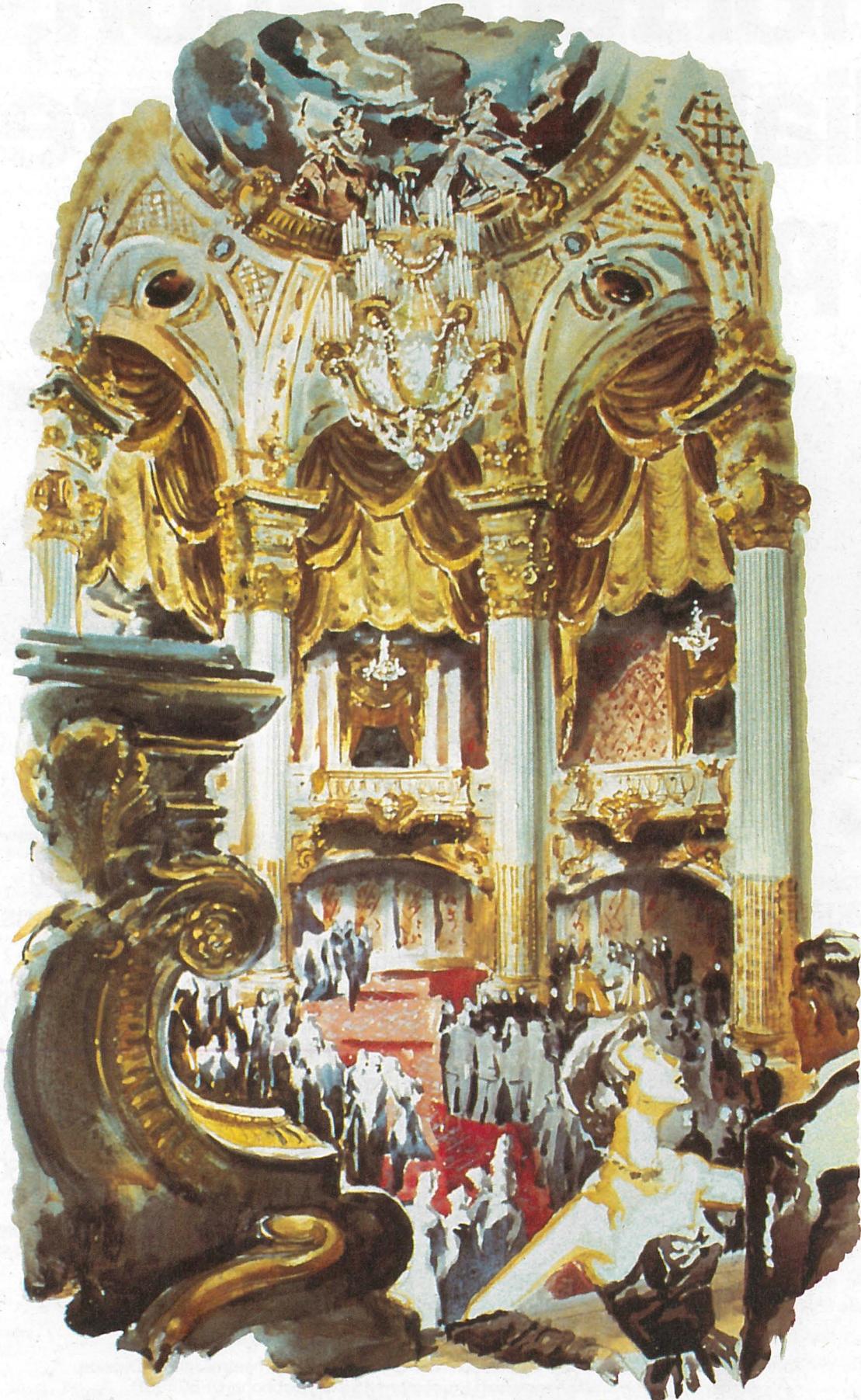


CUE

Technical Theatre Review



November - December 1980

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CUE

Technical Theatre Review

8. November – December 1980

Cover picture

Original Rambusch sketch for the lobby of the Mark Hellinger opened in 1930 as The Hollywood. Iain Mackintosh describes this among many other historical American Theatres on page 14 of this issue.

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Audience Power

We live in an age of pressure groups. Confrontation by strength or stealth is the order of the day. Consumer groups are a growth area. Where stands the entertainment industry? Will the audience soon rise in unified voice to vote with a corporate show of absentee bottoms?

Withdrawal of labour is the traditional sanction available to dissident theatregoers. But, as in other industries, the strike weapon can often destroy the situation that it seeks to reform.

An empty seat, however, is usually the result of an individual decision: audiences are reluctant to follow their leaders.

The professional critics are frequently spurned. Critical advice to 'Black the Bard' resulted in a sold out Old Vic, followed by a touring bonanza with box-office returns rivalling the traditional pantomime budgetary salvation. 'Sending to Coventry' acquired a whole new meaning.

And there has been little recent evidence of audience respect for the dramatic judgement of their community leaders. The pronouncement of a municipal backer's dissatisfaction with his investment only resulted in a National Playgoer's charge across the Thames to study the facts of Roman life.

For how long will the T.U.C. allow this undisciplined behaviour to continue? Why should theatregoers be denied the right to reason with the rhetoric of a flying picket?

Most theatres have a *Theatre Club*, a *Playgoer's Society* or a *Friends of the Theatre*. Admittedly, the act of subscribing to one of these organisations is often regarded as an honourable alternative to actual theatregoing. However such societies do represent a hard core of committed audience and most are affiliated to their national federation.

Ever eager to detect early signs of industrial unrest in the audience sector, CUE infiltrated the Twenty Third Annual Conference of the *Federation of Playgoers Societies* at Tewkesbury. We are happy to be able to report that audience power seems set to remain in the hands of enthusiastic rationalists with a commitment to support the developing art of theatre with their critically aware – but sympathetic – attendance.

Autolycus

Back to School

The Arts Council is running a second one-month course for arts administrators, starting on January 19, 1981 at the City University Centre for Arts, Northampton Square, London EC1. It is aimed at sharpening up the skills of arts administrators in every sphere of the arts, from theatres and arts centres to touring companies. It also serves as a useful refresher course for more experienced administrators.

The course covers such fields as book-keeping, budgeting, budgetary control, licensing and employment. There will also be tutorials, seminars and opportunities to extend and develop specialised interests and skills.

The course fee is £150. The Arts Council will be offering bursaries to enable some students to attend.

Twelfth Night at the Wells

Lilian Baylis re-opened Sadler's Wells Theatre on Twelfth Night, 1931, fifty years ago next month. The site on which the theatre now stands, furthermore, has been occupied by buildings devoted to entertainment since 1683, when Mr Sadler discovered the mineral wells in the ground of his 'musik house'. Baylis found the present building in a state of disrepair approaching a derelict shell and launched an appeal for its improvement. The rest is history.

With the emphasis now on dance and opera, the Wells is London's main lyric touring house, not to mention the home of the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet. So its fiftieth anniversary celebrations will focus on these fields with tributes from top performers.

Starting with a party for 1,000 people

featuring the Twelfth Night Revue and a vintage bus trip from the Old Vic to the Wells to collect celebrities from the National, Coliseum and Royal Opera House (all associated at one time or another with Baylis or the Wells), the send-offs will continue until June. The other four theatres will also mount their own tributes, among them the unveiling of a plaque to Baylis in the dress foyer of the Coliseum.

Any veterans of the era or friends who've not been contacted or bought tickets for the party and cabaret on January 6 should write to Mary-Ann Bemish pronto enclosing six pounds (all in) for each ticket . . . they are going like hot cakes.

But yet the pity of it, Iago

As the cries of 'wolf' grow louder and louder among West End theatre managements and darkened or half empty theatres testify to the gravity of the problems facing the industry, there lurks an even more sinister threat, one of self-destruction.

The vultures of the business, who live not on remote cliff tops but in agents' offices, lighting hire shops, at stage doors and even onstage, are the black angels of death, whose murderous cries and poisonous influence is harder to stomach than the twin evils of rampant inflation and rocketing costs.

These black creatures' chief delight is rumour. Not informed rumour, which is after all the very fabric of showbusiness, but idle invention, malice. And their motive? Ego. Nothing as outgoing as the bearing of good news, but the mischievously selfish aim of inventing stories where no juicy, real-life disasters have come to their ears.

So widespread are some of these rumours that one can begin to doubt one's senses. The brainwashing can be persistent, and, coming as it does from the very heart of the theatre industry, it really hurts. The effect is truly poisonous, alas, since it spreads doubt and gloom on even the most successful shows.

For months now theatrical masochists have rubbed their hands with glee at each fresh disaster besetting 'Sweeney Todd', the most conspicuous recent victim of the rumour machine.

Someone heard of a producer hiring lighting-equipment for his show at Drury Lane, which would follow on the heels of Sweeney. Was he *already* hiring effects back in July? 'Mack and Mabel' was going to open at the Lane on September 10; then 'Barnum' was going to squeeze out the Demon Barber after its acclaimed New York run (although another variation was squeezing 'Annie' out of the Victoria Palace instead); and finally London's only pantomime this year was to open after Sweeney's closure (in fact Jim Davidson in 'Dick Whittington' has been booking for its Palladium season for months and there will no doubt be other pantos as usual).

Ever since the first night of 'Sweeney Todd', it has been an obsession that it cost £500,000 to stage, and would be the costliest failure if it closed.

Even the rave notice in the Sunday Times, which described it as a 'brilliantly integrated piece of music theatre, breathtakingly impressive, with stunning performances', could not resist adding that 'if it were to fall, the expensive crash would be heard all over London'.

So, finally it did close in mid-November, barely five months after it opened. It ran at a weekly profit, modest admittedly, but the half full houses would have filled the Prince Edward where 'Evita' is playing, so percentages are deceptive. And we should remember that at Drury Lane this superb show was playing eight performances a week.

We should all have been rejoicing, of course, that the English production of Sweeney was as successful as it was. This was the nearest Stephen Sondheim's music has got towards operatic form. The New York Met has taken up its option and will include it in its 1981 season. Meanwhile the U.S. production with Angela Lansbury and Len Cariou opened in September in Washington D.C. for a year-long nationwide tour. All we have left is Sheridan Morley's comment that to anyone who cares even remotely about the future of the stage musical, 'Sweeney Todd' would *have* to be judged the most important musical of the decade.

It would be foolish to claim that silly or even malicious rumours killed Sweeney. But in this case, as with many others on the theatrical scene, one might say again 'with friends like these, who needs enemies?' Anyone can dislike a show - even without seeing it. But what is gained by thoughtless gossip of the poisoning kind? With much of the media only too willing to be misinformed about the realities of our business, speculations and innuendos,



Alas, poor Todd.



Ministers to the Environment (Michael Heseltine and friends at the inauguration of the Cleaner Westminster Scheme).

based on 'inside information', do nothing to help.

Sweeney, by the way, is not being followed by anything. There is expected to be a six month fill-in period of concerts and small shows while the management negotiates a replacement. Mrs Candour and Lady Sneerwell please note.

An evening of British Rubbish

The level of street litter in the West End has dropped by a record 60% according to a series of photographic surveys. Announcing the results at the end of October, Sir Henry Marking, chairman of the British Tourist Authority paid tribute to the concerted drive being made to clean up the area by presenting 'cleaner city' awards to individuals and organisations whose contributions had been 'outstanding'. Among them was the Society of West End Theatres.

The campaign was launched in May 1980 by Westminster City Council in a zone covering Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square, Trafalgar Square and most of theatreland. The pea green and white striped litter bins and signs denoting the clean-up scheme are dotted everywhere so that there's rarely one out of sight. Volunteer street leaders have put in a lot of work, reporting problems and progress as it happens from every corner of the zone, and the council has organised extra collections of rubbish and additional weekend street cleaning. Over £30,000 has been donated by firms and individuals to help underwrite the scheme, which many see as a last chance to save central London from the growing tide of litter and rubbish.

The pilot scheme ended on November 6, but despite fears that local government cuts would kill off its extension into 1981, its importance has been recognised by giving it a fresh lease of life and indeed widening the area all the way up to Oxford Street.

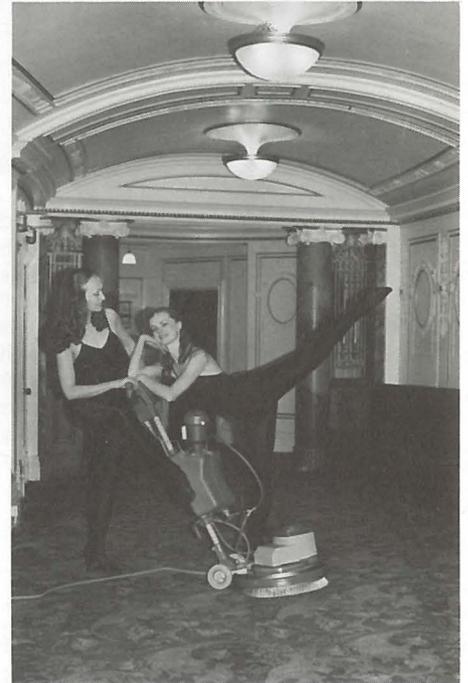
Prince Philip sent his own message of encouragement to everyone involved. 'The

state of the city's streets is a measure of pride and concern of its citizens. In the case of the City of Westminster which attracts so many visitors from abroad, it is almost a shop window for the whole country'. And as a co-operative effort on the part of the West End community at large, it has been heartening in its enthusiasm. Sponsors who have contributed in cash or kind include Berman and Nathans, theatrical costumiers, and Sir Fred Pontin, and such varied firms as British Airways, Courage and Whitbread breweries, Grand Met hotels, Lyons Maid, MacDonald's the hamburger chain, NCP car parks and even the Post Office . . . right down to a dear old pensioner of 96 by the name of Mrs. E. M.

Adami in Chinatown who offered £2 from her pension 'to help out'. It was not accepted, but instead an appeal was launched for a lamp-post bin by her home.

After the Coliseum's lift had been installed a clean-up was staged by a number of cleaning manufacturers on October 15. Ballet dancers and members of the English National Opera Company were present to witness the lightening-quick sprucing up of the 11,020 sq. yds. of carpet in the public areas of the theatre.

But what impact has the improved tone of the neighbourhood had on business for



Clean up at the Coliseum (dancers with the ENO).

