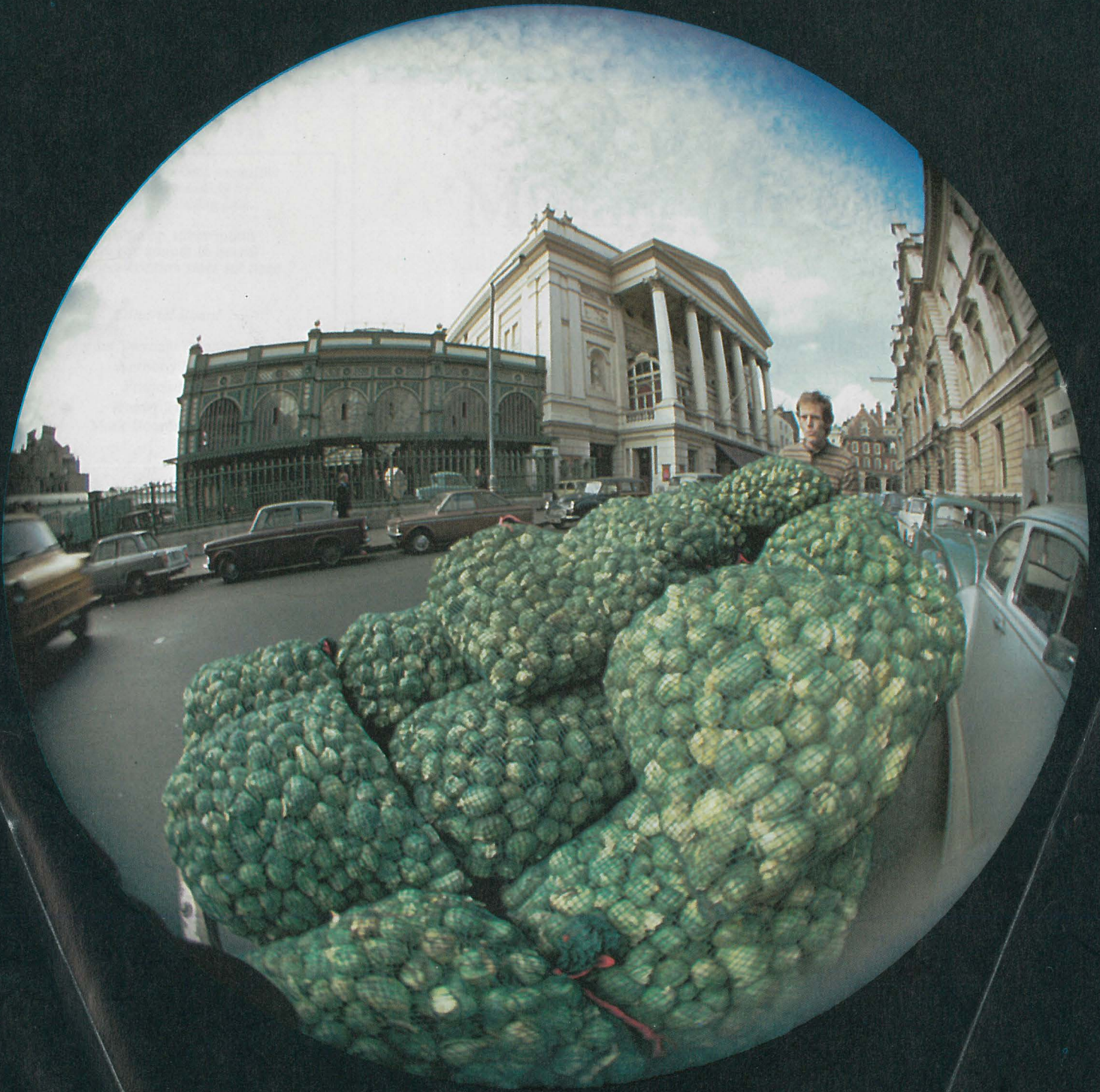


CUE

Technical Theatre Review



July-August 1981 £1.25

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CUE

Technical Theatre Review

12

July–August 1981

Our cover picture this time is an intriguing photographic study by Reg Wilson. In it he successfully captures the idea of a departing market watched by the Opera House from what appears a new and solitary eminence. Anthony McCall reports on the Opera House extensions now nearing completion.

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Missing our Cues?

It seems a pity to allow the Royal Wedding to disappear in a fizzle of fireworks and a breaking of souvenir mugs.

Apart from something that Clive James appears to have done for his friends, and what may be dramatised later from the writing of the well-known Sylvie Krin, very few efforts were made in the theatrical world to commemorate the recent nuptials. Not even as far as we are aware, a gala performance of 'Comus'. You'd have thought some mute, inglorious Milton could have made himself a bob or two out of all the parallels and classical cross-references that could have thrown up. With HRH symbolised as Charles Wain, of course (the seven bright stars of The Plough), and his bride as the 'fair moon' (or Diana of the Evasions, as the reporters could have dubbed her).

At least, to honour the occasion, we could have expected, we think, the launching of some new theatrical companies. 'The Prince's Players', for instance. That rings the appropriate bell for something to happen down on revitalised Bankside. Or what about some new appointments made in a Wedding Honours List? Was this not the time to create anew the lost offices of Master of the Revels (Lord Grade), or Master of the Queen's Musak (Harry Rabinovitz), or Prince's Prologue (Anthony Holden), or Grand Dame of Pantomime (Barbara Cartland)?

The trouble with the theatre today, which was certainly not true in the first Elizabethan age, is that it has become too timid to be topical. Either every production costs too much for anything to run for less than a decade or everything you want to see happens once only at a private performance for charity.

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Everything in The Garden will be lovely

A special report
on the Royal Opera House Extension
by ANTHONY McCALL

Apart from hitting the headlines this summer over the threatened withdrawal of funds by the new Labour GLC, which was not a crisis of its own choosing, the Royal Opera House has chosen a deliberately low profile over the subject of its extensions. However, Cue was granted an interview with Robin Dartington, the development project manager, to keep readers abreast of progress before the official announcements are made nearer the time of opening.

Phase One is due for completion in February 1982, and will serve primarily to meet artists' needs. In style it matches the original 1850s Barry exterior of the main house, while the interior (on seven floors) will be modern. Whether there will be two more phases, as first envisaged, remains to be seen. Fund-raising has proved such an uphill struggle that the idea of an overall development scheme, split into separate phases, has had to be deferred in the interest of expediency. A more mundane approach is being looked at, alas, probably more expensive in the long run, which looks no further ahead than the next building stage. 'Small is practical' thus becomes the order of the day, however much this limits the options, and so it will probably remain, unless a fairy godmother crawls out from under one of the few commercial or charitable stones left unturned in this country, with a large cheque in her hand. But the prospect, even for our most prestigious of theatres, seems remote.

Solving the various backstage problems, and even the front of house needs, in order of priority, was, and remains, an invidious task. Nevertheless, artists came out top of the list and will now be able to enjoy fairly modest comfort, by international standards, but at least not the cramped and antiquated conditions of the Victorian building, which put one in mind less of stardom and glamour than of an Outward Bound course. The existing rooms are being refurbished for ballet, and opera will be housed entirely in the new extension, with wardrobe, rehearsal rooms and chorus room all under one roof. So there will be separate quarters for each company. 'By and large' explains Dartington, 'the old objectives are not totally lost. But it must be stressed because it is simply not understood, that this first phase is only a step forward. It will do nothing for the stage, nor make the technical operation of the theatre more ambitious — as yet.

'The next part was expected, for instance, to provide for additional artists' facilities, like canteen, music studios, ballet studios and the like. But it hasn't got off the ground, and I think it has now missed



The Royal Opera House extensions follow the classical elevations of the original building.

its chance. The stage will now probably be seen as the major priority, and what resources there are, should go on that.'

He summed up the planner's dilemma nicely in the face of continual financial pressures. 'I used to think in terms of stage one, two and three, but it doesn't honestly happen like that. Hereafter it might be stage two a, b, c, d and e. It is what we call in management terms, an over-constrained problem. In other words, there is no solution which matches all the constraints. There is no way of proceeding, which does not have disadvantages.

'And of course', he added, 'in the arts world, it is difficult to get people to accept disadvantages. Therefore it is necessarily, a fraught development programme.'

Why especially in the arts world? A remark like that can't be let by without at least some discreet clarification. 'Because they're there not to compromise, but to do their best' Dartington feels. 'The whole point of art is to aspire to the best, not just to turn something out because they've got to get it out by Friday.'

The original plans drawn up in December 1977 were for 98,000 sq ft, with planning permission for only 55,000 sq ft. Cost went way over as well, to £9.3 million, at 1978 prices. The interior was 'far too busy', says Dartington, and the whole project had to be drastically cut back. 'The target was over-reached in three ways: in area, in cost and in the extent of the allowable disturbance'. The projected rear stage (on the site of the

present dressing rooms) was dropped for reasons of economy and it was decided to refurbish existing dressing rooms instead of locating them all in the new building.

The new extension is a concrete frame building on deep pile foundations, whereas the Barry house, which it copies exactly, was built of brick on very shallow foundations, which you can't build today because it would be far too labour intensive. Planning permission stipulated an exact copy of the Barry style, which 'is not as much as twice the cost, but certainly more' says Dartington. John Mowlem are acting as management contractors, working on a fee, rather than a profit from the building. Under their wing is a string of some 21 sub-contractors. Architects, the GMW Partnership, who did the Commercial Union and P & O buildings in the City, specialise in very well worked out and finished jobs, most of them large, and many abroad. They were chosen by the Royal Opera House back in 1963, when the market move was mooted and they were acting for the Market Authority.

An interesting insight into the financing of a project this size is the problem that faced Sir John Tooley and his colleagues in 1977, after they'd decided to opt for a reduced phase one building, and to leave various features for incorporation in later plans. The appeal had been launched in October, and by December, the money raised was losing value while it sat in the bank and inflation merrily whittled it down and

down. Six months further hard work brought fresh plans for an amended building, at a cost of £7.8 million, all in. But again, on a sum of that size, every week that building work was delayed added some £30,000 to the cost, just to keep up with inflation. 'So with the time-clock running, the thing was put together fairly rapidly' recalls Dartington, 'and started in July 1978. That's when the concept was agreed for this exact amount of accommodation and so forth. Budgets were set for all aspects of the work; and those budgets have been juggled since. But now, apart from a further increase in inflation, we are very close indeed, within a few per cent, of the original budget'.

As for the building schedule, it is about three weeks late, or seems likely to be by February. Which, on a four-year project, is not bad, as he points out. 'As far as we can tell so far, we have not compromised any major aim, so it's not coming through too badly'.

Dartington's function is a trifle complex. He is an employee, to put it simply, of the National Building Agency, who were asked by the Covent Garden management to supply a management consultant as a specialist to the project, to act on their behalf. In addition, he has a colleague, employed by the ROH, who works alongside him as an interface between artists and him, to ensure their practical considerations are constantly taken into account.

How did the mixture of personalities, logistics of the operation and sheer pressure of work, make the day-to-day running of the project, I wondered? 'I can't be everywhere at once' he replies good-humouredly, 'but I rove around making sure people know what they're meant to be doing, and that they are doing it'. He is a slim, youngish-looking professional man, whose manner, one imagines, manages to combine efficiency with diplomacy, with most people he comes across. He displayed patience and an orderly mind as he ran through the development programme; no grand airs, but an awareness of the several clashes of interest between artists, architects and planners, and cash limitations. 'I think I ought to say that the architects' advice is fairly dominant on the aesthetics of the overall conception' he explains. 'But on internal planning, the ROH is acting as a very strict, and informed client. There is a wealth of experience among the staff, on a scale unmatched almost anywhere else. My, or indeed our theatrical understanding, he says motioning to the builders outside the window, is thus bound to be not only inadequate, but even incorrect sometimes. So a tremendous amount of consultation goes on with its users - the management, and artists. But at least we're going to fail having tried' he laughs.

But to return to the artists' extension, there were some intriguing architectural headaches to cure. As Dartington put it dryly, 'You get all sorts of funny things happening in classical buildings - it's often all a big botch-up'. Owing to the different uses of the old and new buildings, which share an identical exterior, the rooms inside the new have different ceiling and floor levels.



*Without unduly altering the scale, windows are slightly enlarged to improve the light in the modern interior.
(photos Richard Belsham)*

For example, to give more light in the ballet rehearsal studios the window sizes were upped slightly, without unduly changing the scale on the exterior. Also, in modern buildings, there are far more services, like heating, ventilation and so forth, so the spaces are not, in the main, grand at all in the extension, but rather, like a continuation of the old, with trunking and wiring visible in the corridors. 'Because it had to be a classical building, we couldn't add more bits to it when the money became available' says Dartington, 'as you would with a factory. The exterior had to be finished completely in phase one. So with a shortage of money, a gap was left internally between the old and new buildings, to become a light well, instead of being filled from the start'.

After this extension is completed, what other choices will compete with stage improvements, for the next phase? Dartington: 'Apart from the efficiency of the stage operation, the prospect of a small second theatre has always been a possibility, or even a second large one. It could conceivably be connected with the video operation they have set up, to film live performances for television and eventually for sale across the world. Video may transform the Royal Opera House in time, who knows. That option is unlikely, though.

'Storage would probably be improved as part of the technical phase, somewhere under the stage. A new get-in would be needed as well. It's always been visualised from James Street, but now that that has been made into a cul-de-sac, with pedestrians walking everywhere, one wonders if giant pantechinons won't become something of a hazard. Bow Street,

which will remain a thoroughfare, could be a freer place in which to operate. That would present tremendous problems, but I don't see any area which doesn't. Get-ins are now from the car park to the south of the main building, and already parking is banned whenever scenery is being delivered. It goes up from the ground level to stage level by hoist; but although the hoist is too small for its requirements, it is all that can fit into the masonry of the present building. So there are plenty of hurdles to clear on that side of things, too.'

Dartington outlined front of house improvements, at some stage, which is rarely mentioned, being low on the list of priorities. 'Hitched on to one of these phases, will be much better public facilities. Better places to get a drink, maybe a bite to eat, or buy books, which are obviously very crushed at the moment. The higher you go in the house, the worse it is. A lot of people spend quite a lot of money, in absolute terms, even for the cheaper seats, and the facilities are pretty primitive, purely for enjoyment.'

The next phases, wherever they may sprout from, will not copy the Barry style again, it seems. As the building moves further away from the main house, style will be taken rather, from the Covent Garden Piazza, like the colonnaded Bedford Chambers. Some of the architectural exercises carried out in the past already look dated: there will be much less glass, since energy costs have soared. As each stage takes shape though, and the buildings creep towards the Piazza, the area will have a theatrical Acropolis as its new focus capable of transforming the neighbourhood.

