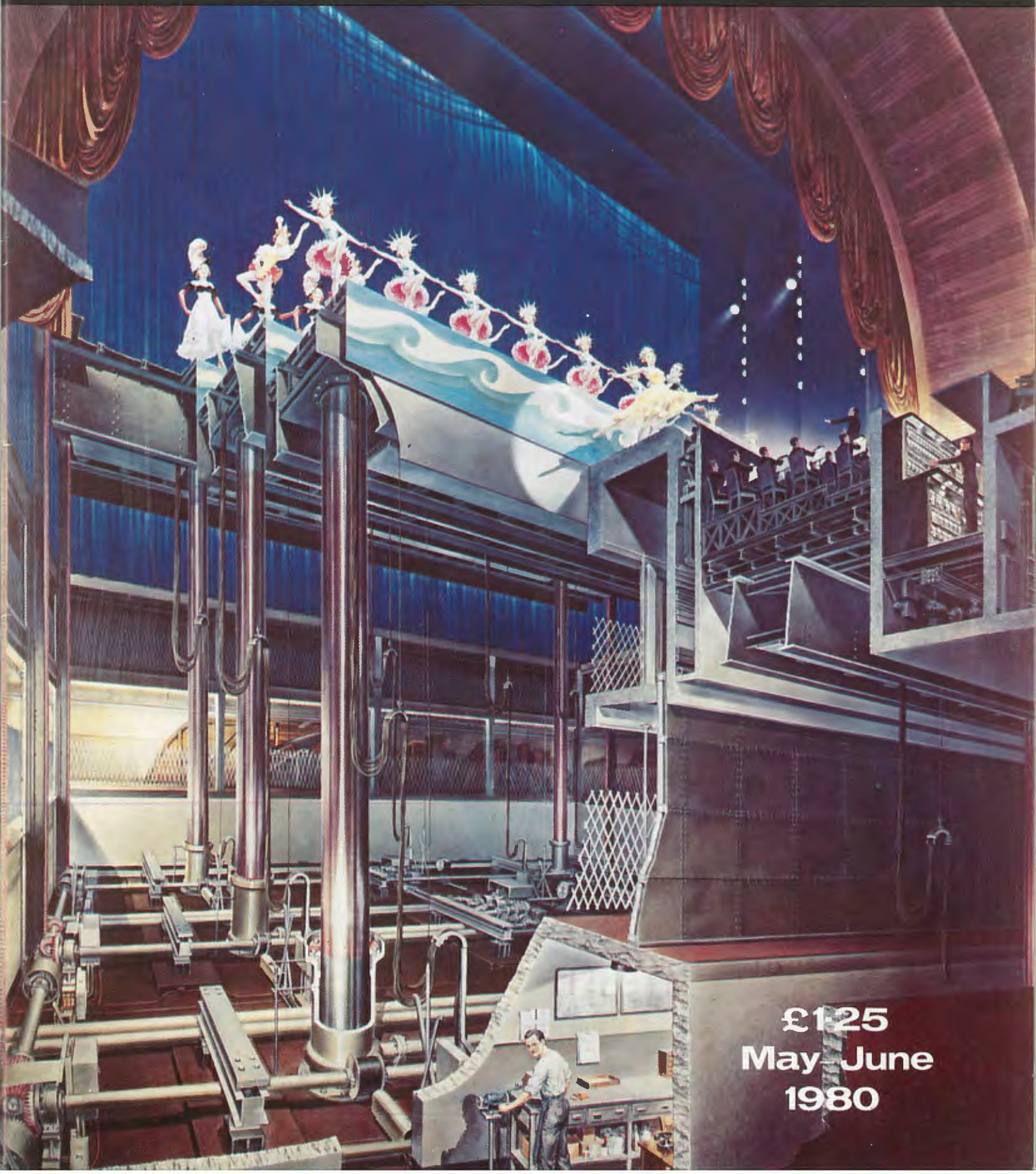


CUE

Technical Theatre Review



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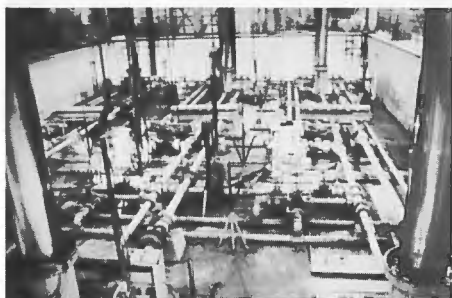
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The stage machinery of New York's Radio City Music Hall, as illustrated on our cover, was installed for the theatre's opening in 1932 and has been in continuous daily use ever since. The hydraulics continue to give trouble-free service and look set to feature in the theatre's productions for a long time to come.

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CUE

Technical Theatre Review

5

May—June 1980

Wanted: More Fairy Godfathers

As the *Sunday Times'* John Peter has gloomily pointed out the total sum contributed by all of industry to the income of all our theatres in 1978-79 was barely £100,000. Or, put another way, the cost of making just one 30-second commercial and screening it, nationwide, just 5 times.

Meanwhile, as our *Autolyucus* columns this month again seem to show, complete new theatrical enterprises are still being started up all over at prices for both the construction or conversion of the theatres themselves and for their equipment not much greater than this same £100,000, and the companies or sometimes just the few talented individuals who are nursing and coaxing these projects into existence are cheerfully soliciting funds. Despite, or possibly because of, the Arts Council's or a Local Authority's Seal of Approval on their fund-raising endeavours they seem to get more help locally from OAPs or Bring-and-buy-sales than they do from industry or commerce.

Is this because it is thought, within boards of directors, that an industrial company has no business to be in show business? Is it because of the company secretary's stock question: "what would the shareholders say?" To answer this, apart from 'professional' or vexatiously litigious shareholders, us widows and orphans would say what we would always say at company meetings we never knew were taking place anyway: "nothing".

In fact, we might be more enthusiastic about leaving our money in the keeping of a public company which showed at least some interest in the locality and the community in which it carried out its operations. 'Cultural sponsorship expenses', indeed, might show up as a more attractive item in its balance sheet than 'Unfunded obligations to overseas loan sharks' or whatever.

After all, did *anyone* except a politician ever hate a sponsor? Peeping slyly out from programmes, tucked away at the back of committees of management, humbly identifying himself on T-shirts or even, more boldly, on facades, fascias, and safety curtains, he seems rather a jolly fellow. Nicer, somehow, than Sir Subsidy Cut-Purse, puffing like an adder, and looking only for undertakings that will reflect his worthiness.

Give some money, we say to local business, to your friendly neighbourhood theatre. Get closer to what's happening there. Remember only that your patronage is not your passport to closer contact with naked showgirls in chains. Though, come to think of it, the customer might think it is.

The Music Hall

FRANCIS REID

The *Jumbo Auditorium* is alive and well and scattered across the United States. In particular, the jumbo auditorium forms an almost definitive component of university campus ecology. Big daddy of the species, however, is New York's 1932 *Radio City Music Hall* and as a piece of architecture it is something very very special indeed. It is a cathedral (no, *The Cathedral*) of Art Deco. A celebration of elegant restraint in movie palace construction. A hall for the big entertainment statement.

A statement has to be big to leap the 200 odd feet to the back row of this 6,000 seat hall. A leap that would be defeated if the walls were encrusted with an excess of twentieth-century hollywood baroque. But the simplicity of the auditorium is deceptive. The classical pitfalls in building a high-capacity pure-sightline house have been avoided. The balconies are shallow to avoid the illusion of isolation that is induced in an audience seated under any considerable overhang. The curves and contours of the ceiling overcome the bareness of the side walls and the choral staircases, which substitute for a possible shallow box layer, allow the formation of a controllable link between audience and performer. This link is further enhanced, in a fluid but controlled way, by the possibility of painting the entire auditorium ceiling curves with coloured light to carry the ambient mood of the stage through to the auditorium.

The seating capacities are:

Orchestra	3,410
1st Mezzanine	944
2nd Mezzanine	841
3rd Mezzanine	687
	<hr/>
	5,882

That a *shallow* balcony can seat 944 – or even 687 – is surely an indication of the auditorium width!

To assemble such an audience requires an expanse of circulation space and the foyers are correspondingly huge – and simple. They are the very epitome of Art Deco: from the restrained grandeur of the Grand Foyer to the understated sophistication of the Grand Lounge and the elegant intimacy of the powder rooms – every 'ladies' and 'gents' room a treasure house of art deco furniture.

By contrast the entrance lobby and box-office area is small and functional. As well as making for efficient audience processing – and something like 85% of the seats are unreserved – the restricted lobby enhances



the scale of the Grand Foyer. Emerging from the ticketing tunnel into the Foyer acreage immediately gives one a sense of having got an instant return for one's money.

ROXY

Opened in 1932 and saved from destruction and redevelopment in 1978 by designation as a *Landmark*, the Music Hall was the concept

of S.L. 'Roxy' Rothafel, by general consent the master movie exhibitor of all time. Although representing the climax of cinema architecture, the Music Hall was intended, not as a showplace for films, but as a home for full length Vaudeville Spectaculars. The audience rejected this idea and in less than three weeks Radio City had adopted the formula which was to last for 46 years . . . continuous daily performances of a major feature film alternating with a 40-50 minute live spectacular. (4 shows per day).

THE STAGE

The stage is in proportion to the auditorium. Its size and complexity were outstanding for 1932 and we have one of these rare cases where the original planning provided adequate facilities to survive without significant modification for half a century.

The stage is 144ft wide by 66ft deep, with a proscenium opening of 100ft wide by 60ft high. The stage floor is divided into three 70ft long elevators which can sink to sub-basement level of minus 27ft or rise above the stage to plus 13ft. These elevators incorporate a 43ft revolve and when the elevators are interlocked, the revolve can turn simultaneously with ascent or descent of the elevators.

The orchestra pit contains another elevator which rises to stage level to form an apron. The orchestra play on a band wagon which can travel on either the pit or 1st or 3rd elevators. The wagon can move upstage or downstage in audience view or be repositioned while at basement level. For example, it may rise through the pit – travel upstage – ascend to +13ft on elevator 3 – then drop below stage – reposition on to the pit elevator – and reappear once again.

The elevators are powered by hydraulic pistons. As there are no sliders to fill the stage floor, gaps are left by sunken platforms. Therefore production use of the stage must be very carefully planned in terms of both scenic movements and artistes' safety. But scenery appearing and disappearing amidst a large dancing cast is the very stuff that spectacle is made of. (Incidentally the bandwagon is driven by an electrician who lies horizontal within the structure, inches from the floor. He requires a fine judgement: there are no brakes.)

CURTAINS

The House curtain, weighing 3 tons and renewed three times since opening night, is a 13-cable contour. The thirteen motors enable the curtain to assume any profile preset on the prompt corner mimic. The late great Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times reporting on the first night tells us 'The first number on the bill is entitled the *Symphony of Curtains* during which the great contour curtain folds and unfolds relentlessly across the proscenium'. With Rimsky Korsakov's 'Hymn to the Sun' and a full colour-mixing kit, it must surely have been one of the greater moments of the age of colour music – although Brooks Atkinson's use of the word *relentlessly* has perhaps something of a cautionary significance.

There are other curtain possibilities built into the structure – a rain curtain, complete with a rather unconvincing description of the use of a canvas trough in combination with a 5" elevator sinking. And there is a steam curtain fed from the very same supply that emerges from every Manhattan road surface. It is easy to accept the official line that

By the time that this article appears in CUE, the new Tours Department of Radio City Music Hall will be established. Extensive daily tours of the complex will be available and it will be possible to arrange specialist tours for groups with detailed interest in particular aspects of Music Hall's architecture and operation.

this device is always used at the very end of the finale so that the stage will not be too slippery for dancing. The flying system has 79 sets of single purchase – with weights somewhat more massive than average.