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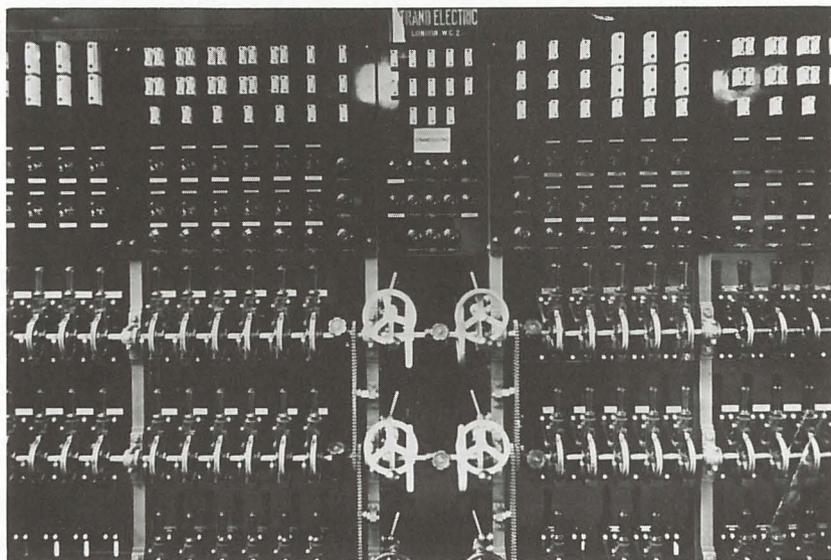
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Stage Lighting. Bentham was referred to in a recent issue of CUE as 'being perhaps the father of British Theatre Lighting'. I think he would deprecate the suggested paternity, not from any lack of self appreciation I hasten to add, but from any consequent inference of impending senility. I am told that the latest revised edition of the book is now available. After this unsolicited plug I expect to receive an autographed free copy.

Forty years ago a reasonably well equipped proscenium stage would have had three or four compartment battens, a No. 1 twelve way Spot Bar, a compartment footlight and half a dozen F.O.H. Spots. Obviously this was before we were expected to think in tens of everything except eggs. There would have been a mechanically robust and bulky board embodying resistance dimmers in 48 or 60 circuits. Today if a similar type of theatre has been modernised the battens and footlights would be absent, except for lighting backcloths or a cyclorama. Over the acting area there could be anything from 50 to 100 spots of various types and there would certainly be a generous proliferation of F.O.H. Spots.

The most flexible of the old directly operated dimmer boards was impressively named a Grand Master. One of the last of that type was installed in the Blackpool Opera House in 1938. It had 90 dimmers and was 13ft. 6ins. wide and 7ft. 10ins. high, sited, as was customary, on a sturdy platform in the prompt corner. Even an operator wearing roller skates would have been over stretched when coping with the timing of complicated cues: two operators were usually necessary. Obviously there were physical limits to the number of dimmer channels that could be controlled in this fashion. As the numbers increased technical inventiveness had to be concentrated on systems of remote control: father Bentham's organ console was an early type, controlling large banks of motor driven dimmers remotely situated. It is in this field of condensed control that technical ingenuity has been most conspicuously demonstrated, aided and abetted by the arrival of thyristor dimmers and computers. In the March/April issue of CUE Adrian Dightam reviewed ten different but basically similar types of compact panels, some controlling anything up to a thousand memorised cues, others having more modest capacities. To those of us who are electronically illiterate the technical specifications of such controls are mumbo-jumbo of disconcerting obscurity. Fortunately one can learn to manipulate the most complicated of the magic boxes without having any knowledge of why the controls respond so miraculously to a modicum of finger-tip dexterity. We can, of course, learn to drive motor cars without having even elementary notions of the component technology and manage to operate with moderate expertise: there are not infrequent lethal casualties but these are mostly due to reckless ineptitude, not to faults of the mechanism.

In the professional theatre there has arisen an elite corps of lighting designers



An early Grand Master lighting control – two operators were usually necessary. (photo Rank Strand)

whose experience has fostered a desire to have maximum facilities for subtle variations of light and shade in their striving to achieve the Apian fluctuations of appearance in that phenomenal world of the stage. Their promptings have stimulated the inventive genius of the technical lads who now vie with each other in devising controls of impressive versatility. The danger is that one may become so fascinated by the versatility that the basic purpose is obscured.

What matters most, of course, is not the expansion of ways and means but the capacity for effective use of whatever may be the ways and means available. There are still a lot of lighting enthusiasts, both professional and amateur, who have neither the means nor the need to acquire extravagantly sophisticated equipment. Some of them are still compelled to rely on a limited range of light sources and comparatively simple control units. Although the resistance dimmer is now obsolescent there are still stages with light control restricted to the humble Junior 8 or, possibly, if the original owners had been a little more prosperous, they might have a 24-way bracket handle board. If so they should not be despondent or inhibited. Although their facilities may be lamentably restricted the basic principles of lighting remain unchanged. The first need is to provide appropriate visibility that can be varied to add significance to the pictures being created. There must be a clear idea of the visual effect being sought. There must be a sensitive appreciation of what can be achieved with whatever equipment is available. There must be a knowledge of what additional units can be hired or borrowed if there is an imperative need which cannot otherwise be met.

An appreciation of the principles of pictorial composition must be developed. Each of the constantly changing stage pictures must have visual quality, an artistry of line and form and of the essential focal points that must blend emphatically but not obtrusively. Whatever may be the scale of the production or the limitations of

facilities there is the need for artistry. Fortunately there is universal distribution of the divine spark. Each of us is a bit of an artist, an attempt at an artist, and however little the bit or unsuccessful the attempt there is an ability to develop appreciation of the detail of visual expression.

There are numerous books dealing with the problems of stage lighting. It is possible to select those most likely to assist the ambitious beginner. They cannot *teach* him (as always the masculine embraces the feminine) the subtleties of artistry. They can suggest what the palette for painting with light should consist of and how it should be used. They cannot offer any specific formula for creation of a masterpiece. They can help the serious student to learn by experience if he knows what he wishes to express and has the guts to have a go. He will often learn more from failure than from success if he can recognise which is which.

The tyro must realise that he should never use light just for the fun of demonstrating ingenuity of control. Light waves should be used as the actor should use sound waves, to interpret to an audience the creation of the dramatist: both must have light, shade and colour to achieve subtleties of emphasis.

The extent and sophistication of the apparatus cannot guarantee success: that must always depend on the quality of the individual involved. The would-be lighting artist must be willing to give a lot of thought and time to the job and, unlike the actor, must not expect the reward of applause from the audience. The best lighting usually results from the least obvious use of light. If he has the essential critical ability to judge his own work objectively, not being satisfied too readily with approval or too easily deterred by criticism he will learn much from disappointments and, just occasionally, he will have a glow of satisfaction when he knows that the job has been well done. Like all other mortals he can never command success but at least he should make every effort to deserve it.

Gossage gets out from under

SIMON KELLY

For Bruce Beckwith, provisional Equity member and quarter page in Spotlight magazine, the wolf was at his door so frequently he was thinking of calling it Rover. Since leaving Drama School last year all he had done was ASMin on a tatty tour with a miniscule walk-on part. Since then, not so much as a sniff at a greasepaint stick. If he didn't work soon, he thought he would go mad. Then, as the season of good will to out of work actors hove itself sluggishly over the horizon, he was summoned to his agent's office.

His agent, Stella Frisoli, was an ex-actress of the old school; for many years she had been thinking of retiring. Bruce wasn't by any means the only actor on her books. He and three hundred other people had to scrap about for whatever accidentally found its way to her cluttered desk. When Bruce arrived, she was stirring her mid-morning cup of Horlicks and talking to the two men seated opposite.

'This is Mr. Ben Fenton, and Mr. Gossage of Surprise Productions, dear,' she said. 'Bruce is one of my clever boys. I think that he would be very good for a part.'

Bruce looked at the pair on the overstuffed sofa, his nerves tingling. A Part? Fenton, a bloodshotly large person in need of a shave, leaned forward.

'Can you sing and dance, that sort of thing?' he asked. Bruce noticed that he had apparently had a few.

'Yes. Well, I can move, if someone choreographs me a bit . . .'

'He's very good,' said Stella, putting the Horlicks down.

They all looked at him. Gossage, a mild man with rabbit teeth, smiled.

'Is there a part for me?' ventured Bruce, 'In something?'

Fenton hiccuped.

'I'm mounting a Panto. Aladdin. Palace Theatre in Colne, Lancashire. Gossage here is putting up the money. You'd do for one of the Chinese policemen and ASM. Are you free to do it?'

Was Bruce free? Do monkeys dangle from trees?

'I'll take it!' said Bruce.

Fenton stood up abruptly.

'I need a drink,' he announced. 'Gossage will sign your contract and tell you where and when.'

'Just sign here, dear,' said Stella, rummaging for an Esher Standard contract form.

Bruce went down the creaking stairs as if floating on air. Working! Great!

The Palace Theatre was situated in a prominent corner position atop a steep hill that led up from the station. The wintry northern sleet was sticking to Bruce's back as he found the dirty stage door. A riot of institutional green and brown paint greeted him in the dingy ill-lit passages that led to the stage. The resident Stage Manager, a vacant fat man holding a 'Yankee' screwdriver greeted him.

'Tha'll be from t'Panto company. All t'others are in t'Green Room, tha knows.'

Bruce lugged his heavy suitcase down the stairs and joined his new colleagues. Gossage shook his hand and introduced him all round.

'Ben hasn't arrived yet, unfortunately,' he said. 'He was supposed to be here last night.'

Four hours later and several phone calls, Fenton still hadn't materialised. They found a cafe in a nearby street and had lunch.

'My dear,' said Jeremy Bennett, a camp elderly 'Dame', laying a fatherly hand on Bruce's arm, 'The man's an absolute disaster area. He drinks, you know. He is a hissing, dear boy, and a byword in the profession. Frankly, I don't suppose we shall see him today. Not if he was on the sauce last night; and knowing him, he was.'

The other members of the cast began to vie with each other with Ben Fenton horror stories to which Gossage listened, eyes bulging in amazement. A man who believed the best of everyone, his world began to crumble.

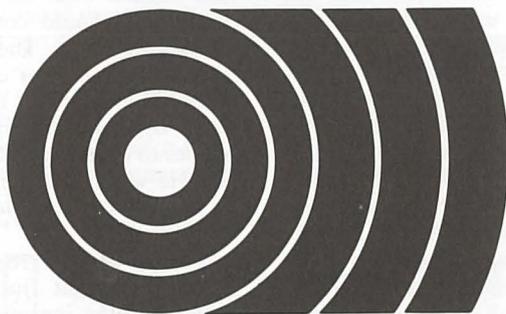
'I had no idea he was like that,' he said in hushed tones. 'My God, I've put every penny I've got into this show!'

Bruce spent the afternoon with Annie Piper, an attractive blonde who was playing the 'Aladdin' part, looking for digs. They eventually put up in a Pub near the station. The next two days everyone spent looking over their scripts and watching poor Gossage going to pieces slowly. Eventually one of the frantic phone calls bore fruit. Fenton had been arrested in Bournemouth for abusive behaviour, assaulting a constable and causing damage to a police vehicle. He had been fined and sent down for two weeks. No director. No show.

The Resident Stage Manager brought a message from the Theatre Manager.

'He says that t'advance bookings are goin' well. Hadn't tha better start rehearsin'? Tha've only got two weeks, tha knows.'

The MD, Julian, who was to play the an by way of being the band, button-



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holed the sandbagged Gossage.

'You're in charge. What are we going to do? It's too late to get another director now. Do we pack up and go home, or what?'

'I suppose we do . . . I'm ruined!' Gossage realised the magnitude of the disaster. 'You'll all get your money. I'll pay you. I had no idea this man was so unreliable. . . . I always thought that the Show Must Go On, that's what they say, don't they?'

'They do, but sometimes it doesn't,' said Jeremy. 'Unemployed again!'

Bruce pushed forwards. He had come to do a show, and he wasn't going to go home without doing one.

'We must do something,' he said.

'Bloody right, you'll have to do something,' said the Theatre Manager, who had been fetched. 'I can't get another booking this late, and I'll not give them their money back. The first week is sold out.'

The ingenue, Sally Skeats, began to cry. 'What can we do?' asked Gossage, twitching. 'I can't direct the show. What could we do in less than two weeks?'

'Why not do a Christmas show?' asked Bruce. 'We got something up at Drama School last year. What about a Music Hall thing? It would go down a bomb!'

Gossage clutched at this straw. The others looked dubious.

'We could do that, couldn't we? Couldn't we?'

Julian scratched his head.

'I haven't got the music,' he said. 'Unless the local shops can come up with something.'

'I could do my stand-up patter act,' volunteered Jeremy. 'We could all of us do something, I'm sure.'

They consulted the Manager, to see if it was feasible. He clutched at lapels, sweating.

'Anything. Just give me a show. Nothing dirty, mind. It's the kiddies. No problem about publicity. I can get space in the paper as soon as you let me know what it's going to be.'

They sweated blood to get it together. The air was cacophonous with snatches of song and cross-talk acts. Gossage was everywhere at once, praising and exhorting. The show began to take shape, and one of the problems began to be its length. No-one wanted to have their 'bit' cut. Then, four days from the opening, a large lady of refined voice, certain age, and balletic walk presented herself on stage.

'I am Cynthia de Neuville,' she announced. 'What arrangements have you made for my Gels?'

Behind her stood some twenty females aged from nine to fifteen, arms folded and beadily silent.

'Gels?' asked a bemused Gossage.

'The Cynthia de Neuville Dancers. They are all local girls: They always perform in the Christmas Pantomime.'

She was a formidable woman, and they were formidable girls.

'We have prepared two main numbers, as usual. They are Chinatown and Limehouse Blues. So suitable for Aladdin.'

They had to be fitted in somehow and the running order altered accordingly. The girls ran through their routines in their lumpy leotards as if daring anyone to take the Mick or else. Bruce was up a ladder adjusting the Pattern 23's when he became aware that he had acquired a following. Clustered below, gazing up knowingly, were five of the fruitier de Neuilles. In the next few days he came to realize that the de Neuville Dancers regarded the younger company members as their own personal property. Eventually he fled for refuge to Annie Piper who made it plain to the girls that Bruce was off limits; a process which Bruce enjoyed very much.

The costumes and scenery had arrived and were adapted for their new use. They called the show 'Northern Lights! A Music-Hall Extravaganza', and posters and programmes were got out in record time. There were few cancellations and the Manager and Gossage began to breathe again. The show was to open on the 23rd, two days before Christmas Day. They had a final Dress Rehearsal that afternoon. Everything went smoothly, except for a de Neuville who kept throwing up with nervousness. Everyone went to the cafe to have a meal before the show. They had long forgotten the dreadful Ben Fenton.

Gossage paced the foyer as the house

began to fill. He took a seat somewhere at the back of the auditorium. The houselights dimmed, and Bruce in the prompt corner gave the signal for Julian to begin the overture. The show began.

It was a smash. It was a riot. Thunderous applause as the de Neuilles clumped through their numbers, and some of the audience very nearly smiled at Jeremy and Bruce's act, they enjoyed it so much. The curtain fell at the end to a storm of clapping.

Gossage was making his elated way through the Foyer, on his way to congratulate his troupe, when he was intercepted by the Manager.

'It'll be a bloody smash hit, this show of yours. Well, it's Professional, is that. We could be booked through to February with it.'

He felt as if he was ten feet tall. He turned, and shied like a frightened cart-horse. There, newly sprung, stood a blearily unsteady Fenton. He was waving an empty whisky bottle and holding on to a rococo pillar for support.

