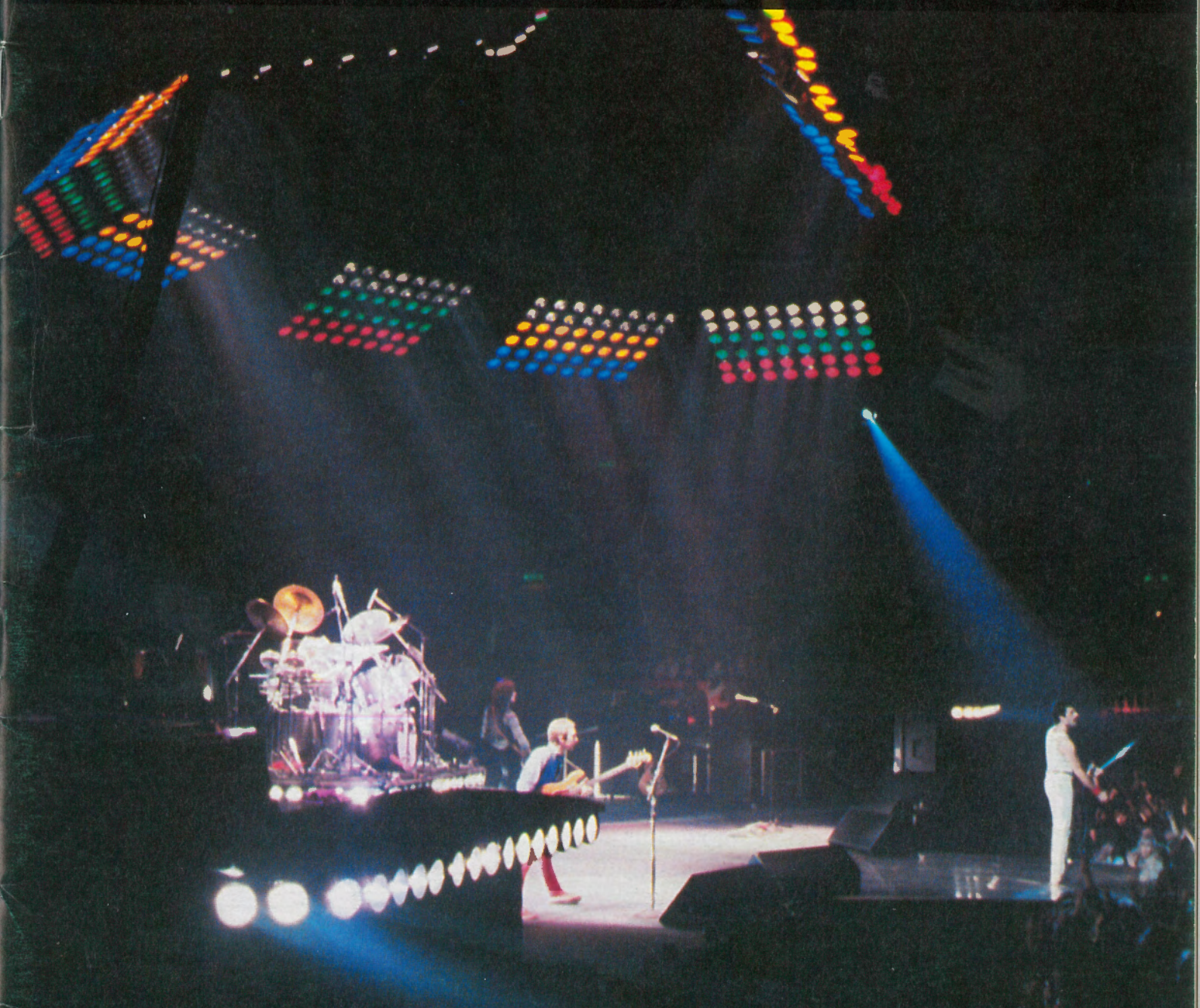


# CUE

Technical Theatre Review



March-April 1982

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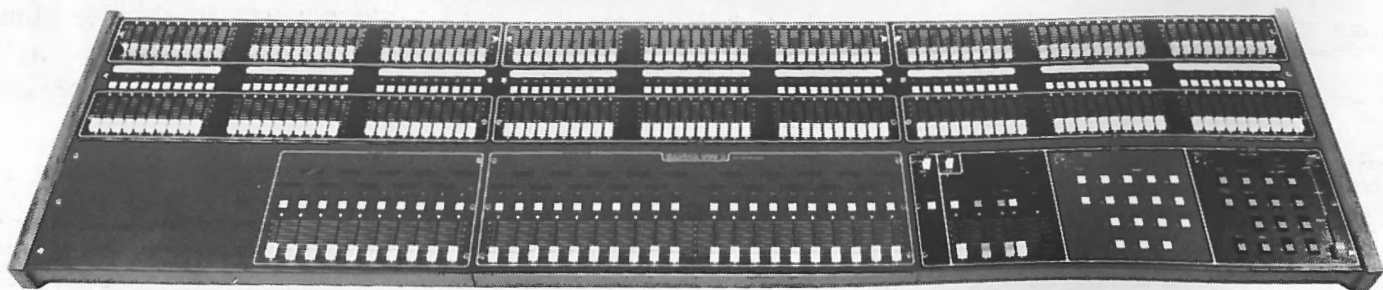
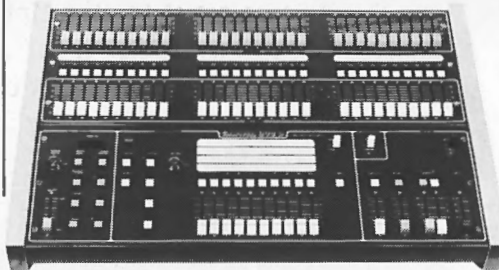
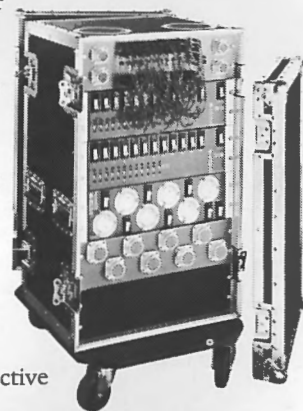
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# CUE

## Technical Theatre Review

16

March-April 1982

Pop music lighting brought about a not-so-quiet revolution in fast-rigging systems to meet the close timing and special needs of the one-night stand.

Brian Croft describes some of these trucking systems and the close-run erection schedules which have to be observed. Our cover picture is the lighting grid for "Queen" 1979/80.

Lighting designer Jimmy Barnett. Rigging by M2 Inc. and TFA.

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|---|----|
| <b>Rock 'n Roll is here to stay</b><br>by Brian Croft .....   | 4  |
| <b>Some New York Theatre Museums</b><br>by Francis Reid ..... | 7  |
| <b>Autolycus</b> .....  | 9  |
| <b>The Prince Consort Theatre</b><br>by Anthony McCall .....  | 11 |
| <b>Quake-resistant Theatre</b> .....                          | 14 |
| <b>Books</b> .....  | 15 |
| <b>Rising to the Occasion</b><br>by Nicholas Rideal .....     | 16 |
| <b>The End of the Pier?</b><br>by Anthony McCall .....        | 18 |
| <b>Southward Wurlitzer Theatre</b><br>by Francis Reid .....   | 20 |
| <b>Product News</b> .....                                     | 21 |
| <b>Between Cues</b><br>by Walter Plinge .....                 | 24 |

## Engineered Theatre

A careers article in the New York Times caught our eye. *Engineers Needed in Theaters* ran the headline. What followed was virtually a thousand-word recruitment plea for Purdue University's Master of Fine Arts degree in 'Engineering for the Theater'.

The theatre departments in American universities are generally large and awash with students. The engineering schools are not exactly empty. So what are the prospects for a marriage between the two disciplines? Well, surprisingly, in the half-dozen years that the Purdue programme has been available, there have been only five graduates and there is currently only one student.

We find this disturbing.

Theatre technology is a fascinating mixture of art and science. It is not perhaps a pure marriage of equals: the science must surely always be at the service of the art. But the art and the science are interdependent: they must stimulate each other. It is not enough for the theatre artist to stimulate the engineer by specifying what is wanted. The engineer must stimulate the artist by suggesting what is possible. It is only through dialogue that we can stimulate technology's contribution to theatre.

Interdisciplinary studies foster such communication by exploring, and establishing, a common language that leads to mutual understanding. Recent years have demonstrated the benefits that accrue from theatrically aware electronics specialists and computer programmers. Just think how the stage might be liberated by a generation of theatre conscious mechanical and optical engineers!

We therefore welcome the initiative of the New York Times in treating theatre engineering so seriously as a career topic, and we trust that their action has stimulated recruitment to this specialised and potentially exciting area of the performing arts.

# Rock 'n' Roll is here to stay

The benefits of fast-rigging in theatre today

BRIAN CROFT

In the twelve years or so since the 'pop music' business started to get serious about lighting, the artistic freedom allowed by the lack of script has produced a dynamic lighting style which cannot be ignored; and the economic climate which exists in that business has forced the development of many far reaching technical innovations which the 'legitimate theatre' is now adopting, and has christened 'fast-rigging'.

To the average theatregoer, and the average theatre technician, Pop lighting probably means a lot of coloured lights flashing on and off in a random sort of way, more or less in time to the music. Unfortunately this mindless kind of 'disco' lighting still prevails amongst many Pop Lighting Designers, and their bad habits are nurtured and perpetuated by their imitators in the lighting departments of television companies. However, thankfully, there is much intelligent and high-quality lighting work being done by some talented designers and board operators. There are, of course, some fundamental differences between the skills of a Pop Lighting Designer and his 'straight theatre' counterpart. The absence of both script and Director gives the Pop Lighting Designer enough rope to hang himself - many of them do - and the freedom has led to some pretty adventurous lighting. There is no requirement to establish time or place; only mood, illumination and pace. With a few exceptions there is no real story to tell, and it is an almost entirely abstract art. The freedom from these restrictions may have produced a music which to many is not culturally satisfying, but it has produced some fabulous and dynamic lighting and continues to do so. The accent is on intensity of colour saturation with a high ratio of back-light. Although the overall shape of the song will be determined in advance, much of the lighting will be extemporary, as is much of the music. Dramatic 'bump' cues to accentuate the music are commonplace, and there is much use of special effects which have more to do with scenic design than illumination. Most 'pop' lighting control desks have relatively elaborate 'chase' circuitry; and it is here, and in the area of bump cues, that special care must be taken not to fall into the random flashing disco trap. The absence of script and Director can of course also be very frightening for the Pop Lighting Designer, as he clearly has less to fall back on when inspiration deserts him. Consequently, he is inclined to rely more heavily on the technical aspects of his lighting rig. For instance the physical shape of the lighting rig very often becomes a strong feature of the overall design, rather than a discreet convenient place to hang luminaires.



"Queen" (1980). Lighting Designer, Jimmy Barnett. Set design & construction, M2 Inc Lighting equipment, TFA.



"Yellow Magic Orchestra" (1980). Designed by Patrick Woodroffe. Built by TFA.

The Pop Lighting Designer has also had a great influence on the design of control desks and dimming systems, which have developed on a parallel course to straight theatre control systems, at about the same pace; but I think that is the subject of another article and I should now turn my attention to the subject of rigging techniques.

Up until about 1969 pop groups and rock bands were playing the same touring circuits as variety acts, middle-of-the-road acts, big bands etc. One-night stands have always been the order of the day. The venues played were proscenium arch theatres and concert halls which were equipped with permanently installed 'basic'

house sound and lighting systems. In the late 1960's and early 1970's it became clear that these house systems were too basic, and did not adequately fulfil the demands of touring groups, who began to carry their own equipment with them. At the same time, starting in the USA, the bigger groups began to play larger venues, with larger gross potential at the box office; and very soon sports arenas became the norm. The problems of mounting large sound and lighting systems on a tour of one-night-stands were enormous, and this was a period of very rapid development. Pioneers in the field like Chipmonk, working for such bands as 'The Rolling Stones' and 'Crosby Stills Nash and Young', borrowed



*Detail of Loadspan Truss and drape track fitted.*

heavily from techniques already in use by 'Disney on Parade' and 'Holiday on Ice', and added innovations of their own. There has been a steady progression since that time. Although the details vary enormously from rental company to rental company, a typical rock 'n' roll rig today consists of the following components.