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Shopping at Sainsbury's

With the chilling prospect of next year's Arts Council grant falling drastically in real terms (according to leaks on Fleet Street), and with contingency plans accordingly being drawn up by grant-aided companies all over the country, it is inspired timing to announce a mammoth £500,000 injection of cash into arts sponsorship by a newcomer to the field, Sainsbury's. (An estimated £5 million is contributed annually to the arts by commercial sponsors).

Is this the biggest single sponsor to date? Such statistics are difficult to compute in precise terms. But here's a quick comparison. Du Maurier's wholesale sponsorship of the Philharmonic Orchestra, whose impact has been enormous and whose benefits are measurable, is probably the most impressive other single sponsor recently. A few prominent examples would be, Gulf Oil's £250,000 to Scottish National Orchestra (over seven years) for recordings and the current series of concerts; General Accident's estimated £250,000, also to the SNO, for a year's educational touring to 21 towns, plus recordings and educational materials and competition prizes; Harvey's £120,000 towards music and fine arts, not forgetting their Leeds Piano Competition sponsorship; and newcomers, Clark's shoes, whose £150,000 (over three years) has transformed the fortunes of playwright David Wood's new company, Whirligig, for children.

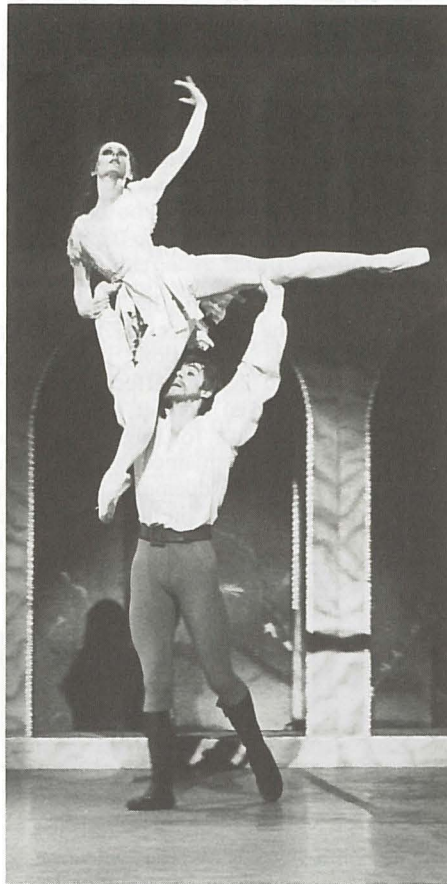
In Sainsbury's case, the money will support Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet (pictured), whom they have supported ad hoc in the past, and also Kent Opera and Polka Children's Theatre.

The Sainsbury supermarket chain, which is now pushing for the number one position as Britain's largest food store (Tesco has headed the league for years), has long been a patron of the arts, at least through the Sainsbury family's private wealth. But for them, this marks a new departure: a serious commitment to support the entire spectrum of artistic endeavour, with discussions now underway about support for classical music and the visual arts. The emphasis is not on upmarket activities, but rather a family image.

Chairman, Sir John Sainsbury said: 'We believe we should develop a planned programme of sponsorship distinct from our charitable donations - for two reasons.

'Firstly, because it is clear that well-directed and imaginative sponsorship can bring prestige and credit to the company, and in purely material terms can be fully justified as 'good business'. Secondly, by so doing we are making a contribution, however modest, to the quality of life of those around us. We feel that sponsorship from successful businesses can be a valuable additional source of funds for the arts'.

Noble sentiments. But it is the size of their undertaking which will echo round the



Sadlers Wells Royal Ballet
The Taming of the Shrew
Katharina (Siobham Stanley)
Petruchio (David Ashmole)
(photo Leslie E. Spatt)

business community, we hope, and do more than speeches, theories, or articles ever achieve, to accelerate the growth of arts sponsorship. Sainsbury's seem to be as good as their word. Former deputy chairman and brother to Sir John, Simon Sainsbury, is chairing a special Sainsbury's

Arts Sponsorship Committee, to address himself to the problem of how to achieve maximum benefit and coverage from every pound spent, from the company's point of view - and, indirectly, the public. His concern, of course, will focus on attracting large numbers of people, not funding the *avant garde*, but no matter. It releases another £500,000 of Arts Council cash for supporting innovative work. Let us hope this pattern develops, as the word gets round. Nor should we forget the part played by Bill Kallaway's team, as the major arts sponsorship consultancy on the scene, in selling their services daily to industry. (Kallaway Ltd, 2 Portland Road, Holland Park, London W11 4LA. Tel: 01-221 7883).

Lady into Fox

Maria Björnson is rapidly becoming the designer whose name one looks for as a sort of guarantee of visual pleasure in a production. But there is, of course, much more to her sets and costumes than their pretty faces. She seems to have that happy knack of imposing a consistent *style* on a whole production that bridges the gap - it is sometimes a chasm - between the realities and the fantasies that every audience has to be made to cross, if it is not to fidget and find itself more knowing than the authors and the actors. We noticed this first in her work on the cycle of Janacek operas which the Welsh National Opera and Scottish Opera have been lovingly co-producing and touring with. She did the designing for 'Jenufa', 'The Makropoulos Case', and, most intelligently and imaginatively of all we think, for 'The Cunning Little Vixen', which requires the sort of interaction of human beings and animals on stage at the same time that has defeated designers as ingenious as Walt Disney. For 'Vixen', which is produced by David Pountney, and

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scrupulously lit by Nick Shelton, she rejects the easy option of people pretending to be animals and adopts the subtler one of animals pretending to be people – and people in Moravia in the twenties at that. Thus Helen Field, who sings the role of the Vixen, wears a shifty, slithery flapper style dress circa 1925, and a long orange boa marvellously suggest her foxy brush; the Badger (sung by Julian Moyle) becomes more badger than badger by simply being dressed in voluminous leather motoring coat and a fur hat of the Stutz Bearcat era: the splendidly silly Hens fuss domestically in white Mother Hubbards over bright red socks and under bright red bobble-hats. There is no cartooning; what we get and believe in is the very *essence* of the animals presented. All of which might be enough to identify a winning style, but, now, Maria Bjørnson turns up again as designer for the Royal Shakespeare Company's new 'Midsummer Night's Dream' which Ron Daniels has produced at Stratford, and this time she is doing something quite different. With nice lighting by Chris Ellis, and with Ali Bongo (the programme says) as 'Consultant on Magic', she achieves another willing suspension of disbelief for the lovely mélange of courtly love, fairy frolics and coarse acting by the rude mechanicals that Shakespeare's poetry elegantly brings off – and so many stagings have fallen flat over. This time she uses the style of a Pollocks Theatre or a Victorian dolls house flying in set-pieces in genuine cardboard, dressing the girls à la Kate Greenaway, her mechanicals as proper 19th century tradesmen, and 'realising' the fairies as wax-faced articulated rod-puppets (Barry Smith is the puppet-master) hand held by their black-clad 'voices over'. You *watch* enthralled . . . and, while it's all happening, you can't remember any other production you've seen . . .

What CUE, in our questing role of Peter

Quince (As Joiner, Stage Manager, and as The Epilogue we never get to hear) would like to ask is how Maria Bjørnson gets it all together so wittily, so well, and so often.

Crying 'Wolf'

Worried by a note in the programme: 'Members of the audience are advised to take appropriate precautions if they are sensitive to rapid lighting effects' we went and talked to Steven Pimlott *before* going to see 'Der Freischütz' for English National Opera North. He explained some of the horns of some of the dilemmas a producer is confronted with if, in all good conscience, he wishes to stay faithful to the historic importance and the traditional text



The ENON's Der Freischütz production.
Conductor: Clive Timms, Producer: Steven Pimlott, Designer: John Fraser.
(photo Simon Warner)

of this seminal Romantic opera, which was already quite set in its ways when it was first performed in England in 1824. 'Part of the trouble,' he says 'is that Friederich Kind did his libretto in nine days, and Weber took three years over the music – they could hardly be said to have really got together over it. What we have, of course, is some marvellous music built round a stern but fair morality play . . . and some of the dottiest dialogue and stage directions one is ever asked to cope with'. These last seem to have caused trouble as early as the *first* dress rehearsal in 1821. The gigantic owl(sic), which is one of the succession of things that have to go bump in the Wolf's Glen, met with an accident that disabled one of its wings and simply *drooped* across the stage, the oil lamps intended to convey its threatening eyes looking more like drunken street lamps. The fireworks for the Fiery Carriage didn't go off, and the Fiery Wheel that has to cross the stage was revealed simply as a rather old cartwheel bumping through. Not that these small mishaps – in Victorian times quite a few performances seem to have ended in the arrival of the fire-brigade – appear to have detracted one whit from our forebears' fascination and morbid satisfaction in the romantic goings-on. 'The trouble nowadays', Steven Pimlott says 'is that British audiences are rather cynical about the Sturm und Drang bit . . . and it doesn't help that singers *hate* dialogue. Then, if you take the stage directions too literally, and try to convey wild boars and fiery wheels realistically, all you get is the wrong *kind* of laughter in all the wrong places. What I've tried to do – to produce the authentic frissons is to visualise a good Hammer Films version, with overtones, I think, of good Dennis Wheatley. But what I'd really like to do with 'Freischütz' if I were starting from scratch with no costs barred (this production was designed to tour, and we met it on the too wide and too shallow stage of the New Theatre in Oxford: CUE) would be to work much more with *lighting* within darkness for the effects and the general atmosphere'.

In the event we see what Steven Pimlott means. The 'apparitions' are ingeniously contrived by the use of a mixture of puppetry (Ariane Gastambide designed them, John Casson worked them) and lighting effects (Mark Henderson). But since, in succession, we have to identify, as invoked by Samiel the Black Huntsman, that gigantic owl flapping, the ghost of someone's mother gibbering, a wild boar boring through, some fiery wheels whirling, a Wild Hunt etc etc there tends to be the same 'Whatever *next?*' reaction occasioned by the phenomena conjured up for Macbeth by the black and midnight hags (there, too, all one's sympathies go out to the producer for the ultimate stage direction: 'Enter a show of eight kings, the last with a glass in his hand').

If we are to have more 'magic' on the stage – and the omens are good, and the machinery is ready – perhaps this is CUE's cue to plead once more that Lighting Designers and Directors are called on for their ideas *before* a style of production is decided on, rather than after it has been.

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Self Help Seagull

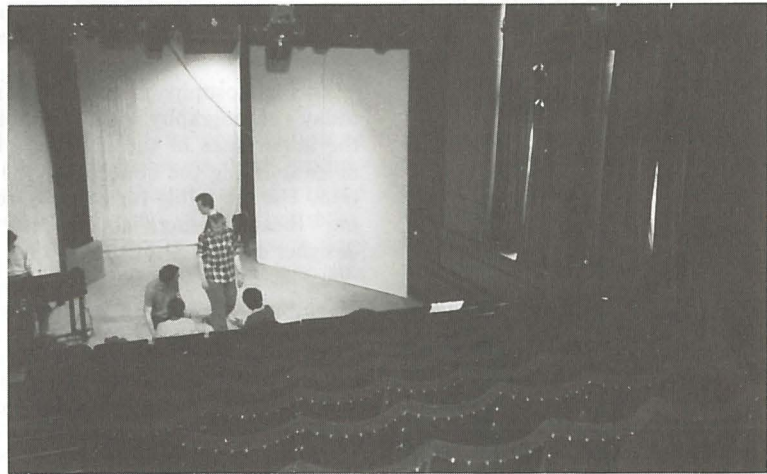
There are not many new theatres opening in Britain this year. And not many foundation stones being laid either. Nor is there much funding available for plushy conversions. £30,000 is not what it was, and by the time these words are printed it will be even less. But £30,000 is the cost of a new theatre that opened this spring. It is called the *Seagull Theatre* because it is in Lowestoft.

A few miles up the coast in Great Yarmouth, the seaside spectaculars continue to give television stars their annual live exposure in a format that will soon become the victim of its integral self-destruct production approach. In smaller subtler Lowestoft, apart from a cosy remnant of an earlier seaside style at the curiously named *Sparrow's Nest* theatre, there is a newish harbour-side pavilion always apparently searching for an entertainment idea, and a couple of fly towers playing bingo. There is a Georgian fragment and, until quite recently, a car park wall carried the unmistakable imprint of an Edwardian gallery stair. So although there is a theatre tradition in Lowestoft, the town has been without a playhouse since the folding of weekly rep at the Theatre Royal a couple of decades ago.

The *Seagull* has restored drama to Lowestoft and, in the words of co-director Patrick Redsell *will offer not only events at Lowestoft but a major programme of activities in the schools, towns, and villages of the area, drawing together the skills of groups of local amateurs who will work closely with the small team of part-time staff.* Patrick Redsell is Drama Adviser to Suffolk County Council and the *Seagull* has been created within Education Department premises. It is a conversion of an 1895 Board School – a very typical example of Victorian educational architecture. The *Seagull* functions as a community theatre.

For amateur drama it not only provides a home but acts as a catalyst. It mixes these amateur productions on a 50:50 basis with professional drama drawn from the best of the small alternative theatre companies on the small scale touring grid.

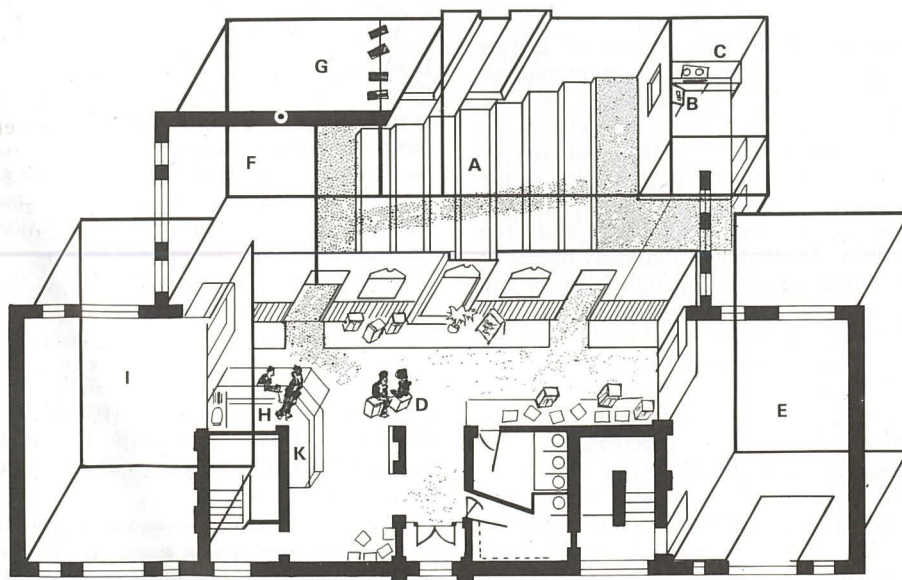
The theatre has been formed from a room 15ft high, 21ft wide, and 60ft long. The stage occupies 24ft of this depth and is at floor level. The stepped auditorium has 108 seats in 12 rows of alternative nines and tens to allow staggering for sightlines. Lighting bars are positioned to give good angles and there is a surprisingly spacious lighting and sound control room at the rear



of the auditorium. The theatre opened with a couple of 18-way 2-preset boards but will shortly get a 48-way, 3-preset, 3-group dipless x fade Eltec desk. The lighting instruments are CCT Minuettes (20 fresnels and 8 profiles) plus 8 Furse JFR. It is good to see, particularly in an education authority building, 137s relegated to just about the only job that they were ever really fit for: houselights.