'Gossage! There you are. Lissen . . .'

He lurched over and threw an arm over his shoulders. He smiled proudly.

'That was the best bloody Aladdin I ever directed!'

Tattoos, Tournaments and Combined Operations

ROBERT ORNBO

I believe that my Theatrical-Military connections started in the early 1950's in Singapore.

In those days, I fancied myself as an actor (like all good guardsmen) but it was Mr. Lee, the chief technician of the Little Theatre, who guided me into the fascination of rigging ancient spotlights onto bamboo poles and of feeling light upon the face. In between trips up-country and wearing sandals to the Colonels annoyance, I began to enjoy the problems which always arise from mounting a production, whether large or small.

Many shows later, the wheel came full circle.

An old friend, Tom Fleming, who had taken over as Royal Commentator, asked if I could give advice on a project in Washington. This turned out to be the Scottish Military Tattoo at Wolf Trap 1976 - a major part of the Bicentennial celebrations.

The Filene Centre is a large theatre with no auditorium, just a park. Full flying

facilities, a modern switchboard, a few seats under cover but mainly seats on the grass and a feeling of space and of grace - almost a Glyndebourne. And our job was to present a Tattoo in a Military but also a Theatrical manner. Tom Fleming directed and commented, Col. Leslie Dow of the Castle, Edinburgh (what a splendid address) produced and we had a professional designer and stage manager: Colin Winslow and Barbara Stuart respectively. The theatrical team learned a great deal. Timings were exact; the last order had to be obeyed; memos had to be distributed to over thirty people, including the Yeoman Gaoler but we also learned that a quiet word could work wonders. Suggestions for bangs during a battle sequence resulted not in the traditional maroons but in the Presidential Gun Salute Platoon which sounded off all around the park to the astonishment of local residents and of course the pigeons.

But it was the use of a theatre which caused us all to re-assess the potential impact of



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Anything else is second best.

a Military Tattoo, and it was fortunate that Leslie Dow and Tom Fleming were at hand to stop us from turning it into a musical. While staging, lighting, sound, smoke, sets and all the paraphernalia of the theatre can help, they must always be subservient to the Military aspect.

Even so, 500 fierce Scottish gentlemen – Black Watch, Seaforth and Cameron, the State Trumpeters of the Life Guards, and the Blues and Royals, the Fanfare Trumpeters, the Corps of Drums of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the Buglers of the Royal Green Jackets – all were reduced to the ranks under the fierce discipline of a theatre stage manager. Fortunately, Barbara Stuart had a faint Scottish accent but there was no doubt from the very start who was in charge.

Surprises on the military side were that we all took such interest in detail, attending rehearsals, marking up 'prompt' scripts and, of course, liaising with the American theatre crew. Happily, I am a member of the US Union so there was no need to have a sleeping designer being paid to do nothing and, having had experience of working practices both on Broadway and the Coast, I was able to oil the wheels – sometimes at the expense of a Bloody Mary or two!

On the technical side of the lighting, there were seven bars of spots over the stage area, six in the front of house area and a few odds and sods scattered about the trees. Ninety three changes of light and not a dry eye in the house.

We had Royalty and Presidents and it all seemed to work out well – apart from my flight back from Washington on an RAF plane. Although ranked as a Brigadier (for messing and driving purposes) I was severely ticked off by a lady sergeant in charge of feeding us for producing my silver hip flask half way across the Atlantic. All service planes are dry – very dry!

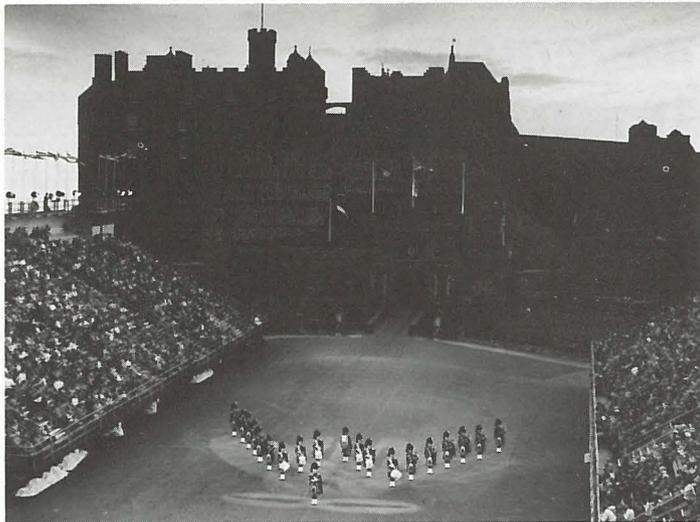
This year, I was involved in two other Military events – the Royal Tournament at Earls Court and the Edinburgh Tattoo and both provided different problems and different solutions.

The Royal Tournament, this year, celebrated its 100th Birthday and, after many discussions between my colleagues at Theatre projects, the BBC and the Tattoo Authorities, we came up with a fairly revolutionary scheme. For years, the Tattoo had been lit by floodlights and about sixteen follow spots. This meant that the televised performance had to be boosted by the addition of five or ten thousand watt lanterns dotted around the arena at considerable expense and inconvenience to the Tattoo and to Earls Court. By persuading the BBC to chip in and by assuring Michael Parker, the producer, that four followspots would be enough, we were able to install sufficient equipment to cope with the show and the tv at the same time. A main truss running the full length of the arena carried 240 units downlighting the main area; another 160 round the sides and 40 low voltage lanterns completed a scheme which gave us lots of 'firsts'. Biggest single run truss in Europe; nearly a crisis at the Electricity Board and the first time a televi-

sion director didn't have to say 'Can I have more light?' A computerised switchboard (Kliegl), a professional operator, a rigging and focussing crew who more than knew what they were about and once more I learned lots of lessons. Horses don't like sudden changes of light; top light is better for motorcycles; candles are magic, red, white and blue are good standard colours; must remember not to call costumes 'frocks' – they are uniforms. And please try to stop our lady switchboard operator saying to the producer 'Look, Major Darling, will you kindly belt up.' This caused shudders from some of the Military but a wry smile from Major Parker who confessed on the last night that it had been a pleasure working with professionals. What higher praise could we have asked for?

And what greater pleasure than to move on (after a hasty show in the Hague) to Edinburgh and an entirely different kettle of fish. Here again, with the help of Bert Donaldson and Mike Smyth, we tried to beat the television problem and only just failed. The addition of a few extra lanterns was necessary but the main lesson learned was that the angle of light on a wet esplanade can illuminate the audience nearly as well as the performers.

Sixteen follow spots (fewer next year!)



Edinburgh Military Tattoo 1980



The Royal Tournament, Earls Court 1980

labelled with military precision, Alpha, Bravo, etc., a 'Duet' computer type switchboard instead of a series of switches and a one preset board.

The Queen's Guard of Rutgers University, New Brunswick, USA, with their hair-raising display of precision drill – razor sharp bayonets to the fore – provided the only colour problem, but we soon found out that steel blue was the answer, and once again deep reds and blues combined to highlight the uniforms. Technically, this time it was only seventy two lighting units covering ten areas but with 178 lighting changes.

The three displays that I've mentioned have had only a few things in common; a military hyphen theatrical aspect, imaginative producers willing to listen and, of course, the British flair for doing these things well. But uncommon was that Wolf Trap, Washington was half open air, Earls Court was completely enclosed and Edinburgh wholly in the rain.

There is a phrase used by my commercially minded colleagues – 'At the end of the day'. It's only when you've worked hard to get some decent lighting at the Edinburgh tattoo and suddenly you see the sunset behind that magnificent Castle that you realise that you've still got a long way to go before the end of the day.

Management by the Book

FRANCIS REID

A patron of a recent performance in my Theatre Royal declared that I was on duty in a state of undress. *Undress* is a relative term and by my own standards I was decently clad – not, as one might suppose from the term ‘undressed’, clad only in my winter woolly one-piece – but properly dinner jacketed with a generous cummerbund to disguise the plimsoll line at the point of trouser suspension.

The accusing patron in question was, however, Mr. Mervyn Gould. Now Mr. Gould cherishes memories of a British Empire upon whose Hippodrome the sun has never really set. Every Monday morning he puts his band parts on the rail while lesser men have sunk to putting their tapes on the deck. His is a world of triple wing floods and butterfly swags, with a jupiter batten and trailers opening to a cameo dead. The Gould Standard for theatre managers requires not just full dress suit with white tie and cigar, but an attendant page bearing the manager’s gloves upon a silver salver.

Suspicious that my lack of dress sense might be but the outward manifestation of a more fundamental ignorance of the finer points of theatre management, Mr. Gould has submitted for my attention a manual issued to theatre managers in 1933 by the proprietors of one of the former provincial touring theatre chains.

I have studied the volume with diligence and application. There are many pointers in it which are as true today as they have always been. But there is also just a hint of the inflexibility of approach, of a stifling of possible initiative by the local man-on-the-spot, that helped to run-down the theatre chains.

Flick through the book backwards – and that is always my initial approach to getting an overall feel of any publication – and one is immediately shaken by the number of forms. Curiosity made me do a count and I discovered that proper management of a theatre on a touring circuit required completion of 17 daily returns, 19 weekly returns, and 6 monthly returns plus the maintenance of 24 record books. Each theatre had its own printed forms bearing that theatre’s name and frequently printed on its own identifying paper colour. Much of the paperwork was bound in book form with tear-out duplicates and triplicates to simplify communication with head office.

Precise hours of work are not stipulated for the Manager and his Assistant – and they are the only two people in the building whose comings and goings are not recorded (in an appropriate departmental printed ledger) to the nearest minute. However it is made clear that *The Manager and the Assistant Manager are to be at their desks in*

*sufficient time to glance at the morning correspondence before supervising the opening of the Box Office at 10am and under ‘evening duties’ the Manager and Assistant are informed that they should be in the theatre not less than 30 minutes earlier than the advertised time of the opening of the doors to the public, so that they can see that everything is in order, and that the staff is up to time. All good stuff, equally valid today, including an injunction to be in attendance during the assembling and dissembling of each audience and to inspect all parts of the house each morning and each performance. They must have been kept pretty busy doing this while completing or checking all the paper work. Nevertheless they were formally informed that *The Directors do not desire that the Managers attend the theatres on Sundays unless stress of business necessitates their presence.**

There is a timeless truth in the statement *As it is the company’s business to please the public, the Manager must pay particular attention to see that every member of the staff is polite.* However the ways of ensuring this have changed: today’s audiences would be positively alienated by a return to 1933 – *Men attendants should always stand to attention when spoken to by patrons. They must, when addressing patrons, salute and stand to attention. All attendants must always address patrons as ‘Sir’ or ‘Madam’ as the case may be.* Instant dismissal is the sanction against smoking, eating sweets or chewing gum and any lounging about or unnecessary talking was strictly forbidden. And what has more flavour of a pre-feminism world than *It is essential to engage girls smart, intelligent, and of good appearance. Middle-aged women cannot be engaged.*

This flavour extends to the ‘Press Requirements’, where the photographic entry is an uncompromisingly cryptic *Plentiful supply. Non-copyright. Ladies preferred.* None of us would actually dare to say that today, but it is just what we require for publicity purposes!

And who would not like to have available enough advertising sites to enable a print requisition of 25 eighteen sheets, 20 twelve sheets, 50 six sheets, and 300 double crowns.

Typesetting costs were under scrutiny. There is a spirit of optimism in *Managers will note that they should endeavour to delete any superfluous matter from the submitted copy of Daybill and Programme.* This optimism is recognised in the subsequent sentence *It might be necessary to obtain Touring Manager’s consent.* Contractual programme biographies may be fairly new, but the niceties of Billing are an evergreen.

The Manager’s technical responsibilities seem to have been fairly limited. Apart from countersigning the daily, weekly and monthly flow of backstage staff, lamp and meter returns, it was noted that *The Manager will satisfy himself that the Stage, Property, and Electrical Staffs for the week are the minimum required, and discuss these minimums with the Head of each Department each Monday forenoon.* Still a

difficult area because such calls are made by the visitors and not by the theatre: presumably, however, a big touring circuit could bring some pressure to bear on the number of showmen called by the visiting company. (The cost of the get-out has always acted as a break on calling excessive get-in crews.) But it is still valid to particularly note that *no unnecessary lights are burning in any part of the theatre, front or back.*

There is some still valid advice on comps: *Managers please remember that our seats are our only goods for sale, and the issue of complimentary permits must be carefully controlled. This permit system is much abused, and while it is necessary upon occasion to dress the house, the greatest care must be taken in doing so.* There is also some positive tuition in the art (in one or two theatres I have recently attended, the lost art) of *obviating rows of empty seats between different priced parts of the House.*

However I am sure that NO manager ever anywhere has needed to be formally instructed to *Study the plans daily and note how things are shaping!*

For Mervyn Gould’s benefit *It is understood that full Dress Suit is worn at Evening Performances, and Morning Clothes during Matinees.* But, Mervyn, there is nothing about an accompanying Page with silver salver. Had decadence set in as early as 1933?

REIDing SHELF

I first saw *PERFORMING ARTS. An Illustrated Guide* on the new titles shelf of a bookshop. When I flicked through the pages I saw lots of pictures that suggested that the book ought to be on my own shelves – and on the shelves of CUE readers. I therefore invited the publishers to submit a *reiding* copy. Closer inspection revealed that this book must come high on the Christmas stocking hope list of anyone interested in the performing arts. (And if you are British and consequently educated to be afraid of the word *Arts*, fear not: this book could equally be called *Performing Entertainments*).

The pictures are not only lovely they are there for a purpose: they are not mere graffiti. Nearly every picture has a positive instructive message and most captions are model clarifications of why the picture was chosen. The text is tightly written. It has to be with 225 pages – albeit coffee table pages – to get through Plays, Opera,

Concerts, Ballet & Dance, Mime, Musicals, Variety, Carobaret, Magic, Circus, Puppets, Pantomime, Jazz & Pop, and Happenings & Events. Plus a useful chronological table, a chapter on Roots of Performance (a quick flash history of the development of performed communication). And a perceptive Foreword by Sir John (for a performer with an art like his, who needs a surname).

PERFORMING ARTS does not have an author. It has Michael Billington as Consultant Editor, and a distinguished posse of Contributing Editors: it is quite fun guessing who wrote what.

They have covered the field well. From Epidaurus through Olimpico, Farnese, Drury Lane and Bayreuth to Sydney Opera, Concrete National and Manchester Exchange. There is Streetcar, Jimmy Porter, Maggie Smith and the Pattern 23. Opera from Melba to Hockney. We are informed that 'several tricks of the magician's art have now become so familiar that it is time to reveal how they are done'. Panto, Bette Milder, unicycling, Dame Edna, buskers, Vesta Tilley and the logistics of the 1978 European tour of Genesis. It's all there.

But if there is a reference to that latest genre of the performing arts – *Performance Art*, well I failed to find it. So I will read the whole book again over Christmas. And that will be a great pleasure.