The 'rigging' itself comprises a large selection of steel cables of various lengths, from 5ft to 100ft, varying thicknesses and breaking strains; all prefabricated with eyelets at each end and colour coded. In association with an assortment of carabiners, D rings, shackles and nylon strops, these 'steels' are used by the rigger to establish hanging points from which to suspend the lighting structures and sound arrays. The term 'rigger' in this branch of the industry applies exclusively to the experts who provide the hanging points and spend much of their working life anywhere between 40ft and 200ft above the floor. They are usually quite separate from the lighting crew, who actually assemble the truss structures and hang the luminaires, because they are also responsible for providing suspension points for the sound system, drapes and scenic items. They have accumulated their equipment and their expertise from mountaineering, from boating, from the circus, from cranes and dockyards. Once the hanging points are established accurately above the performance area, which usually involves multiple bridles, the chain motor chains are hauled up and attached to the hanging points.

The electric chain motors have been modified to operate upside down; that is to climb their own chains. They have lifting capacities from a quarter-ton to two tons, and the chain length varies from 30ft to 80ft, sometimes single-reeved and sometimes double. The most common types of motor in use are the CM Loadstar (American 110volt), the Demag (German 220volt), and the Verlinde (French 220volt). The reason the chain motors are modified to work upside down is to avoid the almost impossible task of hauling the heavy chain motor 40ft into the air by hand – the chain alone is heavy enough. The chain motors

are fixed directly to the truss structures whilst they are still on the deck; only the hook on the end of the chain is hauled up.

Present day lighting trusses are all constructed from aluminium tube on a space-frame principle. TFA's 'Loadspan' is a box beam (square in section with 4 cords), 18 inch OD, and 16 inch centre of cord to centre of cord. It is built from lightweight, thin wall, 2 inch aluminium tube with a minimal amount of diagonal bracing. The truss sections are made in multiples of 4ft (from 4ft to 20ft) and are joined together, end to end, by means of spigots and Spirex pins. Junctions are effected by 90-degree corner blocks, T jointing blocks, and hinged 'universal joints'. Modifications and variations are easily effected by the use of spring-loaded snap braces similar to those found on access towers and Telescopes. It is possible to produce, from stock, virtually any straight-sided geometric shape as a structure on which to place the luminaires, according to the client's wishes. Sometimes these lighting grids are masked off by attaching borders to the trusses; often they are left unmasked if this suits the style of

the production. The maximum length of 'Loadspan' supported only at each end, with a full complement of luminaires and a live load of one man, is about 48ft. In the last two or three years, inevitably perhaps, the demand has occurred for bigger touring rigs, up to 65ft wide so far, and it has been necessary to develop a butch big brother for 'Loadspan'. 'Superspan' is built in the same size modules as 'Loadspan', but has a very much thicker wall tube and more internal bracing. It has flat flange plates at the end of each section which are bolted together with very stout high-tensile bolts. It can span upwards of 60ft supported only at each end, with a load of perhaps 100 luminaires per truss, drape tracks and full-drop tabs, and two men on the truss working in the centre. Consequently, it is the heaviest available touring truss system. 'Telestage' manufacture a truss which is triangular in sections and comes in 8ft sections which fit together by means of clevises and crane pins. Its weight and span capability is somewhere between 'Loadspan' and 'Superspan'. 'Loadspan' and 'Superspan' are exclusive to TFA in the UK and USA; 'Telestage' is available to all production companies and is used by many of them. In addition many other production companies produce their own style of truss. 'See Factor' produce and use a very interesting triangular truss which folds flat for transportation, an attractive feature now that trucking costs are so very high. In my view, square-section truss has many advantages over triangular-section truss. It has an extra cord on which to overhang luminaires, it is more comfortable and safer to crawl along, it is easier to fix masking drapes to, and it is easier to stack in the trucks. Above all, it is easier to join together to form rectangular grids and geometric shapes – the triangular truss requires very complicated corner blocks for this purpose.

If it is totally impossible to hang the lighting grid from the roof of the building, then it must be ground supported. There are a number of mechanical cable and hand-winch devices used for this job, the



*Lighting Grid for "The Rolling Stones" USA Tour 1975 and Earls Court Shows 1976. Designer Jules Fischer. Built by TFA Inc.*

most common being the Vermette lift with a load capacity of 500lb, the Genie Super lift with a load capacity of 650lb, and the Sumner Roustabout with a load capacity of 2000lb. All of these devices will safely lift approximately 50% more weight if used in facing pairs at either end of the truss. Weights greater than this must be raised by building substantial scaffold towers off-stage with cantilever 'I' beams at the top, to which the electric chain motors are fixed. In other words a straight substitute for roof structure, built on day of show. This is an expensive labour-intensive operation but one which has been utilised on several tours of one-night-stands. There are also a number of mechanical and pneumatic devices available for use as single lighting 'trees', for use in smaller venues.

The next item in the 'fast-rigging' chain is the luminaire. In the past most production companies and rental houses have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to permanently house the luminaires within the space-frame truss. In the early days a single row of perhaps 30 lanterns on a typical 40ft truss was acceptable. When the demand for the number of units on a truss went up, attempts were made to fit two rows within the truss structure. In order to do this the cross-section dimension of the truss had to be massively increased to accommodate the units, and complicated devices were developed to lower the bars of luminaires from the travelling mode to a position below the truss where the light beams would not be interrupted by the structural members of the truss itself. These devices are often difficult to operate and mechanically unreliable. Moreover, they are almost all designed to accommodate only the Par 64 unit, and any profile spots with a longer lens tube than the Par 64 unit, or a bulkier

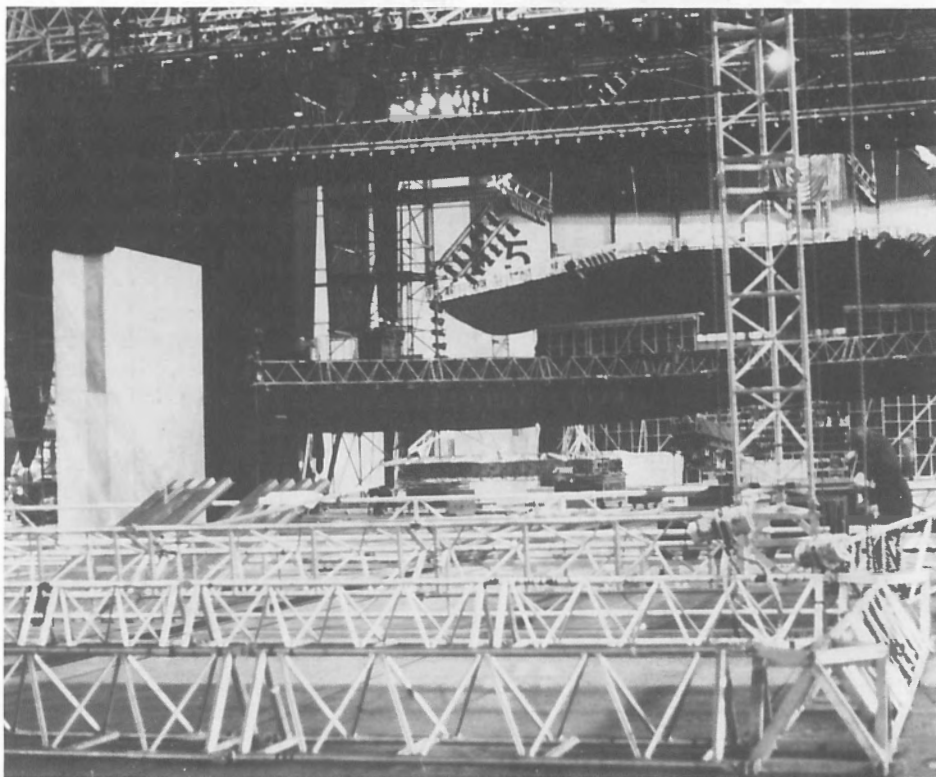
lantern, cannot be accommodated in the space available within the system, and need to be hung separately. As a consequence of these short-comings the tendency today is to hang pre-prepared bars of luminaires below the bottom two cords of the truss by means of hook clamps, or overhang on the top cords by means of swivel couplers. Most companies in the UK now seem to have agreed that the optimum system consists of a lightweight aluminium 2-inch OD pipe between 7ft and 8ft long, with 6 regular female 15amp short trailing sockets internally wired to an 18-pin connector panel-mounted at the end of the pipe. The yokes of the luminaires are bolted directly to this pipe to eliminate the weight of the hook clamps. The luminaires are pre-gelled and pre-plugged before leaving the stores, and travel with 2 or 3 lamp-bars in a wheeled road box or, in TFA's case, in groups of 8 lamp-bars hung in an open-sided frame rack on wheels.

The lighting units are fed by bundles of 6-way multi-conductor cables with in-line multipin connectors on each end, which plug directly into the panel-mounted multipin connectors on the lamp bars. The most commonly used connectors are the 18-pin Lectriflex and the 18-pin Socapex. The patching and pairing is carried out at the dimmer rack in order to get the lighting rig above head height as early as possible in the day to allow the stage, the sound equipment and musical instrument paraphernalia to be set up underneath it. The dimmers and control systems are too complex to discuss in this piece - suffice it to say that they differ from company to company but that the same 'fast-rigging' thinking is continued right the way through to the house main electrical supply. A typical rock 'n' roll lighting rig of perhaps 300 lamps needs

to be above head height by mid-day, the riggers having gone into the venue at 7 or 8 a.m. Once the mains hook-up is complete, and all the truss-mounted luminaires have been checked, then the lighting grid is taken to full 'trim' height and locked off. At this point the lighting crew turn their attentions to such things as the placing of follow spots, running intercom, and a spot of lunch; returning to the stage after enough sound equipment has been placed in position to establish the exact location of the musicians, and a focus can be carried out. The focus session normally starts at around 4 p.m. The crew invariably carry out the focus from the truss itself; the stage layout and activity on-stage during focus time does not allow for the use of a ladder. After the focus has been completed there are still the floor-mounted luminaires, power for any set associated lighting, and special effects (such as smoke machines) to set up. These are naturally left until last; and by now it is very close to show-time. Three hours later the whole process is reversed; and although load-outs are quicker than set-ups, it is still several hundred miles to the next 8 a.m. load-in (oh yes, it's a man's life in the Royal Rock 'n' Roll Corps). The only opportunity for rest on a large-scale tour of this kind is on the sleeper bus between shows. All of the better sleeper buses have been specially built to cater for this market. Similarly the travelling crew caterers, the fork-lift trucks, the type of 'artic' provided together with its proper cargo handling accessories; all of these things are aimed at keeping the whole expensive operation rolling for the duration of the tour of one-night-stands.

It is clear that other branches of the entertainment industry can benefit from these fast-rigging methods which have been specifically developed for the pop music world. Although most of the systems have been developed with expediency rather than economy in mind - for the most part they utilise expensive materials - it should be remembered that now the systems exist, development costs have already been paid, and the systems can now be used to make economies by significantly reducing set-up time. Properly equipped theatres with productions which run for at least a week or two clearly have no reason to borrow from the pop music touring experience; but it is equally clear that the touring repertoire companies are right to be looking at the fast-rigging possibilities which exist. Branches of the industry which do not play properly equipped theatres, but share the concert platforms, Town Halls, exhibition halls and sports arenas with the rock 'n' rollers, have even more reason to look to the benefits of existing fast-rigging systems. Many of the leading companies producing trade shows and conferences have been using the pop music lighting rental companies for a couple of years now and with a little bit of attitude adjustment on both parts the results have been very good.

We have the technology - everybody now has the chance to be bionic.



Trusses for British Leyland launch by Zenvail Ltd.

Photographs by Plumblin Designs and Woodroffe Barnett Associates.

# Some New York Theatre Museums

Theatre Tourist FRANCIS REID  
reports from Broadway

I would not be so bold as to attempt to list the world's theatre centres in any sort of pecking order. But, in my own affections, New York comes pretty high. Possibly because I tend to regard the Broadway Musical as the peak of contemporary theatre writing. (John Kander and Fred Ebb may be no Mozart and da Ponte but they are about the best of today's bunch.) However, I am not at all sure that I fully back the current campaign to clean up New York's theatre district: part of the attraction of all these magnificent musicals is the contrast between their bright, sharp attack and the seedy decadence of the surrounding streets.