LIGHTING

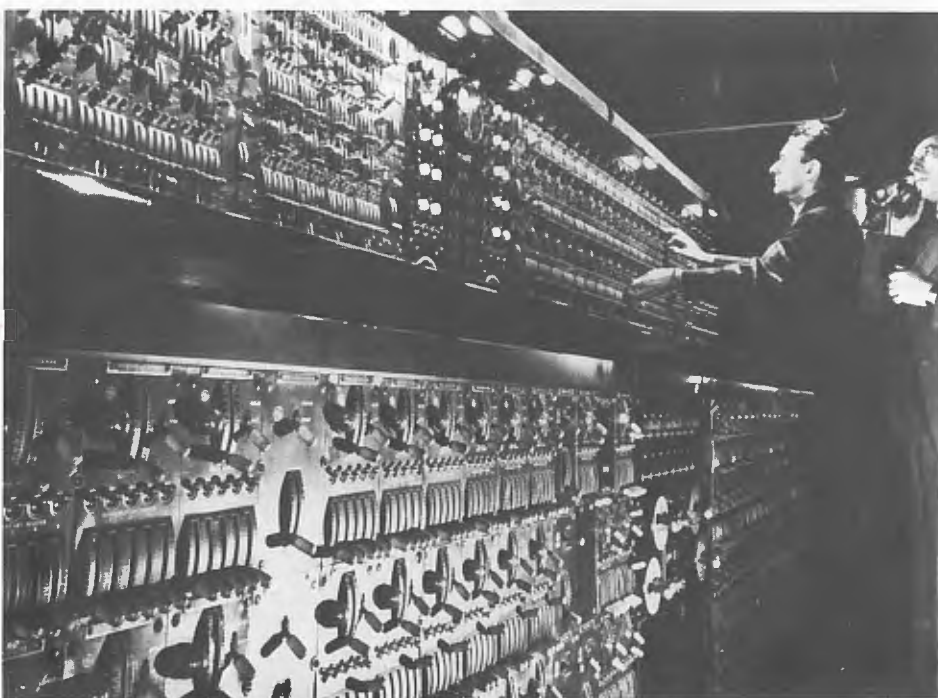
The jumbo dimensions of auditorium and stage create lighting problems. The enormous throws (190ft to the stage from the projection and follow-spot booths) require power beyond the capabilities of the tungsten lamp. This problem was solved in 1932 with 150 amp arcs. These original Kliegl spotlights are still in use but are now converted to 1200watt HMI sources. The main follow spot positions house a dozen such instruments with one operator to a pair (much of the operation is re-angling rather than complete following). There are a further half-dozen similarly adapted Kliegl arcs in a high mid-ceiling bridge position. These are

static but have one operator in attendance to strike up. The original selsyn-operated colour changers and blackout dowers still operate remotely from the lighting board. The lighting control is the original GEC system which was way ahead of its time when installed in 1932. Forty-eight years on and it is still running the show daily. *And*, although recent changes at Radio City have involved the importation of Broadway lighting design, it can still cope without the supplementary 'temporary' boards with which historic installations often have to be augmented. The system has 316 channels of thyatron-controlled saturable reactor dimmers. The console, situated in its own pit on the audience side of the orchestra pit, has one major ('rehearsal') preset and five subsidiary ('scene') presets. It should be emphasised that this was multi-presetting (level presetting, not grouping) and the date was 1932. There is talk of a memory board but let us hope that this original control will be allowed to complete its half century.

The 375-stop *Mighty Wurlitzer* organ has two consoles which slide from small curtained rooms in both proscenium walls. A visit to the organ's percussion loft is particularly mind-boggling . . . every conceivable percussion instrument including a Concert Grand Piano servo-linked to the Consoles.

SOUND

The auditorium shape has a good natural acoustic but the sheer size demands considerable reinforcement. Cine-variety demands a similar 'presence' to film sound to avoid a difficult aural transition for the audience. Much of the original sound equipment remained in service from 1932 until 1979. The sound desk is now located at the



The lighting control installed in 1932 is still running the show daily. (Herbert Gehr, Life Magazine © 1942 Time, Inc.)



The Grand Foyer

front centre of the second mezzanine. Coordination between conductor, organists etc frequently requires the use of a click-track. The target sound level is 98db.

The building includes a recording studio with independently sprung floor. Equipment is 32 channel, 24 track. There is yet another Wurlitzer and the room includes a fine collection of 1932 percussion with a particularly splendid Art Deco Glockenspiel.

Rehearsal rooms within the Music Hall building include one for the Rockettes with a measuring stick attached to the door — each

of the Rockettes (36 in the line plus 12 swing) must be between 5' 5½" and 5' 8" in height. Dressing Rooms include a special Animal Room.

There is appropriate and adequate on-site accommodation for all production activities including wardrobe (both making and maintaining), music library and design studios.

THE SHOWS

For forty-six years Radio City stayed with the blockbuster film plus stage spectacular formula that *the Music Hall* had developed

out of the older concept of cine-variety and thereafter made its own speciality.

Over the years, rising costs ensured that there was a dilution. The orchestra gradually dropped from 100 to 40 members. The Ballet Company (claimed to be America's first permanent Corps de Ballet) of 28 started to reduce in the late 1950s and was finally chopped in 1974. The famous Rockette kicking line shortened a little. By 1978, falling attendances, rising costs and, probably most devastating, the virtual disappearance of the big family-rated movie brought the theatre to the brink of destruction. Saved from redevelopment by a successful passionate campaign for designation as a National Landmark, the Music Hall came under the control of a new production company headed by Robert F. Janni.

An extensive renovation of the audience areas was put in hand: new carpet to the original designs, fabric renewal, total cleaning, freshening of gold leaf etc. etc. — and removal of the hot-dog and coke facilities which had crept into the grandeurs of the foyer and lounge during the cash crises. Practically everything (with the exception of the programme lights in the backs of the original auditorium seats) is restored to 1932 condition.

The films have gone and the stage show has reverted to the twice daily revue format for which "Roxy" had originally built his Art Deco Palace. Can Radio City Music Hall succeed now with a formula which fifty years ago survived not even weeks but mere days? Was a full stage show given a fair chance? A disastrously over-long opening performance combined with a first-night departure of the show's Designer (Robert Edmund Jones, no less) and first-night heart attack suffered by the project's mastermind, 'Roxy' Rothafel.

Is the place just too big to provide the audience/stage contact necessary to sustain a full-length programme? Much of the attraction of the 40-minute show in the old movie days was that all the wonders (the orchestra's arrival, the Rockette's Routine, the seasonal pageants, the scenery machinery) could be produced casually — almost thrown away. Now they may have to be milked.

On the other hand, history is now on the side of probable success. The building is not only an official American *Landmark*, it is an unofficial American *Institution*. An essential tourist attraction. A new addition to the show, two dozen young singers called the *New Yorkers*, are as wholesome as Doris Day. At least the *spirit* of the family blockbuster movies is alive and well and living in Art Deco splendour.



An Auditorium with good sightlines and remarkable acoustics.

The first major phase of the Music Hall's history — the period 1932 to 1968 — is detailed in a new lavishly illustrated book, *THE RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL*. An affectionate history of the World's Greatest Theatre by **Charles Francisco**. Published by **E. P. Dutton**, 2 Park Avenue, New York 10016.

Setting Sail for yet Another Part of the Forest

ROBIN DON

So many 'Dreams', both play and opera, have gone before.

How on earth does one approach the piece now to please and excite yet another audience, expectant and eager to see if yet another and hitherto undiscovered rendering of the piece has been found? At once to be angry and annoyed if offered an attempt to bring some contemporary flair and bored stiff crying 'tedious and dull' if solidly set in tradition.

There is certainly no way you can please all.

More acutely aware of the difficulties of capturing the imagination of the audience than we can recollect having had with any other production, director Christopher Ren-

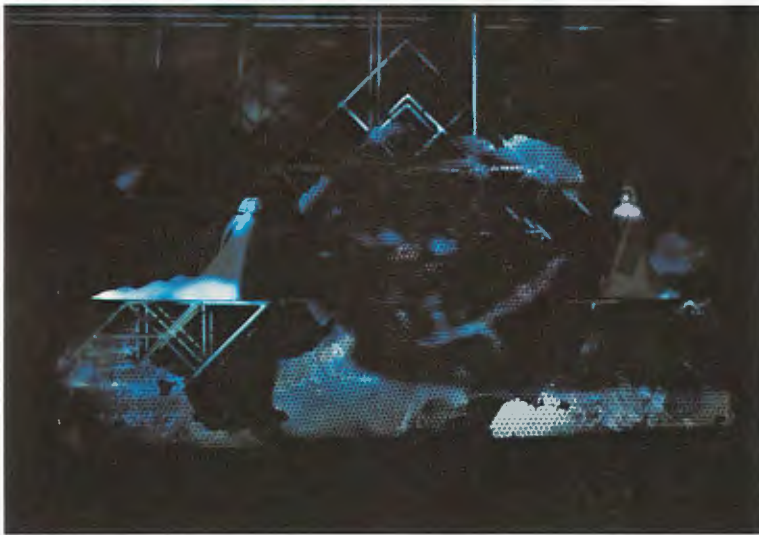
shaw and myself have been wrestling for the last five months with the problems of the new production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for this year's Aldeburgh Festival.

A joint venture with the Festival and the still alive and kicking English Music Theatre.

The Maltings at Snape. Such an inspiring building. Without proscenium, flies or wings, ones whole approach is geared around the warm Suffolk brick and wooden beamed interior.

Four sets of winch lines to the roof, thirty feet above and one large trap centre stage are the magnitude of the technical facilities.

The biggest headache and in fact what the whole production was eventually designed



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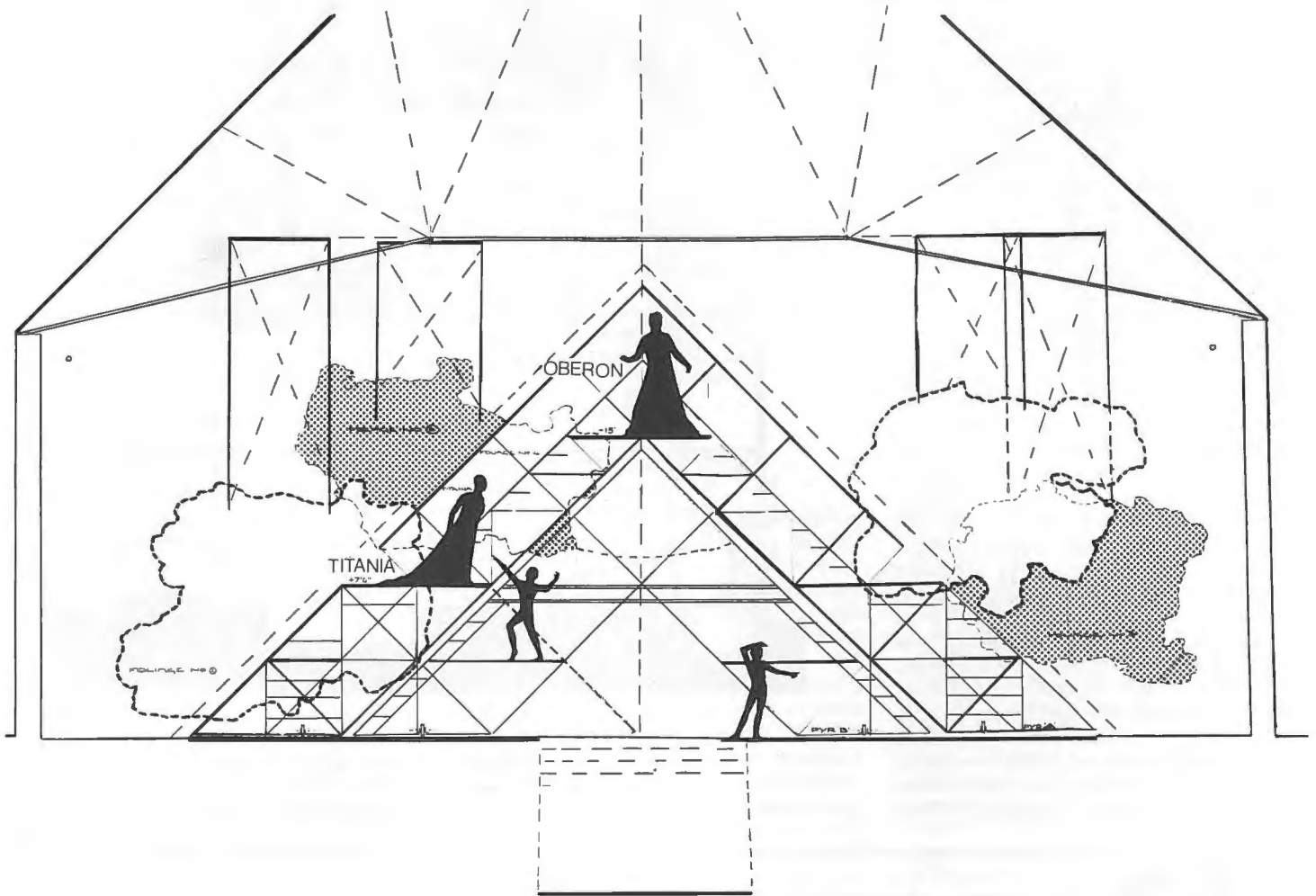
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around were the elusive fairies. One knows what such items look like when spotted at the bottom of the garden but those ones don't sing and certainly don't usually come as tall as twelve-year-old boys!

Where does one begin to give such beings a convincing and magical reality?

We were both keen to endorse the feeling that they are capable of achieving heights unavailable to the humans. Their domain was to become a constructed network of raised areas which soared to a pinnacle from where Titania and Oberon could control all. In the throbbing heart of this mountain of balance and symmetry the drugged Titania will entice the curious mortal stranger to lie with her. In his wildest dreams dear Bottom could have barely imagined such a union.