Performing Arts is the type of book that is easier to read when rested on a table. With Martin Gottfried's *BROADWAY MUSICALS* there is no alternative. It brings a new meaning to the description 'coffee table book'. Give this volume four legs and you have a solid practical coffee table. 13 3/4" by 10 3/4" in format. 1 1/2" thick. And it turns the bathroom scales at half a stone. While we are on statistics, it might be interesting to note that the 350 thick pages carry 400 illustrations, 112 of them in full colour. Many of these pictures are full page. Therefore this book, like most Broadway imports, carries a heavy price tag.

Now it so happens that I regard the Broadway musical as perhaps the greatest contemporary performing art. I love old operas. I cherish moments of great classical acting. I enjoy television plays of today. But for the ultimate evening of *twentieth century* performing art, give me a Broadway Musical. Preferably on Broadway. The Broadway musical does not travel well. Naturally a great art will survive transplant, but only on Broadway does the musical have that ultimate edge. That crisp attack. It is perhaps something to do with the wide proscenium openings and correspondingly wide houses which bring a goodly proportion of the necessarily large audience close to the stage. And a lot of the magic comes from the orchestras which are (blessedly) kept large by union assistance and contain players of technical virtuosity. The brightness of American orchestral playing can be a drawback in symphonic music but it is a glowing asset in the theatre pit.

The push forward into an integrated art form can often go wrong, but the general

direction is certainly forward. However, like everything else in the arts, any view is very subjective. I was certainly not alone in finding *Pacific Overtures* to be unacceptably pretentious. And how will history rate *Sweeney Todd*? Both in New York and in London I always found greater pressing priorities than a visit to it. But then – heresy, perhaps – I personally find more contact with Ebb and Kander than with Sondheim. And therefore, not surprisingly, the director credit of choreographer *Bob Fosse* is enough to draw me in a straight line to any box office, with a fistful of dollars waving hopefully.

So with a history of loving the American musical – big and small – and the experience of working on the European versions of several of them, I naturally drool over the pictures in this book.

I just cannot make up my mind about the text. There is a lot of useful fact. And Gottfried's subjective judgements are always interesting even when, frequently, one disagrees with him. But my eye kept wandering from the text to these wonderfully emotive photographs. Bringing back memories, in particular, of *Cabaret*, *Dancin'*, and *The Wiz*. Of Gwen Verdon and Chita Rivera in *Chicago*, Dorothy Loudon in *Annie*, Richard Kiley in *Man of La Mancha* and Avon Long in *Bubbling Brown Sugar*. And these fascinating glimpses of the 1930s that we can only now get the feeling of from old movies.

A big book for a big art.

Multivision is a word that is gaining usage to describe a performance where projected photographic images dissolve, merge, transpose and superimpose in conjunction with integrated sound images. These performances may be classified as *recorded* rather than live, since the timing is not normally dependent on audience response. The jargon of *Multivision* is the jargon of the marketing industry rather than the entertainment industry: a world of 'specific objectives', 'group communications', and 'Joe Public'. This is appropriate language for a communication medium that has a recent history of fast successful growth in exhibitions, conferences, seminars and other allied presentation techniques.

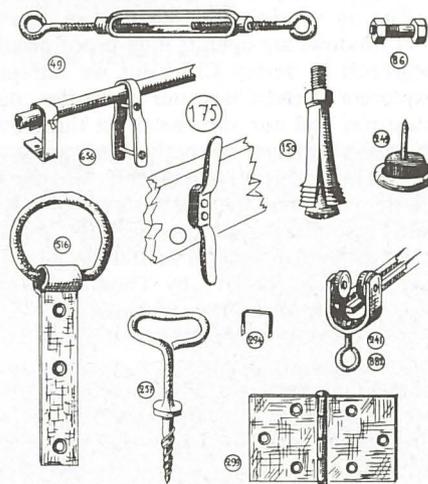
The basic tool of this type of audio-visual presentation is the *Kodak Carousel* – or rather, stacks of carousels with sophisticated control systems which increasingly involve microprocessors. These projection techniques have been incorporated in the scenography of several conventional stage productions. (I particularly recall *Bubbling Brown Sugar* which used most of the standard cuts, dissolves, composites and flip/flops that form the basic language of microprocessed carousels). John Lewell in his new *MULTIVISION* mentions only (and in passing) the musical *Beatlemania* because his book is geared towards the non-actor *presentation* type of show.

The book, however, is full of information for anyone who wants to learn the fundamentals of 35mm slide projection.

There are obviously useful technical chapters with titles like 'Projecting the Image', 'Rear Projection Screens', 'Slides', 'Control Systems', and 'Encoding Systems'. But there are also good discussions of matters which are peripheral to the technology, although essential to getting the show on the road: matters like scriptwriting, graphics and presentation.

The nice thing I can say about this book (and I think it would probably be the nicest sort of thing to be able to say about any technical book) is that, as a result of reading it, I no longer feel afraid of programmed carousels as a tool of theatrical production.

A belated word of praise for *TEATER ORD* published in 1975 but only just come into my possession (as a departure gate farewell present). 924 technical theatre words are equated in five Scandinavian languages plus English. They are cross-referenced and illustrated. The word list and pictures would form a splendid basis for a much wider international vocabulary and dictionary.



120

A typical page from *Teater Ord*.

Would you believe that, the very day after writing the above, I read in the *ABTT News* that a new edition has been published in collaboration with OISTT. It contains 1000 words in nine languages – English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Swedish, Hungarian, Czech and Russian. A Japanese appendix is available on special order.

PERFORMING ARTS. An Illustrated Guide. Consultant Editor: Michael Billington. Published by Macdonald Educational Ltd. £9.95 (UK).

BROADWAY MUSICALS. Peter Barkworth. Published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York.

MULTIVISION. The Planning, Preparation and Projection of Audio-visual Presentations. John Lewell. Published by Focal Press £10.95 (UK).

TEATER ORD. Theatre Words. Published by Nordiska Teaterunionen, Stockholm.

Pavilioned in Splendour

IAIN MACKINTOSH

The temperature is 103°, the humidity 101% and four buses are speeding north to beyond where any white man dares to go. The mission is to locate and inspect Loew's Picture House on 175th Street deep in Upper Manhattan. The crew is a motley collection of theatre and movie palace buffs – bare knees, nikon's at the ready, bermuda shorts and even tape recorders as it is rumoured that the Wurlitzer may be in working order. Led by physicist and part time member of the N.Y.C. Landmark Commission, Dr. Joe Rosenberg, these are determined men and women, as fanatical as those mystically motivated clerics in Britain whose talk is of Bradshaw and whose visions are of steam trains. They've already inspected twenty seven theatres in the hottest summer New York has known for a decade but still they would kill for plasterwork.

The air conditioning has broken down. The windows are opaque mug-proof plastic begrimed in Jersey City. But we intrepid explorers already have our memories, our pleasures and our sorrows. First there was the Casa Italiana, formerly the Stanley, a single tier Spanish 'atmospheric' with dance floor spread over the rear seats for Mafiosa weddings pizza style – even the motto 'God Bless America' is in Italian. Then a pair of early theatres by Thomas Lamb, also in downtown Newark, both with high S.F.I. – Sticky Floor Index – by which we learn to rate live theatres now at the bottom of the movie league of soft porn and martial art. Next door and now dark were the Proctors, a pair of 2,000 seat vaudeville houses piggy-back style – are they missionary or soixante-neuf, we ask as we peer for telltale smoke vents at the top of the thrusting fly towers?

On Staten Island we've visited Sailor's Snug Harbour, an 80 acre garden site of Greek Revival, Empire and Beaux Arts buildings overlooking Manhattan, which boasts an 1892 theatre complete with stalls and horseshoe gallery of archaic form. Here, incredibly, is a solid plaster ceiling, apparently original, covering half of the fly

Down the road our first taste of Eugene de Rosa, the St. George which is, or was, a 3,000 seat Moorish-Spanish vaudeville house opened by Eddie Cantor probably pursued by the Riff. Our 120 members watched it broken up before our eyes; many camera bags soon becoming as heavy as our hearts on leaving.



The magnificently restored facade of the Lyric in 41st. (photo Iain Mackintosh)

tower in area and pitched two-thirds up the tower – holes neatly drilled for the still working hemp lines. (Were those omnipotent American acousticians filling the stage with their gear even before the turn of the century? If so, form squares and remember Bunker Hill.)

In Manhattan itself we had discovered two theatre quarters now largely given over to marauders. First there was the 14th Street area with two flagships still afloat: the Academy of Music of 1854 rebuilt in 1926, three levels, 3,650 seats by Thomas Lamb in Paris Opera mood and anxious to outpoint Garnier. It is now retitled the Palladium and given over to the loudest, brightest rock imaginable. Second the Jefferson, a 1913 Adam style Lamb house now, after fifteen years of closure, being painted white all over by the Disco boys led by the Studio 42 man who wasn't in jail for tax evasion, and who, in his description of the project managed to insert 'state of the art technology' into every sentence. Uptown we toured the theatres of 42nd Street, before the First World War New York's Shaftesbury Avenue and now dangerously involved in drug trade and other fortunately less distasteful pursuits. Here we saw the theatres of the Brandt chain, owners who although understandably commercial have kept threatened theatres in existence and even restored one, the Apollo, in an 8-week orgy of steam cleaning. High S.F.I. but they are, in the words of the Sondheim lyric, 'still here'. The Liberty, a rare 3-tier house, retains its original painted 'asbestos' (safety curtain) from 1904 and some of its elegant, stepped boxes. The Lyric, formerly

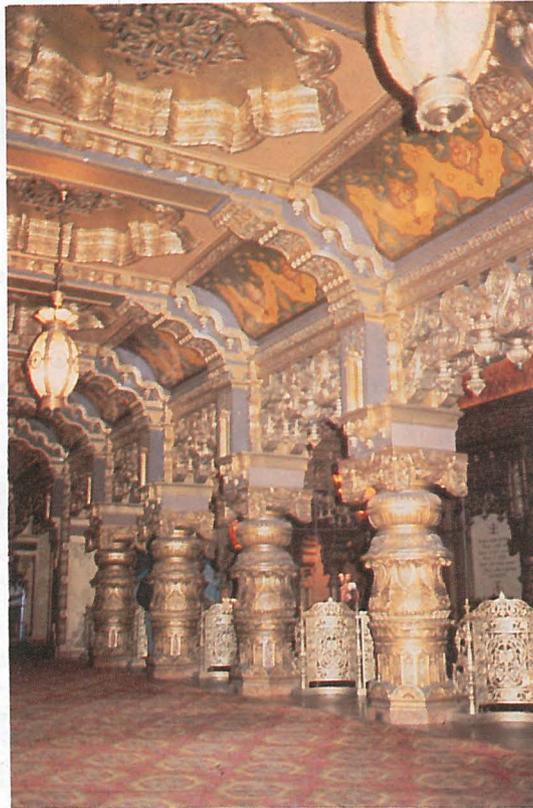


The Winter Gardens, New York, opened 1912. (photo Iain Mackintosh)

the 1903 Old Heidelberg, has a frontage on 41st Street magnificently restored while inside all of its boxes have been amputated, one manager having discovered that porn so inflamed his patrons that they resorted to the boxes for – well nothing new in *that*, Holland designed basket boxes from which it was impossible to see the stage of Drury Lane in 1794, a practice Wyatt kept on in 1811.

In 42nd Street we had discovered one almost untouched beauty, the Victory, alias Belasco's, née the Republic on September 27, 1900. This theatre predates by three years the Lyceum which is generally considered to be Broadway's oldest theatre. Thus the Victory is actually the first theatre to be built in this part of New York. The plasterwork is rich and largely intact. It is a horseshoe house, tiny by American standards, with the feel of the Criterion. It has three levels (or two mezzanines, the euphemism for balcony favoured by stair-hating New Yorkers). Today it is all over white and red but the quality, as a comedy house, shines through. That a Londoner would feel remarkably at home is what is so unusual; it is radically different in shape and layout from the theatres built between 1903 and the Depression.

Something had by now dawned on the single Brit on board for this the Conclave of the New York Chapter of the Theatre Historical Society. There had been a whole generation of theatre building in America



'Voluptuous Pagan Ornament!!!' (photo Glenn Loney)

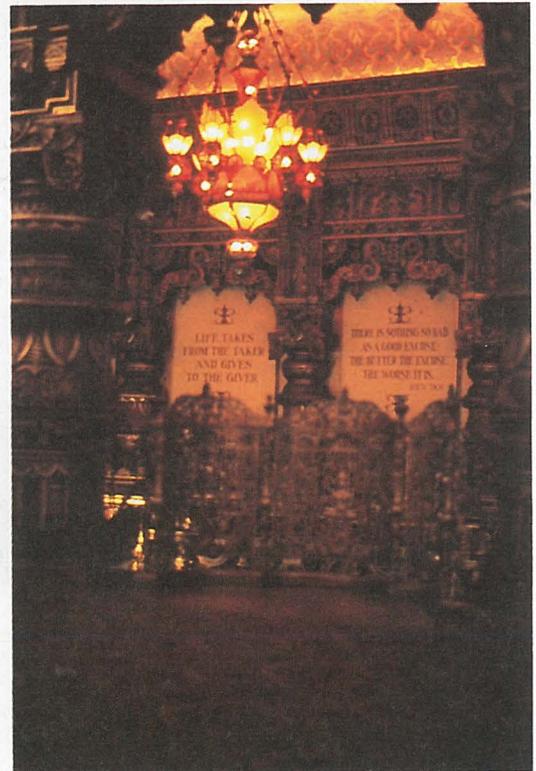


'A Rajah's Ransom'. (photo Iain Mackintosh)

which we in Britain do not know. On this side of the Atlantic the relatively few theatres built between 1905 and 1914 generally followed the pattern of preceding boom years. There followed a fifteen year moratorium from which we had emerged with theatres as pedestrian as Piccadilly or Cambridge in London, or as clumsy and mean spirited as the Playhouse in Edinburgh or the Empire in Liverpool. But in America nearly all their best theatres date from 1905 to 1930 while even the newest ones follow that pattern.

