

# CUE

Technical Theatre Review



March-April 1981 £1.25



# THORN LIGHTING

## THEATRE LIGHTING DIVISION

We regret to announce that as from March 31st 1981 our Theatre Lighting Division will cease trading as a manufacturer of lighting control systems.

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T. W. Shaw  
Divisional Manager



# CUE

## Technical Theatre Review

10.

March–April 1981

### Time for a Titboard?

*It is the fashionable topic of the theatrical moment. Conferences – local, regional, national, international – find it an acceptable conferable problem and many are the resolutions to have more of it. But although there is much agreement that it should be done, there seems a lack of agreement on how to do it. "It" is the training of theatre technicians. . . . Thus began a Tabs editorial in those gentle, rosy, far-off days of summer 1975.*

*With the approval of the SWET Executive and the TMA Council, the Theatre Training Committee of the TNC has decided to hold a Consultation under the auspices of the Gulbenkian Foundation on training in the technical areas of theatre. Informal discussions have led us to believe that there is widespread concern about the problems of technical training in the theatre combined with an uncertainty about how such problems should best be resolved. . . .*

The careful wording of this latest call to confer illustrates the finely developed specialist literary style of those who spend the still watches of the night unravelling the emotional niceties and contractual complexities of poster billing. Cynics will say that if the managers have gone to this trouble over the billing, they must be pretty serious about putting on a training show.

For far-flung readers unfamiliar with the jargon of the British Arts and Entertainment Establishment, we should explain that SWET is the Society of West End Theatre, TMA is the Theatrical Management Association (incorporating CORT, the Council of Regional Theatre and ATPM, the Association of Touring and Producing Managers) and the TNC is the Theatre National Committee (which comprises representatives of SWET, TMA and the Association of Circus Proprietors of Great Britain). Anyone worried about the absence of TAC (the Theatres Advisory Council) or its bed-mate SACLAT (the Standing Advisory Committee on Local Authorities and the Theatre) should fear not: all these bodies practise a degree of incest that has made them the darling of the Hat Stand Marketing Board.

With every due respect to the bodies who have been beaver away at the training problem for years – the Arts Council Training Committee and its recently dissolved working groups, the National Council for Drama Training and, above all, the ABTT – CUE suggests, even ventures to believe, that this latest call to confer constitutes a very important initiative. There is even a temptation to get lyrical and sing *This could be the start of something big.*

Why? Because in all British technical training activities the least involved, and possibly even the least concerned, seem often in the past to have been the Managements and the Unions.

With the meeting scheduled for the end of April (managers, incidentally, have been invited to take along a member of their technical staff), CUE feels a duty to identify some of the problems and to aid solution by asking in the form of rhetorical questions

- Is the traditional education system, with its emphasis on pre-entry study, really appropriate for theatre?
- Should not theatre offer short orientation pre-entry courses followed by in-service, block release, specialist training for technicians who have identified their personal areas of specialist interest and shown appropriate aptitude?
- Is there not a danger that current – and correct – pre-occupation with Health and Safety regulations will produce training courses which stress technology at the expense of theatricality?
- Will the demand for certification perhaps lead to a course syllabus which includes content that can be easily examined, at the expense of content which is relevant?
- Are the narrowly based stage management courses of the traditional drama schools really appropriate to the needs of today's theatre?
- AND, despite the reluctance to create yet another committee, is it not now time to set up TITBOARD (Theatre Industry Training Board)?

Our cover picture is from the Maugham Collection of Theatrical Paintings now on permanent exhibition in the National Theatre. The painting in oil is by Samuel De Wilde of a performance of *The Children in the Wood* first produced at the Haymarket in October 1793. The picture shows Walter, a repentant villain (John Bannister), Josephine his sweetheart and the children's nurse (Maria Theresa Bland), Winifred, Walter's mother (Ursula Booth). Photograph by courtesy of National Theatre.

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

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The logo for BOCS (Box Office Computer Systems) features the word "BOCS" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Above the letters, there are three stylized, rounded shapes that resemble the tops of three boxes or the humps of three stylized figures, arranged in a row and slightly overlapping the top of the letters.

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# Autolycus

## A pin to see the peep show

Recently on elegant display at the Whitechapel Gallery, and with any luck about to circulate, the "Boxes" of the reclusive New Yorker, Joseph Cornell, make one speculate anew whether the theatre is an imitation of life or an imitation of Art — with a capital A.

It depends, we suppose, whether your view of the theatre is of something circular looked down on, in the tradition of the bear-pit (which developed first into the Elizabethan stage, and, fashionably today, into apron stages and theatre in the round) or of something square to be looked into (which is what a proscenium dictates). Cornell was for getting people to look into



Joseph Cornell 1969. Photo' Hans Namuth

perienicing the "feel" or even the smell of sets as different and as masterly as Julia Trevelyan Oman's for "Brief Lives" or John Bury's for "Amadeus", and those of a whole generation of BBC designers for TV dramatisations of books we always meant to read, one begins to wonder. . . .

## Mise en scene '80

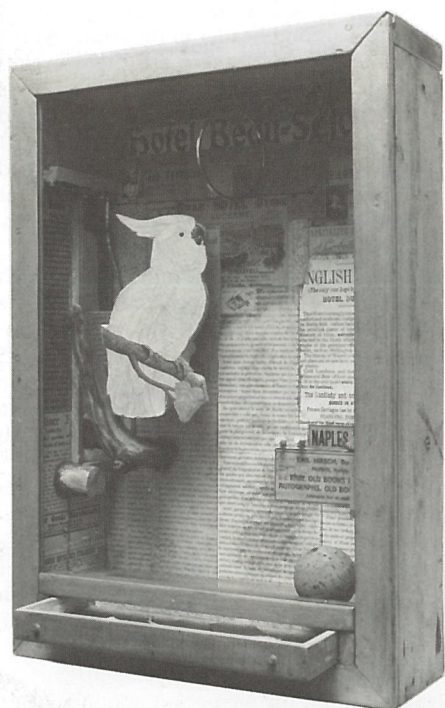
Stratford's Royal Shakespeare Theatre housed the final consummation of the National Federation of Women's Institutes' "Scene '80" five-year plan, directed towards a festival of creative entertainment (patron Donald Sinden, sponsored by Johnson's Wax Arts Foundation). If you ever wondered whatever happened to costume craft, there it was in abundance, wonderfully evocative masks, head-dresses

and cloaks with hand-embroidered detail which could make some professional costumiers look silly. High spot of the miscellany was a masque production of "Jabberwocky", danced to the Lewis Carroll nonsense poem and music by Stravinsky, with an imaginative use of masks, costume and lighting which caught the weird quality of the verse exactly. Most ambitious production, incorporating back projection film, told the story (in Welsh) of the carrying of slate on the narrow-gauge railway from Ffestiniog to Portmadoc, using traditional work-songs and dances to cross the language barrier. Out of the cast of over a hundred performers thirty-five of them were named Jones. Inigo is alive and well and living in Merionydd, it seems.

## The sound and the fury (continued)

From time to time we seem to sound off in an exasperated, back-row-of-the-pit manner about the inadequacies or infelicities of sound in the theatre. We're still waiting for some comprehensive or even philosophic answer. Meanwhile, Production Manager Howard Bird has some good points to make, we think, about how some troubles start — in management. From Aldersgate Productions he writes:

It has always seemed strange to me that during the birth of a production technical rehearsals are conducted and fixed within two days whilst the performers get three weeks. I would be the last to argue that performers' rehearsal time should be reduced, but the disparity could be solved by increasing technical rehearsal time. Administrators, say "It costs money to have a longer production week!" Of course it does, but the time between the first technical time on stage and the opening of the show does not have to be lengthened. Technical rehearsal can go on whilst the performers are in their rehearsal. This already happens in war-



Found Aspects interpreted

things. His boxes are mostly square or rectangular and, by intent, glazed. Their dimensions come close to those of a set-designer's model, which, in some mysterious way, often becomes more meaningful as a picture than its final interpretation in full-stage terms.

In his miniature theatres, which he crams with the odds and ends and "references" he has gathered of theatrical performances, ballets and dancers, stars and myths of stage and screen and scholarship, the pinned-down ephemera of our times, Cornell seems to be able to tell stories without the need for action or, indeed, actors. This should make his work, we think, required study for designers and, even more, for set-dressers and props people involved with the staging of any sort of "period" entertainment. He is, perhaps, too esoteric a figure to have influenced set design. But, ex-

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# Victoria & Albert in revival

ANTHONY MCCALL

It is probably this magazine's pet grouse that so little is ever done to preserve or protect our theatrical heritage. It is gratifying, therefore, to see that the first major exhibition (and indeed the main one at the Victoria and Albert Museum this summer) is being mounted by the Theatre Museum under the title, *Spotlight: Four Centuries of Ballet Costume* — in tribute to the Royal Ballet's 50th anniversary this year. It runs at the Victoria & Albert from 8th April to 26th July and the 'show', for that is what it is, looks a corker.

The first half of the exhibition is devoted to designs and photographs covering fancy dress from about 1570 to the early years of this century. The second part takes place in the main exhibition hall, where the latest electronic technology turns the normally static models into a 'programme of lights and music', crossfading spots from one group to another, and from the work of one designer to another. Here, the exhibits range from eighteenth-century Italian to the



*Le Dieu et la Bayadere. Marie Taglioni as Zoloe. c 1830*

present day. Using pitch black backdrops and models, the costumes seem to 'come at you out of the darkness — like being onstage', explain Sara Woodcock, exhibition assistant at the Theatre Museum and her helper for the event, Philip Dyer.

Sources for the exhibition vary from the Royal Ballet wardrobe, to the main British dance companies, and such unlikely foreign sources as Zizi Jeanmaire and Merce Cunningham. Design material has come from Australia, the United States and Europe.

Costumes worn by dancers such as Alicia Markova, Frederick Ashton, Margot Fonteyn, Lynn Seymour, Merle Park and Rudolph Nureyev are there, plus the work of many artists and designers: Picasso, Matisse, Beaton, di Nobili, Oliver Messel and Julia Trevelyan Oman. In all, there are about 100 designs and 77 costumes.

What of the Theatre Museum itself? The staff themselves admit that people constantly ask where it is and when it will open 'properly'.



*Zephyre et Flore. Alice Nikitina as Flore. 1925. Costume designed by Georges Braque. Les Ballets Russes de Serge Diaghilev*

Curator Alexander Schouvaloff outlined the situation to date: 'After successive delays (since 1976, in fact), it now looks as though the builders will begin alterations to the Flower Market Building (in Covent Garden) later this year. We have had the grant sent through; now for the work to begin. The opening has been set for late 1983, but it may slip to the spring of 1984.' Any further plans for exhibitions at the V & A, we wondered? 'Yes, in the autumn and right up to the Museums's opening, there are likely to be a series of smaller exhibits on various subjects'.

The Theatre Museum has a grant of its own, although it is administered as a department of the V & A. Among the items under the dustsheets are such old treasures as bits of old theatres: the balustrades from an old music hall in Manchester; the box-office from the Duke of York's; boxes from the Palace, Glasgow, with elephant motifs. And more irreverent relics such as Barry Humphries' famous Ascot hat with the Sydney Opera House on the top, not to mention kitsch little mugs and posters of



*Les Rendezvous. Alicia Markova. 1933. Costume designed by William Chappell. Vic Wells Ballet*



*Hamlet. Margot Fonteyn as Ophelia. 1942. Costume designed by Leslie Hurry. Sadlers Wells Ballet*

theatrical and pop music memorabilia industries.