Even the tattiness of the theatre buildings makes a positive contribution – the shows do not have to surmount the challenge of a dominant architecture. However, the observant auditorium lover can have many pleasurable moments in the discovery of subtle felicities of decorative treatment, often submerged under the neutral paintwork that many bricks and mortar owners use to keep their buildings sufficiently serviceable to attract show rentals. And these buildings are very important in the history of theatre architecture since many of them belong to a part of the century (1920s and 1930s) when European and Antipodean theatre building was at a virtual standstill.

So, for this theatric tourist, at least, the theatres are the number one attraction. But, as always, closely followed by a desire to experience the ephemera of the past upon which the current living tradition is founded.

New York City is rich in museums, but it does not yet have a conventional "Theatre Museum". There are many theatre paintings and sculptures scattered through the various galleries, but interest is concen-

trated in three organisations: the Museum of the City of New York, the Songwriter's Hall of Fame, and the Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts.

## Lincoln Center Library

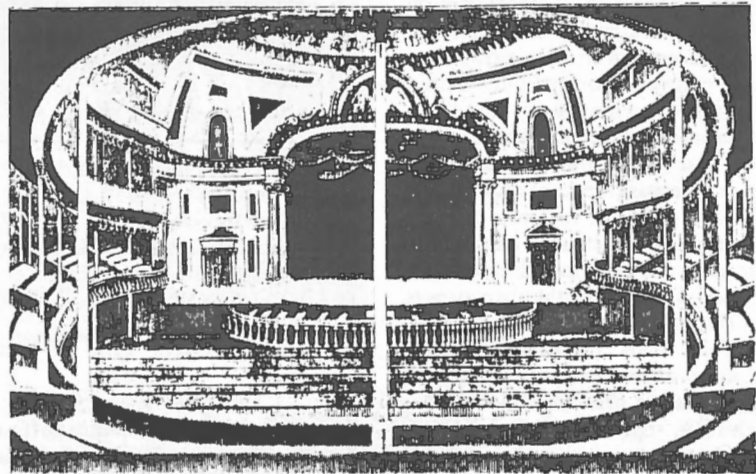
It has been my policy in previous articles in this series to concentrate on displayed theatre material which is readily accessible to the casual tourist. Research collections have either been ignored or mentioned in passing. However, the research collections at the Lincoln Center are totally accessible to the most casual tourist visiting the Performing Arts Library on impulse.

The library at the Lincoln Center is the arts branch of New York City Library and therefore houses the main theatre collection for both borrowing and reference. The ground floor section has accessible book

stacks containing all the standard theatre books including some quite scarce titles. It is also a good place to consult the current theatre periodicals – drama, dance and opera. There is an openly displayed disc collection, strong in both opera and musicals. And turntables/headsets for listening. There was a small shop but this has now been consolidated into a new large shop serving all the Lincoln Center arts complex, although the Metropolitan Opera Guild continues to run its own boutique. These shops are a good browse and carry the postcard stocks that are an essential part of any museum operation.

The Lincoln Center Library includes a gallery for regular exhibitions on performing arts themes. I recall with particular fondness, displays on Kurt Weill and Diaghilev.

To use the Theatre Collection all you



New York's Chatham Theatre (1834) pushed proscenium doors of entrance to the limit!



Ballet Rehearsal, Metropolitan Opera House, 1900 (Museum of City of New York Collection).

have to do is to sign the visitor's book – not forgetting to check all bags and coats downstairs as there is a vigilant security guard as you emerge from the lift (sorry, elevator) to the research floor. Some material is catalogued in bound volumes, but most is in card index. To consult items, complete a request slip and delivery is pretty quick.

I ran a test on the index card "Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds" and within a few minutes had a file of cuttings documenting the rescue from barrel store. (From the press reports I discovered, incidentally, that the restorers seemed to change their minds, at least annually, as to why they were restoring, how they would do it, and what it would cost.) I would have expected the file to include Iain Mackintosh's TABS article and it did. I also expected it to go beyond 1965 and it did not. Perhaps the various New York City budget cuts have restricted continuous collecting or at least catalogu-

ing. I did not enquire because curtain time was nigh.

But I can testify to the strength of this collection in the area of early lighting technology (including manufacturer's catalogues) because I used it some years ago to dig out information on early American dimmers.

I also ran a test on the microfilm section – using the index entries on Cambridge Festival Theatre to dig out an *Era* interview with Harold Ridge in 1927. The cheerful lady archivist, spotting my horror at the prospect of an unfamiliar model of film reader, gave me a crash course in operation.

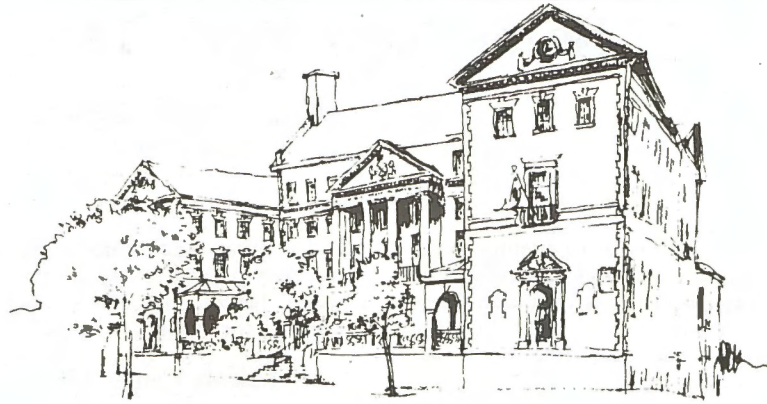
Xerox facilities and print-off from microfilm are available on the research floor – which, in addition to the Theatre Collection, houses the Dance Collection, Music Collection and the Rodgers & Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound.

### The Museum of the City of New York

On the entrance floor of the Museum of the City of New York there is an audio-visual presentation (a big apple opens to form screens!) giving a potted history of New York. Inevitably, theatre is included in this history and many slides, not just theatre ones, have appropriate Broadway tunes on the sound track. Commentary mention of the Metropolitan opera brings spotlighting on to a box removed from the old Met.

The J. Clarence Davies Gallery contains a showcase of theatre items including a lovely coloured print of the Chatham Theatre with elaborate proscenium doors facing the audience.

The Theatre Gallery houses exhibitions from the museum's collection of New York theatre history. In January the display was *Designs to Dazzle*, costumes from Ziegfeld through into the 1950s. The era of the long-legged showgirls who dazzled audiences as they strutted across the stage in beads, feathers, chiffon, sequins, bangles and lace in a state of fascinating dress – or undress. But an undress that was more provocative than mere nudity. Most of the early designers of these costumes never received personal recognition, and some of the



*The Museum of the City of New York occupies a splendid chunk of colonial Georgian in Fifth Avenue overlooking Central Park.*

names were entirely omitted from the programmes. Many of the designs on display were labelled "unidentified show" even if the designer was named.

The exhibited designs were mainly drawings but included a few costumes like the heavily sequinned *I'm a Daughter of the USA* with silk flags of all nations around the waist, held up by a gold cording at the neckband and kept in place by a thin wire to form a kind of tutti.

### Theatre Museum in the Theatre District

The Museum of the City of New York is planning to open a branch on Broadway in the Minskoff Theatre arcade. I inspected the site and can report that February found display surfaces under construction. This could be the start of something great for theatric tourism.

### The Songwriters' Hall of Fame and Museum

A few steps from the Minskoff site is the building known as One Times Square – the triangular block where a dropping ball signifies the start of a new year. On the eighth floor is the Songwriters' Hall of Fame and it is a knockout. Let me just list,

at random, some of the goodies on show.

Tónk piano, from the audition room of Mills Music, on which the songs of Hoagy Carmichael, Duke Ellington, etc. were demonstrated. As Tin Pan Alley movie lovers would expect, this piano is complete with the traditional cigarette burns.

Original guitar from the Sound of Music.

Breakfast tray on which Otto Harbach wrote lyrics for many songs including *Smoke gets in your eyes*.

Key of New York City presented to Sammy Cahn.

Desk at which Victor Herbert stood to score Broadway shows.

Fred Astaire's top hat and cane. The cane was a gift from Cole Porter whose name is engraved on the top of the gold knob.

One of the pairs of dancing shoes that Gene Kelly wore out in "An American in Paris".

Elvis Pressley's guitar pick.

George Gershwin's desk.

Fats Waller's and Duke Ellington's pianos.

Oscar Hammerstein's "A Good Boy" certificate at primary school in New York.

Plus lots of ephemera, posters, sheet music covers etc. and a model of Tin Pan Alley.

As the theatric tourist wallows in all this, the duty attendant improvises on the piano on which Fats Waller wrote "Honeysuckle Rose". What more can one ask?

There are two indispensable books for the theatric tourist in New York. The *New York Theater Guide* (see Reiding shelf in this CUE) and the slim *A Guide to New York Museums* (published by the Cultural Assistance Center and widely available in museum shops). And which of the world's daily newspapers carries most theatre news, reviews and advertising? I'd say the *New York Times*.



*Broadway around 1835 (New York Public Library).*



# Autolycus

## £600,000 for Swansea

The Grand Theatre, Swansea, has pulled off a coup that is not only noteworthy in itself, but most unusual for a Welsh theatre. It has been granted no less than £600,000 over the next five years towards the cost of improving and extending its facilities. This sum comes from the Arts Council's Housing the Arts fund, and represents the largest grant made in this fashion by the Council. The Palace Theatre, Manchester got £450,000; and the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, £500,000.

Swansea's whole scheme is expected to be phased over about ten years in all and to cost over £5 million. The Housing the Arts grant relates specifically to the early phases of the scheme, which include reconstruction of the stage, fly-tower and understage, as well as building a new dressing room block and fitting it out; construction of a new theatre entrance and foyers; and the demolition of the old entrance foyer, which will be replaced by bars and restaurants. At a later date Swansea plans to build a new workshop block and to convert a disused Coach Station next door into small performance and exhibition spaces.

Apart from the New Theatre, Cardiff, the Grand Theatre, Swansea, is the only Welsh venue capable of housing medium- and large-scale touring production. The many problems both backstage and front of house at present inhibit its development as a theatre and prevent it being used to its full potential. It is a receiving venue for Welsh National Opera and runs full programmes of subsidised drama, opera and dance as well as commercial entertainment.

After the redevelopment, the visiting managements will use it more extensively than before. Welsh National Opera expects to increase the number of weeks' performance in Swansea; there will be greater possibilities for in-house drama; and the theatre will be able to attract middle-scale dance and drama touring of an 'excellent' standard from outside Wales. Welsh company visits will also be more frequent, from the likes of Theatr Clwyd and the Welsh language company, Theatr Cymru.

Sir Hywel Evans, Welsh Arts Council chairman said: 'I am delighted that we have been able to assist Swansea in building the sort of theatre that our best companies, both from inside Wales and from outside, will enjoy playing in. Swansea is the natural cultural centre for some half-million people in south-west Wales.

'I am sure that with excellent new buildings the management of the theatre will succeed in developing an enthusiastic audience for productions generated by the theatre and for touring audiences. This is the

largest sum ever awarded by the Arts Council for a theatre development and reflects the importance which we attach to responding to Swansea's initiative in the arts'.

\* \* \*

Lamp changing in the houselights seemed an insoluble problem for Norwich Puppet Theatre until Norwich Caving and Climbing Club came to the rescue. (Photo: Eastern Daily Press).



## Books and Theatre — a joint venture

Penguin Books and the RSC have broken new ground in marketing their books and plays. They have agreed to formalise their previous publishing relationship of play-texts, with introductions by RSC directors, by extending it into a new series called the Penguin Shakespeare. The arrangement also allows Penguin to publish texts of non-Shakespeare plays performed by the RSC, such as their Schnitzler's *La Ronde*, which becomes the first published version in the English Language.