The foyer is theatrically red and has a huge mirror facing the doors to give a simple but dramatic illusion of space. There is an exhibition area and essentials like box-office and bar. On receipt of a small donation, the Seagull logo will not only fly, but pelt the punters with polo mints. Cupboards in the exhibition area rather surprisingly house the dimmer packs giving a conveniently accessible patch.

One large ex-classroom presently serves as dressing room, green-room etc. It is hoped that funds will eventually become available to divide it both horizontally and vertically.



- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| A) 100 seat theatre | E) Workshop | I) Dressing Room/Green Room |
| B) Lighting Control | F) Stage cloth | K) Box office |
| C) Sound Equipment | G) Lighting Grid | |
| D) Foyer | H) Bar | |

The rambling nature of the old school building has enabled accommodation to be found for ancillary activities such as administration, lighting and costume hire, sound studio etc. And there is a drama studio the same size as the main theatre. Indeed there has been a drama centre for some years prior to the conversion of the *Seagull Theatre* itself and so the building is already established as a centre of theatrical expectation.

The *Seagull* cost £30,000 and was funded in the following way:

Suffolk County Council Education Department	30%
Business Sponsorship	25%
Waveney District Council Lottery Fund	20%
The Larter Group	15%
Gifts, Grants & Individual Contributions	10%

Donations included a fire escape made by a local shipbuilders and bar furniture made by local high school pupils. Wherever possible local firms were used – not just builders but Norfolk theatre technology specialist firms like *Eltec* and *Ancient Lights* who have now become East Anglian specialists in the renovation of *Ancient Seats*. Painting was by a Manpower Services Commission Youth Opportunities Scheme. And there was a lot of Do-it-Yourself by a lot of enthusiastic volunteers.

It takes more than a recession to stop anyone determined enough to build a theatre.

FRANCIS REID

REIDing SHELF

From time to time magazines like the late *Theatre Quarterly* carry 'production log' type accounts of a play's day-by-day gestation in the rehearsal room. These observations tend to concentrate on the play's text and interpretation. They are written by a fly on the rehearsal room wall. Now such a fly has been given unrestricted access to the walls of every department, workshop, office, room of the National Theatre – including the corridors of power which we learn are situated on *the fourth floor*, an area which the fly came to regard with a sinister respect.

The privileged fly on the N.T. walls is called Jim Hiley and his qualifications are that he 'studied Drama and English at the University of Birmingham and has since been involved in all aspects of theatre and community arts. He has been an actor in repertory and television, and has performed, written and directed in fringe and children's theatre'. His writing pedigree includes *Time Out*, *Radio Times*, *Observer*, *Guardian*, and *Plays & Players*. On the evidence of his book, these are exemplary qualifications. Mr. Hiley has done a good job and no single CUE reader can fail to be rivetted by a book which is surely destined to become an obligatory case-study for all theatre students – uniting actors, directors, designers, technicians, administrators, critics and audience in an examination of the interplay of their various roles in bringing to life the playwright's otherwise still-born concept.

Jim Hiley's **THEATRE AT WORK**. The story of the National Theatre's production of Brecht's 'Galileo' follows progress through the N.T.'s 22-week cycle for a new production in the Olivier Theatre:

- Week 22 play decided on
- Week 20 director, designer and lighting designer chosen
- Week 16 outline design for set and costumes proposed
- The National's staff would then have a fortnight to discuss with designer and director the likely cost of what had been put forward, and to work out amongst themselves how the new show would fit in practically with others in the repertoire – how easy storage and change-overs would be, for example.
- Week 14 final design arrived at; by now a model of the set would be built and budgets agreed on.
- Week 12 drawings of the set with measurements submitted by designer; from these, much more detailed drawings of each component job would be made for the benefit of the theatre's workshops.
- Week 10 making of set, props and costumes commences
- Weeks 2 and 1 the now completed set installed in the rehearsal room for the use of actors and director.
- Week 0 Production Week

In *Theatre at Work* Jim Hiley guides us through this production cycle, the detail increasing as the pressure intensifies during the later weeks of the countdown.

The core of the Galileo team were Howard Brenton (translator), John Dexter (director), Jocelyn Herbert (designer) and Andy Phillips (lighting designer). All key figures from the more influential periods of the Royal Court. Reviewing in last CUE that theatre's silver jubilee book *At the Royal Court*, I noted that although the Court had been founded as a writer's theatre, a Royal Court production is often more recognisable by its scenography than by its text. Jim Hiley gives us the basis of this philosophy in Jocelyn Herbert's words:

What interests me is to put as little, not as much, as possible on a stage, to evoke a period rather than present reality. If you need a chair, and the play is set in a particular period, you try to have just one chair, beautifully made, that truly represents that period.

This philosophy is central to much of today's scenography. And it is indicative of the importance of the designer's influence in establishing the concept of the production. The inevitably for practical reasons of our theatre being, at least in part, a designer's theatre, is explained by Hiley:

In the preparatory phases of a large theatre operation, design – rather than casting – is the practical activity that serves as a medium for exploring interpretations. Things might be different in the best of all possible worlds, or even in the event of a true, permanent theatre ensemble being created. Then the evolution of performances and design would happen simultaneously and collectively over a sustained period. But in the present reality, actors can only be available for a few weeks before a show opens, whereas the design scheme for that show – costumes and stage furnishings as well as scenery – must be determined months ahead. As an embodiment of the director's ideas, the design pre-empted the work of the actors. A scale model of the set, and sometimes costume drawings are presented to the cast at their first rehearsal. The director must either persuade them to fit in with this scheme, or expect a disharmonious end-product.

We are shown the process of casting followed by the month of interpretative creativity in the rehearsal room. We are lead through the hassles of getting the design completed, budgeted, and agreed. We trace the problems of realisation of the designs in the various workshops. Then the fit-up, the dress-rehearsals and the previews. Throughout, Jim Hiley makes us aware that theatre is a people industry and lets us see all sides of the operation from the points of view of the actual people carrying out the various stages of the work. The tensions are not spared and the quotes are only too real. I have never worked at the National, but, from my experience of other production organisations and given the circumstances of this particular production, *Galileo* proceeds through its 22 weeks in precisely the way that I would have expected.

A final quote provides a text for yet another debate on the extent to which the costs of experiment are an acceptable feature of the production process. It also

illustrates Jim Hiley's readable and perceptive style:

But the major event of the evening occurred during the first interval. While the choir rehearsed and the electricians raced about with tallescopes, Dexter bounded on to the stage and started pulling around various of the benches and candelabra that had been set for the ball scene to come. Nobody knew what was happening. Roy Bernard's crew had been trundling the balustrade forward with some awkwardness, but now Dexter waved it out of the way. After a few words with Herbert, he stepped off the stage bristling exultantly and declaimed 'Light that, Phillips!'. Those in the stalls who had been gawping, in one or two cases quite apprehensively, now realised that Dexter had completely changed the setting for the ball. The balustrade was axed, as was the large candelabra with its 'National Theatre wobble'. What remained was skeletal and spare, but more in keeping with the overall design.

Later, Jocelyn Herbert explained that she and the director had discussed the change over tea. The balustrade had been mentioned in the text, and she originally intended to reinforce its appearance with clouds and cherubs on a back projection. This had been dropped when they decided they were using too many slides, and the balustrade was left as a bit of an anomaly. The large gold candelabra had been meant to contrast with the slimmer, dowdier models in the preceding scene. But metal benches featured in both scenes, and indeed travelled 'anonymously' through the course of the play, so it was not illogical for the more ascetic candelabra to reappear in the ball sequence, too. At this stage, Herbert commented, you always pare things down. At a stroke, two of the most troublesome scenic pieces had been dropped. Weeks of labour had gone into that candelabra, as well as much heartache. Roy Bernard thanked Dexter for relieving him of the hassle of shifting the balustrade, but everyone agreed that a production in the Cottesloe could have been mounted for what it had cost. John Malone later calculated that labour charges run up by Kemp's to finish the chassis in a hurry, added to the cost of materials, could bring the bill up to £3,500. Rodger Hulley said that he had persuaded Herbert to accept a two-dimensional balustrade at first, but she had changed her mind in favour of the three-dimensional model moulded in glass fibre. His version, he claimed would have cost £40.

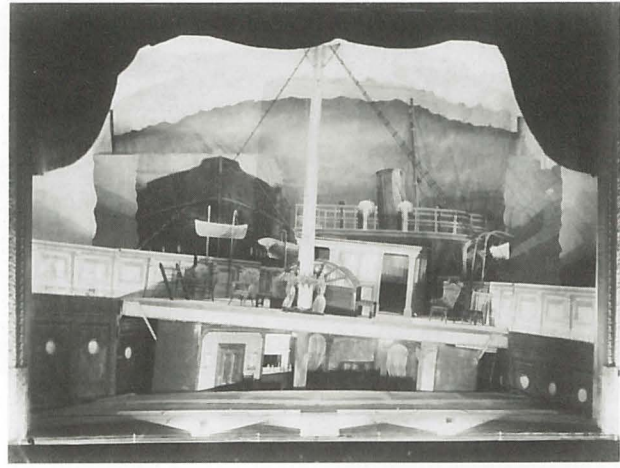
If you wish to consider these figures in relation to the total budget, there is an interesting appendix on *The Cost of Galileo*. However it deals only with material costs: there is no assessment of production labour costs, or the performance labour costs which are consequential upon decisions reached during the production period.

Galileo was a critical and audience success. I wish I had seen it. I hope to catch it on revival.

On page one of his **VICTORIAN SPECTACULAR THEATRE 1850-1910**, Michael R. Booth summarises today's pared-down staging style:

Actors move in an empty space defined and limited by light, against a selective and non-representational scenic background (if any), whose materials and textures are closely related to the world of the play.

The theatre of Michael Booth's book was a theatre of archaeological accuracy and



Two of the illustrations from Victorian Spectacular Theatre showing the sinking yacht scene from 'The Price of Peace' as portrayed by the 'Graphic' artist, and for comparison a photograph of the actual set at Drury Lane.

one of its activists was E. W. Godwin whose credo was that

We do not go to the playhouse merely to observe the passion of the actor or listen to funny speeches, 'but to witness such a performance as will place us as nearly as possible as spectators of the original scene or of the thing represented, and this result is only obtainable where accuracy in every part is secured.'

He argued that comedies of manners and customs require exact archaeological treatment, not to mention the artistic treatment of costume, scenery, and properties demanded by the higher poetical drama represented by Shakespeare. Godwin even suggested that the critic ignore acting and 'give undivided attention to the externals of architecture and costume.'

Much of the flavour of this approach to historical plays comes through in a quotation from William Poel's ironical advice to Shakespearean producers:

Choose your play, and be sure to note carefully in what country the incidents took place. Having done this, send artists to the locality to make sketches of the country, of its streets, its houses, its landscapes, of its people, and of their costumes. Tell your artists that they must accurately reproduce the colouring of the sky, of the foliage, of the evening shadows, of the moonlight, of the men's hair and the women's eyes; for all these details are important to the proper understanding of Shakespeare's play. Send, moreover, your leading actor and actress to spend some weeks in the neighbourhood that they may become acquainted with the manners, the gestures, the emotions of the residents, for these things also are necessary to the proper understanding of the play. Then, when you have collected, at vast expense, labour, and research this interesting information about a country of which Shakespeare was possibly entirely ignorant, thrust all this extraneous knowledge into your representation, whether it fits the context or not; let it justify the rearrangement of your play, the crowding of your stage with supernumeraries, the addition of incidental songs and glees, to say nothing of inappropriateness of costume and misconception of character.

The core of the book is two case history chapters devoted respectively to *Irving's Faust of 1885* and *Beerbohm Tree's King*

Henry VIII of 1910. The contribution of Goethe and Shakespeare to these productions was not unlike that of a novelist to the Hollywood screenplay of his bestseller. Michael Booth attempts *production logs* but, unlike Jim Hiley at the NT who was what we might term a *primary source fly on the wall*, Michael Booth has to be a secondary fly – perhaps a *fly on the library wall*. Nevertheless he has uncovered excellent primary material from the time of these productions: prompt books, programmes, prints, photographs, autobiographies, letters, newspapers, reminiscences and plots of all kinds (scenic, prop, wardrobe, lighting). He fits the jigsaw together and the production comes alive.

Michael Booth is writing about a high-technology theatre. But unlike today's theatre where the technology is essentially a labour saving device, the Victorian spectacular theatre used its technology to serve its visual credo. The 1881 pantomime at Drury Lane required a running crew of 50 carpenters, 30 prop-men, 15 gasmen, 18 limemen and 10 firemen. Tree's 1910 *King Henry VIII* used some 28 limelights backstage plus a further two in the dome – a sufficiently new use of foh for Tree to feel the need to explain that they were 'a device for throwing the light upon the faces of those on the stage.'

(Michael Booth uses the word *lime* throughout but presumably the 1910 follow spots were Digby Arcs. Just as we still refer to the latest discharge lamp follow spots, and their operators, as *limes*.)

The book describes the lighting of the various scenes with these resources and a picture emerges of rehearsal methods in a pre-union world where dress rehearsals would start in the morning and go on until two or three o'clock the next morning if things went well. If there were problems it could be five, six or seven with virtually no breaks. For a week!