How does the Broadway pattern differ

from the Shaftesbury Avenue mould? The stages are all size for size wider than in Britain – giving substance to the story that on the sixth day God created the 30 ft wide proscenium but the Americans, being further away, did not hear properly and made it 40 ft. (Result, all those multi-set



The Gospel according to the Rev. Ike (photo Iain Mackintosh)

naturalistic modern plays from Tennessee Williams *et al.*, which are grist for the lighting designer but a strain if you are sitting at the end of the front rows.) Then the architects, Grad, de Rosa, Lehman, Lamb, Ahlschlager, Rapp and Rapp, and Krapp (sic), pulled the patrons in the front

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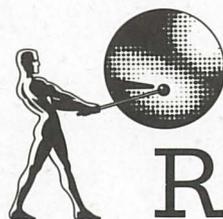
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row of the circle towards the stage, pushing out the side walls which they clothed with superb boxes with impossible sightlines, just one of the decorative devices that had as their sole object the narrowing of over-wide auditoriums. Ceilings spanned the entire circle (more often one than two) in contrast to the late nineteenth century British practice of central space capped with dome and deep shelves off. On stage the four walls policy (only recently overtaken by the introduction of permanent lighting installations on Broadway) resulted in stripped out fly towers with no false proscenium for the incoming show to set behind. Just as sets spilled through the wider openings so the auditoriums spilled into the street. It is generally known that Broadway theatres do not have bars. It is probably less well known that the New York fire codes allowed all vertical circulation for the audience to be within the auditorium volume and safety exits applied to the outside in the form of open ironwork staircases. But what makes New York theatres as simple as barns or cathedrals (i.e. porch direct to nave direct to sanctuary) is that in New York there was no pit, by which in Britain was meant separate rear stalls at prices considerably lower than all other places except the rear top balcony. In England, the convolutions of stair, passage, tunnel, go-up to go-down are designed to restrict the foyers and saloons to the inhabitants of dress circle or front orchestra stalls who must never meet or even see the pit-ites. In democratic turn of the century America you strolled straight off the street, through the lobby into the rear of the stalls, significantly called the orchestra from front to back. The architect was allowed arcades, decorated screens and elegant balustrades to his rear-of-the-orchestra stair up to the mezzanine, no theatres being buried below ground level as they were in safety conscious Edwardian England.

From this generation of theatres, 1903 to 1930, we had seen the best of Broadway. Frohman's Lyceum of 1903, which has an atmosphere not unlike London's Haymarket and carved wood effects which Grinling Gibbons would have envied plus foyer paintings of Garrick and Siddons after Reynolds which this author did envy. The Winter Gardens of 1912 which is deeply articulated, much too wide and gives the feeling that it has been sat upon by a skyscraper. (It hasn't, but is a conversion of a riding school, an oddly Viennese touch for a theatre where David Merrick wants \$35 off you for a side seat at 45° to the proscenium to see '42nd Street' – not worth it.) Next came the incomparable Mark Hellinger, formerly and more appropriately The Hollywood, which opened as a baroque picture house in 1930 looking just like a studio set for Monsieur Beaucaire (the Bob Hope/Louis XIV movie). Today the oval lobby, Bavarian in its rich colonnaded simplicity (see Cover), is full eight times a week with the smash hit burlesque musical 'Sugar Babies' which at \$250,000 a week in a 1,600 seat house is the only show your author has seen twice in a three month

span. (Thanks, Francis, for the tip – see CUE No. 5)

Back to those buses after this Levinesque parenthesis. Past Columbia University, through Harlem to the George Washington Bridge and the borders of the Bronx. We have arrived at Loew's 175th Street. Let us hand you over to the Loew's and M.G.M. PR Department: 'An Oriental Palace of Jewels! 4,000 seats! A Rajah's Ransom in Furnishings' – 'Ancient splendour and beauty of the Indo-Chinese architecture! Pagan glories of old are revived to create an atmosphere of luxury and exotic charm.' – 'Voluptuous pagan ornament.' Thus the effect when this theatre was opened with a policy of vaudeville and talking productions (films). Norma Shearer had been there with co-star Robert Montgomery and M.G.M. boss Nicholas M. Schenk on the great day, February 22nd, 1930. But we knew that within eighteen months the Depression had killed off the stage shows, the entrance price was reduced from 50 cents to 35 cents and the cinema demoted from first run to second run in an area that had moved downwards ghettowise from Jewish to Black. In 1960 the cinema was closed and sold.



Harold Rambusch, saluted by friends on his election as Honorary Member of the Theatre Historical Society (of the United States of America). L to R: William Weber (Rambusch Studios), Glenn Loney (THS & City University), Harold Rambusch, Joseph Rosenberg (THS & Municipal Art Society of New York) and Iain Mackintosh (Theatre Projects Consultants and author of this article).

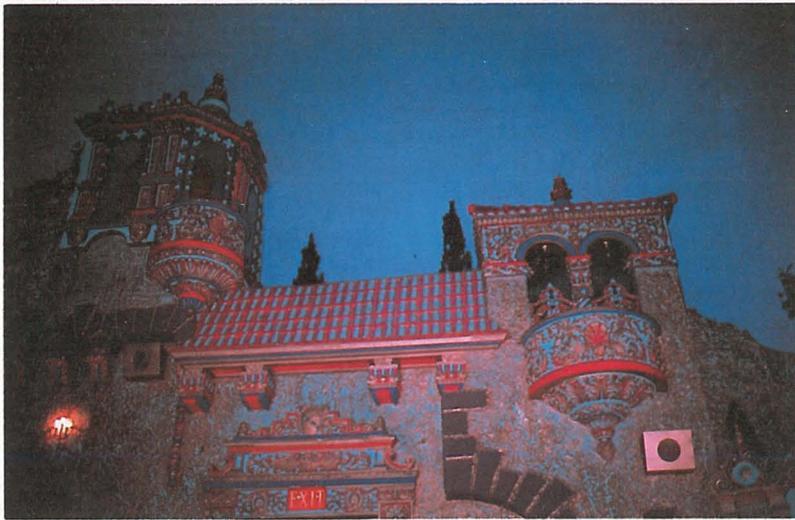
What we found was still Aladdin's cave. The interior had been magnificently restored. Regilded, scrubbed clean and shining with a massive electrical installation for coast to coast TV, Loew's 175th Street had been translated, converted, *reborn*, and was now the United Palace Church, Pastor the Rev. Ike. The Dream Palace, which had failed due to the Depression, had now come into its own and plays to capacity Friday nights and twice on Sundays. The dollars pour in and the organ, a 4/23 Robert Morton it appears, is in full throat. This vast theatre, occupying an entire city block, is an oasis of noisy confidence in an area of sullen poverty.

Back to the buses. Perhaps this regeneration, this new life for an old theatre was an exception. We peeled off East and headed into the heartland of Harlem. First stop Hammerstein's Opera House on 125th Street, New York's oldest remaining theatre building dating from 1890 when it was thought erroneously that the new middle class would continue to march up Manhattan. A beautifully balanced theatre, this is now near derelict with only one useful function, the stage being a basket ball pitch which, being raked, must give a new slant to young Globetrotters. But just as we think 175th Street an exception we draw up outside the Regent in central Harlem. Smiling ladies in large mauve hats greet us for this is now a Baptist Church. Inside the colour scheme introduced by 'Roxy' Rothapfel in 1913 for the screening of the opening film, 'Last Days of Pompeii', has been set aside for something a little stronger. Walls are apricot decorated in gold over viridian or cobalt with scarlet lining. The original boxes, six a side have been retained and regilded. Each and every 'putti' has been given paper wings. The stalls seats have been replaced with white formica. 'Old Glory' stands Down Stage

Left and within the stage are four rows of choir stalls built within a solid plastic shell. Over, eighteen feet above the pastor's head, flies a bridge supported on two slender columns. Centre and built into this bridge we see a full-length see-through font.

This is nearing completion. We inspect the changing rooms each side at fly floor level. We inspect the font, complete with two taps. We are unable to take part in its commissioning. But by now it must be fully operational and provide an effect that Roxy would envy. The Regent is in good hands.

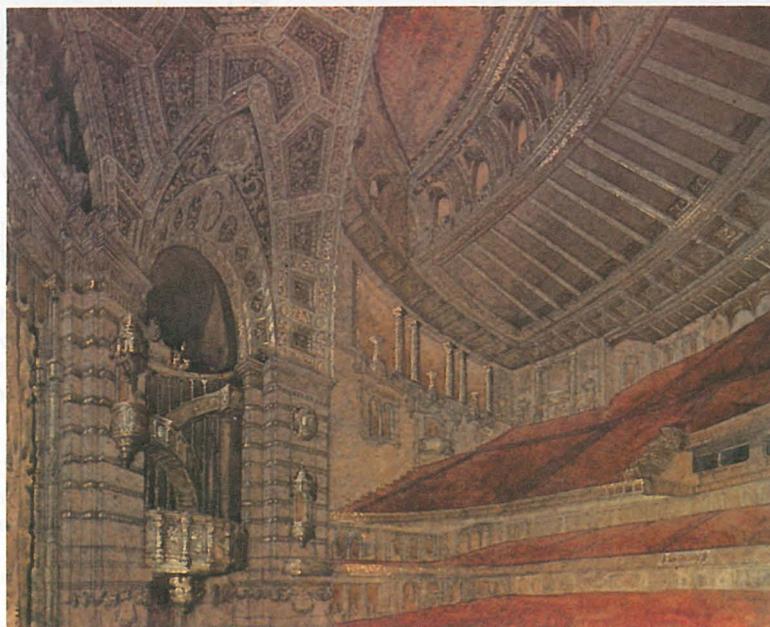
Clearly, this is no isolated phenomenon. It would seem to be a revivalist movement. Off then, in our nostrils the scent of victory



'A Spanish patio garden in gay regalia' (photo Glenn Loney)



Hallelujah! Lourdes comes to Queen's, New York City, via Spain. (photo Iain Mackintosh)



'Inside a copper kettle'. (photo Rambusch Studios)

if not incense (these are, for all the show biz, *low church* cinemas, if you understand me) to the third of these reborn palaces, the Valencia in Queens.

In the Bronx kids are playing in the spray of the fire hydrants, those reassuring pieces of street furniture unchanged since Chaplin films and as sure a signature of New York as the West Side Story fire escapes. In a graffiti emblazoned city it is a relief to find one new art form unscarred, the naive paintings on the roller shutters which protect the small shops from the gangs. The town is ugly, brashly commercial and everywhere is the rusting ironwork, monuments to a past industrial power, of fly-over, of rail bridge, of wharf and of empty factory. But inside these two Palaces all was glitter and ecstasy. Was it thus in seventeenth century Rome: outside squalor and poverty, inside Bernini's St. Teresa swooning in voluptuous ecstasy? Have the new churches, in borrowing the cinemas of the thirties, simply copied the cut of an older Catholic cassock?

We pull up outside what the marquee (= canopy) announces to be The Tabernacle of Prayer. Inside the assistant Pastor greets us with charm and courtesy but also firmness: 'Please to keep away from the rear of the mezzanines so as not to disturb the Counsellors who are even now speaking unto five Continents'. We wonder at what turns out to be a true 'atmospheric'. Building Magazine of 1929 on John Eberson's 3,440 seat masterpiece: 'The auditorium is a Spanish patio garden in gay regalia for a moonlight festival. Low garden walls executed in palmed plaster and rough cast ornament richly enhanced with statuary, treetops, climbing vines and plants, add illusion of open air treatment by a great sky dome'. Lord, oh Lord – the Heavens declare the glory of the Lord. Even if the sunset effect does not work any more, the firmament does. All the stars are winking, obscured only around Orion by the largest Greek Orthodox chandelier in the Western World, hanging by sky hooks in space, too close to the ceiling and thus too clearly an encounter of the ill-conceived kind.

What are those fifteen, life size figures standing over the proscenium? Our guide: 'The Pastor, he had a vision. And he sent for the sculptor and said: "Clothe those naked bodies"'. And now you see the wings he added. These angels watch over our prayers in this our Tabernacle where you are all welcome. Alleluia'. But plaster robes cannot conceal the sassy poses of M.G.M. goddesses.

Out then into the Spanish Mexican foyer, decorated with the help of countless widow's mites after the gift by Loew's Picture Corporation to this House of Prayer. Against the wall of green, mauve and purple hang rows of crutches, walking sticks and braces of all sorts. This is the American Lourdes.

We've seen in a single day evidence of a great new movement. These later houses were failures almost from the start – the Depression cut the audience while the vaudeville performer undoubtedly found them unmanageably big for his own stand-



A Yaarab Temple in Athens, Ga. (photo Iain Mackintosh)

up art that had been so successful in the preceding, smaller, generation of theatre. Now the dream palaces, whether 'hard top' or 'atmospheric', have found a role for which they are ideal. While churches of the dourer sort close, the new revivalists have found a pitch that works. Who advised designers of theatres that a theatre is halfway between a church and a brothel and must suggest both? I can't remember, but Loew's 175th, the Regent Harlem and the Valencia Queen's certainly compound that advice.

Your Editor asked me for tales of North America with pen and pentax and I've hardly left New York. No space in this issue to tell of the League of Historic American Theatres, whose guest I was at their annual conference held at The Home of the American Musical in upstate Connecticut. This is the 1876 second floor Goodspeed Opera House seating under 400 with but a 20-foot deep stage and yet managing seven transfers to Broadway of both revivals and originals ('Man of La Mancha' and 'Annie'). This second conference switched the emphasis from movie palaces to nineteenth century theatres, a quest that in 1980 also took me to the Woodlands Opera House in Sacramento Valley, California - 1895, but in form like an 1840 English playhouse, - and most recently to a black burlesque theatre of 1910 in Athens, Georgia. More of these anon. To finish this chapter, a couple of postscripts.

On Thursday, 2nd October, on a return visit to New York, a reception at the Rambusch Studios on 13th Street. Harold Rambusch, age 89, is to receive a plaque honouring his contribution to theatre

design from the New York Chapter of the Theatre Historical Society, in the person of Joe Rosenberg and Glenn Loney, anglo-ophile professor of theatre and noted critic. The Rambusch Studios are still very active and now restore the very theatres and churches for which they designed the decor between 1898 and 1930. Rambusch reminisces on 'Roxy' Rothapfel for whom Rambusch worked on Radio City Music Hall and, most significantly, the 6,214 seat Roxy, a Florentine fantasy built in 1927 but now sadly destroyed.

Two quotes worth recording. Roxy had rejected fourteen competing decoration schemes for this stupendous Ahlschlager designed theatre. Harold Rambusch, who had refused to compete, was called in. 'I will do it, but only if you can give me a succinct instruction.' 'OK', said Roxy, 'I want the audience to feel they are *inside* a copper kettle.' And that is precisely what they got, with subtle russets, dull bronze and glowing golds - a world away from the revivalist pagan! Second quote in answer to your correspondent's journalese questioning of this most eclectic expert in the *Alhambra - Neuschwanstein - Versailles - Parthenon - Delhi - Ankor Wat* styles of the world's most prolific theatre boom: 'What single piece of advice would you give to this generation of theatre designers?' Pause. Harold Rambusch: 'Yes, this. Surely after all these years have we not learnt just one thing - that these great big theatres just do not work?' Thank you, Sir, from little England.

The final postscript is more of a visual one. It is not a holiday snap from a Theatre Projects Consultants team leader on safari

in the Gulf. What it is is the exterior of the South's largest remaining legit theatre, the 4,000 seat Fabulous Fox, Atlanta - 'an exotically clad superstar' which started life as the headquarters of the Yaarab temple of the Mystic Shrine in 1927, was sold to Fox as a movie palace before it opened, housed the Metropolitan Opera on tour from 1947 to 1967, closed in 1975, and is now being restored in all its Moorish magnificence (with rest rooms a la King Tut). What the new policy will be only Georgian Foxophiles can tell, but that *must* be another story. . . .