The storage room is rapidly filling up, according to archivist Carolyn Harden, although more room may turn up when the prints and drawings collection of the V & A moves out to another building this summer. Researchers are welcome to make use of the archives, although Harden warns, 'People have to be fairly specific about what they are looking for'. Six people at a time can be admitted, by prior telephone appointment. 'They need to know what theatres or what dates apply', she adds, 'not just "everything we have on say, Vesta Tilley or Charlie Chaplin" because the collection is not fully catalogued or complete.' Ring 01-589 6371 and ask for her by name. Hours are: 10 am to 1 pm; and 2 pm to 4.30 pm Tuesdays to Thursdays.



Continuing his visits to **Museums of Theatre**, in pursuit of tourist pleasures rather than academic researches, **FRANCIS REID** explores

## PARIS and VERSAILLES

Paris is probably one of the most museum-conscious cities in the world. There seems to be a specialist museum for just about everything. Except theatre. Archive material in abundance: but little of it on public display. However, a city with a stage so distinguished in the past and so active in the present must offer an abundance of riches to the casual theatric tourist.

There is one accessible formal museum, the *Musée de l'Opéra*. It is within the *Opéra* building but has its own sweeping approach ramps to an entrance which in any other building would be rather grand, but within the florid *Palais Garnier* context of this opera house seems just like some inconsequential side door.

The opera museum and library were established in 1877 as a result of a proposal by the Opera's archivist (M. Nuitter) and opened to the public in 1882. On the evidence of a contemporary engraving the rooms have changed little across the century.

The most important room is the reading room: an elegant well-lit rotunda for scholars rather than tourists. The displayed items from the collection are housed in a long gallery, part of which also contains archive bookcases and locked cabinets with intriguing titles like *Théâtres Antique, Afrique, Amérique, Orient* and, perhaps even more mouth-watering, *Opéra Anciens Salles*. The huge numbers of opera scores, mostly of long-forgotten works but juxtaposed with the occasional immortal hit, set the atmosphere for an emotive viewing of the items on display.

Items like the case of Debussy memorabilia including his composing desk equipment, pens and baton. Props, musical instruments, statues, engravings. Early manuscript dance notation in bound volumes. Watercolours by J. L. Desprez of elaborate *Scènes de "Christine"* at Grips-holm in 1785. Two dramatic paintings (by Hubert Robert) of *L'Incendie de l'Opéra en 1781, Salle de Palais Royal*. A large timber model of the machinery at this theatre shows the typical French nineteenth-century laddered scenic supports passing through stage floor slots to ride on understage wheeled chariots for scene changing.

There is a collection of scenic models from the decade spanning the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. These models include a *Tristan*, a *Mastersingers*, and a *Ring*. They are triumphs of the art of pictorial scenic design; the painting is finely detailed and delicately tinted.

The vast foyers of the Opera house itself provide a suitable space for exhibitions. I recall with pleasure — and the catalogue aids the pleasure of that recall — the 1975 exhibition in celebration of the centenary of the building of Charles Garnier's *Opéra*. The opening quarter of 1981 saw an exhibition on *Benjamin Britten*. Photographs (well captioned in both French and English) document his life and works. Of particular interest were the comparative photographs of different productions of his operas around the world. It is fascinating to see the way in which the Suffolk architecture of Peter Grimes and Albert Herring take on something of the various national building styles of a scenographer's own country.

The exhibition included a few showcases of ephemera but was mainly documentary. It did, however, demonstrate where a pictorial exhibition on large display boards can score over a picture book: quality of photographs, size of images, and the juxtaposition of these images to make points by suggestive comparisons.

At the Comédie Française, the collections are not on permanent formal display although certain items may be seen in the foyers and special exhibitions are mounted from time to time. The archives include documents from the seventeenth century and the library has some 50,000 volumes. The museum includes 233 pieces of statuary, 340 paintings, hundreds of drawings and objects pertaining to former actors and productions. But not formally exhibited for the casual visitor.

Paris has many historic theatres in daily

use including the Odeon (1807), the Palais Royal, the Variétés etc etc — going to the theatre, to any Paris theatre, is invariably a rewarding experience for anyone interested in theatre architecture (working in them can also be a technological experience — but that is another story!).

But the essential theatre experience — and it is an easily accessible experience — must be *L'Opéra Royal* at Versailles, ordered in 1768 by Louis XV and completed by his architect, Gabriel, in 22 months for the marriage festivities of the Dauphin and Marie Antoinette in 1770.

It was stripped at the revolution and its curtains burned to recover the gold threaded into them. In the nineteenth century the theatre was painted ox-blood red, and bronze gas lamps were attached to the columns. Restoration began in 1950 and was completed in 1957. The theatre is now used for about 10-12 annual performances, the same number as in the eighteenth century.

Accurate restoration was assisted by the availability of illustrated inventories made by the artists during building, and samples of the correct shades of pink, blue and gold were found in sections of original paintwork under a later false floor. The ceiling painting was discovered backstage where it had lain for 80 years under a pile of scenic rubbish.

The auditorium is an oval, flattened at the proscenium. Stage and auditorium are of equal depth and so, when the floor was raised to stage level and scenery erected to mirror the auditorium, an oval room was created for balls and assemblies. The floor-raising machinery has not been restored although its essentials are said to be still in position.

The original capacity of 1,500 is now reduced to seating for 800. The 1,500 was possible because only the Royal Family were seated in chairs. Duchesses had stools, other ladies had cushions and the men stood. The Royal box has a grille for private incognito visits when the court behaved as if the king were not there and therefore did not require to look to him to lead the applause. Bench seating of a later date is



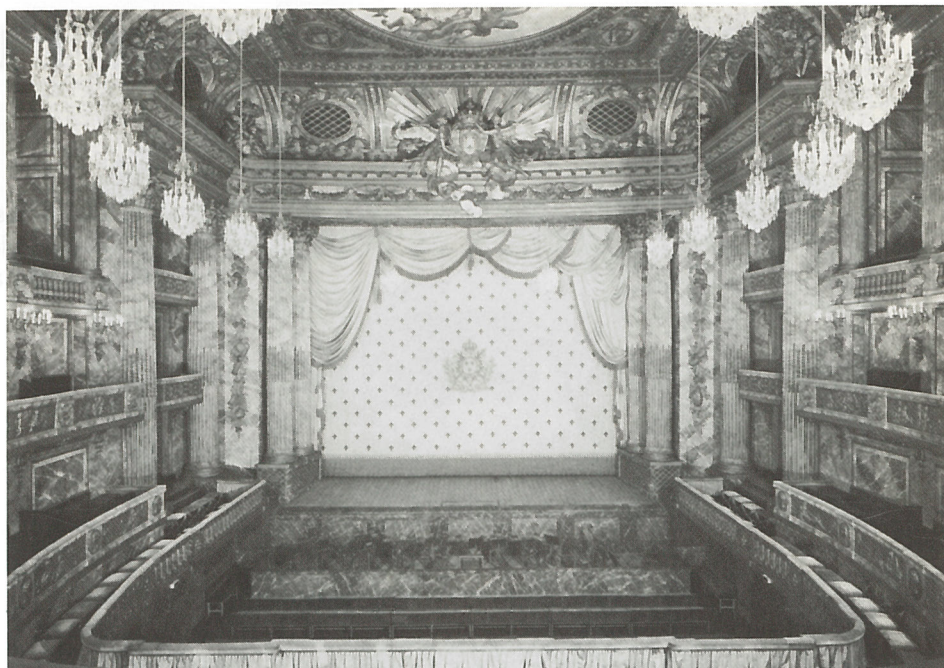
*The Opera Museum and Library have changed little since this nineteenth-century engraving.*



now installed with blue patterned velour to the original design, but the floor is carpeted rather than restored to bear skins.

Lighting was by 6,000 candles : 3,000 in the auditorium and 3,000 on stage. It is therefore hardly surprising that the architect omitted a heating system but included ventilation.

The entire auditorium is constructed of wood with particularly realistic, painted marble treatments. This was a theatre where the audience was more important than the performance — Marie Antoinette, coming from the Vienna of Haydn and Mozart, is said to have been appalled with the perfor-

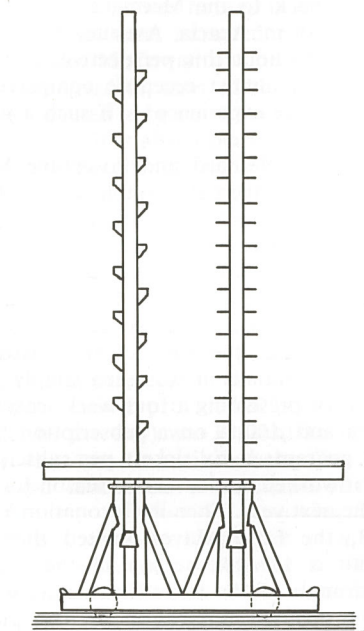


*The Opera at Versailles.*

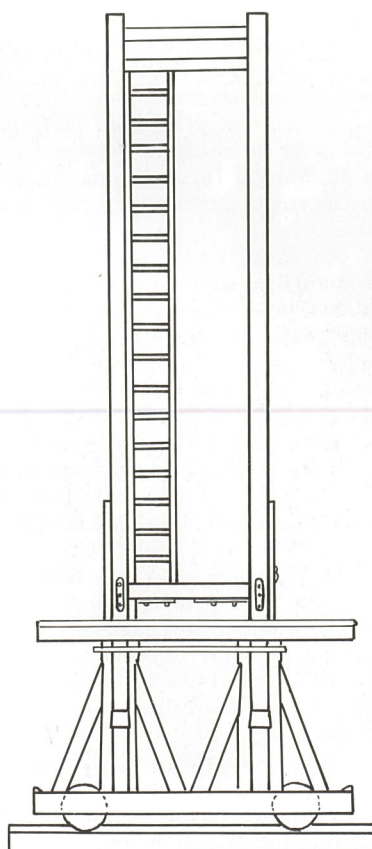
mance standards and the old-fashioned operas performed. With a clever use of mirrors to enlarge and multiply the space, it tended to be an auditorium to compete with the stage splendours rather than focus upon them. But visiting the Versailles Opera is a surprise. The photographs are misleading — this opera house is so well-proportioned

*et Marie-Antoinette le 18 Novembre 1777.*

It only remains to add that the galleries of Paris are a happy hunting ground for theatric tourists. Students of lighting design will certainly spend their time more profitably looking at La Tour and Le Nain in the Louvre than studying electricity and electronics. My own Louvre favourite is



*Forms of the traditional French scenic chariot for supporting and changing flats.*



*LE NAIN's Famille de paysans dans un interieur one of the many paintings in the Louvre to inspire sculptural use of lighting.*

that the decorations seem much more restrained when one actually sits in the auditorium.

Marie Antoinette's tiny (about 60-seat) personal theatre is not yet restored but the *Théâtre Montansier* has been refurbished as the civic theatre of Versailles and carries the explanatory plaque *Elevé en 1777 par Heuriter et Boullet pour Mademoiselle Montansier, Directrice de Théâtre de la Ville de Versailles. Inauguré par Louis XVI*

*Pannini's Concert donné à Rome le 26 Novembre 1929 l'occasion de la naissance du Dauphine fils de Louis XV.* Can someone confirm my memory that this is the Teatro Argentina?

*PS* For theatre bookshops, start walking from the Odeon towards the Seine, via Rue Bonaparte and Rue de Seine.



# Plans and progress at Puddle Dock



The Mermaid Theatre has been closed for renovation for nearly three years. As its re-opening day approaches (7th July), old triumphs and new enterprises are discussed by

ANTHONY MCCALL

I must admit, one of the things I miss most on returning to these shores from abroad, is the widespread practice of eating breakfast in a cosy cafe on the way to work; and at the other end of the day, of sitting down to a late-night supper, say, after midnight. Either it is those Presbyterian and Protestant worms still eating our souls with some rare species of guilt, or this near-spiritual love of the hearthside has the side effect of instilling a nanny's outlook on the world beyond our front door. Who knows the real reason? But strangely, there is a *theatre* in London where both will be served, come July. So do not be surprised to find me there, napkin tucked into the collar.