The men at their posts on the limelights would drop off to sleep, and the actors would lie about in the circle or in the boxes. Tree would disappear for hours to have supper or talk over some problem of the play, and

return at three or four in the morning. The limelight men would spring to attention, the actors rush down on the stage, full of apologies for daring even to feel sleepy in his presence. And he would be as bright and energetic as ever. (*Constance Collier*)

One wonders how today's *Health and Safety at Work* inspectorate would regard this bit of 1885 technology from *Irving's Faust*:

Two iron plates were screwed into the floor of the stage, to which two wires from the 50-cell Grove battery were attached. Faust and Valentine each wore a metal sole in the right boot, and insulated wires were run up the clothing of both men to an indiarubber glove in whose palm was a metal plate. When each duellist had the correct foot on the plate on the stage, a 90-volt intermittent current was generated and an eerie blue fire flowed from the small saw-teeth on the sword blades when they clashed. Playing Valentine, Alexander received a nasty shock on the first night when he grasped an uninsulated part of the sword hilt.

Apart from the two production logs, there is an account of the costumes for the Drury Lane 1886 *Forty Thieves*. More general chapters describe production techniques of Shakespeare, Melodrama and Pantomime plus an introductory *The Taste for Spectacle* to set the production information in context.

Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910 is the first of a welcome new series of *Theatre Production Studies* with a stated aim of presenting a clear idea of the various styles of production developed in the great theatres of the past. The second volume, published concurrently, is *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900-1933* which will be reviewed in the next Cue.

THEATRE AT WORK. The Story of the National Theatre's production of Brecht's *Galileo*. Jim Hiley. Routledge & Kegan Paul. £9.75 (cloth) £5.95 (paperback) (UK)

VICTORIAN SPECTACULAR THEATRE 1850-1910. Michael R. Booth. Routledge & Kegan Paul (Theatre Production Series) £12.50 (UK)

All at Sea

RICHARD ANDREWS



Company manager of a five month season of the Black and White Minstrel Show, on board a Greek cruise ship, off the coast of South America – sounds unlikely? Well it was far more unlikely than it sounds! I write this as a guide – or warning – for anyone thinking of becoming involved in this rather specialised branch of show-business.

The ship in question was the T.S.C.S. (Twin Screw Cruise Ship) Navarino. Originally built for a Swedish company, it was refitted by a Greek line in 1975. In the summer months it cruises round the Mediterranean, and each winter it sets sail for somewhere more exotic. Last time it was Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil – stopping off in South Africa en route.

The entertainment set up on the Navarino was different from most ships, very much to the artist's advantage. The Robert Luff Organisation provided a package consisting of thirteen minstrels (singer/dancers), two acts (a musician and a magician), costumes, lighting and sound installations, operated and maintained by a wardrobe mistress, a sound/lighting technician, and myself. At Robert Luff's insistence everyone was on an equity contract, required only to perform in Black and White shows and cabarets. On many other ships, entertainers – except 'acts' have to be part of the cruise staff, and are involved in deck sports and bingo in addition to the shows, and there are no theatre technicians. Our cruises averaged fourteen days, as we performed only on nights at sea. Except for the three days of Carnival in port in Salvador, when even the Brazilians were afraid to go ashore after dark! There were four different Black and White programmes, each lasting about an hour, and consisting of three sequences interspersed with the acts. Performances were twice nightly, with only the final show using the traditional black faced make up. On other evenings members of the company performed in cabaret, either solo, in double acts, or a mini floor show. Once the various shows were rehearsed and in our repertoire, we had a clean up rehearsal/band call in the afternoon of whatever we were doing in the evening. This in the real meaning of repertoire, when you only perform each show fortnightly, or even once a month. You really do have to stop and think what you did last time.

The performance area was the ship's Main Lounge. At one end was a small stage

occupied by the four piece band. In front of them was the dance floor, approximately 30 feet square. The audience sat at tables, and there was a bar at the opposite end to the band. We therefore had to suffer the usual indignities of working in a cabaret environment – the catering comes first, the 'turns' are incidental. Guards had to be posted to stop people blocking entrances, or taking a short cut across the stage. We also had the inevitable waiters on the follow spots, but here of course with the added complication that they did not speak English!

The technical installation, while necessarily basic was very effective, and far superior to most ships. The lighting consisted of a bar with 6 Parblazers in 3 colours at the front of the arena, and on either side, two booms each holding 4 Pat 123's in 4 colours. There were 11 circuits in all, up to

was made of follow spots, as they were operated by members of the company rather than waiters. Even this modest level of equipment however, when first installed moved the Commodore (the Navarino is too high class to make do with just a Captain!) to decree that it must be removed after each show. 'You make my ship look like a christmas tree'. Good sense prevailed though and it stayed.'

The concept remained with regard to the sound system, where rather than a permanent installation, the speakers were on stands. In order to minimise the wear and tear of equipment they were not struck every night, but they had to be demounted in rough weather. It was not unknown for this to occur at 4 am, resulting in a dash up to the Main Lounge, hotly persued by the band to attend to their own gear. The



the limits of the power available. These were controlled by an 18 way Mini 2 board. This gave us 1 spare dimmer rack, and 1 spare circuit should there be trouble. By the end of the season the equipment had been on the ship for three years, and I am told that no lamps had ever blown – we were of course running on 220v supply. In addition to this there were 2 Silhouette 1k CSI follow spots. Obviously more equipment would have enabled greater sophistication in the lighting, but with the lamps available quite a degree of variation was possible. It was more effective in cabaret, when greater use

system comprised 2 Revox tape decks, a Soundcraft 16 into 2 desk, with Bose amps and speakers. This proved quite satisfactory, except when the room was over full of exuberant South Americans. Then extra speakers would have been useful, to ensure that those at the very back heard clearly, without deafening those at the front. The other difficulty with a very noisy house was that while the Black and White shows were on tape, and could always be pushed sufficiently high, in cabarets using mikes there was a tendency to start picking up the band, since they were right behind the singer. The

mikes we used were AKG D1200's, plus a radio mike.

The system certainly proved its worth – and the skill in its operation of course – in the quality of the recordings that were made. In some cabarets live and recorded sound was mixed, without any difference in quality discernable, even to members of the company who knew how it was being done. The problem of recording was that the studio was the Main Lounge, and open to passengers at all times. The sessions therefore had to be arranged after the dancing had finished at 2 am. Once we had experimented, and arrived at the optimum positioning for miking band and singers, the results proved comparable with any demo studio. All the more impressive since we were asking something of the equipment which it had not been installed to do. One advantage of living above the shop was that when we finished at 6 am, we had the choice of a 30 second stroll home to fall into bed, or a half hour wait for 'early bird breakfast served poolside'.

In addition to the sound rig in the Main Lounge, we had a portable H + H 6 into 2 desk with built in amp and speakers, for occasional cabarets in the smaller Forward Lounge, or out on deck for Tropical Nights. The Forward Lounge had an air of improvisation, with sound at preset level and lighting controlled by trip switches in a cupboard in the corridor outside! Furthermore, since the ship was originally Swedish all notices and labeling of breakers and switches was in Swedish and Greek only. Arrangements for Tropical Night usually followed this pattern: Firstly, an argument between the cruise office and the band, who did not want to play outside and take the chance of getting their equipment wet and electrocuting themselves. Secondly, elaborate efforts on our part to see that the H + H was rigged so that it would remain dry whatever happened. Thirdly, a torrential downpour which put an end to the whole thing. The cabaret was then re-scheduled in the Main Lounge, which the stewards tastefully decorated by dumping all the portable greenery they could lay their hands on around the outside of the floor, between the artist and the audience, so that he or she could neither be seen nor lit properly!

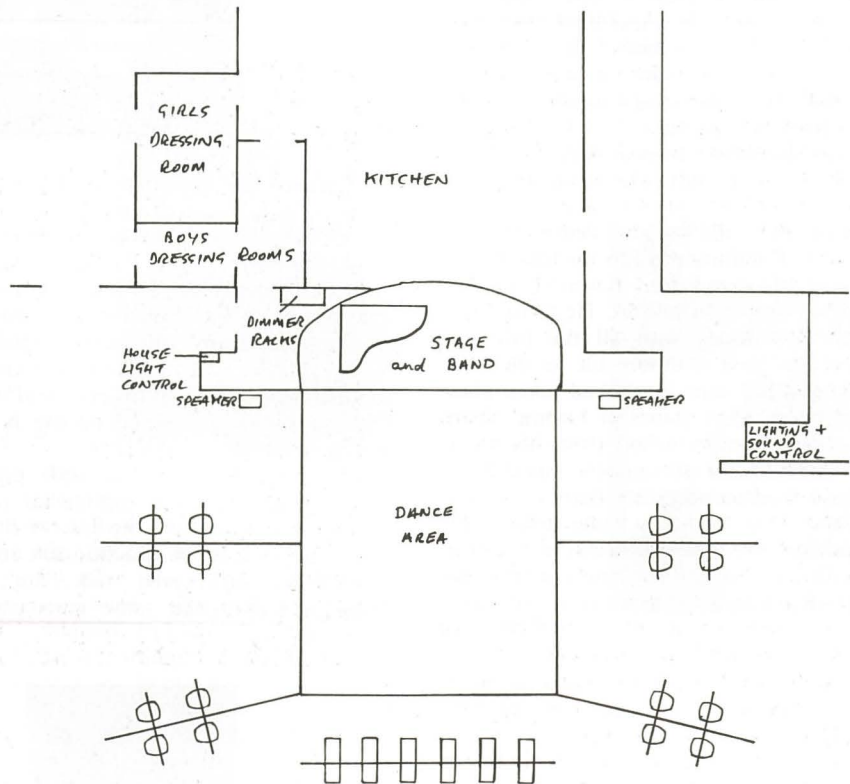
The problem of theatre standards versus cabaret thinking manifested itself in many ways, aided and abetted by the language barrier. On various nights decorations were put up by the stewards, who obviously regarded the sprinklers as an elaborate suspension system, installed with paper-chains and flags in mind. I found one day that each of the lamps on the booms had a delightful plastic garland draped over it. Dozens of balloons descended at the end of the final show, and these were rigged on lines which passed in between the lamps on the booms. I always had a vision of the waiters tugging at the lines and the booms collapsing to the floor, while the balloons remained resolutely aloft.

The dressing rooms also had drawbacks, the boys room being hived off from the kitchen, through which the artists had to pass

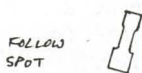


in order to enter stage left. The plumbing was always causing trouble throughout the ship – sometimes it appeared to be sinking from within. On three occasions water leaked through the dressing room ceilings on to the costumes (via the light fittings naturally). The costumes then had to be rushed to the Chinese laundry in the bowels of the ship, to be cleaned and dried. By the way, it wasn't just Swedish, Greek, Spanish, and Portuguese I couldn't speak,

but Chinese as well. The final, and worst flood occurred during a cabaret. As I dashed through on my way to the houselight controls, situated on the opposite side of the Lounge to the board, I found two plumbers watching helplessly as boiling water cascaded like waterfalls into three plastic dustbins. Fortunately this was at the very end of the season, and most of the costumes had already been repacked elsewhere into the 14 skips in which they had arrived.



NAVARINO MAIN LOUNGE



There was a tremendous feeling of isolation, 6000 miles from home, living and working in one foreign country – Greece – and stepping ashore in another – Brazil, Argentina or Uruguay – every couple of days. We had to be totally self reliant. One is forced to say that the organisation of the ship was not exactly 100%. Any problems we had were only exacerbated by involving anyone from the crew. The Chief Electrician was known to us as Mr Charisma, as he oozed charm with his dashing smile, curly grey hair and engagingly broken English. Although he could always be relied upon to provide us with an awesome rendition of 'I'm getting married in the morning', accompanying himself on the guitar, at all or any social gathering, neither he nor his staff were able to bring the lift 'Temporarily out of service' when we started the season, or the Tannoy which disintegrated after about two months, into working order before we arrived home – or probably to this day.

Obtaining supplies or spares in South America was very difficult. Even getting hold of good quality batteries for the radio mike was sometimes a problem. In Brazil there is a ban on imports of practically everything, in order to support their home industries. Unfortunately there is no indigenous product of professional quality in the audio or electronics field. This has resulted in a flourishing black market in imported goods. When I tried to find a mike for the ship to buy I was offered an AKG like our own for \$600 – three times the price at home. In Argentina imported goods are readily available in the bigger cities, but with an inflation rate of 210% per year, prices are as astronomical as the Brazilian black market.

Even Harrods in Buenos Aires could not supply a spare part when our musician broke the chanter on his bagpipes. I had hoped to persuade British Caledonian to fly one from Edinburgh to Rio for free, but to no avail. We were forced to wait until a new magician flew in to join us. He arrived like Father Christmas, with all the bits and pieces that were unobtainable locally. Apparently a full scale battle had taken place when he changed planes in Lisbon. Spare tapes had been wrenched from his hands and X-rayed – fortunately causing no damage. Furthermore they flatly refused to take off while he had a radio mike in his possession, even though it was in pieces in its case, for fear of the plane's radar being affected. Eventually they gave way. Difficulty in communication across 6000 miles was apparent when the black gaffa tape I had asked for – we already had plenty of grey – turned up with a note saying 'Our black gaffa is grey'.

Looking back I can truthfully say that it was unlike anything else I have ever done. Where else would you cancel a performance because the stage was moving up and down so much? Nor did I know quite what I was letting myself in for. I never expected to be playing Neptune in the Crossing The Line Ceremony, and throwing the Commodore into his own swimming pool! Summing up, the motto seems to be: go prepared for every conceivable eventuality – and you'll still be outsmarted.

Here today and there tomorrow?

FREDERICK BENTHAM

The Publications committee of OISTT has recently been meeting in London and speaking for myself I became aware, once again, of the difficulties in exchange of information about the technical side of theatre within one language, let alone with the confusion of tongues as an additional hazard. It is not just a question of the differing interpretations carried by words: that one may have to go into the 'orchestra' in the States to do precisely the same thing as we would do over here in the 'stalls'.

Before we get too deeply into that, it is necessary to explain what OISTT is and stands for. It is the International Organisation of Scenographers and Theatre Technicians. Two clues proclaim its origin across

technical vocabulary. The technician wants to know about something in order to do something with it (if only to say it is not for him) whereas the academic wishes to ponder and reflect upon it. Immediacy has only a little part in the latter's brief; he deals in archive and it is not of great importance whether the 'happening' was last week, month, year or century. To satisfy him *our* publications must arrive, preferably indexed, for preservation in filing cabinets or upon library shelves: or interred on micro-something-or-other ready for instant digital exhumation.

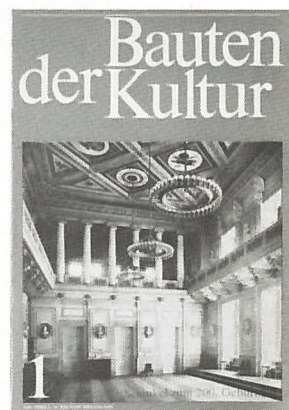
That is enough provocation in that area, let us turn to the man* who is actively engaged working in, or for, theatre. What does he want? Years ago I used to think that if he were a pro he didn't want to read anything technical; whereas if he were an amateur he wanted to read everything, within reach or out of reach. It doesn't really matter to the latter whether the equipment is in scale with his field of operation or not. Technology exercises its own allure – all the greater, perhaps, if one doesn't have to use the stuff.