'Son of Pavilioned in Splendour' is the author's title for a second article on historical American theatres to appear in the March/April number.

Letters to the Editor

From Mr. Graham Walne

Dear Sir,

May I congratulate you, and your contributor, Dorian Kelly, on an excellent article in your last issue on the subject of lighting control. I would like it to be required reading for all students of stage lighting.

I have great sympathy with many of Mr. Kelly's ideas. In the days when I sold lighting controls I encountered these ideas when Mr. Kelly was resident at the Mermaid Theatre and casting his critical eye over what was then available. In the intervening years I have experienced much of what he discussed and can only reinforce his views.

Much of my work is in opera, and much of this in establishments like the Royal Academy of Music where there is a sophisticated system (see Cue May-June) BUT no resident electrical staff. I therefore have to provide an operator from the student body. In theory all I need is a button pusher but in these circumstances what I get is lighting operated as efficiently as the memory system will allow, but totally without feeling. So what I actually have is a musician, usually a singer, who is much more familiar with the score than I could be, and, what is more, able to get many more run throughs than I ever could. The result is that I have an aid who is well informed on moves and fade times and operates the control beautifully with that knowledge. On other shows I have followed this practise and extended it with a third member of the team, a good draughtsman and electrician. This leaves me free to concentrate on the central purpose behind my being there, as lighting designer.

I am currently researching a new book, on the subject of the international lighting designers themselves and it is clear that these people can achieve considerable results if they are aware of the nuts and bolts, but free of them, and assisted by a good operator. I know of no leading designer who does not acknowledge the contribution these individuals can make. I agree with Mr. Kelly that it is high time these people were duly recognised and rewarded.

Yours sincerely,

GRAHAM WALNE,
Managing Director,
Leisure Plan,
4, Great Pulteney Street,
London, W1

Travelling Hopefully

FREDERICK BENTHAM

Two important and useful London Transport events have happened in recent months: the opening of the L.T. museum in Covent Garden and the publication of the guide *Theatre London**. That a book can be 'useful' no one will question but how can such an adjective be applied to a transport museum in our theatre context? The answer is that it gives us some very good clues as to the way the *Museum of Theatre Technology* or the *Backstage and Outfront Museum*, or whatever it is decided to call it, could be run. We must no longer deceive ourselves by believing that *The Theatre Museum*, in the slow process of being set down in a basement in the same locale, can cover even a small part of our needs as technicians. They have neither the space nor the right staff, even if they had the right funds.

It is only necessary to take a look around *The Science Museum* in South Kensington to confirm this. A wonderful and successful place but it can only be a general museum for most, perhaps all, the branches of science

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and engineering there included. If one wants real detail then the R.A.F. museum at Hendon, the Railway at York, the Montague at Beaulieu or the L.T. one under review here have to be visited. How can we, in our own case, imagine a satisfactory comprehensive combination of the *Art of* with the *Technology of* – the very words are anti-pathetic! And each covers such an immensely varied field. Indeed even when keeping the two strictly separate there is still the risk of a bias in a particular direction. In 'ours' it is the lighting lobby that is the active one. Stage machinery people are singularly ill-represented on paper for a start – the doers and have-doners that is. Any skill in penwork seems to lie with the going-to-doers. Then again although stage lighting switchboards have been very large some stage machinery is enormous. That is one reason why the L.T. museum is so relevant, it includes large and small and, like us, it has to include architecture. So let's get back to London Transport.

Like that Anglo-Scottish play recently, they have been collecting a lot of rotten notices: from their own G.L.C. director too – a curious parallel! I wish Margaret T., Sir

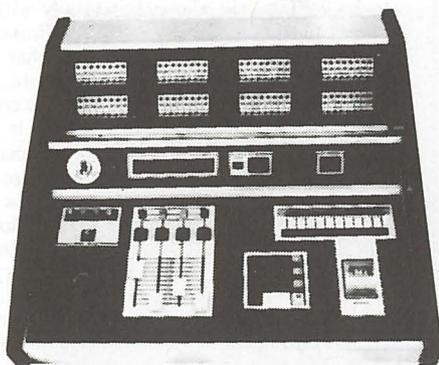
Geoffrey H. and the rest of the front bench (and their shadows opposite!) had to use L.T. daily. After all, unlike the rest of us their place of work has a covered walkway and subway directly to their local station – Westminster. In the case of Downing Street there is a bus stop right to hand. The same rule of daily use would have to apply to those at the top of the G.L.C. and of London Transport itself. I couldn't see the PR man I had an appointment with at 280 Old Marylebone Road, next door to the Edgware Road Station, because his car was held up in traffic on his way back from Bayswater – two stations away on the Circle Line!

Does anybody who is anybody ever use public transport? The present Lord Chancellor prefers to use a push bike and very environmental it is of him but years ago I did look up and see Michael Foot sitting reading in the tube. About the same time Dame Sybil Thorndike, with an elderly Lewis Casson in tow, made an entrance at South Ken and this in a packed rush hour train. Very impressive it was too: a pair of (house?) seats were instantly found for her although she declared above the tunnel noise that they really didn't need them! Legend has it that Dame Sybil did a lot of travelling to her place of work by tube.

As for my own – Kingsway, Floral Street and King Street – it has always been the tube for me. Indeed when it comes to writing, the tube has been a most satisfactory workplace in itself without interruptions or distractions – given a seat and a fashionable skirt length of well below the knee. As for theatre going itself there has only been one sensible method of doing that – London Transport. Not that during my, let us say sixty, years it has always been called by that name nor do I include buses. It really means London's Underground. To walk, cycle or park the car on the outskirts and take the train. Of course the key station was Piccadilly Circus – Cochran's *Centre of the World* – but people will find it difficult to believe from what they see today that this station was at one time a masterpiece, one of the sights of London. The architect was Charles Holden who was to make our commuter architecture famous.

What we see today seems a squalid affair to be got out of as quickly as possible. Not that this is possible if, like me, you *have* to join the long queues at the inadequately staffed 'box offices'. In the thirties this sub-surface circular concourse was warm and inviting, exuding a degree of luxury. That it no longer does so is not just due to the fact that we cannot keep anything within the public's reach clean nowadays. The fluorescent lighting ruins the original colours. These, according to Charles Hutton who was in Holden's office then, were very carefully chosen to suit tungsten lighting. The columns in the concourse are bronze

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We did all this first. (Piccadilly Circus 1930)

castings faced with red scagliola and each carried a pair of lamps with cylindrical shades. The bronze appears as a series of ribs which it was considered that the inevitable contact with the public as they brushed by would keep polished. Across the top of the escalators as they dropped away into the depths was a colourful mural not advertising anything!

The escalators carried a series of bronze columns each with an indirect lighting fitting and the detailing of everything showed the same master hand. Until one got down to the platforms that is: there one came down to earth with a bump, so to speak. All was Bakerloo and Piccadilly & Brompton. The reader will think that I am making an unnecessary fuss but our subways and other below ground pedestrian spaces are rightly despised when compared with, say, the shop-lined affairs of Vienna. But we knew how to make them attractive but practical spaces, once upon a time. We did all this first. This station is a remarkable example of what can be done with a large area but low ceiling height. Piccadilly was the first application of the 'grand' manner to interchange stations on the tube. Since the various lines were originally all commercial enterprises separately launched, their stations were quite separate too. To change from one line to another often meant surfacing to cross a busy road and descend again. In the case of Holborn on the Piccadilly line there was quite a walk thrown in. So much so that the Central line called its station British Museum.**

It must be difficult for those, who were not around in the thirties, to realise the stimulus that the stations of Holden and his team did for the likes of me. The general architecture here at that time, with but few exceptions, seemed to take no account of the exciting activity on the Continent. Then suddenly Frank Pick's Underground blossomed in our midst and pushed out into the suburbs building new stations as it went. Compared with the Edgware and

**A station preserved for posterity in Hitchcock's Blackmail.

Morden extension of the twenties, things were suddenly all of a piece. The same master touch appeared in everything – platform furniture, poster layouts, booking halls, lighting fittings and the rest. This side is the least satisfactorily presented in the L.T. museum. Of necessity it is more concerned to show the contrast between the thirties and what went before than in architectural analysis. Both in the museum and in what appeared on cursory acquaintance to be a superb photographic archive at



... an interesting building in its own right.

280 Old Marylebone Road, that which went before is well evoked. The developments devised to process the increasing numbers of passengers from street to platform had resulted in something as cluttered as a Victorian mantelpiece. What we need now is to conserve some of those *pre-thirties* stations. Russell Square is a good candidate in the central area which only needs a little tidying up. The great depth (only Hampstead is deeper) of Covent Garden has preserved the three lifts but two have been trivially tarted up. The third needs but little

done to conserve it exactly. Incidentally the new control boxes come out poorly when compared ergonomically and decoratively with the original Waygood-Otis circulars! Some of the earlier surviving stations really do have something and it would be a pity if lack of money were the only reason that they have not been drastically altered. North Ealing (very well preserved and looked after) is a fine example of an early District line surface station complete with authentic overline footbridge. This is just as important to keep as the 'Holdens' on the same line out to Uxbridge. Then there are still some typical Metroland stations but it is time to get back to the L.T. Museum itself.

The most theatrical way to travel there is by the London General B type open top motor bus of 1910 which runs from near Oxford circus to the museum and back at regular intervals. This is a good reminder that the museum is not just a temple to trains. And what a temple this, the old flower market, is – an interesting building in its own right. Plenty of daylight through a good glass roof has removed the temptation to indulge in the spotlight-decor with which so many displays are swamped today. Here we see a tram as a tram and not as a nocturne or an aubade. Exhibits are clearly annotated rather than displayed. There is an occasional 'mobile'. For example, a good way of showing the contactors notching-up as the train starts has been devised.

The range of full-sized exhibits is good.

One can climb into some of them. The gaps in the story are well filled by models. It is really possible to see how things developed. This applies equally well to the accessories – bus and tram tickets for example. It was lovely to be reminded of the conductor's ticket rack. Such a simple idea – a piece of wood with some springs either side of it to hold bunches of tickets coloured for the different values. Many of the tickets, including those which took me to school, were originally printed with the names of all the fare stages along the particular route.



... there will be children of all ages around.



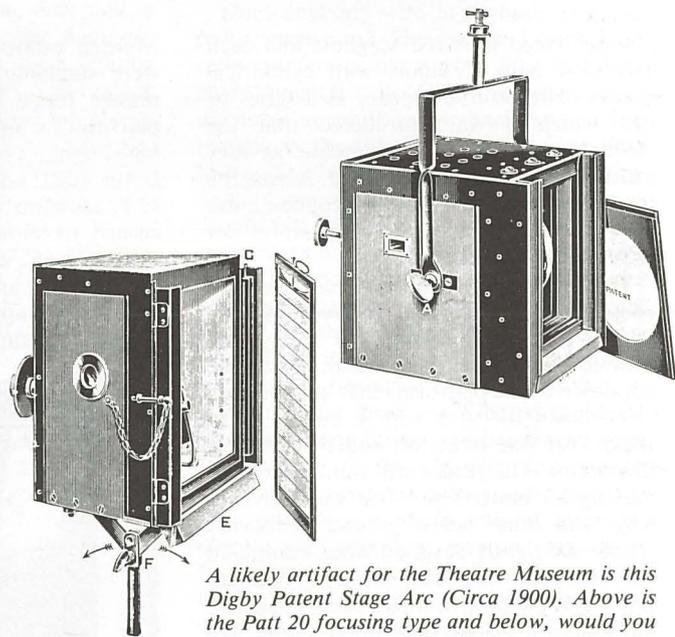
The gaps are well filled by models.

Eventually numbers, as always, took over and the way was clear to replace the bell-punch by the dial-a-number machine with its indecipherable flimsies torn from a ticket-roll. Who would want to collect them! I doubt if a dialling conductor is any faster than his punching predecessor but accounting is another matter. Not only did the conductor have to make a detailed return but girls (men were no good at it) had to sort and check the minute colour circles emptied from the bell-punches.

I wish all museum curators would get it into their heads, as those here have done, that the artifact itself exudes an authenticity which talks directly to the visitor. Only a contemporary photograph can approach it and then it must not be blown up or otherwise fooled around with. In the present case, there it is: just a piece of wood with a rib along the back and some rather crude spring clips. It is not even stained or painted. Yet no willow pattern plate can be more evocative of the period. A period when the trams and trains all bore liveries which involved a lot of careful paintwork,

lining and lettering. And on the wall above there is an actual conductor's return sheet with an archive photograph of a girl sorting out the dots. What more can you want? Well, if you want to climb on the open top of a bus and remind yourself, or just see, those aprons we had to hook back on a rainy day, you can. But you can't 'strike hard' that knob thing to stop the bus *before* descending the steps.

Also one can't step on the tram driver's football. An accident which sometimes happened when about to alight after 'the car has stopped'. The museum authority has of course realised that there will be children of all ages around! But everything else is there ready to drive the tram away including that slender polished brass handle which the driver with hand encased in giant glove used to wind up interminably to slow down or stop. There were magnetic brakes but he seldom seemed to use them. Perhaps he held modern machinery for *his* stages in a proper contempt. Anyhow, below his platform is that intriguing cow-catcher contraption to scoop you up instead of



A likely artifact for the Theatre Museum is this Digby Patent Stage Arc (Circa 1900). Above is the Patt 20 focusing type and below, would you believe it, the Patt 23 flooding type.

wheeling you down. No such precaution has been seen on any vehicle for decades. It is as if the pneumatic tyre has been relied upon to cushion the blow. One can examine in artifact and model the very expensive conduit system which fed the tram from plough and slot between the rails and prevented the streets of central London being disfigured by overhead wires.

One very small criticism: I wish the automatic slide displays gave some idea of the total running time before repeat. Quite properly a time switch shuts the things down at short intervals to keep the general public moving. A few stations go a very long way with them, for example. But the specialist moves away only to be recalled for further transports when someone else presses the Start button.

So well done, London Transport.

I hope it will inspire and encourage some practical planning for our own Theatre Museum. We shall continue to travel hopefully.

Rented Light

Once upon a time – and that time was little more than twenty years ago – there was only one British lighting hire firm of any consequence. Hire was part of a package through which that one firm dominated the stage lighting hardware market by manufacturing, selling and hiring the entire product range. Through one of the softest sell house magazines in the history of controlled circulation journalism, and one of the most readably literate engineers in the history of technical books and catalogues and lectures, this firm ensured that there was little conflict between the needs of the user and the equipment available.

In the late fifties another firm broke in and grabbed a substantial slice of the major west-end long-run hire market in no time at all. The equipment offered by these new boys was basically that manufactured by the established chaps. It was going to be very late in the sixties before any other manufacturers would make a significant dent in the market, other than some discounted follow-my-leader designs for the educational stages.