The tangible quality dissolves with the crisp morning light and his basic needs deny him a clear memory of such a blissful encounter.

His life continues not entirely unchanged. Unlike his friends for whom the night and the dream have put back on the straight and narrow, he is not unaware that there are higher regions to be reached. – 'I am to discourse wonders; but ask me not what'. – If only for once he'd grasp the nettles and get on with it!

The boos would undoubtedly be deafening if one ever attempted to perform at a height of twenty-three feet from the deck in a proscenium theatre. The Kings, Edinburgh in particular. Six feet off the stage and the gallery can only see the performers knees – likewise from back stalls at the Aldwych, and numerous theatres on the touring circuit.

The Maltings, having no sight line problems is indeed a great bonus.

Our humans are firmly set on the ground until gentle Puck persuades them up into the higher reaches. The entire construction, set on an undercarriage of sturdy wheels, can track upstage (fairies and all) to totally vanish, enveloped by on-off tracked foliage screen panels for the scenes where rustics and lovers belong in a more natural environment.

The lighting designer illuminates the screens with projected images. With the juxtaposition of these six mobile screens many other parts of the forest open up before us as we chase on into the depths.

The clothes have undergone many changes, struggling through various periods. Certain silhouettes somehow, always felt very right. I find it particularly amazing how some of these silhouettes, originally in a present day outfit were able to be retained in a costume evocative of the Elizabethan era.

Our final choice firmly places our characters in that exciting period between then and now. They will traverse the centuries linking fragments of time before awakening from the shadows to face another day. As Puck sends us home with 'Give me your hands, if we be friends, And Robin shall restore amends', we feel we have certainly tried. Chris is happy, I think I am happy too. All is decided, – it's in the bag.

It's a nice feeling when all the designing is completed and ready for the workshops. A delightful high from that nervous tingle, perhaps not totally convinced our decisions have been right until it's up there and working.

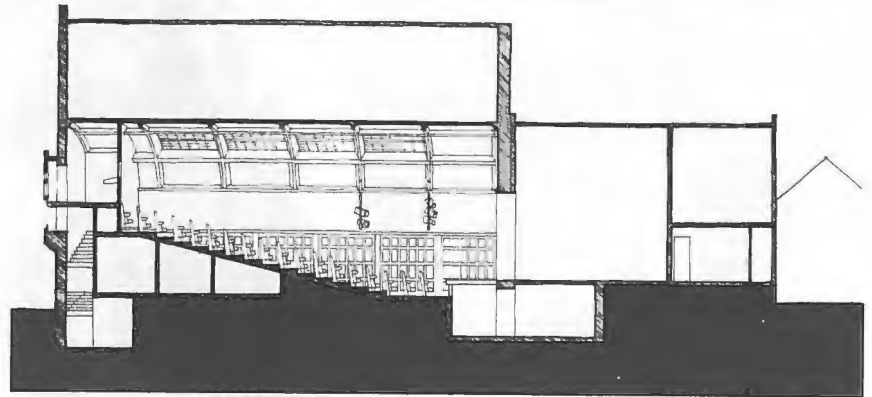
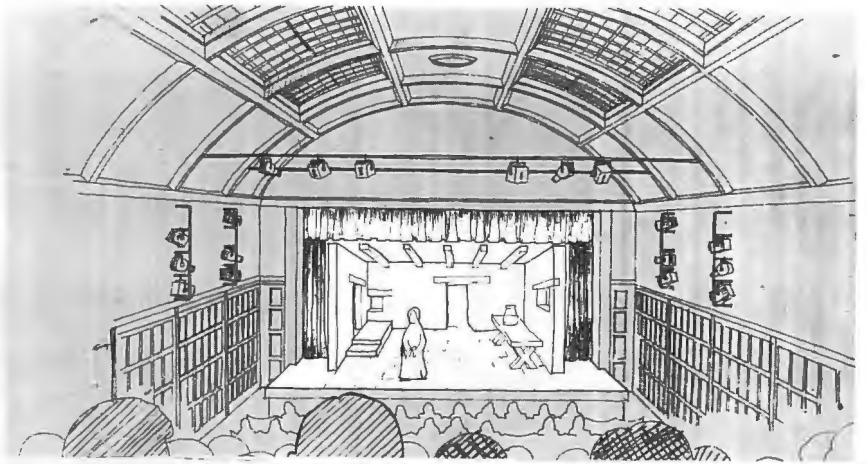
The five months have flown, I'm left with a pile of discarded ideas. I guess that's what dustbins are for. Our 'idle whims and fancies' give us courage to face the critics. With every channel explored one now feels confident enough to unfurl the sails and head out to the open sea.

*First performances Aldeburgh Festival, The Maltings, Snape.
June 7th 13th 19th.*

Autolycus

Ride a Cock-horse

Banbury, which used to be, before motorways and despite its cakes, its cross and its fine lady, the sort of town you couldn't help going through but never stopped at, is experiencing a spiritual and cultural awakening. Except remotely in the eighteenth century it seems never to have had a theatre as such, unless one counts the just-demolished Palace Cinema in the Market Square (which has *not*, praise conservation, been brutalised like that, say, of Northampton), where up to the last war 'fit-up' shows interchanged with films. But it has been trying to have one since the mid-seventies when an energetic and philanthropic businessman, the late Jimmy Black, bought up a run-down area down by the canal, and set about creating around a disused mill and its environs a community centre for all kinds of leisure activities. The area is known as Spiceball. It gets its name, it is said, from the sobriquet of a butcher renowned in those parts for the aromatic qualities of his faggots, and it has given its name to an ambitious local group, the Spiceball Arts and Community Association, committed to serve something like forty societies and clubs who use the centre, and, particularly, to get Banbury a theatre of its own. Heavily committed, inside the association, we find for example Martin Blinkhorn, whose firm, historically, supplies Banbury



with all things photographic and audio-visual, and whose father ran the aforementioned Palace Cinema: Oh small, small

world of show-business.

The original intention to build from scratch down by the mill (estimated costs

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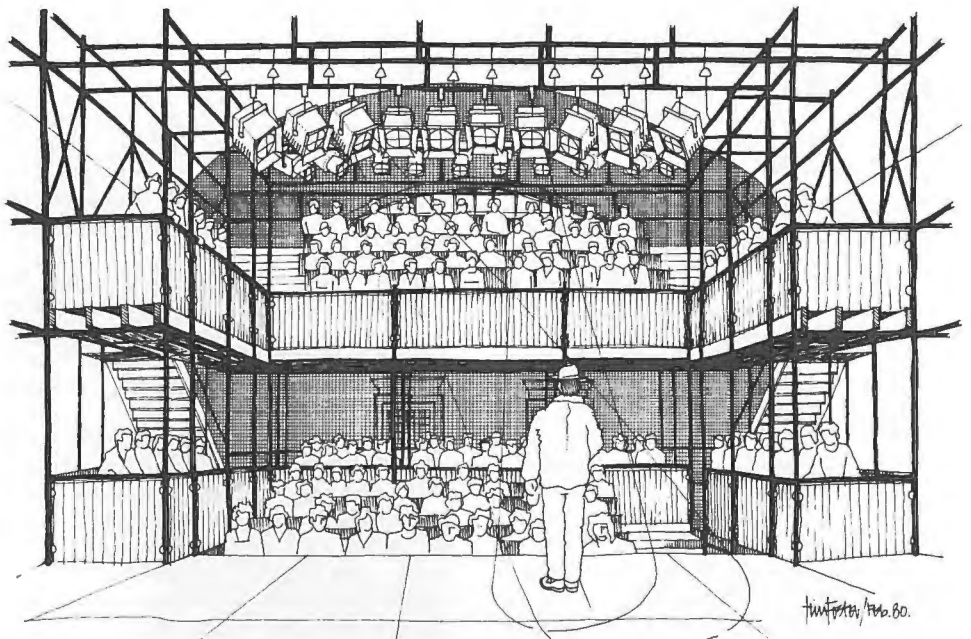
rose inexorably to £250,000) was as so often frustrated. Instead S.A.C.A., to the relief presumably of the Church Commissioners who had had feelers from the Moonies, has put some £70,000 of its money into buying Church House which sits solidly and solemnly on Horsefair, near the Cross and just across the road from elegant St. Mary's Church. St. Mary's, incidentally, is often used as a venue for concerts, its pantheonic acoustics making custom-built halls sound dry as dust in comparison.

Now, in and about Church House, local architect David Ronson is at work on a 250-seat theatre, plus its greenroom, clubrooms etc, which will open this coming Autumn and will provide pleasantly central, professionally equipped quarters for amateur groups from a pretty wide catchment-area, and proper facilities for touring companies and visiting firemen from Kansas City (as delegates to conferences and conventions used to be described). Come back and come home from all those draughty village-halls, partially-converted Nissen huts and school gymnasias all ye of the Banbury Cross Players, the Banbury Amateur Operatic Society, and the Banbury and District Music Society.

If we seem to be doing a lot of name-dropping in this interim report it is only to emphasise that, in the next decade, in what may well turn out to be the real decentralisation of support for the arts that successive Ministers of Culture have been fantasising about for years, local needs and interests should be catered for *first*. And that applies, too, to fund-raising. In fact, though they did pretty well themselves in the early stages, and the Cherwell District Council has been a lot more generous than some local authorities we could name (Edinburgh, for instance?), S.A.C.A. has now appointed, to help get together the £150,000 still needed to get 'The Jimmy Black Memorial Theatre' to the Church House on time, a professional fundraiser with the resounding and door-opening name of Lt.-Col. Ferdinand De Weld Silmon. It helps, he thinks, that several industries with national names — like Alcan, the aluminium people, and General Foods, the practically everything else people — actually live in Banbury. 'Getting pledges just of money is wonderful, of course,' Ferdy Silmon says, 'but contributions in kind are, I suppose, an even better way of showing involvement. Nothing is nicer than if a demolition firm offers to lend us a bulldozer for an afternoon, or if a firm that makes neon signs decides to let us have one free. Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the opening night.'

Try cycling to Kilburn

We *still* don't quite understand how the Wakefield Tricycle Theatre Company came by its name. Alright, it started out back in 1972 doing lunch-time plays at a pub in King's Cross called 'The Pindar of Wakefield'. But, wait a minute, which Pindar would that be then? The Greek Pindar, we all know of, whom Ruskin described as 'ranking only with Homer, Virgil, Dante and Scott (Scott ?)' Or the Peter Pindar, everybody seems to have forgotten about, who was successively a doctor, a clergyman



and 'a fearless lampoonist' in the latter years of the eighteenth century, but was really called John Wolcot and had absolutely nothing to do with Wakefield at all? So far so confusing. Then 'Tricycle'? Maggie Easton, who handles the company's publicity, explains that this 'has something to do with Wakefield (like York and Lincoln) having a cycle of Miracle Plays, and because there were originally three founder-members of the theatre. . . .' You see what we mean? All this aside, the simpler, more succinct Tricycle Theatre Company is now preparing a permanent home for itself in Kilburn (which has hitherto not been too flush with dramatic entertainments), from which they will continue with their rare and welcome policy of putting on mainly new plays by mainly new — or at any rate not overdone — writers. The incumbent artistic directors most involved are Shirley Barrie and Kenneth Chubb; most recently, you probably remember them, on

tour or at the King's Head, doing Adrian Mitchell's comprehensively eclectic romp 'Hoagy, Bix and Wolfgang Beethoven Bunkhaus'. (This complicated titling disease seems to be catching).

From the Kilburn High Road the facade behind which the company is working — skeletally, because the actors are on tour at Cardiff — doesn't look any too promising. Despite the stone-carved antiquity of its name, Forester's Hall dates, in a mausoleonic sort of way, only from the 'twenties, and retains of its historic associations ('This entrance hall', a notice warns 'is the freehold property of the Ancient Order of Foresters') only an outposted office of the Foresters Friendly Society. But, behind this, is a complex of pretty impressive saloons and chambers in the largest of which the architect, Tim Foster, with Theatre Projects as is de rigueur coordinating, is creating a neat, flexible and even portable 'galleried

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courtyard' theatre with seating for 200. This is better by 100, the company and CUE believes, than that in so many London locales one has felt a somehow too involved groundling in. As a bonus to their leasehold, the Tricycle Theatre Company also gets possession of enough space for proper dressing rooms, bars and a kitchen etc., and a spectacularly large rehearsal room-to-be, which will double as a venue for the childrens' activities Shirley Barrie specialises in.

As his drawing shows, Tim Foster has based his structure for the theatre proper on a type of contractor's scaffolding which can be bought off the shelf and will be put up by the Company itself. And this, of course, has kept costs splendidly down, the whole conversion coming out at no more (in London, in London!) than £130,000. So far the company has raised about £100,000 of this, the benevolent Borough of Brent weighing in with £50,000, £20,000 coming from the Arts Council of Great Britain's 'Housing the Arts' Fund, and two sums of roughly £10,000 coming from the GLC Arts Committee and the Gulbenkian Foundation. Tricycle has some £40,000 still to find (local businesses and institutions please note, 'though not splendid Guinness which has already been good for them').