The idea began to take shape in 1980 when Penguin published *Hamlet* with an introduction by Anne Barton, and the RSC's rehearsal texts were, as on many previous occasions, the Penguin texts. That Stratford *Hamlet* was also directed by John Barton — keeping it in the family. Under the newly formalised arrangement, Penguin provides the RSC with a royalty on each text sold. Every book contains an invitation to join the RSC's mailing list. The RSC's *La Ronde* is a new version prepared by RSC director, John Barton.

The 'special relationship', as they call it, will widen the range of Penguin plays, and

besides benefiting from the weight of the RSC connection, will provide the chance for joint promotions, sharing advertising costs say, when a playscript is available while in the RSC repertoire. There is also the possibility of selling tickets in Penguin Bookshops.

Both companies regard this as 'the first phase of an exciting and fruitful link between the book trade and the theatre' says an official statement, 'with a wide range of possibilities, many of which will be realised during the next few months'.

## Neon is a gas

Confronted with all the flashing signs in Times Square G. K. Chesterton is said to have remarked heavily: "How beautiful — if one couldn't read" Oh, come now . . . the dotty advertising legends and illuminated publicity for bars, hot-spots and sinful addresses are almost a branch of aesthetics in themselves — the glittering costume-jewellery on the sagging bosoms of the aging cities they decorate. Neon lighting and necklaces of coloured bulbs are what the eye seizes on first and most satisfyingly on any documentary excursion to Paris by night, the Tivoli Gardens, a fair-ground, or even a catalytic cracking-plant, as if they were the magic markers to the innocent pleasures of life.

All of which seems marvellously well understood by David Hersey, who designed the lighting for the NT's not quite American enough production of "Guys and Dolls!" Not, we hasten to add, that Hersey isn't American enough himself. He's been in this country 14 years now, has lit over 100 productions (including, of course, "Evita" and "Cats") and has been the senior man at the National since 1974. Which is, we think, very right and proper if we are (ever) to catch up with the stagecraft that is the glory of a Broadway musical. What he does, we think, is to paint pictures with lights which have the effect of energising the scene on stage, whether or not anything is actually happening. This is a long way from the modest, naturalistic lighting "typography" supplied too often by the very English school of designers, which so often leads to a feeling in an audience that the stage area has died.

All credit to Hersey, then, and also to Argon Gallery who supplied him with yards of yer actual neon for all his now you see it now you don't effects. We give due thanks ourselves for another credit in the NT programme which seemed beautifully appropriate to the location for the number "The Oldest Established Permanent Floating Crap Game in New York City". It reads

simply "Sewer ladder by P. E. Kemp Engineering Ltd."

### Post Judicem tristitia

What we *were* going to draw attention to was the appeal on behalf of the Theatre Defence Fund to help defray the costs of Michael Bogdanov's legal skirmish with Mrs Mary Whitehouse over that brief encounter in Howard Brenton's play "The Romans in Britain." Where we all go now and indeed, where all the money goes now after the party of the second part has triumphantly withdrawn, and Mr Bogdanov (and behind him the National Theatre and behind that generations of playwrights and, even perhaps, Lord Chamberlains) has retired hurt is anybody's guess.

What could be hoped, it seems to us, is that once a hurdle has been cleared it doesn't have to be put up or knocked down again. It feels only yesterday (or about a hundred years ago) that stagings as various in intention as "Hair", "O Calcutta", even "Equus" (remember?) were thought capable of being arraigned for outraging standards of decency. Nobody, however, thought of actually suing the distinguishable Kenneth Tynan or the distinguished Peter Shaffer. "And more's the pity", Mrs Whitehouse's adherents might cry. The trouble now as then seems to be the old one of a picture being more sensational than a thousand words, and, in this respect perhaps, the theatre — like publishers — has some need to censor itself. Serious writers, directors *and* their audiences all seem to agree that for a work of art to administer a moral shock is a Good Thing: unfortunately, publicists of many degrees seem to examine the same work for its capacity to create an immoral shock — as might be measured in terms of supermarket gossip or box-office sales. On such an on-going basis we *all* become susceptible to improper suggestions, 'though none of us (unless 1984 is suddenly declared) becomes liable to proceedings. The question then arises, we suppose, whether The Law, in reducing all such general matters to the level of a simple contest between individuals, is more or less of the ass we are led to believe.

Certainly Mrs Whitehouse emerges sounding (and looking) more and more like Dame Edna Everidge, and we all know how average Barry Humphries is or not.

### Hallowed Boards

You may just be in time to bid for an item in Sotheby's Decorative Arts sale on April 27th. This is a handsome desk that the furniture and cabinet-maker Jeremy Broun has designed and made, nobly devoting all the proceeds to the Appeal Fund for the Theatre Royal, Bath (see CUE last issue, and, if you'd like to contribute, ring Bath 62821). The planks from which the desk is fashioned are taken from the stage of the theatre C. J. Phipps completed in 1863, and have been trodden therefore by generations of illustrious feet — Ellen Terry's and Henry Irving's just to be going on with.

We are all for preserving history in the round in imaginative and *useful* ways like this: it stops the feeling that we are wasting the past, and promotes a new life span for a lot of good materials. Theatrical museums are all very well in their way but they do tend to concentrate, perhaps perforce, on small and simple souvenirs like Dorothy Ward's tights or Little Tich's big boots. When interesting conversions or extensions are made, as in the case of Mr Broun's desk, it gives one, somehow, a livelier sense of the continuity of the theatre. So, forward somebody to turn the old curtains from Covent Garden into a whole line of costumes for a better production of the Borgias, and somebody start thinking about what to do *next* with all those plastic bubbles from the ceiling of the concert-hall at the Barbican.

### ASSOCIATION OF LIGHTING DESIGNERS

The formation of the Association of Lighting Designers was announced today by its President, Joe Davis, and Chairman, Richard Pilbrow.

At a recent meeting supported by Andrew Bridge, Robert Bryan, John Bury, Tony Corbett, Philip Edwards, Chris Ellis, Bill Graham, David Hersey, James Laws, Robert Ornbo, Francis Reid and John Wyckham, the Constitution of the new Association was unanimously approved.

The Association has been formed around the membership of the Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers which in 1975 incorporated scene and costume designers and dropped the word "Lighting" from its title. That body, through Equity, continues to be the pressure group for all designers in the theatre on matters affecting conditions of engagement.

However, lighting designers have continued to feel the need for an association that is only concerned with providing a forum devoted to the development of the art and craft of stage lighting. Thus the new association has been brought about.

Membership is open to all those professionally engaged in stage lighting and the association is enthusiastically seeking new members. Details of this and Associate membership (for those interested in lighting but not professionally employed) and Sponsor membership (for companies concerned in promoting the interests of stage lighting) are available from the Secretary, Association of Lighting Designers, c/o 10 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LN.

Stage lighting in Britain attains, at best, a very high standard. The work of our designers is seen in many other spheres of activity — commercial presentations, exhibitions and architectural lighting; and in other countries, where, for example, Broadway's renowned Tony Awards have in two successive years been won by the English: John Bury and David Hersey for the Best Lighting Design. It is perhaps a relevant comment, which concerns the Association, that in this country no such award is even available for competition.

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# THE PRINCE CONSORT

ANTHONY McCALL

If you plump for the new-fangled excitement of the Hoverlloyd service across the Solent, which takes only eight minutes, rather than the traditional sobriety of the dignified and infinitely more romantic old Sealink ferry, you hurtle on to the sloping beach at Ryde, in a rush of adrenalin, on the eastern side of the long pier, and miss an excellent first view of the island's new Prince Consort Theatre. 'It looks like a cathedral' its ebullient new owner, Brian McDermott, told me over the telephone, which description, if taken with a theatrical grain of salt, is not too far-fetched really. It stands out and apart from the other buildings on the Ryde seafront.

There it stands overlooking the shoreline, with its large arched white window surrounds, white pillars, and elegant iron balustrading, for all the world living up to its name as befits the pretensions of a formerly glorious and oh-so-royal queen and her prince consort.

So it's a pity to miss the view from the sea, as I did. But then I had no intrepid Cue reporter to tip me off first. Indeed, my thoughts were bent rather on the interview, not the approach to the building in which it would take place. That was my first mistake.

My second mistake was picking lousy weather. I chose one of those leaden winter days, as luck would have it, with bad visibility, and a cold wind blowing gusty showers off the sea. This is a theatre to be seen in fine weather. For it is part of its setting, and it is appropriate to visit it with a sense of occasion.

But whether you climb over the seawall from the hovercraft, or set off down the long, long pier after alighting from the ferry, which locals call 'red funnel' (because of the colour), the Prince Consort does indeed strike you as you approach. Brian McDermott, the actor-writer, bought it last summer and finished improving it in October. It had gone downhill in recent years.

Queen Victoria had it built as her residence early in her reign, to house her and her beloved Albert during Cowes week and for those health-giving breaks so beloved by our forbears. Prince Albert laid the foundation stone in 1846. It is a large building, especially by Isle of Wight standards, and it needs a big personality, and pocket, to keep it going. Successive owners, using it for different purposes, tried, not all successfully, to keep the doors open, as hotel, restaurant and even disco. Eventually it went on the market at well under its 'real' value, since it had come to be regarded as a white elephant, a lame duck, or some manner of not-very-healthy animal.

Now enter Brian McDermott bubbling over with zeal and drive, keen to move away from London to his childhood holiday haunt, Ryde, away from some of the modern pressures, to settle and rear his

family. He is determined everything will work out, so he sells his London home and buys a rambling palace of crumbling paint and moves into his father's former flat next door, which quite coincidentally, overlooks his new theatre-to-be. Perhaps dinner-theatre would be nearer the mark, but we'll come back to that in a moment.

McDermott, a Liverpoolian by birth, was a child actor from the age of 12 and now, aged 48, he's worked regularly on stage and on 'telly' (as actors inevitably call it), in a range of things from 'Wait Until Dark, with Juliet Mills, to 'Doctor Who' and such primetime serials. He's had a go at writing too, for instance, adapting John Fowles' 'The Collector' for the stage. 'It was a bit like being back at school again' he quips, 'with Professor Fowles okaying my stage script like a beak'.

He has an interesting connection with both London's King's Head and Bush theatres, which now rank at the top of our fringe theatre league tables. A quick history goes as follows. Dan Crawford, the fellow behind the King's Head, had seen supper theatre in America and thought he'd give it a whirl in England. But it failed dismally. Then something happened that pushed the bar takings through the roof: they got a review in one of the nationals — and all the others followed. They never looked back. Brian McDermott takes the credit for this breakthrough, though he claims it's usually assumed to have been Crawford's idea. Various actors, including McDermott, were cast in a play there very early on, but after some of the big names had left in desperation, with no pay, frozen bottoms from



Brian and Joanna McDermott and baby Josephine with planned improvements to exterior of the Prince Consort.

working in bitterly cold conditions, and no prospect of any important reviews changing things for the better, a determined young McDermott went out to push the play for himself. He hit on the idea of finding out where an important critic lived, and worked, and then proceeded to plaster handbills of the play in every tube station from his home to the office. He then approached the man and persuaded him to come and see it, as something entirely different. The formula worked. He had pricked the critic's curiosity, and in a few days he dropped in on the King's Head. Then came a rave review. After that, the

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dressing rooms and technical control room are reached by the onstage exit.

The only area on the first floor not taken up with theatrical use is the kitchens. These are spacious, old-fashioned in feel, with Aga-style ovens, hotplates and culinary gadgets in stainless steel standing round like kitchen statuary. Both chefs were kitted out in long white aprons and chef's hats on the afternoon I visited, and they looked only too willing to turn their hands to decorating a couple of plates with a stylish cold buffet for a hungry proprietor and CUE reporter. They related how catering for 80 or more took a couple of days' preparation sometimes, if it was to be a special dinner evening. Evidently they enjoyed their work and took considerable pride. Which made a nice change from sullen Spanish *camareros*, to whom, I fear this urbanite, at least, has become accustomed.

Brian McDermott's artistic aim for the Prince Consort is twofold. First, to come up with entertainment that catches the imagination of locals, whose taste is, quite simply, staid. Second, to stage his own productions, whenever possible, using original material, with a view to transferring any successes to London or elsewhere for a longer commercial run, or tour. Attractions hitherto have offered safe 'draws' like Peter Bull, and Hinge and Bracket, for one nighters, which have done well. They managed to open on 'the first really dreadful night of that foul winter in December'

he tells, with *Mistresses Hilda and Evadne* on the bill — and it sold out. The audience struggled through the elements to keep their bookings, and Hilda and Evadne braved the choppy seas.

