in these columns know exactly what they're doing and where they're going (of which managements, the Arts Council, etc. kindly take note).

A. P.

In addition to the formal sponsors of the Festival like ourselves, a large number of people and organizations gave tremendous support in different forms. University College Student Union provided the Collegiate Theatre free for the festival period and Jeremy Anderson and his stage committee generously provided voluntary back-up without which the quick get-in programme of the festival could not have been achieved. Theatre Projects Ltd. saved the festival considerable expense by providing all the additional lighting required for the fortnight free. And throughout, things were kept running smoothly and cheerfully by Ann Ceri Llewelyn, the Collegiate's Administrator, and Alison Holding, the Festival Co-ordinator.

The Festival also brought two promising photographers to the fore. Christopher Booth who took the photographs used in this review and Anastasi White who took the photographs for the Collegiate article in our last issue.

# A Myth No Longer

FRANCIS REID

A professional English theatre in Montreal, with an adventurous repertoire from established classics to contemporary creations, enjoying a critical and popular success for a decade . . . The Centaur is obviously a myth!

*The Canada Council*

Montreal is aggressively French. Her superficial topography may have more affinity with New York than with Paris, but her culture is unmistakably French . . . including a French theatre tradition with little place for drama in English.

Except at *Centaur*.

Centaur is little more than ten years old. Physically, converted from the old Montreal Stock Exchange. Conceptually, godfathered artistically by Maurice Podbrey and administratively by Herb Auerbach. Their priorities appear to be audience, then writers, then actors, then peripherals like designers and technologists. The pecking order is correct. So Centaur works.

Centaur is Podbrey's theatre. Sometimes he directs, sometimes he acts, sometimes he is just around. Softly softly but always there. He is a South African Canadian so Centaur has done all the Fugards. But the first decade saw — to take but a couple of dozen authors — Albee, Arrabal, Arbusov, Beaumarchais, Bond, Brecht, Brenton, Chekov, Euripides, Genet, Griffiths, Hampton, Leonard, Miller, Osborne, O'Neill, Pinter, Shakespeare, Shepard,



*The two theatres in the Centaur complex are shown here, the one above is the larger Centaur 1 theatre.*





full justice, this should be extended to read *functional but inviting and spectacularly successful*.

There was, of course, an English language theatre in Montreal before Centaur . . . particularly *Her Majesty's* (demolished 1962), a touring house which for more than half a century provided a showcase for London and New York imports. The Canadian Centennial generated a nationwide surge of theatre building and in Montreal this produced the multi-auditorium *Place des Arts* — an uneasy compromise between American performance architecture (formal even

*Anne Butler, Maurice Podbrey & Alex Diakun in Athol Fugard's latest play A Lesson from Aloes, directed by the author. The first performances outside South Africa were given in Montreal at the Centaur Theatre in January 1980.*

Simon, Stoppard, Strinberg, Williams, Yeats. Most of them contributed more than one play: clearly the language may be English but the scope is international.

There are two theatres in the Centaur complex. Centaur 2 came first followed by the larger Centaur 1. Both are in what might be called the *Mermaid* tradition — rectangles with steeply raked seating facing an end stage. Very functional and rather heavy going for both actor/audience and for audience/audience relationships. A

mecca for seekers after purity of sightline and those who like to retain an objective detachment from the play.

Good lighting bridges and a control board which indicates the mixture of English and United States practice that is incorporated in Canadian lighting techniques . . . a Strand S.P. with six presets.

The bar/exhibition space is functional but inviting. Indeed *functional but inviting* might well form an accurate capsule description for Centaur. Although, to do

pompous) and French performing arts (informal even casual).

(*aside* — it is interesting, is it not, that time seems to have produced something of a reversal in French and American attitudes to the role of formality in the arts.)

*Place des Arts* — as its name suggests — houses a mixed programme. The two main auditoria are quasi-opera-houses used for concerts of every possible musical style, together with some opera, dance and musicals, most of the latter being short stay bus-and-truck tours. There is a playhouse within the complex but much of the gut-drama seems to arise elsewhere in the City. *Place des Arts* is essentially French . . . to the extent that, in a city where graphics are ostentatiously bilingual, all posters and labels are totally French. However a bilingual poster appeared this spring: the Centaur Company were in residence in one of the larger *Place des Arts* auditoria with *Balconville* described as a bilingual play (une pièce bilingue).

The future? Hear the words of the Quebecois Minister of State for Cultural Development . . .

'Primarily a French-speaking society, Quebec must discover a source of vitality in its minorities . . . any society that helps its minority groups to preserve their cultural heritage reaps a cultural reward and achieves a better balance. This could and should be the case for Quebec . . . Centaur's programmes are varied; its professional status exceptional. Never stilted by an over-emphasis on the classics, it has always been prepared to embark on the new and innovative. Although appealing mainly to Anglophone audiences, it is now enjoying the increasing interest of French-speaking Quebecers . . . In the Quebec of tomorrow, the Centaur has its place. It is a necessary contribution to Quebec's culture. In the name of my government I wish it every success.'



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# Osbert Lancaster and the Littlehampton Connection

ANTHONY PUGH

In *Who's Who*, where his activities and honours occupy a fat three or four column inches, Sir Osbert Lancaster gives his recreation as 'topography'. This could also sum up fairly well the character and style of his work for the stage, whether ballet or opera or drama is concerned, but it doesn't properly convey the extra factor of a gently mocking or knocking wit that pervades all his designs. For what we get, in addition to the authenticity he brings to the re-creation not just of a period but often of an exact year, delights less by its scholarship than by the pricking of pretension and the poke of parody. To deeply 'committed' directors, he thinks, this is probably disconcerting.

Curiously, as the retrospective exhibition of some of his work (now, alas, closed) at

the Redfern Gallery has reminded us, Osbert Lancaster seems to have arrived on the theatrical scene quite late in his life, and almost by accident — one of those happy accidents of having old friends that has meant so much to invention and taste in the theatre. His first designs were for John Cranko's energising romp for the Sadlers Wells Ballet *Pineapple Poll*, back in 1951. 'They'd asked John Piper, of course . . .', he remembers. 'He said "somehow I don't think it's quite my cup of tea. Why don't you have a go."' So I did.' A year later came *Bonne Bouche*; again for Cranko, again a call for a stage crowded (Oh happy pre-depression days) with incident and colour. 'I don't think Ninette de Valois liked it much,' he says. 'Too frivolous, I suppose. Pity.'



The drawings for the *Bonne Bouche* costumes, and for the Old Vic's *She Stoops to Conquer*, ten years later, reflect perfectly, I think, his capacity to catch the mood of a period, suggesting not only how the dancers or actors should look, but also how they should move, and even how they should act. Even now, one feels, if you study the costume for Mrs Hardcastle in the Goldsmith play (reproduced here) it is possible to identify exactly how Peggy Mount played her. This would be true, too, of the many designs he has done for Opera at Glyndebourne, which will be on show there during *their* big exhibition later this year.

