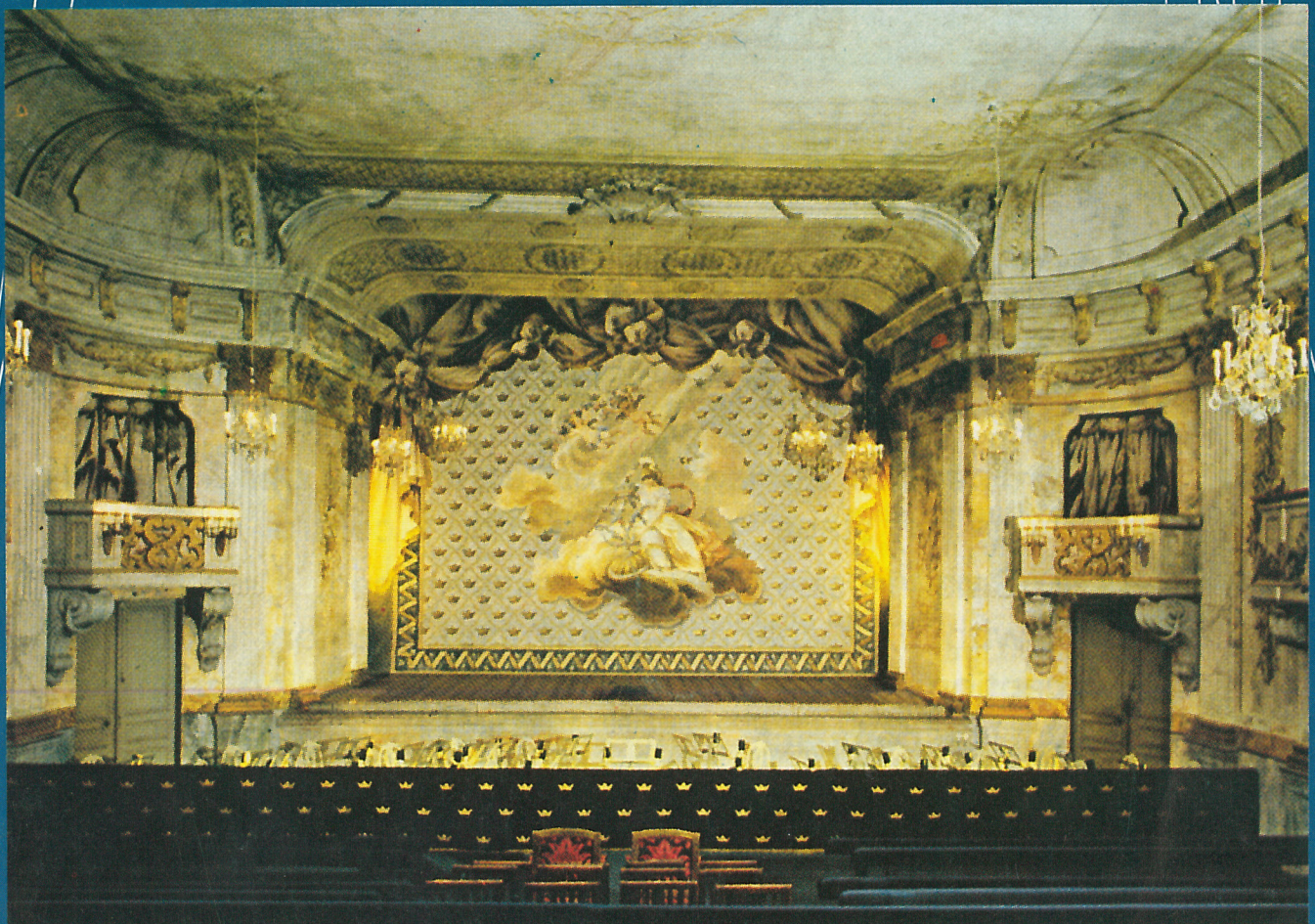
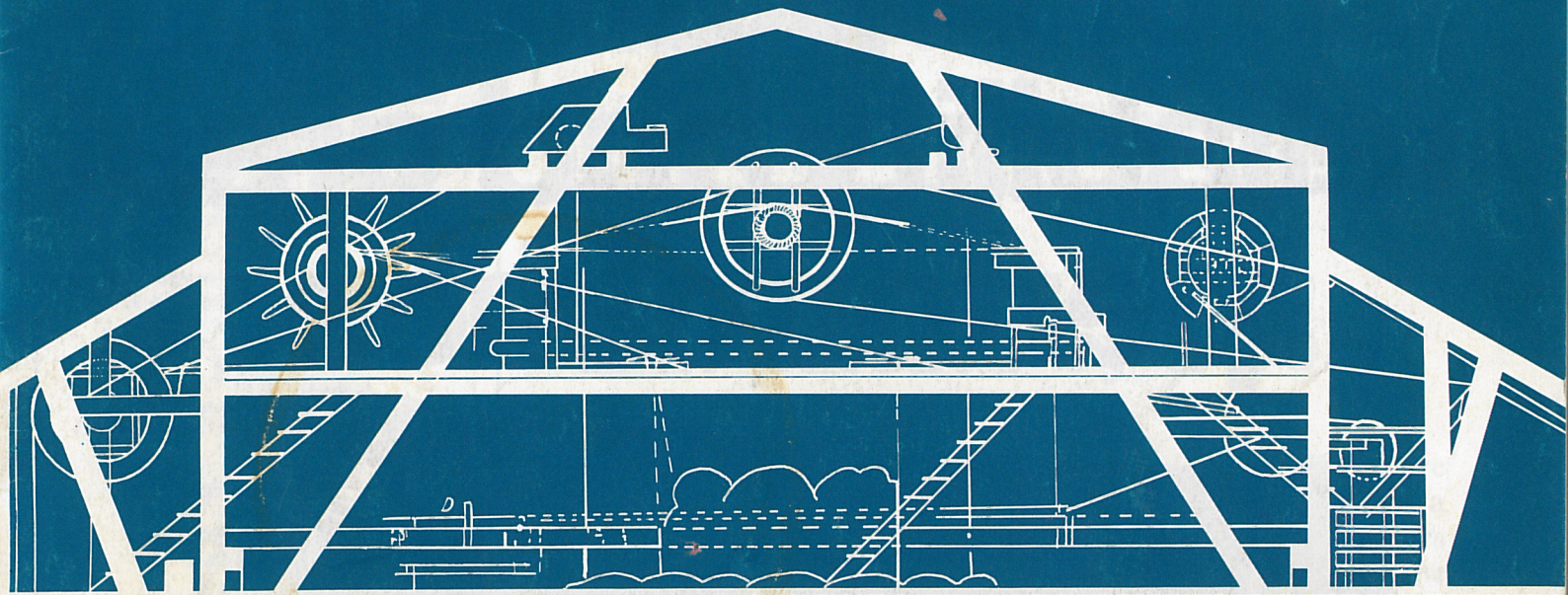


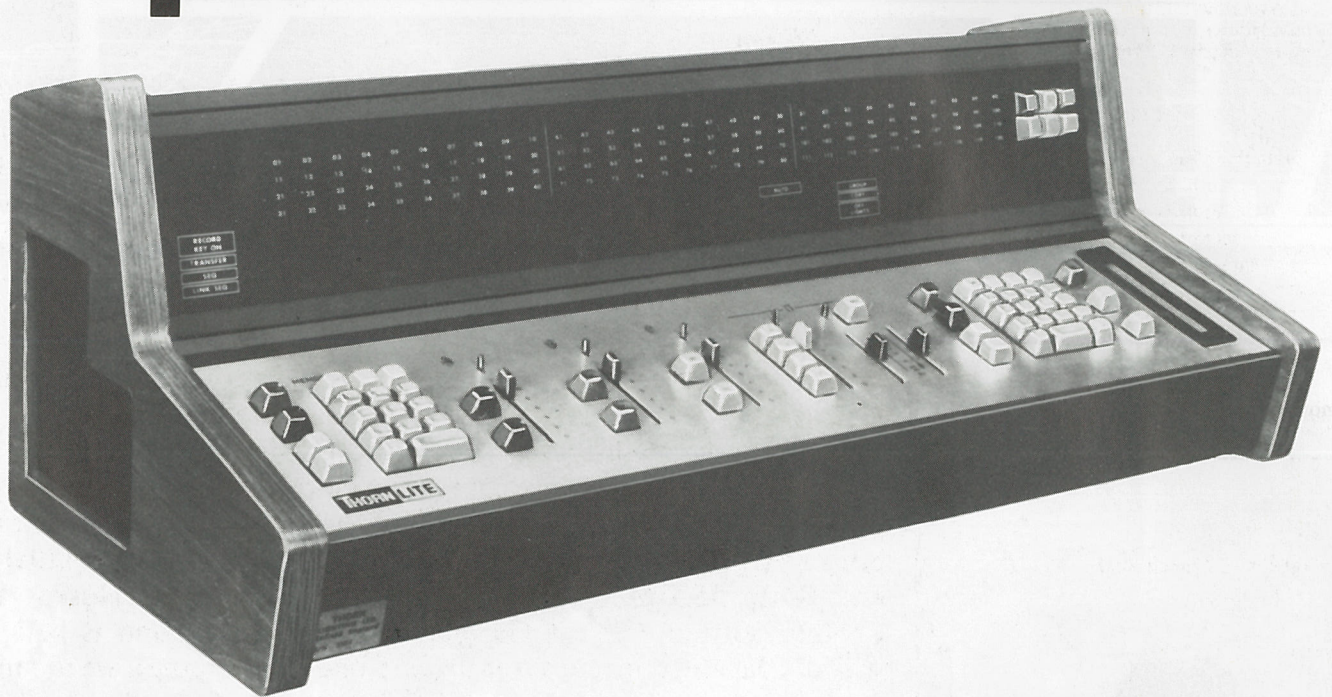
CUE

Technical Theatre Review



January-February 1981
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CUE

Technical Theatre Review

9.

January–February 1981

Our cover shows a photograph of the Drottningholm proscenium set within a sectional drawing from Agne Beijer's book published at the time of the 1921 rediscovery of the intact 1766 theatre. The photograph was taken before the recent adjustments to the lighting (The four chandeliers within the proscenium now hang from the four equidistant black rings).

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Editorial Board

James Twynam (Managing)
Anthony Pugh
Francis Reid
Jeremy Twynam
Mark Boardman (Art)

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

Exit pursued by a bore

It would be churlish to allow Mr. Norman St. John Stevas to leave the stage in his rollicking role as Minister for the Arts without a ripple of applause. However much his own theatrical qualities might have jeopardised the gravitas of his other office in the Cabinet, at least he was *in* there proselytising, putting on the style, and in a nice position to sneer embarrassingly at the Philistine tendencies that appear to have been the pride of Treasury ministers since economics were invented.

The period of the Norman Conquest was not much more than a year long. Nevertheless, and whether coincidentally or not, in his short reign we seem to have experienced a lot more actual, rather than just promissory, changes for the better than have happened in previous administrations. The Arts Council cuts, after all, have not been swingeing ones, except on the outermost fringes of minimal art and fairly negligible theatre. Covent Garden hasn't closed, and another sort of Covent Garden has opened. London is still the world's darling in musical terms, and opera companies, we are told, are now having to queue up for theatres to tour to. The National Theatre has become, on the side, a positive centre of creative play, not least for children. And, 'though it puffs out warnings of the need for a greater accountability in marketing the arts, the ponderous machinery of commercial sponsorship does at last seem to be getting up a good head of steam.

It remains to be seen whether the return of the Arts, more as the fatted calf than as the prodigal son, to the chilly bosom of the Department of Education and Science will interfere with a growth that is an essential need, surely, in our utilisation of a leisure that we may have all too much of in the future. We note that the new Minister, Mr. Paul Channon, has complained rather waspishly that:- "to read some of the papers recently, it would seem that the arts had been banished to the bottom of some obscure cellar at Waterloo Station." Remembering, of course, that this cellar is probably closely connected with the Old Vic, and that another obscure cellar under *Charing Cross* Station housed the Players' Theatre from which the whole revival of Victorian show business seems to have sprung, we'll just have to soldier hopefully on—seeking the bubble reputation in the Channon's mouth.

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Living History that is Drottningholm

Francis Reid continues his Cue series on visits to theatre museums, considering their interest to the casual theatric tourist, rather than the academic researcher.

Drottningholm must surely represent something approaching the ideal theatre museum—or at least the centrepiece of such a museum. Abandoned—softly cocooned in a century of dust—from its age to our own. Preserved from the inevitable periodic refurbishings that would have been required to modernise the theatre in conformity with developing ideas on staging. Oh that many more such moments in theatrical evolution had been frozen in this way!