And, why not! If readers can enjoy an historic past impossible for them to experience why not an equally impossible present. Is this what the journals of the twenty-six member countries of OISTT



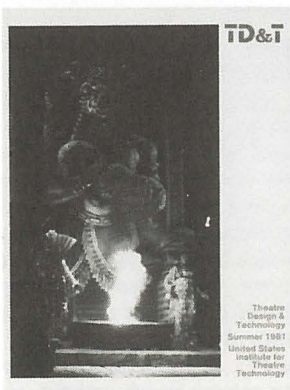
the channel; the O before the I in OISTT and the word 'Scenographer'. It is inconceivable that we theatre people over here would dream up a word like that to describe any of our activities. To me it evokes not John Bury or Pat Robertson – both of whom are, I assure you, scenographers – but a professor with rimless glasses and not so much as a twinkle in his eye. And twinkling eyes, both active and passive is what theatre is about.

Thus it is that, leaving aside political philosophies, different approaches to the funding of theatres and the like, we have to face the fact that the practitioners and the academics don't even talk the same language within the same language and



exist for – to be all things to all men? Surely not: though such a wide range of readership certainly comes within the province of CUE.

The best example of an OISTT journal is *Bühnentechnische Rundschau*: in itself hardly a catch-phrase for the bookstall. Founded in 1907 – long, long before there was an OISTT – it must surely be the oldest regular technical theatre journal in the World. It is the organ of the German Society of Theatre Technicians. The present editor is Helmut Grosser and he is probably



* Just in case: 'man' = human being, distinguished from other animals by superior mental development, articulate speech, and upright posture.

representative of many of the editors of other OISTT journals in that it is not his principal job. Indeed, Herr Grosser is technical director of the Munich Opera House, as well as the reigning president of OISTT itself, though I should point out that the headquarters of that organisation are in Prague.

What do we find in BTR, aside from the fact that it is only printed in German? Not surprisingly there are detailed descriptions, plans and all the rest, of new theatres. There seems lately to have been a decline in the rate of new theatre building even in Germany so an exceptional multi-purpose hall will turn up or something rather special from outside, like our own National theatre. Productions of outstanding merit, or at any rate of special technical interest, will be featured. New technical equipment is reviewed or rather described. It would appear that commercial firms' own



specifications and descriptions are used or such articles are written by a believer. This is a problem not just for BTR: it is difficult to review a new spotlight, for example, without a real chance for a reviewer to make some proper comparative tests. The American IES has for well over twenty years a recommended practice for doing this and there is now an attempt to up-date the document and under the auspices of CIE (a lighting equivalent of OISTT but founded in 1929) committee TC 4.3 get it international recognition. A brave foray, especially as it has been so largely neglected in the States, the country of origin.

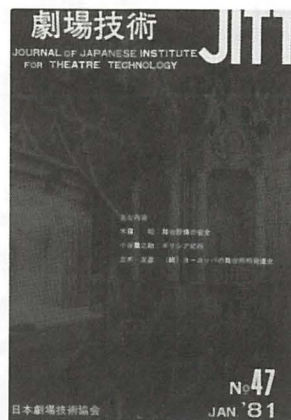
TC 4.3 formed a kind of epilogue to a series of international goings-on in London which included two days of *Showlight* in the new Barbican conference centre and the OISTT meeting this article is supposed to be about. Back to BTR, it does carry occasional articles on what may be described as the philosophy behind the various forms of theatre or presentation but in the main it is a journal of technology. For many years now there has been an excellent bibliography of books and the latest issues of all journals, occupying four or five back pages of each two-monthly issue.

The East German *Bauten der Kultur* is obviously more preoccupied with theatre architecture. When at last the refurbished Semper Dresden Oper is completed, this is where the architectural facilities will be well illustrated with the backstage elevators and all the rest taking second place. In BTR the



reverse would apply. Having once been described as 'Prodigieux animateur' as part of a tribute to my own work, in terms only publications in the French language can conjure up, I would like to have covered some more of the national journals but this would be out of proportion since there is a whole range of these printed in characters which do not provide me with the slightest clue as to what is going on. I happened to recognise that the Hungarian journal is issuing detail information sheets on each of its theatres as a pull-out supplement complete with scale plans. A model, if overwhelming, exercise for all of us.

Nothing illustrates better the general atmosphere of amateur-professionalism within which most of the OISTT journals are put together. The cost of translation is



astronomical and in any case theatre technology uses a special language. Thus articles of mine which have appeared in BTR have been translated by Helmut Grosser himself and an excellent job he makes of it, according to my wife. But then as he puts it: he *knows* me! In the case of the couple which have appeared in the journal of the Japanese Institute of Theatre Technology, the translations were done by Sadahiko Tachiki the director of their National theatre. It is an established principle that members of OISTT can publish each other's articles without going through the rigmarole of obtaining permission and there is certainly little point in submitting proofs in most cases. All this can speed things somewhat. The Hungarians have a nice way of doing these reprints, whether full or summary, as they reproduce the particular journal's logo or

characteristic way of printing its name at the head of each. For example; 'Sightline' heads an article on 'A 19.sz.-i Színházak Megóvások Indítóokai' by a certain 'I. Mackintosh' in 'Színház-technikai Fórum 1980 december'. The article had appeared in the ABTT's journal *Sightline* exactly one year earlier.

The OISTT meeting would have liked summaries of the articles in each issue of any country's journal to appear in two or three languages. This was always the practice with the old *Tabs* but then my wife could do the German and my secretary the



French, so there was little delay (and expense!) involved. I think the most we can hope to do at first is to ensure that short summaries in each journal's own language do appear, so at least the nature of articles not clear from any illustrations can be sampled at minimum translation effort and expense.

I am convinced that it is important to provide bound copies or decent binders. En passant, may I recommend the CUE ones. Exercise a little patience and you really do get a near-equivalent of a proper case-bound book. There are none of those messy wires of other systems. Of course a good

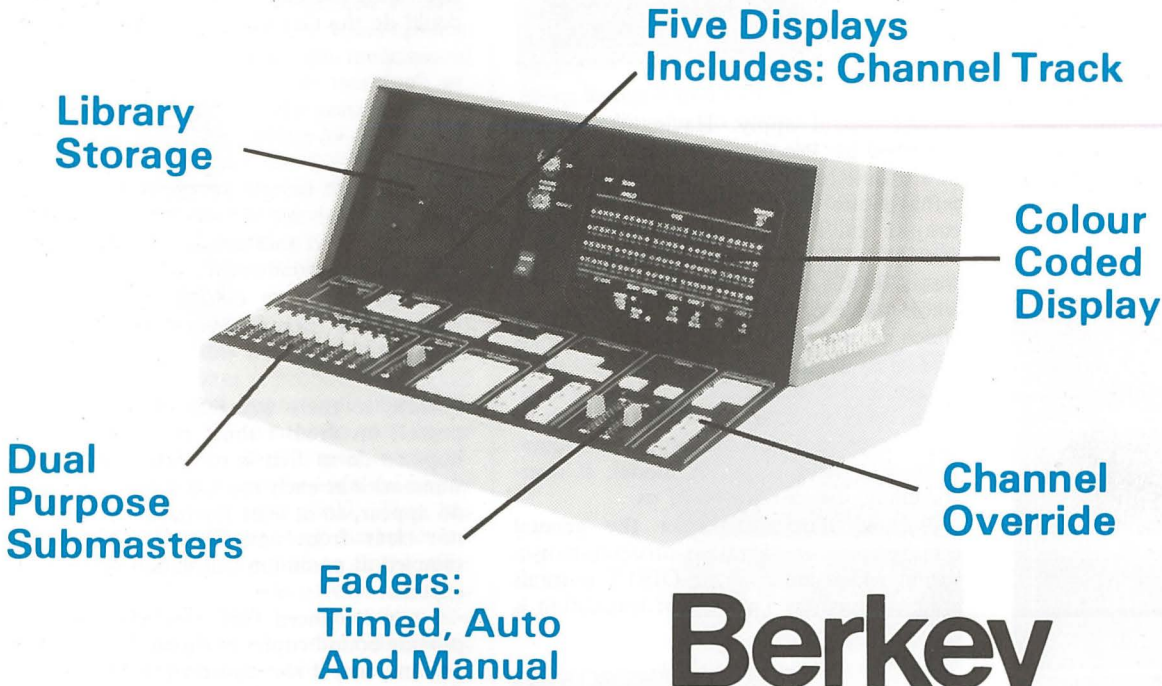


index is a sine qua non. After this brilliant display of linguistic virtuosity, I shall conclude by pointing out that whatever we write today, no matter how ephemeral, is the solid archive of tomorrow and if we stay around long enough we may be only too glad to consult it ourselves. How long is long? In the case of some technology ten years is a long time. It is a sobering thought that this trivial article improvised directly upon my typewriter – itself doomed before long to be replaced by a word processor – may have a greater power to survive than the latest and most expensive of stage lighting or sound or flying control systems.

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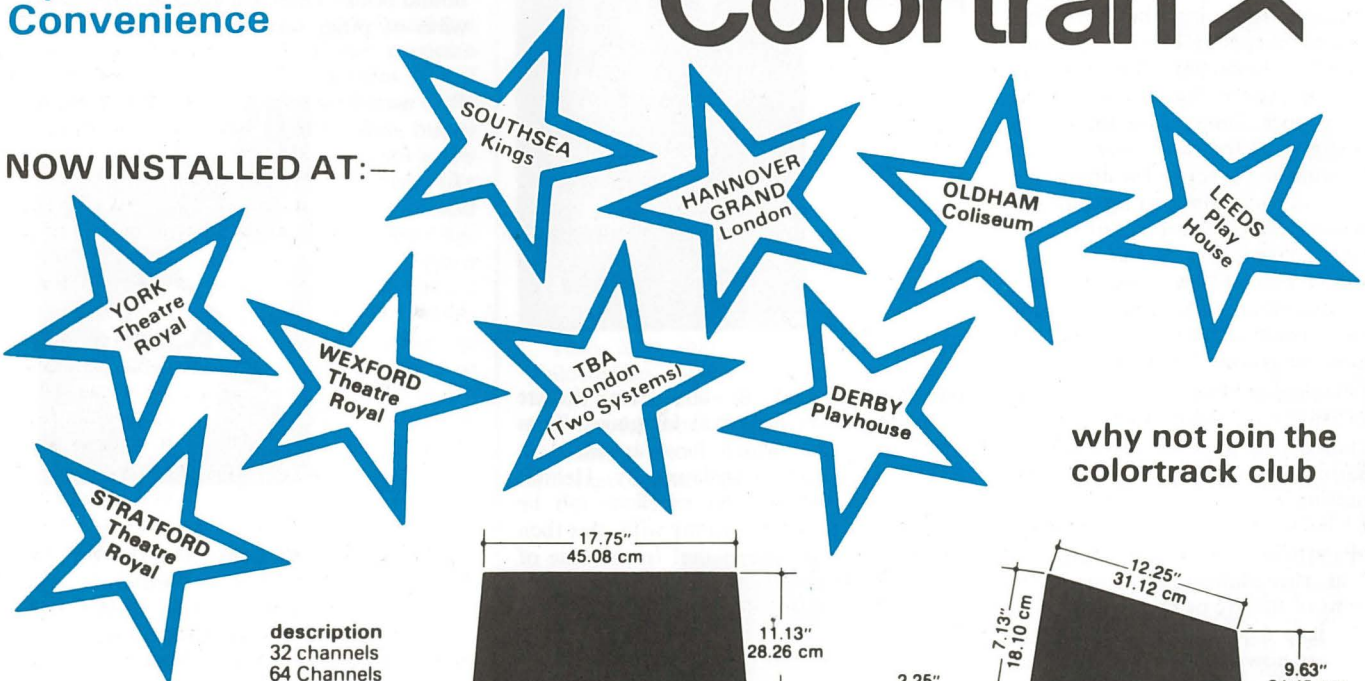
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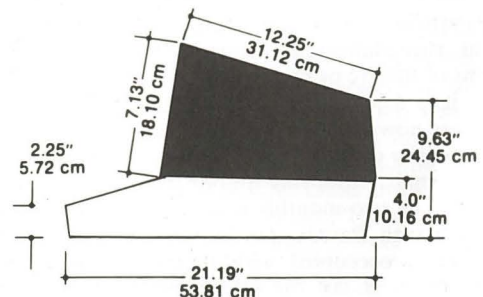
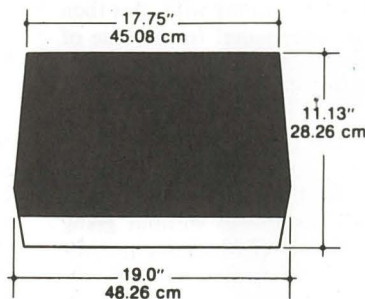
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PRODUCT NEWS

MONTREUX '81 INTERNATIONAL TV SYMPOSIUM and EXHIBITION

Montreux 81 was the biggest yet, and an extension of the exhibition site allowed a record number of more than 200 exhibitors. The symposium also attracted about 1900 delegates which is again a record for this biennial event. As regards visitors, the saturation of hotel and restaurant facilities told its own story, and due to late booking, at least one British exhibitor was faced with a 20 mile commuting exercise into the mountains – highly panoramic but quite an ordeal after a tiring day on the stand.

Among the products exhibited, video recorders and digital programme handling equipment were well to the fore and in the former connection it is fascinating to observe the enormous advances made since the early days of bulky and decidedly jittery VTR machines. Equally, digital video processing techniques can not only preserve the quality of the transmitted image, but also offer mind boggling possibilities in pattern generation and visual trickery.

Coming closer to home as far as this journal is concerned, stage and studio lighting was represented by a mere handful of exhibitors. Notably absent for the first time was the Thorn Theatre Lighting Division which, as readers are probably aware, ceased trading on March 31st of this year. This closure, made for topical financial reasons, has marked the end of an era which commenced with Q-File in 1967. This was the world's first fully electronic memory system and the archetype of today's lighting control philosophy. Past Montreux exhibitions saw the appearance of many more Thorn inspired 'firsts', and the microprocessor based Thornlite was a feature of the last Montreux in 1979.