Above all, Osbert Lancaster, in a business too full of adumbrators, really draws. He takes great satisfaction in the drawn-to-scale and then painted backdrop to set a mood and for its ability to define and discipline a production. He views the fashion for bare stages and expressionist props, and the decline in importance of the proscenium with gentle distaste. He's not too keen on tee shirts and jeans either, one gathers. 'One trouble today, when you're designing costumes,' he says 'is that the younger generation seems to have forgotten how to wear clothes. But what can they do, poor dears, when they have to perform in theatres like prison yards, surrounded by scaffolding and search lights?'

As a designer, in keeping with the sort of scholarship that has brought him honorary degrees from no less than five universities, and made him, into the bargain, an honorary FRIBA, Osbert Lancaster is as meticulously attentive to the pictorial detail of productions as, in their diverse ways,



Set and costume designs for Bonne Bouche 1952. By kind permission of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.



were Diaghilev, Frank Lloyd Wright and are Franco Zeffirelli and Hal Prince. 'You have to keep your eyes on everything - in person,' he says. 'Too many disasters come about by just letting people get on with it.' Hence he much prefers working, say in the everything-under-one-roof conditions at Glynbourne to working in the 'we always have that done at Whitechapel' conditions of Covent Garden. He prefers, in fact, a civilised approach to production, and to his

part in it. 'I'm probably old-fashioned,' he says. 'It isn't generally recognised that the Victorian era went on well into the twenties, and, in my part of London (the splendid arrangements of squares, crescents, and gardens North of Holland Park Avenue) into the thirties. I think audiences are a bit old-fashioned, too. . .'. Well, maybe. But, meanwhile, the Littlehamptons, Maudie and Willie, who, in the name of egalitarianism, should have died off years ago, are

alive and well and sneering, and can be found every morning in your 'Daily Express'.

'That's really,' Osbert Lancaster says 'why I don't manage to get to the theatre as much as I once did. When I'm through with the Littlehamptons, I need a nourishing drink. And when I've had that I need a proper meal. And when I've had that . . . well, usually, the theatres are closed'.



# Give us the job, and we'll finish the tools

RAY DASILVA

Apart from the occasion when we lost five trowels in one day and recovered three of these set fast in an abandoned barrow-load of cement the above slogan, adopted by various Job Creation/Work Experience schemes has, thankfully, not seemed appropriate to the Norwich Puppet Theatre project.

For the last twelve months a team of fifteen young people on a salary of £23.50 per week have converted a disused mediaeval church into an exciting and unique theatre, already described by the press as becoming one of the most delightful buildings in Norwich. From a technical point of view the most exciting features are the special facilities being installed to allow for many types of puppet operations and, at the same time, allowing sufficient flexibility for the presentation of almost all the small scale performing arts, including drama, music and dance. The diagram (1) shows the two operating bridges which track up and down stage. These are both 3.20m from floor level and the front bridge in its forward position serves as a proscenium top and control gallery. The

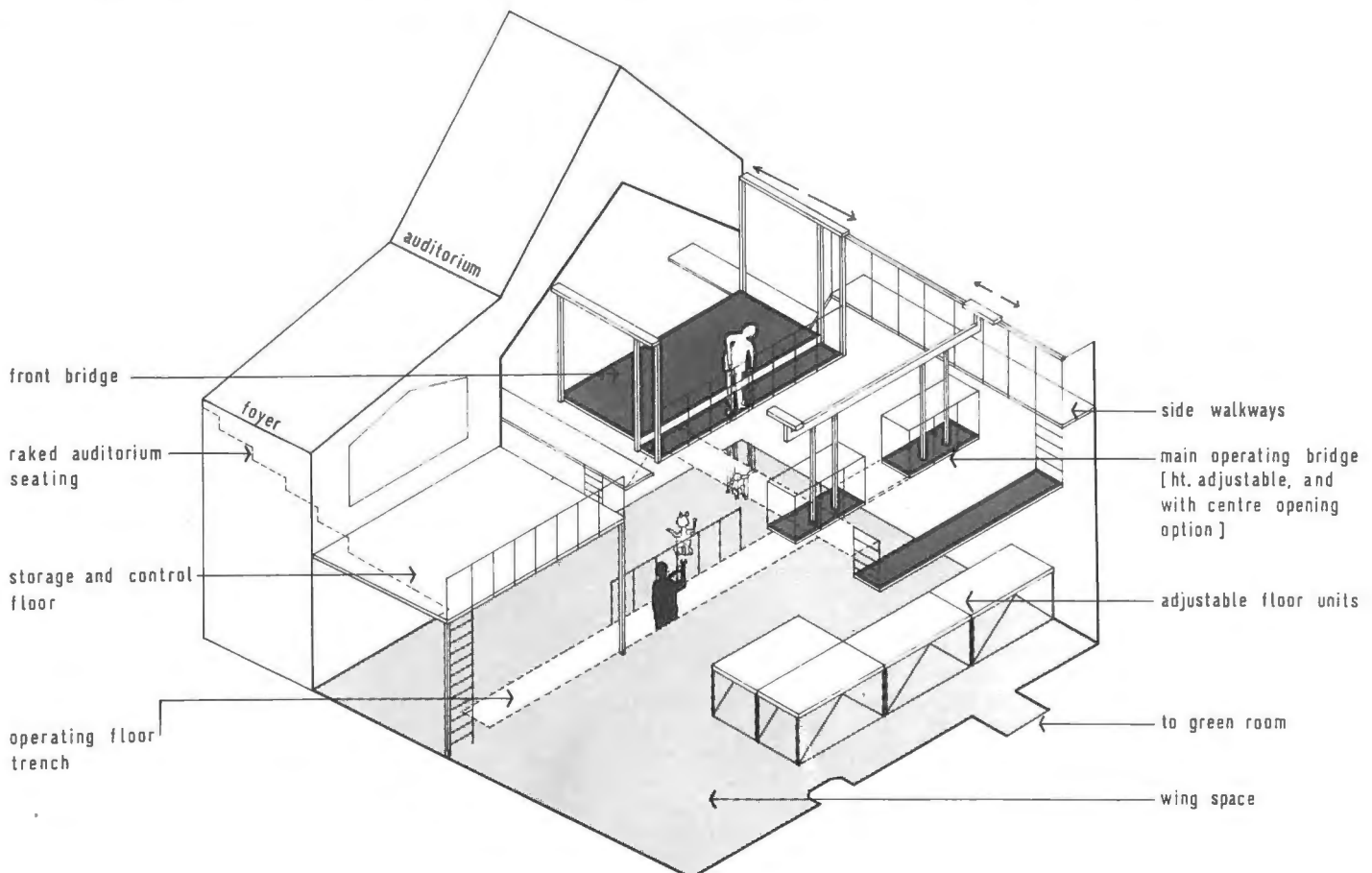
lighting board (Green Ginger, 40 way, 3 preset in two 20 way units) and sound control (not yet selected) will be situated on this bridge with an optional position in a control room at the rear of the auditorium. The second bridge serves as the main operating platform and will allow puppeteers to animate marionettes over the entire stage area. It is height adjustable to allow for different string lengths of visiting companies and splits in the middle to allow centre entrances and exits. Each of these features is unique in this country and to the writer's knowledge are not combined in this way anywhere.