Which theatre is it, do I hear you ask?

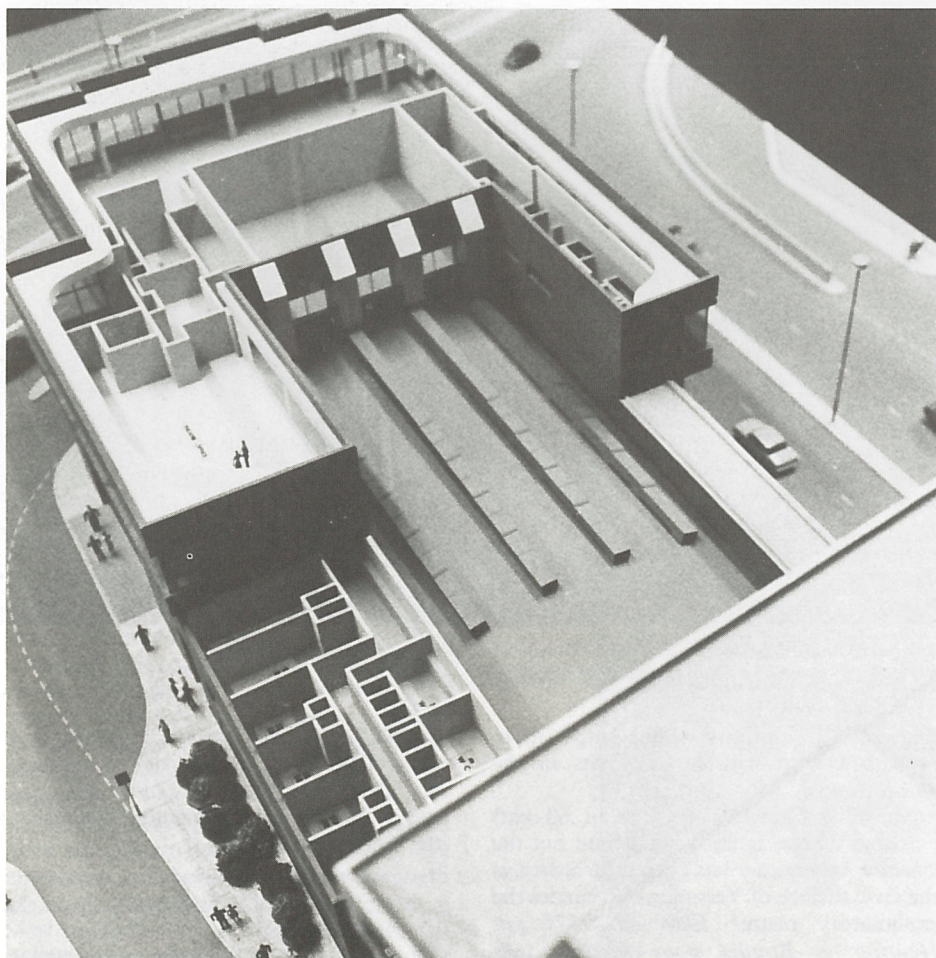
Well, there is no surprise really, for obviously there is a maverick at work here. And who has the longest history of straying away from the herd (thank God), especially when it comes to catering? Bernard Miles, the peer of Puddle Dock. (Peter Brook hardly counts, since little is known about his cooking and anyway, he's exiled in France, or Africa or somewhere or other). Breakfasts are at 8am five days a week and midnight suppers are after the late show — yes, the early show starts at 6pm for city types dropping in on their way home. Doors open on July 7.

The Mermaid has been closed for near on three years, not the two Lord Miles originally envisaged. But the transformation is considerable and all signs point to it being well worth the wait. It is bigger, better and easier to get to. First though, let us cast

a look back to the Mermaid's origins 28 years ago in Acacia Avenue, St John's Wood. Without this perspective, the present seems almost eccentric compared to most theatre experience — if such a norm exists.

In 1951, Bernard and Josephine Miles decided to convert the tumble-down school hall of St John's Wood School into a small but faithful reconstruction of an Elizabethan-Jacobean playhouse, designed by C. Walter Hodges and Michael Stringer, the staging-house mounted on trestles and erected under the roof of the Victorian building. Initially it was seen simply as a means of presenting a four-week season of opera and drama on a subscription basis that guaranteed six tickets per subscriber. But it worked, and a second season followed the next year. Then in Coronation Year, 1953, the Lord Mayor invited them to mount a 13-week season in the central quadrangle of the Royal Exchange, which made such an impression on the public (71,000 came to see) that the Corporation put forward the idea of using Puddle Dock, then the blitzed shell of a warehouse, for a peppercorn rent over seven years. Godfather of the project back at the beginning was their neighbour, the legendary Walter Legge, director of music for ENSA and artistic director of HMV and performing friends in the early seasons included Kirsten Flagstad, Maggie Teyte, Thomas Hemsley, Leon Goossens, Dennis Brain and Murray Dickie.

Of course, as Cue readers will hardly need reminding, the Mermaid stayed on a good deal longer than seven years in their strange home on the corner of Upper Thames Street and Puddle Dock — the one-time City Mills Building, that became a temporary car park after an enemy bomb removed its roof in December 1943. And who can resist feeling nostalgic to recall that the total cost of fully equipping and rebuilding the theatre cost £126,000? When the seven years were up, the Corporation extended the agreement, 'thus reversing a 300-year-old precedent by countenancing and even encouraging a band of theatrical squatters to occupy a prime site in the Square Mile free of charge' to quote Lord Miles. 'They even helped us to obtain rehearsal space in and around the City for token rents — courtesy and generosity at that time unmatched in the history of British Theatre, but soon leading other local authorities to follow suit.'



Cutaway model shows roof of auditorium and upper floor levels arranged on three sides.



The Mermaid re-established an ancient tradition by offering permanent theatrical fare within the City in a style and atmosphere that earned it universal praise. Lord and Lady Olivier: 'Bernard and Josephine Miles have without question created a fresh and an entirely refreshing tradition for the British theatre. A blessed chance of benefaction has set the imagination a-dazzle, the brains a-buzz and the palms itching to find vigorous employment in the realms of improvement, reconstruction, and refurbishing and generally to undergo an invigorating sea-change.' Or Paul Scofield: 'The Mermaid always seemed to me to be the most personal and courageous theatre movement to emerge after the war. It was housed in an exciting building, but what attracted most was its spirit'. Alec McCowan put his finger on a telling, if invisible, asset: 'The Mermaid has always seemed to be more than just a splendid theatre. It is also a place for friends to meet. There is always a feeling of welcome'. And this, before such new, higher beings as theatre consultants told us that theatres should have 'friendly foyers' and 'meeting places' to attract audiences! Bernard and Josephine were true pioneers.

Costs multiplied five-fold in three decades. Total revenue (comprising box office receipts, royalties and catering receipts – which provided 82% of total income, by the way) was £3,773,000. Grants from the Arts Council and the City Corporation amounted to £851,000. Expenditure on production, running and overheads, came to £4,624,000 – a dead even tally, with not a bean left over. 'This,' ventures Lord Miles 'is surely a record of self-supporting activity unmatched in any comparable field?' It is no secret that life was an unending balancing act on a finan-



A £2 million part of a larger redevelopment project



The auditorium will now have 100 additional seats, 50 each side of old tier.



Bernard Miles and boy Jonathan Scott-Taylor  
"Treasure Island"

cial tightrope that must at times have felt more like a razor's edge.

Although they survived, by hard work – and luck – the time came when their thoughts of moving on turned to reality. It was the only answer, furthermore. The Mermaid Theatre Trust, now in charge of its fortunes, was granted permission to build 40,000 sq ft of office space on condition that the theatre remain *in situ*, by the then Minister of Works, Anthony Crossland. After numerous attempts to find a way of achieving this end, an ingeniously altered agreement was struck with Touche, Remnant & Co, City Corporation and investment fund managers. The rejuvenation of the Mermaid became a £2 million part of a larger redevelopment project. Touche, Remnant agreed to provide the basic structure 'complete in every detail except for extra fittings and finishes and the necessary replacement of equipment'. The cost of these 'extras' is estimated at around £600,000.

To avoid the nerve-racking tightrope act of the past, an endowment fund of £400,000 is being started. Total Mermaid cash requirement is therefore £1 million, of which £350,000 has already been found.

Lord Miles' aim of providing 'a cross-section of the world's drama' with the

originally-stated formula that it is possible to 'bridge the gap between high-brow and low-brow by way of understandability' will be greatly aided and abetted by the new premises. (See box for full details of refitting and refurbishing – by Trust).

An account of its achievements between May 1959 and October 1978 shows that the Mermaid played without interruption. It staged 152 productions, drew 2.93 million theatregoers into its doors and catered to 3.57 million people in its restaurant. It also presented regular lunchtime films, Sunday concerts and poetry readings and even admitted promotional events where time allowed. 'We believe that seldom has any theatre been in full public use for so many hours of every day over so long a period' comments Lord Miles. And it is especially good to report that the practice of the early days is to be reinstated, offering twice-nightly performances. The 6pm houses will be at reduced prices.

For all there is now underground parking for 300 cars and access across a high-level walkway from Blackfriars tube, not to mention the fancy new entrance foyers, we will be greeted by the same adventurous theatrical productions that made *Alfie*, *Funny Peculiar*, *Whose Life Is It Anyway*, *Cowardy Custard*, *Cole* and *Side By Side*



By Sondheim milestones of their time. Starting with an evening entitled *Hidden Talents*, compiled by Jane Asher, a procession including Phyllis Calvert, Tom Conti, Edward Fox, Joan Greenwood, Felicity Kendal, Dinsdale Landen, Alec McCowan and Sian Phillips will, one can feel sure, surprise and astonish, with the proceedings going to the Mermaid Appeal.

It will be followed by a mixture of experiments and old favourites. *Eastward Ho!*, a Jacobean comedy; *Children Of A Lesser God*, a Tony Award-winning play from New York; *Shakespeare's Rome*, co-scripted by Miles himself; and then *Lock Up Your Daughters* running in rep with Treasure Island as the matinee and early evening show. (Both of them opened the theatre in 1959). Next February, they take the plunge, and mount the British premiere of Stephen Sondheim's success d'estime (but commercial flop) on Broadway of 1976, *Pacific Overtures*. Sondheim and his director Hal Prince shored up the show with their own private money. How typical of our inimitable, eccentric – even swash-buckling pioneer, as full of life as ever before, to pull off such a publicity coup. The press will be buzzing around Puddle Dock for months before it opens, and since when was that bad for business?

So, what's new? Just some of the changes at the Mermaid are indicated below.

#### STAGE AND TECHNICAL

Refitting of lighting control, dimmer units, socket outlets, etc. Refitting of sound and projection equipment, screen, etc. Fitting out of stage and scene dock areas.

#### AUDITORIUM

Re-carpeting, re-seating and re-decorating. Provision of 100 additional seats (50 on either side of 'old' tier. Improvements to auditorium lighting.

#### FOYERS

Fitting and installing of box-office. Occasional furniture including bookstall/kiosk fitting. Display boards, lighting and hangings. Exhibition hangings, lighting, etc.

#### OFFICES AND STAFF ACCOMMODATION

Partitioning of office areas. Fitting desks, tables, shelving, etc. Board Room furniture and fittings. Additional lighting and floor coverings. Green Room equipment and furniture.

#### CATERING, RESTAURANT AND BARS

Full kitchen equipment (2 kitchens), smalls, crockery, cutlery, knapery, implements, bench equipment, etc. Air conditioning to restaurant area. Furniture and fittings to both restaurants. Curtains, blinds, etc. Floor coverings to upper restaurant. Bar fittings to upper and lower foyers, coolers, glass-washers, ice-makers, etc. Coffee bar fittings to upper foyer. Tills, safes, office equipment, etc.