The Drottningholm Theatre opened in 1766 in the grounds of the Royal summer palace on the Island of Lovö in Lake Mälaren some eight miles from the centre of Stockholm. It is the second theatre on the site: the first, built in 1754, burnt down in 1762.

The Adelcrantz (he was the court architect) 1766 theatre enjoyed a period of particularly successful activity from the accession of King Gustav III in 1777 until his death in 1792 as a result of being shot at a masquerade in the Stockholm Opera House. When the king was in summer residence at Drottningholm, the opera personnel were ordered to follow and were billeted in the numerous small rooms behind the stage and in the surrounding buildings.

A memorandum dated August 8th 1799 relating to *the provision and upkeep of His Majesty's chapel and opera inside the Royal precincts* reveals that the opera company at Drottningholm that year contained at least 150 persons. It describes at which table the actors were placed and the amount of wine to which each was entitled, *each getting one bottle of wine—Uttini (the conductor)*



The 1980 footlight uses modern technology to recreate the effect of 1766. Each of the 30 reflectors holds 3 Cima electric candles. The auditorium candelabra and sconces now also have Cima candles (compare with the cover photograph showing the small lamps and shades used until recently).

two—and coffee in their rooms after breakfast and dinner. All male and female dancers other than those in the corps de ballet get one bottle of wine each, and female ballet-dancers half a bottle.

In 1791, the year before the King's death, the theatre received its only major addition: a neo-classic foyer to the design of Louis Jean Desprez. This foyer has an interesting all round ceiling gallery where musicians can play unseen.

After Gustav's death the Court continued to take up residence each summer at Drottningholm. There were a few performances but the last decade of the eighteenth century was a period of decline for the Drottningholm Theatre and it passed through the nineteenth century in a state of hibernation. Its slumbers were interrupted briefly for single performances in 1854 and 1858. Throughout this period the theatre was permitted to remain undisturbed although some of the smaller rooms, including dressing rooms, were used for guests and for the billeting of military personnel. For part of the time, the auditorium is reported to have served as a Sunday School, but in general the whole building was nothing more than a store house.

Hibernation lasted until 1921 when Agne Beijer and two officials from the National Museum in Stockholm were searching for a painting. On the way into the room where the painting was expected to be, Beijer relates that they passed through a narrow passage that was so dark that they could hardly grope their way through it. *Time after time we rubbed in the dark against tremendous wooden frames with strangely cut profiles. These wooden frames were the wings, and the passage was part of the Drottningholm Theatre stage. Underneath a three-foot pile of dust lay the very original material for which I was searching. It appeared so insignificant in the condition it was in that it was quite understandable nobody had bothered to look at it previously.*

Agne Beijer set about discovering what lay under the thick carpet of dust. On the stage he found about thirty complex sets from the time of Gustav III—wings stacked in pairs and cloths close hung from the flies. The machinery was undamaged and unchanged from the eighteenth century. *To put it into working condition said Beijer the only things required were innumerable coils of rope for attaching by expert hands to the pulleys.*

Reorganisation rather than restoration was all that was required to put the theatre back into working order. *Nothing was changed or added to says Beijer either in the interior or to the settings.* The only innovation was the introduction of electricity: it was decided that a return to candles presented an unacceptable fire risk.

Drottningholm Theatre reopened on 19th August 1922 when, in the words of Beijer *The scene changes which were made with the curtain up proved to everyone's general surprise to be noiseless and quick. The highlight of the demonstration was when the theatre's "gloire"—the expressive 18th century technical term for the cloud machinery of revelation of the gods and*

goddesses—slowly and ceremoniously floated down from the fly loft and enveloped the garlanded pale pink coloured palace decorations painted by Carlo Bibiena in 1774 with a shimmering golden wave of cloud. In its midst was suspended a special cloud carriage on which was perched two tiny rococo Cupids from the ballet school.

Since then the theatre has been in regular use and now houses a summer opera season. I have not yet had an opportunity to attend a performance at Drottningholm: that is one of the pleasures of life still to come. An experience high on my list of things to live and strive for—and an experience that will, I feel certain, place some strain upon my emotional stability. But although I have not yet experienced a summer opera, I have inspected the theatre from cellar to loft on a crisp November morning—under the guidance of Drottningholm's current lighting designer Torkel Blomqvist.

Entering the auditorium was an experience so totally traumatic that I do not think that I can describe it in mere words. But I must try. From time to time in my life there have been *click moments* when I have suddenly *understood*. In a moment of great clarity some event has suddenly—quite dramatically—linked together a series of earlier experiences (visual, aural, literary, sensual) to allow an understanding that has been hitherto elusive.

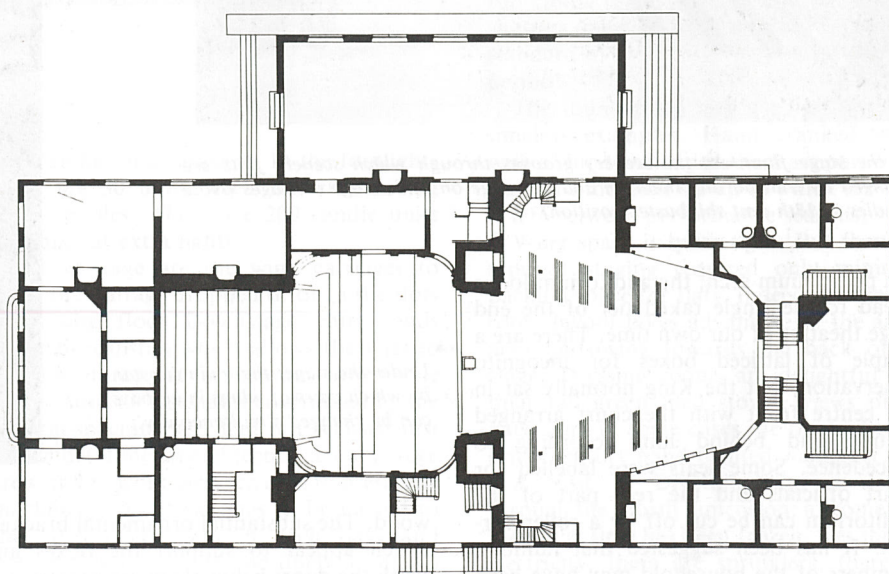
I am no stranger to eighteenth century theatre. I am very familiar with the highways and byways of its opera. I drool daily over the prints of the period. I have read my way through a great deal of literature: certainly most of the historian's analysis plus an increasing scrape at the pile

of primary material. For the past eighteen months I have spent my working day in a theatre which is so rooted in the eighteenth century that I nightly observe the house through the spyhole in a proscenium door. For years I have sought out early theatres and rejoiced in the ambience of their architecture. But something has been missing—something to pull it all together.

That missing catalyst has been provided for me by the *auditorium lighting* at Drottningholm.

Light is surely the most important single influence in creating ambience. I do not think that I believe this just because I am a lighting designer. Certainly any lighting designer is more likely to analyse the lighting component in any situation and perhaps be aware of lighting level and source in a conscious rather than subconscious way. But the selectivity which light imposes upon our perception of space must be a major factor in experiencing the original atmosphere of a historical interior. When Drottningholm was first refurbished, the lighting was by yellow coloured bulbs with shades. In 1980 the candle sconces and chandeliers were refitted with CIMA candles. These sources are, of course, closer to original candle power and do not require shading. The slight *tremolo* of the spring filaments recreates what one would imagine to be the ideal never quite achieved by a master wick trimmer (doubtless someone somewhere is at work on a microprocessor programme to pulsate individual candles in simulated guttering mode in random sequence). But the effect in this auditorium of light level, position and multiplicity of source is magic.

The auditorium is not a conventional horse shoe of tiered boxes. Although there





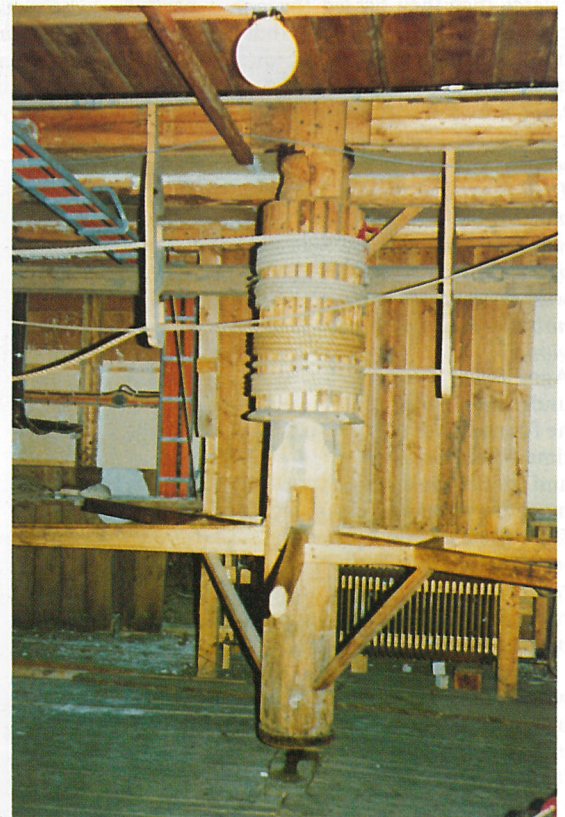
The original wing lighting poles have recreated reflectors with Cima electric candles.



The master dimming wheel by which all the wing candle poles can be rotated towards or away from the stage.



In the stage floor are the scenery grooves through which scenery flats are changed by transporting them on and off stage on understage carriages (Note candles in 18th cent shinbuster position)



Under the stage: the main capstan by which pairs of wings in all bays can be changed simultaneously.

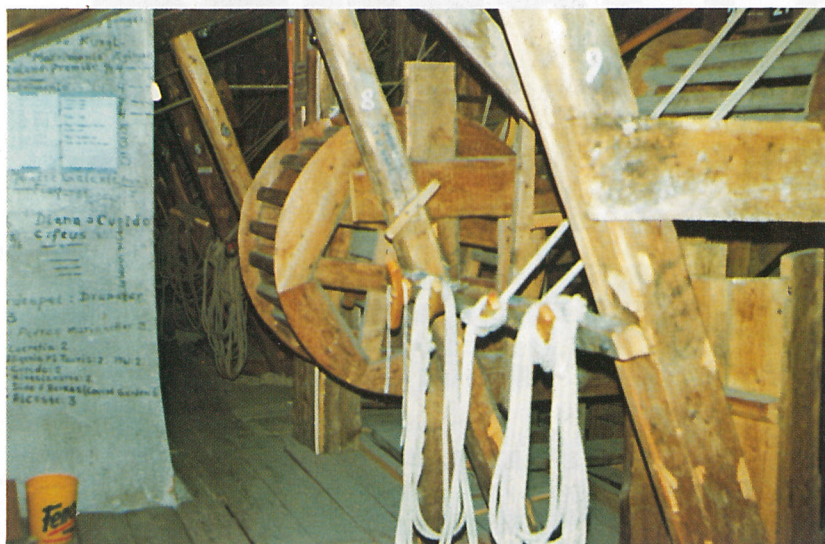
is a proscenium arch, the auditorium looks ahead to the single raked tier of the end stage theatres of our own time. There are a couple of latticed boxes for incognito observation, but the King normally sat in the centre front with the court arranged around and behind him according to precedence. Some seats were labelled for court officials and the rear part of the auditorium can be cut off by a roller curtain. It has been suggested that humbler members of the household may have been concealed in this way except during the actual action of the performance.

The walls are grey-white, pale-yellow tinted with ornamental ochre motifs. These walls are broken by stucco corinthian pilasters with capitals of yellow-brown

wood. The substantial ornamental brackets which appear to support the boxes and flank the doors below them are constructed from papier mache. There is a considerable degree of restraint which bridges auditorium and stage rather than offering a visual conflict with the scenery. The proscenium arch chandeliers have been rehung across the proscenium to correspond with

the four symmetrical circles in the proscenium arch ceiling. They not only look right and feel right but are logical in terms of both the ceiling paintwork and the practical lighting of the scene.

To stand on the stage is magic. I could not find a point of command: you can stand virtually anywhere and embrace the entire auditorium. Standing on any stage is



Above the stage: 20th century fly-plot on the wall of 18th century fly-loft.