The stage floor will consist of height-adjustable trolleys so that live theatre and puppet theatre can take place at various levels while a trench across the width of the stage allows rod puppet operation in front of the house tabs, which can be raised through a slot in the front bridge. Large scale rod or shadow puppet productions and live presentations are possible by the movable proscenium which, when tracked upstage, gives a total performing height of six metres. These facilities allow all the

traditional, contemporary and experimental type of puppet theatre to take place under good conditions.

The auditorium seats from 198 to 204, depending upon the size of bottoms sitting on the six bench seats at the front. These benches are removable in order to accommodate wheelchairs, to allow extensions of the stage and for accommodating television cameras.

Every available space has been used to its advantage for the theatre's various amenities (see plan) and the architect, Peter Codling, has sensitively preserved and enhanced the original character of the building. A rood staircase has been restored and connects to a balcony above becoming an extension of the performing area. The timber beamed roof of the auditorium has been left exposed and the whitewash repainted a cherry red. Internal brickwork has been faced with handmade bricks donated by the Istock Group. The infilling of the auditorium windows leaves the original lines of the arches exposed on the inside and lights will be placed between the infill and the glass so that the building will



ISOMETRIC VIEW OF THE STAGE AREA  
TAKEN FROM UPSTAGE LEFT CORNER



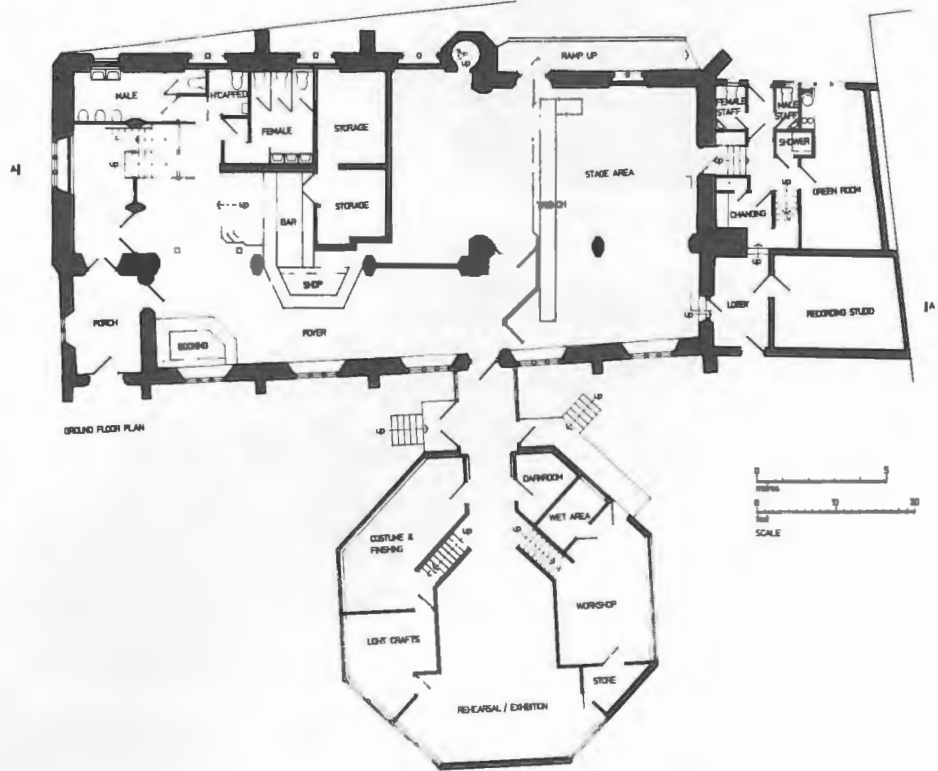
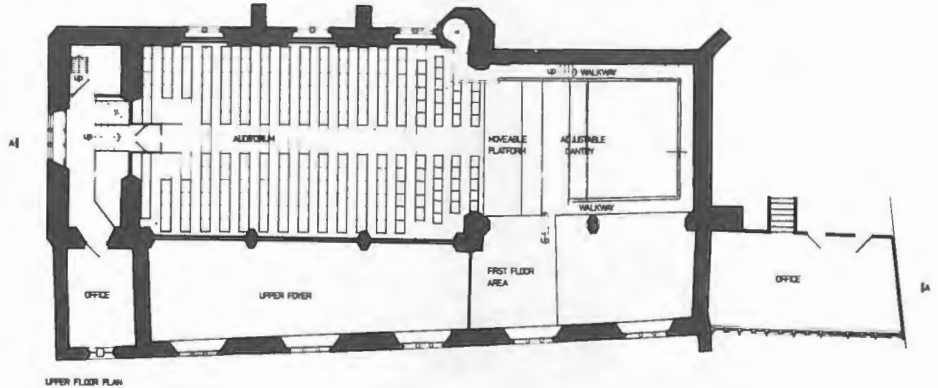
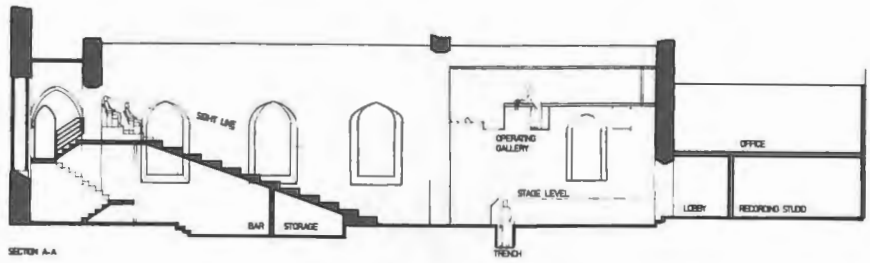
Raked auditorium seating.



Excavating the stage area gave the archaeologists a field day.



Church into Puppet theatre.



look alive from the Norwich inner ring road on which it is situated within easy walking distance of car parks.

Outline planning permission has been obtained for the extension of the foyer to a new building for studio accommodation on the adjoining church-yard. However, whilst it has always been recognised that the 'puppet centre' activities are integral to the whole operation, and that it is very desirable for the company's creative work

to be done on site, a decision was made to concentrate all efforts on the theatre first and to rent alternative temporary premises elsewhere in Norwich. Once the theatre is open, our fund raising efforts will be directed towards achieving this final phase in order to provide the full facilities required to operate the theatre efficiently, to provide exhibition space, making the whole a very worthwhile attraction for visitors between performances, and to run



*DaSilva puppets after Tenniel.*



*Geppetto and Pinocchio.*

the various courses for children, adults, teachers and trainee puppeteers.

The theatre will become the touring base for DaSilva Puppet Theatre who will continue to use this name for trading, particularly touring, although the official company name has been changed to Norwich Puppet Theatre Trust Limited.

The company will present seasons of performances from repertoire and plan to produce a wide range of presentations including new works and others drawn from existing plays, opera and ballet. The building will offer good puppet theatre

facilities to touring companies and it is hoped that it will soon become a centre for the puppet arts of international significance.