#### MISCELLANEOUS

Bleacher seating to Molecule Theatre for 250. Central vacuum plant. Security fittings including safes, burglar alarms, etc. Hardwood floor to Function Room including screens, furniture, etc.

## An Acre of Seats in a Garden of Dreams

CATHEDRALS OF THE MOVIES by David Atwell. Published by the Architectural Press Ltd. £12.95.

"Prepare Practical Plans for Pretty Playhouses – Please Patrons – Pay Profits" was the office slogan of John Eberson, American inventor of the 'atmospheric' cinema. Not for nothing did he name his own decorating firm 'Michelangelo Studios'. Alas, the British atmospheric is only a shadow of the great American houses such as the Fox, Atlanta. Only at the Rainbow, Finsbury Park, née Astoria, can one savour the effect of "an acre of seats in a garden of dreams". These are pleasures until now largely unsung, though the authenticity of Finsbury Park's Moorish harem received a nice compliment when the foyer made an unannounced appearance as the lobby of an Istanbul hotel in the opening shots of *Murder on the Orient Express*. (It was discovered that Mr. Finney did not fly and as there was no time to get him by rail to the Orient for some location shooting, the Finsbury Park Astoria stood in rather rapidly.)

David Atwell certainly blows the movie palace trumpet in this copiously illustrated account of the English cinema. The text does not restrict itself to Britain: there are useful potted histories of all the American greats including Eberson. Their achievements were so colossal that the British movie houses seem pretty second rate stuff, confirming Maxwell Fry's view of them as "those really dreadful by-blows of unawakened commerce that failed to achieve a total form of any consequence, but merely added to the corruption of the High Street".

But there was one glorious exception, a Russian named Theodore Komisajevsky who, between directing Gielgud in the late twenties and marrying Peggy Ashcroft in the early thirties, managed not only to direct some epoch-making productions at Stratford-upon-Avon's then new theatre but also to design most of the Granada circuit in London. First a live theatre, the

Phoenix in Charing Cross Road, later the Granadas of Tooting and Woolwich in Venetian Gothic. More survive – Clapham Junction, Ealing, Bexley and Walthamstow, all theatres the interiors of which rank with the work of any American. (The exteriors are usually of dull brickwork by Cecil Masey.) But in his excellent short essay on this most un-English of naturalised Britons, Atwell reminds us that to the end Komisajevsky considered that "the cinema does not only cater for imbeciles, it breeds them. The commercial cinema is an entertainment for illiterate slaves". But, he certainly handed out the pearls.

David Atwell's view is a strictly personal one. He follows enthusiasms and thus while he is hazy as to how many legitimate theatres became cinemas between the wars (and after reverted to legitimate following a dip in fortunes at the end of the talkie boom), he allows himself a properly ecstatic description of Britain's only chinoiserie theatre, the Grand, Clapham Junction. There are appendices which give the illusion of this being a complete survey but when my own local pre-talkie cinema, the Ritzy, Brixton, née Electric Pavilion in 1911, is omitted one has doubts as to the book's claim to being scholarly. One also would have liked to have known with what brief stages with flytowers were included in most thirties' super cinemas – were the British expecting the late arrival of the already dying vaudeville/movie practice from America?

Art Deco buffs may be able to muster the enthusiasm needed to save a few cinemas "as permanent memorials to a vanished era". We live theatre enthusiasts may ponder somewhat smugly that while a good Victorian theatre may serve a modern actor as superbly as a Stradivarius serves a violinist, these old cinemas for the most part appear to be no more than yesterday's technological junk, a now closed side alley in theatre architecture of little more use today than a steam engine or ocean liner, and certainly lacking the grace of either.

IAIN MACKINTOSH

*The Borough Theatre, Stratford East. Built by Matcham in 1895, the same year as the Lyric, Hammersmith. Became the Rex Cinema in 1930 with new foyer seen on right. Closed after a prolonged bout of Bingo in 1979. Now open for Sauna & Massage in the pit bar. . . .*





# REIDing SHELF

In 1935, President Roosevelt's *New Deal* attempted to fight the depression and its massive unemployment with a Federal job creation programme. This was the FTP of the WPA. The WPA was the *Works Progress Administration* which set up projects to use federal funds as salaries rather than as conventional unemployment relief payments. In the arts the WPA organised the Federal Music Project, the Federal Art Project, the Federal Writer's Project – and the *Federal Theatre Project* or FTP.

Created as a *free, adult, uncensored* federal theatre, the FTP in its four years (1935-39) employed 120,000 people in the production of some 830 stage plays and 6,000 radio plays. Orsen Welles, John Huston, Arthur Miller, Joseph Losey, Abe Feder, George Izenour and Howard Bay indicate the quality of young talent that was nurtured during the years of the FTP.

Life was never easy for the FTP. Any free adult and uncensored theatre was bound to reflect the problems of the times. Such contemporary drama could easily be regarded as leftist propaganda. And from the more extreme right that propaganda seemed dangerous. The FTP therefore became an inevitable target for the Un-American Activities Committee and so this potential nationwide US National Theatre was demolished in 1939 against a background of rising worldwide prosperity in anticipation of the war.

The documentary records of the four-year project were packed away and survived a 1949 destruction recommendation by the Library of Congress to be unearthed in 1973 in an aircraft hanger

where we found six-thousand play and radio scripts, dozens of cabinets of photographs, production notebooks, and play-reader reports, crates of posters and set and costume designs, and even seven file cabinets full of newspaper clippings that were the base of the living newspaper morgue. We were ecstatic – the material was in excellent condition and there was more than we had ever imagined (over 800 cubic feet)

The collection has now been deposited at George Mason University where a research centre has been established for the organisation and study of this important archive. **THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT** has been edited by John O'Connor and Lorraine Brown who have been working on the material at the research centre.

About 10% of the book is concerned with summarising the history of the FTP but the real meat is the 17 chapters each describing one specific production with comments by actors, critics and members of the production teams, and illustrated by 300 photographs (48 in colour) from the archive. As was the custom of that time, the photographs tend to be posed rather than action shots. However, viewed in conjunction with the poster graphics, design drawings and contemporary comments, one can gain an impression of the work and trace

the seeds that were being sown for a later American theatre that we are more familiar with.

Many of the productions were big and exciting: this was after all a project to create employment and so there was an encouragement not only to use large casts but also big technical crews.

The last scene of the first act was a ballroom in a Paris mansion. It was crowded with guests waltzing to the music of an improbably large band of zimbazon players, augmenting the conventional orchestra in the pit. The dancers floated around a fountain in the center of the ballroom. (You must remember another object of the Federal Theatre was to provide jobs for technicians.)

The fugitive hero of the piece, played by the young Joseph Cotten, whom we had seen being chased by half the population of Paris, dashed onto the stage pursued by gendarmes. The dancers and the music stopped as the hero leaped like a gymnast to the branches of a chandelier. As it swung back and forth, pistols were whipped out from full-dress coats and décolleté gowns. Everyone began firing at the young man on the chandelier. Simultaneously, the fountain yet rose higher, drenching the fugitive until the chandelier, on an impulse of its own, rose like a balloon out of range. While the shooting kept up, ten liveried footmen made their way through the crowd. As the curtain began to fall they announced to the audience with unruffled dignity: "Supper is served." The moment the curtain shut off the scene, a lady cornetist in a hussar's uniform appeared in an upper box and offered a virtuoso demonstration of her skill.

(Marc Connelly on "Horse Eats Hat")

And for a designer or technician, this is the sort of stuff that archives are for:

At the end of the sequence, when the Devil's about to come for him, there was a glow from the side, which had a warm cast to it, and another wash. His friends leave him and he stands center stage. All of a sudden the smoke pot started and out of the pipes, two pipes, came fingers of light. First this side, then that side, then this side – there were fingers of light. The smoke was filling up these fingers and they (his friends) stood parting there. Then as the mist came on, it was so blindingly bright, because of this battery of light, that as he stepped back, you didn't see him. A shaft picked him up through that mist and saw his face. Now how to finish it. How did the devil come to him? In the back, in the gloom, we had a container about three foot in diameter, and we had salammoniac powder in there. And we had, along the side, some electric elements, and if you blew it, you'd see a flash of fire that would go up twenty feet. Through this mist, as this flash of fire occurred, **BLACKOUT!**

(Abe Feder, lighting designer of Orson Welles' "Dr Faustus")

I opened Roger Wilmut's **FROM FRINGE TO FLYING CIRCUS** at the index. *Rowan Atkinson*, 247 led me to a page with no textual mention of our latest cult comic, but his name does appear as the bottom line credit on a tiny marginal illustration of a record sleeve. This reveals something of the quality

of the detailed indexing which is essential in a history book. It also indicates, with some fine precision, the cut-off point in a chunky volume which carries the subtitle *Celebrating a Unique Generation of Comedy, 1960-1980*.

The book is largely factual. Its critical content is restricted to an analysis of comedy technique. It does not attempt to analyse the way in which the *Oxbridge Mafia* (as they have – more or less affectionately – become known) have used comedy to reduce the more pompous elements in our society to the level of human frailty. Future pens will doubtless research the effects of this generation of debunking, and we may even see a reaction set in whereby the pundits of politics and the media are restored to credibility by an application of that old theatrical law *suspension of disbelief*.

Meanwhile the back-end papers of this book carry a photograph of actors whose televised phases are probably more familiar, and certainly more credible, than the people they lampooned. The front endpapers have a family tree of cross-bred complexity indicating just how incestuous has been this comedy generation.

The dust jacket refers to *an era largely dominated by writers and performers from student cabaret and revue who came into show business almost accidentally*. The era had its roots in theatre with *Beyond the Fringe* and *Cambridge Circus* but the flowering was in television: initially taking the stage's mid-sixties "open set, no masking, show the back wall" philosophy into the studio with *That Was The Week That Was*, but rapidly absorbing the technological potential of film and electronics to produce in shows like *Monty Python's Flying Circus* a visual humour beyond stage technology or at least beyond financially viable stage technology. The true medium for this comedy is surely television just as the true medium for pop is the recording – as the Monty Python team found at Drury Lane.

Cleese was puzzled by the reactions of the audience – they would applaud a sketch upon recognising it, laugh a moderate amount through it, and then clap and cheer enthusiastically at the end. It began to make sense when he realised that the show was really the equivalent of a pop concert, and that the audience were celebrating the performance of old favourites.

Presumably the films and tapes have been preserved in archive (? the BBC's). This book will have a future value in untangling the comedy strands of its era. But read it now – especially for the many script extracts.

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**THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT.** 'Free, Adult, Uncensored'. Foreword by John Houseman. Edited by John O'Connor and Lorraine Brown. Eyre Methuen. £9.95 (UK)

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**FROM FRINGE TO FLYING CIRCUS.** Celebrating a unique generation of comedy 1960-1980. By Roger Wilmut. Preface by Bamber Gascoigne. Designed by Kate Hepburn. Eyre Methuen. £7.95 (UK).



# A Stockholm Diary

**Monday** An ego-boosting welcome at Torlanda airport – Carin Fröjd of the *Dramatiska Institutet* is ostentatiously carrying copies of my books for identification. My ego would have been further boosted if I had known that a second welcoming party (the lighting designers of the Royal Dramatic Theatre and the Røyal Opera) were at that moment parking their car unaware of an early landing. But Klas Möller and Hans-Åke Sjöqvist catch me up in the hotel and bear me off to dine on reindeer and good lighting talk. (On the run in from the airport Carin, under cross-questioning, has given me an intensive induction course on the current state of Swedish theatre design and technology).