ADB were also absent, and the field was dominated by the British companies of Rank Strand, Dynamic Technology and Lion Lighting Systems which is a newly formed concern of which more will be said later. The **Siemens** stand included a Sitralux K lighting desk among a wide variety of other broadcasting equipments. Another German company, **Kobold Licht**, was showing a range of HMI units and portable lighting equipment for professional and home use. Portability was also the theme of **Lowel-Light Manufacturing Inc.** the sole representatives of the USA in the lighting field.

Regrettably, details of the last two exhibitors were not acquired due to time limitations.

INNOVATIONS

While exhibitors in this field were very few, the equipment shown provided further dramatic evidence of the potential of the ubiquitous microprocessor. Imagine a situation where, when you call up a memory, details of the corresponding

action cue appear in words on the VDU screen. Or a system in which one can record not only the channel level but the optimum dimmer law required for any channel. These are just two of the impressive new features offered by the latest version of the **Rank Strand** Galaxy control desk. First exhibited in July of last year, Galaxy now has an alpha-numeric keyboard which allows the operator to record text information such as cue titles or any other message or instruction. The claim of a major breakthrough is also backed up by new operational facilities such as the ability to key-in channel to dimmer patching information, channel to master grouping, and the designation of non-dim circuits. Dimmer law is defined by keying in the percentage coordinates of the required control curve.

Based on modules of 48 channels, Galaxy has a maximum capacity of 720 channels and up to 10,000 CMOS memory locations. Ferrite memories are available on option.

Rank Strand were also showing their Satellite microprocessor based 'package' control system, and a range of luminaires of which two at least warrant special mention. Altair is a compact and robust lantern designed to take advantage of the new high efficiency CID discharge lamps. Available in 1000 watts and 2500 watt versions, Altair has an effective light to power ratio four times better than that of traditional sources. Incidentally, CID stands for 'compact iodide daylight' and is a development arising from the CSI or 'compact source iodine' lamp.

Kahoutek, named after the comet, is a dual source fresnel spotlight and soft light with all mechanical adjustments motorised for remote control. While not new in principle, this is perhaps the first really practical remotely manipulated source with neat, quiet running motors controlling pan, tilt, focus, individual barn door flap angle and barn door mounting ring rotation. Other remote control facilities are soft or spot changeover, lamp wattage selection and on/off.

Following the exhibition we understand that no less than 264 Kahoutek luminaires have been ordered by the ZDF German television company.

The **Dynamic Technology** stand featured their new modular Datalite lighting control desk plus a range of advanced television signal processing and information handling equipments.

Its modular concept now allows Datalite to accommodate up to three channel controllers, up to three playbacks and a choice of six or ten wheel type group masters. From a constructional viewpoint it is interesting to note that its designers have reverted to the earlier technique of separating the desk from its associated electronic hardware. The control console thus

contains a minimum of electronic elements, and is coupled via a twisted pair data link to a compact central processing unit which may be up to 500 metres distant.

The channel capacity can be tailored between 120 and an inherent maximum of over 1000. Upwards of 400 solid state memories can be provided, with optional floppy disk library storage. As with the Rank Strand Galaxy, the memories avoid wasted information capacity by pooling all bits not actually used in a given memory file. The effective number of memories thus varies with their individual content and the number remaining available is constantly displayed.

Other features shared with Galaxy include 'soft-patching' by which a random selection of dimmers can be assigned to a smaller number of control channels. When recording lighting controlled by group masters, recall of the resulting memory also restores the assignment of channels to the original group control wheels.

The memories include fade times, and can be linked for automatic recall in any predetermined order. In combination, these two facilities offer the interesting possibility of an inherent special effects routine with continuous automatic recycling of flash and fade sequences.

In addition to its subtle operational possibilities, Datalite makes dramatically effective use of its visual display unit which provides very comprehensive operator information. With monochrome monitors, such data can be confusing, but in this instance clarity is assured by a full colour display in eight different hues.

Even more impressive is the use of the VDU as a 'geographic' mimic showing the state of the individual light sources in their correct physical positions on a simulated floor plan. To show the necessary detail, it is normally necessary to switch the display to cover the area in section like the pages of a map. Datalite elegantly avoids this inconvenience by providing a joystick control which can move the floor plan in any direction and thus enable any portion of it to appear on the display.

Sales of the new Datalite system have already reached 13.

While a new name in the television field, **Lion Lighting Systems** has an authoritative link with the industry through the personage of Derek Lightbody, the well known ex-member of the BBC's lighting equipment design team. Having spent many years in studio engineering, Derek has applied his experience to the design both of a control desk, and the first of a proposed new range of highly imaginative luminaires.

The control system, provisionally named 'Lighttime', is unashamedly based on Q-File, for which the BBC was Thorn's first customer in 1967. Despite the passage of years, many of the Corporation's lighting people have remained convinced that the basic Q-File philosophy has never been bettered, and Lighttime is an endeavour to update the original concept and to endow it with the modern advantages made possible by microprocessor technology. The fundamental principle is that of an output and a preset store, each with its own master

fader. A mix stores facility is provided for manual control, and automatic fades are performed by the progressive transfer of electronic data from preset to output.

Q-File introduced the idea of a mechanical servo-controlled fader for channel lever adjustment, and in Lighttime, all fader type controls are of the motorised type, including those for fade time setting and group mastering. Fade times are memorised, and on recall of a memory, the time setting levers motor automatically to their correct positions. However, this servo-control aspect is of special interest in the case of the output and preset master faders. When mix stores is selected, the preset master fader motors to zero, and the new memory is cut into preset. A crossfade can then be carried out by manual operation of these faders in the usual way, but on their release, the preset data is transferred into output and both faders motor back to their original positions in readiness for the next cue. Manual crossfading is thus a repetitive one way action, giving some justification to Lion's claim that 'Lighttime is the simplest of all consoles to operate'.

Other features include the ability to assign memories or channels to the six group masters with the provision for easily modifying individual group master channel levels. Vital statistics are capacity for up to 512 or 1024 channels and 200 semiconductor memories backed up by the possibility of ferrite, bubble or disc storage. Construction is in two parts with the remote processor unit housing the microprocessor board, one or two memory boards and a dimmer drive board for each group of 32 channels. Lighttime can be fitted with additional channel or memory controllers, and a remote control unit will be made available. It is however only fair to mention that much of this new equipment is still in the prototype stage, and its full operational performance has yet to be demonstrated.

The new luminaire is also the brainchild of Derek Lightbody, engineered by John Allwork and manufactured by John Page Ltd. Appropriately named 'Leo', the unit displayed was the first of a range of four, and is a new concept aimed at meeting the needs of television and the theatre for the next decade.

Leo is a multi-purpose lantern with a single light source which can be a single or dual filament lamp with easy conversion to HMI or CID. Variable optics allow operation as a spotlight or as a softlight with adjustable polar diagram. A blind type diffuser is incorporated, and it can be fitted with a pole operated half wire scrim frame. Provision is also made for a rotating cut out frame for soft edge pattern effects. The barn doors are of preferred aspect ratio, and are pivoted in ball races for easy rotation and the possibility of motorised control. The entire lantern is designed on a modular basis for ease of maintenance and replacement of parts.

Returning to Montreux as a whole, the symposium occupied four days with concurrent sessions in two lecture halls. In all, some 70 papers were presented on subjects which included television picture quality enhancement and digital recording, teletext and data transmission, satellite broadcasting, and community aerial systems including optical fibre transmission. Television studio lighting was not featured on this occasion.

A Museum of Fishers

Theatric tourism takes Francis Reid to the seaside where he discovers a Theatre Museum amid the saltings of the North Norfolk coast.

Wells-next-the-Sea, a town on the North Norfolk coast (population 2400) is perhaps not one of the more obvious stops on the theatric tourist trail. Yet Wells has both Theatre and Theatre Museum. Flourishing.

Both the *Wells Centre* and its *Fisher Museum* are recent developments. A pair of Victorian grain buildings house a performance space, a gallery, the museum, a coffee (& stronger) bar, and enclose a courtyard with performance potential for anything that climate will allow.

This Arts Centre may be new but Wells was a theatre town in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with an 1812 playhouse as part of the *Fisher* theatre circuit which this new museum records and celebrates.

Georgian East Anglia had its major *Norwich Theatre Circuit* based on Norwich Theatre Royal and touring to Cambridge, Bury, Colchester, Ipswich, Yarmouth and King's Lynn. And for half a century the smaller towns had the *Norfolk and Suffolk Company of Comedians* in which the Fisher family not only acted but performed every other function including management, music, painting and even printing.

The core of the Wells Centre Fisher Museum is the David and Charles Fisher Collections — material recently made available by Fisher descendants who have inherited the family archives. This is

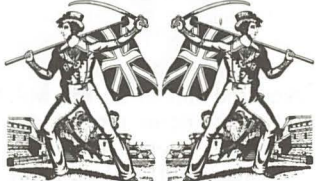
displayed on a summer seasonal basis (the museum gallery is not yet equipped to offer a controlled environment across the seasons) under the exhibition title of *The Lamplit Stage*. The long low cool upper floor of the granary makes a gentle setting for an afternoon wallow in the pleasures of ephemera from what was essentially a *people's theatre*.

For me the visit to Wells would have been worthwhile for one item alone: the prints of the interior of Fisher's Theatre at North Walsham (drawn by G. T. Plumbly). These finely detailed interiors are familiar from the black and white photographs in Richard Southern's *Victorian Theatre* but the blue and gold was a revelation — apart from the feeling of contact with the period that one always gets from being with a contemporary print. (A subjective sensation as opposed to the rather more objective pleasure of a print reproduced photographically in a modern book.)

The North Walsham playhouse was built by David Fisher in 1827 and is it my personal fantasy that it seems to acknowledge some architectural debt to William Wilkins' Bury St Edmunds theatre of eight years earlier? Certainly the marbled columns of the double proscenium linked by curved doors of entrance evoke Bury rather than the prints of most other Georgian theatres. (Yes, I know that 1819 and 1827 were hardly

AT THE
WELLS CENTRE
Staithe St. Wells-next-the-Sea
1st June - 30th Sept. 1981

THE
**LAMPLIT
STAGE**



AN EXHIBITION
concerning the
**FISHER
THEATRES**

IN GEORGIAN NORFOLK
"The Norfolk & Suffolk Company of Comedians"
FROM THE DAVID AND CHARLES FISHER COLLECTIONS
Norwood Post, Fakenham, Norfolk

Georgian years, but the country theatres were Georgian in architecture, ambience and attitude.)

The building of their own theatres was a unique feature of the Fisher circuit. Their first was built in Wells in 1812 (replacing a barn that had served as an earlier playhouse) and by 1828 David Fisher, the founder of the family theatrical dynasty, had built new theatres or adapted existing ones in Woodbridge, East Dereham, Eye, Sudbury, Thetford, Beccles, Swaffham, Newmarket, Lowestoft, Bungay and North Walsham.



None of these survive as theatres although their remains provide a happy weekend for any theatre archaeologist armed with car and camera. Garages, show-rooms, municipal offices and sometimes just *Theatre Road* remain. Whereas the Victorian/Edwardian theatre archaeologist watches the horizon for fly towers, the

THEATRE, WELLS.

On MONDAY, JUNE 20th, 1836,

By Desire of the Committee and Members of the

Walsingham

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Will be performed (for the first time here,) Garrick and Colman's celebrated Comedy of The

CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE.

Lord Ogleby, Mr. C. FISHER—Sir John Melvil, Mr. BELFOUR
Sierling, Mr. YARNOLD—Lavewell, Mr. LEMMON
Canton, Mr. TWIDDY—Brash, Mr. FISHER
Seymour Flower, Mr. J. FISHER
Mrs. Heidelberg, Mrs. HODGSON—Miss Sierling, Mrs. FISHER
Fanny, Miss C. ATKINSON—Betty, Miss COPPIN

A SONG, by Mr. YARNOLD.

A DANCE BY MISS COPPIN.

After which, (never acted here,) the new laughable Farce of

PLEASANT DREAMS;

Or, The MODERN WHITTINGTON.

Porridge, Landlord of the Crown Inn, Mr. YARNOLD
Peter, his Son, Mr. BELFOUR—Banguish, Mr. C. FISHER
Biggs, his Uncle, Mr. TWIDDY—Booby, Mr. J. FISHER
Walter, Mr. HOLLIDAY—Oatlers, &c.
Mrs. Porridge, Mrs. HODGSON—Sally, Mrs. FISHER

The Theatre will close for the Season on Monday, June 27th

Doors to open at 6, and Performances to commence at half-past 7.

Places to be taken of Mr. GEORGE, at the Theatre, from 11 o'clock till 2.

Boxes, 2s.—Upper Boxes 1s. 6d.—Pit 3s.—Gallery 1s.
Second Price, Boxes 2s.—Upper Boxes 1s. 6d.—Gallery 6d.
Children under Ten, Boxes 3s.—Pit 1s. 6d.

NEVILLE, PRINTER, WELLS.

Fisher hunter seeks a steep roof pitched from high gallery down to flyless stage. *The* guide book to East Anglian theatre history is Elizabeth Grice's *Rogues and Vagabonds* (1977, Terence Dalton) replacing the earlier (1928) Burley's *Playhouses and Players of East Anglia* which although less accurate is still worth reading because its author was historically closer to the scene and can describe a visit to East Dereham *I found the stage curtain hanging, and there was still some scenery about . . . The stage seemed a trifle insecure, but the pit seats were all right, and so were the circle and gallery. A general air of what may be called unreadiness . . .*

The playhouses were built in towns with a theatre tradition which the Fishers could develop or revive by playing in an extemporised barn theatre for a couple of seasons to build an audience prior to opening their own 'proper' theatre. They were 'proper' theatres in that they had two tiers of boxes plus gallery and proscenium doors. The stages were of uniform size to take the company's touring scenery. *Certain scenes and equipment were left in each theatre, but special scenery for the current repertoire, stage properties and costumes, were conveyed in three wagons, each holding six tons of goods and pulled by teams of six horses.* This quotation comes from an excellent summary (two A/4 pages) produced by the curator, Moira Field, as a Fisher summary for visitors to the museum.

When visiting theatre museums for pleasure, it is my policy to act the role of innocent tourist and not disclose any specialist or journalist interests. My CUE role is to discover what is on display for the casual visitor and my personal pleasure is to wander unorganised among evocative artifacts that create something of the ambience of performances long past. In Wells, however, the enthusiasm of the Curator is part of the museum — and it must take such driving enthusiasm to get a theatre museum going anywhere, let alone a specialist one located on a coastal extremity. Moira Field is full of anecdote about the items on display and the detective work by which they have been acquired and linked with each other to build up the Fisher picture.