We are extremely fortunate to have found such an intrinsically beautiful building to start with. It has so many natural features which can easily be incorporated into the design so that it will be unnecessary to spend money on lavish decorations in order to create an artificial atmosphere. The atmosphere is already there — one of welcoming dignity.

Today, as I write, the first of the steel structures with the tracks for the moving

bridges are being hoisted into position. The theatre seats, which came secondhand from Crewe Theatre, have all been reupholstered in a beautiful moquette (rejected by a German bus seat order because of pattern flaws which do not affect us) by three trainees under the Manpower Services scheme, and are ready for fixing. The main house electrics have all been installed and the toilets and bars are functional.

When we launched this project just over a year ago we were warned that this was the hard way of doing the job, but for us it was the only way, simply because of the impossibility of raising the money required, with little chance of Arts Council funding. (Puppet theatres which do not normally employ actors in an acting capacity have only recently come within the area of subsidy and, at the moment, very little money is available for new projects.) So, the offer of £30,000 from the Manpower Services Commission for giving work experience to previously unemployed youngsters labelled as 'low achievers' was accepted in both hands and this, put with other money raised from local industry, enabled work on the project to be started. Now, twelve months later, the total income towards the scheme including gifts in kind, exceeds £80,000.

We still have a long way to go — money is required for the emergency lights system, sound and intercom system, stage fittings etc., but with a fair measure of continued support we should be open this year.

Meanwhile, the Manpower Services Commission are delighted with the success of the project from their point of view and have agreed to an extension of the scheme for a further three months. Jobs for the youngsters have been given as much priority as getting the theatre built and, so far, the scheme has enabled seventeen youngsters to leave and take up permanent employment.



*Hansel and Gretel.*

# Be Prepared

DOROTHY TENHAM

Yes, I was a Girl Guide! Indeed, as I remember it, my entire personal war-effort was geared towards out-badging the number of medals I once saw displayed on Goering's chest. I had no idea in those young days that 'Be Prepared' was a motto worthy of adoption by most backstage theatre workers. I think that most SMs realise the importance of being prepared for all eventualities within their own particular jobs. In this hiatus of theatre preservation and expansion caused, we are told, by 'economic difficulties', I would like to suggest that now is an excellent time for us all to take a close look at our past achievements and prepare for a much better future. The buildings and management of the theatres already in existence leave a lot to be desired. Now is the time to prepare for better things if our jobs are to be preserved and the conditions of employment improved in the future.

If a theatre is pulled down in our Capital City for any reason, it has to be replaced — but how? The Prince Charles is a cinema; the Royalty (where more money was spent on the projection room than on the stage equipment) can hardly be said to replace the old Stoll; the New London is fast becoming nothing more than a conference centre and an extra outside broadcast TV studio. What hope is there for the Criterion and the Shaftesbury when their turn comes to join the good old theatres in the sky?

When I was living and working in Canada in the 1950's, I met a young architect who was anxious to join the, then semi-professional, Montreal Players. He just wanted to learn about the theatre — anything about the theatre — and meet some theatre people. At the time he was one of the architects working on the new and very big Canadian National Railway Headquarters in the bustling centre of down-town Montreal. His name was Sean Kenny. What a pity that one of the last things that he worked on, the New London Theatre, is wasted as far as the theatre is concerned. It needed a Sean Kenny of the management world for it ever to have realised its potential. My experience of management has led me to believe that there is no such animal. Consequently we, those of us who prefer to work in ordinary theatre situations, were better off with the old Winter Garden.

The old Stoll was considered uneconomically large and old and impersonal. A new theatre was welcomed by many who thought that the Royalty was modern and the right size for companies somewhat smaller than Kismet. It has not proved to be the outstanding success it should have been. The Prince Charles, I can recall, was to be cheered as a suitable Leicester Square

alternative to the Fortune. The kindest criticism I heard offered twelve months after its opening was that it was most 'unFortunate'!

I concede that many of the problems in these fairly new theatres are in-built. Everyone is very ready to join a 'bash the architect' campaign. For the past twenty years it has been a favourite backstage sport. Twenty years is long enough. It's time that we started to look elsewhere — management perhaps? — for the cause of the cynicism which now automatically arises out of the knowledge that a new theatre is about to take shape. I have never worked in any theatre where everything backstage was exactly as I, personally, would wish it to be. Theatre buildings are very personal things and we all have our own ideas of the ideal concept. Those of us who have to make them work as well as possible for a company deserve to have all the mod. cons. available at the time included in them for our own help and convenience. Thank goodness that some of the worst

mistakes gave birth to the ABTT consultation body. What a pity we cannot encourage more people to consult before the event and not during or after the plans have been drawn up and the idea has already taken 'concrete' form. Before money is once more released in the direction of 'The Arts' in this country, I suggest that we all need to study closely the mistakes of the recent past and make sure that the money of the future is not wasted on what can only work in very rare circumstances.

The future managements have a great number of headaches in their inheritance already. Don't let's add to them by our mistakes in the future. I find it very refreshing that one of the newest members of management (I nearly called him newest management, but he's my age and therefore far from new!) is turning one of the oldest theatres in the country into a success. He even likes his old building. There must be a lesson to learn from this example alone. Let us not wait too long before we learn it.

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# PRODUCT NEWS

The ABTT memory control symposium held in January provided the rare opportunity for an informative and informal get together of manufacturers and lighting men at Warwick University. For the benefit of those unable to be present we have asked Adrian Dightam, chief lighting technician, London Contemporary Dance Theatre, to review the occasion.

Our extended products feature in this issue also includes John Leonard reporting on some significant developments of sound controls in France.

## Memoria 80

Where is it all going to go next. I keep saying to myself what more can they put on to a control board that is going to make the way it works any better. Well the answer is a lot more. Don't ask me what – but while the competition is as hot as it is at the moment manufacturers are going to have to keep updating the facilities of their respective controls just to keep in business. We all had in our theatre's SP's and Three-sets and LC's and CD's that lasted for ten to fifteen years or more. The memory board that I bought for LCDT three years ago is already obsolete and I'm talking here about a relatively up-to-date desk that was reliable. But I find myself saying that we must get a new control board soon, very soon, because I need the 'profile fade' and I need the 'dual floppy disc' and I need the . . . ! When of course all I need is the memory facility of circuits and levels that can be assigned speedily to a few masters, two hands and a lively brain.

Too late now anyway. The race is on. The operators have had their appetites whetted and they want more facilities and colour VDU's and this and that; and of course it is fun, all these buttons and lights, and you can do a lot of tricks, but it's funny how routine it all becomes. Working a fast show on a manual board was real fun and it made you work, really work. Now it's all one finger – or for those who like to think that they are working it manually a few levers to push. Hands up those board operators who come down at the end of a show with a real sense of having contributed – and hands up those who at the close of a show pat the memory desk on its mimic board, say well done, goodnight – and cover it up with its own tailored bright red dust sheet. Don't get me wrong – I'm for memory boards very much. But after Memoria 80 – it really did strike me that even ultimate control of the lighting soon will be under a CPU rather than a MAN. 'No', I hear the shout go up, 'there will always be an operator.' WANNA BET?