The Foyer, added in 1791.

an emotive business: to stand on stage timbers that supported a 1773 performance of *Acis & Galatea* is lid flipping. And years of studying old stage plans with sets of grooves drawn in a perspective narrowing to upstage is no preparation at all for making an entrance between bays of preset flats, slotted into their carriages to await a mechanical substitution for the current scene.

There are six sets of slots. The downstage four have a capacity for four wing flats, the fifth can accommodate three and the sixth (the most upstage) can carry two.

Care has to be taken in making an entrance: there is a boom in each bay—a *candle pole*. The lights are now electric and each wing has its own thyristor dimmer, but the poles can all still turn in unison from a single timber dimming wheel in the prompt corner. These wing lights have just been changed to CIMA candles. There are 210 units on the wing poles: each unit comprises

two candles in a reflector. In the footlights there are 30 units, each reflector having three candles. There are 200 candle units available as extra lights.

Below stage are the wing carriages to carry the flattage dropped through the slots in the stage floor. Downstage centre stands the main capstan which allows the flats to be substituted. It is obvious when one thinks about it but, until confronted by the actual machinery, I had not realised just how much time an eighteenth century stage crew had to work between cues to preset the machinery. All these lines to be moved to the correct carriages in each bay (and presumably tensions to be finely adjusted) before manning the capstan for a magical coordinated change.

Also understage, of course, is the trap machinery which was an essential feature of baroque opera—a platform gently rising by means of a timber windlass rather than the counterweighted instant appearance traps



18th Century Hot & Cold in all dressing rooms (plus 20th century sprinkler in case of fire).

of the pantomime stage.

The fly loft is a wondrous collection of timber devoted to the art and science of mechanical advantage. There are simple rope sets but there are also complex drum and shaft operated systems for border substitution and for chariot flying. Flying height is restricted and cloths are tumbled—but the scenes were painted on full cloths rather than on the paired back shutters (meeting from the side) which were standard in the British theatre of the same period.

The thunder-run and wind machine are timeless examples. Hand cranked waves with a ship to sail upon them are part of the standard museum set-up in which the stage is left between performance seasons.

Wing space is quite tight. But then this type of staging required only minimum packing space for flats. Indeed the dressing room layout takes advantage of the acting area narrowing towards the back of the stage. Dressing rooms are delightful with their tall green tiled stoves, views of the park, and in some cases the original eighteenth century hand-painted wallpaper.

A visit to Drottningholm is a step through the fourth dimension: a moment of theatrical time has been frozen. Yes there is electricity, there are sprinklers, there are fire extinguishers and a prompt corner desk which is a concession to the modern cueing methods of visiting operatics. But these are the only intrusions of the present and they are so insignificant that they do not constitute any kind of alienation effect. Drottningholm is living history.

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Autolycus

The sound and the fury

Trying to listen to what sounded like the divine ghost of Gwyneth Jones singing lieder in an elegantly long but acoustically difficult drawing-room—this was on TV, mind you, where you'd think they would have had practice enough—we got to wondering what went wrong with microphones. In this reporter's dear, dead, departed days at the BBC, when *all* vision was somehow enhanced by the swinging interventions of the boom, sound seemed to work better. Of course, then it was thought of as monaural rather than stereophonic, and balance, if it was considered, required the human voice to emerge as if in *front* of the instrumentation, rather than behind it. Nowadays, with the microphone being used by most singers if not actually as a vibrator at least as a phallic symbol, and catering better for impressions of musical noise rather than for the expression of sung words, it may be possible to hear things better but it is becoming harder, surely, to *listen* to what's going on.

Drawing a veil over the physical dangers of sound in, say, yer average discotheque, which may fill a different kind of orgiastic need, we would still like to ask why, in the live theatre, musicals sound so much *worse* than they do on recordings. And, as an extension, if *this* is why in this country ('though not on Broadway), despite the enormous cost of their staging and the huge goodwill that welcomes them in, shows like "Sweeney Todd" have left their audiences vaguely dissatisfied.

Today, maybe, everything has got too complicated to be measured by Sir Henry Wood's criterion of what made for good acoustics—that everybody in the audience should be able actually to see the "F" holes in a 'cello. But you'd think that *something* in the world of sound could provide the counterpart to the marvellously subtle memory-boards of theatrical lighting systems.

And you'd think that a new class of Sound Designers might have proudly emerged into theatre-programmes for credit and congratulation. The note we often make on theatre-programmes is:- "Sound by Tannoy 1945".

Flying the flag

London's attraction to tourists as the theatre capital of the world is often remarked on, particularly with reference to our friends across the Pond in the New World. However inaccurate the statistics may be, it is certain that in high season the West End is knee-deep with them. We thought we would investigate the selling methods used

to sell theatre over there and came up with a surprise or two.

Under the umbrella slogan 'London Is . . .', the promotion boys at the British Tourist Authority have had the cunning idea of using two expatriate Americans, Elaine Stritch and Michael Rudman, to extol the delights of the London scene (in all its glorious variety) compared to say, ah, Broadway, for the sake of argument. The object of the 'London Is Theatre' publicity tours to various American cities is to earn editorial space *outside* the travel pages. Both La Stritch and whiz-kid Texan Rudman have had success in New York theatre and thus present a more credible (unbiased?) sales team to the average yank.

Stritch, forever immortalised for her performance in Sondheim's 'Company' and 'Two's Company' on television here, and Rudman, who started at the Mermaid and worked widely (he guided Hampstead Theatre's fortunes until his departure to the National as an associate director), are indeed good choices. Their observations as 'outsiders' were interesting.

Rudman, for instance, notes that ticket prices still trail New York's by a considerable margin. 'Evita' in London runs from \$7.50 to \$20; in New York the figures are now \$10 to \$30, for the same show. A top star might get \$1,200 a week, "maybe more" for a play, whereas Richard Burton was clocking up a reported \$50,000 a week for 'Camelot', he said. London's fringe theatres charge \$4 to \$5, which is still low. The steepest tickets on Broadway, note, are now '42nd Street' with a top ticket price of \$50. For that you'd get in to see Luciano Pavarotti at Covent Garden, in our highest-priced seats of the year.

The climate for new plays and playwrights is healthier over here, Rudman remarked, however bad things may seem to us. And of course, our state subsidy system is so different from the paltry American equivalent, that new plays are treated quite differently over here.

But the hottest tip of all was the British Airways offer under its 'London Show Tours'. For \$249 per person (based on double occupancy, and not including air fares) you get a remarkable three nights of theatre, unlimited public transport, hotel with breakfast, car rental for three days, a pub tour, admission to discotheques and casinos (presumably for *après théâtre*), and dining discounts. You interested too? Full details are available from your local *American* travel agent.

Veni, videodi, vici

We turn, with great pleasure, to the subject of video to report a world first by a British arts organisation. Raise a toast, please, to

the Royal Opera House, and in particular, to their enterprising Paul Findlay, who recognised the potential of a specially set-up video company to record its own productions. Following up a few casual conversations on the subject, Findlay saw an opening for additional revenue to be earned without undue capital risk to the taxpayers.

It is worth noting that the temperature is hotting up in this field. The Metropolitan Opera in New York and the Paris Opera are actively seeking to tie up similar agreements of their own. Television companies like Thames are being quick to exploit sales opportunities worldwide of say, 'Swan Lake' with Natalia Makarova and Anthony Dowell, which they recorded at Covent Garden last autumn. All areas of video are mushrooming, not least such specialist areas of production as live entertainment. Long may the arts remain a specialist field; how much better to 'popularise' a subject as complex and often multi-layered as opera and ballet with the benefit of comfortable experience, than to bring in 'new boys', whose aim can only be to go for the big effect. These are vital issues if video is to play a part in popularising live entertainment.

The deal concluded by Covent Garden is for a tripartite agreement between the BBC, an independent company, Covent Garden Video Productions, and themselves. Although final negotiations with the unions have yet to be concluded—a traditionally sticky area, this, and one of the reasons why we do not see more live entertainment on the small screen—it looks as though a minimum of three productions of opera or ballet will be recorded each year for the next five years. After that, they will take stock again. As for how they will market each video disc, it is still too early to say. But all video 'configurations'—their way of saying all manner of video uses, including no doubt, possible domestic sales and a rumoured pricetag of around £40 per video disc—have been tied up, with Covent Garden Video undertaking to raise the lion's share of the cash required for each recording. Mind, they also take the lion's share of any profits. As for how they will market it, there is talk of launching their own recording label or labels to suit the 'product'.

The first two recordings have already been made: Offenbach's 'Tales of Hoffman', with Plácido Domingo heading a starry cast and reputedly the major production of 1980 (broadcast by the Beeb in early January); and the ballet 'La Fille Mal Gardée'. Joint managing director of Covent Garden Video, Robin Scott, tells us that they have not ruled out the possibility of recording in other areas as well, such as opera, dance or theatre by other companies, if it were beneficial to all parties. Chairing his board is the Garden's indefatigable Mark Bonham-Carter with Sir John Tooley, Dr. Reiner Moritz (*the* TV arts salesman), Julian Wills (joint MD) and Christopher Peers (ex-record industry boffin) making up the rest of board.

Autolycus column contributed by
Anthony Pugh and Anthony McCall

Palace Revolution

The refurbished Palace in Manchester will be the first theatre to use the new Box Office Computer System.

A report by ANTHONY MCCALL

It is one of Sir Roy Shaw's pet topics. Whenever the conversation turns to Arts Council spending and particularly when ratepayers' money is seen to support the status quo at the expense of experimental ideas, he draws himself up, his craggy face visibly chagrined at hearing the old arguments. For his detractors keep on judging the state of the arts by what they see in London.

When will people realise that the most exciting developments take place outside London, he asks? The capital may get the lion's share of the budget, it is a very concentrated centre of activity in the arts world, after all; but the risks, the strides forward are being taken out among the green hills.

This time it's Manchester in the limelight. And that lean and hungry management team at the Palace Theatre are setting a brisk pace, to prove that big is best... best in the country. As part of the £3 million renovations, they have revolutionised the box office operation—for a mere £100,000 plus.

Gone are the curling corners of paper seating plans and rows of piled up printed tickets. In their place, a gleaming computer terminal.

The computer hardware itself is one of the new BOCS* models, and the people at the Palace who are taking possession of it comprise one of the top teams in the country. Peter Willets, the Theatre Manager, came from the RSC, Stratford and the Liverpool Empire; Robert Scott, the Administrator, came from the Royal Exchange across the road, and chairs the Arts Council Touring Finance sub-committee; finally Tom Pate, the General Manager, joined from Moss Empires, as head of day-to-day operations. Even Jose Tillson, Box Office Manager, has spent 30 years in the business, 20 of them at the Palace.

Just why the computer was installed, I shall leave them to explain. Suffice to say that with ticket prices the same as the West End and with attractions to match, 'every

unsold ticket will be a personal insult' to quote publicity chief Forbes Cameron, allegedly the wizard among wizards. (He launched the Royal Exchange, too).

They sum up their reasons for buying, or rather lease-buying, the BOCS terminal and computer as follows:-

"1/It will provide a much more efficient and speedy box office operation. This is particularly important since the Palace will be presenting a very broad spectrum of entertainment including variety, pantomime, opera, ballet, drama and concerts of all kinds (any of which may be booked in a single working day).

2/We will be able to produce our own tickets, using BOCS, at a cost of about one-fifth of orthodox theatre tickets. BOCS tickets will be printed at the moment of sale with no wastage.

3/BOCS will allow tickets to be sold from multiple points—the traditional seat-plan can be used by only one person at a time.

4/BOCS will identify immediately the best available seat for a customer and will, for example, facilitate the selling of standby tickets.

5/A full report on the house will be obtained immediately the last ticket has been sold and agencies will be invoiced automatically. Up-to-the-minute progress figures can also be supplied on the spot.

6/BOCS will allow for an efficient and updated mailing list to be maintained. It will also provide a specialised direct mail facility and an instant sales analysis for marketing campaigns.

7/It will have the capacity, in the future, to link directly to the Post Office Prestel computer. People will be able to purchase tickets by telephone, using continuously updated ticket information on their television screens."

The Palace re-opens on March 18, with bookings from December 1. The hardware was delivered in mid-November for training; and even before that the theatre's free mailing list had been placed on computer and the first mail-out left the Palace *before* it arrived.

Normal discounts are being employed: groups, students, pensioners, standbys, plus day-of-performance allocations, subscription schemes (operated with their

Discount Card), and credit card bookings. But a novelty is the network of ticket agencies who will charge no extra and whose choice of seats will not be restricted by an allocation. Whereas in London, say, agencies make their money by charging customers some 17½% of the ticket value and theatres 2½%, thus 20% in all. Libraries, as they're referred to, also operate on an allocation basis only.