Then off to a regional meeting of the STFF (Sweden's equivalent of ABTT and USITT) where I am billed to speak about *Ljussattärens arbete, hans relation till Scenograf och Regissör* which obviously translates as *The Lighting Designer's work and his relations with the Scene Designer and Director*, indicating the status of the Lighting Designer in Sweden – *emerging*.

Sweden is moving towards acceptance of lighting as a design discipline with all the processes of concept, planning and realisation that are implicit in the very word *design*. But there is still some way to go before the lighting designer is universally recognised as a full contributing member of the production team. There still remains some idea that lighting is conceived at the lighting rehearsals through the director and scenographer having their ideas – often spontaneous and frequently conflicting – realised by technicians on a more or less experimental basis. What is normal in Anglo-American-Canadian-Australian theatre lighting still has some novelty in much of Europe and this is evident from the discussion, both formal and informal, that follows my talk on procedures that have come to be regarded as standard during my own quarter-century.

After a refreshment pause, the four-hour meeting continues with an illustrated exposition by the consulting team of a proposed expansion of Stockholm City Theatre by gutting the interior of a relatively new office building which already houses one of the City Theatre's stages.

Meeting held in the *Södra Teaterns Kågelbana* – the Studio Stage of the South Theatre – a converted bowling alley with cast-iron columns whose elegance excuses any interference with sightlines. The main Södra Theatre is an 1852 intimate elegant 400-seater standing high and floodlit above the city. Sometime revue house and radio studio, it now houses visiting companies. A punch card board controls a near saturation rig including interesting motorised side bars with steadying runners. A focussing grid stage cloth (used in conjunction with polaroid photographs) in position.

**Tuesday** The State theatres – the

Kungl. Dramatiska Teatern and the Kungl. Opera Teatern – are known as the *Dramaten* and the *Operan*. The main house of the Dramaten is a 1908 horseshoe, ornate yet restrained. With three shallow audience shelves allowing 787 seats to have contact with each other and with the stage. There is a 15m revolve and a two-segment hydraulic lift gives flexibility in the pit/pros zone. Two lighting bridges (there were three) but only 36 flying lines.

The adjacent *Lille Scene* is a 345-seat converted cinema with all the problems of low ceilings and nil wing space that make technical life difficult on any stage but particularly on a repertoire stage. "On Golden Pond" rehearses in full sets with a couple of months to go until opening. In the control room stands a 180-way AVAB with extra dimmer cards to detect blown lamps and non-pluggings. The Dramaten has several other stages including a harbour-side pavilion (a timber café conversion) within sight of the main house, plus a 50-seat studio and a paint-shop conversion (see Thursday) within the original main building. In a period of four days, the five stages are offering a repertoire of ten plays.

Lunch in the much-glaziered roof-top Dramaten staff noshery, then over to the *Operan* perched beside another stretch of water: but unlike the placid harbour beside the Dramaten, the operatic waters (perhaps appropriately) rush and gush.

Like the Dramaten, the Opera is a

horseshoe (but a little earlier – 1898) with shallow circles and grandiose boxes within the architectural depth of the proscenium. The stage floor has been reconstructed recently. There are five bridges, each in three sections giving fifteen units independently capable of rising to +2m or sinking to -8m from stage level. The hydraulics are computer controlled for balance and the flying system is also hydraulic. Next in line for modernisation is the lighting system which at present has punch cards and magnetic amplifiers controlling an abundance of PC lenses. The rig suffers from acute profile starvation.

Dine on a delicious plank steak, wafer-thin but covering a large area of historic timber plate (plank) into which generations of prime cuts have breathed their richness – and, naturally, another of those impromptu theatre conferences which always arise when two or three are gathered with glasses in their hands.

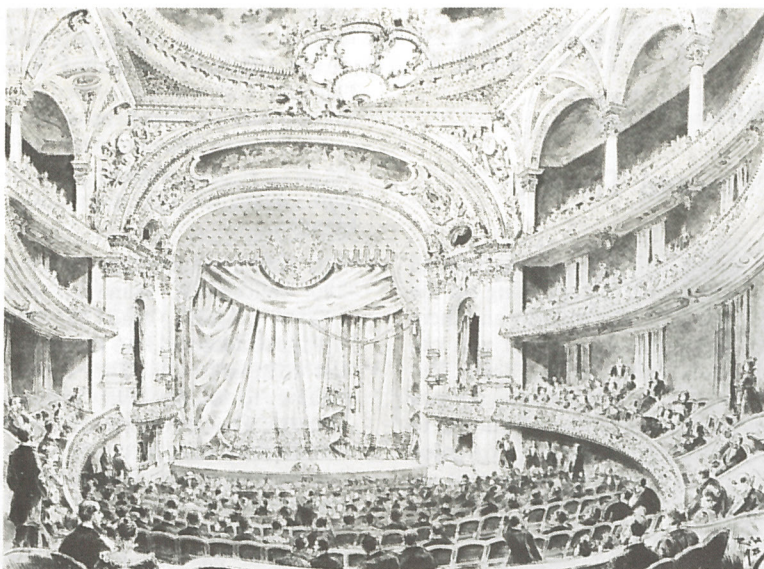
Then back to the Opera for a fine *Macbeth* conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario. I know every note (every? Yes every!) of this opera and for me the tempi and dynamics leaping from the pit sounded delightfully and totally true. The director has chosen to set the action in the ruins of a war-stricken hospital. If this were intended as an alienation effect, then it fails to alienate me. Whatever the scenographic location, I always hear blasted heaths and peat-fired castles. Provided, of course, that the lighting is Verdi in atmosphere. Tonight it is. Tonight it is splendidly so.

**Wednesday** Today's *Teater Som Bild* seminar is the original purpose of my Stockholm visit. *Theatre as picture* is the literal translation of the title of this opportunity for the teaching staffs of

It would seem from this contemporary cartoon that Stockholm's Royal Dramatic Theatre, like most new theatres, was ready "just in time" for the opening night. The circular format of the high proscenium box is a characteristic feature of Swedish theatre architecture.







Kungl. Opera Teatern (1898)

Stockholm's academies of art (fine and performing) to devote a day to consideration of the visual language of theatre. Logic suggested that the final subject should be light: certainly the indispensable visual element in a controlled environment, and probably the most flexible one.

So, after politely listening to the opening session in Swedish and looking over a good Dramaten design exhibition assembled for the day, I wander off for a crisp, river bank stroll of the museum quarter. The recently opened *Etnografiska Museet*, splendidly domestic and red-timbered alongside its concrete fellows – an elegant flexible space. The *Tekniska Museet* is full of goodies (a lovely beam engine for example) and particularly strong in communications generally and radio/TV particularly.

The seminar hears about theatre visuals from the points of view of author, actor, director, scenographer, writer, critic and lighting designer. Perhaps all that need be said about my little chat is that it was in English and I tried, for once, to speak very slowly and distinctly. Perhaps my notes will find themselves transcribed into a Cue article in due course!

Hazy recollections of dinner – no memory of what I ate except that it was quite delicious. One of these restaurants – with timbers and plasters rather than decors – in which one feels that one is part of a long history of pampered digestions and relaxed minds. My hosts, Carin Fröjd and Lasse Erickson of the Dramatic Institute, then take me on a grand tour of the theatre that they are building with their own hands. They are theatre technicians and designers so this will be a performance space where the practicalities are assured from the very start!

**Thursday** Morning at Drottningholm with results that can be read in last Cue (9). Then another grand tour. This time it is the headquarters of the *Riksteatern*: formerly film studios, now a factory for the organisation, rehearsal and technical provisioning of Sweden's touring companies which take theatre to all corners of that large, sparsely populated country. Scenic



Kungl. Dramatiska Teatern

shops, lighting maintenance, and sound studios all have an air of efficiency and humanity.

Within the studio lot is a restaurant built as location for a film and now used "for real" – ideal location for a working lunch with Claes Englund the Swedish publisher of my "Stage Lighting Handbook" which is being transcribed by Hans-Åke Sjöquist of the Operan. Afternoon with the scenography students of the Dramatic Institute. Discussion certainly stimulating for me – and I hope also for them.

The *Målarsalen* of the Dramaten was a paint-shop. It is now an adaptable performance space with about 150 bench seats. The motorway setting was built from concrete and steel and so the play (Howard Barker's "Birth on a Hard Shoulder", or should I say "Morklaggning") was produced for a run rather than in repertoire. Reality becomes paint where the structural motorway reached the *Målarsalen*'s wall: the join is a triumph of the scenic artist's craft. Without the words I have to concentrate on the visuals of this commentary on contemporary England. Despite the heavy stylisation of the acting, there is an uncomfortable feeling that this could be the truth

of where we are heading. So I end the day with a conversational glass or three in the elegance of an adjoining establishment long ago founded by one Riche for the refreshment of those who have been subjected to a dramatic experience.

**Friday** The *Danshögskolan* is training three (or is it four) dancers as choreographers so the morning is devoted to a discussion of the role of lighting in dance – and the methods of realisation. Some generalisations, then some specific problems with me asking the sort of questions that a lighting designer asks his choreographer and scenographer.

A lunchtime tour of the *Filmhuset* where the Dramatic Institute is housed. The training facilities for film, radio, design etc leave me gasping with admiration and not a few twinges of jealousy. Afternoon with the scenographers starts with a practical discus-

sion on the set of a forthcoming in-house production, until we have to yield to the actors. Then back to the studio and the models. The smallness of the group makes for a tight total involvement. Under these conditions teaching can be rather satisfying (or rewarding or any of these kind of words).

To the *Klarteatern*, one of the five stages of the Stockholm City Theatre. The Klara is in the office block where redevelopment as a theatre complex was the subject of the discussion at Monday's STFF meeting. A modern end-stage with full side-stage area to the left but nothing to the right (like the NT's Lyttleton). Comprehensive lighting bridges and useful workshops. Interesting *Fedra* – there is nothing like drama in an unknown language to concentrate the mind on visual details. Nicely lit by Mari-Katrin Lundberg (delighted to find that Sweden's emerging lighting designers are not all fellas). It is the opening night – so end up at first night party in the greenroom: wine and lighting talk into the morrow.

**Saturday** Book-shopping and home.

Francis Reid



# The Maugham Collection of Theatrical Paintings

on permanent exhibition in the National Theatre

The National Theatre now has, on permanent public exhibition, a major collection of paintings of mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century actors and acting. The collector and donor, Somerset Maugham, explains –

Now, it has always seemed to me a shocking thing that so great a capital as London should not have a national theatre such as there is in Paris, Vienna and Berlin. Such an institution would be a worthy monument to British drama. . . . When at last the long efforts of a number of enthusiastic persons, striving indefatigably year after year to overcome the indifference of governments and the apathy of the public, seemed likely to be crowned with success and a national theatre would be built, it struck me that by presenting my pictures to it I might achieve my object of keeping them together. Theatres in the eighteenth century with their rococo decorations, with the red curtains to the boxes, with their immense chandeliers, had a glamour which put you in a comfortable state of mind to enjoy the play you were about to witness. The theatres they now build are

severely functional; you can see from all parts of them what is happening on the stage; the seats are comfortable and there are abundant fire exits, so that you run small chance of being burnt to death. But they are cold. They are apt to make you feel you have come to the playhouse to undergo an ordeal rather than to enjoy an entertainment. It seems to me that my pictures in the foyer and on the stairs of a new theatre would a trifle mitigate the austerity of the architect's design. I offered them to the Trustees of the National Theatre and they were good enough to accept them.

W. Somerset Maugham, 1954

The oil paintings (over 40) were handed over in 1957 to the Trustees and exhibited in that year at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The water colours (a similar number) came to London in 1965 on Maugham's death and joined the oils in store. A selection of watercolours and oils was included in the Arts Council exhibition, *The Georgian Theatre 1730-1830*, held in 1975 at the Hayward Gallery to celebrate the opening of the National Theatre.