Memoria 80 was the extremely bright and innovative idea of Barry Griffiths and Mike Reese of the Midlands Branch of the ABTT. That fine organisation for us technicians that I and many of its members don't support enough. Anyway Barry and Mike decided that instead of having a routine meeting they would do something

that would benefit us all. So being themselves in the process of getting their own control desk, but still waiting, they thought it would be a very good idea if they invited all the suppliers of memory boards in this country to come along to Warwick and display their wares. And it seems most manufacturers thought so too. Thorns absence was a disappointment however, because most of us would like to have seen representative models of all the controls on the market. I was particularly sorry they were not around as I bought one of their fine controls for LCDT a few years ago – and I like Thorns.

Anyway, on entering the theatre, the stage was a sight indeed. I didn't know that so many controls now had VDUs, there must have been a dozen of them. Indicators galore were flashing – and my fingertips started to get that itchy feeling which has resulted in many a button being pushed with no idea of what I'm doing. All the controls were arranged in a large semi-circle around the stage. There were two rules to be observed; only one desk could be displayed and no dimmers were allowed. It was after all unnecessary to have lights going up and down to see how a control works.

The time-table ran thus: From about mid-day to 2 p.m. the stage was opened for everyone to have a look and talk to the reps, or have a chat at the bar. The stage was packed at this time with 250 people moving around comparing one desk with another without the distraction of someone selling a G clamp or the new profile bomb tank with non-stick shutters. It was a unique exhibition in that it was devoted entirely to memory control desks. Then at 2 p.m. came the discussions and demonstrations proper.

Fred Bentham opened the show with a short speech. I like Fred. He says things that do put your feet firmly on the ground. His wealth of experience and being perhaps the father of British Theatre Lighting gives him the right to say some things that I respect but don't entirely agree with – but he did set me on my opening train of thought. I have not the space here to quote him, but *ABTT News*, January 1980, has some of his speech in and I'm sure the next edition of *ABTT Sightline* will quote him in more detail. One thing for sure, Fred's eloquence is not shared by many of his contemporaries. Now I know it's not easy

talking for ten minutes about anything to an audience and particularly difficult if it is the workings of a memory board which you must put into a ten-minute nutshell. But if sales of memory boards depended that day on the salesmen's performance instead of the silent flashing of indicators on the controls themselves, then I'm afraid not many boards would have been sold. Too much time was spent telling us about facilities on desks that they all had in common, e.g. that they all had memories, and timers, etc., rather than a hard-hitting concise 10 minute demonstration on the specialities of their particular control. Statelight did very well indeed with illustrations and a *News at Ten* style presentation. Berkey set up TV cameras and monitors and looked very impressive and then they proceeded to blow it with a garbled monologue which mostly concentrated on past failures (I thought only the British undersold their products like this). The Swedes were good, one of them marching about with his remote control doing the most complex lighting changes with the same ease as changing channels on your TV. The achievements of all the manufacturers of lighting control boards in recent years have been quite remarkable and this is something they can be proud of.

Here is a brief rundown of the exhibits at MEMORIA 80 with a few comments on items of special interest rather than a full brief. This is better gained from the dealer.

## BERKEY COLORTRAN

Watch out English lighting manufacturers. Here's a firm with a lot of potential and a lot of guts behind it. They are going to make big inroads in British Theatre in the next couple of years. I went to see them in Burbank, California last Xmas and they have a good setup with people that have a type of energy that I haven't seen in England for a long time (except possibly their best friend in England, Tim Burnham). They were showing the very able Berkey Channel track. They will be very happy to supply full details on request. I rang Alistair Coubrough from Norwich Theatre Royal who was full of approval for it. He said it was exceptionally reliable. He was very impressed by the speed of operation, he said he can punch in circuits and levels at the same speed as the designer calls them, with no sweat at all. He also said they all appreciated the very straightforward operation. However he wished it had a little more manual facilities for those unpredictable Sunday concerts.

## CCT and MEMOLIGHT

A new improved version of this Israeli made control was shown. I really am trying to like this board – but it is still a little complicated. The new program however has given it more possibilities with less button-pushing and it is beginning to sell.

## THEATRE PROJECTS and the KLIIEGL PERFORMER

Nothing too special about this. It is rather like a small office computer in looks. It has



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# STRAND

**Rank Strand make it**

a VDU and all the basic memory facilities. TPL mainly have it for rent at a terrifying £400 a week. Tell that to the Arts Council. Still there are always the trade shows, I suppose.

**ADB MASTERLIGHT SYSTEM**  
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ADB controls are well liked on the continent and their designs in controls tend to favour the continental form of lighting controls rather than ours. The complete touring version shown was quite large (or long) compared with the mini-systems that we see from other manufacturers. However you can buy just the main control desk and repertory disc unit. I like the facility of being able to take cues straight off the 'floppy disc' in the event of an emergency. It also has a considerable 'BOOST' facility when a state has been recorded. You can if you wish adjust any level, whether individual or grouped, by up to 40%. It is worth mentioning that ADB are known abroad for their reliability.

**BPS represented by CONTEL**

Very bright ideas coming from this firm. They have designed and produced a 120 way memory unit that will add on to any make of manual control. It has most of the basic functions that all memory boards have with the added bonus of being able to keep the manual control installed and fully

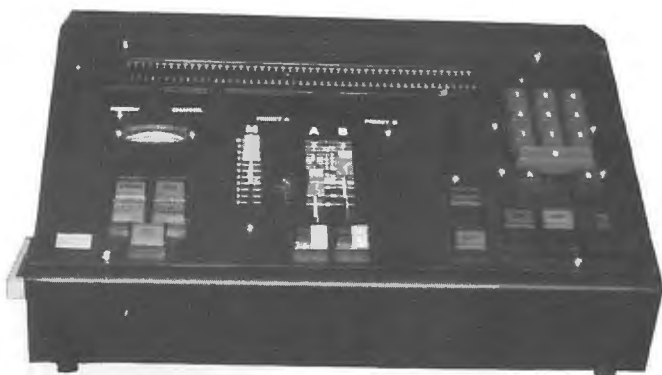


this can and is being updated all the time it should theoretically never become obsolete. This particular suitcase model handles 96 channels and up to 250 cues. There is a disc unit and copy printer as add on items. It does everything the bigger boards do with numerous extras, like automatic cueing which lets you run a sequence of cues, complete with crossfade times. Chain cueing or 'chasing' as we know it. They have what I think is the first pin-matrix system which in

So we all had to put up with the Duet – which is a nice board, but there cannot be many serious technicians who haven't looked into DUET a long time ago. So I'm going to digress from the exhibition a little and talk about the control that I think marks the next major step ahead in lighting control.