All in all this parade of sordid figures shows at least what can still be done for how much and who is doing it. Still to come is the Tricycle Theatre's opening in September this year - probably with a new play by Michael Abbensetts. We suggest that you might need to start queueing for a 32 or 176 bus up to Kilburn in about early August.

Lighting the Festival (1)

In our quest to spotlight the valiant but anonymous backstage technicians who do all the heavy and exacting work of rigging and lighting with none of the glory, we met Ray Purvis who is deputy chief electrician with the London Festival Ballet.

Both Ray and the Festival are 30 years old. He hails from Newcastle and has been in the business for 15 years. With evident good humour he spoke of back-breaking tours constantly assembling and dismantling the company's vast number of lights. While on the road, the Festival will take anything up to 600 colours depending on its repertoire. 'Do you know we've got 27 shades of blue,' said Ray, still faintly amazed.

The roadshow does not travel light. Six tons of electrical equipment are crammed into a monster Artic truck 40 feet in length. And in 1978 it took an astonishing 27 tons of gear when visiting Australia with 'The Sleeping Beauty'.

All this equipment means one hell of a lot of work for Ray and the other four members of the lighting crew, including chief electrician David Mohr. 'When we're really busy I guarantee we'll miss two nights sleep per week,' said Ray with a live-hard play-hard note of pride. Not surprisingly, his constant companion is his sleeping bag.

Such dedication pays dividends of course. It meant, for example, that Ray and the Festival were among the first westerners to visit that most rarefied of countries; China. The Chinese hadn't seen a western ballet for 25 years and the 1979 visit attracted considerable prestige. Peking, Shanghai, names on a map in a once forbidden land suddenly became real and tangibly exotic places. Even the fabled Oriental inscrutability became flesh - 'They didn't applaud,' said Ray. 'At least, not in the conventional manner. It was just a few claps and then off. But I think they liked it.'

'Another odd thing,' he continued enthusiastically, 'they have a habit of spitting everywhere. In fact while we were doing The Sanguine Fan in Shanghai, a guy in the third row gave such an almighty heave from the throat that the orchestra couldn't stop laughing. Titters started in the clarinet department and spread right round to the first violins. The Chinese must have been

rather embarrassed because a woman made an announcement in the interval asking the audience to refrain from spitting.'

Ray assured us that this quaint culture shock did not however detract from his enjoyment of the mysterious East.

The London Festival Ballet is in the course of celebrating its 30th anniversary and a new phase in its distinguished history under its recently-appointed artistic director John Field.

Lighting the Festival (2)

The end of Gatwick Airport's main runway might seem an incongruous place to hold a son et lumière. But there nestles the village of Charlwood and its 900-year-old Norman Church of St. Nicholas. And the church was the focal point of the Charlwood Festival, medieval pageant held at the end of May in celebration of its longevity and as a means of raising money for its restoration.

Rector, Rev. David Clarke said the festival grew out of the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations. 'We had such a jolly time we decided to repeat it,' he said.

Unusually, the son et lumière was held inside the church because of fears that it might rain.

Local man Kevin Monk was in charge of the lighting; one follow spot, five soft beam spots and five floodlights which were used in conjunction with a projector.

While not a professional, Mr. Monk has devoted much of his spare time in the last five years to lighting the comedies and pantomimes performed by the local amateur drama group, the Charlwood Players. 'I got collared into it somehow and found I enjoyed it,' he said.

Built by the Normans in 1080 the Church of St. Nicholas was added to over the centuries until 1500 when work was completed. Its story, culled from a local history called 'The Freeman of Charlwood', was presented in documentary form together with sound effects, electronic music and excerpts from orchestral works by Brahms, Tippett, Handel and Vaughan Williams.

'We're also cheating a little,' said the rector, 'by filling in with two live acting parts - two characters in seventeenth-century costume.'

Some forty families in the village were preparing to welcome a planeload of Texans into their homes for the week-long festival. The son et lumière was only part of the attraction. The promise of medieval jousting had captured their imagination and no doubt their proverbial lust for the past.

Billed as the biggest tournament since jousting was abolished in the sixteenth century, ten knights of Knebworth, replete with chain mail and tabard, were preparing to demonstrate their horsemanship and skill in the lists by tilting at each other with lances, hacking at each other with axes and two-handed swords and finally battering each other senseless with ball and chain.

Any unchivalrous action by the brave knights (stuntmen in real life) would be met with punishment in the stocks or, worse still, being tied up in a sack and dragged around the arena by one of the horses.

Well, nice work if you can get it, we suppose.

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REID ing SHELF

Will It Make a Theatre is subtitled a guide to finding, renovating, financing, bringing up-to-code, the non-traditional performance space. The two hundred pages of crisp factual nitty gritty are intended to give practical help to Americans in general and New Yorkers in particular. Some of the information is specifically geared to New York City building codes but that does not make the book significantly less interesting to anyone who is considering turning an existing building into a performance space.

Many of us agree that the success rate for smaller less orthodox theatres is higher for conversions than for virgin designs. Existing spaces, no matter how unpromising their shape, can often stimulate the imagination whereas the freedom of a blank drawing board can induce paralysis of the inspiration cells.

like *consider*. And is not self-questioning the basis of any design process?

The book is illustrated with line drawings, schedules, and a couple of jokes. The treatment of dimensions is very positive and the graphics often illustrate just why a certain dimension has to be the minimum suggested. The writing team have obviously had 'hands on' experience of doing everything in cramped conditions and there are many space-conserving ideas.

When I build my studio theatre, I will think most carefully upon this text.

It is unlikely that I would have bought the new biographies of *Hannah Pritchard* or *Robson of the Olympic*. However, as a member of the *Society for Theatre Research* I received these publications as an integral part of my annual subscription package. I am glad that I did. I usually enjoy the Society's publications and I got much pleasure from these volumes – not because I am particularly excited by the detailed careers of either Mrs. Pritchard or Mr. Robson or indeed their like, but because biography is such an excellent framework for presenting the sort of minutiae which are the essential stuff of feeling any period's atmosphere.

light the scene. The Stage Manager, with a notebook and pencil, remains on the stage as a connecting link with the unseen electrician.

'I want more light on the back,' cries the producer.

'Two more floods upstage, Bill,' says the stage manager.

'What mediums, sir – amber or pink?'

'Neither,' says the producer. 'I want to try white.'

'How's that, sir?'

'No good. Check them down. That's too much. Bring them up again. What are they now?'

'Half-check, sir.'

'Not enough. Bring them up . . . slowly. Slowly! More yet.'

'They're full up, sir.'

'Oh, all right; put in a pink.'

'How's that, sir?'

'No good. Try an amber. *Hm* . . . I don't like it. Try the pink again. Now try a straw. Let me see the amber again. That's not rich enough. I want a number four.'

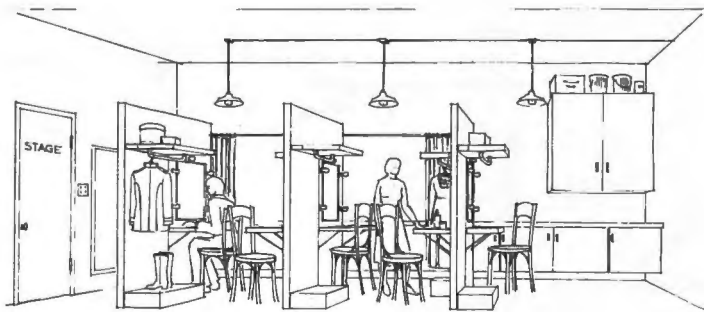
'Put in a number four, Bill . . . Eh? Oh! That is a number four, sir.'

'Then frost it. All right, that'll do.'

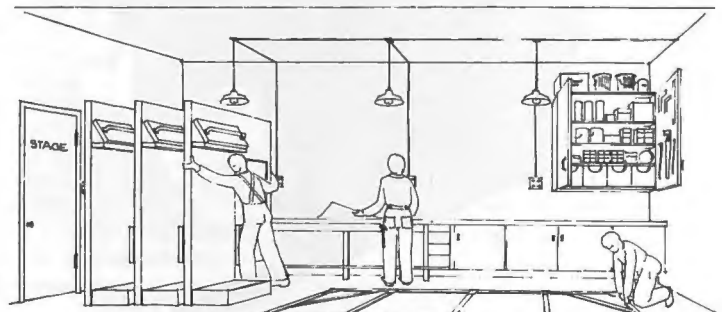
'Plot that, Bill', says the stage manager, making a note.

'Now your floats', cries the producer.

'Check up the whites . . . more yet . . .



Portable dressing rooms set up.



With dressing room units stacked, the multi-use space can become a shop, a rehearsal space, or can be used for other activities which do not conflict with the performance schedule of the small theatre company.

Will It Make a Theatre is in four parts (1) *The Search for a Space*, (2) *How to Get It* (3) *Designing and Planning* and (4) *Making it Legal*. The art of *searching* is deciding what to look for, knowing how to set about finding it, and then evaluating what you find. *Getting it* is about negotiating and funding while *designing and planning* divides its consideration of space into The Stage Space, The Audience Space, and The Support Spaces. Although the details of *making it legal* refer to New York's planning and building regulations and procedures, the general problems are universal and requiring consideration on the grounds of commonsense and safety. Much of the language is terse and much of the advice may seem to be a statement of the obvious. If the advice seems obvious, then just recall some of the theatres that we have all worked in. Was there not a lot obviously wrong? Now, if the persons who got it obviously wrong had been studying checklists of the obvious, might not some of these obvious mistakes been avoided? The checklists in this book are not dogmatic – they are sprinkled with words

These are academic books (the presence of *footnotes* is always a reliable indicator to the reader in search of scholarship) and the format belongs to a more leisurely age of publishing (there is a 37 page listing of Mrs. P's nightly performances).

For an impression of a more recent (but nevertheless now quite historic) theatrical period, I have acquired a second-hand copy of Philip Godfrey's 1930s *Backstage*. There is a familiarity about text and pictures which makes me feel that it was probably one of the books that inflamed my schoolboy desire for a stage career. Cynics – and we all must surely have just a soupçon of cynicism if we are to survive – will particularly enjoy the chapters on 'Studio or Art Theatres' and 'The Producer'. *Producer* is now the Mr. or Ms. that we call *Director*, so let us pass over an evocative description of a scene change when scenery was scenic and catch the Producer doing a bit of lighting. The equipment has changed but has the procedure? . . .

The Producer comes in front and begins to

Stop! Too much! Down again! That's better. Are the baby spots in?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Take them out. What's in your perches?'

'Ambers, sir.'

'Give me straws.'

WILL IT MAKE A THEATRE. Compiled and written by Eldon Elder; associate writers Marsha Imhof and Sharon Lee Ryder; with drawings by Eldon Elder. Published (1979) by the Off Broadway Alliance and Distributed by Drama Book Specialists, 150 W 52nd St, New York 10019. \$6.95.

BORN TO PLEASE. HANNAH PRITCHARD, ACTRESS 1711-1768. A critical biography by Anthony Vaughan.

ROBSON OF THE OLYMPIC. Mollie Sands. Both Published (1979) by The Society for Theatre Research, 14 Woronzow Road, London NW8 6QE. Each £6 to non-members.

BACKSTAGE. A Survey of the Contemporary English Theatre from behind the Scenes. Philip Godfrey. Lithographs & Drawings by Pearl Binder. Published by Harraps (1933).

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PRODUCT NEWS

I'm told that the word TEMPUS is Latin for time. It is the name that RANK STRAND have chosen for their new portable lighting control, which is replacing the MINI 2 system. I must admit I find TEMPUS a very evocative title, and as I travelled to Brentford to see it I mused as to whether this was going to be the beginning of a new line in names for lighting equipment. Perhaps we are going to get away from such boring descriptions as T-SPOT and PATT 243 etc., and go towards more emotive names. I can imagine coming into a theatre on a Monday morning fit-up in a couple of years time and saying: 'Right Fred, nip down to the TEMPUS and push up circuits.' 'George - you go up the Tallescope and focus the SANTA

MARIA's.' 'Bill - get four pieces of 861 and put them in the SCHEHERAZADES', and so on!

Anyway whatever the name, STRAND are onto a winner here. TEMPUS is the best thing to come out of their design office for quite a while.