Broadly speaking, there is no theatregoing habit on the Isle of Wight. There are precious few theatres. What attractions there are tend to be unremarkable, much of it geared to holidaymakers in high season.

To make theatregoing work, the evening has to be turned into an event. A full-scale outing. Hence McDermott's comfortable, social, spacious bar with its views, a fire, and friendly bar service. Hence the sit-down meal in a grand, but not too formal dining room *upstairs*, followed by dimmed lights and the magic of showbusiness only a few feet from their tables. You couldn't be farther from theatre traditions in sleepy Ryde, or farther from new styles of theatre presentation, scriptwriting, acting or anything new in theatre.

On the island, holiday operators make their killing during the season, then retire to the Bahamas for the winter, according to McDermott. But he's after regular audiences, out of season, not just the free-spending tourists, though they will provide useful jam. So to tide him over financially until the Prince Consort becomes known and accepted, (a potentially lengthy run-in period), he has breathed new life into the formerly moribund disco in his basement. The previous owners charged a couple of

pounds entry fee to keep 'undesirables' out; McDermott has a bouncer instead, but allows the kids in free, preferring that they spend in a more relaxed manner at the bar instead. The idea worked a treat. The couple of dozen attendance rose to 200 overnight, when the word 'free entry' got about, and where there are more kids, more will congregate, of course. It now has the highest attendance on the island, says McDermott proudly. And they provide his bread and butter for the moment.

He is left with a longer term problem, however. How to keep separate the disco image from the theatre . . . without killing both? The answer perhaps is to hold them on separate nights and to ensure different parts of the building are used for each. He's got his fingers crossed, but thus far, it's worked.

On the theatre club side, he's even been approached by an up-market yacht club to arrange some sort of tie-up for their members, whose membership of the Prince Consort, could help its publicity, and image. McDermott has also started a theatre club at £30 a year, with a respectable membership around 250, whose members get tickets at £3.50 instead of the £4.50 public price, and other benefits like priority booking. For an island of 118,000 souls, average age 55, that's not bad going after a couple of months. Ryde itself and the surrounding area has a population of some 30,000.

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Prelude 16/30

Melodramas with a modern twist may be the solution to putting McDermott on the map. Time has come, he prophesies, given his circumstances and the shortage of 'different' stage material, to put on *right-wing* plays. Of course, he is not entirely alone in speaking out for a change from left-wing drama. Many eminent and unbiased directors have done so, including BBC producers, seeking some kind of balance of views. Here McDermott has an advantage. He may join the fray himself.

He talks, evidently with some relish, of a work entitled, say, *'Round the Benn'*, featuring local figures, national politicians and union leaders. The evening could include bunfights, music and references to current events, more in the style of a topical sketch than a play. (A team of fringe theatre actors put on a similar idea in Notting Hill Gate's venue, the Gate Theatre, recently, in the fashion of *'Not the Nine O'Clock News'*, which achieved a small cult following — and excellent reviews).

'Imagine' he begins, 'the heroine, Britt-Any (geddit? Britannia), with a tatty shield, telling of her series of uncles who haven't treated her that well. There was Harold, who told her she'd "never had it so good"; uncle Enoch, who always spoke the truth, though no-one ever believed him; and so on.' He pauses to conjure up a subplot. 'Oh yes, then there's Vlad Dracula (Communism) up in the hills, where the miners live. There could be several butts for the evening's humour' he adds. 'And when Britt-Any finally gets tied to the track, like in the old silent movies, a little train comes puffing down the line, shown, like shadow puppets, on a wall, using a trainset puffing billy. When all of a sudden . . . the railmen go on strike.' (The recent ASLEF strike was still underway at the time). To cap his crazy proceedings, McDermott rather fancies playing the Emcee himself, he confided, 'completely legless . . . paralytic', just to keep in the spirit of the evening.

So much for melodrama Prince Consort-style. What its commercial prospects might be no-one can say, except that an informal setting will probably be necessary to make it work. A transfer to a Victorian theatre would kill it dead, probably. Admittedly, there could be room for gags based round current lunacies or ironies of current affairs that would keep things bouncing along, (such as 'Where can you buy fish and chips on a Sunday? Only in a Chinese takeaway') but they couldn't be expected to do more than fill in between sketches or scenes.

The truth about why Brian McDermott came down to the Isle of Wight is that he felt it was time for a complete change, especially with his young family on his mind. 'My two-year-old daughter can have a better childhood on the island than on the mainland' he says. 'Yes, I've sold out, to some extent, by coming down here and starting afresh. But the atmosphere is jollier in Ryde. It has some of the flavour of postwar England. In fact, the world outside seems to bypass the island, which is unashamedly backward in spirit. Even the tramps look like King Lear', he exclaims, as if to prove the point. 'The more you know this place,

the more you love it'.

Sitting in his rooftop eyrie, gazing across the water to the mainland, you can manage to feel delightfully remote from the world and its troubles, yet still on British soil. But like many things, one suspects this is, like so many things on the island, a pipe dream, in an old fisherman's pipe. The huge platters of assorted cold meats and relishes, *crudités*, wine and cheese on the working desktop suggest ample comforts at the Prince Consort, and even the name is redolent with overtones of another age. The office is entirely theatrical, with easy chairs, white long-hair carpet under the low table, posters and agents' letters all over the walls and empty coffee cups and saucers hinting at percolated coffee during mid-morning breaks . . . it obviously all feels like home for McDermott. And perhaps it deserves to be.

But there's something uncertain, it seems to me, about his vision of the finished product. The producer who isn't quite sure what he wants, immediately makes you feel uncomfortable. If *he* doesn't, who does? you ask yourself. Am I being unfair to Brian McDermott, who has undoubtedly

put a lot into his new venture? Perhaps the thing must work on trial and error, by its nature. There was an uneasy feeling though, which wouldn't quite go away the day I called to see him, that there were questions he hadn't yet asked himself. Some of them important ones, whose answers could prove vital. How right was he when he said unthinkingly at one stage, 'I'm quite naïve really'?

The man's got style, however, and determination. And that combination could work, in Ryde. There is room for a theatrical venture, feeling its way. For all sorts of reasons, I raise a glass to our intrepid McDermott, who is not trying to fool anyone, hoodwink them, or claim he knows something he doesn't. If he makes a go of it, it's another blow for the ordinary man, the non-expert, and a delightful building to restore to its former glory. And if he thinks the Arts Council is run by buffoons or that producers are mostly twits, so do most people who don't know a lot about their problems. All that is likely to change.

And anyway, he's not entirely wrong, is he?

## Quake-resistant Theatre

A sum approaching £400,000 has been spent on the fabric of the State Opera House in Wellington. The work has been done so discreetly that it is virtually impossible to detect where the money has been spent. The world's theatres are an endangered species but the threat in Wellington is rather uniquely different from the traditional risks like age, poverty, and property developers.

Wellington, sitting along a geological fault, is a high earthquake risk and the city's building codes require old structures to be brought up to tremor-resistant standards — or be demolished.

The 1913 Opera House is one of the few buildings in Wellington not to show extensive cracking after the 1942 earthquake. This survival was largely a result of the bricks being bonded in cement rather than lime mortar. In a quake, bricks slide along a lime mortar join. With no floors to provide lateral strength, the 22m-high walls are thought to be probably the tallest freestanding walls in New Zealand. Without good bonding of good bricks by the original builders, additional strengthening would have been impossible. Fortunately tests on the bricks indicated that they could withstand the bending strains required by the city codes.

So, over the past two years and without any interruption to the performances, the State Opera House has been fitted with an elaborate steel corset. This corset includes 42 tons of structural steel attached by drilling 6,000 holes through the brickwork. And a lot of reinforced concrete.

The seven masonry columns across the forestage look much the same as they



always did, but now include inserts of 200-mm thick rolled steel. Between the frontage and the curved brick wall of the auditorium, a large gap has been filled with a massive, reinforced concrete wall from basement to ceiling. Along each side wall there are 12 new columns of reinforced concrete, each column enclosing seven 32mm bars. At three levels, steel rods run around the perimeter of the building to stitch the verticals together. Between ceiling and roof there is a complex web of cross bracing.

So this fine theatre with its deep stage and delicately plastered auditorium is preserved as a home for the major music, dance and drama productions in New Zealand's capital. As safe as any new building in Wellington thanks to an encircling corset which — like all the best corsets — offers firm support, but hardly shows.

Francis Reid

# REIDing SHELF

**GEORGIAN SCENE PAINTERS AND SCENE PAINTING** is a well-made book. As befits the subject, it has an air of a more relaxed age. The lines of print appear to have been justified by a human eye rather than a computer. The text is set on a cream paper of sensuous texture and the plates grouped on a forty-page insert of art paper. I am conceited enough to think that my personal copy will have some minor historical significance of its own in the centuries ahead: it is a presentation copy from (and therefore signed by) the directors for the time being of one of our few Georgian stage remnants to their manager in the year of publication.

This is an academic work: every statement, quotation and conclusion is justified in a footnote. It is the sort of book that I first read quickly for an overview, pulled only to the footnotes by some particularly fascinating quote. I then go back on chapters in detail, possibly years later, when stimulated by some event in the theatrical or literary cupboards of my life.

Sybil Rosenfeld has organised her book in two halves. Part One covers 1700-1799 and Part Two moves on to 1800-1830. In each period she details the painters and the styles that they worked in. Most of the known research material relates to the London theatres, both patent and minor, and so this is basically a book about scenery in the Georgian *London* Theatre.

There is, properly, a concentration on the visual innovations of the period. However, the reader would do well to dwell upon the early chapter on stock scenery and bear it in mind while reading of the experiments in such techniques as built scenery, practicable pieces, drop scenes, slanted scenes, projections, transparencies and hydraulics. After all, anyone studying only the Cambridge Festival Theatre, Glyndebourne and Basil Dean would hardly get an accurate impression of the British theatre of the 1930s.

It is encouraging to know that such a minority interest book can still be published in a recession. Our thanks are due to Sybil Rosenfeld and Cambridge University Press for producing it at all, never mind producing it so well.

Moving forward half a century, Michael Booth has edited **VICTORIAN THEATRICAL TRADES**, a facsimile reprint of a series of occasional articles which appeared in *STAGE* in 1883-84. These articles are reports of visits to various establishments supplying the needs of London theatres. The anonymous reporter writes with an air of naivety that suggests that he knows his theatre from without rather than from within. And his obsequiously-rounded style

causes one to conjecture that he might well have been calling on the establishments as an advertising representative for his newspaper.

However it is a lovely read for some of the period details of life in such workshops as those producing costumes, wigs, hosiery, shoes, jewellery, masks, posters and furniture. There is an article on gas lighting and one on limes from which (amid puffs for the contractors) we may learn something of the

particulars relative to Mr Augustus Harris's lime-lighting arrangements for Drury Lane pantomime of *Cinderella*. There will be twenty lights in all, and no coloured mediums will be used, their place being filled by the use of coloured fire. In the transformation scene all the lights will be in use at the same time, and an equal number of pans of green and red fire as well. By use of this coloured fire, instead of covering the lens of the lime-light with coloured mediums, a vast deal of the lime-light is economised, and it is quite obvious that more brilliant colours for the time being can be obtained, besides the additional illuminating power of the pans of fire themselves. In the grand ballet scene sixteen lime-lights, without any coloured light, will be in use; in the procession scene the full twenty will be brought into requisition also, without the addition of any colour. In the final scene, after the comic personages have completed their revels, twelve lime-lights and twelve pans of fire will be in use up to the fall of the curtain. There will be ten bags of oxygen and twelve of hydrogen, each of fifteen cubic feet measurement, fixed at the back of the flies, and the gases will be conducted by fixed iron barrels to the various light boxes.