Light Palette has, amongst other basic facilities, 6 faders for the six possible parts of any cue. Any fade can be programmed to be manual or if timed can be taken over manually without matching. This control has screens which display the running cue sheet up to ten lines at a time. All data for each cue part is displayed such as fade time or manual, split fade, delays and fade profiles. A useful feature is a Rate Wheel that allows proportional modification of all recorded fades and can also take control of running fades so that they are completed manually. Welcome too, is an electronic patch between dimmers and control channels. This can be changed and recorded as required. Light Palette can bring the memory control back to the lighting operator who feels that he can help the show by his sensitive control of the movement of light. This board is technology helping the craftsman. The best thing to happen in memory control since Q-File and MMS. A very, very important board for technicians and operators – and most appropriate for Memoria 80 one would have thought. But we had to put up with a rather patronising speech from a senior rep about a board that most of us know inside out. Ah well! I wonder how many AVAB's and Channel tracks there will be installed instead of Light Palettes with that sort of sales pitch.

Vic Oliver, Technical Manager of the newly renovated Empire Theatre, Liverpool, is very pleased with their Light Palette now that it has settled down. They find that after getting to know it, it is fairly easy to work. They feel that they have had excellent service from Rank Strand! And the back-up module, which is almost a complete control in itself, has been extremely useful in the couple of teething problems that they have had with the main control.



operational. The best of both worlds, perhaps. I rang Richard Evans of the Festival Theatre in Malvern where there is one of the two models installed. He says that it is very good for them as they have many one night stands. They find that the full flexibility of the manual side is enhanced by the use of the memory side for fast sections of cues in all types of shows.

**AVAB of Sweden gets the Adrian Dightam PANDORA's BOX award**

I think we were all impressed by the incredible things that this tiny suitcase control could do. Coupled with the fact that it can also be controlled in every function from a hand-held infra-red remote. It is completely software based – so its facilities reside solely in the computer program. As

the event of an emergency could give you the chance of creating something on-stage which resembles what is in the memories. They have colour-coded diode pins which give you nine different preset lighting levels. At last a real pin-matrix back-up. Its frightening in a way. The AVAB 2001 is a very intelligent board. If it ever went wrong during a show it might need a New York analyst to get through to it rather than the local engineer. See it!

**STRAND ELECTRIC and DUET**

'Excuse me.'  
'Yes.'  
'Could you tell me why you didn't bring the Light Palette along?'  
'Well we did not feel that this exhibition represented the correct sales market.'





## STATELIGHT

This enterprising firm have made a very nice little control that I hope will find its way into many a theatre in the near future.

The model on show at Memoria 80 was the basic 64/64 model. That is channels and memories. It has all the characteristics of all memory boards but at quite a low cost comparatively. It includes a keyboard, with '&', 'plus' and 'sequence' keys. It also has a 'Balance Control' which is a large drum control which can give the final lighting balance after setting up all the different circuits and levels on the manual side or on group masters. Statelight made a very good job in explaining their control in the allotted time. They are very enthusiastic people and I hope they do well.

## DATAQUE and Tim Burnham lighting

Tim brought along the first really low-cost memory board that you can hire. At around £35 a week for the 32 way model – it takes some beating. It can record up to 100 cues, it can link to a VDU and it has most of the basic facilities of all memory controls. It works with most dimmer systems as well – and the new Mk. 2 version has arrived with percentage marks that go from one to ten on the masters instead of one to fifteen as on the first model. (Very strange saying put circuit 21 to check 13½.)

Finally, the TIPSPOT riggers control was present. This wireless circuit controller is primarily for use as a riggers control



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although you can build a lighting state on it. Very useful for a repertory theatre with daily changeovers or houses with small crews that can't afford to loose someone on the board all the time.

So there it was. Memoria 80 surprised me. When I had to buy the memory board for LCDT three years ago — there were two in the running — now it's almost too much of a choice. Now I would have great difficulty in making my pick from the controls I saw at Warwick that day.

Is it time now for the manufacturers to look to other sides of our trade that could be improved? What about someone developing an automatic lantern-focusing device that we can all afford — not just the Germans? Or a new lightweight dimmer that could be part of the lantern and controlled by multi-plexed signals? Or how about the colour filter that changes colour depending on the signal you send it and so on. The trouble is that the time saved in lighting and plotting by the memory system has now been taken up by the larger rigs, and more adventurous sets, etc. It would be nice to see advances on some other sides of lighting NOW.

ADRIAN DIGTAM

Chief Lighting Technician  
London Contemporary Dance Theatre

## Sound Futures

JOHN A. LEONARD

'When,' I am often asked, 'is theatre sound control going to catch up with theatre lighting control?' Until recently, the answer was, 'By the looks of things at the moment, never.' Manufacturers of mixing desks for theatre use were few and far between, and the commonest sight in a theatre sound control room was a modified P.A. or recording studio desk; a ten into four, maybe, with a clumsy and cumbersome speaker switching matrix tacked onto the output stage. 100 volt line transmission to speakers was the norm, very often utilising step down transformers that were designed for public address systems where high intelligibility rather than high fidelity was the overriding factor: yet at either end of these makeshift controls one could find high quality equipment. The Revox A77 tape machine, Quad and H-H amplifiers, Tannoy, Bose, and Altec speakers, studio quality microphones, and broadcast quality transcription decks, arms and cartridges for disc reproduction, were then, as now, standard items to be found in any self-respecting theatre sound control room. All capable of providing far greater flexibility and higher quality than the control equipment would allow. All was not lost, however; for a small band of sound technicians were rapidly becoming increasingly frustrated with the limited range of control equipment available to them, and were turning to custom building to provide the facilities that were so badly needed. Ian Gibson and Audio Developments produced the desk for the Manchester Royal Exchange, Theatre Projects and Alice (Stancoil), equipped the new National Theatre sound control rooms,



*The Libra theatre sound console.*

and the prototype of what was to become the Libra System, was being assembled in Bristol, with the help of Helios Electronics. Bill Graham and David Collison were sorting out the final details of the computer assisted desk that is soon to be installed at the Barbican Centre, and this marked a small but fairly important step in the development of theatre sound control.

'Computer Assisted' Lighting boards had been around for ten years, and developing rapidly from their early, slightly cumbersome format. The MMS and Q File systems were being seen in more and more lighting control rooms, as theatre managements committed themselves to the comparatively large capital outlay. In recording studios, the automated mixing desk was also making

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headway, with a widening variety of systems to choose from. Perhaps the most interesting of these was the Neve NECAM system, which utilises servo-controlled faders, but that's another story. Yet still, in the under capitalised world of theatre sound, specialist mixing desks were the province of the major theatre companies, and it is only in the past few years that combined pressure from sound engineers, and sound conscious directors, that high quality theatre sound systems have started to appear in more than just a few select theatres.

Since then, the market has slowly but surely, started to expand. There are eight Libra desks in theatres all over the country, including a touring model owned by the Old Vic (latterly Prospect) Company. Hardware House in conjunction with Peter Barham Associates, are about to launch an automated theatre console, and at CISCO, the French company, Tecnicobel, showed their new CX40 special effects mixing desk. It is this desk that was mentioned in the last issue of CUE, and it is to this desk that the rest of this article is devoted.