You can get a 2-preset TEMPUS control desk in 12, 18, 24, 30 or 36 way units. Each desk has a single, split crossfader for dipless and profiled, proportional cross-fades between the intensity levels set on the two presets of channel faders. Presets can be pile added too, with the highest level taking precedence. In addition there is to the side of the two masters a rotary control knob which allows crossfades to be automatically timed

between 5 seconds and 5 minutes. So to put it a little simpler let me set up a little scene as if we were doing a cue and you will see for yourself the possibilities:

You have on preset one the state that is visible in stage. You have preset on two the next lighting state. It comprises some new circuits coming in, some going out and some common to what is on preset one and on stage at the moment. The cue is to be moved in twenty seconds. Now on the 'GO' you can do it one of two ways. You can preset the timer to zero and move the masters by hand together, lagging one or the other to taste. Or you can preset the timer to 20 seconds and on the 'GO' move the two masters FAST together to the new preset. This automatically activates the timer circuitry and the desk will do the crossfade itself, turning off an LED above the new preset when it has finished. The control also has a SNAP black-out switch alongside both presets. So whether you choose to do a cue automatically on the timer or by hand, you only have to concentrate on moving the masters to bring in or take out circuits nicely - rather than working at the crossfade to avoid a dip. Very nice!

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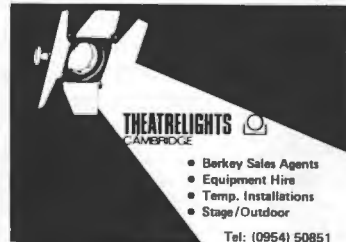
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The patented dipless crossfade circuitry takes care of that! However the only thing I would suggest at this stage of TEMPUS's development is not to take too seriously the automatic timings between 5 seconds and around twenty. It isn't very accurate at this level. It did a 10 second cue in six! It would be better to do those sort of cues by hand. But the little timer really comes into its own on longer cues. I'm sure many of us have had to do long cues on these tiny boards with their miniscule sliders. It's no fun trying to get a smooth and slow crossfade out of a fader that only has a track of a few millimetres long. Now with TEMPUS you can forget that problem and put it onto the timer.

The control desk is very handsome with a red face panel, white sliders for preset one and grey for preset two. The sliders all have a high quality carbon track potentiometer with integral slot closure which keeps the conductivity in and liquids and dust out. The very tough surround is coloured black. Inside, each block of six control channels has self-mastering circuitry with the integrated control signal outputs going to a 2m-long flexible cable terminated by a robust, metalclad 8 pole plug with mechanical latch. (Yes! It really is a very tough and good control connection system they have on TEMPUS as opposed to that very poor one on the MINI 2).

If your funds are limited you could purchase initially say a twelve-way desk. Then as funds become available you could buy additional twelve-way modules called TEMPUS 12X desks. These have channel controllers only. So you can add these twelve-way units to your original desk and keep the whole lot on one set of masters only. This is the same as the Electrosonic LINKIT system.

Each compact dimmer pack, with integral carrying handles contains either 6 x 10amp or 3 x 5kw Thyristor dimmers. (It's interesting how STRAND say 6 x 10amp dimmers rather than giving a specific wattage maximum. Does this mean that these dimmers will take a loading of 2.5kw without taking the fuse?) The pair of Thyristors for each dimmer are mounted on generous heat sinks and are surge and continuously rated for the maximum load. Each dimmer has fairly substantial filtering considering its size; including a radio frequency filter on either side of the dimmer. The recessed front panel has twin output sockets for each 10amp dimmer channel or a 32amp 2-pole and earth socket for each 5kw dimmer. The front panel also has a power supply indicator and a very useful earth continuity lamp, also an 8-pole socket for the control cable. The recess in the right hand side of the pack houses the mains cable grip and also a row of HRC fuse links, each one with a neon indicator to show its status. The dimmer rack, like the control desk is both very tough and smart. Even the red paintwork looks as if it will survive many lorry trips. One problem though, is that STRAND recommend that you only stack the dimmers two high, which means that a touring show in a date with limited wing space may take up a lot of room.

There it is then! On first sighting it seems a very clever little system and well designed too.

ADRIAN DIGHTAM

Bespoke Lighting from the Standing Rig

GRAHAM WALNE

The pages of a technical publication may not be the place one would normally expect to find reference to our current economic climate, but our world is a precarious one and our field the likeliest area for the accountant's scrutiny. Technical endeavours rely for their success on vast amounts of time, manpower and capital equipment. It is important now as never before that we ensure maximum effect is achieved with minimum effort. It is high time it became fashionable to complete a task ahead of schedule, to buy or hire all one's needs and still have money left over.

The lighting field is a great consumer of money and in the last edition of 'Cue', Adrian Dightam highlighted the pressure being exerted on us by manufacturers anxious to capitalise on the memory control's tendency for built-in obsolescence. Let us remind them that we are merely a part of the package that the audience has come to see; we are not an audio-visual spectacular. Let the competition result in simpler, safer, cooler, cheaper, lighter and brighter equipment. Let us ensure that management can fill the seats by affording good managers, good publicity, good actors and good plays. The latest systems are redundant if no one comes to see their work.

Above all, let us ensure that our time and money are spent effectively. It is to this end that this article is directed. The golden rule must at all times be to remember the audience, to try and see the results our work will have on them. Maybe a painted moulding will look just as good as a real one, maybe there need not be real silk or real leather either. Or maybe we need not re-rig our lights for every production. Maybe we could achieve a standing rig that would save production time and money. The familiarity would save lighting time.

About 200 of the 300 shows I have lit were presented either at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in the sixties, or at the Royal Academy of Music in the seventies. In both establishments I evolved a standing rig out of necessity - in both places technical staff, budget and time were either minimal or non-existent, but we still had to produce professional shows on a weekly basis.

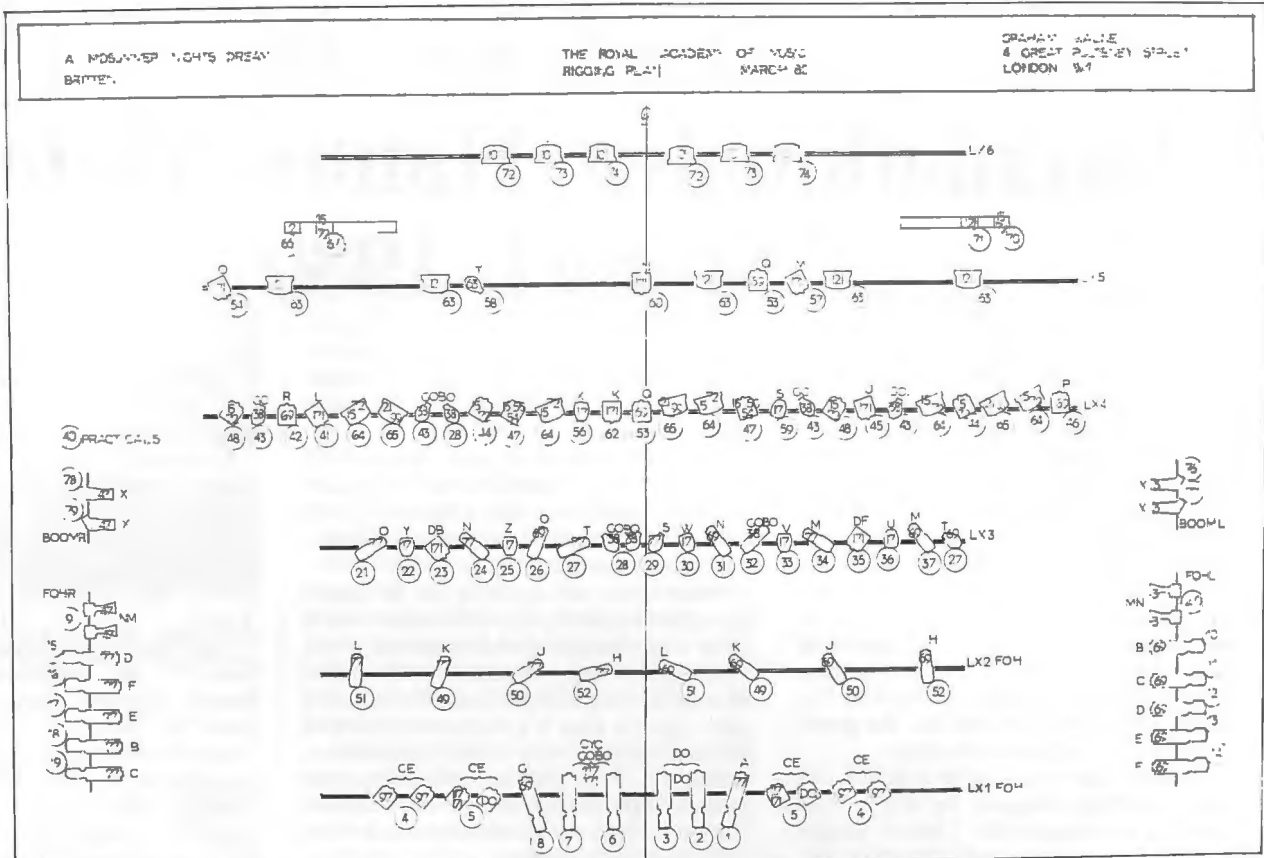
At first glance both RADA and RAM appear to have fairly set productions but this is not so - it is true that one presents straight drama and the other opera but visiting directors (and designers in the case of RAM) ensure that there is always a new challenge. Both are proscenium oriented, RADA at 24' with a full fly tower, RAM at 36' with a half tower. The rig at RADA has changed considerably since I was there from an LC with 58's and 53's to an MMS and just about every luminaire there is. The Royal Academy of Music's rig is new and all Rank, controlled by a Duet.

A standing rig is nothing new of course but it does appear to have come into disrepute.

To a certain extent this is understandable - no one wants a restriction placed upon their creativity but such a system affords more time to devote to other areas. Several directors at RAM have expressed great reluctance in accepting what appears to be a pre-packed lighting design, created before models and score were ever seen. Later they are usually grateful for the extra stage time a standing rig affords, time that can be used for rehearsal not rigging. A standing rig reflects the tastes of its designer - not just the productions it caters for. I like sharp highlights so my rigs always possess a lot of backlight and crosslight - useful anyway in opera which is most of my work now. Other features are colour washes. From an early stage of my career I found the problem of too few lanterns somewhat solved by using a fairly light colouring of acting light combined with a wash of a suitable colour, usually darker and provided by two fresnels FOH. This can be backed up by other fresnels in different key colours - the main area pairs still providing the key and the moulding. Generally the washes are confined to a warm colour and a cool colour and I especially like the blending this technique provides; it picks out relevant colours of set and costume and hence the mood can easily be changed merely by the use of one or two channels, leaving the basic actor keys fairly untouched. This can simplify lighting tremendously. I am a great user of crosslight - especially in the vital downstage strip and I am always disappointed when the set either obscures the position or is too light to take the continued beam. I was introduced to crosslight twenty-five years ago in one of the hardest working standing rigs ever - that of the London Palladium. Here a total of 32 pageants were assembled onto 8 ladders which in turn were suspended on tracks - moved freely in between numbers or scenes. Each ladder thus had 4 pageants, usually in different basic colours and hence the whole stage could easily be crosslit in any colour. I copied this technique at RADA by building ladders of 2K fresnels hung on tracks and up/down bars and again at RAM using T64's.

The FOH is usually fairly static and in my time at RADA served the apron - now part of the scenic area of the main stage. This meant it could be focussed into areas and left virtually untouched from show to show - just a tidy and a recolour. I extended this at RAM to cover the whole stage and this has paid off since about two-thirds of their productions have limited set and rely heavily on lighting with no time at all for focus - just come in at 10.00 a.m., switch on, plot and dress at 2.00 p.m. An echo of my childhood Palladium days when weekly variety meant 10.00 a.m., band call for a 2.30 matinee.

Both the RADA and RAM possessed full wrap around cycs and the high cost of colour now has tended to demand that a good choice stays at RAM for a long time - there

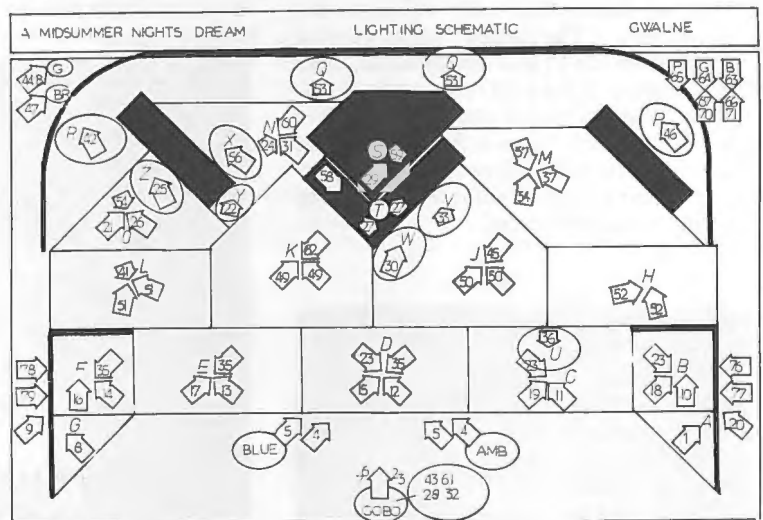


Scale drawing of standing rig at the Royal Academy of Music, as set for "Midsummer Nights Dream"

is simply not enough cash to recolour for each show. Fortunately the new high temperature colours will last a long time and RAM recolours its cyc about once a year at a cost last time of just under £100.00. The emergence of colours combined with frosts could cut this down since I never light cycs without frost everywhere. Generally my taste is for a combination of a good deep Mediterranean blue with other washes of deep (but not vibrant) pink, and again some Brechtian feeling too from greens, chocolates and browns. I have never had enough equipment to light a cyc properly and so there is a tendency for the wash to fade away at the edges; this is acceptable to most designers anxious for a chiaroscuro effect. Another part of any standing cyc rig for me is a number of fresnels – frosted, to give the centre no-mans-land a bit of extra punch. This allows top and bottom washes to be checked a little and the whole made more interesting.