The Palace will be offering top international stars from the Palladium and Royal Opera and Royal Ballet—another Manchester 'first'. Top price for Verdi's "Otello" in May therefore, will be £23.50, but for this, Mancunians will see not only the best British but also foreign singers of the calibre of Gracé Bumbry and Piero Cappuccilli.

Eschewing an 'arty crafty' image, the Palace, says Forbes Cameron, will programme 20 weeks of Art Council product and 32 of commercial entertainment. Catchment area is estimated to extend 100 miles outside Manchester.

The prospect before us

Space-Time Systems are reportedly happy that their first client was outside London, and a touring theatre. It helps demystify the image to start in the 'sticks', and it demonstrates the versatility by adjusting prices and 'best seats' criteria according to the attraction; heavy rock or an evening of ballet. Apron-stage auditoria and theatre-in-the-round have still more unusual requirements.

As Cue went to press, the Palace was the only theatre to have placed a firm order for BOCS. But according to managing director Kenneth Fraser, another 10 are actively discussing the prospect, many in the regions, once again.

Fraser is not looking for the quick sale. He prefers to know that buyers are aware of what they are acquiring; for being a major capital investment, it is important to grasp the potentialities in every area of BOCS's capability. He wants to sell the living proof, not theory. 'I want them to test drive BOCS's, as he puts it.

**(Box Office Computer System, announced in Sept/Oct Cue) from Space-Time Systems of 14 Langley Street, London WC2.*

Fraser trained as an engineer and later in data processing. He was instrumental in getting the unsuccessful SRS (Seat Reservation Systems) off the ground in the early seventies, but left, disappointed at the way the operation was being run. His deputy, John Taylor, has a computer background and is responsible for development and installation of BOCS, Space-Time Systems' first application of computer technology to audience requirements, but not, they hope, the last. Other fields like sport will follow when the first is safely launched.

It is heartening at a time of deep recession to learn that Fraser obtained the venture capital for his project within a month of outlining the idea. And in the sleepy holiday month of August, to boot! That was in 1979. The city's Foreign and Colonial group, with investment potential of over £300 million and mid-Victorian ancestry, had been impressed with Fraser from earlier dealings and were quick to respond to an attractive project. F & C has the majority shareholding; Fraser holds a minority interest as does Theatre Projects Ltd, represented by Richard Pilbrow on the board. A third minority shareholder is Venture Link Ltd, the venture capital company that put forward Fraser's idea to F & C.

Detailed explanations of the BOCS operation are most clearly grasped after taking a 'test drive'. But in essence, the seats are booked through the keyboard and the booking comes up on the screen. For example, 'what are the best available seats at £3.50, next Tuesday evening (which happens to be a piano recital)?' The answer will rely on the box office manager's pre-programmed definition of 'best seats', in this case, nearest to the piano. In a multi-purpose venue this can vary from day to day. However, manual override can operate at any time. A seating plan, like existing paper ones, plots the gradual sale of seats, and each performance has a separately filed seating plan. In contrast to present manual systems using paper seating plans, BOCS's on-line programme enables any number of sales staff to handle bookings simultaneously.

Fraser calculates that some 200 of Britain's 600 box office operations could be using computerised systems before long, with America providing a sizeable export market of about the same numbers.

One reservation raised within the trade so far, is the expense of even a small BOCS, about £30,000. For the majority of theatres, 1,000 seaters and under, a mini version has been suggested with more modest performance or capacity.

A central computer can store information, however, for any number of terminals in different theatres. Ian Albery is thinking of running lines between his Wyndham's and Albery theatres in London and using Post Office lines to connect up his Piccadilly and Criterion theatres half a mile away, says Fraser.

There are other bonuses. Information vital to running the box office can be stored (on magnetic floppy discs) and several copies kept in case of damage or loss. So goodbye to the old 'master plan'.

Also, explains Fraser, 'one is now used to standby schemes, but there are further possibilities. With instant pricing facility, you can introduce Dynamic Pricing, as I call it. Special prices at short notice, for promotional competitions and one-off discounts'.

In time, as the Palace mentioned, BOCS and its competitors will link up with Prestel, Ceefax and Oracle as well as agencies with terminals all over the country. Availability of tickets could thus be checked and instant bookings made from private homes or agents in far away Edinburgh or Lower Slaughter.

At present the difficulty with Prestel, which runs ten computers round the country, is that information is only updated every 24 hours, so that any theatres using a display card to publicise shows, like the RSC, have to withdraw it with 200 seats unsold, to avoid double booking. This creates PR difficulties.

But Prestel is making strides and it should soon be possible to update information every hour. Orders, incidentally, sit in the Prestel computers and have to be regularly checked by box office staff. As Ken Fraser puts it: 'When they have better technologies, less Space Invader-like, they will become very valuable.'

Advantages to producers of the BOCS are, as Fraser sees it, an efficient means of analysing accounts as it goes along and providing a no-wastage marketing tool by storing customer information. This could make it safer to mount more varied and complicated repertoires at the last minute, since a lot of organisation goes into the detailed types of event.

Advertising patterns would probably change too, he thinks, as the leading means of publicising something. Prestel, direct mail, agency promotions would all assume greater importance.

Cautious enthusiasm

I sounded out a number of managements on their reaction to computers, and BOCS in particular.

Paul Findlay at the Royal Opera House was 'very impressed' by what he saw. 'Computerisation must come in time, probably not that far in the future' he felt. 'What worries me, given the complexity of our bookings, is whether the system is foolproof? Is it also quicker than our manual system, because that's pretty quick. We must see it in action for a while rather than in a demonstration. SRS, you see, did not work as fast as our manual. Pre-printed piles of tickets were more efficient every time'.

The Barbican arts centre will be the biggest complex in Britain when it opens. How does it see the computer revolution? Richard York, the Deputy Administrator: 'We are well aware that computers are the right answer for us and they open up the way for outside sales terminals. Our 52-week programme must develop a consciously efficient image. There will be a cen-

tralised booking point for all events, with individual redemption desks by each cinema, concert hall or theatre—as at the National.

'BOCS's attitude in exploring our requirements was a refreshing change. Rather than taking the available hardware and patching it to our needs, they worked the other way round. I have enjoyed that process and thought it was constructive.'

Although ICL is not yet active in this field', he added, 'they are not to be underestimated in their capacity to produce the goods. Perhaps they will not be around for another 12 months or more, but who knows? We may find two or more compatible systems on the market, each suiting particular needs. I admit though, that BOCS have made great progress.'

'I expect the next six to nine months will see something shaking out of the current discussions, especially with the Theatres' National Council (representing all major British theatres). Thereafter the purchase pattern will be interesting to watch'.

York did not believe savings would come from staff salaries or cutting down in the box office. 'The operation is run on a very slim staff normally, so I can't see savings there really. But it may release them from the interminable drudgery of stub counting and stub reconciliation'.

The Barbican is owned by the City of London. Does York feel that local authorities will be the first to change to computers? 'Quite possibly. They are very heavy users of computers and don't have the fear of them that smaller users do. For the last 20 years they have invested in computers in most departments'. As an afterthought he added: 'One of the things about computers is that things change very fast. Of that much you can be certain'.

The official line from the Society of West End Theatre is let's-wait-and-see. Development officer Vincent Burke appeared quite chary, perhaps not having seen the demonstrations. 'We are looking at it with cautious enthusiasm. It is no doubt inevitable for the future, but the main misgivings are currently, (1) that it must be proved reliable; and (2) it must be compatible with any other system, such as ICL (when it comes along).'

BOCS's John Taylor commented: 'ICL are talking about developing a system over the next six months or so. But it is not physically possible to do it that soon. 12 months is more realistic. The question as we see it, is: will ICL make their systems compatible with BOCS? For ours will certainly have that facility.'

In general, Ken Fraser detects a new climate of opinion. 'I found an enormous difference in reaction to computer systems now from that in 1970. Now it is assumed computers will do what we want. People used to think they just printed lots of zeroes like your gas bill. The pocket calculator changed a lot of views, ditto space programmes. Perhaps we now believe too readily that computers will do whatever we need'.

Undoubtedly BOCS is the shape of things to come. And being first in the fields always helps.

REIDing SHELF

Theatres and Audiences in the Eighteenth Century is the subtitle of Allardyce Nicoll's **THE GARRICK STAGE**. The book is an attempt to help us to see eighteenth century theatre through eighteenth century eyes. My own eyes are certainly grateful: they are now better equipped to interpret the evidence. Much of the book's proposition derives from Kant's declaration that *The eye brings with it what it sees* . . .

The theatre historian needs to preserve, or try to preserve, a double vision. His first objective must be to determine what might be called factual or physical truth—the shape of the theatres, the methods used in translating scenic designs into actual sets, the mechanics of the stage, the prevailing trends in histrionic style, the playhouse habits and customs. But in addition, and even more importantly, it should be his task to try to see these things as they were seen by contemporaries, and it is here that Kant's statement becomes of paramount significance. Obviously, for example, the painters and engravers frequently refrained from depicting certain things so familiar as to remain almost unseen. The stage-doors, for example, were permanent features of all playhouses, but on occasion an engraver could omit them entirely while hardly any illustration shows us performers making their exits or entrances by their means. This leads us to suppose that, although the doors would have been close objects of attention for us if we had been able to attend one of Garrick's performances, they were practically invisible for the spectators of Garrick's own time.

Allardyce Nicoll goes on to suggest (and I believe him) that, whereas prints and paintings which show the actors against wings and shutters confirm what we have already learned about playhouse realism from other sources, pictures which are less architecturally faithful may be more important to our knowledge. They reveal what eighteenth audiences thought they saw. (When tomorrow people look upon today's theatre will they realise that our audience see, but do not consciously perceive, the exposed lighting, the loudspeaker stacks, and the acres of black masking? And how would today's audience respond if they were suddenly transported to the 1930s normality of battens and floats?)

For me the outstanding chapter in the book is *Lights and Scenes* from which I now more clearly understand Garrick's lighting reforms. . . .

When, in 1763, Garrick visited the Comedie Francaise his first impression was that the house seemed to be 'dark and dirty', yet it was not long before he came to realise that considerable benefit accrued from the absence of the unshielded overhead lighting fixtures; and his return to London found him fully determined to effect a change—almost a revolution—at Drury Lane. What he actually did is certain, and there would seem to be but small doubt concerning the way he did it. The certainty is that he removed the chandeliers, while at the same time he sought such means as might compensate for their loss. To achieve this end, he evidently did three

things. First, he increased the number of candles set in concealed positions, and probably he insisted that these candles should be of the best quality: whereas his annual lighting costs in 1747 had amounted to a little more than £400, in 1766 they had risen sharply to £1,200 and during the season of his retirement they soared to nearly £2,000. In 1765 *The Public Advertiser*, commenting on his innovations, was right in declaring that now the public was being given 'a perfect Meridian of Wax'. Secondly, there is reason to believe that he both improved the lamps in the footlights and supplied them with reflectors: at any rate he was at this time showing considerable interest in instruments of such a kind; on June 15, 1765, his friend Jean Monnet, obviously in answer to an enquiry, wrote to say that he would send him 'a reflector and two different samples of the lamp you want for the footlights at your theatre'. Thirdly, there is further reason to guess that he equipped the scene-ladders behind the wings with similar reflectors thus causing *The Annual Register* to note particularly the 'lights behind the scenes, which cast a reflection forwards'.

It is almost needless to say that the disposal of nearly all the lighting instruments in concealed positions offered better opportunities for controlling both the strength and the colour of the illumination, while at the same time a new significance came to be attached to the scenic area.

. . . . *The Public Advertiser* drew special attention to the fact that now 'you have a full view of the whole stage' . . . As a result, the actors gradually were prepared to move back from the front position which previously they had tended to occupy and they were prepared to make at least some of their entrances and exits from within the space behind the frontispiece. Nevertheless, the movement was slow, and many years were to pass by before the stage-doors were abolished, before the platform was cut down and before the players, forced to accept the conditions and conventions of a new age, came habitually to perform their dramatic movements within settings framed like pictures.

The chapter on *Mixing with the Audience* is very helpful in evoking the performance atmosphere and the chapters on *The Idea of a Mid-Eighteenth Century Theatre* and *The Playhouse* are very good introductions to the period while also forming good reading (well annotated) for the Georgian Theatre Kink.