Maugham at the Villa Mauresque 1948

The collection has now been cleaned and restored and is on permanent display in the Olivier foyers. The opening ceremony on February 18th was performed by Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson who are surely to the Theatre Museum what the RSC is to the NT. It was Mander and Mitchenson who, again in the words of Somerset Maugham –

. . . poured over dusty volumes, searched collections, examined innumerable faded playbills, read old criticisms of plays and looked into the records of sales at auction rooms. They have spared no pains to make their information accurate. They have followed clues with the pertinacity of a detective of fiction; and so have been able to identify an obscure actor in a forgotten play, and in some case even been able to quote the very words he was saying at the moment the artist chose to picture the scene. They have corrected mistakes in attribution; they have been able to decide which was the original painting and which the replica. They are true lovers of theatre and their labour has been a labour of love.

Maugham wrote that in 1954 and the detective work has continued ever since – and indeed Mander and Mitchenson in their catalogue preface *hope that interest and new scholarship will be revived by the housing and display of the complete collection as envisaged by Maugham*.

Now all this may seem just a little bit too much like sycophantic too-ing and fro-ing but it is in fact a genuine two-way expression of gratitude for Maugham's magnificent bequest and Mander & Mitchenson's skill in identifying the items for our pleasure.

The youngest picture is 1846 and there are two or three from the 1760s, but the collection's period is really that golden age of British theatre spanning the last twenty years of the eighteenth century and the first twenty years of the nineteenth. The paintings are pictures of actors. They tell us nothing about the theatre architecture or the theatre technology or the performance conditions of the Georgian theatre. But they show us (as Allardyce Nicholl has taught us to understand) *what the audience thought they saw*.

How much do they tell us about costume? Or the acting style? Just how heightened was the acting style?

Perhaps the ready (daily) accessibility of this collection will encourage further comparison between the pictorial and the literary evidence of this period.

Meanwhile let Sir Ralph Richardson have the last word. . . . *another picture might go to an actor's dressing room. What a hint with a wink the artful old craftsman might give to the modern actor.*

F.R.

The Maugham Collection of Theatrical Paintings is on view during the time that the National Theatre foyers are open to the public. The 63-page A4 catalogue is on sale at the NT bookshops, price £3.95. All 83 pictures are reproduced, 14 of them in colour.



# Son of Pavilioned in Splendour

IAIN MACKINTOSH

Drive even further north across the Henry Hudson Bridge and your limousine will soon be purring through leafy green belt. Nowhere, except possibly in equally rusty Glasgow, can you so quickly exchange decaying inner city blight for genuine countryside. Settling back in the long low leather seats of what is probably a mini-mustang, the frenetic Turkish bath hustle of New York, New York, is forgotten. Tie knotted, summer suit crisp and freshly cleaned, (oh, that American Room Valet Service long since forgotten in Trust-House-Forte-Metropolitan Britain) preparations are complete for a languid weekend in up-state Connecticut, with side visits to Ivy League New Haven. . .

(Roll titles, because this is *Son of Pavilioned in Splendour*, the sequel to the earlier epic to be found in CUE Magazine No. 8 of November-December 1980 in which your correspondent was trapped for five days in a bus crewed by the fanatical New York Conclave of the Theatre Historical Society. Hence the opening comparative of driving *further* northwards, beyond even Loew's 175th. Titles end, correspondent turns left and addresses his Brookes Brothers casually dressed Canadian pilot, Americo-Anglophile theatre consultant Lou Fleming. . .)

"Have you any idea who these people are? I have met their President, Gene Chesley, earlier this year in California, but all I know about the League of Historic American Theatres is that they're different from the Theatre Historical Society." A fair question when it turns out that Lou and I were two of only four people who were taking in both of these consecutive annual conferences. Lou did not know the answer either and so we enjoyed the scenery and the cool spell in the low nineties until, some hundred miles north, we turned into the driveway of Banner Lodge.

Imagine the TMA meeting in a Prestatyn Holiday Camp and you have some idea of the incongruity. True, it was warmer and a shade further up-market. The day's special cocktail, involving Bacardi and a representative selection of Florida's vegetable produce topped with Disney green foam, was served by more literate college students than you are likely to find in North Wales. But as we left for the evening performance at the Goodspeed Opera House the senior citizens were doing eurhythmics by the pool to the encouraging strains of an ex-Marine Sergeant. *Carry on Connecticut?*

Down at East Haddam two surprises awaited us. The first was the theatre itself, the second the show. The former occupies the top two floors of a towering six-storey timber building on the banks of the Connecticut River. In 1876 the lower floors housed a steamboat terminal, shipping offices, general store, doctors' and dentists' surgeries and a bar. The theatre itself was a flat floor hall with a single elegant horseshoe balcony leading through to



The Goodspeed, built in 1876 restored 1960. The theatre occupies the top two floors. (Photos: Goodspeed Opera House)



Interior, 1960. The floor is still flat.

paired stage boxes and a twelve-foot deep stage. Slated for demolition in 1959, the theatre was restored from 1960 to 1963. Concrete-clad vertical circulation systems were inserted inside the building and the remainder of the structure devoted to offices, plant room and what is reputed to be the only licensed theatre bar in the State of Connecticut. The seating capacity is but 375 and yet this theatre now advertises itself as "the only theatre in America entirely dedicated to the preservation of the heritage of the American musical and the development of new works to add to the repertoire". The season lasts 40 weeks each year, two revivals and a premiere played consecutively. Seven have transferred to Broadway in 13 years, including the premieres of *Man of La Mancha*, and *An-*

*nie* and a revival of *Very Good Eddie*, all three of which finally made it to London. Small wonder Goodspeed received a special Tony Award last year. But what of the show? This was *Little Johnny Jones*, the Cohan musical, with at least two all time hit numbers: *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and *Give My Regards to Broadway*. Thomas Hulce, as Johnny Jones, may not have been as accomplished a musical performer as the rest of the talented cast but certainly had the nervous physical energy of a younger Ian McKellen. This central performance gave an edge to a production which occasionally threatened to go over the top into arch pastiche. Fortunately the cast just managed to resist the temptation and gave us such delights as a 'glove number', which must be the American equivalent of 'the

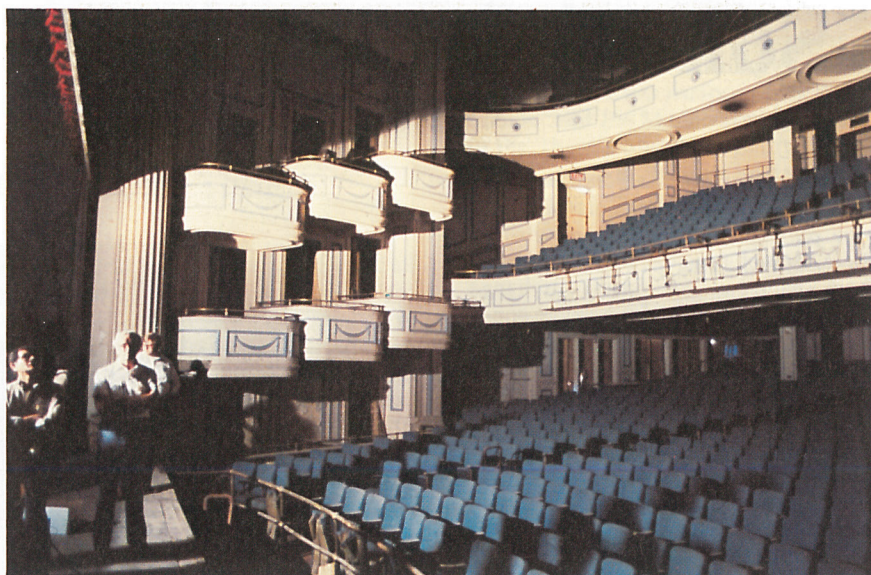


spoons', and the departure of the ocean liner from Southampton (yes, twelve-foot deep stage). The evening was one of those rare marriages of show and theatre possible in the UK only in such auditoriums as the Georgian Theatre, Richmond or Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

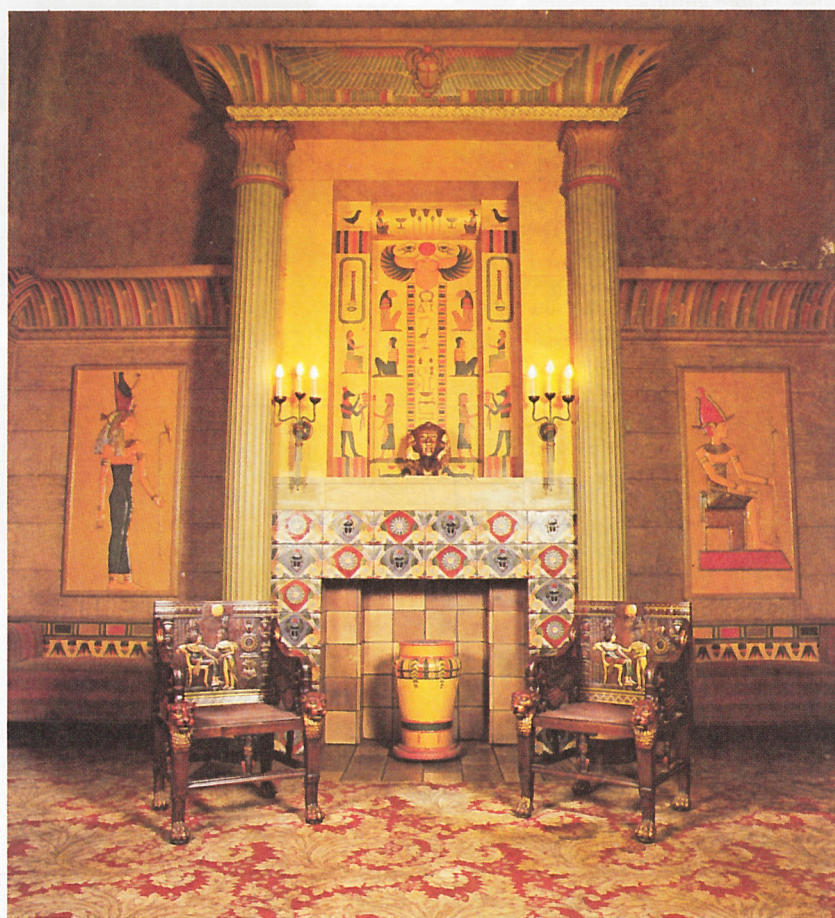
*Little Johnny Jones* has ever since been touring North America with Danny Osmond in the lead, making Goodspeed a few dollars to offset the fact that in their home base a cast of 22 and an orchestra of nearly as many face a house which holds only 375. How is it done? Theatre Director and Founder of the Company, Michael Price points to the back of the 56-page free programme: 6,500 names (two-thirds being Mr. & Mrs. which suggests 10,000 supporters) of those who have donated between \$15 and \$1,000 each *in a single year* over and above the price of the ticket. In 1981 they will all do it again (sorry, Dr. Ireland, there is an even more successful patron-puller across the pool). The whole miracle provides the lie to all those who say theatres must grow ever larger for 'sound economic reasons'. Give the right public sheer excellence and if they really enjoy it they will find a way to support you. Come on Francis Reid, it's your turn now at Bury St. Edmunds. . . .

The next morning we are invited to dress comfortably – the bus leaves at 8.45 am and we will not return to our Happy Camp until 10.30 pm when your correspondent has, finally, to sing for his supper by presenting a Late Late Show, a 100-slide presentation on restoration of British theatres. This conference turns out to be more serious than others: the delegates are not merely enthusiasts, they are also the directors and managers of historic theatres the length and breadth of America. We confer all day long – about the law for non-profit distributing companies, about unions, about marketing, about using theatres for other purposes during the day, and about "souvenirs as part of the participating process for first time theatre goers". The Keynote address is by Charles Ziff, marketing specialist of the Ford Foundation. Fascinatingly, Ford actually launched six totally different subscription pitches for the same dance season at the Lincoln Centre to establish the best marketing technique (surprise, surprise, the most successful was not the one with the biggest concession but the one with the simplest presentation).