Of course there are specials and all standing rigs need a pool of various items either loose – to be rigged as required – or already rigged in likely positions. I am lucky in that both RADA and RAM's FOH are all accessible without ladder so specials and those left as spares can easily be focussed, often during technical rehearsals when lighting is the last thing on a director's mind. Again this saves time.

Planning from a standing rig, at least for me, involves a slightly different technique. I always draw a scale plan as normal – this ensures that I use the rig, not the rig me! The standing rig should be an aid not a strait-jacket. Next I do an area plan with angles and numbers marked in. I find this easier to light from since so many productions now need tight areas constantly changing and



Schematic based on rig plan showing areas, direction of light and dimmer number involved. It is often easier to light from a drawing like this than the rigging plan.

there is just not enough time (or the fee) to work this out in minute detail from watching rehearsals. If the stage is broken down into areas – each served by two good front lights and a back light – and all this clearly marked, then you know that you can hit anyone anywhere, no matter how much the set or the action may move about. This technique I find most useful in opera where one is often engaged so late that directors have little time for discussion and personal schedules can't be changed to accommodate more than one run-through. I have been told so many times 'Don't worry, there are no cues, it's very simple' – 90 cues later we are still at it. Only a good grid/area rig, very familiar to the designer can get one out of trouble at times like this – and against the clock too.

Let us demystify our profession and not be

guilty of Tyrone Guthrie's accusation that we hide our incompetence behind jargon. At the Palladium so many times did we labour into the night to replace our rig with one that was newer but capable of little that was innovative. Is it really necessary to spend the night hours moving a luminaire, or a hundred luminaires, just two or three feet? Is it really necessary to replace that very soft focussed profile by that fresnel? Is it also necessary to spend more night hours arguing over half a point when you know it will go higher tomorrow when the cast come in?

No it is not – and if we want to save our jobs, our audiences and our theatres, we will have to learn to do it – on time, on budget. I know that a standing rig has helped me do that – and without compromising the result. What do you think?

Thirty-second Internationalen Handwerksmesse Munich 1980

Jet airline companies tend to maintain a very high quality of service. Perhaps because it was Sunday or maybe it was known that the plane would be groaning with plaster-covered limbs from the ski-slopes that such a patched-up effort, fraying at every available edge, was offered by British Airways. It bore little resemblance to the beautiful bilingual Lufthansa that sped to a sunny 10°C Munich three days before.

9.30 a.m. Saturday 8th March, with a resounding rendering from the Convivium Musicum Orchestra and some encouraging words from the President of Bavaria, Dr. Franz Josef Strauss, would hail the grand opening of this splendid exhibition.

With two days to go to the deadline, the special Pavilion designed by Prof. Willi Schmidt, to contain the Theatre Design Exhibition was under round-the-clock construction.

Having checked the safe arrival of the British entry – The Golden Trophy winning models from the Prague Quadrennial, there was naught to be done till the morrow. A fortifying Wienerschnitzel allowed me to face the chilly Munich night. A short walk would take me to the hotel. Spirits rose as I happened upon a Turkish bath; the enveloping steam completed the day.



*"Les Femmes Savantes" (Moliere)
Jaques Le Marquet*

Windowlene kept me busy on Friday. Getting rid of static on acrylic perspex model covers is a nightmare. A lady T.V. interviewer, having a sneak preview in stiletto heels, produced a chamois leather and insisted that this was the best method. After she had charmingly rubbed every model box there was no way one could disagree.

This Annual International Craft Exhibition has no equivalent in Britain. Everything from pottery and jewellery to furniture,

models from architecture and industrial design, are spaciouly displayed in an exhibition complex three or four times the size of Earls Court.

For Herr Gotthelf to have organised the means for a special pavilion showing theatre design in the midst of such a highly technical and highsell environment was indeed a courageous gesture.

Nonetheless, unsuspecting carrier-bagged Bavarians happening upon this oasis were to be at once fascinated and engrossed. Prof. Willi Schmidt had been extremely successful in creating 'this room of magic', enthusing that: 'Here is what it's all about. In here we are face to face with Ibsen, Shakespeare, Mozart. . . .' He had scoured Europe and brought together an exciting cross-section of current Designs plus some fascinating pieces from previous centuries.

4 Designers from the Bundesrepublik

4 from the G.D.R.

7 from France

1 from the Netherlands

3 from Austria

and the British entry from the Prague Quadrennial.

From the Paris Opera, a majestic 'Tannhauser' designed by Carpezat in 1895 and Gailhard's delightful 1904 'Tristan and Isolde'. Alongside, in stark contrast was the present puzzling 'Valkyrie' from Eduardo Arroyo and Peduzzi's already legendary 'Lulu'.

'The Magic Flute' from Eberhard Keienburg for the Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater, Schwerin, came close to being my favourite design. To emanate such mysticism and magic from a painted set constructed entirely from vertical planking is indeed a fine achievement. I would very much liked to have seen Prof. Willi Schmidt's simultaneous production of 'Woyzeck' and 'Leonce and Lena', starkly set with steps and levels of skeletal construction on two concentric revolves.



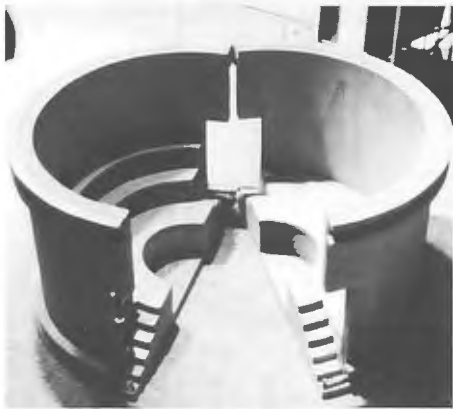
*"Madame Butterfly"-
Reinhard
Zimmerman*



*"Magic Flute"-
Eberhard
Keienburg*



Leonardo da Vinci's secretly mirror coded plans for a 'theatre in the round' and the constructed model from same.



Two of his previous students were included: Pieter Hein's multi-levelled 'Die Rauber' from the Volksbühne, Berlin 1971, and a brutally sharp 'Antigone' from Susanne Raschig, which used every available corner of the Schillerteater, Berlin.

Zeffirelli's 'Carmen' livened up the Austrians; looked like one would have an exciting evening. Likewise Joseph Svoboda's 'Die Soldaten' by Zimmerman for the Munich Staatsoper.

Two novel features were a 200-year-old pen and wash model from Vienna, full of Biblican grandeur, and a lovingly constructed model for a 'theatre-in-the-round' from Leonardo da Vinci's secretly mirror-coded plans.

Our own presentation, now nearing the end of its first year of touring, looks extremely fresh and still holds its own, primarily because of its overall unity and keen individual economy of style.

After Munich, the whole collection will be on show in Zurich during June, before our golden trophy section (featured in Cue No. 1) comes to the National Theatre for July, August and part of September.

ROBIN DON

CURTAIN DOWN – to begin

REG BARTRAM

The term 'Curtain up!' has become so much a part of our theatre jargon that it can be written into cue sheets and it means that point in time when the stage is revealed and the action commences. This belief is reinforced by the O.E.D. which states, under the heading of 'Curtain' that it is the screen separating the stage from the auditorium, which is drawn up at the beginning and dropped at the end of an act. Curtains which rise from their parked position on, or within, the stage floor are known, but the associated problems tend to put them into the effects or novelty class and to be situated in the back stage area where their ever-present hauling wires will not prove a hindrance and may even be disguised with clever lighting. I do remember seeing one front curtain which rose to close the act, but its very venue, the Tivoli Gardens, probably puts it into the novelty class.

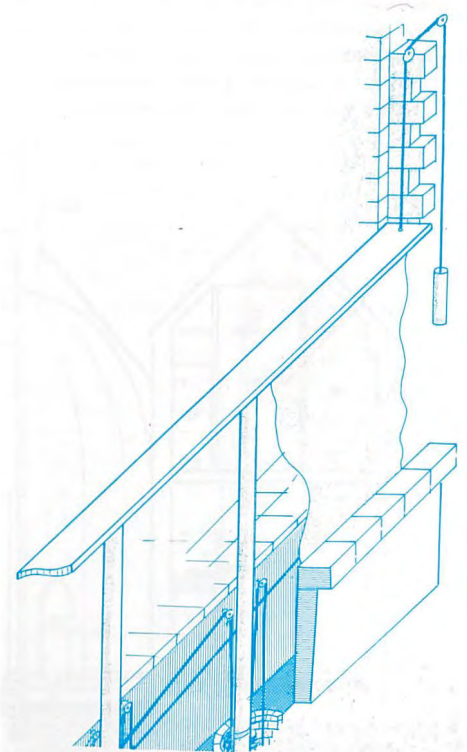
The first users of a front curtain on a grand scale appear to have been the Romans at about the first century A.D. and modern technicians might amuse themselves with the problem, in the absence of any contemporary technical explanation. This absence is fairly puzzling in itself as there still exists the ten books on architecture by the Roman engineer, Vitruvius. Book five is mostly devoted to the theatre, beginning with the selection of the site; then going on to the detailed lay-out and construction methods, seating, acoustics, stage and scenery etc. Elsewhere he shows a keen interest in mechanical contrivances, so how could he have resisted the minor marvel of a mechanical front curtain, spanning a width of sixty to one hundred feet with nothing above but the open sky? Not even a mention of its existence.

The direct evidence comes from archaeologists who, in the course of their excavations have revealed a trench, parallel to and immediately behind the stage apron front and the claim for this trench is that it housed the *aulaeum* (front curtain) in its parked position. These trenches occur at the theatre of Dionysos at Athens (dating from the rebuilding during the reign of Nero) and at the Roman theatres at Priene, Timgad and others, but notably at Pompeii, where it can still be viewed.

Along the bottom of the trench are stonelined holes of a drain-like appearance. This sums up the evidence and one can be excused for feeling sceptical. Logically the head batten of such a curtain should also be wide enough to cover the trench opening; so that it forms part of the stage flooring and it seems out of the question that this could be hauled from above, apart from the absence of overhead purchase points the ropes and bridles would need to disappear somewhere when the curtain was down, during the action on stage. Perhaps the trench had another theatre function, even a common drain, it was the lowest part of the whole building.

However, scepticism takes something of a

dive when one reads the only eye witness account which I've been able to track down. The Roman poet Horace writes, 'When it (the curtain) was dropped at the beginning of the performance, first the heads and last the feet of the actors could be seen. When it was raised at the end, first the heads and last the feet of figures painted on the curtain would appear.' He scarcely could have dreamed this one up and there is no doubt about what he described. It must have worked and somehow have been thrust upwards from below.



The trench at Athens is about 23 metres long and about 5 metres deep and there are 9 shaft holes in the floor of the trench which would allow this number of poles to push the head batten, with its attached loose curtain, sufficiently high enough to mask human activity on stage from the uppermost audience seats. How was manpower applied? The obvious solution would be a rope fastened to the foot of each pole, passing over a pulley high up in the trench and down again where it could be pulled by a man in the trench (nine men actually). A second pulley, for each pole, with a second rope down to a leaden counterweight would help. The hauling lines might even gather at some point and go onwards to a windlass, though this would be difficult in the trench itself. There would be some danger that the whole somewhat crazy contraption might topple over in the raised position and my suggestion is that a rope at the ends of the head batten, passing over pulleys high up on the side stage walls and down to counterweights on the outside of that wall would help to make it more stable.

CURTAIN UP – Fin.

This Atmosphere Divinest Shrouds thee

STAHL THEATRE, OUNDLE

PETER ANGIER

I had to suffer the humiliation of a television interview to help publicize the Oundle theatre before it opened. It was mercifully brief, but in the course of it I said something suitably glib about churches and theatres having a lot in common, both really being performance spaces, and it was only when I thought about it afterwards that I realised it might be true, and that apart from the obvious similarities of seating plan etc. good theatres and most old churches have in common that intangible quality, atmosphere.