The Garrick Stage is a posthumous work of Allardyce Nicoll. It has been edited by Sybil Rosenfeld who has chosen the illustrations. Some are, as they should be, familiar classics. Others are less well known. All are apt. The page to page transposition of the 1763 engraving of Covent Garden during the 'Fitzgiggo' riot with an anonymous 1765 oil painting of *Macbeth* in the same theatre summarises what this book is all about: the narrowing of the eyes by which we can transport ourselves out of a working light glare into the ambience of a performance.

Turn of the century is a useful—and consequently much used—phrase to categorise the bulk of Britain's heritage of conventional theatre architecture. The century turn is that of nineteenth into twentieth. Compared with the rest of Europe, we have very very little eighteenth century theatre building still standing—and none of it in mint condition. Not for us the gradual nineteenth century transition of court theatre into civic theatre: it was to be mid-twentieth century before British theatre was to be recognised as a social amenity on a par with books and paintings. When that recognition came, it was on a quite classic "too little/too late" basis and stages were felled without responsible assessment of their past or future.

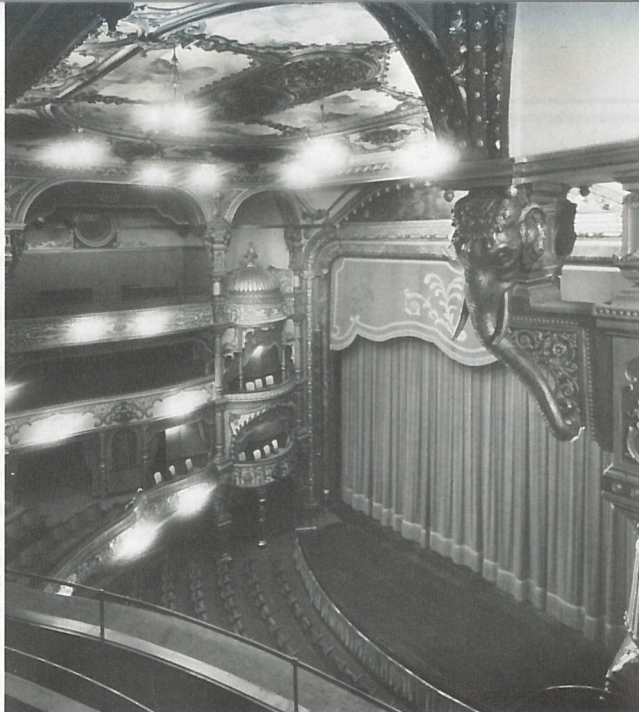
About 120 of the theatres that fell and 34 of the theatres that remain were the work of Frank Matcham. The swings of fashion can be extreme. The current adoration of Matcham is as positive as earlier reaction against him. **FRANK MATCHAM Theatre Architect** is inevitably and, at this time appropriately, sycophantic but it certainly makes clear why he was the leading British theatre architect of his time.

The book reveals his uncanny ability to keep coming up with elegant solutions to the problems of absurdly proportioned sites while coping with the increasing demands that were, quite rightly, being imposed by developing safety codes particularly in respect of exits. And within these theatres he found ways of accommodating the large seating that commercial viability demanded. The patrons of Matcham theatres always had a view of the stage even if their feeling of contact tended to be rather more with their fellows than with the actors. Above all, the ambience of a Matcham theatre was sumptuous: this was a night out and no mistake.

The turn-of-the-century theatre explosion was profit motivated: Matcham was at hand with a cost-effective product. And a lot of flair.

His theatres are not ideal, especially when compared with the same period in central Europe where less strenuous commercial pressures enabled the retention of the eighteenth century's shallow tiers. Matcham's seating capacities could only be attained by extensive overhangs—his theatres can have a delightful intimacy from the best seats, but from the back of pit and circles there is an inevitable tunnel effect. Also, inevitably, the exuberance of much of his plasterwork, especially in its oriental extremes, can rival the stage picture rather than focus upon it. Nevertheless, while, for example, the clean lined rococo purity of the court Schlosstheater is just right amid the exuberant splendours of Potsdam, the bleak poverty of Edwardian England demanded the escapism of baroque extravagance in its popular theatre.

However you rate Matcham, this new book is a treasure box for anyone interested in theatre architecture—indispensable to



Frank Matcham's Belfast Grand Opera House was opened in 1895 and restored in 1980.

anyone (like me) whose heart beat notches up a few extra revs on entering any real theatre auditorium. Its publication is assisted by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and occasioned by the restoration of Belfast's Matcham *Grand Opera House*. Edited by Brian Mercer Walker, the book has a chapter on the Belfast restoration by its architect-in-charge Robert McKinsty, and contributions from many Matcham specialists including Michael Sell, John Earl, Sean McCarthy, Christopher Brereton and, of course, Victor Glasstone who sets Matcham within the context of his architect contemporaries.

There are a dozen plans and a couple of dozen exteriors plus (joy of joys) about sixty interior illustrations. There is a short description of each extant theatre with a note on its present status—oh blessed be the game of Bingo for it hath kept so many theatres upstanding in the hope of restoration. An appendix lists theatres built, rebuilt or altered by Frank Matcham—in many cases with interesting contemporary newspaper quotations.

I rejoice in the Matcham heritage but, at the risk of provoking a few murmurs (perhaps even screams) of rage, I would respectfully suggest that the Matcham theatres do *not* provide a potential source of positive ideas for future theatre builders. Matcham was housing a pop theatre. His Royals, Empires, Palaces, Alhambras and Hippodromes were built and sustained by box-office profits from audiences who flocked to the actor-managers' melodramas. What did they see? Modern revivals are usually disastrous as a result of failure to apply stylistic truth to the acting, direction and scenography. However we are now far enough away from the period to take the sort of serious objective view that is necessary if we are to present these late nineteenth century plays either with historical accuracy or in a relevant contemporary idiom.

Who will be the first to restore *The Bells*—the RSC or the National?

My own insight into the period has been helped by the publication of **HENRY IRVING AND THE BELLS**. The core of the book is Irving's personal script of the play with which its extensive stage directions. Editor David Mayer's introduction sets the play within the context of its period and creative team. Eric Jones-Evans who saw performances by Henry Irving, H. B. Irving and Martin Harvey, as well as playing the lead with his own company, contributes an evocative memoir. He also joins David Mayer in providing script annotations which amplify the text in a particularly constructive way.

The book prints a piano reduction of the music score with an introduction by Nigel Gardner discussing the role of music in *The Bells* in the context of the theatre music and theatre orchestras of the period. This music plot together with scene and costume plots and a goodly selection of contemporary illustrations plus first night reviews from the Times and Observer (Clement Scott) enable us to piece together some sort of evocation of performance.

There is some interesting stuff for the technician including the disposition of the limes in the vision scenes with a stipulation to use *dia* (iris diaphragms which would have had a softening effect when used with plano-convex optics). And the receipt for *snow* is given as:

¼lb Common Yellow Soap
A Small piece of Soda
3 pints of water
all boiled together, then churned in machine till thick.

What comes through the whole book is the professionalism of the Irving approach and the dramatic sincerity of a play which (to quote David Mayer)

thoroughly deserves the recognition it received in its own time and again today as a remarkable psychological drama which compels its audience to sympathise with a man guilty of a vicious murder.

Coming up to our own time, John Elsom has charted the drama landscape of the past 35 years in **POST-WAR BRITISH THEATRE CRITICISM**. His method is to select several reviews for each key production and tie them together with a piece of his own. The play selection is pretty good—no one would, I think, quarrel with Guthrie's *Thrie Estaites*, *Cocktail Party*, *Streetcar*, *Look Back*, *Birthday Party*, *Wars of the Roses*, *Marat/Sade*, *Rosencratz & Guildenstern*, Peter Brook's *Dream*, *Equus* and *The Norman Conquests*. And there are three dozen more.

There are critics for all seasons—I have personally always inclined towards entertaining positivists like Levin and Tynan. They are well to the fore in this book; and two particularly felicitous phrases are included to remind me of critics who influenced my formative years: Stephen Potter ("... produced the play to pieces") and Ivor Brown ("... a death worse than fate").

John Elsom has picked well and summarised well—take this assessment. . . .

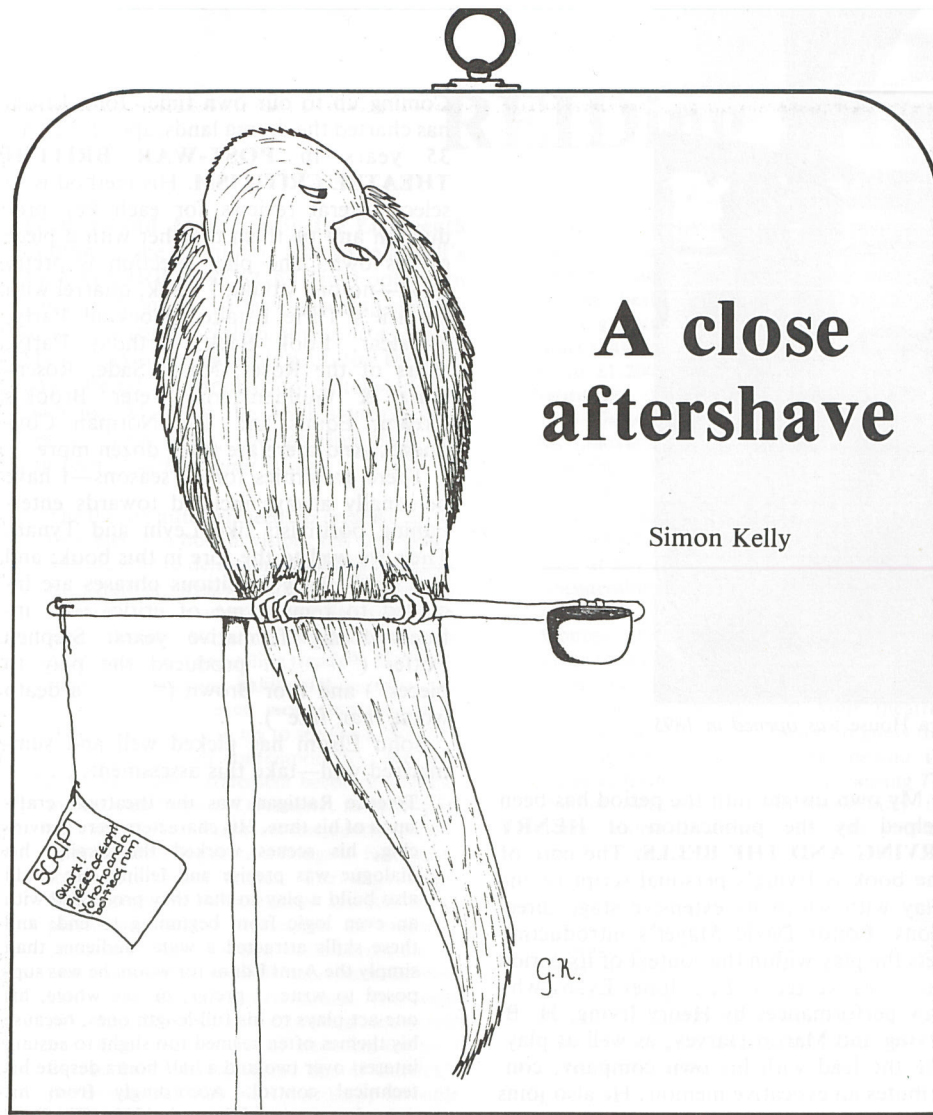
Terence Rattigan was the theatrical craftsman of his time. His characters were convincing, his scenes worked theatrically, his dialogue was precise and telling. He could also build a play so that they proceeded with an even logic from beginning to end: and these skills attracted a wider audience than simply the Aunt Ednas for whom he was supposed to write. I prefer, on the whole, his one-act plays to his full-length ones, because his themes often seemed too slight to sustain interest over two and a half hours despite his technical control. Accordingly from his several successes of the early 1950s (*The Deep Blue Sea* among them), I have chosen *Separate Tables*, two one-act plays which share a common setting, a shabby genteel private hotel. The sympathy which Rattigan extends to the new middle-class poor contrasts with the later studies by John Mortimer and Giles Cooper, who are both more acid in their observations; while the skill with which Rattigan handles the different stories in the dining room anticipates Alan Ayckbourn, who was then a schoolboy.