Throughout the later sixties and earlier seventies, the growth of entertainment lighting accelerated. With mechanical engineers giving way to electronic whizzers and computer programmers, a foothold in the market place became easier. The industry became internationalised and the customers became more articulate than the manufacturers. (There is a possible future thesis for someone in an analysis of the changes in lighting – both hardware and software – brought about by the shift in

control of the literature from the manufacturers to the users.)

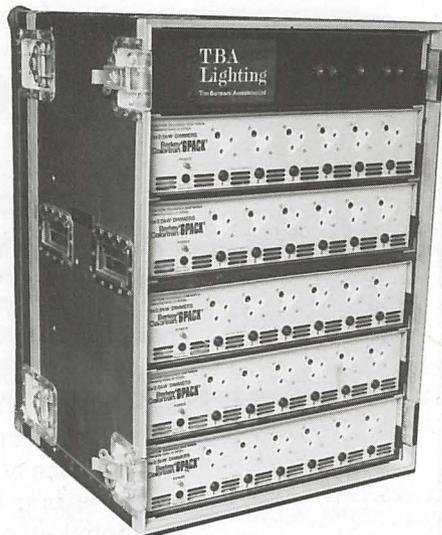
Stage lighting has now become a more conventional wholesale/retail operation. There is still considerable direct selling at the top end of the market but it is increasingly to the small retailer that we must turn – and are happy to turn – for our bread and butter lighting requirements, whether on sale or on hire.

Sale or hire – buy or rent – is a basic decision of lighting management.

For a theatre with a resident company producing its own shows, a semi-permanent flexible rig of bought equipment is almost certainly the correct cost-effective decision. But for nearly every other form of entertainment lighting where there is a landlord and tenant situation between the building and the producing company, there is a strong case for considering hiring the lighting equipment. This has long been the practice in London's west end and has been adopted for the big-budgeted touring that promotes the stars created by the recording industry.

Financial Advantages

The costs are clearly known and are fixed. This simplifies budgeting and removes one of the great imponderables – lamp maintenance (normally included unless negotiated otherwise) – from the area of risk, and consequently reduces the amount of contingency provision necessary. With so much theatre accountancy based on a weekly balance, the inclusive weekly charge of a rental system simplifies accounting



Flight case packaging by TBA Lighting.

procedures. When a show is financed by investors, the accountancy charges and complications of amortising purchase and maintenance costs are a deterrent to equipment ownership – particularly when so many producing managements consist of a skeleton staff with small offices and minimal storage. Quite simply, it can be cheaper to let a rental company carry the maintenance problems and the financial risk.

Technical Advantages

The equipment is clean, electrically safe, and mechanically sound. The cable runs are prepared with the specified parings all combined into labelled cable harnesses. On a west-end changeover with the customary fast turn round, there is just not sufficient time to clean, service, and re-organise the equipment from a long run: the only practical schedule is to get the complete old rig out and bring an entirely new one in. Similarly, for a tour the rig has to come from workshops ready to erect at the first venue in a time which in most other industries would be considered unrealistic. Good rental shops are geared to this type of operation. And it is easier to tour with a known rig than to cope with strange equipment on a weekly or daily basis.

Artistic Advantages

When using existing equipment, it is often necessary to utilise a less than ideal item of equipment just because it is there. When hiring, it is possible to specify exactly the right instrument for the job.

But, and it is a large BUT

If the equipment is *not* clean, electrically safe, and mechanically sound, the rental company is cutting corners to cut costs. Having to change two or three profiles during focussing because of jammed shutters or slipping locks can be an expensive exercise in terms of time. Hire companies are like every other commercial exercise: you get what you pay for.



Part of the large Hire Department at Donmar Sales & Hire.

CUE LIGHTING DIRECTORY

The Lighting Directory is divided into three sections covering Manufacturers, Distributors and Hirers.

The Manufacturers section is arranged in alphabetical order and gives the address, telephone number and broad categories of products manufactured by each company.

The Distributors section is not a list of official agents (although these are included) but a guide as to which products can be purchased from each distributor. The distributors in this section are arranged geographically by county and if a distributor appears in a county other than the one in which he is based this indicates that he serves this additional area.

The Hirers section is also arranged by county. Companies providing a nationwide service are listed under London. In addition to the address and telephone the name of the manager or contact is shown together with any services provided in addition to hire. Again companies listed in more than one area provide their services in these additional areas.

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Replayed with Interest

FRED BENTHAM

I am not alone in finding the subject of lighting control rather a bore nowadays. A certain F. Reid has stated in another place* that he has got to the stage of a polite groan as the best response he can muster in response to the launch of yet another system. But the subject had its fascination once, and on it he and I have spent animated hours in discussion over the years. The truth is that when, some ten years ago, it at last became possible to memorise instantly for subsequent recall the exact dimmer levels, the need for the many aids which we used to dream up to enable the operator to become a virtuoso appeared to vanish. If you follow the contradiction.

That philosophy is well shown by the master panel of my own first memory control. System WHZ, the one which found itself in the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. It had but two masters – one for the lighting at present on-stage and the other for that to come. You upped the one and downed the other in turn. However, WHZ did have individual controls for each dimmer. The rockers which turned up again in DDM at Stratford-upon-Avon – my swan-song of 1972. The real jerk towards today's ubiquitous control format came from Thorn when, in devising the new generation of colour TV controls for BBC studios, their Tony Isaacs insisted on numerical call-up for the dimmers. Add to this, later on, the TV screen or VDU (first featured in Lightboard) and you have the unacceptable face of modern controlism. Or unacceptable to me, for I am allergic to cash registers and balance sheets! Nor do I approve of painting by numbers. In consequence, one way and another, the less the numbers game obtrudes into stage lighting

the better I am pleased. So how fares *Galaxy*, Strand's latest, in my eyes?

Well, the name *Galaxy* does not enthuse. My preference was for modest codes like WHZ, CD, SP and LC which kept the customer (and many of our own staff) guessing. In fact, the last-named stood for Len's choke but enough of him or that! I had a private session with *Galaxy* a couple of weeks before attending the press launch at which I was able to say I liked it very much. System GXY (sic!) though primarily designed for television makes a fine theatre control. Of course one reason is its keen price but there are better reasons than this. The first is that it lends itself to a rethink in the layout of the operator's console as distinct from panel layout. The second is that the VDU screen plays a purely auxiliary role. You do not have to depend on it for vital information as to what you have done and are about to do. All push buttons and the like give a clear indication of their state. Furthermore, there are not too many of them and they are logically arranged. Lastly, the facilities take account of the need to be able to play the lighting – perhaps play-about-with is a better expression.

Not only is this technique needed at rehearsal when the lighting effects and changes are being composed but there may be parts of a show where, if the operator is a good one – nay, if he *is* an operator – it could be a good idea to write 'Ad Lib' on the plot. The idea that a lighting designer has the time and the skill to sew up meticulously every moment of every lighting plot is a mistaken one. Too often the race is to put it all in the 'memory' and play back the show like shoving on a gramophone record. This notion can go completely against the heart of *live* theatre.

It apes, in lighting terms, Gordon Craig's asinine idea of the 'Über-marionette' to replace the actor. Let us leave the strictly recorded automated repeat to the intergalactic space of the laser lightshow.

In any case, for strictly practical reasons there will be occasions when there simply is no time to compose and record in advance and there certainly will be some one-night stands which are one long vamp from end to end. System GXY, although perfectly able to record the strictest plots for disciplined repeat makes provision for the likes of me to play about. In saying that I assume that whoever buys the thing for me goes for the Group Masters option with six wheels rather than the Preset Masters one with ten positional levers. These master wheels – also used in pairs on the two playbacks – mount at close centres. At last one's *fingers* can be used instead of one finger! This is the age of the one-finger exercise; everywhere people poke away at their calculators.

Every operator who has used the more complex lighting controls will be aware how easy it is to get locked-up. There are times when one becomes a virtual prisoner of the control state. First this, then that and the other has to be undone and then with a final hasty look around the operator drives off. In a car he would have crashed long since! In the case of GXY your last action takes precedence. And look at the problem how you may this is the only rule that really makes sense. After all, if some floater is made, it is easy – unlike in olden times – to as-you-were the thing.

This review is no place to go into detail but it is necessary to make the odd point on physical layout. There is no longer any excuse for the common practice of making the operator reach over a shelf full of papers or sandwiches to get at the controls. Mark this well. No piano or organ console ever put the music score between the player and the keyboard. The reason for the growth of this tradition has been the great depth of levers, wheels and associated electronics. You simply could not get your knees under. Things that mattered *had* to be distanced. With GXY all this goes in a compact crate which can go in the dimmer room. So put it there and put the plot desk *beyond* the control panel. If you, as operator, then find it makes you tired when writing, you can safely assume that you are writing down more than you need to. As to the writing the electronic finger traces upon the VDU screen, that gadget can be put to one side. It is no bad thing to have to turn through 90° when referring to it. What really matters is the stage. Never mind what the balance sheet on the VDU says; are the lighting circuits happily deployed on the stage!



**Sightline*, Vol. 13, No. 1.

PRODUCT NEWS

Photokina – Food for thought

Photokina is not an event where one expects to find very much that is new for theatre lighting but this year two exhibits gave some cause for thought. In the last issue we mentioned Charlie Paton's Light Scan system (Light Works Ltd.) which provides remotely controlled movement for up to 18 par cans.

Light Works have recently been collaborating with Berkey Colortran to develop the idea further and a prototype was demonstrated at Photokina. They have motorised all the functions of a TV multi-purpose 5K light, including pan, tilt, focus, all four barndoors, barndoor rotation and various changeover switches. The processor control will store positions and speeds, and home in to a pre-set position at the press of a button. Manual override via a proportional speed joystick is provided for initial setting up or fine adjustment. In addition, the traditional pole operation will override the servo systems. While this is a very specialised piece of equipment, the electrical and mechanical components are adaptable with any luminaire suspended from a yoke.

Now you may well say that remotely controlled lights are nothing new and this is true enough. They were first tried about fourteen years ago but the motors were extremely cumbersome and the cost just could not be justified unless there were constant lighting changes.

Five years later the French TV production organization, SFP, thought they had a suitable application for remotely controlled lights with their new audience participation studio. They bought 25 Berkey lights and had them motorised by Kremer. This was a partial success – you could pan, tilt and focus but there was no control over barndoors.

Richard Pilbrow, innovative thinker if ever there was one, is believed to have looked at them for the National but had the idea turned down on grounds of cost.

More recently Zweits Deutsches Fernsehen have been looking at the problem and have motorised 12 Berkey lanterns at their Wiesbaden Film Studios. They have now done a thorough costing exercise and have come to the conclusion that remotely controlled lights are an economic proposition – at least for them, and are inviting tenders for 200 motorised units for their Mainz studios.

So what has changed? We have not seen the Germans' figures and can only speculate that the ubiquitous chip has tilted the scales against the man on the ladder at least in cases where a remote control facility can be used regularly.

Of course this could mean no more than

200 custom built lanterns and conventional wisdom certainly seems to take this view but Charlie Paton and Light Works, and presumably Berkey Colortran too, think this may be the start of a new breed of standard lanterns not just for television but theatre as well.

Light Works and Berkey Colortran are not of course the only ones in the field. Quartzcolor Ianiro have motorised pan, tilt and focus on their Pollux, Castor and Polaris spotlights and these were also on display at Photokina on the Rank Strand pitch who sell Ianiro in Britain.

BBC re-equip studios

The BBC has been re-equipping a number of its TV studios. At the Television Centre studios 7 and 8 have just been brought into commission with the first all micro-processor lighting systems, Thornlite 500s. The Thornlites replace the old Thorn Q-file which has been on the go for over 10 years.

There are two VDUs built into the desk so that, as well as seeing the present lighting arrangements, you can get a preview of future lighting states and 'interrogate' each part of the system individually.

A separate special effects panel has been installed as well which can be used with the system. This panel, made by Zero 88, has twelve channels appearing on 12 crossbars. The effects have been included primarily for pop music and light entertainment productions.

Thornlite 500s are also planned for the Open University studio in Milton Keynes and have been in use for some months now in the Cardiff studios.

Rank Strand have their new Galaxy system going into Studio 2 at the Television Centre and Studio B at Glasgow where Berkey Colortran are supplying the other studio equipment including pipe grid, spring pantograph and multi purpose lighting. Berkey are doing much the same at Manchester's Studio B.

Berkey's two main control systems, the Channel Track and Color Track also appear to be selling well, about one a month, the most impressive installation so far probably being the one at the Cork Opera House.

New Discharge Lanterns from Ianiro

Quartzcolor Ianiro have produced new 1kW and 2.5kW lanterns using the new Thorn CID discharge lamps. They are being called Altair spotlights and are based on the Sirio HMI Daylights but the Altair lamp holder can take both CID and HMI.

Ianiro have also produced a 1kW

addition to the Pollux and Castor Bambino range called the Polaris Bambino. It is much smaller and lighter than the standard Polaris. Ianiro lanterns are marketed in Britain by Rank Strand.

A useful gadget

I have been sent an ingenious little gadget for testing fuses by A. J. S. Theatre Lighting and Stage Supplies Ltd of 15, Kilmarnock Road, Winton, Bournemouth in the county of Dorset hereinafter called AJS (there are confusingly two companies called AJS, the other being in County Durham). But now back to the said ingenious gadget which is called the MP fuse checker. It is very simple, comes in a smart plastic case and I have tried it and it works. You simply place the fuse on a 'V' shaped bed and if it works a green panel lights up with the letters O.K. If it's a dud nothing happens.

It is the sort of gadget that appeals not just to professional electricians but to people like me and James Thurber's aunt who, you will remember, put bowls under empty light sockets to catch the leaking electricity.

Fifty years behind the scenes

Lew Burroughs, joint managing director of Theatre Sound and Lighting has just celebrated 50 years in the theatre. He joined Strand Electric, as it then was, in 1930, and was in charge of the new demonstration theatre at 29 Floral Street when it opened in 1932.



1935 was when he first started looking after the equipment needs of West End productions. In those days there was no distinction between selling and hiring. Lew thus joined that amazing team of characters that served the West End and further afield for a generation – including Eddie Biddle, B Bear.

Shortly after Strand's Covent Garden showrooms closed down, Lew joined TS & L in 1972 together with Eddie Biddle. Lew has earned himself and his company a well deserved reputation for being able to sort out exactly what any production needs, without fuss and above all, on time – in short the right man for a crisis.

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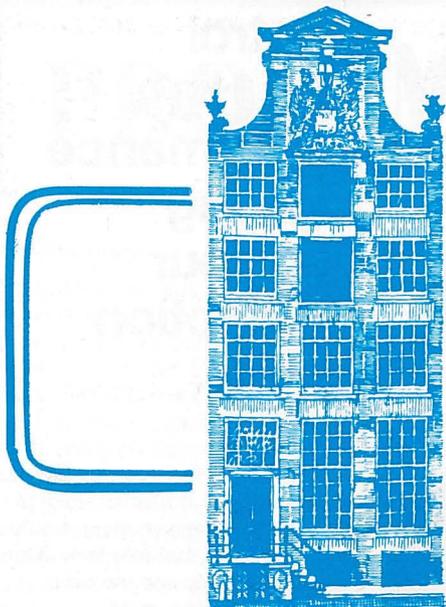
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Museums of Theatre

In a new CUE series, *Francis Reid* visits theatre museums, considering their interest not to the academic researcher but to the casual theatric tourist.