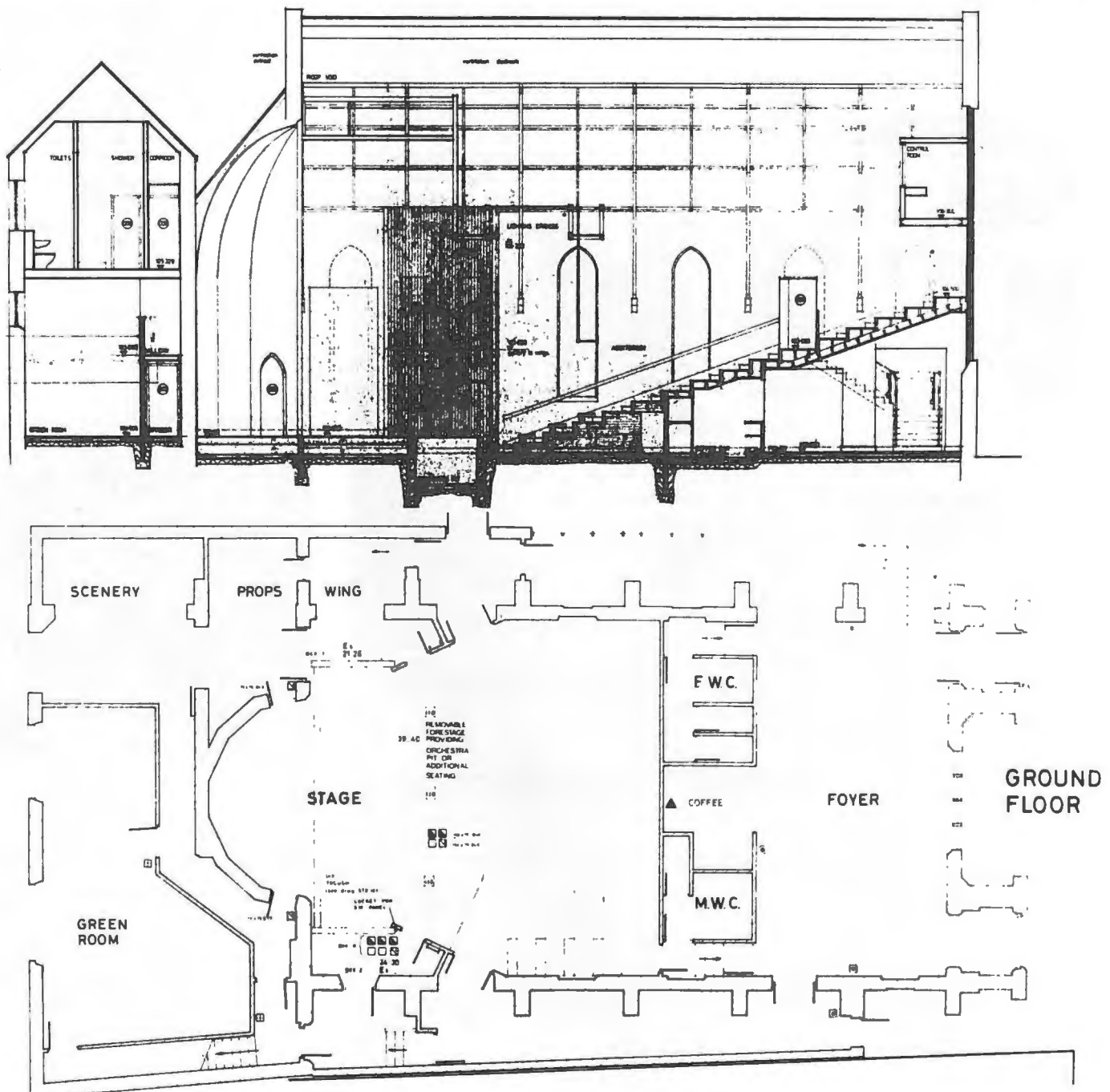
There was not much atmosphere evident

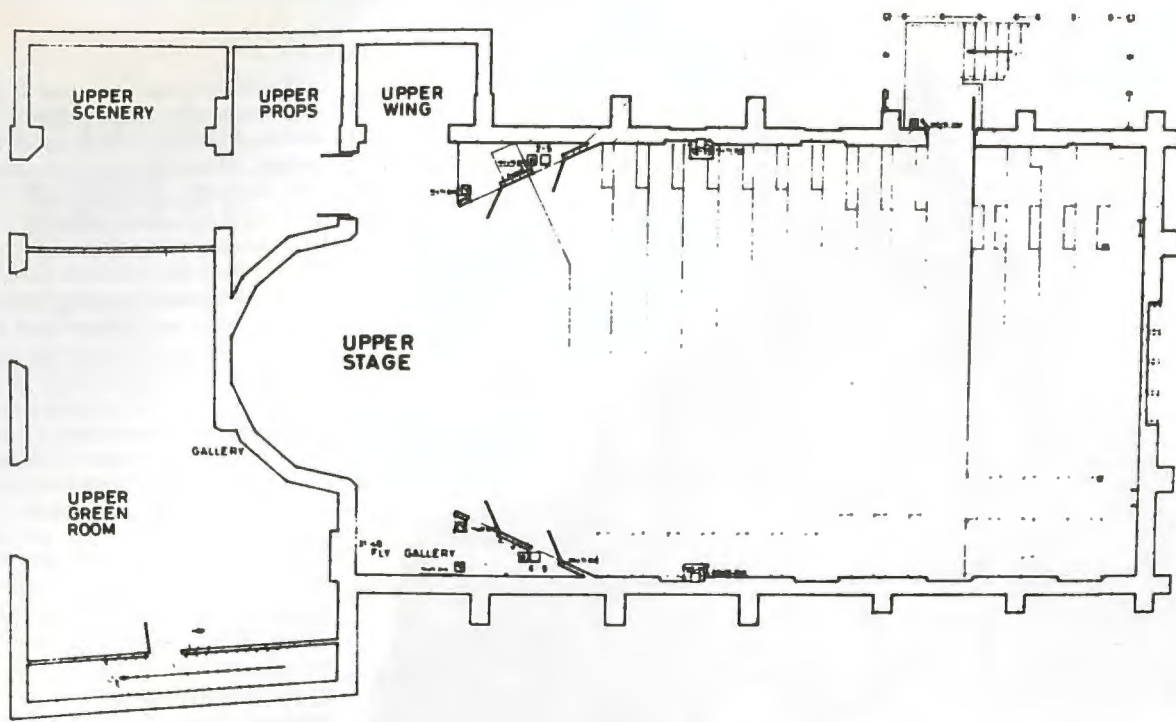
when I first saw the Congregational Church in West Street, Oundle in 1977. It had been empty for some time, and Oundle School had bought it with the intention of converting it into a theatre for the boys, with the possibility of putting on public performances with small scale professional tours. The exterior of the building was listed, and the interior was complete with pews and organ, all rather shabby. It dated from 1879, and was built on the site of an earlier mediaeval church.

It was tempting to say that nothing should

be done beyond a coat of paint and improved services, since superficially a theatre already existed, with seating, a possible acting area, even a small timber gallery. But the closer one looked, the clearer it became that the building would have to be gutted and re-built from a bare shell to achieve everything that the school required. An architect was appointed (Robert Weighton, Cambridge), and it was during this closer look at the building that we all realised that the church interior, which at first sight seemed gloomy and depressing, actually had great potential with an impressive roof structure and semi-circular apse at the 'stage' end, which were theatrical assets to be exploited.

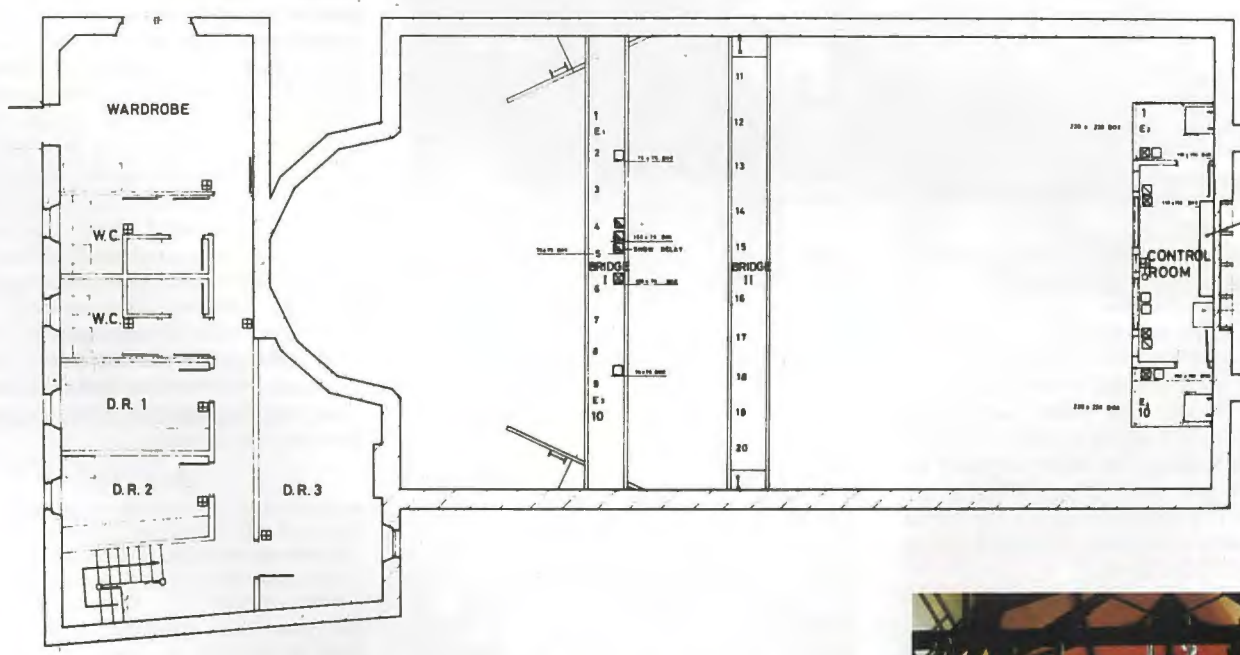
The school had asked for a variety of staging arrangements to be possible in the finished building, including in-the-round. It was interesting trying to see how this could be achieved, but in the end it was clearly impossible, the narrow town centre site, circulation and exit requirements, and the rectangular shape of the main building made it inevitable that we settled for the original





- SYMBOLS KEY**
- ☐ Microphone unit
 - ☐ Loudspeaker unit
 - ☐ Cue light
 - ☐ Intercom point
 - ☐ Call operator
 - ☐ Call & show relay operator
 - Bell
 - ▲ O.P.: telephone

UPPER GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

- SYMBOLS KEY**
- 10 2kw circuit
 - 10 5kw -
 - E Non-dim circuit

church orientation: end stage. Behind the main church building the old manse which joined it had space for dressing rooms and wardrobe, and also at stage level an unusual double height room which was to be the green room. This height allowed a small

gallery to be inserted on one side, and the room can double as a rehearsal room or an informal studio for experimental work, which compensates in part for the lack of adaptability in the main auditorium.

The end stage format was achieved by in-





serting a rake in the gutted building, which gave enough space underneath for a foyer, box office, coffee bar and the required public WCs. On one side of the auditorium there was a space for a small exhibition gallery, on the other side a new public stair was built outside the main plan of the building, and enclosed in a glass 'box'. This successfully manages to leave the listed exterior much as it was, but at the same time makes clear to people passing that the use has changed, particularly at night when the lights show the audience inside.

In the auditorium the rake is uniform and steep. The lancet windows have been blocked, but their shape can be seen. The roof structure forms the main unifying element, running the length of the auditorium to the back of the stage, leaving one in no doubt visually that stage and seating are in one space. Two lighting bridges have been inserted with trusses spanning the auditorium, made from large square section steel tube. This gives them a massive appearance, and it was a worry that they might be dominant. In fact, finished in the same brown as the roof timbers, they fit in very well without appearing too heavy. Most people visiting the theatre have not immediately realised that they are new work.

Two things have been done in this auditorium which might cause some disagreement. At each side of the stage, a triangular structure has been built in the conventional 'assembly' position, creating wing space, forestage entrances, Juliet balconies and lighting positions. These triangles stop at eaves level, and are finished in dark stained timber in direct contrast to the walls, so appear obviously inserted within the original building. It could be argued that they destroy the purity of the end stage concept (if there is

such a thing!), but I think that the wing space requirement is paramount. The other decision which goes against theatre conventions, was to paint the side walls and roof a warm, but quite light cream colour, including the stage end. The intention was to emphasize again the unity of the space, and also to recapture some of the church atmosphere. We did compromise a bit by using a darker shade round the stage, and the walls the audience cannot see are brown to cut down reflections, but I think it is worth it, and the gain in atmosphere outweighs the loss from a slightly light auditorium. Oddly enough, the blackout on stage is good, it is in the auditorium that one never loses a sense of the presence of the audience. I think even that has some advantages, and certainly we were glad to avoid the theatre vogue for slapping black paint everywhere.