Throughout the next three days the working sessions continued. There was much to learn from different approaches to problems that are universal from Adelaide to Aberdeen, from Bury St. Edmunds to Brooklyn: how to retain a businesslike approach to what each year becomes a less businesslike activity by reason of the live theatre's unalterable labour intensive nature. With a historic theatre this is all the more difficult, for at the same time as balancing today's budget one is reminding supporters of the theatre's once buoyant place in the community. How is one to explain either to the public or to Thatcherite/Reagan governments that show-business is still buoyant, still profitable but



*The 1914 Shubert, New Haven, today undergoing restoration.  
(Photo Iain Mackintosh)*



*In 1922 Howard Carter opened the tomb of Tutankhamen. In 1929 designer Oliver J. Vinour went a bit further in the Ladies' Room at the Fox. (Photo Fox, Atlanta)*

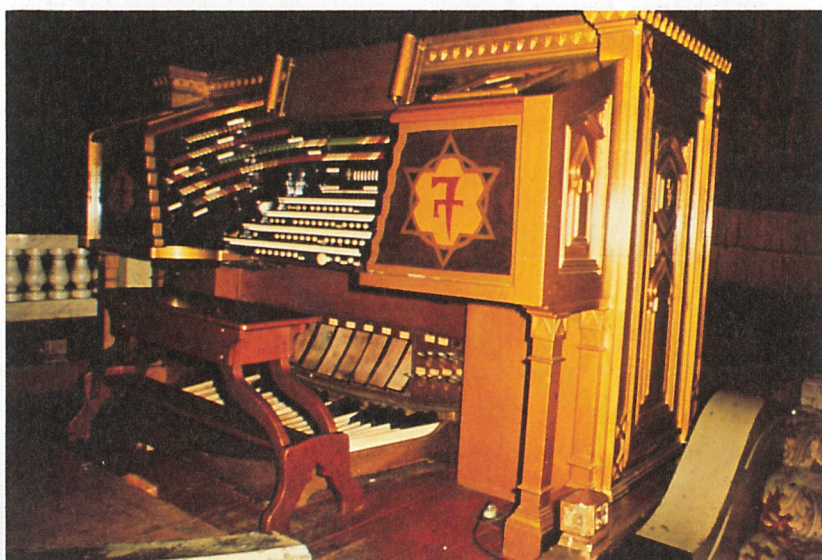
that an exclusive reliance on market forces results in either 3,000 seat playhouses, or else the destruction of live theatre by more 'cost effective' television? This part of the problem we did not grasp. Of course, the answer was in front of us at Goodspeed – that if other delegates could muster a quarter of the artistic talent which here danced to the tune of *Fiddler-on-the-Roof* Michael Price, they would need less popcorn or trade shows to underpin their own operations. This really is a cri-de-coeur from a working theatre consultant: how

often, when a tough thinking client asks for what he feels to be frills to be cut or a more cost effective method adopted for packing more in to see the show, does one think to oneself that the most important thing about either building or renovating for the arts is *not* so much how to save or make dollars but how to attract creative people who are the only ones who will bring in the money. Remove the character through economics or else get greedy with the box office take and the result is either dreariness or elephantiasis, both deterrents to the per-

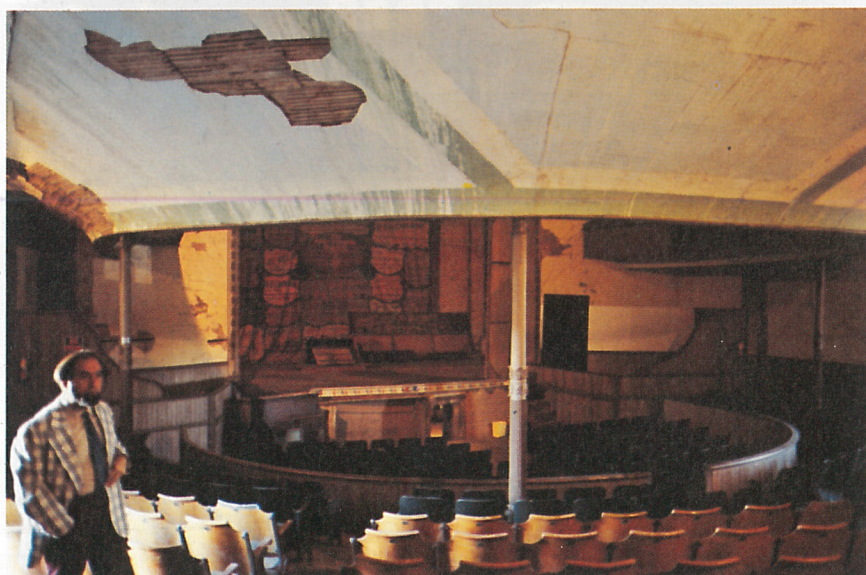




*"The open air illusion was largely secured by the depth of colour in the sky" wrote architect P. Thornton Mayre of his 1929 Fox, which he threatened would "out Baghdad Baghdad". It did. (Photo Fox, Atlanta)*



*Not Fred Bentham's latest board but the FOX console which was once billed as the world's largest organ — 3,610 pipes, 367 stops and 42 ranks. (Photo Fox, Atlanta)*



*The 1896 Woodland Opera House plus native Californian professor of drama. (Photo Iain Mackintosh)*

former without whom the dollars cannot be attracted.

The League membership is divided into those who run nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historic playhouses and opera houses like Goodspeed, generally with further to go towards re-establishing themselves, and a second group who run much later movie palaces which communities all across America are trying to re-establish as downtown centres for the performing arts. The trouble is that because both groups are referred to as 'historic theatres', there is a tendency to think that their problems are comparable. Certainly both groups desperately need shows but it is hard to see how anything other than dance can leap the gap between the 500 and the 5,000-seat theatre.

How comforting therefore to find that the first theatre to be visited on this New England theatre ramble is a straightforward 1,710-seat touring house, the Shubert, New Haven. Built in 1914, it had closed in 1976 having performed a role for Broadway straight plays and musicals comparable to the part played by the New Theatre, Oxford or the Theatre Royal, Brighton in Britain. Now everything beyond the auditorium and stage has been pulled down and a glossy new front of house is planned complete with glazed foyer, studio theatre, exhibition space, and underground dressing rooms and offices. Sadly, the leader of the present design team did not know the name of the original architect nor appeared to realise that the plasterwork must have been 'improved' in the 'twenties or 'thirties (the architect surely must have been Thomas Lamb to judge from the typical stepped box arrangement, or so it appeared to one who had had the T.H.S. Conclave 42nd street theatre treatment in New York). Incredibly the design team, advised by theatrical (sic) consultants System Design Associates, had decided to put their front-of-house stage lighting on the circle fronts — "don't worry, you will hardly notice them because we are making boxes with sympathetic plasterwork in which to hide the instruments".

With feelings of a great opportunity about to be lost through indifferent detailing we managed a quick look at Louis Kahn's incomparable new Yale Centre for British Art. Here every human scale room sets off a range of Hogarth, Gainsborough, Stubbs and Turner paintings which I would swap any day for the Elgin Marbles should one day we all get back our own. Then off on our rounds to the next two calls, Derby Conn., and Poughkeepsie N.Y.

In Derby the magnificent three-level 1889 Sterling Opera House awaits restoration. Superb cast-iron circle fronts, original seat standards and a capacity of around 1,000. Downstairs were shops plus the fire department, court-house and jail — real community centres these small town opera house buildings — but upstairs all has been silent since 1935. The name Opera House was originally a dodge in puritanical New England where 'Theatre' was irredeemably improper. In the nineteenth century there was perhaps *Faust* once a year and for the rest, melodrama, minstrel shows, Wild



West shows, vaudeville and operetta. Now the name 'Opera House' deters a small town reluctant to countenance culture.

Not so in Poughkeepsie. As our air-conditioned coach arrives we are welcomed by straw-hatted, rosette-wearing, hand-shaking members of the Bardavon 1869 Opera House Committee. Champagne, New York State variety, flows. The Chairman makes his speech of welcome. We are handed engravings of the three-level, horseshoe-tiered auditorium where played Bernhardt, Booth, Paderewski and Casals. We are then ushered into the stalls and voila! we are in a second-rate 1923 sub-Adam style cinema. The "improvements" had been thorough — only in the 25-foot deep hemp flytower can one find traces of the 1869 theatre already remodelled in 1910. The sightlines from the single circle which cut off at the knee any performer daring to venture downstage of the carpet cut betray the fact that it never was nor never will be much of a live theatre. But this Committee will raise the money. Would that the citizens of Derby had this energy for the largely unloved Sterling. The juxtaposition of these two theatres underlines the need for a nationwide policy of identifying which theatres are worth saving: Poughkeepsie would certainly be better off with a brand new theatre rather than a tarted up 1923 cinema.

Late that night, in one of those smoke-filled motel bedrooms which any British thriller reader hopes to find, the committee of the League confer, informally, with the delightfully named representative of the

National Endowment, Miss Fifi Sheridan. Should the League commission a handbook on restoration or should it go out and review the better theatres? Of all people present Gene Chesley, President of the League and compiler of the National List of Historic Theatre Buildings, knows just how difficult comparative judgements are in a country this size. As a University man he is also allowed to say that the most sinister problem is the unsympathetic imposing of 'necessary' technical equipment (viz. the circle front boxes at New Haven) on fine old theatres, often on the advice of drama department professors performing a part-time quasi-amateur consultancy service.

No solutions are reached but as the official foreign guest, I am immensely impressed at the fact that these historic theatres are run by cultivated managers who are great company and who care enough about putting new wine into old bottles to travel hundreds or thousands of miles to discuss matters of common interest. In Britain we are blasé, take our old theatres for granted and do not, for the most part, realise that we have already lost over 90% of our pre-1914 theatres. Perhaps the New World can redress our own theatre balance of care.

Now for the promises hitherto made. In the last episode (CUE No. 8) there was a tantalising glimpse of the exterior of the Fox, Atlanta together with the promise of some disclosures about the Mecca of Peachtree Street. Although restoration proceeds gradually, financed by a 25¢ levy on all tickets sold, there is little to be said

beyond trotting out a few more jaw-dropping statistics like 64,000 square feet of floor space in the auditorium, a 79-foot proscenium, a flytower 140 feet wide, a Grand Master (still working) 35 feet wide with 450 circuits and output of 530 Kilowatts (1929, remember). From 1947 to 1967 the Metropolitan Opera toured to the Fox with extra camels for *Aida*, the only show not to need masking-in. But perhaps the most revealing statistic is that in 1967 the City of Atlanta switched the Met to the less good acoustics of the new Civic Centre on the grounds that it had 600 *more* seats than the 4,000 seat Fabulous Fox. Ambition: to see a new print of *Gone With the Wind* from the centre loges of the Fox with intermission music on the mighty Moller.