THE GARRICK STAGE. Theatres and Audiences in the Eighteenth Century. Allardyce Nicholl (Edited by Sybil Rosenfeld). Manchester University Press. £14.50 (UK)

FRANK MATCHAM. Theatre Architect. Edited by Brian Mercer Walker. Blackstaff Press. £12.75 (UK)

HENRY IRVING AND THE BELLS. Irving's personal script of the play by Leopold Lewis, edited and introduced by David Mayer, with a memoir by Eric Jones-Evans, Etienne Singla's original musical score arranged by Nigel Gardner, and a foreword by Marius Goring. Manchester University Press. £15.00 (UK)

POST-WAR BRITISH THEATRE CRITICISM. John Elsom. Routledge & Kegan Paul. £9.75 (cloth). £5.95 (paper) (UK).



A close aftershave

Simon Kelly

just returning from a morose pre-dress run drink in a nearby pub with Doctor Livesey and Squire Trelawney. He went to his dressing room to prepare. Arnold the parrot watched him put his makeup on and climb into his costume. Rawlings went to the dressing room door.

"Hey! Mandy! Give me a hand to strap up my leg, will you?" he bellowed.

He waited impatiently until Mandy White appeared. She had been with the tour as his dresser since it started and was getting pretty fed up with the Star of the Show. She gave him a smile, making the best of it. He repaid her with a grunt. Arnold watched the leg-tying-up procedure with interest, making comments of a 'give us a nut' variety.

"Bloody bird," said Rawlings, "I hate parrots. You can catch psitticosis from them. I don't like the way that one looks at me."

"Oh, I think that it's a nice old bird," said Mandy, scratching its poll. Rawlings grunted again.

"Make sure I've got a cup of coffee in the Green Room when I come off after the first act," he directed. "Hot. I hate working with animals. Bring the bloody thing over, I suppose it had better sit on my shoulder for a while."

He practised stumping up and down for a while, Arnold clinging on with wings flapping.

In the orchestra pit the band was warming up, the SM was sitting in the stalls conferring with the newly skint Lighting Designer, Jim Hawkins was talking pop records with Blind Pew in the wings, Billy Bones was being woken up by the DSM, the daymen were finishing off the Sound Man in the flies, and Bernie was talking on the telephone.

"Yes, truly," he was saying, all traces of the accent now missing, "I'll have it there tomorrow for the opening. Guaranteed. Trust me. No problem. I won't let you down. . . . Yes, I know. Leave it with me."

He replaced the receiver and went to take his place at the front of house Tab controls.

The Director was deferentially listening to Rawlings' complaints about everyone and everything.

"Yes. As to the parrot, Donald, I'm afraid that it is the only one that could be had in the whole of Newcastle. It actually belongs to one of the daymen on the production. We were lucky to get it. As you know, we were going to tour a parrot as a member of the cast, so to speak, but the admin problems were a little extreme."

He went over to Arnold and peered at it. "It seems docile enough," he said.

Arnold gave its pneumatic drill impression and squawked. Rawlings grunted.

"It had better behave, or I will personally wring its neck," he said darkly, touching up his teeth with tooth-black.

The Director went on stage and clapped for attention.

"All right everyone, I want a good crisp run-through. I know it's difficult, getting used to a new theatre. Just give it everything you've got. Tonight's a sell out."

A few pirates and mutineers listened to

Arnold the parrot sidled along its perch mistrustfully. Its head feathers rose as it cocked its head and regarded the new dayman with a suspicious beady eye.

"Quark!" it said. "Got a nut?"

Bernie unstopped the bottle of Old Spice making soothing noises. Behind his back he was holding a substantial chunk of cheese. The parrot made a noise like a train coming out of a tunnel, then gave a quick snatch of the Rite of Spring.

"Blimey mate. What a turn up. Quark!"

Arnold watched Bernie's approach, rocking from side to side. Bernie held the unstopped bottle under the parrot's beak. The parrot inhaled the heady aroma for a few seconds.

"Ar Har! Jim Lad!" said Bernie, then gave it the cheese.

He watched the parrot for a while as it singlemindedly demolished the Danish Blue. It really went for the stuff in a big way. It was its all-time favourite in the whole world. That parrot would do anything to get its beak on a bit of ripe Ponky.

Bernie let himself out of the dressing room carefully, looked up and down the corridor. The coast was clear. He sneaked away, only breathing easier when he reached the safety of the empty Green Room. He tucked the cologne bottle away behind the cupboard and picked up his paperback book on the life of Pavlov. Another couple of sessions with Arnold should do it, he

thought.

High above the stage on the fly floor, the customary card school was going full blast. Seated on coils of rope were the other daymen for the 'Treasure Island' production, scientifically separating the Lighting Designer and the Sound Man from their money. The fire buckets were filling up with dogends steadily. There were that many dogends in the sand, accumulated over several years, that if the buckets were ever used to fight a fire in the theatre the fuel content would transform the place into a nicotinic inferno. There was another hour and a half before the final dress rehearsal—plenty long enough to clean the visiting Techs out. Bernie's head appeared at the top of the fly ladder.

"Wye aye, lads," he said in his Geordie accent, "Are ye ganning' on al' reet? Deal me in, will ye."

He helped himself to a bottle from the crate of Newcastle Brown Ale and took a seat round the upturned tea chest that served as a card table.

Earl Grey was looking, as usual, out over the Tyne, high above the city of Newcastle on his column. Far below in Grey Street was the grand old Theatre Royal, its magnificently collonaded entrance thronged with eager customers queueing for seats for the touring production of 'Treasure Island' which was starring the famous but bad-tempered actor Donald Rawlings in the Long John Silver role. This gentleman was

him vacantly then went back to discussing the Star behind his back. The Tabs went up, and apart from some of the lighting cues getting out of order, and Black Dog trying to make an exit through the Harbour backdrop, everything went routinely. Arnold behaved impeccably. Bernie watched from the wings as the parrot performed its part. The opening was that night. Would it be ready?

Once again, Bernie sneaked into Rawlings' dressing room with his bottle of Old Spice and a chunk of Danish Blue. He repeated the sequence of cologne, 'Ar Har Jim Lad' and cheese, and watched as Arnold ganneted into it. Arnold was well into motorbike reproductions as Bernie let himself out carefully. It was nearly the 'half'.

The show went up. During the first interval, Bernie saw Rawlings minus his hat, wig and greatcoat, stump to the Green Room for the coffee which Mandy had prepared for him. Bernie slid quietly into the room again. At the sight of his cheese pusher, Arnold perked up. This time, there were to be no goodies for Arnold. Instead, Bernie made for the greatcoat. He applied several splashes of Old Spice to the collar, then tucked some slivers of the parrot's favourite nosh into the inside hatband. Arnold was making plaintive creaky door effects as Bernie left.

During the second act on Rawlings shoulder, Arnold was being driven mad by the Old Spice aroma, which to him meant that a nice chunk of Ponky was in the offing. Furthermore, he could smell the stuff somewhere. He took to climbing from shoulder to shoulder in search of it, presenting his backside to the audience as he peered down Rawlings' back. The audience began to giggle at the wrong moments. Arnold began to climb beak over claw all over Rawlings, searching in his pockets, burrowing down his neck.

Rawlings was beginning to lose his temper. As the whole thing began to get out of hand and the audience's laughter rose, the other actors on stage were 'corpsing' and the wings were filling with hysterical stage hands. In the auditorium, the Director watched with dismay as Arnold began to screech with frustration. At last, the inevitable happened.

"Ar Har! Jim Lad. . . ." said Rawlings.

"Give us a nut!" yelled Arnold, utterly brainwashed. He suddenly realised where that tantalising, maddening, marvellous smell was coming from and launched an all-out frontal attack on Rawlings' head, frantically scrabbling under his wig. Severely unbalanced, the actor came crashing down to the stage in a cloud of green and grey feathers. The audience rocked with laughter. Rawlings climbed to his foot and tried to go on. Arnold flapped his way to the 'Hispaniola' prop rigging and craned his neck greedily down towards Rawlings below. Jim Hawkins, shaking with laughter, tried to catch Arnold, who flew out into the auditorium doing his dog-barking act, made a wide circuit and perched on a plaster cherub where he alternated

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Westminster Chimes and Factory Siren. Every eye in the house was riveted on him.

The cast made heroic efforts to go on, but it was no use. At the very next 'Ar Har Jim Lad' he gave a squawk and launched himself at Rawlings again. Over the actor went again, bellowing imprecations and yelling curses. He staggered erect once more and flailed with his crutch at the parrot. Arnold took to stalking Rawlings on foot wherever he went. Rawlings did not dare to stay in one place but delivered his lines, when they could be heard over the laughter, backpedalling around the stage followed by his feathered nemesis. At one point, Ben Gunn, a whole act too early, came on with a blanket trying to catch him, but Arnold effortlessly skipped out of the way and continued his relentless advance.

Rawlings found his retreat cut off downstage centre. Arnold stalked him, wings outstretched, neck protruding, beak agape, making sinister tap-running noises. The audience fell silent expectantly. Rawlings seemed hypnotized by this fiend in parrot guise as it came on, step by step. Arnold sidled slowly along peering up at him balefully, craftily. He made a sudden leap up to his head. With a despairing yell, Rawlings hopped off the edge of the stage into the pit where there came a mighty jangling of cymbals, saxophones and splintered double basses. Arnold finally attained his heart's desire in the rhythm section and emerged triumphantly to a standing ovation from the audience. The Tabs fell and Mandy caught Arnold. Bernie was waiting in the wings with his cage.

Fifteen minutes later, Bernie and Arnold were on their way to the Byker district in a taxi. They arrived at the Brunel Hall where the Byker Amateur Dramatic Society were just packing up rehearsals for the night. Bernie carried Arnold in to the hall.

"Here we are," he announced. "I told you I'd bring him." The BADS members clustered round in amazement.

"What? You mean that we can have him for ouwer show, man?" demanded Ernie the stage carpenter. "After you went an' let us down by letting' them London pros have him?"

Bernie tutted in reproof.

"Ernie. I told you it was going to be all right. About that show. It's off. Cancelled. The leading man fell off the stage and broke his leg."

"Broke his leg? Why, that's lucky . . ." said Ernie blankly.

"Isn't it?" observed Bernie. "Here's us, rehearsing 'Treasure Island' for six months, then some jumped-up pro company brings it into the Royal one day before we open with it . . ."

"Wye, that's right, man. Looks like we'll be getting' their customers, doesn't it?"

"I wouldn't be surprised at all," said Birnie.

"Blimey, mate. What a turn-up. Quark!" said Arnold.

Struck by a thought, Bernie took the Long John Silver man aside.

"Er, one thing . . ." he said thoughtfully, "You don't wear Old Spice, by any chance?"

Paper Stages

M. E. A. PASSMORE

Mr. Passmore approaches the use of a honeycomb design for building stage platforms with caution and suggests that other shapes could offer stability in three dimensions. His analysis is intended to encourage stage designers to experiment further with other materials and other conformations.

Writing in a recent issue of Theatre Design and Technology Mr. Tom Corbett of the University of California explores the technique and use of Honeycomb paper structures in fabricating stage platforms and other load bearing free form shapes. As he rightly observes this new structural concept is one of the most exciting possibilities available to stage craft although the engineering data needs interpreting to be theatrically useful.

First let it be said paper is no longer a cheap material, so structures which use this medium, have to be efficient in its utilisation in order to satisfy a growing demand to stop the waste of natural resources.

Honeycomb cored constructions have the disadvantage of using a high area of material in relation to the useful working surface of the structure. This is an acceptable compromise when this method of problem solving is applied to configurations and applications which cannot be solved by other methods. They are also valid while the thickness of the core walls is only a few thousandths of an inch, thereby keeping the total volume of material used to a minimum.