The school had asked in their brief to be able to stage simple productions with the minimum of scenery, and this requirement was met by keeping the apse in the stage back wall. It has two original gothic doors which can be used for upstage entrances, and forms a shell-like shape which can be made to disappear or stand out with careful lighting and give a simple but very attractive and dramatic setting without scenery at all. There is provision for scenery, of course, and a large new extension at the back of the site is used as a scenic workshop and wardrobe store. There is direct and easy access between store, workshop, get-in and stage, all with clear height of 4.3m.(14'). There is no full flying, but hemp and winch suspensions over the stage can hang up to a height of 8m.(26'). Sections of the stage at the front can be fitted in three positions, to give the conventional forestage, additional seating, or orchestra pit for about ten players.

The seating rake has been fitted with padded bench seats, which allow boys to be accommodated at rather closer centres than adults. Maximum adult capacity is about 280, depending on the stage arrangement, and size of adult! At the back of the auditorium there was enough height over the seating for a control room to be built, which contains the usual lighting and sound equipment. There are follow spot and lighting platforms at each side of this room.

The particular pleasure of this job for me has been that the building contains all the facilities that one expects to find in much larger and more expensive theatres, but they are scaled down, almost in miniature, but still thoroughly workable. The other pleasure is that it has got atmosphere, whether created new or inherited I am not sure. Which reminds me that it certainly ought to have that other theatre necessity, a ghost. When the nave floor was being dug out at the beginning of the contract for the foyer lavatories, several coffins were immediately exposed, virtually on the surface. I was intrigued to watch one of the builders casually pointing out what they had found with a thigh bone taken from a broken coffin. It turned out that the mediaeval church used to stand further back from the road, and one of the vicars, his wife and several children had been buried in front of it. When the Victorian church was built it extended over the grave, and it looks as if the excavations for the nave stopped when they hit coffins. Visitors to the theatre may be reassured that all remains were removed, after meticulous official investigations to determine their age. In the course of several late evenings spent working alone in the building I decided that whatever presence there may be is entirely friendly.

<i>Seating Capacity</i>	Without Orchestra Pit 288 With orchestra pit 262
<i>Dressing Rooms</i>	3-4 person Additional changing for 20 Separate showers and WCs.
<i>Stage Lighting (CCT Theatre Lighting)</i>	40-way Electrosonic 3 group 3 preset manual board, controlling 38-2.5kw. and 2-5kw. dimmers.
<i>Sound (CTL Ltd.)</i>	6 channel 2 group mixer, 10 mic. lines in, 13 speaker lines out. 2-50w. amplifiers. 1-Revox B77 tape deck with space for second 1-Pioneer gram. deck Portable S.M. Desk with socket point stage right. 10 - red & green cue lights. Intercom Dressing room calls and show relay Auditorium calls Foyer calls and bell
<i>Communications (CTL Ltd.)</i>	Robert Weighton RIBA Cambridge.
<i>Architects:</i>	Carr and Angier
<i>Theatre Consultants:</i>	

Letters to the Editor

From Mr. Reg Bartram

Dear Sir,

In your March-April issue you covered a range of Memory Controls from various manufacturers and granted to AVAB of Sweden the 'Pandora's Box Award'.

My version of the box is from the Theogony of Hesiod and apart from minor variations, remains the same throughout history.

It was Prometheus who gathered all the spite and evils of the world and imprisoned them in a box (therefore strictly *his* box), thus enabling people to live the perfect and innocent life as intended.

Zeus, jealous of Prometheus, fashioned a beautiful creature, Pandora (which means 'all-giving') and using ungentlemanly means, arranged a marriage between her and Prometheus' brother, Epimetheus. Thus, having the freedom of the house, Pandora found and opened the box and out they flew; old-age, sickness, hard-labour, insanity, vice, passion etc., which then attracted all the mortals. Delusive hope however, whom Prometheus had also shut in the box, discouraged them by her lies from a general suicide.

REG BARTRAM,
11 Raymond Road,
Neutral Bay,
N.S.W. 2089
Australia

From Mr. A. J. M. Stevenson

Dear Sir,

PAR64 lamps

Many technicians will not have been surprised to read Francis Reid's reply to Dr. Tarrant's article, showing as it does the difficulty of expressing artistic judgement together with technical information.

Confidence in series-wired 120V lamps has perhaps been developed in organisations with time and money to spend on extra types of connectors and heavier cables (to avoid mismatch and excess volt-drop), whereas blithe acceptance of 240V lamps ignores an important restriction, their non-rotatability in the lantern.

It is agreed that the narrow 240V produces less *oomph* (peak intensity) than the narrow 120V, so Mr. Reid and Dr. Tarrant might do best by combining to persuade 240V manufacturers to use a biplane filament of more compact area, and to make only narrow-beam versions which could then be shaped by directional frosts as required.

Yours faithfully,

A. J. M. STEVENSON
Lancelyn Lighting (N1)
Ash Park,
Knockan,
Dungiven,
co Derry,
N Ireland

We asked Francis Reid if he accepted peak intensity as a measure of oomph. He replied No, intensity is only a part of the oomph story. Other contributing factors include distribution, colour temperature, and clarity. Directional frosts are currently my favourite toys, but they do rather act as de-oomphers. (Editor)

Between Cues

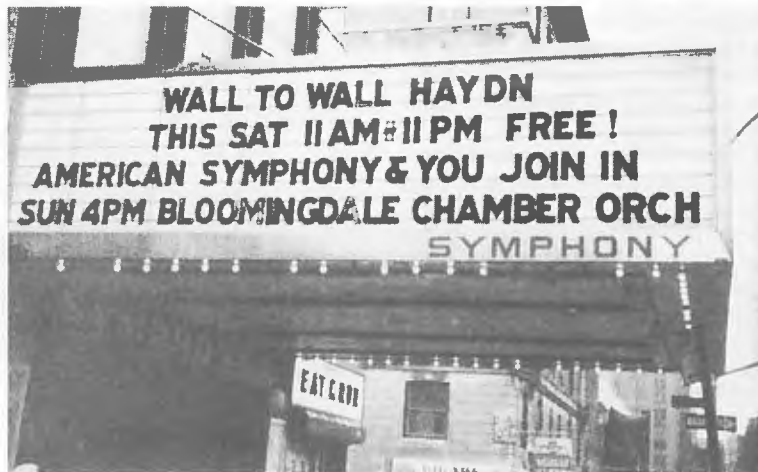
The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

Houselights Go

Economic factors play a bigger role in theatre life than many of us often care to recognise. It is generally accepted that the development of lighting controls was largely due to such factors as supply company payments to lubricate the change to AC, performance manpower reduction and, more

Symphonic Wallpaper

The alternative was a *Dramathon* (53 hours of non-stop theatre from Chekhov and O'Casey to new playwrights plus sundry celebrity spots, stand-up comics, jugglers and pie-throwers scattered between the plays – and a continuing auction offering theatre memorabilia, tickets to shows, vouchers for



recently, rehearsal time savings. Artistic gains were a result rather than a cause. I had always assumed (and so did Terence Rees in his *Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas*) that the fading of houselights was introduced for artistic reasons. I am now fascinated to learn that there was also an economic motive. Eric Irvin in *Theatre Notebook* quotes two Australian examples. A Melbourne stage manager was instructed (in 1859) that the Theatre Royal was losing money and that he must see that the gas was turned off 'behind when the curtain is down, and before when it is up'. A Sydney newspaper reported (in 1892) that 'Actors complain of the darkening of theatres, because they like to see the happy faces before them. They might as well be playing to Dante's Inferno, under this cheap system'.

dinners, tap dancing lessons, a horoscope reading, a handwriting analysis and an autographed cookbook by Salvador Dali.) But I opted for a slice of *Wall to Wall Haydn* where it took a mere 12 hours to play through 5 symphonies, 4 trios, 3 concertos, 2 quartets, 2 sonatas and 1 oratorio. I can think of no better way to use a battered and redundant but acoustically sound cinema than to label it *Symphony Space* and programme it with just this sort of musical imagination.

Tickets at TKSTS

London's West End theatre is experiencing a period of diminishing affluence (I choose my words with delicacy). I will resist the temptation to offer a full-scale Plinge analysis of the



situation and merely record my fundamental belief that, for starters, (1) actors will just have to start working on Sundays (with a day off in lieu) and (2) managers will just have to discount their daily remainders from a central selling point like Broadway's TKSTS in Times Square. When I speak to people in the TKSTS queue, I am convinced that this is an *extra* audience from the one that buys full-price tickets. TKSTS shifts more than 10% of the total seat availability and rain seems to make little difference to the queue length. London theatre could use a drop of this quality of audience enthusiasm.

The Sound of Beecham

For personal reasons which I prefer not to reveal (although they will be obvious and understandable to those at the heart of the matter) I am reluctant to comment on the sound of *Beecham* at the Apollo. However I have been horrified by the response of some people whose opinions I had hitherto respected. I refer to those who claimed that it was a mistake to use old Beecham recordings with a *Fi* sometimes somewhat less than *Hi*. These insensitive idiots would have selected recordings on the basis of technical quality irrespective of conductor. They would then have blasted the music at us from an orchestra of loudspeakers. Theirs is the sort of technological assault on the Arts that we must all continually be on our guard against. Fortunately Director Patrick Garland was on our, the audience's, side and ensured that we only *overheard* the music . . . keeping the *decibels* and the *presence* until a quite magnificent Coup de Theatre encore.



Regular readers of these ramblings will know that Mr. Timothy West's acting is much admired by this Plinge. I never met Beecham but I heard him many times in the concert hall, once in the opera house, and his recordings now pleasure me more than do most of the flash-in-the-box-office glossy gents currently beating time. And I built up a picture of the man from conversations with many of the original R.P.O. players. *Timothy is Tommy*. The show has gone but the performance must remain. Fortunately the scenery was but an intrusion – the play would look better with just podium, chandeliers, and a collection of music-stands, chairs and percussion starkly downlit against black nothing. So, surely we can look upon his like again.



Burlesque Babies

The only really hot ticket on Broadway this spring seemed to be *Sugar Babies* – like it took me three visits to the box-office to get accepted as a standee. It's great. It's 100% me. It seemed to be 100% everyone in the audience. Mickey Rooney and Anne Miller lead a company of old comics (supported by young glammers) through a gorgeous collection of historic cross-overs and black-out sketches. That so many of the jokes (or their variants) are familiar only adds to our pleasure at this finely tuned display of timing and pointing. Anyone who shares my joy in television's re-runs of old showbiz movies will understand my rapture over such matters as Anne Miller's first entrance atop a barrowload of luggage and lines like *I feel a song comin' on*. As this is a technical magazine, I should perhaps add that a window has been knocked through from the cloakroom so that, amid the coats and hats, there was that symbol of the Broadway lighting revolution (straight from 1920s piano boards to 1980s microprocessors, with no in-between) a memory console – in this case, a *Kliegl Performer*.

They're Miming our Song

They're Playing Our Song just survives (but *only just* survives) big theatre treatment. This elegantly constructed little piece, with its crisp Neil Simon one-liners and compelling Marvin Hamlisch duets, would be lovely in a small playhouse. From the *Imperial's* first shelf it was like a mime. The show's album is orchestrally overblown but I have become severely addicted to it.

Short Sammy from the Oxford

A delicious 1893 programme of *The Oxford* music hall now costs the old price of ten best stalls (or fifty visits to the pit or gallery). I never knew *The Oxford* but during the late fifties there was a rather hectic couple of months when I doubled the roles of Stage Director of the English Opera Group and Aldeburgh Festival with that of Chief Electrician of the Scala (the one in Charlotte Street, not the one in Milan). The splendid brass and mahogany shoes that were used as splitters by the Scala stage electrics were known as *Oxfords* since they were reputed to have been acquired from the famous old music hall down the road. And in the centre of number one spot bar (between the two pairs of focus spots) was a short length of batten known as *The Short Sammy*. Sammy was, of course, short for Samoilloff but I was never able to discover whether that famous Professor of Colour ever used this particular sammy for his colour conjuring. I was maestro of the splendid tracker-wired liquid-dimmer bank feeding the battens and dips. Interlopers like spotlights and 'The Short Sammy' were, however, relegated to the slider dimmers of *Bogey's Board*. Bogey was a splendid gentleman. If the lighting were criticised, he would always protest 'But I'm only the boiler man', whereas any query over the auditorium temperature would be countered with 'But I'm only the electrician'. Dispute the logic and his cue light was liable to be interpreted as a signal to stoke the boiler.