Basically, the desk consists of a main-frame, into which various modules are plugged. In its simplest form, it appears to be a straight sixteen into sixteen mixer, but here, one must look more carefully at the routing facilities that are available. Suffice it to say at this point, that each output is equipped with a Voltage Controlled Amplifier (VCA), that is selectable to one of four master controls, or an external control. For the benefit of those who have not come across a VCA, I should explain that this is an amplifier whose gain can be varied in proportion to a varying D.C. control voltage. It is thus possible to control several discrete sound sources by one control voltage, without mixing the sources together. To return to the CX40, each input comprises the following feature; electronically or transformer- balanced mic or line inputs, treble and bass E.Q.,  $\pm 12$  dB @ 6KHz and  $\pm 12$ dB @ 60 Hz respectively, E.Q. in/out switch, pre-fade-listen, and mute switches, and a miniature linear fader. The sixteen input controls are arranged in four groups of four at the extreme right side of the desk, next to the output modules.

There are sixteen of these (24 to special order), each consisting of the following controls. A sixteen way input selection switch bank, a six way D.C. grouping switch, P.F.L. and monitor controls, and an analogue V.U. meter. Outputs are unbalanced, although balanced outputs can be provided as an optional extra. Next to these modules come the four master control sections, each having sixteen output level potentiometers, a full-up switch, and a full mute switch, and an associated linear fader. The output modules can be switched to any one of these four masters which provide the control voltages for the VCAs, and can therefore be considered as preset masters.

It can be seen that the desk has some very interesting control functions, and I will attempt to describe a typical operational set-up. Once signal sources have been assigned to the various input channels, and given a level, and tone correction, any signal, or combination of signals may be selected to any output group, or combination of groups. Thus it is possible to have all sixteen inputs selected to all sixteen outputs, or each input selected to a different output, or any permutation of the two. It is then possible to assign any output, or combination of outputs to any one of the four master controls, which act effectively as presets. In addition to this, each output may be switched to independent, at which point it is controlled solely by its own fader, or it can be switched to an external control source, to allow remote operation. The provision of output potentiometers at the preset stage, taken with all the other control possibilities must make this desk one of the most flexible mixers for theatre work available. There is one other function that I have yet to mention. At the right hand side of the desk is a module that contains what the French press release calls '1 manual circular sound quadra-stick, and 1 electronic circular sound'. In other words, one quad pan-pot, and a voltage controlled quad pan-pot. Both of these controls are accessed through a pin matrix, so that various combinations of outputs can be panned. It can be seen from the above, that this desk has been specifically designed for theatre effects work, and the presetting and remote control facilities should prove very useful. In addition, interface with a computer for subsequent automation ought to be a simple matter.

I should explain that this article has been written without the benefit of a console to play with. All the information has been gleaned from a variety of technical sheets that Tecnicobel issued at CISCO, so there may well be some important areas that I have missed. I hope to travel to France in the near future, to visit the IRCAM centre in Paris, and I will take the opportunity to visit Tecnicobel, and try the desk out 'hands on'. As yet, there is no importer of Tecnicobel equipment in this country, so we will have to wait and see if the CX40 can advance the state of theatre sound still more. Judging by the specifications, and assuming it is not priced too highly, it will make a welcome and versatile addition to the theatre sound engineer's steadily growing choice of equipment.

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## New PAR Fittings

David Hersey, who has used everything from aircraft landing lights to torch bulbs, is just the sort of person who understands the value of PAR lights. David Hersey Associates Ltd have announced two units



for PAR 46 and 56 lamps. The technical data for the PAR 46 (shown here) is: Input voltage 220-240V Output 5.5V, Watts 25. The fitting can be supplied ready to accept a standard hook clamp for 48mm bars or for direct attachment to a 'besa' box. Its standard colour is black but other colours are available to special order.

The cool running of the lamp enables it to be colour-sprayed to almost any colour, but a colour frame is available to utilise standard ranges of gel.

The fitting for the PAR 56 lamp is a scaled down PAR CAN. It comes with a range of adjustments and with a colour frame. Like the PAR 46 fitting, its standard colour is black but other colours are available.

## Strand's new portable lighting control

Strand's new Tempus lighting control system is about to be launched as we go to press so a proper assessment will have to wait for a later issue. Basically it seems to

be a development of their Mini II system. The desk is available as a six way lever control box or as a 12, 18, 24, 30 or 36 way, two pre-set desk. There is also a 12 way extension desk designed to save expense when expansion of the system is required. There are two new features, a dipless crossfade between pre-sets and an auto-timer facility on the crossfader.



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# Letters to the Editor

From Mr. Francis Reid

Dear Sir,

Many practising theatre electricians and lighting designers will have been surprised to read Dr. Tarrant's suggestion that lamps in series are not practicable. Surely the series pairing of 120 volt PAR lamps has become standard practice in recent years. Like many of my colleagues I have specified series pairs for long runs, for short runs, for the west end, for Europe, for tours, for theatres large and small, conventional or converted. The problem is no greater than remembering to use the correct splitter.

A small price to pay for the low voltage filament advantages that Dr. Tarrant explains – plus the extra oomph of low voltages (like my old friend Walter Plinge I am unscientific and have to fall back on evocative subjective words like *grotty* and *oomph*).

From my own work with low-voltage beam-lights at Glyndebourne in the early sixties and my observations across Europe, I am convinced that one of the most promising areas for theatre lighting research is the combination of low-voltage filaments with parabolic optics (whether part of the lamp or part of the housing).

Yours sincerely,

FRANCIS REID,  
4 Hospital Road,  
Bury St. Edmunds.

From Mr. David Martin

Dear Sir,

The article in the November/December issue of *Cue* in Product News headed Multi-Mini Luminaire complexity was, I am sure, read with interest by most of your readers. A number of questions of fact concerning Strand Products in the article should I feel be corrected.

1. The Pattern 123 is not dead. The luminaire has been largely superseded by the 803 and 833 but we continue to sell the Pattern 123, have current stocks and intend to manufacture further quantities.
2. Turning to the 803 and 833 there are significant differences between these two luminaires and we are surprised that your unnamed reviewer has looked only skin deep. The flexibility of the adjustable beam spread and user-convenience are very different. The 803 takes advantage of the small envelope size of the Tungsten Halogen lamps to get a wider beam spread at flood setting and has a front hinged lamp tray to ensure ease of relamping without the need to remove or disturb a barndoor attachment. The 833 on the other hand is limited to 500W and is indeed designed for the low-cost 500W T1 lamp with its larger envelope – lamp cost, particularly

replacement lamp cost is a very significant factor to many users of Stage Lighting Equipment.

3. The Pattern 23 is still rated at 500W, a rating determined by the temperature of the lens tube, overcome on the 823 and 813 by much larger lens diameters.
4. The beam spreads which you quoted for the 823 and 813 are half-peak angles whereas the figures which you quote for another manufacturer's products are cut-off angles. The difference is considerable especially for American originated equipment. The cut-off angles for the 813 are 22 to 35° and for the 823 22°.

Perhaps at some future date we can look for an article explaining some of the different methods of presenting photometric data and how this affects the performance claims of different manufacturers.

Yours faithfully,

DAVID C. MARTIN,  
Market Development Manager,  
Luminaires,  
Rank Strand Electric.