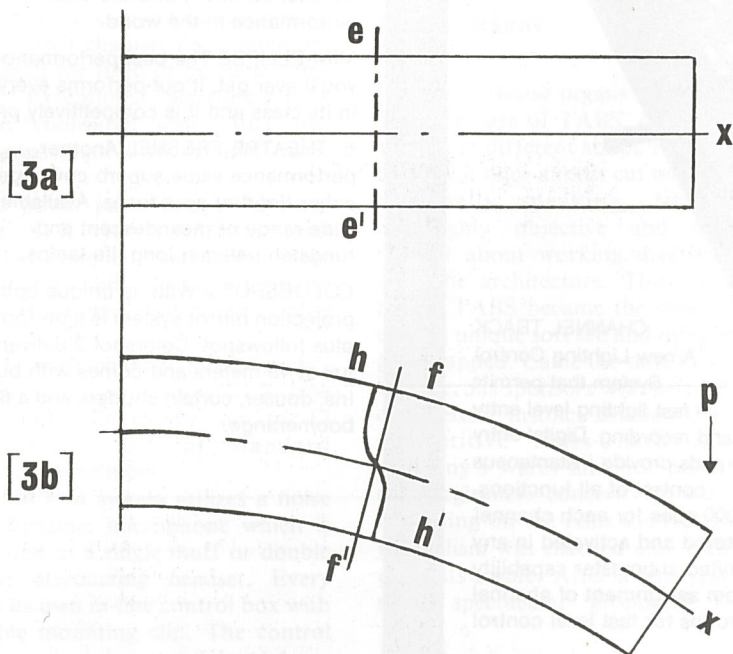
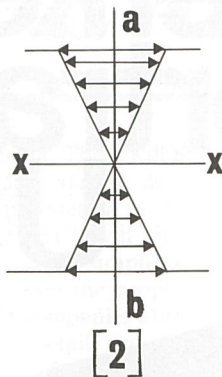
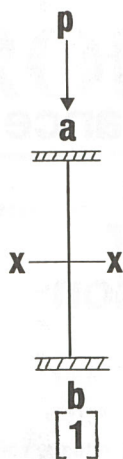
When honeycombs are of a low overall depth, then the ability of a finished structure to withstand imposed loads is very good, because the vertical elements of the core are able to resist the buckling forces. The walls of the hexagons being short in relation to the thickness of the material used.

If the depth of the core is increased, the forces causing warping (horizontal shear) and buckling (discontinuity of deformation), increase and become disproportionately large in relation to the new depth and thickness of material used. Thus it can be seen that as the depth of the configuration is increased, the cells of the core give way to their inherent inability to resist horizontal forces, and this leads to eventual compression failure of the top skin, or the bottom skin in tension. This is due to the fact that the hexagon has excellent vertical resistance to force, but becomes easily distorted by lateral or side loads because the hexagon standing ver-

tically does not have continuous cords in the horizontal plane. This is borne out by the fact that the core can be formed into a variety of shapes and curves and only becomes rigid when surfaces are attached to the open cell ends. One can see from this that if the cores were of a more stable shape, and if there were continuous cords in the core elements, then the construction would not have this disability. If the configurations had these qualities they would not be honeycomb structures. A method of overcoming some of the above problems is to adopt the approach used by manufacturers of household doors. The sides, top, bottom and centre sections of the door are framed with solid timber, and then the remaining voids are filled with a cellular mat. This method relieves the core of the stresses which are mentioned above, and gives a structure which is extremely stiff and simple to manufacture. It is also cheap because the paper core is thin, and despite the fact that a large area of paper is used the total volume is low.

To achieve better results one should look more closely, as already suggested, at the basic configuration. Dr. Makowski at Surrey University suggested that the shape of a structure is more important than the material it is made from. I interpret this to mean that shape adds an important ingredient to the structural concept, but that the value of shape can lose its impact if that shape is so arranged that the physical laws which govern the performance of the resulting structure are forgotten. I suggest that the shape of the core construction should be in harmony with the duties imposed on it.

Although the honeycomb or hexagon shape may well be the most efficient known mechanism for high density storage, it does not appear to be used by nature for high performance structures. Therefore my enquiries are directed towards the triangle, the tetrahedon, the cone and generally at shapes which have stability in three dimensions, because I feel that they yield greater potential for high performance/low cost structures than those which do not have this structural integrity of a stable form.



The diagrams which follow demonstrate that a designer has to arrange the materials of the core (web of a beam) to give the best configuration to absorb all the stress created when the structure is loaded, if the quantity and type of material used is to be kept to a minimum consistent with maximum performance.

In Fig. 1 the beam of section a-b is loaded by P. The neutral axis is at x.

The Equilibrium diagram Fig 2 shows how the bending stress is zero at x and progresses to a maximum at a (compression) or b (tension).

One can see from these two simple diagrams how a very thin section can have difficulty in maintaining continuity of deformation.

Fig. 3a. This shows a rectangular rubber block held so that it is a cantilever. A line e-e' is marked on the face of the unstressed form.

In Fig. 3b it is seen that the block is deformed by a force P. As a result of the bending forces, tension in the top surface causes it to stretch, and compression in the bottom surface causes it to contract, while the length of the neutral axis x remains constant. Thus e-e' originally vertical becomes f-f'. Also shown is the line h-h' which represents the warping which has to take place before e-e' can become f-f'. As there is no shear stress in the outer fibres of the block, and as there is no change in the length of the neutral axis x, then the points h-h' remain normal to the upper and lower surfaces as is seen at both h-f and h'-f'. The value of the horizontal shear stress is represented by the angle of warp on the line h-h' where it crosses the neutral axis. It is therefore seen to be zero at the outer surfaces, and maximum at the neutral axis x.

Mr. Passmore is a Consultant on high performance/light weight structures and designer of the Planar construction system.

Letters to the Editor

From Mr. Richard Pilbrow

Dear Sir,

It was cordial of you to describe me in your last edition's "Product News" as "an innovative thinker if ever there was one". This was with reference to the developments in remote control, pan, tilt and focus of luminaires. In fact, for the sake of historical accuracy, you might like to know that we did more than "think" about the installation of such equipment at the National Theatre during the planning period in 1969/70.

The lighting control systems, "Lightboard", installed in both the Olivier and Lyttelton theatres have a remote control section that controls, via a multiplex ring circuit throughout the whole theatre, the remote control of pan tilt and focus lanterns, slide change and focus, and colour change. The action of any of these functions may be recorded on any lighting cue. Further, twelve remote control units were built for the Olivier Theatre, commissioned and installed. These lanterns are modified Pattern 243's that were mechanised by Pani of Vienna with the control system being built by Rank Strand. The remote control section of the board is at the far right hand end. I still harbour the belief that, in years to come, this section, controlling the remote movement of luminaires, will be gradually promoted to a central position alongside the prime playbacks of the lighting control systems of the future.

Yours faithfully

RICHARD PILBROW
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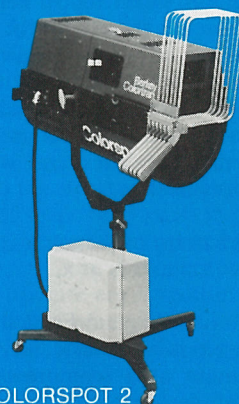
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PRODUCT NEWS

New "hands free" Intercom system



MINICOM announces a new closed circuit, "hand free", two channel PK-2 intercom system designed for fixed or portable communication. Exceptional performance is provided by contoured wide range frequency response and high volume capability.

The PK-2 power pack/main station has six headset XLR type connectors (two channel A; two channel B and 2 switchable A or B) and can handle up to 24 headsets via the use of standard microphone cable splitters.

The PK-1 single channel power pack/main station has three headset XLR type connectors and will handle up to 12 headsets via the use of standard microphone cable splitters.

Each MINICOM system utilizes a noise cancelling, dynamic microphone which is boom mounted to a single muff or double muff, noise attenuating headset. Every headset has its own in-line control box with an adjustable mounting clip. The control box contains microphone and headphone amplifiers and includes a volume control and on/off switch.

The MINICOM LS-1 loudspeaker station enables the user to establish "push to speak" two-way communication in those situations where the wearing of a MINICOM headset is undesirable.

The new MINICOM is available through TBA Lighting and the price (£98.50 for the PK-2 for example) should prove attractive to UK theatres.

Lighting '81

"Lighting '81" is the spring trade show in Canada of the Society of Television Lighting Directors. The show will be held in Radio Canada Studio 51, April 27th and 28th and will be hosted by Radio Canada.

Features of the show include displays of lighting and rigging equipment for theatre and television. A presentation, "Design and Lighting for T.V. and Film". Talks on lighting control systems and demonstrations of scenic projection materials and use

of colour media. There will be guided tours of CFTM and Maison de Radio Canada design and production facilities.

"Lighting '81" will provide an ideal opportunity for suppliers and manufacturers to meet the people who use their products. 26 companies are exhibiting.

For more details contact Tom Nutt, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 7925 Cote Street, Luc Road, Montreal, Quebec H4W 1R5.

House Organs

Company House organs come and go and, as in the case of TABS, come back again. What's so different about TABS however is the way it once almost cut its apron strings, editorially speaking, to become a thoroughly objective and authoritative journal about working theatres including even the architecture. Thus in its middle period TABS became the classic PR exercise—a unique soft sell and most beautifully gift wrapped. Came the time however when its generous sponsors with perhaps a keener commercial instinct decided that in these competitive times hard selling the company's wares and not publishing was their legitimate concern. So with a gentle tightening on the reins the free gallop into journalism was checked and TABS returned to its stable. After a two year rest and some spectacular grooming TABS re-

appeared last December as a clearly recognisable house journal for Rank Strand. As such and within the limitations of its new role, the No. 1 Mark 2 TABS is a well produced publication and its editor is to be congratulated on his balancing of content and interpretation of marketing policy. One slight criticism is the small text, more like the bottom line of an Oculist's test card.

TABS is free on application to Rank Strand, PO Box 51, Great West Rd., Brentford, Middlesex TW8 9HR.

Fame is the spur

The award of the American Society of Lighting Directors goes to Lee Filters in recognition of their contribution to the science of film lighting.

Here we see visiting members of our own British Society of Lighting Directors being shown the shield by their host David Holmes, Managing Director of Lee Filters.

Recognition of this sort from the American Film Industry will undoubtedly give a new impetus to their export sales drive. As it is Television and Film industries abroad are taking up more than 85% of the company's production of polyester and resin filters for lights and cameras.



David Holmes (centre) and members of the British Society of Cinematographers and the Society of Lighting Directors. On the right John Lee, Director of Lee Filters.

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Pictures come first

GRAHAM WALNE

It is interesting to look at all the technical departments that make up theatre and contrast the balance of artist and technician in each. It is easy to dismiss the electrician or the carpenter, the cutter or the painter as a mere technician without any creative sense because they are usually employed to carry out the creations of others. Their interpretation does however rely on an innate aesthetic sense even if they prefer not to display it. But what of the balance in those who can only realise their creations through their own, and others, technical efforts? The question whether they are practical artists or gifted technicians is an old one and we seek not to find an answer here but to debate the matter with particular regard for the lighting designer.

Few members of the creative team have to communicate their ideas as thoroughly as does the lighting designer. A good cutter, painter or carpenter can produce excellent work from the skimpiest of models or sketches but a chief electrician cannot produce a good rig without a plan. The costume designer must sometimes think in vague terms if the show is not yet cast and in any case the wardrobe people will deal with sizes. The carpenter can work from a model if that is the best way that the set designer can express his desires. But the chief electrician needs decisions, which spotlight, which colour, which dimmer, which barrel. These answers can come from applying logical questions, the outcome is definable.

We all know that the best lighting may be based on extensive calculations but that it is the spontaneous creativity of the designer that will elevate the picture from the technically correct to the theatrically superb. This is exciting for both the

operator and audience alike but spontaneous rigging or focussing does not have the same guarantee of success. These things need to be calculated. On the whole the positions for lights are known, so we can calculate the throw to the various acting areas. We can calculate the beam angle for the relevant area and select the correct spotlight and we can predict which spotlights will be used in each scene so we know what needs individual control and what can be grouped if necessary.

Up to this point we could produce a list of precise instructions which could enable almost anyone to design a basic lighting rig. Lighting by numbers. In the the same way a recipe enables anyone to cook. But a recipe book does not make a cook any more than a calculator and ruler make a designer. Up to now the process has been largely objective but once we sit at the production desk and start painting pictures then the process becomes subjective. Which colour, which level? Here there can be no definable approach because there is no correct answer.

For most people doing lighting, time is very tight and results can only be guaranteed by adhering to the predictable, the calculable. We have all worked in situations where time restricts us to lighting totally from something we have proven in the past. Lighting like this has its place and will do as long as schedules are tight but it is certainly not lighting design. There is no creation, only recreation.

Wherever I lecture I find in the students something ego boosting about being responsible for a complex and intricate arrangement of computer controlled illumination. Lighting seems to attract people who are technicians first and designers second. Lighting should not be

left to those who have mastered the art of programming and photometrics. Lighting is about giving life to pictures, it is about movement, colour and people.

I am disturbed that the process of being a lighting designer is too much oriented around the technical and too little around the creative. It is possible to light a show on a mathematical basis but this will not produce the spark that marks real theatre from the rest. The technical lighting man either doesn't notice shadows or obliterates them altogether but the designer uses them. The technical lighting man abhors variety in colour, everything is either all colour or all white, the designer makes white a part of his palette alongside the other colours. The technical men are everywhere. They like tidy plans, neat rigs, firmly focussed lanterns, clear choices. There is nothing wrong in this but just try and make some alterations, technical men hate change. They look on the plotting process as the completion of the designer's job. In fact it is almost the beginning. The plotting session is the first time the designer has had access to the canvas and his paints. Lights, colours and dimmers are not fences to restrict movement they are vehicles for the creation of movement. The plotting session is not the icing that completes the cake, it is the mixing of the ingredients.