I. Amsterdam Theater Museum

When I first visited Amsterdam's *Theater Museum* in the early 1970s it was called *Toneel Museum*. This change from 'Stage Museum' to 'Theatre Museum' is presumably part of a process of internationalisation not unconnected with the installation of the Dutch Theatre Institute in the house next door. *Toneel* is a lovely word but *Theater* certainly simplifies contact between museum and casual visitor.

The museum is housed in an early 17th century house on the Herengracht canal complete with a pair of elegant reception rooms with fine 18th century murals. A further two ground floor rooms have a semi-permanent display of early Amsterdam theatre. On the upper floors there are a series of exhibition spaces and archive rooms.

Centrepiece of the permanent display is the 18th century *Miniature Stage of Heronymus Van Slingelandt*. This model stage was made in 1781 by the scenic painter Pieter Barbiers. It is not a tuppence coloured 'juvenile drama' stage but is a full technical working model (I would guess about scale 20:1). A film box alongside gives a full performance of the model's scenic possibilities with simultaneous wing and border substitutions, cloud machines and lovely practical waves. In addition to the frontal audience view, the film has a

section on the model's backstage operation. Students of the British Georgian stage will be surprised to find flying cloths.

Tony Cole's model of the 1638 Amsterdam Schouwburg is a modern reconstruction – the auditorium form is courtyard but the conventional 'portrait' format is given landscape proportions.

The model has a small cut-away so that we have a feeling of being perched in the gods (3rd circle). Pea-bulb chandeliers give some idea of light levels and, perhaps even more interesting, an indication of the atmosphere of an illumination shared by stage and auditorium.

A model reconstruction of Gent's 1539 *Rederijkerstoneel* has a feeling of a later age – Jacobean was the word that came into my mind before reading the model's caption.

There are prints in support of the models and items such as Pieter Balen's 16th century *Boernkernis*, a painting which appears in nearly every theatre picture-history book. For the atmospherically inclined, there are practical reconstruction wind and rain machines without 'don't touch' signs.

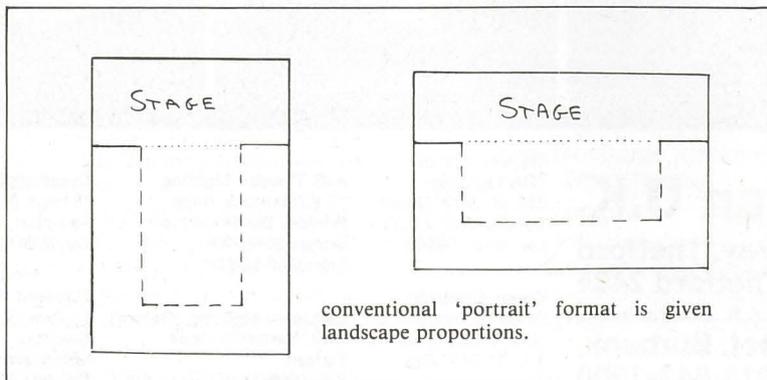
Linking the permanent exhibition to this summer's temporary *Revue* exhibition, watercolours (1896 + 1912) of the *Schouwburgzaal in Het Paleis Voor Volkvlis* shows

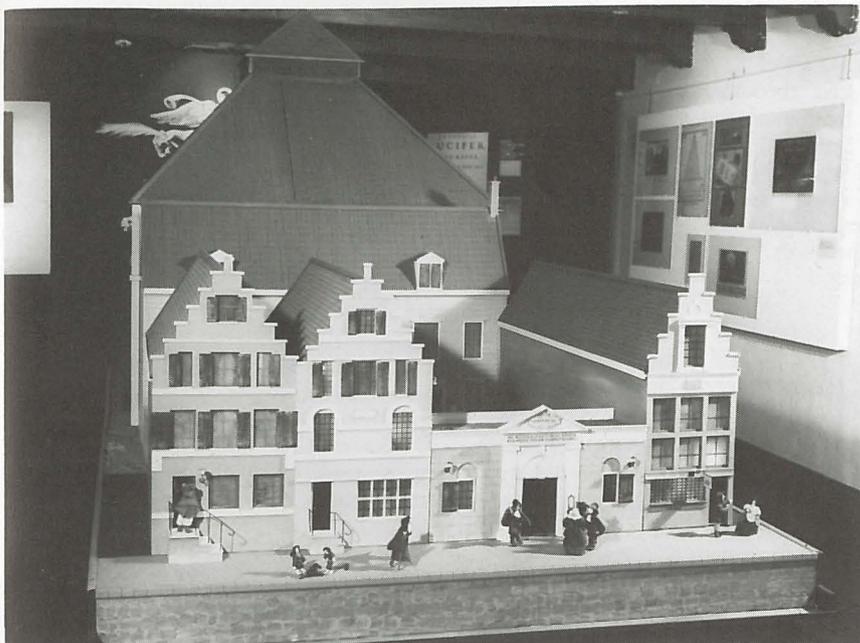
a stage ill-proportioned to its auditorium. It is virtually impossible to introduce a proscenium stage successfully into a circus auditorium. (I love the general atmosphere of Amsterdam's *Carre* theatre but there can be no acceptable compromise between the levels of projection required for nearest and farthest audience – remembering that 'near' and 'far' are only partly a matter of measurable distance). However the watercolours offer delightfully atmospheric details including absurd audience-facing boxes on the proscenium and a splendid upright pianoforte (to shorten the word would be to insult the instrument) sitting centre pit in an unmistakable 'piano-conductor' position.

Amsterdam's Theatre Museum is rather good at the art and craft of exhibiting. Good at evocations of total atmosphere and good at presenting details by selection and juxtaposition of appropriate objects. Living in East Anglia, Amsterdam is my international airport and so I have stopover memories of encounters with displays on such diverse theatre topics as circus, costumes, fairs, architecture, theatre photography, etc.

This summer's exhibition was devoted to the History of Revue in the Netherlands – a theatre form which first reached Amsterdam in 1889 when *Naar de Eiffeltoren* played in the *Salon des Varieties*. (Both title of revue and name of theatre indicate the country of origin of 'revue'). Revue is still alive and well in Amsterdam: in particular the annual Carre Theater revues starring Andre Van Duin. The exhibition included Van Duin performances on film which, by cross-cuts to members of the audience almost in pain with laughter, captured the spirit of personality comedy.

Exhibition techniques included video interviews and a slide history with atmospheric sound. And, by the way, 'Scottish Scenas' are not peculiar to English summer shows and pantos: a heavily posed old photograph of girls in kilts with one arm up has a caption which says it all – *In Schotland Ligt Mijn 'Home'*.





Tony Cole's model of the 1638 Amsterdam Schouwburg. Collection Netherlands Theatre Institute, Amsterdam.



Miniature Stage of Heronymus Van Slingelandt. Collection Netherlands Theatre Institute, Amsterdam.

In a corner displaying appropriate photographs stood a 1933 radio playing an archive tape.

Sets, costumes, photographs, prints everywhere.

But my mind kept coming back to the stages. Most of these Revue Theatres were contrived – primitive halls with stages offering little ease of audience contact. But the revue is an 'out-front' form of perfor-

mance. The actor/audience relationship needs little subtlety – provided that there is ample audience/audience relationship. And the photographs and prints certainly demonstrated lots of that.

Amsterdam Theater Museum
168 Herengracht.
Normally open Monday to Friday 10–5
(Sundays and public holidays 1–5).

Between Cues

The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

Walter Moony

I have been moon watching. Taking a serious look at a primary source that I have hitherto failed to study with the concentration that any audience would be entitled to expect from their lighting designer. I have passed a lot of my life – particularly my operatic life – by moonlight. That atmospheric moonshine which conveniently waxes and wanes on cue, casting its moonbeams into dramatically appropriate corners with a fine disregard for the sciences of astronomy and meteorology. So I decided to set aside fourteen plingular nights for observation of the real thing. I selected a suitable mediterranean seascape. At the merest indication on the horizon of a possible entrance, the cork was pulled on the first litre (for august moon watching, a very dry very chilled Rioja rosé has considerable merit – but no sipping, it needs a tumbler to make its full statement). The first appearance was always tinged with a positive gold – 47 or even 34; the beam tightly parallel as from a truly parabolic reflector (I do not recall Mission Control reporting that the Man in the Moon had a parabolic countenance). A follow spot whose phosphorescence tingled over the ripples with unerring aim as I (and my litre) tramped along the beach. Then a colour modulation through 52, open white, 17 and finally 61. The skyward track accompanied by a slight distortion of source to produce a gently conical beam. Subtle variations nightly (as in all good live shows) but with a standard reference provided by the precisely shaped, focussed and timed 804 beam from the lighthouse. When spot had opened to full flood I took to my bed, knowing that the remains of the nightly lunar progress would not yet have settled behind the mountains by the first swim (and gin) of the morrow.

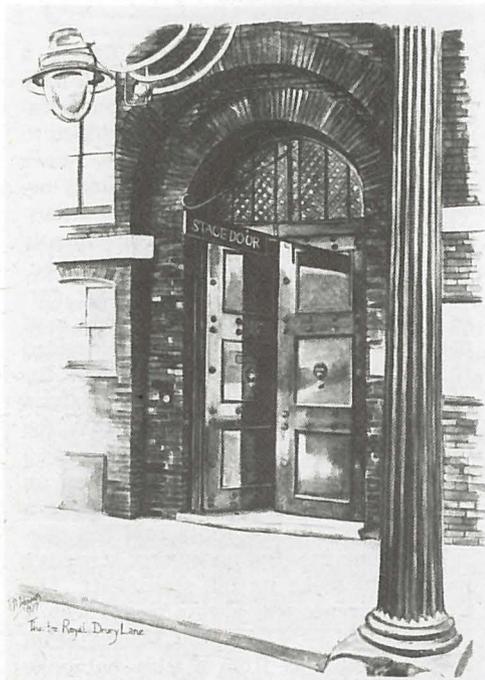
Televsual Reality

Impersonation is a specialised form of acting. Particularly in a stage play about historical figures who have already been portrayed on television. Televsual fidelity rather than historical accuracy then becomes the reality which enables the audience to suspend their disbelief. Thus thought Plinge while watching a staged *Crown Matrimonial* with recent memories of a televised *Edward and Mrs Simpson*. Royce Ryton scores by brilliantly deploying

a classic device: Mrs Simpson remains off-stage. And in an age where tags, like tabs, are out of fashion, a play with seven curtain lines must surely be declared *well made*.

Theatre Doors

My favourite door in any theatre is the *Pass Door*. One step divides illusion from reality, effect from cause. The point of interchange between truth and mask. The walk through the pass door is always a strange sensation – even on the ninety ninth trip during a single rehearsal day. Pass doors are deliberately inconspicuous, whereas the front *Auditorium Doors* are



Drury Lane Elegance. (Arts Council, original by Pat Adams)



Fortune Art Deco. (Arts Council, original by Pat Adams)

ostentatiously obvious. Pictorially, the front doors are well documented – unlike *Stage Doors* which have a different magic (I have passed through with every known emotion from elation through fear to blind panic). London stage doors have now acquired a delightful documentation in a series of a detail drawings by P. A. Adams, discovered during a plingular browse among the cards in the Arts Council Long Acre Shop.

Asymmetric Bulls

I feel a growing urge to study a rather neglected species of entertainment architecture: the *Bull Ring*. A study of Spanish fly posting indicates that most Rings offer an alternative culture: the pop star and his decibels can supplement the matador and his bulls. This does offer the possibility of observing the actor/audience relationship of the Ring without assisting in the traditional performance where the climax is the irreversible ultimate. But to embark on an adequate study I must surely absorb something of that culture which accepts the bullfight as a performing art. I seek assurance that the bull enjoys the choreo-



Stage Door for Bulls (photo Walter Plinge)

graphic thrust and parry of ritual conflict because he is secure in the pleasurable inevitability of his ultimate failure. When I am convinced that the Bull is a masochist by instinct or education, I will absorb myself in a consideration of the ring on audience/audience/actor/bull relationships. Meanwhile I will merely note that (1) With seat prices based on *sol y sombra* we obviously have an early instance of the influence of lighting designers over the box office; (2) the high technology dressing room and green room arrangements for the bulls in the newer rings suggests sophisticated stage management procedures; and (3) theatres are not the only entertainment buildings to be experimenting with *asymmetry*.

Marketing Lunch

Misprint of my year is the report of a memory system launch where the marketing manager is alleged to have *announced 17*

pre-lunch orders. A 'literal' dedicated, surely, to the memory of that great marketing man – B. Bear.

Gold . . .

In the ranks of stage lighting world market leaders, PANI are rather special. They are not a segment of a bland conglomerate: they are controlled by an *exclusive owner*. They also have a tradition of packing their specialised optics with a degree of mechanical sophistication and visual elegance that eludes some of their mass-producing competitors. There have been firms where GOLDEN JUBILEE has been an occasion for taking solace in past achievements. But PANI, at fifty, can look confidently to the future while celebrating an illustrious past.

. . . and Silver

No reader with any knowledge of plingular peccadilloes would expect this page to allow the SILVER ANNIVERSARY of HANDEL OPERA to pass without comment. I do not elevate Handel above Mozart, but he is a very close second. Handel Opera – firstly in St. Pancras Town Hall (an opera house of blessed memory) and latterly in Sadlers Wells (a poor substitute for the potential of a restored Old Vic) – has made two dozen of Handel's Dramatic Works available to us in productions that rarely come between the opera and the audience. Their well-dressed processions and simple formal gestures concentrate rather than distract my mind. To the past, present and future of Handel Opera, I can only utter (with *da capo ad lib*) that much used word of the Master's librettists – Hallelujah!

Pre-heat

From time to time I have the odd moment of doubt about the growth of extra knobs on lighting desks. Now I certainly do like each function to have its own knob (otherwise the cockpit drill is nasty) but, well, I do have the occasional doubts about all the facilities that get provided. I can understand their theoretical value when I am in the rarified company of consultants, engineers and salesmen. But when I am in action trying to get a bit of practical lighting on a real show, I just seem to need a sensitive operator caressing simple knobs with rather basic functions. However I did get rather excited the other day when I saw a desk with a push labelled *pre-heat*. Now everyone is familiar with the jerk that can be inserted into a build by the delay while the lamp filaments warm up. Every operator – of every kind of desk controlling every kind of dimmer – is familiar with the technique of cheating just enough level to warm the lamp without creating significant light. Now a push that looks at the recorded incoming cue and pre-heats any lamps currently at zero – well, I guess that's a knob I could warm to!