I wish that Chuck Lawliss's **NEW YORK THEATRE GUIDE** had been around when I first visited that city. The core of the book is a description of each of the 300 plus theatres in New York City - Broadway, Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway. There are brief histories and details of policy for theatres which have a policy. More than 250 seats earns a seating plan. There are street plans and a descriptive listing of restaurants with a theatrical flavour or reputation. Plus sections on theatre shops, museums and libraries, organisations and publications. The critics are analysed and for anyone unsure of how to behave there is a chapter on Theater Etiquette to advise on matters like lateness, talking, coughing, eating, sleeping and

wandering gloves. Indispensable for any theatric tourist to Manhattan.

For any easy to read account of the business aspects of Broadway show business try the new **THEATER BUSINESS** by Jan Weingarten Greenberg. Ms Greenberg is a New York theatrical press agent and she does a good job on behalf of Broadway, selling it as a sane, relaxed, earnest, smoothly run business. Any theatre as laid back as this would surely produce bland shows! So its good inflight reading with some interesting recent budgeting figures. But for a closer look at the actual nuts and bolts, this new book introduces rather than supplements the two old warhorses by Donald C. Farber: *Producing on Broadway* or, for Off-Broadway, his *From Option to Opening*.

**CURTAINS!!!** the book and its associated travelling exhibition will be properly reviewed by an architect in next **CUE**. However, I must just record that this book is a mind-blowing wallow for old theatre nuts like me. But it has still not converted me to Matcham worship although I admire his professional skill in meeting briefs.

**GEORGIAN SCENE PAINTERS AND SCENE PAINTING**. Sybil Rosenfeld. Cambridge University Press £29.50 (UK)

**VICTORIAN THEATRICAL TRADES** Articles from *The Stage* 1883-1884. Edited by Michael R. Booth, The Society for Theatre Research. £3 (UK)

**NEW YORK THEATRE GUIDE** Chuck Lawliss. The Rutledge Press. \$8.95 (USA)

**THEATER BUSINESS** From Auditions Through Opening Night. Jan Weingarten Greenberg. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. \$10.95 (USA)

**CURTAINS!!!** or a New Life for Old Theatres edited by Iain Mackintosh and Michael Sell. Photographic Editor: Victor Glasstone. John Offord (Publications) Ltd. £5.95. (UK)

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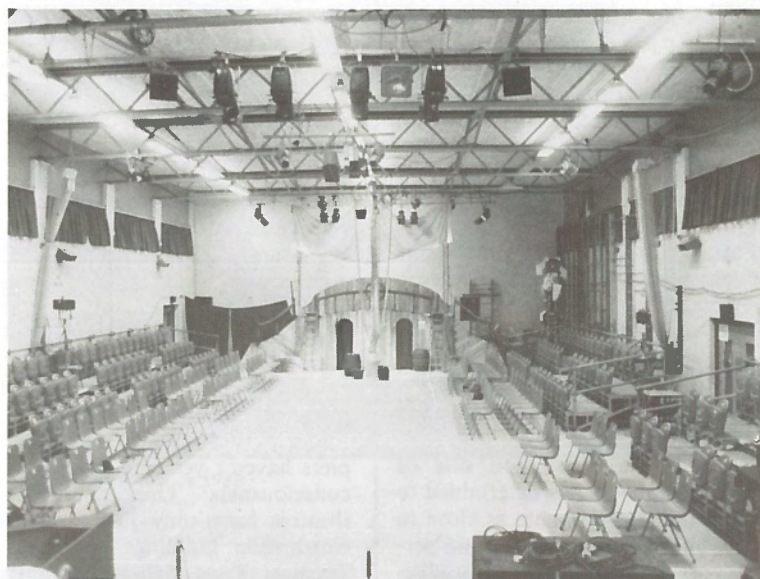
## KEY

Lanterns used.

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
|     | Batten         |
|    | Patt 137 Flood |
|    | Patt 60 Flood  |
|    | Patt 264       |
|    | T-Spot         |
|   | Patt 123       |
|  | Patt 23/23S    |
|  | Not used.      |



*The Nursery.*



*Lighting rig, seating and pirate ship viewed from the stage.*

emergency exit signs and lights, but also over the lanterns suspended above the gymnasium floor to cover the various acting areas. This demanded that every barrel and lantern had to be securely chained to their respective steel girder which ran above across the width of the gymnasium, plus every cable had to be fixed, despite the fact that this was only to be a temporary rig for the duration of this production. Nevertheless, the Police and Fire authorities insisted upon this requirement, otherwise our doors would never open to a wider public. To hang, secure and focus the numerous lanterns above the gymnasium was no easy matter off an extended aluminium ladder and did take time, valuable as it was. In future, in a similar situation, a 'tallescope' would prove a godsend, if the budget would run to such seemingly 'unnecessary' expenses.

A word or two here should be made about the various effects incorporated, for the fantasy of 'Peter Pan' is dependent upon certain theatrical illusions to the eye, not the least being the 'flying' of various characters. Clearly to have flown Pan in the



*The technical team.*

# The end of the pier?

ANTHONY McCALL

conventional way was out of the question, for no 'flying' area existed above our stage. The simplest, yet equally effective solution, was to turn to ultra-violet with the characters wearing fluorescent material and the carrier or 'flier' dressed totally in black. And the result? Most convincing.

The director wanted the 'lagoon' scene, which was centred around a rock, to be set in a mist of 'dri-ice'. One main problem was the large area to be covered. We were concerned as to how quickly it would disperse, as the scene was to run for about ten minutes and would require the 'mist' for that length of time. I was indeed fortunate in being able to hire a 'dri-ice' machine and in being supplied with 'dri-ice' by a local firm at no expense to ourselves. With a great degree of 'trial and error', in particular the pre-heating of the water tank, the desired effect was achieved even though it involved running our 'mist tank' right up close to the central rock (on the gym floor) in full view of the audience — artistic licence!

Other required effects were less sophisticated: a 'strobe' for the Indian massacre on stage; a powerful torch positioned above the scenery and operated by one worthy pupil to bring alive 'Tinkerbell'; a conventional stage smoke box positioned behind the mushroom on the lost boys' hideout for Captain Hook's chimney business; and for the mock smoke effect in the Wendy House, built by the Lost Boys on stage, a small tin (containing Fuller's Earth) with a rubber tube from one side through which one blew the powder through a hole at the top of the tin — cheap but convincing'.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this production I have only lightly touched upon at present, namely that of the technical team. With six years' experience from the production side of theatre to draw upon, I was determined to run the backstage departments as close to professional lines as limitations would permit. From past practice in school productions over the years, I have found that children, when allocated definite responsibilities, will usually, with sufficient encouragement, rise to every occasion. For any production teamwork is essential — and this was particularly vital in our case to ensure success. In each department — stage management, props, stage electrics, stage lighting controls, follow spots, stage staff and prompters — everyone pulled their weight. Around thirty children were involved on the technical side — with two adults only assisting on some of the larger pieces of scenery. Certainly an invaluable experience gained for the many noble volunteers!

Despite the sheer volume of work involved on all sides, it did prove to be a most exciting and rewarding venture — and one which will be long remembered in school circles for its high degree of professional attack.

*(Any information about the availability of the 'Peter Pan' script can be obtained from: Bill Pearson, Frasco International, 40 Moreton Street, London.*

Of the 90 piers that graced our shoreline at the turn of the century, only 61 survive today, overwhelmed by maintenance and restoration costs. Many cannot sustain a commercial basis of operations, and councils are reluctant to take over the responsibility of playing at entrepreneurs. So where do they go from here?

It seems highly unlikely that we shall be able to save all our piers, to look at the problem squarely. Nor should we seek to, to my mind. In the best British tradition compromise seems to be called for, as with our major touring theatres, who have largely emerged from this same trauma. A collective decision needs to be taken about which piers to keep and which to scrap.

A great number of piers are now reaching the end of their natural lives. One architect involved in pier restoration estimated that by the end of this decade all our remaining piers will either be near collapse or have found a means of salvation. There is not much time left, therefore.

The case for their restoration by the public purse is an interesting one, and as yet, it has not been much voiced in public. Piers are classic examples of maritime architecture, marking not only an important part of Victorian architecture, but more importantly perhaps, the birth of the holiday era and the idea of institutionalised swimming. We no longer weigh up the merits of saving country houses, or even follies if they are of sufficient merit, but piers haven't yet entered our architectural consciousness. One could argue that theatres have only just been accepted as worthwhile buildings to save, with the Theatres Trust fighting a constant battle with planning authorities and Whitehall. But piers fall into much the same category now.

One of the first piers to be built was Brighton, in 1823. It was designed as a jetty to receive packet boats from Dieppe and it soon became very popular. People

wandered along it to enjoy the benefits of being at sea — without getting seasick. Then piers began to spring up all along the coast, like Eastbourne in 1872, and no ambitious resort considered itself complete without one. Today, however, the phrase 'the end of the pier' has taken on a new, and unflattering meaning.

That universal song, 'Oh! I do like to be beside the seaside . . .', still conjures up fresh salt breezes, rugs and deckchairs, donkeyrides, pierrots, sandcastles, cockles and much, much more. It reminds us of the innocence, as we now see it, of the seaside pleasures of another era. And though braces, long skirts and straw boaters may have given way to Ambre Solaire, dark glasses and bikinis, many of the pleasures do not change: bucket and spade; picnics; strolling just out of reach of the tide; and indeed, enjoying the view from the pier — if it manages to look crisp and well-cared for, rather than down-at-heel. Which brings me to my point. A careful marketing choice must clearly be made as to whether the public is downmarket (slotmachines, space invaders and toffee-apples all the way) or upmarket (restraint, tea served in tearooms from white cups and saucers, and American-style cheesecake . . . all very Peter Jones and Sloane Square) or somewhere in between. Muddling through no longer works.

The American view might be for a brasher approach, like Disneyland. Bright paint everywhere and an overall attempt to be larger-than-life. Perhaps different types of pier should aim at different types of appeal. Resorts with thriving summer show audiences might go for family and more everyday appeal; leaving the lesser-known piers to seek a more unusual public. It's hard to imagine a broad appeal that would draw everyone, unless the pier were simply for a stroll to the end and back to catch the sea breezes. But the tollgate would have to turn pretty fast to make that worthwhile on its own.

The more unusual pier is epitomised by Clevedon Pier on the Bristol Channel, which the Victorian Society feels is 'undoubtedly the most graceful pier in the country'. Clevedon is situated between Weston-super-Mare and Avonmouth, just off the M5 (exit 20), and it looks out across the Severn Estuary to Cardiff, a dozen or so miles away. The structure is built of iron and steel, using sections of Barlow rail, designed for Brunel's Great Western Railway, for its horizontal members. It is 113 years old and two sections fell into the sea a few years ago while undergoing safety tests. I might add, parenthetically, that they probably wouldn't have collapsed, if the council workmen had taken due care. They left the stress-measuring equipment to add more and more stress to the girders while

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they took a lunch break, and on their return two spans had been so strained for so long that they'd fallen away. The stress was applied too heavily and for too long, on a structure which was clearly delicate. This kind of carelessness is galling, though there is no redress, either. The Woodspring District Council owned it at the time and could hardly sue their own workmen.

Last November, a company set up to restore the pier to its former glory, the Clevedon Pier Trust Ltd, took over the romantic collection of decaying arches at a peppercorn rent from Woodspring Council. Even so, it is no great bargain. Its beauty is an inspiration; but its derelict, dangerous structure will prove a taxing problem to renovate.

The trust comprises a distinguished and practical range of trustees, including two architects, a surveyor, a builder, and Lady Elton, the widow of Sir Arthur Elton's great grandson, whose unique collection of industrial archaeology now resides at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. Sir Arthur of Clevedon Court, was chief shareholder in the original pier company, although even 90 years ago it was not the success they had hoped it would be. So he handed it over to the Clevedon Local Board, which, in due course, was inherited by our friends Woodspring, as they became known after Ted Heath's county reorganisation.

The council decided to demolish it for reasons of safety, although local public opinion was keen to preserve it. Demolition costs are estimated though at around £200,000. So it has been agreed that the Clevedon Pier trust will be granted the demolition cost towards its restoration, providing an important sign of official goodwill to other vital sources of funding, like the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Historic Buildings Council.

Mrs Jennifer Jenkins, chairman of the HBC, has been quoted as saying she is sympathetic. But she and her colleagues have no funds for piers at present, but as soon as they have, Clevedon will have priority.