Within obvious limitations it is accepted that scenery can be rebuilt and repainted before it reaches the stage. Costumes can also be altered before the first night. But why do I feel guilty when I want to change a colour or refocus a lamp? The freedom to make mistakes is a vital component in the creative process and on the whole lighting men are denied this opportunity. For most lighting men the design stage is not innovative because they do not have the time to push against the barriers of their imagination by experiment. Hence their creative abilities are corsetted.

Lighting men also lose out by rarely being in at the birth of a production. If they lose so must the audience. It is a grave error to believe that the lighting man must not be engaged until the model is made because until then he cannot start work. He is not there to apply his paints to someone else's drawing. He is there to help create the picture in the first place. These early stages can be immensely exciting and rewarding if one relaxes and swims with the stream. The journey can be unpredictable but it is likely to be valuable. In my experience set designers think of light in a more abstract way than do lighting designers. Unfortunately they often have difficulty in communicating this to the lighting man who frequently responds with pure jargon and delights in the consequent confusion and embarrassment. If a lighting designer can be engaged whilst the set is still in embryo then he can tap the rich vein of ideas the set designer will display at this stage. All will benefit. The secret of course is to think in terms of pictures right from the start and let the nuts and bolts come later.

Experienced lighting designers can more easily think in terms of pictures because they have a wealth of productions behind

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them which furnish an instinct for making quick and accurate decisions. Of course they have more freedom too than most. Freedom in equipment, locations and time. They therefore possess a self-perpetuating enhancement. An experienced man also treats his operator with due respect for the aesthetic judgement he can bring to plotting and operating. The operator is not a button pusher but an instrument of movement, one of the cornerstones of good design. There is evidence that the latest control systems are designed more with a view to helping the operator to play than has been apparent in earlier systems. There has been a realisation that a lot happens before the record button is pushed.

A change in emphasis in lighting, one of concern for the end rather than for the means could generate a healthier atmosphere in which we could all work more successfully. The benefit would spread right down the line and the actor especially would be stimulated by the sympathetic way in which his environment was created. All we need to achieve this is that the lighting must grow alongside the set fed from the initial concepts of the play and its director. The equipment in turn should serve the designer with ease and not possess an identity on its own. Lighting has experienced possibly the greatest revolution of any technical theatre department in the last few generations. It has been established as an industry on its own. Now that it is reaching some maturity let us not lose sight of its creative purpose.

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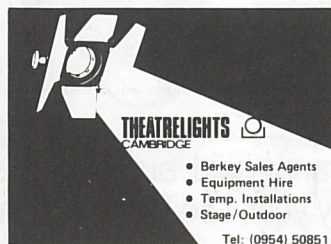
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Training the people behind the scenes

A report on the Arts Council's courses for administrators by ANTHONY MCCALL

When the Arts Council's finance director, Anthony Field, joined that august institution in the fifties, the annual grant was well under the million pound mark, or about 100 times less than the current figure. The relative unimportance of subsidy can be judged by the fact that, in those days, administrators were often "part-time actors who came in on Thursday afternoons"—to use his own phrase. He couldn't get any statistical back-up when grant requests were put in, or real details of where and when the money was spent. In the strict sense, the Arts Council was therefore not accountable, as public bodies are meant to be. Quite often, they didn't know exactly where their subsidies were going.

So the then chairman, Arnold Goodman, said yes, fine, let's start a course to train our administrators. And since then it has gone on to become one of the most popular of all courses, with about 220 applications for 20-odd places on the annual diploma-course.

Various educational bodies were invited to start a suitable course and the Polytechnic of Central London was the first to set the ball rolling. Their course later transferred to the City University, London, where John Pick presides as director of Arts Administration studies. His two colleagues are Michael Quine, course leader for the dip course; and Peter Stark, who takes the practical course. John Pick's book, *Arts Administration*, brought out late last year, by the way, makes an excellent introduction to the subject.

The first courses tended towards a general approach, dealing with economics, statistics and so forth. A more specialist outlook was adopted to suit the different areas of arts activity, like accounting, production management, administration. Production management for instance, is now split into three two-day modules: the 1980 course offered 'Buildings', 'Finance' and 'People' as headings. It was enormously successful, too.

Courses vary enormously. They range from piano tuning—yes, piano tuning—for concert purposes (not domestic uprights) to musicians' bursaries. New ones are always being considered. They are investigating the interest in community arts and bookshop managers training. Puppeteering is another specialist field short on professional back-up skills. Other new fields are photography and video—although film is not Arts Coun-

cil territory, since the British Film Institute already runs its own schemes.

Why is there such demand for specialist training, one wonders? At least 20 letters a week arrive at the Arts Council requesting help in entering this field of the arts.



Typical "student" in theatre administration is Ellen Cannes, now using her Arts Council bursary to study stage and costume design with the Contact Theatre in Manchester. Photo by David Chadwick

Accordingly, job-lists go out now on the first Wednesday of every month (over 600 copies in all, 500 by mail and the others to regional arts associations) to help with individual requests.

Judith Strong, the Council's training officer, and Loretta Howells, her assistant training officer, run a very busy department all year round. Their work is not connected with educational training in any way at all, she is quick to explain. The Department of Education and Science would be quick to rap them over the knuckles if it were. It is more like the courses taken at the National Opera School, where you study say, 'stage presence' for the roles of Violetta or Mimi.

Some people come into the Arts Council after ten years work in the theatre who are

still worried when they see a contract or a local authority's fire regulation, she pointed out. Or to give a more common illustration of how specialist courses can help, people tend to pick up a lot of information about their own particular field as their career progresses, without being too aware of their role in the wider context. Indeed, similar or even better systems of working may exist in other organisations, without their knowledge. A box office manager who wanted to move on from his job once he got to the top might not know where to go from there. A course can open his eyes to other possibilities.

Typical 'students' have been in the business for five to six years, in fact. Depending on an individual's experience, he has the choice of how much study time will be spent out on secondment, or on practical work.

The present courses will continue, we have been assured, but the clampdown on money will mean that courses will need to respond closely to demand or need. If they are not well supported, they could be postponed.

Many leading lights have begun on these courses: Paul Findlay, Sir John Tooley's side kick at the Royal Opera House; Welsh National Opera finance director, Nicholas Payne; and in the Arts Council itself, Paul Collins is the assistant finance director; and Pat Abrahams is subsidy officer for the regions and fine art. They "graduated" in the first year, 1967-68. Coming up for 200 people have been through the diploma course, which runs from October to June, like the normal university year. More specialist courses have sent back 'students' to the Old Vic; the 7.84 Theatre Company, Sadler's Wells, Nottingham Playhouse and many more.

The single biggest grant goes to the ABTT for courses tailored to the needs of senior carpenters, lighting designers, period-costume cutters and sound engineers. The main problem with technicians, as the ABTT's Ken Smalley put it, is that, very often, there is more enthusiasm than skill. Hence the need for training.

The Council's overall budget for 1980/81 stands at £338,000 of which £18,000 goes to the National Opera Studio. It funds about 50% of the training; other sources are the SSRC (Social Science Research Council, London) and the Welsh and Scottish Arts Councils.

Between Cues

The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

Lighting Ideal . . .

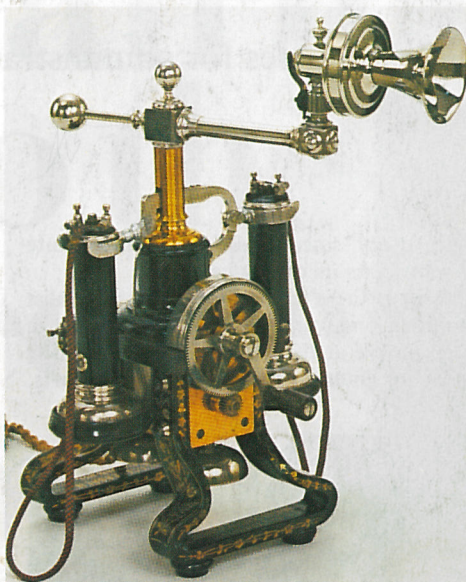
Somewhere in Soho, I was assisting with the education of tomorrow's technicians. "At what point" I enquired, "should the lighting designer become involved in the planning of a new production?". Quick as flash came the reply from a likely lad "as soon as he has signed his contract". The same fellow paid little further attention to my discourse except to dispute my observation that director and scenographer did not always find it easy to agree on a mutually ideal lighting balance. He advised me that there is a scholastic establishment to the north of London where harmony prevails and the path of the lighting designer is forever smooth. Why should (indeed how could) it ever be otherwise? Why indeed! How indeed!

. . . And Lighting Real

Somewhere in Europe, I was enjoying a dress rehearsal as guest of the production desk. The director and scenographer were English and work frequently together. They were known to me but I am unknown to them. So I played fly on the wall to their foot stamping disagreements about whether the actors or the set should be favoured with the available light. Both of them displayed a rather alarming ignorance of the more basic facts of stage lighting. Perhaps if their talents had been tempered by just a touch more rationality, their vision might possibly have been communicated more positively to the audience. Fortunately the resident lighting designer deployed the necessary cool logic and tact. His compromise saved the day.

Elegant Eavesdropping

One of the negative influences on my development as a lighting designer was a certain departed London impresario who had the less than endearing habit of summoning me to his office for a little advice on modifications that might, with advantage, be incorporated into the lighting plot. Perhaps advice is too gentle a word for the instructions to ignore the concept of Author, Composer, Director, Choreographer, Scenographer and my humble little self. These sessions taught me little about lighting but they did wonders for my diplomacy. And they opened a little window on the world of wheeling and dealing. Our discussions were continually interrupted by the telephone and throughout the calls a secretary made shorthand notes. She



eavesdropped by means of an earpiece cannibalised from early technology headphones. (One suspected the hand of a theatre electrician rather than a post-office approved engineer) Strange that an impresario of his undoubted elegance had never acquired a more stylish model. Perhaps he never visited Stockholm's Telemuseum where he would surely have been inspired by Ericsson's 1884 model.

Original Staatsopernbühnenboden

Regular readers of this column (if any there be) may have gained an impression that my approach to theatre is emotive. I do not deny it. And so you will understand that my most cherished card of this or any Christmas came from the Munich State Opera. Helmut Grosser's signature was on a fragment of timber from the original stage floor.

FPB at the IEE

Lighting has very little to do with electricity. It just so happens that, for the time being, electricity provides the most appropriate way of processing the required energy. The electrical chappies, however, like to keep abreast of the direction their current is flowing in such esoteric fringe fields as stage and studio. So it has become their habit to invite Fred The Console along to their palatial Institute from time to time for an hour or so of light entertainment. I doubt whether many of the Institute's

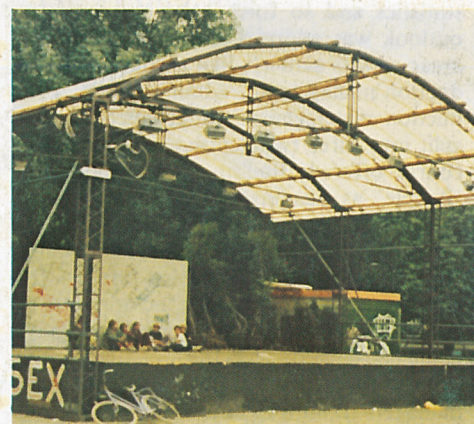
distinguished Electrical Engineers can appreciate the finer points of a Bentham discourse on the playability of digital keypads. To do so they would need to understand the differences between lighting design and lighting operation, the differences between a lighting plot written on paper and one kept in the head and, perhaps most fundamental, the difference between the solo act of composing colour music and the corporate act of lighting a production with actors. But it is Fred Bentham's special gift to be able to throw out thought provoking crumbs to the handful of specialists (albeit, in Christmas week, mostly manufacturers and consultants rather than designers or operators) while entertaining a non-specialist audience with pithy comments on his fifty years of slides. And I hope that someone somewhere is recording samples of the comments without which no Bentham lecture is complete: that is, his views on the architecture and equipment of the room which has had the misfortune to be selected for the lecture.

Park Theatre

Strolling in Amsterdam's Vondelpark last summer I chanced upon a lovely bandstand all rustic and romantic, but overgrown and unused



Then I found the stage used for today's concerts



Oh, dear.