Let Moira Field's notes describe life on the circuit of this incredible family who at their height could fill nine parts in one evening, having been in the pit to play the overture with top coats over their costumes. *It took about two years to make the complete round, with a season of some two months in each town, preferably coinciding with assizes, fairs, races, or other crowd-pulling events. They played only four nights a week, but each performance lasted from 6.30 until nearly midnight, and consisted of a double or triple bill, with songs and dances as well. As many as 40 different pieces might be played in the season, at least a dozen 'never given here before', and only a handful performed more than once. 'Bespeak' performances 'by desire of' the local lord, gentry, bowling club, stewards of the races, Odd Fellows Lodges, or other patrons would ensure a good lump sum in the takings and attract others to these gala nights.*

The family home was built adjacent to the East Dereham theatre where the actors could walk from the drawing room straight on to the stage!

The collection includes playbills, notebooks, account books, portraits etc — not only from the Norfolk and Suffolk circuit but from other activities of family members such as David III's 1870 lease of Edinburgh Theatre Royal and Charles II's conquest of New York.

I like every museum to stimulate a direction that I feel bound to pursue. In this case it is a sketch of the interior of the Sudbury Theatre (converted 1817/demolished 1848) based on an old drawing in the Ipswich Record office. With high stage, one balcony and no proscenium doors, this represents an aspect of minor Georgian theatre architecture of which I would like to examine original documentation.

The Fisher items are filled out with a background of stock items to help set the period — costume prints penny plain/tuppence coloured actors, and that lovely classic of the Macbeth witches in a barn theatre.

All in all a lovely (and developing) evocation of a theatre that perhaps had a more direct contact with its audience than the sophisticated metropolitan playhouses which are so often the subjects of theatre research. A blessed era when a town of 3,500 souls could support a theatre season.

A Dream and a Reality

DOROTHY TENHAM

When, some seventeen years ago, I said that one day I would come to live in Pitlochry, two questions were asked with monotonous regularity. 'Where is it?' and 'Why there?' These were not original questions which baffled my friends. Long before I had to produce the answers, the questions must have bored the pants off one John Stewart. Not only did he plan to live there, but he also had the absolute intention of opening a theatre there. What a crazy notion it must have seemed to be. Let me try to offer an answer or, maybe, even both answers and then let you know how dreams come true.

Pitlochry is in Perthshire, which — for the benefit of my friends who still believe that you 'drop off the edge' halfway up the Barnet by-pass — is in the central highlands of Tayside, Scotland. At the last count it had a population of just under 2,500 residents — half village, half small town. Geographically it is only two miles from the centre of Scotland. Already I can hear the theatre statisticians' computer-brains working overtime. 'Who, in their right mind, would plan to build a theatre there?' Answer — John Stewart. And — even more baffling to those down south who work with a daily vocabulary of 'population' and 'catchment area' and 'accessibility of public transport' — I don't have to prove John Stewart's point because the theatre IS. Indeed it pays my wages as Box Office Manager! This year, in May, the new, permanent home of the Festival Theatre Society opened its doors to the paying public in its 31st season of plays and concerts. Not bad going, eh!

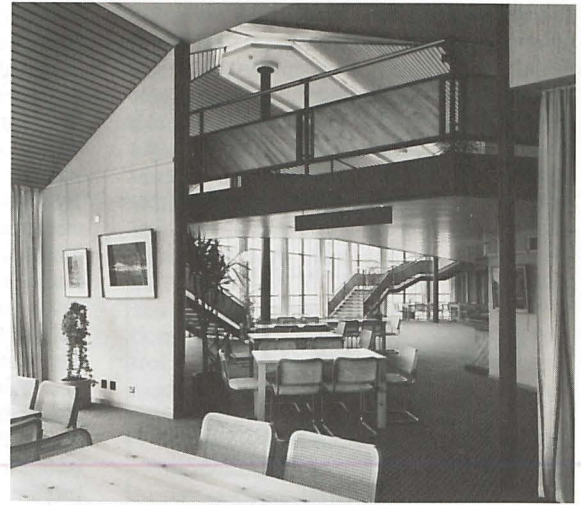
To work for the theatre in Pitlochry is quite an experience. Because the 'small town' is so very small, the people who work there are known to each other and to the rest of the villagers in a way that doesn't happen in 90% of theatres in England — even in the provinces. There is a feeling of kinship amongst the staff and a great, enthusiastic surge of goodwill for the theatre's success that simply can't happen in a less personal atmosphere. The only way we, the staff, can get to work is either by car, if we are fortunate enough to own one, or by walking. We know each other and enjoy our sense of 'belonging'. The new theatre is something we've all been promised in the village for many years and we've all believed it would happen. We have watched it grow and so we feel part of it. Indeed, after only 2½ months of working inside it, we feel it has been there for ages. The fact that it actually opened on time with the bills paid and the workmen off the site is a great achievement and the credit goes to the man who inherited the John Stewart dream — Dr. Kenneth Ireland. As 'births' go, this one was comparatively painless. Like all births though, the problems don't end there — the 'child'

now has to be 'brought up' so that it reaches a healthy maturity. Whilst we, the staff, settle in and enjoy the beautiful views around us, Dr. Ireland has the continuing task of convincing 'powers that be' that the bills will continue to come in and that the 'birth' is only the beginning. A tricky task in this day and age.

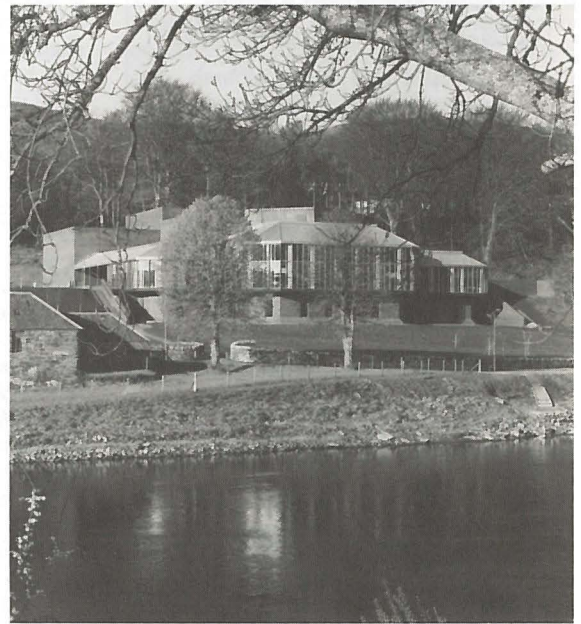
For those who like delving into such subjects, it is quite easy to find published figures which will explain to them how such a beautiful building could ever have been afforded in the first place – so I won't go into all that again. For me, the one fact that sticks out a mile in all those figures is not the big grants and huge donations from 'authorities' – very necessary though they were – but that the people who had supported the old tent and, later, the asbestos theatre for over 25 years, also shared the dream and wanted it to come true so much that they gave an enormous amount of money themselves towards its fulfilment. It is one of the very few theatres I know of where the 'team' includes the general public i.e.; the audience – the users of the FOH facilities, the people who put their bottoms on the seats in the auditorium. After only half a season there, I feel I know these people who made the dream come true. Indeed, one of them even sent a picture postcard from China where she went on holiday early in our season. It has pride of place on the ticket racks in the Box Office. She came to collect her tickets especially early after her return to this country so that we could have a chat about her journey and the people she'd met on her holiday. Most of our audience are 'old friends' of long standing who return season after season because they like the friendly atmosphere. They know their theatre and they know where they like to sit. I must just digress to tell you that my first introduction to this 'personal preference' style of booking had me quite worried. One gentleman who wrote to us in February to book his tickets for June this year ended his letter by hoping I would be able to oblige him as usual, as my predecessor always managed to give him what he wanted on the side! As I have always said, in theatre work nothing can replace the personal touch!

Working at The Festival Theatre has strengthened my belief that theatre is about people. Children on holiday with their parents and grandparents going to the theatre for the first time have a magic look on their faces that makes you want to keep it there for ever – for the rest of their lives as they continue to walk into all the other theatre foyers up and down this island. Regular theatregoers who know the ropes and are comfortably having a familiar night out. In Pitlochry we get the lot – the foreign students who are hitch-hiking their way to the Loch Ness Monster and the local lairds who are using the theatre, with its restaurant, to dine their house guests and see the play. The audience is a great cross-section of humanity, dressed in anything from jeans or shorts to full dress kilts and long evening gowns. Many Scots think nothing of driving from Glasgow, Edinburgh or Inverness to see a play or hear a concert. Senior citizens have a day-trip by

Main Foyer and staircases leading to picture gallery and rear of auditorium.



Avon, Thames and River Tummel all have famous theatres on their banks.



train from Perth, Stirling, Kirkcaldy or Dundee and see a matinee, have their tea and are home again in time for Coronation Street. As we have special party concessions and restaurant menus we get our fair share of coach outings. Indeed, having worked most often in London theatres, it is very evident to me that the audience comes to the Festival Theatre to enjoy itself not to keep up with those wretched Jones's that have so much to answer for.

Another splendid 'people' feature of the new theatre is that you don't have to go to see a play or hear a concert at all in order to have an excuse to come through the front doors. These front doors open every weekday at 10.00 a.m. and at 6.00 p.m. on Sunday concert days and anytime between then and 11.00 p.m. everyone is welcome to come in and just look round, have a drink – a wee refreshment or otherwise according to your taste – have lunch, a snack, dinner or just sit down. The view is the best I have seen from any theatre I have ever been in and the wholesome peace (between intervals) is an experience worth travelling here to enjoy. They say Piccadilly Circus is where you are bound to bump into a friend – I have bumped into quite a few of you in the foyer of the Pitlochry Festival Theatre. I hope it won't be long before you pop up to see us again. Indeed, the Theatre Con-

sultants were a firm not entirely unknown to me!

So, why Pitlochry? Because up here, your catchment area does not depend on the last bus or whether the Southern Region (Eastern Division) is once more cancelling trains at will. It depends much more on the true values. Do I like your village? Do I feel at home in your front of house? Am I remembered from last year? So often the first words through the Box Office window are, 'It's nice to be back again'. Yes, accessibility is important too, but Pitlochry is very accessible. We are on the A9 (which is fast becoming the M9); we have a splendid little railway station; there is a theatre bus which runs from and to the village for all performances – and it's a lovely walk. What more could a theatre ask for. Gentlemen much more qualified to do so than I ever will be have written and will continue to write about the architecture of the building itself but, as you may have gathered from my theatre work so far, I am a 'people' addict. Without the people there is no theatre. I know of no perfect formula for bringing people from all over the world into a British Theatre – but I do believe that this particular British Theatre, set in wonderful highland scenery, has found a good many of the answers.

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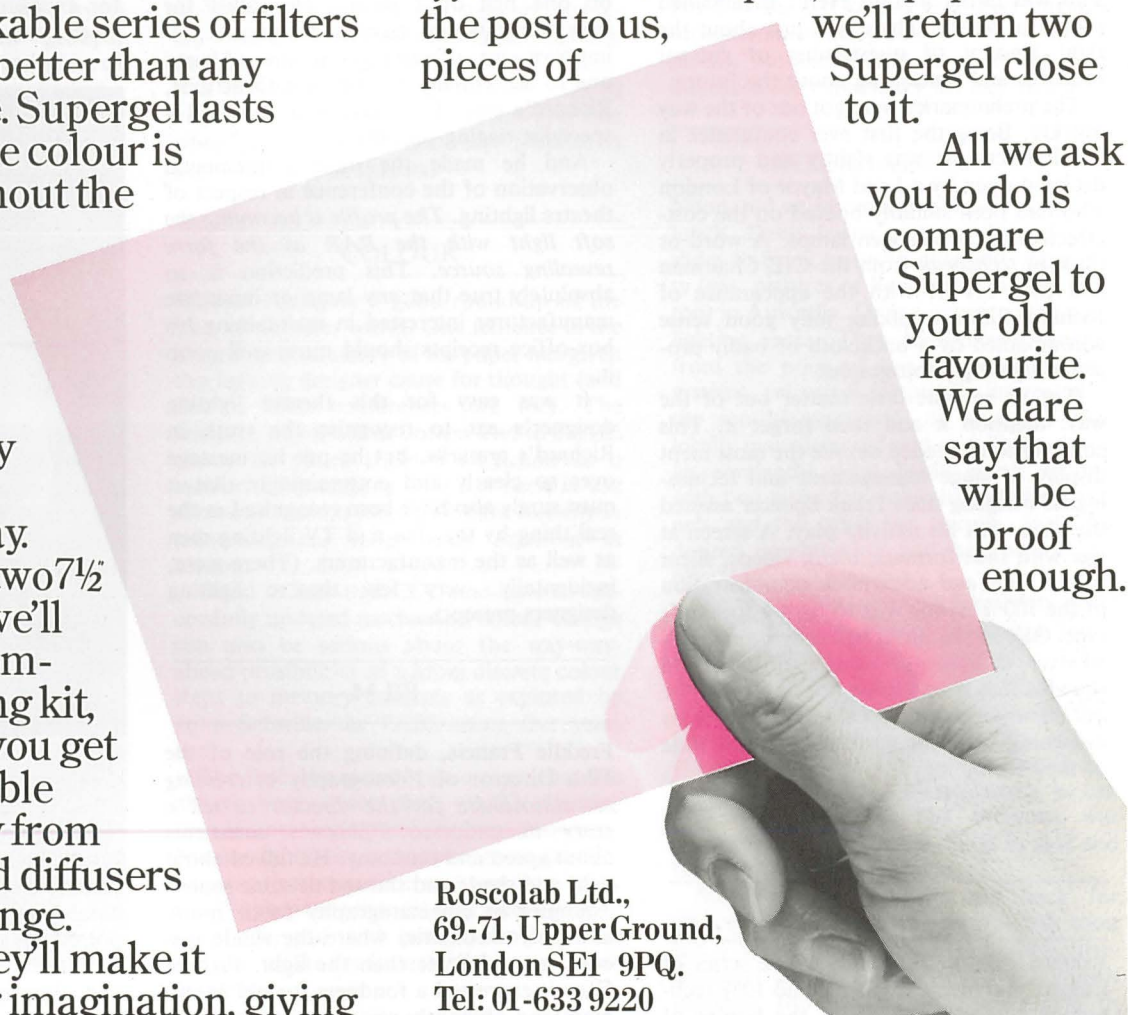
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Lighting the Show

Francis Reid reports on *SHOWLIGHT 81*, the International Colloquium on Television, Theatre and Film Lighting organised by the National Illumination Committee of Great Britain at the Barbican Conference Centre on July 6th & 7th.

This was rather a good event. It remained rooted in reality. There was just about the right amount of questioning of current practices and fantasising about the future.