The trust's directors are unusually confident and hard-working in their approach to their daunting task. Admittedly they have impressive expertise as a team, but national opinion is still uninformed about the lobby for preservation of Britain's piers. So the arguments for saving our piers as part of our national heritage must be put first, before Clevedon's case is argued. This all takes time. The costs, which escalate with every passing month, are estimated to top the million mark. A sample of the breakdown is, in rough figures, as follows.

- \* Demolition of fallen spans, involving recovery from sea bed, salvage of reusable members, cleaning, storage for reuse: £90,000.

- \* Restoration of Toll House into exhibition room and office. It is intended to use Toll House as the fund-raising centre during restoration: £25,000.

- \* New beams hidden inside existing decorative plate girders. This is required for spans 1-6. Spans 7 and 8 will have new steel girders not included here: £85,000.

- \* Structure to spans 7 and 8. Structurally important members will be replaced in



High tide at Clevedon pier circa 1870



Low ebb in Clevedon fortunes 1980

the form of the original spans in steel. All other members will be reused salvaged components from the fallen spans: £190,000.

- \* Additional foundations and temporary works. Piling will provide support for scaffolding during the restoration and will then be connected at sea bed level to the existing structure to ensure its long-term stability: £300,000.

- \* Renew timber decking and repair ancillary steelwork to promenade and pier head to original form and type: £75,000.

There are various ingenious engineering devices being employed to keep the structure sound, while retaining the original outward appearance of the graceful and ingenious Victorian building design. An example, is the high-tension steel bars running through the pre-stressed concrete infill under the banks of wooden seats along the length of the pier. The handrail will double as a back to the seats, with wooden slats added for comfort and to keep out some of the breezes.

An appeal fund was launched in 1974, which raised £70,000, illustrating the loyalty of public support for the pier. Now discussions are well underway with the

Manpower Services Commission to use MSC grants and Job Creation labour to carry out much of the work. It could prove a crucial aspect of the restoration.

Clevedon, like all piers, has to decide how to finance itself once it is back on its feet, structurally. The aim here is to make it self-supporting, so its maintenance and upkeep will be automatic. It is hoped that it can be sufficiently enticing to become the really special place to all manner of social occasions, from wedding receptions to *soirees* and sales promotions. Certainly it will make its mark as *different*, and doubtless memorable, too. Which brings it closer to its original design in its heyday: something fun and out of the ordinary.

One of the trust's directors, Michael Allman, thinks that public opinion has turned a corner. He feels that despite the threat of storm damage and corroding ironwork, the pier is already saved. Whether this is inside information from the top brass in our national preservation societies, or his reading of the local opinion around Bristol, his sentiments mark a new chapter in pier history, if he is right. And it is devoutly to be hoped that he is.

# Southward Wurlitzer Theatre

FRANCIS REID

You would not normally expect to find a fly tower on a car museum. But there can often be an unorthodox reason behind some of the more sensible things in life such as building theatres. The theatre in question was built to house a Wurlitzer organ.

Such goings on are usually the work of an individualist and *Southward Museum Trust* is no exception. The Trust, at Paraparaumu in New Zealand (about 40 miles or so from Wellington) is the creation of Mr Len Southward.

Len Southward started work in 1919 as a message boy in a Wellington motor warehouse, then set up a motor cycle repair business with a partner. Responding to equipment shortages in 1939, he began manufacturing rear view mirrors and Austin 7 silencers. Wartime shortage of steel meant devising machinery to make it and today the company he established continues as a main supplier of steel tube to New Zealand industry. He became known throughout Australasia for his championship wins in the speedboat Redhead and was the first man in the region to travel at over 100 mph on water.

Len Southward began collecting cars in 1956 with a Model T Ford and the fascination of vintage cars gradually claimed more and more of his spare time and, since retiring from daily involvement in his business, he has devoted his time and energy to the establishment of the museum where visitors can share the nostalgia of transport in a bygone age.

The museum was opened in December 1979. The collection comprises some 250 vehicles, approximately half of which are on show at any one time in a hall covering 4,400 sq. metres. In addition to vintage and veteran cars dating from 1845, the collection includes traction engines, motor cycles, cycles and a wide variety of stationary engines, working models, early motoring curios and a model railway. The site covers six hectares of parkland and landscaping was carried out to create a 3,000 sq. metre lake and a bush walk.

The theatre, opened in mid-1981, shares a foyer with the car hall. The angle of the auditorium floor is determined by hydraulic rams. When raked for theatre use, it can take 474 seats. Alternatively it can be set horizontal when it comes level with the stage to create a large floor area for functions and exhibitions. Doors at different heights in the rear auditorium wall provide extrances for the alternative floor positions. The floor rises and falls 3' 6" at its extremities and the pivoting action takes less than one minute.

The stage has a variable proscenium opening of 12.26m to 7.82m and a height of



*The Southward Car Museum and Theatre*



*The Wurlitzer Organ is mounted on a turntable which travels on an elevator in the stage apron.*

4.2m. Wall to wall stage width is 21.3m and depth is 11.6m. The stage tower permits a flying height of 10.1m and there are 30 sets of single purchase counterweights. The apron thrusts 3.7m forward of the proscenium line and includes an orchestra pit which can sink to 2m below stage level.

The auditorium ceiling contains two lighting bridges and there are two booms in foh boxes. A generous installation of Strand lanterns is controlled through a patch panel by a 40-channel Theatrelite three-preset, three-group triac system.

The theatre, not surprisingly, has quickly become a popular home for local societies as well as for some of the major touring productions.

The Wurlitzer organ – rescued from the Civic Theatre cinema in Auckland and the original inspiration for building the Southward Theatre – is set on a rising rotary elevator alongside but separate from the orchestra pit elevator within the stage apron.

On the site there is a fully equipped and staffed engineering workshop where the restoration of vehicles continues, as well as experimental work in developing vehicles for the disabled.

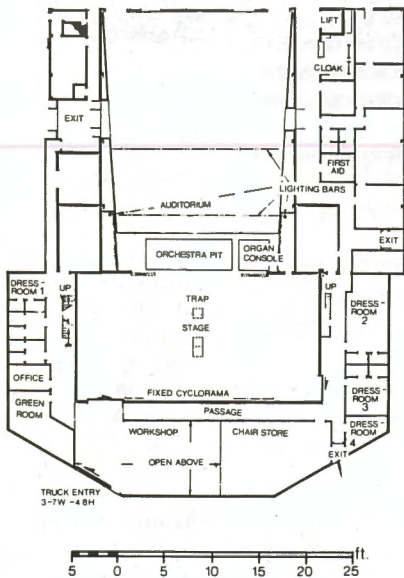
Len Southward's collection includes all sorts of examples of early engineering that he has acquired over the years. He has, for example, limelight units with brass and mahogany equipment for producing the



Alternative auditorium doors for flat and raked floor



One of the hydraulic rams which adjust the rake of the auditorium floor.



### CCT and Dynamic Technology announce joint venture plans for new theatre controls

Don Hindle, Managing Director of CCT Theatre Lighting Ltd. and Derek Tugwell, Managing Director of Dynamic Technology Ltd. have announced that from April 1st this year they have agreed to jointly develop and market a full range of lighting control and dimming equipment for theatre and entertainment lighting in general.

DTL, of course, are internationally renowned for their broadcast television lighting control and switching systems which are to be found in many studios of the world. Their modular Datalite Microprocessor control system has established new high standards for memory lighting control. DTL will continue to serve the television industry direct with CCT concentrating on theatre and other live entertainment applications.

CCT, of course, are a major manufacturer of entertainment luminaires and accessories. They have pioneered the use of extruded aluminium construction and their Silhouette and M650 ranges have become industry standards.

Both DTL and CCT can claim that over half of their current sales are to overseas users and their joint venture is seen as considerably expanding exports for both companies.

In order to meet the very broad live entertainment market DTL and CCT are designing a completely new range of control and dimmer product which promises high standards of performance and reliability whilst remaining price competitive.

Further information is available from CCT at Windsor House, 26 Willow Lane, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 4NA, to whom all

necessary gases on tour. New Zealand is actually a potential gold mine for the theatre archaeologist because sheer distance from Europe and North America means that imported items of stage technology have had to be cherished and carefully maintained.

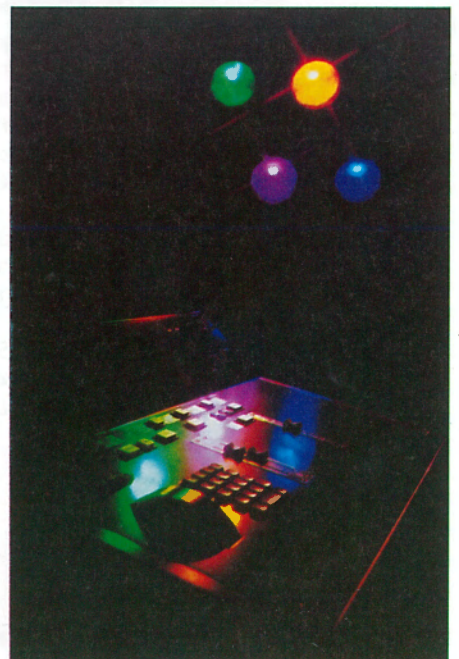
Who knows, perhaps Southward Museum Trust could take this area of engineering history under their wing and become the world's first stage technology museum with equipment restored to, and maintained in, operational condition.

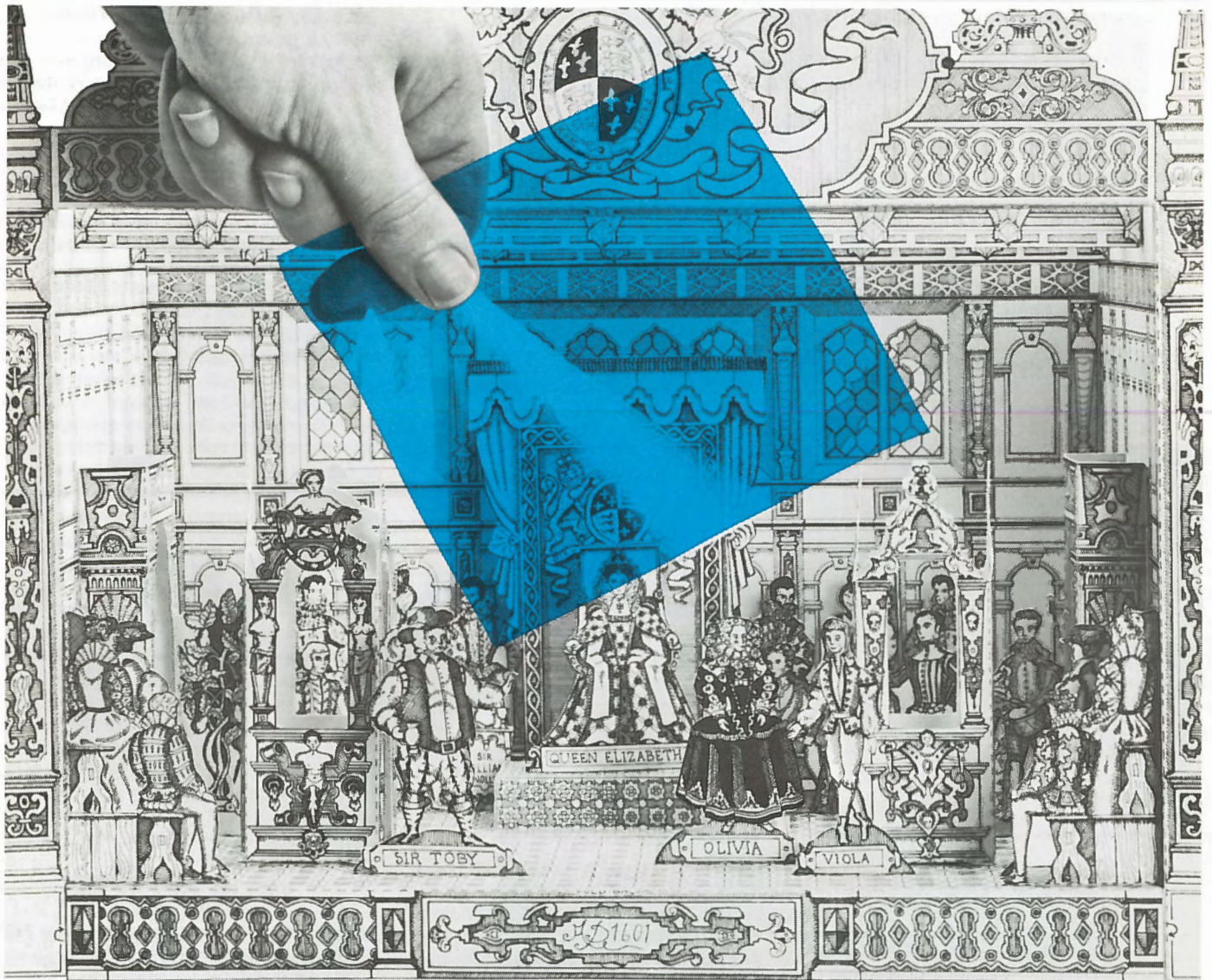
## PRODUCT NEWS

enquiries for live entertainment applications should be sent.