Today, most movie palaces are the fallen women of street architecture, battered marquees beribboned with anachronistic neon which beckon the passerby to pornography or worse. True, some (see CUE No. 8) have been reborn as revivalist churches. But generally they reappear uneasily upon the live theatre circuit, too big for anything but the Met and rock shows. Certainly some occasionally burst into life with dance companies, or else manage to attract sufficient theatre-starved audiences to fill the house for shows that are, if one is honest, lost and hopelessly diluted in the vast spaces of a 3,000- or 4,000-seat theatre. If you build big for so-called economic reasons, then sooner or later the audience drifts away preferring the close-up of television, leaving a vast white elephant which costs a fortune to heat or air condition for the 40 weeks when it is



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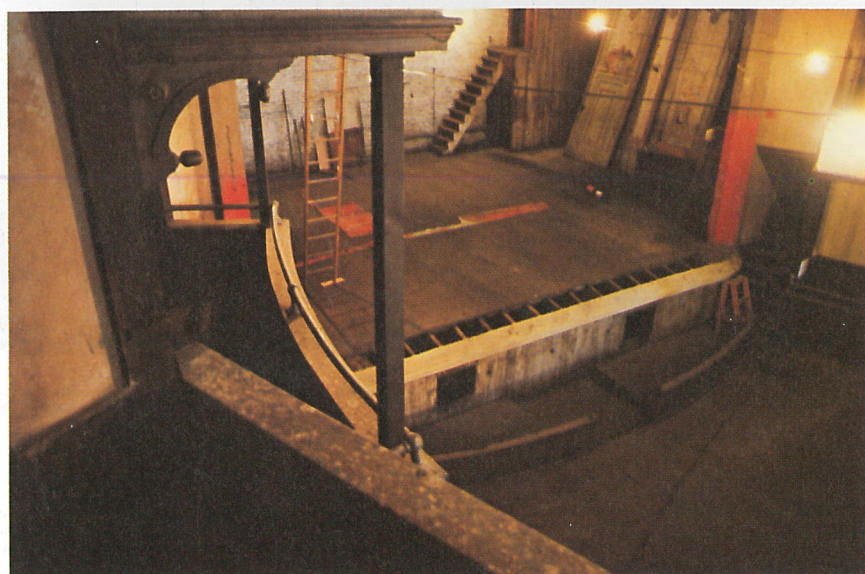




*A Groove! In situ! As late as 1896! To those who know what they are a rare, rare sighting. Scene changing system pre-dating flying – there are whole libraries on the subject. No space for further explanations. (Photo Iain Mackintosh)*



*Exterior of the Morton Building in Athens, Georgia – the theatre is on the 2nd, 3rd & 4th floors (U.S.A. counting). (Photos, Iain Mackintosh)*



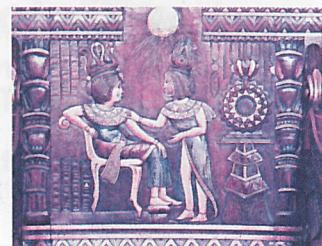
*View of the proscenium of the Morton from the side boxes.*

not sold out. (Impossible not to return to this theme.) So, to conclude this travelogue here are two theatres in North America that could, with the right leadership, become as successful as Goodspeed. Both have a two-level horseshoe auditorium, a capacity of 600 and a proscenium of under 30 feet.

First, the Woodland Opera House in Yolo County, California. Built in 1896 for legitimate theatre and variety shows, closed in 1913 after a legal dispute, this theatre now awaits restoration almost untouched. It is complete with original seating, remnants of the gas board and at least one set of working grooves *in situ* in the fly gallery. The total effect is much earlier than the date of 1896 suggests – more like a Wild West version of Bury St. Edmunds, all *Destry Rides Again* timberwork with an advertising cloth straight out of a burlesque movie.

Second, something even more incongruous: the Morton Theatre of 1910 in Athens, Georgia, reputedly the only all black theatre in all America, put up by 'Pink' Morton, illegitimate son of a white banker, who built up his own business with a four-floor theatre building complete with shops and dentists' saloons to help support the shows. Here, under the pressed-steel ceiling, played Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, Butterbeans and Susie, plus others from the Supper Club. Once again, a horseshoe balcony, here with every pillar different – some timber, some iron, suggesting later improvements or else cost-cutting in 1910. Today Athens, Georgia boasts three things – an eighteenth-century university renowned for its superb neo-classical architecture, its football team, and its enthusiasm for ever more novel ways of 'streaking' along a particular highway. It might soon add a unique theatre if architect W. Lane Green and arts officer Jill Reade get their way.

*The Era* of 12th October 1901 reported: "Mr. Frank Matcham, the well-known theatrical architect, has returned from his trip through America. In his five weeks' absence from London he has visited New York, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Philadelphia and other towns, and has seen nearly all the principal theatres. His opinion is that there is little to learn from our American cousins in the matter of design and construction of places of amusement, and that certain means of exit employed in the American buildings would certainly not meet with the approval of our London County Council." Eighty years later this theatric tourist would not gainsay the last observation but would suggest we now have quite a lot to learn from our American cousins, especially in caring for old theatres. For a start, we might create an association with similar objectives to either the Theatre Historical Society or the League of Historic American Theatres.





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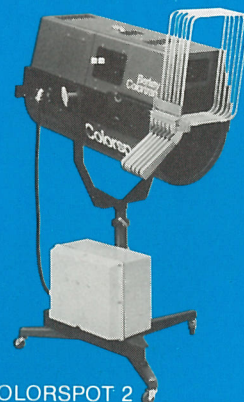
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# PRODUCT NEWS

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## Joe Thornley joins Strand

Joe Thornley brings 20 years' experience in television and theatre equipment to his new



appointment to the marketing department at Brentford. First as development and design engineer, then development manager for Mole Richardson he was appointed marketing manager at the takeover by Berkey Colortran. His new responsibilities will include lighting and associated stage and studio equipment.

## Binders for CUE

Handsome stiff-cover binders to hold the first year's issue of CUE will shortly become available. Each binder holds 8 copies and costs £4.00 including VAT, postage and packing.

A limited number of back copies of CUE are also available at £1.25 each for anyone missing some of the early numbers and wanting to complete their set of CUEs.

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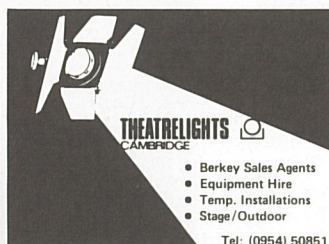
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# Between Cues

The thoughts of  
Walter Plinge

## Christmas by design

Christmas comes but once a year and the last one was some months ago. And so it is perhaps rather late to urge readers to hasten along to *Charles Spencer's Two Centuries of Christmas Entertainment* in an elegant, if difficult to locate, basement gallery at the old end of Bond Street. But it was the sort of exhibition that we need more often, full of goodies that could well have formed a Christmas present for my own walls, had I but been in possession of an allocation of what is fashionably called disposable income. Frankly I found the display rather more enjoyable and stimulating than the SBTD 1979 at Riverside. No, a love of old rather than contemporary design is *not* the reason. It is just that the Spencer Collection selected more from the lighter and lyrical divisions of the arts and entertainment world – *panto, revue, dance and musical stages*. And, as befitted a Christmas exhibition, the designs were by painters rather than constructionists.

## Underwater Panto

And still remembering Christmas recently past – and only just recently past, because pantomime carries the Christmas season well beyond twelfth night – I found myself dodging sharks and fighting off all manner of creatures of the deep, with the help of a young lady called Robinson Crusoe, in the underwater depths of Norwich Theatre Royal. (No, Dick Condon has not resorted to the old trick of converting the stalls into a water tank: he is reported to be saving that for Sinbad, provided that he can find a way of quick freezing the water for Sunday concerts). The trick was a more recent one, brought even more up-to-date: *3D Film* but without the risk of superimposing images from two hopefully synchronised projectors. Both images are carried on the same film and a clever prism/lens system does the superimposition. I really did dodge the fish coming at me – and I dodged physically, not just mentally. I was so scared that I nearly discarded my magic polaroid specs to escape.

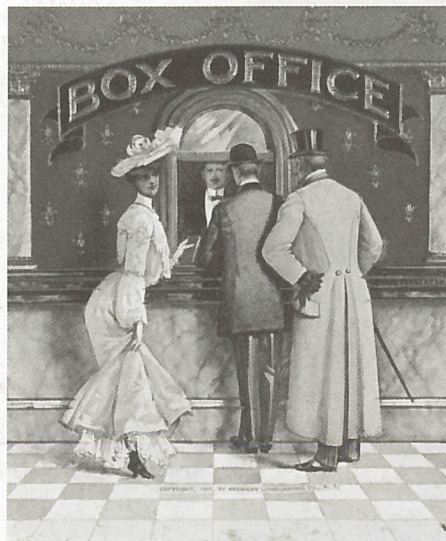
## Phipps Blues

Two or three years ago I was in literary limbo. I was a back pager without an alias. My tabs had fallen and I was standing by for a cue. In this state of between and betwixt I had nowhere to record my horror at what had happened to my Lyceum. Well Phipps's Royal Lyceum actually. The one where, throughout my formative years, I

had a Saturday night permanent booking in a gallery seat now occupied by a profile spot. Then it was a cream and gold Lyceum with green plush and a painted act drop. Now the plush is red, the cream has become a mediaeval shade of blue, and a team of narrow-boat decorators have been encouraged to get primitive wherever they could find a clear surface. It is all horrible, quite hideously horrible, and I cannot accept the defence of the worthy Edinburgh citizen who assured me that theatres require some degree of honest vulgarity. Yes, I admit the necessity of honest vulgarity, but the honesty must surely stem from an architectural statement of the kind that Matcham mastered. Phipps is elegant and the Edinburgh theatrics really must take a trip on the Glasgow train to learn from that city's Theatre Royal how to paint their Edinburgh Phipps gem.

## Interface at the window

I am all for box-office computerisation and I have found my own seat buying from computerised box-offices to be pleasantly painless. Presumably there will continue to be a human face at the box-office window as an interface between machine and would-be audience – or will we buy all types of tickets including theatre seats by



interrogating our home television screens? The bit that I find difficult to swallow is the assertion that the computer can be programmed to offer the best available seat. When I serve at a box-office window, each customer seems to have a different idea of what constitutes the best available seat. So I have a hunch that the box-office clerk (or to

use the happier American *treasurer*) will remain. And I hope that architects will attempt an elegant point of sale.

## Unnatural pancakes

I went to see a naturalistic contemporary play in a largish proscenium house (shortening skirts – because the play was written a dozen years ago – does not, I think, a period production make). Now attending naturalistic contemporary plays in largish proscenium houses is not something that I do very often. I prefer my naturalism on the telly with the intimacy of its interiors, the reality of its exteriors, and the ease with which it explores both. And the chairs at home are more comfortable and I can be refreshed as I watch. But only for naturalistic contemporary plays: for stylish drama or any kind of music theatre, put me in the same performance space as the actors. But, contrary to my usual practice, I have been to a large theatre to see a naturalistic play in a box set framed by a proscenium arch – and I found many of the lines to be rather fine, and witty too. What of the technology? Well, the lighting was *on – very on*. Towards the end some of it was checked down and the relief was lovely. But when it was harsh, the plastered pancake faces of the male actors were so unreal as to constitute an alienation effect. Why did the director not take notice and correct? (He had a reference point in a debauched inadequately shaved unpainted actor.) A lighting designer would certainly have noticed and advised corrective action. There was no lighting design credit in the programme.

## Don Palladio

The film of my year is Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni*. Which Mozart opera do I prefer? Whichever one I am watching. Each Mozart opera is so perfect that in performance – whatever one may think of the performer's individual inadequacies or the production team's misunderstandings – it is easy to believe that the work being experienced is without equal. A great work can be performed in many different styles: the mark of a successful production is to sustain credibility for the duration of the performance. Thinking now about *Don Giovanni*, I can recall directors who got closer than Losey to the core of the work. But while watching this film I was hooked by the credibility of Losey's approach. His locations are completely believable – I never think of this opera as happening in Spain. Surely *Don Giovanni*, like the Beaumarchais operas, was dumped in Spain for eighteenth-century political convenience on the 'of course, it couldn't happen here' principle. I have always personally located *Don Giovanni* in Prague but will now happily believe that it should happen in Palladio's Vicenza. The film is beautifully lit. True operatic lighting, creating total musically motivated atmosphere rather than illuminating every facial wart.