The preliminaries were got out of the way quickly. Being the first ever conference in the Barbican, it was rightly and properly declared open by a Lord Mayor of London who had been suitably briefed on the cost-effectiveness of halogen lamps. A word or three in *techspeak* from the CIE Chairman and then lift-off with the appearance of Richard Pilbrow talking jolly good sense accompanied by a backcloth of badly projected lighting photographs.

(Let us get one little matter out of the way: mention it and then forget it. This conference succeeded despite the most inept display of stage management and technological bungling since Frank Spencer assisted the vicar with his nativity play. A screen at war with slide formats, blank videos, silent sound films and a textbook demonstration of the 100% wrong way to light a speaker's face. OK, so the room had only been handed over 48 hours previously. So what! In showbiz that is an excuse not a reason. Are not newly opened theatres continuously disguising from the audience the raw state of their technology?)

STAGE

Richard Pilbrow offered a whole series of truisms. Lighting as 90% art and 10% technology (although no doubt the hordes of manufacturers in his audience would have wished – even believed – that it was the other way round!) Despite the phenomenal advances in lighting control, he noted little improvement in the final result. The problem was a human problem – many practitioners were untrained or (dare it be said) untalented. He applauded the advances in TV and in Pop/Rock with its 'need to put

on one hell of a show'. He called for improvements in rigging techniques – improve cost effectiveness or die. (Always one to accompany his words with actions, Richard's own T.P. have just acquired a specialist rigging subsidiary.)

And he made the most fundamental observation of the conference in respect of theatre lighting. *The profile is becoming the soft light with the PAR as the form revealing source.* This prediction is so absolutely true that any lamp or luminaire manufacturer interested in maintaining his box-office receipts should muse well upon it.

It was easy for this theatre lighting designer's ear to recognise the truth in Richard's remarks, but he put his message over so clearly and entertainingly that it must surely also have been recognised as the real thing by the film and TV lighting men as well as the manufacturers. (There were, incidentally, very few theatre lighting designers present).

FILM

Freddie Francis, defining the role of the Film Director of Photography as *creating an atmosphere for the director to tell a story* in endorsed Pilbrow's comments about speed and economy. He talked about light and shade and showed us some superb examples of cinematography (both mono and poly chromatic) where the shade was even more delicate than the light. Freddie Francis expressed a fondness for old equipment and obviously was more interested in the light's direction than whether it was emitted by a fashionable source. Amen. To questions about how one particularly splendid piece of lighting had been achieved, he explained (with all the self-effacing simplicity that is characteristic of so many great artists) that he had stuck a lamp on a stick in the actor's belt. He predicted that technology would take over responsibility

for exposure, allowing the scene to be lit from small lamps.



TELEVISION

From single camera photography to multi camera television with John Treays demonstrating great video lighting of the present but expressing some concern over the future. TV was falling apart. Efficiency had dropped from 30 to 20 completed minutes per day. Techniques were taking over. They were becoming amateur film makers rather than producing good television. They must not become engineering dominated. An increase in the amount of post-production work could remove some artistic control (and therefore artistic concern) from the originating production team. Communication between Director and Lighting Director was tricky – and, not

surprisingly, this topic appeared throughout the conference as a problem, probably *the* problem, common to all media.

ROCK & ROAD

Richard Pilbrow had assured us that we had something to learn from rock lighting and now Richard Dale, discussing *Pop and Road Show Lighting* gave us some indication of the state of an art that has matured in the last decade. Straighter forms of theatre have embraced the par can, and rock rigging techniques will and must influence our whole approach to touring – although theatre has not yet expanded its multi-lantern techniques to the point, reached in rock, where 1000 par cans can be used to light a stage 40ft × 20ft. There were some interesting video recordings of show excerpts. All exciting lighting, but so kinetically restless that climaxes surely become increasingly difficult to achieve as the performance progresses.

The informal part of the conference (called *lunch*) was stimulated by all this good talk and show lighters from all fields – human eye, single camera, and multi camera – formed animated groups, discovering common ground. (And some of us agreed that the absence of beer showed a lack of humanity on the part of the Barbican; and that if this expensive plonk was the best that a wine marketing man could blend, then they ought to secure the palate services of a theatre consultant for their cellar).



TECHNOLOGY

Technological Papers was the general heading for the afternoon sessions and, with most of the speakers for the remainder of the day declaring affiliation to manufacturing organisations, there were some thinly veiled marketing presentations. However some of the summaries of developments of the last decade or so were

mildly educational in a way that provides a useful interlude among the more thought provoking stuff.

North America's Doc Joel Rubin and Mid Atlantic's Martin Moore in a double act tried to provoke the lamp manufacturers into revealing any new illumination magic that might be waiting in the wings. (An old technique originally pioneered by Fred Bentham who subsequently spent a couple of decades trying to explain to the lamp industry that fluorescent tubes presented certain shortcomings in their ability to control light direction). But there seems to be no revolution in prospect – although there is considerable promise in the new C.I.D. (Compact Iodised Daylight) lamps with a source of size and shape that permits mounting into *integrated optics*. Following the success of par lamps, some of us lighting designers are perhaps looking a little more hopefully towards the lamp manufacturers than to the spotlight manufacturers for our future optics.

Remote controlled luminaires continue to develop although their cost-effectiveness has some way to go before there can be any significant breakthrough. However Mario de Sisti showed how motor sizes are shrinking – even if at least one theatre lighting designer found the development of motorised barndoors (4 independent motors) to be perhaps a little bit of an overkill at a time when pan and tilt accuracy remains a problem for long throws.

COLOUR

Michael Hall gave a good round-up of the state of the filter world. One sentence in the programme summary of his paper has given this lighting designer cause for thought (and that is what conferences are for). The sentence which will doubtless lead to a CUE article by yours truly is *Diffusion as a method of qualifying light has been in use for many years in film, and more recently in television, but never fully explored in theatre.*

Good to hear that CCT who have so successfully updated mechanical colour change can also be serious about the way-ahead possibilities of adding discrete colour steps to memory controls as explored by John Schwiller in TABS some five years ago.

The first day ended with a topic that has always been a set piece of TV lighting discussions: single point suspension or bars. Not something for a theatre man to get mixed up in: rather a time to muse how lucky the TV chaps are that (a) they don't have to share the grid with scenery and (b) the camera, unlike the human eye, doesn't look up there.

SECOND DAY

The second morning brought a couple of enjoyable commercial moments. There was a manufacturer who informed us, with straight face, that he considered his product to be too important a development to be kept for rental only and that he had a moral obligation to make it available for sale. And

there was an audio visual presentation in support of an advanced control system that caused much hilarity. Particularly the portentous music and an unseen lighting designer whose voice became increasingly incredulous as his operator told him of the wondrous tasks that the machine could perform. Particularly as most of these tasks could have been performed on a 2-preset mini. Fortunately a distinguished light organist who happened to be present was able to assure us that the system was really rather good despite its AV presentation.

Robert Simpson gave a state of the art presentation on computer controlled carousels and raised a big laugh, when dealing with access times, by declaring that many AV producers seemed to have an ambition to make bad movies rather than good AVs.

R. M. Thornton-Brown demonstrated new advances in sound controlled light. But to this pair of eyes the results were still inferior in timing to the operator 'hands on' technique demonstrated in Richard Dale's video recordings of rock shows.

There have been developments in power distribution for heavy current locations. For a moment it looked as if there might be ungentlemanly disagreements about relative merits, but the overall message was clear: increased life expectancy for electricians.

INTERNATIONAL

Noon and an international hour to precede lunch. Denis Irving's easy style and good slides to bring us up to date with stage and tv (yes, pictures of kangaroos and the bush too) in Australia. Oz is a country with good lighting sense. They have never flinched from the price of top imported memory systems, yet one is frequently impressed by the sensible simplicity of many of their locally manufactured add-ons. Today it was an eminently clean MMS patch module with two numerical columns: one for channels and the other for circuits. Push the desired combination and hey presto! No pilot's manual required.

Every good conference, like every good show, likes to be able to produce a *Star is Born* headline. Well it was Mr. Arnon Adar, an Israeli designer at work in Germany who explained the current German situation and how he was dealing with it. His technique might be loosely classified as 'psychological' and, with his charm, he can only win. Everyone but everyone was enchanted by the sensible things he said and the super way he said them.

Strawberries for lunch and back for discussion. Your CUE correspondent soon got it on to the subject of training (predictably) and left before lighting control (perhaps also predictably but certainly in this case unavoidably and certainly without any sense of deprivation).

A good colloquium. Perhaps, inevitably, elitish. Concentrating on ideals, big budgets and top talents. Whereas the real lighting problems are more mundane and are about training (sorry!) lesser talents to work on small budgets in routine circumstances – but to the majority of the audiences. Perhaps another time?

Between Cues

The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

Bottled Tabs

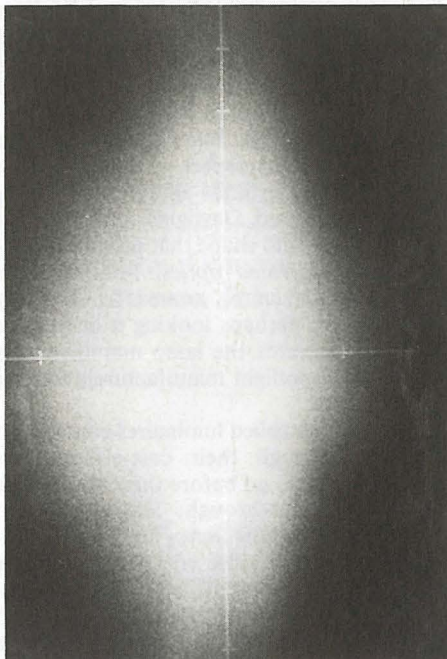
Walter Plinge was once a Tabman and so he is much pleased by his new paperweight inscribed *Fragment of House Curtains, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden*. Acquisition of this encapsulated fragment of plush, calculated to have risen over 70,000 times in performance, is Tabman Plinge's token contribution to the relief of backstage squalor at ROH. Do I detect the start of a new appeal activity based on bottled theatrical ephemera? Fragments of a Diaghilev costume to aid the Theatre Museum? Or a square inch of the Arts Council's letter to the Old Vic? And is it true that the off-cuts from Peter Hall's office carpet are securely deposited in a bank vault?

Bees in a Hobby Horse's Bonnet

There are a number of resident bees in the plingular bonnet and their buzz is a familiar feature of this page. They swarmed when I perched in the higher regions of the vast Theatre des Champs Elysees. *Shallow Circles* (rather than deep overhangs) and *Theatres Usually Make Concert Halls* (whereas concert halls do not often make theatres). The band were thrust forward on the raised pit lift. Visually they were a long way away, but aurally they were close and clear. Their music had presence. And this was not the big stuff: it was an all-Mozart evening. While the architectural bees buzzed, there was activity in another familiar plingular part: the memory playback. Soaring over the Mozart glided the voice of Jacques Brel as the idealist Man of la Mancha. Twelve years on and the Grand Master Bordoni has been overtaken. The foh are new but the optics remain simple pc focus. However the problems in Mancha were – and would remain – finding the right position rather than having available the right instrument. Which is the familiar buzz of another plingular bee!

Any Light for Denis?

While my lighting philosophy remains basically *It ain't what you put, it's the where that you put it*, I am not averse to improvements in the tools of my trade. On certain throws I am not choosy between Silos and Teapots: indeed a cosy old 264 will do just as well if it has a halogen lamp. However I am much indebted to the Silhouette for allowing me to use profiled wide angles and still get a useful quantity of light. And



Rosco Directional Diffusers (about which I enthused in Cue 1) surely continue to be increasingly indispensable tools for practitioners in the art of light squeezing and squirting. The Ironing Lady apparently endorses my view: I understand that both the Silhouette 40 and Rosco 104 are considered essential in Whitehall.

Chamber Rock

At a time when so much Music Theatre is suffering from a masochistic excess of percussion, guitar and decibel, it is a pleasure to find the *Sadista Sisters* exploring the subtler textures of violin, cello and piano in their latest look at society through feminist eyes. This ladies trio owes nothing to the palm court traditions of their chosen instrumental combination. It includes the rhythmic pulse of today's rock and the sparse atonality of today's chamber opera. It embraces the acidity that recalls the music of the political theatre of 50 years ago. It is that rare thing in today's Music Theatre: a score based on sincerity rather than parody. (But includes one devastating musical lampoon which lays bare the full horrors of the country & western idiom). Microphones are used but only because the vocal style requires an electronic quality. Climaxes are not dependent on blasting: we are allowed to enjoy vocal and instrumental textures. Alas, the words do not rise to the music. Heightened realism is all very well up to a point, but must the characters be so closely based on the stock simplifications that have become the Fringe's equivalent of Victorian

melodramatics? Are not the audience at feminist theatre now sufficiently sophisticated and sympathetic to be offered a play about people more detailed than these stereotypes?

Sorry I Was Right

It must be seen in London, but only if it can be given the 'overlooked' style of staging that it gets on the traverse stage at the Circle in the Square. (Remember how The Club fell apart when it transferred from that theatre to a 'played-out-front' production style in London). Having said that in Cue 7 about 'I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking it on the Road', I hastened along to the Apollo hoping to eat my words. Alas, a cool casual brittle piece of music theatre had been hyped into a mini imitation of a showbiz blockbuster. Souffle into suet pudding. In New York I felt feminist: London nearly converted me to chauvinism.

Plinge at Number Ten

On July 12th at 10 pm I walked the ultimate corridor of power: the one that stretches in simple perspective from *the* photogenic front door. The Right Honourable Lady who (with her husband) had 'requested the honour' of my company explained that the length of the corridor resulted from her residence being constructed by Walpole from a pair of back-to-back houses. Upstairs, floating though the eighteenth century elegance of the drawing rooms, I sipped champagne and relished the historic ambience of this superb *theatre of the body politic*.

Sitting Literally

A lovely John Christie quote from Kenneth Ireland allows me to return to the matter of *Audience Assistance* noted in last CUE, and to reassure any curious readers that Britten and Pears were assisting the performance by sitting *in* (rather than *on*) a box! Apparently Christie recommended that Pitlochry Theatre be built *On top of a mountain, with no roads leading to it. Surround it with barbed wire, make everyone wear full evening dress, charge the earth – and you'll be full.* I am sure that the great marketing man was being serious, not cynical.

Cork Critique

The Cork correspondent of STAGE shall have the last word upon which any plingular comment would be superfluous. *A special word of praise is due to the technical team, whose precision work with scene-changing occasionally gets ahead of the lighting box, and even further ahead of the actors.*