### New Zealand joins the Memory Club

In New Zealand high import duties (30% and upwards) have delayed the memory revolution in theatre lighting control. However, Selecon-Reid Ltd introduced *Deltalight* last year and within six months or so it had been adopted by half a dozen major theatres from Auckland's Mercury to Christchurch's Court Theatre. Deltalight is a microprocessor system for up to 80





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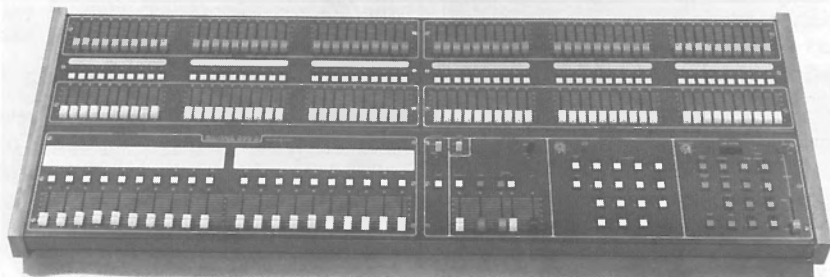
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channels, engineered for Selecon by Callen Controls Ltd. The facilities are similar to all Duet type systems. Channel and memory access are by keypad with a wheel for mods. There are two playbacks: a manual profile crossfader and an auto-timed dipless crossfader. Display is by LEDs, there is a four-master pin matrix and facilities for cassette dump storage. The system has demonstrated to New Zealand theatre the artistic freedom and economic advantages of memory controls and the market now seems to be set for vertical take-off.

### EFS-CELCO control systems

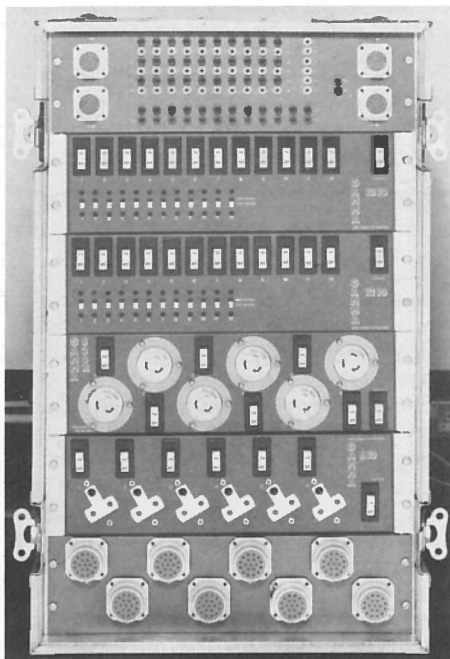
The Gamma range of control desks combine the features of the two-preset desk, the memory desk, and the rock concert desk, with the added facility of patching in disco effects, such as sound-to-light control.

The Gamma control desks work on the simple basis that any channel and level set up manually on either preset can be memorised exactly onto a group of master faders, to be recalled later on a single fader. The chaser works on the principle that every single step in a sequence is memorised individually, each step comprising any number of channels on together. In other words, every conceivable chase pattern imaginable can be set up by the operator, memorised, recalled, edited, or scratched.



The three standard desks in the range are a 30-channel with 40 real level memories, plus 4 x 40 step chase memories, a 60-channel with 300 real level memories, plus 8 x 100 step chase memories, and a 90-channel with 450 real level memories, plus 8 x 100 step chase memories. In addition, the 60- and 90-channel desks are available in a version with an integral alphanumeric display above each memory master, with a separate computer keyboard which is used to "write" a cue above each fader, allowing up to 450 previews of what each fader will bring up.

The systems are completely portable (with internal batteries storing the memory for up to six months when unplugged from the mains). They have been designed with the widest application to entertainment and theatre lighting in mind, including hi-tech disco installations. An inlet port in the back of each desk allows for any external 0-10 volt signal to over-ride each memory master. By connecting for instance, a 6-channel Lightmaster 611, and 4-channel Mode Unit 5 controller (both modified for 0-10 volt output), any channel of the desk



can be grouped into any of 10 faders, which can then be activated by simply using the controls on the external effects units.

Every channel and every master has an individual flash button which will work in an "add", "kill" and "hold" function, the entire system can be played like a keyboard by the lighting operator. The standard

Gamma 300D desk, with a Zero 88 and Mode controller rack-mounted and linked to it costs less than £3000 excluding dimmer packs.

Sole world distributors for Gamma Control Systems, Cerebrum Lighting (Sales and Hire) Ltd, 168, Chiltern Drive, Surbiton, Surrey KT5 8LS.



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### Control desks from DEW

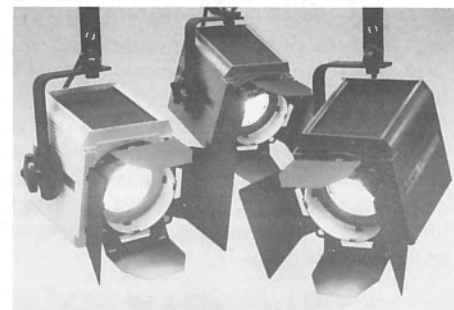
DEW Electrical Engineering Ltd have now added to their range of plug-in dimmer modules their own series of manual lighting control desks. Series SM are conventional multi-preset desks with master fades to each preset. Two and three preset versions of the SM desks give control for up to 60 channels. A larger PM desk is available in two, three and four preset versions for up to 140 channels. Also from the same stable come compact miniature controls for Schools, Clubs and Discos. A feature of these being the special dimmer packs designed for maximum portability in a touring situation.

Details from DEW Electrical Engineering, Maybank House, Unit C, Maybank Rd., South Woodford E18 1ET.

### Rank Strand Minims

Now offered for track mounting and in a range of colours

Strand's miniature adjustable display and exhibition spotlight is now available in a choice of seven colour finishes and with a special adaptor kit to suit principal lighting track systems.



The Minim features a beam angle instantly adjustable between twelve degrees and fifty degrees, and is sold with either a 300 or 500 Watt tungsten halogen lamp included in the pack. Barndoors and colour frames are optional extras.

Further information from Richard M Harris, Tel: 01 568 9222 Ext. 419, Commercial Lighting Division, Rank Strand Ltd., P.O. Box 51, Great West Road, Brentford TW8 9HR.

### Rosco dinner party

With typical style Rosco held a dinner for lighting and scenic designers last month. Eschewing the usual "banqueting room" Michael Hall, Rosco's managing director, packed a quart of distinguished, interesting or plain friendly guests into a pint-sized room at L'Escargot in Soho with a pianist for good measure. The result, helped by excellent food and wine, was a great success with Stan Miller from Rosco in America joining Michael Hall as our hosts.

It would be boring to list those present even if I could remember them all but it was especially good to see John Bury there with his wife and Ralph Koltai.

# Between Cues

The thoughts of  
Walter Plinge

## The Success Dream

I have a personal problem. Naturally I have attempted to rationalise it. Indeed I have rationalised it so well that, in my more philosophical moments, the problem becomes a virtue. *I lack competitive spirit.* I suppose that competition is an inevitable part of the evolutionary process. It will be with us until mankind develops a soul to override that rather poorly programmed computer known as the brain. I admire the physical poetry of people who have developed performance skills with balls of various sizes and shapes: but I deplore the hysteria that hangs upon the irrelevant outcome of win or lose. I admire the achievements of most of our stage lighting manufacturers; but I am saddened, even frightened, when I hear the pleasure with which they speak of beating the competition. The competitive ethic of Michael Bennett's *A Chorus Line* was chilling. But in *Dreamgirls* he defines the ultimate hair split between success and failure.

In a chart-topping pop group, success is to be the lead singer: the rest of the team are failures. At the final curtain I had one of the few dry eyes in a matinee house of prosperous ladies locked into what is sometimes called the American dream, but is in fact one of the more nightmarish aspects of universal evolution.

## Musser Style

*Dreamgirls* and that other "I'm gonna make you a star" backstage showbiz musical *42nd Street* share the same scenography team of Robin Wagner (sets), Theoni V. Aldredge (costumes) and Tharon Musser (lighting). Ms Musser's contributions are essays in what lighting style is all about. *Dreamgirls* is a brittle, high-technology show with a fluid setting of pro-

grammed choreographic lighting towers. The show needs and gets a crisp gloss from the lighting. *42nd Street*, on the other hand, is a nostalgic look at an earlier era, viewing stage life through movie-coloured spectacles. "Every situation has a sunny side" says one of the lyrics. There is some gentle competition for each other's love but the outcome is predictable and no one gets hurt. Lighting here has to convey a period float's feeling, yet do all the things that we now expect lighting to do. Once again Tharon Musser manages this magnificently, catching just the right amount of period flavour at the appropriate moments in the show. The slow rise of the house curtain on a 1930s tap rehearsal is one of the great moments in music theatre.

## Saintly Light

Lighting designers are not particularly renowned for their saintly habits. But it would appear that they have at least two patron saints to inspire their labours. As Bernard Levin once put it in a rather devastating opera review . . . *the lighting appears to be the fruit of an alliance between St Dunstan and St Vitus.*

## Broadway Bulldozed

Demolition is never a pretty sight but the end of a theatre is a particularly chilling event. I walked along W 45th Street the morning after they ran a bulldozer into the Bijou Theater to start clearing the site for the Portman Hotel which is to revitalise Times Square. The Morosco and the Helen Hayes were bleakly boarded, awaiting a similar fate. The new building will include one new theatre to replace the lost three. I hope that it will not be as coldly functional

as Broadway's other recent development houses, the Uris and the Minskoff. But, alas, the published plan shows a strong Izenour influence. The sightlines will be pure and nobody will get a chance to hang on the walls. And regular readers know my views on that!



## Smelling Success

That hardy perennial topic, the actor/audience relationship, is under discussion again. The suggestion is that we have got it all wrong. It is not the proscenium arch that is the barrier: it is the air conditioning. Yes folks, we cannot love the actors because we cannot smell them in the pure climate of a modern theatre. But fear not, for relief is at hand. Modern science has not only isolated the magic pongs (called *pheromones*) but can synthesise them. A few squirts with an aerosol and you too can be a star. I guess these pheromones could also do great things for that other important relationship: the one between members of the audience. (Did all that bygone hygienic spraying of the auditorium with Jeyes fluid only ensure that the audience was always less than the sum of its parts?) And which manufacturer will be the first to spray his new spotlights with pheromones? Or will it be more effective to spray the sales force?

## Balloon Maroon

I had always assumed that the only way to get a big bang on stage was to fire a maroon in a bomb tank. But I have discovered an antipodean device sometimes known as the *Kiwi Bomb*. In the interests of safety (yours and mine), I am not prepared to disclose the recipe. But I will intrigue and frighten you by listing the ingredients: one small, round balloon, one oxy-acetylene torch, one pattern 123 colour frame, Sellotape, 2 inches of 3 amp fuse wire, one 44-gallon drum, and one very, very long cable. Preparation should not take place before the "half" (for physico-chemical reasons as well as safety) and at that time it is possible to preset the degree of sharpness/softness and loudness/quietness. OK, so I am a coward. I don't mind admitting it. I'll stick with expensive maroons rather than cheap balloons.