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# Between Cues

The thoughts of  
Walter Plinge

## A Plinge Rejected

I am suffering from acute rejection symptoms. A leading journal of architecture commissioned my opinion of a new theatre and rejected the resultant pearls of wisdom. Straightforward rejection I can take on the chin (that's how I've survived a quarter-century in the theatre) but to have my polished prose referred to as 'your initial draft' is enough to make any Plinge throw in the pencil. Where did I go wrong? Were my infinitives too inexpertly split? Or my commas too inelegantly scattered? Surely it could not be because I had committed the unspeakable critical sin of *enthusiasm*? Confident that Somewhere there is Someone who will not reject – nay, might even welcome – a Plinge opinion on the *Ipswich Wolsey* let it be recorded that *I like it*. (O.K., so the lighting angles don't acknowledge the importance of an actor's eyes and teeth, but that can be solved by the traditional technique of planting extra lamps on the walls.) Internally the *Wolsey* is a bright, cheerful welcome playroom. Externally, an oasis of stylish domestic architecture in the midst of a particularly hideous example of civic centre barbarism. A dramatic assertion that there is no correlation between cheapness and nastiness.

## Celebrating Stage

Still on the theme of rejection, a sentence disappeared from my little appearance in Centenary STAGE. As I had labelled the missing sentence as 'an aside', the sub-editor may well have thought that it was intended only for his private eye. Or he may have thought that I was trying to insert a free advert. The rejected aside – *I'll be damned if I'll stick with British Theatre throughout the battering that has been officially prescribed for it in the eighties. I am open to offers from any country that actually wants a theatre enough to be prepared to pay for it.* STAGE was absolutely right to cut this: it is not the stuff that centenary celebrations are made of. This was a time to rejoice in the glorious achievements of the British stage rather than contemplate the official attitude to the performing arts... an attitude which traditionally oscillates between tolerance and indifference but is currently locked into positive contempt. The Minister for the Arts appeared at the STAGE's *Savoy Lunch* to toast *The Profession*. His smooth quips were greeted politely but the air was heavy with some two thousand pros silently projecting a variety of emotions from despair to disgust. But it was but a passing moment on a joyful day – greater love hath no other profession for its newspaper. Thank you, STAGE, for celebrating your

first centenary with such theatrical flair. Even though it must have cost your last 100 years savings or your next 100 years mortgage – or both.



Costume design by  
Osbert Lancaster  
for *Tiresias*

## Osbert Recalled

I missed the Osbert Lancaster Retrospective – my fault entirely: I was undergoing a tiny touch of the leap-year confusions. Sadly, because some of the exhibited items would surely have triggered off the kind of rosy memories that tend to overtake Waltraute and I as we sip our twilight cocoa. Like . . .

REMEMBERING the designs arriving: one flat, or border, or cloth per day. In London, by taxi from the Daily Express. In Wexford by the Irish Mail. After the last design came the Designer, just in time to offer sympathetic help to a young Plinge struggling to coax a reluctant prop *Thieving Magpie* into a not very virtuoso display of thieving and flying . . .

cloth. This was for Poulenc's *Tiresias* – possibly my own favourite Osbert design. Seen for only two performances in this Aldeburgh production with elegant role reversals by Peter Pears (in style defining wig) and Jennifer Vyvyan (with liberating levitating bosom balloons) and John Cranko choreographing Osbert's magnificent goosehead umbrella with, if memory serves, Trevor Anthony doing the obvious with it to Hervey Alan. All this incidentally in the Mk1 Jubilee Hall (when it was still a genuine village hall) as part of a double bill with a John Piper Monteverdi mounted by a six-person stage management/technical crew who were coping simultaneously with the world premiere of 'Noyes Fludde' some miles down the road. . . .



Osbert Lancaster  
design for  
*Thieving Magpie*,  
Wexford Festival,  
1959

REMEMBERING the hours, literally hours, of detailed mostly subliminal acting area light balancing at the request of a voluble Italian director while Osbert waits to say, almost apologetically, 'could I be a frightful bore and ask to see the sky in a touch, just a touch, deeper blue' . . .

REMEMBERING throughout a man of wit, elegance and patience. . . .

THERE! You see, although I failed to get to the retrospective exhibition, the mere thought of the exhibits was enough to stimulate rosy recall!

### Street Television

Montreal, in winter, is an underground city. There is an extensive sub-strata of interconnecting metro stations and shopping malls which ensure that any confrontation with chill-factor at street level need only be nominal. There is an absence of buskers and more formal street theatre in this underground society but amidst the hustle and bustle a daily TV magazine programme rehearses and transmits in a performance space hollowed out from a principal shopping concourse.

### Postcard Opera

It was a short announcement in *Opera* magazine that first alerted me to the major publishing event of the architectural year. For months I eagerly and hopefully scanned the theatre bookshop bookshelves. I was not disappointed. The *Opera House Album* is a collection of turn-of-the-century postcards discovered in a Viennese bookshop by Charles Osborne and annotated by him for this lovely little book. They are, regretfully but predictably, all exterior photographs – archival material on theatre interiors is sadly scarce. Several of the pictured theatres recall fond memories for me: particularly *Hannover* which was one of my local opera houses (the other was Bielefeld) during an extended tour (by Royal Command) in the chorus of NATO. It was in Hannover that I saw my first asymmetric *Cosi*, discovered *Matrimonio Segreto* (but called, of course, *Heimliche Ehe*) and became a fan of the young Christa Ludwig. I recall a sparkling circular auditorium (new within the old shell) dominated by ceiling high tabs which opened wider than one's cone of vision from most of the stalls. But is distance lending enchantment . . . must go back!



### Seeing the Music

*Air Somebody's* in-flight mag once made me feel quite inadequate by printing a claim by a media-favoured (and media-flavoured) journalist that any half-decent writer's travel tab could be covered by in-flight scribbles. I have never received the inspiration to cover as much as a tot of duty-free gin. Until today when I am inspired (curiously, while travelling in the complimentary liquor cabin) to report the following from *Air Somebody Else's* in-flight mag –

*No one in his senses goes to a concert to hear music at its best. Live music cannot compete with recorded as to balance and finish. But nothing can compare with the thrill of experiencing music together with others. To say nothing of seeing and being seen. It was an architect what said it and he has just built a concert hall and I kid you not. So you agree with him, huh? Oh, dear.*

### Informeel

#### Concertgebouworkest

As a concertgoer I am always happiest when the band are dressed as casuals rather than as waiters. So I enjoyed a lovely wallow in Mozart at an informal sit-anywhere with Harnoncourt and the Concertgebouw. Harnoncourt's treatment of tempi and dynamics may be personal, even cavalier, but his approach to timbres and textures is sensually tingling. Although Amsterdam is East Anglia's gateway to the world and consequently a frequent Plinge stopover, I had never hitherto visited the Concertgebouw. As a child of the early Edinburgh Festivals, I have long been familiar with the orchestra but never their hall. I find that I have been a touch oversold in respect of the hall's ambience but considerably undersold as to its incredible clarity.



Königl. Theater.

Hannover. Jan 8. Sept. 1899.

*Handwritten text in German script, likely a postcard message or note, partially obscured by the caption and date.*